THE ADVENTURES OF PRINCE MELONSEED

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THE ADVENTURES OF PRINCE MELONSEED

AND

THE ADVENTUROUS ROAD

The Adventures of Prince Melonseed

AND

The Adventurous Road

By

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"Thunder Camp"
"The Little Apricot Cutter"

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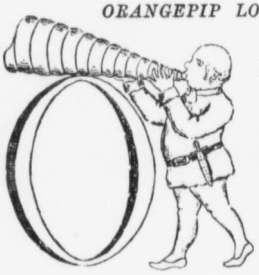
THE ADVENTURES OF PRINCE MELONSEED

The Adventures of Prince Melonseed

PART I.

ORANGEPIP LOST AND FOUND.



IN a lovely island, far away in the Sunny South, there once lived a fairy nation. These fairies were tiny people (the King's own Bodyguard of soldiers, chosen from the tallest men in the land, were not more than ten inches high), but in appearance, and in their way of talking and acting they did not differ much from the people we all meet every day of our lives, as you will see.

The King lived in a beautiful palace on the outskirts of the city, and the grounds of the palace extended to the white sea sand. The building consisted of only two grand halls, called the Banqueting Hall and the Social Hall, standing side by side and connected by an avenue of palms. But it was not built of stone or marble, like

our palaces. The walls and roof were of green trees and vines, while between the trees, at regular distances, were tall pillars made of nothing but pearly shells. The floor of the Banqueting Hall was of white coral, but the Social Hall was carpeted with very smooth, soft grass, for it was used for the fairies to dance in. Scattered around, in all directions, near the palace, were the sleeping bowers. Of these there were a great number, for the fairies were hospitable folk, from the King downwards, and there were frequent visitors at the Court. There were lime-tree bowers, where the shade was dark and cool, and overhead the pale fruit gleamed among the green, like stars; there were orange bowers, redolent of rich perfume in the Spring-time, and later glittering with golden fruit; there were bowers under graceful satin-wood trees, whose glossy leaves, shaking in the breeze, displayed their smooth, softly-tinted linings; bowers beneath fragrant bay-trees; nooks among gorgeous oleanders. One sleeping chamber was called the Oak-bower; its walls were formed by long streamers of grey moss, the waving "Banner of Death," which hung in thick festoons from the branches of the oak-tree to the ground; this stood a little distance from the other pleasant bowers and was such a gloomy place that it was rarely occupied. Indeed the fairies believed it to be haunted, though how the rumor got afloat no one could say.

Now, though the average height of these little people was nine inches, there were two exceptions to this rule, and they were the King's own sons, two tiny youths measuring from top to toe scarce six inches. Their names were Melonseed and Orangepip. They were twins, and they loved each other dearly.

"Orangepip! Orangepip! Come quickly!" cried Melonseed one morning, pausing before the entrance to his brother's bower. "Do you forget that we are to go to the hunt with our father to-day? He is already waiting."

No answer came, and Melonseed pushed back the hanging vines and put in his head.

"Orangepip! Do you hear?—Why, what has become of him?" he added, as he found the sleeping bower empty.

He searched in all directions for his brother, but could not discover him. So at last he gave it up and went into the Banqueting Hall to his father, with a downcast countenance.

"I'm very sorry, Sir, but I can't find Orangepip," he said humbly, for he felt as if he shared the guilt of his brother's misdemeanor in being late for the hunt.

"What does the young scamp mean by keeping us waiting?" demanded the King. "We will have the Grand Trumpet blown, and he will hear that if he is in the city."

The Grand Trumpet was an immense conch-shell of shimmering mother-of-pearl—the largest and most perfect ever cast up on the shores of the island. It was blown long and loud by the Court Trumpeter, who nearly burst his cheeks in his efforts; but no Orangepip answered its call.

"When did you last see your scapegrace brother?" asked the King gruffly of the little Prince. He was beginning to feel anxious himself, but he did not want any one to guess it.

"Not since last night, Sir," responded Melonseed tremblingly.

"Well, well! We shall find him soon enough if he is in the city. And then we shall teach him to keep the Hunt waiting for his Royal Highness!"

It soon became plain, however, that Prince Orange-pip must be looked for outside the city walls, if at all. They searched for him in every nook and corner, but he was nowhere to be found.

"Who can I send in search of him?" cried the King in distress. "My trustworthy Bodyguard is waging war against our enemies the Mosquitoes, while the rest of the army is off on a week's expedition to find turtles' eggs." His Majesty looked sorely perplexed.

"Let me go, Sir!" said Melonseed eagerly.

"You!" exclaimed his father, laughing in the midst of his trouble. "You! Why, a good-sized mouse would think nothing of eating you for breakfast!"

"If he had the chance, Sir," returned the little Prince archly.

"The Mosquitoes would drink every drop of your blood before you had been away a day!"

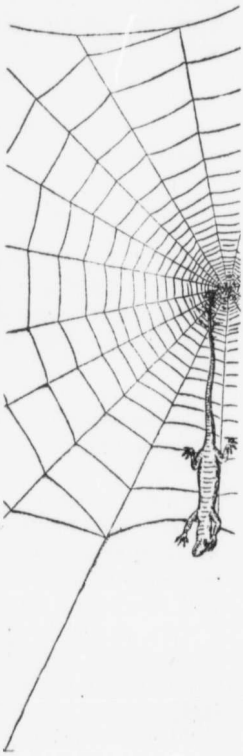
"I have my sword and can defend myself, Sir."

The old King looked at him gravely and steadily for a minute and then said:

"Well, Melonseed, I think I shall let you go. You will find your brother more quickly than any one else I could send, and you have enough pluck for one of four times your inches. Good-bye, my son. Good-bye!"

So Prince Melonseed started off immediately, looking mightily pleased at his father's words of praise. He had on a bright blue tunic, in the girdle of which he carried his sword. His head-covering was a small black velvet cap, and on his feet he wore stout sandals to protect him against stinging nettles and prickly sand-spurs.

Scarce was he outside the city walls, which were built of spiked cactus, an almost insurmountable barrier, when, as he was passing under some low bushes, he saw hanging from the very centre of a huge spider's web a pretty little bright green lizard. It was suspended by its long, limber tail, unable to reach the ground or to break loose, and no doubt was fast dying from a rush of blood to the head.



"Poor little chap!" said Melonseed, "I can soon put you into a more comfortable position." And piling up a few stones that lay at hand, in a moment he stood high enough to cut the spider's web in two with a single stroke of his sword.

The little lizard ran off in a great fright when it dropped to the ground, but before it had gone far it stopped as if a thought had struck it. Turning its head pertly on one side, it eyed its benefactor for a few seconds and then asked saucily:

"And who are *you?*"

"I am Prince Melonseed. Have you seen my brother about here lately?"

"No, I have not," said the lizard, still looking at him enquiringly with his head on one side.

"I am looking for him," said Melonseed, to fill up the pause, for he felt a little uncomfortable under this calm scrutiny.

"Then I will go with you and help you to find him," said the little green animal promptly, as it brought its head back into its right position and, whisking round, ran up to the Prince.

"I shall be very glad of your company, I'm sure," the latter said politely. "Pray, what is your name?"

"My name is Greenback. What is your brother's name?"

"Orangepip."

"Then let us make haste and find Prince Orangepip."

Greenback hurried along so fast that his companion had all he could do to keep up with him. He was a very talkative little fellow, and in spite of his saucy, sidelong glances, Melonseed soon liked him very much.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" exclaimed Greenback in an agonized squeak, making a sudden halt before they had gone very far.

"What is it? Did a scorpion sting you?" cried Melonseed, drawing his sword instantly.

"O, Brownie! Brownie! My dear, dear Cousin! Are you dead? Tell me, I entreat you, are you dead?"

"Not quite," answered a faint voice, and then Melonseed caught sight of a tiny brown lizard, lying stretched on the ground, evidently at the point of breathing his last.

"A cockroach! Oh, for a cockroach! It is doubtless for lack of food that my cousin is dying," moaned Greenback, as he looked up at his companion beseechingly.

"I will see what I can do," said the Prince, rather

doubtfully, in answer to this appeal, "but as I have done very little cockroach hunting I cannot promise success."

He was lucky, however, for before he had wandered far he came upon two magnificent cockroaches, fighting. These he beheaded with great dexterity and, shouldering them, returned in triumph to Greenback and his cousin. The sick lizard revived at the very sight of the delicacies, while Greenback was in ecstasies.

"Two of them! Two immense cockroaches! Why, Prince, you are a perfect Nimrod. Here, Browntail, help yourself, my dear!"

Browntail took a nibble, but quickly sank back again and lay prone as before. "Water!" he gasped. "My thirst is even greater than my hunger!"

So Melonseed started out bravely once more, in search of water this time.

When at last he found a well and had scrambled down its side to the water's surface, what was his surprise to espy on the opposite side a little black lizard this time, with a bright blue tail, clinging for dear life to the smooth, slippery surface of the well. "I wonder how many more lizards I am to save from death to-day?" thought he, then shouted out:

"My dear fellow, come around on this side, where the stones are rough and you can climb out easily!"

The creature simply turned its head on one side and eyed him suspiciously. But Melonseed was used to that now, so he only repeated his call:

"Come around here, do! I'll help you out if you are weak with hanging on there."

The lizard continued to inspect him for a few moments longer and then, without a word, dropped into

the water and struggled wearily to the other side of the well.

"Courage! Courage! A few more strokes will bring you through!" cried Melonseed as the little fellow almost sank within a few inches of the hand stretched out to help him.

"There you are! Now we'll soon be out of this." He put his arm around the lizard's glossy back and steadied him as the two clambered out together.

"More cockroach hunting!" thought the Prince to himself as he helped his new *protégé* along.

"Here, Greenback! Look after this little chap, will you? There's the water, Browntail. I'm off in search of more provisions!" he cried when he joined the others, and put his cap full of water on the ground beside Browntail. Then he turned around and was gone again in an instant.

He soon returned, laden with a miscellaneous collection of beetles and flies, for he had not been so lucky as to find a cockroach this time. The three lizards vowed they had not enjoyed such a feast in a long while. When it was done the invalids begged to be allowed to join the expedition in search of Orangepip; their food had refreshed them immensely, and Bluepoint, the latest addition to the party, was the most eager of all to be off without delay.

So Melonseed set out again gladly, surrounded by his little retinue of lizards. So far there had been but few Mosquitoes to molest them, and now, when by chance one did come sailing by, either Greenback or Browntail or Bluepoint would spring at him and swallow him on the instant.

"I do not know what I should do without you, my little friends," said Melonseed gratefully. "The Mosquitoes are our worst enemies, as perhaps you know, and I was really a little afraid of being eaten up alive by them before I could find my brother!"

"Turn about is fair play, Prince," returned Bluepoint in business-like tones. "You saved our lives, now we are making things a little easier for you."

They continued their search until the sun had reached the zenith. Then they began to look out for a resting-place. The Prince, who was hungry, searched eagerly for a mulberry tree, which would supply him with food and all of them with shade; for this was the season of mulberries. Before he succeeded in finding what he sought, however, they suddenly heard a most terrible squeaking, close at hand, and an instant later a panting mouse leapt from the bushes. At sight of Melonseed she threw herself down before him with one agonized shriek.

"Save me!" she cried. "Save me! and I will give you back your brother!"

"I'll save you if I can," replied the little Prince, drawing his sword. But hardly were the words out of his mouth when an immense whip-snake reared itself out of the grass by which it had been concealed, pounced upon the trembling mouse and carried her off in his jaws.

It all happened in an instant. With one leap the serpent had borne his victim far beyond the reach of the little Prince's help.

"Too late! too late!" squeaked the poor mouse in agony.

"Oh, tell me where my brother is!" called Melonseed after her, but the only reply he got to his appeal was the

dying shrieks of the unfortunate mouse, growing gradually fainter in the distance.

This was a bitter disappointment when, for a few seconds, his hopes had risen high. He turned with a deep sigh to his companions.

"Cheer up, Prince," said Greenback consolingly. "The grey beast is no doubt dead by this time, so that at least your brother is safe from her, and the whip-snake has done you a good turn."

"To be sure, she can't eat Orangepip now that she is eaten herself." Melonseed's face brightened visibly as he considered the matter in this light. "But I wish she had told us where he is, all the same."

"Oh, we'll find that out, never fear," Bluepoint asserted cheerfully.

"I smell mulberries," put in Browntail at this point, sniffing the air with his little head on one side.

"Sure enough!" asserted his two fellow lizards. "There must be a tree near here."

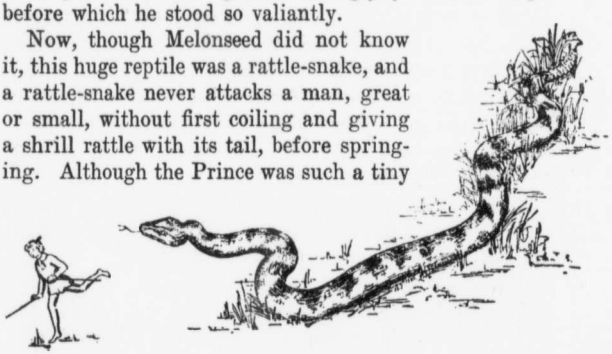
The tree was soon found, a fine large one, with wide-spreading branches loaded with fruit. Melonseed looked longingly at the purple berries so far overhead and wondered how he should reach them. However, the difficulty was soon overcome by Browntail, who ran nimbly up the trunk and along one of the branches, where he deftly nibbled at the stems of two or three of the largest mulberries until they dropped and fell right at the Prince's feet. The latter made short work of them, though each one was as long as his arm, for their long tramp had given him an appetite.

Then they all lay down to rest; the three lizards side by side in a sunny patch; Melonseed not far off in the shade.

When the latter awoke he felt much refreshed. He lay for a few moments looking at his three friends, who were still sound asleep, and was thinking to himself what pleasant little fellows they were and how lucky he was to have come across them, when suddenly he heard a rustle in the tall grass not far off, and looking around he saw to his horror a huge snake moving slowly along the ground. Never in his life had he beheld such a monstrous creature; he could hardly see its whole length at once as it writhed through the grass, and had he been close to it he knew that he could not have seen over its back. It was gliding on very slowly, but its eye was fixed on the sleeping lizards, and Melonseed felt sure the monster intended making one mouthful of them as he passed along. Without a moment's thought he sprang up and placed himself in front of his little friends.

"Greenback! Browntail! Bluepoint! Fly for your lives!" he shouted, drawing his sword—as if that could have protected him against the ugly jaws and fangs before which he stood so valiantly.

Now, though Melonseed did not know it, this huge reptile was a rattle-snake, and a rattle-snake never attacks a man, great or small, without first coiling and giving a shrill rattle with its tail, before springing. Although the Prince was such a tiny



thing, no sooner did the snake perceive what he was than it drew itself instinctively into a coil. In so doing it receded to a distance of at least two feet from the Prince, who, seeing his advantage, lost no time in scampering off as fast as his legs would carry him, after the lizards, who were by this time on the other side of the mulberry tree, awaiting tremblingly the end of the adventure. So it happened that when the snake had given its preliminary rattle and was ready to spring, it looked around in vain for anything to spring at! Melonseed and his companions were hidden behind the tree, safely out of sight. Whereupon the rattle-snake gave an angry hiss and uncoiled again, muttering, as it went off more quickly than it came, that it really could not afford to lose any more time over three lizards and a miserable little specimen of a man, six inches high.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Greenback, when he was quite out of hearing. "That was a good joke! Sour grapes! Wasn't the old fellow wild, though?"

"It might have been a very poor joke, indeed," returned Melonseed. "For my part I can't yet understand how it comes that I am safe here and not between that creature's jaws!"

This seemed to amuse Greenback more than anything else, and he and his two fellow lizards went off into such fits of laughter that finally Melonseed had to join in for company's sake.

"Ha! ha! ha!" rang through the wood.

"What are you laughing about?" asked a big dragon-fly, poising himself on a flower beside them.

Greenback explained the whole matter, holding his sides with laughter all the while.

"I don't see anything very funny in all that," said

the dragon-fly when the tale was ended. "Nothing at all funny!" and he looked sorely puzzled.

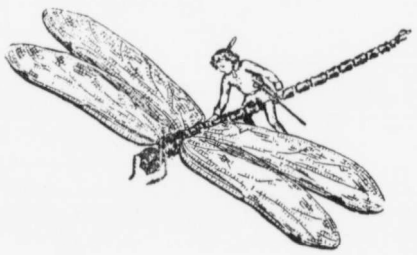
"Neither do I, to tell the truth," put in Melonseed, glad to meet a creature who took his view of the matter. "But tell me, good Dragon-fly, you who fly about everywhere, have you seen my brother Orangepip, a little fellow about my size, only stouter?"

The dragon-fly shook his head negatively. No, he had not, he said. But he proposed that the little Prince should take a ride on his back all around the country, and then he could look for himself as he sailed through the air.

"What a capital idea! I will go with pleasure," cried Melonseed, delighted. "We shall find you here when we come back, shall we not, my friends?" he inquired of the lizards, as he made ready to mount on the dragon-fly's back.

"Oh, yes, we'll be here!" they assured him. "But if you are not back in two hours we will set out to look for you as well as Orangepip," added Greenback, as a precaution.

The little Prince turned to wave his hand in farewell to his friends, who were standing in a row looking up at him brightly —then whizz! his glittering steed shot through the air, and before he had time to more than steady himself in his seat, they were far out of sight.



"Right merrily through the air we fly,
Now close to the earth, now touching the sky;
Brushing the tree-tops, skimming the flowers,
Then halting awhile in fragrant bowers,
Where each blossom fair
Gives us a share
Of its perfume rare.
Onward we go,
Heigh-ho! Heigh-ho!"

Thus sang Melonseed as he sat on the dragon-fly's back, enjoying his ride through the sunny air immensely. He kept his eyes wide open and more than once nearly fell off his seat as he peered down anxiously into every shady corner as they sailed along. But no Orangepip could he see anywhere.

"What a pretty coat you have, Dragonfly," he remarked when he had finished his song.

The dragon-fly gave a little rustle of acquiescence.

"Such beautiful green and black velvet!" he continued, stroking the rich coat softly with his hand. "Who is your tailor, Dragon-fly?"

"It's a tailoress makes our clothes," was the chuckling reply. "Dame Nature, her name is."

"And do the fashions change often?" asked Melonseed innocently. "They do with us, you know."

"Change? No, indeed! Why should they?" returned the dragon-fly indignantly. "When Dame Nature makes a handsome, durable garment and a good fit, what need has she to change, I should like to know, or we either? As far as I know we dragon-flies in this part of the world have worn black and green suits for generations!"

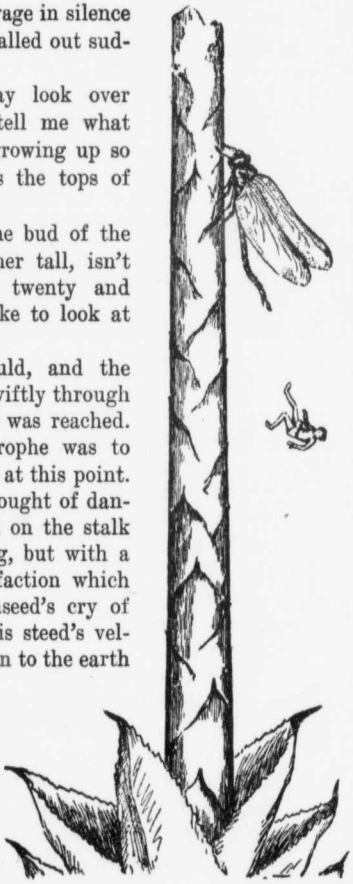
"Dear me, how very old-fashioned they must be!" exclaimed the little Prince. "But I think it is a very sensible idea all the same, and I will suggest it to our Court tailor when I get home."

They continued their voyage in silence for a time, till Melonseed called out suddenly:

"Oh, Dragon-fly! Pray look over there by the water and tell me what that great green stick is, growing up so tall that it nearly reaches the tops of the palmetto trees?"

"That? Why, that's the bud of the Century plant. It is rather tall, isn't it? Somewhere between twenty and thirty feet. Would you like to look at it closely?"

Melonseed said he would, and the good-natured insect sped swiftly through the air till the giant stalk was reached. But alas! a great catastrophe was to happen to our little Prince at this point. The dragon-fly, with no thought of danger to his charge, alighted on the stalk without a word of warning, but with a tremendous rattle of satisfaction which quite drowned poor Melonseed's cry of dismay as he slipped off his steed's velvety back, down, down, down to the earth beneath!



"Not very much to look at when you're near, is it?" remarked the dragon-fly composedly. Then he added, in a low tone of excitement, "Ha! There's a fine large fly! Hold

on fast, my dear little Prince, while I give him a chase!"

Off he darted like a flash of light, and after an exciting chase finally secured his prey and made a hasty meal of him. Not till he had finished, and dropped the fly, now nothing but a hollow shell, to the ground, did he discover that the Prince was no longer on his back.

"Dear! Dear! He must have fallen off while I was chasing that fly. Poor fellow! I hope he was not much hurt. Not much good looking for him, however. I was a little excited and really have no idea where I went."

He flew around disconsolately for a while, rattling his loudest to attract attention, but without seeing anything of the little Prince. "Ah, well! It can't be helped," he said at last, as he concluded to give up the search. "I'll have a hunt for another fly. That last one tasted uncommonly good!"

In the meantime Melonseed was lying in a very bruised and bewildered condition at the foot of the great green stalk. Gradually he collected his thoughts, and for the first time that day his courage began to fail him. He said sadly:

"I have lost my lizards, I have lost the dragon-fly, I have lost myself, I believe, and I have not yet found Orangepip. What am I to do now, I wonder?"

But before long his brave spirit began to assert itself again. He could not be discouraged long.

"Am I any worse off than I was when I started out this morning?" he asked himself. "To be sure I have got a few bruises, but that was to be expected—I do not care for them. The best thing I can do now is to set about finding Greenback, Browntail and Bluepoint, as well as my brother." And checking a sigh that would

come at the thought of Orangepip, the little Prince rose up and set off boldly in spite of his aching limbs.

He wandered on and on, now fancying he had come across a familiar spot, now fearing lest he should be straying still farther away from his little friends. As he went along he called Orangepip again and again, as loudly as he could, but he never got any reply.

Gradually the sun neared the horizon, but still Melonseed continued his search. His tunic was torn to shreds by sharp thorns, his soft flesh was scratched and bleeding in many places, and little by little his hope and courage forsook him. Very weary and footsore he at last threw himself down underneath a low bush.

"I can go no further to-night," he said. "Perhaps to-morrow I shall find my brother and my friends."

The twilight had already deepened, else no doubt Melonseed would have recognized the place where he had laid himself down to sleep, for it was the very spot where earlier in the day he had rescued Greenback from the spider's web. No such thought now entered his mind to comfort him, and before many moments he was obliged to draw his sword to protect himself against two Mosquitoes of gigantic size who hovered about him, hungry and eager.

"Don't let us sing," whispered Have-a-bite to his brother, Why-not-more. "That will bring all the rest of them, and there's only enough for a nice little supper for you and me in yonder small man."

Why-not-more agreed to the wisdom of this, and consequently Melonseed had only two of the black, venemous things to keep at bay; but they were uncommonly hungry, so he had to keep a sharp lookout on them. Their attacks were noiseless, and at the same time they

were so swift in their movements that he could not succeed in cutting them down.

"We shan't be able to dodge that sword of his much longer," said Have-a-bite to his companion as they sat together on a twig preparing for another onslaught. "Don't you think it would be better to wait until he's asleep and then we can take our supper in peace?"

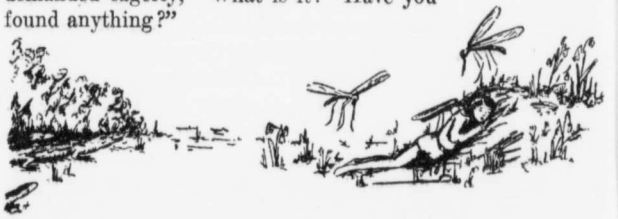
Why-not-more was a greedy fellow, but he valued his life, and so he was obliged to admit the wisdom of trying a little patience.

They had not long to wait, for poor Melonseed, tired and sleepy as he was, found it impossible to keep awake. He soon lost consciousness of all around him, his sword slipped from his hand, and there he lay in the deepest slumber.

"Ha, ha! Now we have him!" cried Why-not-more, bursting into triumphant singing.

"Be quiet, you idiot, or we shan't have him at all!" retorted Have-a-bite sharply.

The warning came too late, however, for Why-not-more's shrill song was heard by a troup of Mosquitoes, friends of theirs, passing near, who came instantly, in a cloud, and demanded eagerly, "What is it? Have you found anything?"



"Oh, nothing of any consequence," said Have-a-bite, with a wrathful glance at his brother, who was looking rather crestfallen.

"I've found it! A nice, juicy little man!" shouted a Mosquito from the front ranks.

In an instant they had surrounded poor Melonseed, singing so noisily that it seemed a wonder he did not wake. But his slumber was too deep to be easily disturbed. The eager host closed around him, and it would surely have fared ill with our little Prince that night had not help arrived in the very nick of time.

Why-not-more had alighted on Melonseed's breast and was preparing to plunge his sharp black sting into the tender flesh; a dozen others were settling on other spots, when suddenly three dark bodies crept swiftly and stealthily out of a bush and began a violent, totally unexpected attack on the Mosquitoes. Have-a-bite and Why-not-more vanished between the jaws of these unforeseen enemies in the twinkling of an eye, and many another of their companions-in-arms was gulped down before they were able to realize what it was that had attacked them so suddenly. Then there was a cry of "The Lizards! The Lizards!" and a hasty retreat was effected, for there is not a Mosquito living who does not fear the lizard more than any other animal. All was quiet again, the little Prince still slumbered on, as unconscious of the rescue as he had been of the attack.

"What a blessing we found him!" whispered Greenback to his companions.

"Ah, yes, indeed! Else he would certainly have been devoured alive before the night was over!" returned Browntail, also in low tones, for they did not wish to disturb the Prince's sleep.

For an hour or more the three faithful friends watched over their benefactor, lying close beside him, their bright little eyes twinkling in the moonlight as they kept a sharp lookout for more enemies. Then all at once a strong wind sprang up which soon blew every mosquito in the neighborhood away. At the same time, however, it blew great black clouds overhead; these covered the moon and stars and left the sky a sheet of inky blackness. Then came dazzling flashes of lightning and deafening claps of thunder. The lizards trembled with fear.

"We must wake the Prince," said Greenback, taking the lead as usual. "It will soon rain, and we must find some shelter before that."

Melonseed was soon roused, but could scarcely believe that he was awake, when a flash of light showed him his three lost friends beside him.

In a few words Greenback told him how they had looked for him everywhere without success, how they had given up all hope of finding him and were returning to his, Greenback's, home, for the night, when on the way they had come upon him, quite by chance, lying asleep and sorely beset by Mosquitoes.

"And now we must seek shelter quickly, my Prince. It will rain in torrents when it once begins."

Melonseed jumped up, and they all hurried on as fast as they could in the darkness.

"I felt a drop of rain!" said Bluepoint before long.

"And I!"

"And I!"

"And I!"

Just then came a brilliant flash of lightning, and in the short second of light they saw, right in front of

them, what looked like a thick wall of grey air-moss.

"A large tree, no doubt," said Greenback. "Let us creep under."

Melonseed bent low; the lizards did not need to do that, and they all passed beneath the heavy grey curtain.

Inside the darkness was as black as jet, but they were perfectly sheltered. Not a drop of rain reached them, although soon they could hear it falling in torrents outside.

"I wonder where we are?" whispered the Prince uneasily. Very soon his question was answered for him. A white flash of lightning made the little space around them as bright as day for an instant, and with one glance Melonseed recognized a chamber of his father's Palace—the haunted Oak-bower!

"Oh, dear!" he exclaimed in dismay.

"Well, what is it?" demanded Greenback.

"We are in one of the sleeping bowers of my home!"

"Are we, indeed? That is good news! But why are you so glum about it, Prince?"

"Only that it is the haunted bower."

"Haunted? What is that?"

"Why, don't you know? A ghost comes here every night at twelve o'clock, they say."

"And what is a ghost, pray?"

In awe-struck tones Melonseed explained, as well as he could, which was not very well, the nature of a ghost to his ignorant friends. But they were not impressed as he expected them to be. As soon as Greenback had taken the whole matter in, he burst into one of his shrill fits of laughter.

"A ghost!" he cried. "A ghost comes here at mid-

night! Well, that is a joke. Ha! ha! ha! What harm do they do, anyway?"

"They don't do any *harm* that I know of," replied the Prince, who was rather shocked at Greenback's levity. "But I would rather not see one, all the same, and I wish it was not *quite* so dark in here!"

He could not help giving a little shiver as he tried to peer through the folds of darkness that hung around them.

"Oh, that's very funny! Very funny, indeed! He's frightened of a ghost, although he owns that a ghost couldn't hurt him! What do you say to that, you others?"

But no answer came from the others, for they were already fast asleep.

"We had better follow their example, my dear Prince, and let the ghost take care of itself," said Greenback. "I'm off already!" and in a few moments he, too, had joined the others in the land of dreams.

But Melonseed was wide awake, and try as he could he could not put the thought of the ghost out of his mind. Nothing could he see, save the thick night around him. Nothing could he hear, save the steady pour of the rain on the leaves overhead. Nothing—

Nothing?

Surely there was another sound!

He could hear, quite distinctly, a sound of gentle breathing close at hand, and it did not proceed from the lizards, for they were not on the side whence the sound came. What was it? What could it be? Every now and then there seemed to be a slight moan and rustle. A great terror seized the Prince as he lay quite still, straining his ears to catch the faint sounds. Yes,

there was no mistaking it! These strange, mysterious sounds were quite apart from the dull thud of the rain pouring down outside the bower. He started up to wake his companions, but remembering Greenback's disrespectful laughter, he stopped short again and began to reason with himself severely.

"You are a brave fellow, Melonseed!" he said. "A fine fellow, indeed, to be a prince and a soldier! Frightened by a tiny sound which very likely is only your own fancy! What would your father, who praised your pluck, say to that? Melonseed, I'm ashamed of you. Go to sleep, Sir!" Whereupon he lay down again, stuck his fingers in his ears, closed his eyes, and very soon after *was* fast asleep.

"Wake up, my dear Prince," called Greenback to him next morning. "The rain is over and the sun is shining, and it is time we set out on our expedition."

"Yes, in a minute," responded the Prince, rubbing his eyes sleepily. Then as he looked around at the grey moss walls that shut them in, he remembered all about his fright of the night before, and began to laugh heartily.

"I am laughing to think of the ghost that never came after all," he said. "I really thought I heard it before I went to sleep, but—halloo!" he exclaimed suddenly, "what's that moving in that heap of leaves over there?"

They all looked and saw in a corner a heap of leaves out of which something was indeed slowly wriggling itself.

"A snake!" cried the lizards. "Let us run!"

"No, no, not a snake," called out the little Prince joyfully. "It is Orangepip, my dear, dear brother!"

Sure enough it was Orangepip, who had lain all night beside them, almost buried in a bed of leaves.

When they came to look at him they found that he was in a melancholy plight. His hands and feet were tightly bound with palmetto fibre so that he could hardly stir, and he seemed so weak from hunger and ill-treatment that he could only with difficulty speak.

"Where are the mice?" he whispered. "Are they going to eat you too, Melonseed?"

"What mice?" they all asked together.

"The mice that carried me off and that watched me all day yesterday. If I stirred they began to nibble my flesh. Look!" And with his bound hands poor Orangepip pointed to his legs, which were bleeding in several places.

"Oh, the monsters; the beasts!" cried the lizards, while Melonseed quickly cut through the tight strings with his sword, and helped his brother to his feet.

"They were to have had a grand feast last night," he went on, "and one of them, the Queen, I think, went out to give the invitations. But she did not come back, and last night the two who were guarding me set off to look for her."

They were so intent on listening to Orangepip's tale that they did not notice a string of great grey mice come creeping one after the other into the bower.

Only when they heard a loud, angry squeak they looked around, and saw to their horror at least ten fierce mice—a whole army, it seemed to them—surrounding them.

Then began a terrific fight, the like of which, I believe, had never been seen before. Melonseed behaved like a hero, you may be sure. With his sword in his hand he

rushed upon the enemy and took them so by surprise that he had plunged his weapon into the heart of one and hewn off the head of another before they had even begun the attack. The mice were taken aback, but soon recovered, and then all came at him at once, biting his legs and creeping up his back in order to dig their sharp teeth into his neck and so kill him outright. Here the lizards came to his rescue, and without their help he would have been lost. No sooner did they see a mouse attacking the Prince in the rear than they seized him by the tail and dragged him off again. Thus they rendered him the best of service, while Melonseed fought like a lion all in front of him.

Orangepip was too weak to do very much fighting, besides he had no sword; so that all he could do to help was to collect heaps of stones and throw them at their enemies, whereby he killed two and wounded a number more.

At last all the mice were killed but three, who were tough old warriors of such immense size one would almost have supposed them to be rats. All three advanced on Melonseed together, and the leader, a coal-black mouse who was in the middle, flew at his throat while the other two attacked his legs, hoping to make him fall. Our little Prince only succeeded in chopping off an ear of his fiercest opponent before they were upon him, biting at him so ferociously that he feared his last moment had come.

Orangepip had used up all his stones and was looking for more, so he could not come to his assistance, but Greenback, Browntail and Bluepoint, who had never ceased to dart about, rendering help wherever it was needed, now came to the rescue as usual. Greenback

gave the order for all three to attack the middle mouse. So they seized his long black tail and tugged with all their strength till they had drawn him off, and the Prince straightway plunged his sword into his heart and killed him on the spot. The other two, when they saw their fierce old General dead, ceased their attack on the Prince's legs and scampered off with all speed, leaving the three lizards and the twin brothers victors of the day.

"And now we had better hurry home to our father," said Melonseed. "He was in great trouble about you, Orangepip."

So they lost no time, but started homewards in the best of spirits, the lizards, of course, accompanying them, and in a few minutes they had reached the Banqueting Hall, where the King was breakfasting with some friends and relatives.

Then there was great rejoicing, as may well be imagined.

"I knew that you would find him, my brave little Melonseed!" cried the King proudly, as the two brothers stood before him. "We will give a feast in your honor, and you shall tell your adventures to all the gentlemen and ladies of the Court."

In a wonderfully short time a great banquet was prepared, to which all the courtiers and the chief citizens were invited. A table was spread the whole length of the hall, and a large and merry company of little ladies and gentlemen sat down to the feast.

But among all the guests none were treated with such honor as Greenback, Browntail and Bluepoint, who sat together at one end of the board, casting wondering sidelong glances out of their bright little eyes

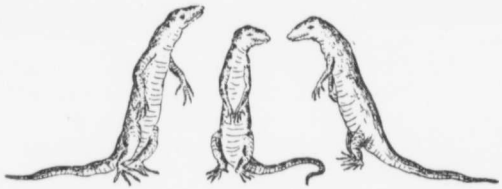
at the feast. Although they were too polite to say so, half a dozen fresh cockroaches would have been more appreciated by them than all the delicacies spread before them. There were oranges, lemons, guavas, figs, pine-apples, prickly pears, and berries of all kinds, preserved, jellied, baked, "au naturel," whole or sliced. The more solid foods were turtles' eggs prepared in numberless ways, tiny snipes and other small birds nicely roasted, and little fish broiled or baked to a turn—for these fairies are excellent cooks.

When the feast was over, all repaired to the Social Hall, which was shut in by magnificent oleanders, the tallest in the land. These formed a thick wall of gaily-hued blossoms which shed a rosy light on the hundreds of little dancers tripping gracefully on the smooth grass beneath. All was laughter and merriment; good fare and good will.

Orangepip and Melonseed were, of course, the heroes of the occasion, and a more charming pair of little princes it would have been hard to find. Both alike were dressed in golden velvet slashed with rose color, and had it not been that Melonseed wore a white heron's plume in his cap, because he was the heir to the throne and therefore the most honorable, it would have been almost impossible to tell them apart. Everyone listened eagerly to the tale of their adventures, and everyone was ready with praise and admiration.

Moreover an expedition was organized on the spot to wage war on the wicked mice and to drive them from the King's dominions. It was decided to begin with the Oak-bower, and to rid it forever of those noisy visitors, who had doubtless given rise to the idea that it was haunted.

Our hero, Melonseed, promised to head the expedition. He listened with pleasure beaming on his kind little face to all that was said and planned, but he did not really hear the half of it. He could think of nothing but his joy at having found his brother, and his pride at having pleased his father, the King, whose words of praise far outweighed all the fair speeches of the courtiers.



PART II.

THE MOUSE WAR.

FTER the banquet there was not much time lost in organizing the expedition against the mice. It was necessary to wait until the return of the soldiers who were off hunting for turtles' eggs, as before stated, but no sooner had they returned than they were ordered to get ready to start out again.

A week after the return of Orangepip and Melonseed all was in readiness, and on a bright morning the procession formed. The Trumpeter led the way, with four men following him to carry the Grand Trumpet. Next came the twin brothers walking side by side, and after them the lizards, who had made themselves the personal retainers of the little Princes and would not leave them for a moment.

Twenty tall soldiers, ten inches high every one of them, clad in apple green, marched next in order. Then came the King himself, under a canopy made from the shell of a great King-crab, which was supported on four poles, each pole being held by a little page dressed in scarlet. The King, you see, was growing old, and even on an expedition of this kind was obliged to walk under

a canopy, for the Court Physician had given strict orders that on no account should he be exposed to the fierce rays of the sun. Following after His Majesty came the rest of the Body Guard, and lastly, five regiments of twenty men each, commanded by five Captains, whose names were Sea-bean, Acorn, Rattle-pod, Sting-ray and Sword-fish.

The soldiers were dressed in russet brown, but the officers wore handsome blue uniforms. Melonseed and Orangepip were dressed in blue also, but their girdles and shoulder-knots and sword-hilts were of gold, while the Captains' were only of silver. The soldiers, I must tell you, did not carry swords at all, their only weapons being bows and arrows, which, however, they handled very skillfully.

The whole army marched in silence to the Oak-bower, which was, as you will remember, only a short distance from the Palace. Their tread was very light, for they were such tiny men, and fairies at that; even the mice themselves could not have crept along more softly.

When the hanging streamers of the Banner of Death were seen close ahead of them, Prince Melonseed gave the signal for all to stand still, while he and his brother, with the three lizards, crept into the bower. He hoped to surprise some of their enemies and find out where their hiding-places were; and they were not altogether unsuccessful in this, as you will hear.

Inside the bower they found a party of very young mice at play, and these little creatures, being small and timid and not at all inclined to fight such formidable looking beings as the Princes appeared to them, ran off in a great flurry as soon as they caught sight of

them, into a heap of old brushwood in a corner of the bower.

"Come on, my comrades," shouted Melonseed to his companions outside, and in they all trooped immediately,—all, that is, except the King and his Body Guard, who remained outside. The Oak-bower, which had seemed a big place before, was now full to overflowing with tiny little men running here and there, poking their inquisitive noses into every crack and crevice and looking under every twig and leaf.

"This is where they are," cried Melonseed, pointing to the heap of brushwood. "Only I give orders that none of the young ones are to be killed. They are only children and therefore they are not responsible."

The soldiers fell to pulling the brushwood apart, and soon they found the baby mice, all huddled together in one shivering, shaking heap, quite frightened out of their wits, and without even strength to run away. But not a single grown-up mouse was there among them, and this was disappointing.

"Let them be carried to the Palace and shut up in the cellar," ordered Prince Melonseed. "There are ten of them. Five soldiers can do the job by taking one under each arm. But first their snouts must be securely muzzled, for, as you know, their bites are poisonous even when they are quite young."

"If it please your Royal Highness," said Sea-bean, who was the oldest of the Captains, "I should like, before they are carried off, to speak a word to the eldest of the family, who looks old enough to answer a few questions."

"Certainly, Captain Sea-bean," replied Melonseed.

"Have I your Royal Highness' leave to make terms with them?"

"Make terms with such babies as they are, good Sea-bean? You will have to bribe them with honey-cakes before you can get anything out of them!"

"An excellent idea, Prince. I shall try it," said Sea-bean gravely; so turning to the trembling mice he said, first of all in a loud and angry voice:

"Tell me, you miserable little grey mice, where are your father and mother?"

But they were far too frightened to answer. They only shook and shivered and crept down closer together.

"Come, you big fellow there, what's your name?" continued Captain Sea-bean, giving the biggest one a tap with the flat side of his sword.

"Please, Sir, I'm General's Tom," said the young mouse quickly, edging away from the sword.

"Tell me where your father is!"

No answer this time.

"Tell me instantly, or you shall feel the point of my sword at once!" cried Sea-bean in very terrible tones.

"*He* killed my father," said General's Tom, pointing to Melonseed as he spoke.

"That must have been the big tough one we killed last of all," whispered Melonseed to the lizards, and they all knowingly nodded their heads in reply.

"So your father was the General, was he?"

"Yes, Sir, and our mother was the Queen, and we think they are both dead now," whereupon all the little mice began to weep bitterly, so there was a great squeaking and squealing for a few minutes.

When the noise subsided Captain Sea-bean began again in stern tones.

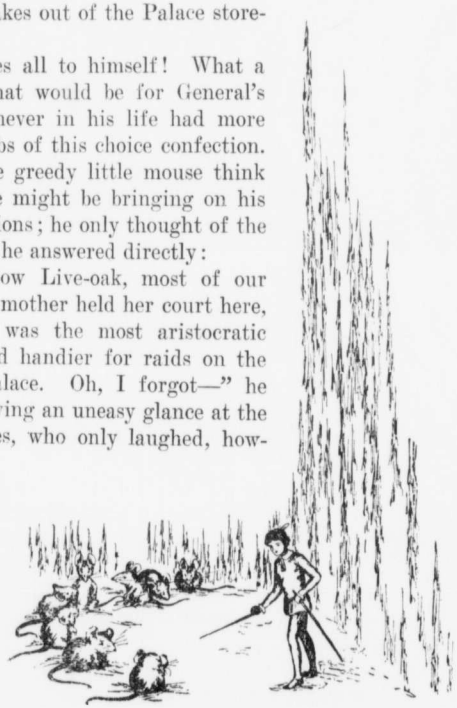
"Now, General's Tom, listen to me. You are to tell their Royal Highnesses where all your friends and relatives live and where they are all hiding now. If you do not tell the truth, you and all your brothers and sisters shall have your tails twisted ten times. But if we find that you have told us the truth, you shall each have six honey-cakes out of the Palace store-room cupboard!"

Six honey-cakes all to himself! What a delicious feast that would be for General's Tom. He had never in his life had more than a few crumbs of this choice confection. Not once did the greedy little mouse think of the trouble he might be bringing on his friends and relations; he only thought of the honey-cakes, and he answered directly:

"In the Hollow Live-oak, most of our family live. My mother held her court here, for she said it was the most aristocratic neighborhood and handier for raids on the Fairy King's Palace. Oh, I forgot—" he added hastily, giving an uneasy glance at the two little Princes, who only laughed, however.

"Go on," ordered Sea-bean.

"A good many more live in the brush and logs around the Bubbling Well. They do not belong to our set, though,



so I do not know much about them," and here General's Tom drew himself up with the grandest air in the world.

"And is that all?" asked the Captain.

"Well, no," replied the little mouse. "I've heard my father say that a large colony of distant cousins of ours lived in a hole under the Great Cabbage Palmetto, but they are very low-down fellows indeed, for they feed on nothing but grass, seeds and nuts!" This he said in very scornful tones and turned up his black nose as far as it would go.

"I think we have found out all we need to know now, your Royal Highness," said the Captain, with a smile to Melonseed.

"A capital idea of yours, good Sea-bean," replied the latter. "I feel very grateful to you for your suggestion and help."

The soldiers now proceeded to muzzle the young mice, to which indignity they only submitted after a great deal of squealing and scratching.

"Where are the honey-cakes you promised us?" squeaked General's Tom indignantly, before the soldier who had tackled him managed to close his mouth.

"You shall have them when we return from the war," answered Orangepip.

Then the Princes went outside to tell their father all that had happened and to ask him to direct them to the Hollow Live-oak, and in the meantime the five soldiers hurried back to the Palace with a wriggling young mouse under each arm.

The King shook his head when they made their inquiry.

"I do not know any hollow live-oak, my sons, so I cannot tell you the way."

The Captains were called into consultation, too, but none of them knew where the place was.

"Very likely that young scamp of a mouse made up the whole story to bamboozle us with," said Sting-ray, with a triumphant glance at Sea-bean, who wore a very grave and perplexed countenance. Sting-ray was a jealous fellow and had not been pleased to hear Sea-bean so warmly praised by the little Prince.

But Acorn said, "I don't think the young beast had brains enough for that."

"Nor I," agreed Rattle-pod. "His head could only hold one idea at a time, and that idea was honey-cakes."

"In the meantime," Orangepip remarked, "as no one seems to know where the place is, I propose that we return to the Palace and study the Royal Maps, where we shall find all the places named, if they really do exist."

"Well spoken, my son," began the King, but just then Greenback, Browntail and Bluepoint glided up to them. "Well," said the first impatiently, "and what is all the delay about, pray? We might have been half-way to the Hollow Live-oak by now!"

"What!" they all exclaimed eagerly, "do *you* know where it is?"

"Know where it is?" repeated the lizard. "Do you fancy I have lived all my life in this land and do not know my way about yet?"

"Ah, Greenback, what a treasure you are!" cried Melonseed. "You help us out of all our difficulties!"

So they were not long forming into rank again and marching on, with the three lizards all in a row in front, leading the way.

They marched along the sea-beach for some distance

and then, all at once, their three guides turned and led the way through a great forest of thick, reedy grass. Here it was hard to walk and they got on slowly, and the poor old King, after having his canopy fall down on his head several times—for the reeds kept brushing against it and knocking it off the poles—decided to turn back and leave the expedition to the young people.

"When a man can't go about without an umbrella and four boys to hold it for him, it's time he stayed at home," said he. "Good-bye, my brave lads. Don't leave a mouse alive in our dominions!"

"If you please, Sir," said Melonseed respectfully, "since you are leaving this expedition to my brother and me, I hope you will allow us to manage it as we see fit."

"Yes, yes. I give you full liberty to do as you like," replied the King a little testily, "but if you take my advice, you'll exterminate the whole race. They are a greedy, sneaking lot, and I've never known one of them do a good turn to anybody!"

With that the old King set off for home, taking his Body Guard with him. The crab-shell canopy, borne by the four little scarlet pages, could be seen a great way off on the beach, and they all stood and watched it until it had disappeared altogether. Then the march was begun again, and being no longer hindered by the presence of His Majesty the King, they quickly got over the bad part of the country and came to the thicket where the Hollow Live-oak stood.

Melonseed gave orders for the soldiers to form a ring three deep all the way round the tree. This they did, and there were about ten men over, who, he said, should go with him into the hollow tree to drive the mice out.

Captain Sea-bean and Captain Acorn accompanied him, too, also the three lizards, and last but not least the Trumpeter with the four men who carried the Trumpet. But Orangepip and the other three Captains stayed outside.

When they reached the inside of the tree, Melonseed found it very dark at first, but as soon as his eyes grew accustomed to the dim light he perceived a great number of their enemies, huddled together, sleeping or dozing, in full sight, and he knew there must be others hidden in different parts of the tree.

"Blow the Grand Trumpet!" whispered the little Prince, and immediately a mighty blast was blown, which so terrified the mice that without waiting to hear or see anything more, they made a general stampede for the hole of exit.

In the meantime the soldiers and officers had been waiting outside and wondering what was going to happen, for Melonseed had told no one but Orangepip of his secret plan. For a minute after their comrades had vanished into the Hollow Oak not a sound was to be heard. Then came the blowing of the Grand Trumpet, and after that the most terrific squealing and squeaking that any one ever heard as the mice began to swarm out of the hole.

"Be ready with your arrows, my men!" called out Prince Orangepip. "Shoot each one of the grey beasts as he shows himself!"

The mice continued to pour out through the hole in a thick stream, and as they came in sight the fairy soldiers popped their arrows at them, and if any one of them escaped and reached the ground it was impossible for him to get past the threefold ring around the tree.

In this way they were every one killed in a short time and their dead bodies lay piled up in a great heap near the tree. It was a terrible massacre. Not a living mouse was left.

The Princes decided to rest awhile before going on to the Bubbling Well to make the next attack, and the soldiers were permitted to hunt through all the secret chambers and cellars of the mice. But they did not find much except a few acorns and nuts, and in a nest of dead leaves another family of baby mice, and their mother with them, for they were mere infants. The poor mother had been faithful to her little ones and had not tried to run away when the others did, and now she begged with tears in her eyes that they would spare her life for the sake of her young ones.

Melonseed was too tender-hearted to refuse her entreaty, and Orangepip always agreed with his brother in everything; so they ordered the soldiers not to trouble or hurt the mother mouse or her family in any way.

"It's very silly of you, you know," remarked Bluepoint.

"Why, you wouldn't have me act like a barbarian, would you?" demanded Melonseed.

"Oh, no, not at all," replied Bluepoint. "I'd have you kind to some creatures—lizards, for instance, and other worthy objects. But mice are a poor lot, and dangerous, too. Best kill the lot of them!"

But Melonseed would not hear of destroying the poor mouse who had thrown herself on their mercy, and so she was left in peace.

After that they enjoyed an hour's rest under the shade of a wild grape vine, whose fruit furnished an ample

meal for the whole army, and then the order was given to form ranks again.

Before they set out, however, Melonseed said to his brother, "Let us go and have a look at the old mouse and her babies. I want to get her to promise never to taste fairy flesh again."

"Very well," said Orangepip.

Together they climbed through the hole in the hollow tree and went down to the nest, but to their dismay they found it empty! Not a sign of a mouse, great or small, to be seen!

"Ha! ha! ha!" sounded little voices behind them.

The laughter proceeded from the three lizards, who had slyly followed them in, and now stood ridiculing the Princes' discomfiture.

"What did I tell you?" demanded Bluepoint.

"And I thought so, too, though I said nothing," put in Browntail.

"She's gone to warn the others at the Bubbling Well," said Greenback. "You'll find them all flown when you get there!"

This seemed so probable that the little Princes had not a word to say, except to order a start to be made without delay.

But for once in their lives the lizards were wrong.

When they reached the Bubbling Well, whither all had marched rather glumly, having little hope of finding any of their enemies there—when they reached pretty Bubbling Well, which was a lovely spot, all overgrown with ferns and creepers and flowers, with the water gushing up like a little fountain in the middle and around it on all sides, closing it in like a wall, the logs and brush which gave shelter to the mice—they found

to their great surprise a large assembly of the little grey beasts waiting for them in full view. They were crowded together in one mass, all in a mighty scrabble of fear.

As the army of diminutive men marched up, with the Grand Trumpet carried on in front, one of the mice, large, sleek and very fat, came a little towards them.

He was holding a small white flower in his paw, which was meant as a flag of truce, and he waved it frantically to attract their attention.

"I want to speak to your Prince Melonseed," he squeaked out.

"Here I am. What do you want?" said the little Prince, stepping up to him boldly.

But the lizards followed close at his heels, for they did not trust the mice for one moment.

"A friend is come to us from the Hollow Live-oak, who tells us that she alone, with her children, is left alive of all her people. She says you have a wonderful machine with which you can kill a whole nation at one blast, and she implores us not to fight, but to make terms with you instead; and indeed I assure your Royal Highness that we do not desire to fight. We will be your Royal Highness' humble slaves, if your Royal Highness will of his mercy spare our lives!"

"Are you the King of these mice?" demanded Melonseed.

"I am their King," replied the mouse, waving his paw towards all the quivering little animals behind him, "but I am your Royal Highness' humble slave."

Melonseed considered the matter for a time, while the Mouse-king stood and shivered with fear. Then he called Orangepip and consulted with him. After that the five Captains were summoned and they all talked over the Mouse-king's speech together, while the three lizards pricked up their little heads and listened eagerly to everything that was said by everyone. Melonseed had a plan which they all agreed was a good one, and so finally he turned to the big fat mouse and said:

"My brother, Orangepip, and I are willing to spare your lives upon the following conditions: First, that you give us the most solemn promise that you will never rebel against our authority, neither you nor your children after you; second, that you submit to having all your teeth drawn by the Royal Dentist as soon as we return to my father's Palace; and third, that you allow bits to be put into your mouths and bridles on your necks, and that you will serve us to draw our carriages and bear our burdens and carry our persons, either for pleasure or for warfare, from now on forever. If you will agree to this we for our part will promise to feed and house you well and treat you kindly. But if you refuse I will instantly order the Grand Trumpet to be blown, and you will share the same fate as your neighbors in the Hollow Live-oak!"

At the mention of the Grand Trumpet the old Mouse-king trembled more than ever.

"We agree! we agree!" he cried in great agitation,

and then he fell back in a swoon and had to be dipped head first into the Bubbling Well before they could bring him around again.

The next thing to do was to provide halters for the mice and also to muzzle them until their teeth could be pulled out, when they would be no longer dangerous. The poor beasts were thoroughly subdued by fright now, and did not attempt any resistance when the soldiers tied their snouts with strong ropes of palmetto fibre and then led them away to fasten them to stakes which were driven into the ground in rows.

While this was being done the mice were counted, and were found to number just one hundred.

There still remained the colony of the Great Cabbage Palmetto to conquer, and as it was by this time getting a little late in the afternoon, a quick march was ordered till they reached the spot. Greenback, Browntail and Bluepoint led them by the most direct route, and they were not long on the way.

Here, under a heap of withered palm-leaves lying at the foot of the tree, lived a society of large, bold mice. But at this time of day they were all under cover, taking an afternoon nap.

Prince Melonseed, after some reconnoitring, saw that it would be impossible for them to reach their enemies as long as they remained under cover of the palm leaves;

so he ordered the Grand Trumpet to be blown, hoping that the noise would startle them and make them come out to see what was the matter.

Sure enough, one great fellow crept cautiously out and peered around him in a dazed kind of way, for the sudden light seemed to blind him.

"What's all this row about?" he asked crossly. "It is shameful that I should be disturbed in the middle of my afternoon sleep!"

"We came on purpose to disturb you," replied Melon-seed boldly. "You and your people are our enemies, and we have come to fight you."

"Stuff and nonsense!" retorted the old fellow, more crossly than ever. "Do you think I can be bothered fighting when I have not finished my afternoon nap! Take your men off, young Sir, and mind your own business in future!"

With this speech he turned around, and was just in the act of creeping under the palm leaves again, when Greenback gave his tail a vigorous tweak. This made him turn back again, furious.

"What's that? Who dared touch my tail?" he cried.

No one answered, so he tried once more to slip under the leaves, without further ado. But this time all three lizards pounced on his tail and pulled him back again.

Old Grey-beard—for that was his name—was now in a terrible rage.

"You wretched crawlers!" he shrieked, "I'll teach you to interfere with the Grandfather of All the Mice, for

that's what I am! You'll be sorry for your insolence before this day is out."

Then he gave a strange, shrill cry, which was instantly answered from within, and all his followers came creeping out and gathered around him in scores.

"Old Grey-beard is not too old to fight, yet! Come after me, my children, and we will teach these fairy Nobodies to insult their betters!"

So saying, he led them up to the Princes' army, which stood in line, ready to receive them.

The fight lasted for hours and was very fierce on both sides. The dead bodies of grey mice lay strewn in all directions and, worse still, the battle had cost some lives and much blood to the soldiers of the Twin Princes. Still they fought on, and at last the sun went down, and had it not been for the light of the full, round moon, it would have been hard to tell friends from foes!

"This will never do!" said Greenback to Bluepoint, as they met in a corner of the field of battle. "They'll keep it up till there's not a man nor a mouse left!"

"The only way, in my opinion, to end it is to get rid of old Grey-beard for a time," said Bluepoint, with a solemn twinkle of his little eye.

"You're right, old fellow, and we are the lizards to do the job!"

They held a whispered consultation, and the result of it was that the three lizards slipped up behind the Grandfather of All the Mice, and waiting until he happened to be a little way apart from his followers, they seized him by the tail and with the greatest energy and dexterity dragged him quite off the field of battle, and away, until they all vanished in the shadow of the bushes and grass.

So quickly was it done that not a mouse understood what had happened. They could hear old Grey-beard's fierce and angry cries, but he was nowhere to be seen, and soon even the sound of his squeaks grew fainter and fainter in the distance.

But his disappearance had precisely the effect that Greenback and Bluepoint expected. No sooner did the mice realize that their tough old leader was no longer with them than they lost heart completely. A good many ran away; the rest tried to fight, but with no one to take the lead they fell into hopeless confusion, and were either taken prisoners by the fairy soldiers or killed then and there; and so the battle soon ended in a complete victory for Melonseed and Orangepip.

When it was all over they moved off to a spot a short distance from where they had been fighting, and there they agreed to camp for the night, and a guard was chosen to keep watch against the Mosquitoes, for that was a precaution that could never be forgotten while the Summer nights lasted.

Here it was that Melonseed first missed his faithful little friends, the three lizards. "Poor fellows!" he exclaimed, in great distress, "I fear they must have been killed in the battle." Back he went to look for them on the scene of the conflict. There were heaps of dead bodies, but not a lizard could he find. This was not to be wondered at, however, in the darkness.

"Oh, my dear Greenback! My good Browntail and Bluepoint! How I shall miss you! How I shall mourn for you!" exclaimed the little Prince, sadly, aloud.

"You don't need to do that yet awhile, Prince!" came a cheerful little voice through the night, and Melonseed, turning quickly, saw his three friends advancing, drag-

ging after them poor old Grey-beard, in an almost exhausted condition.

"Good gracious, Greenback, how you startled me!" he cried. "I had given you all up for dead! Wherever have you been?"

"We've been taking this old fellow for a walk. Rather refractory we found him, too!"

"You see, it was this way, Prince," put in Bluepoint; "we thought the battle had lasted long enough, and so we took this means to end it."

"Well, you are clever little chaps!" cried Melonseed admiringly, when he understood their manoeuvre. "That is what my father would call strategy. When we get back to the Court again the Royal Goldsmith shall make you each a gold collar!"

Old Grey-beard, who had been sputtering angrily to himself all this while, now burst in:

"*Will* you order these insolent reptiles to let go my tail, Prince? I wish to speak to you."

"Speak on," said Greenback, saucily. "We haven't got hold of your tongue!"

"You must first give me your solemn promise that you will not try to run away," said Melonseed, trying not to laugh at Greenback's impertinence. The old mouse took no notice of the lizard's speech, except to bristle his hair more fiercely.

"I promise," said old Grey-beard, gruffly.

"Release him, my friends," ordered the little Prince, and the lizards, very reluctantly, let go their hold of the long black tail.

Then the tough old warrior looked at Melonseed and said, sadly:

"From what I see and hear, I judge that our side has been beaten?"

"We were victorious," replied the Prince, modestly, "thanks to the good service rendered by my three friends here."

"Good service! Humph! That depends on the point of view, Sir," squeaked Grey-beard, giving his tail an angry switch. "Well, what I have to say is this, my young Prince. I am too old to be made a prisoner of, and you did not manage to kill me, you see. I want you to let me go free!"

"I am afraid—" began Melonseed.

"I can buy my freedom," interrupted the old mouse, eagerly.

The Prince shook his head. Although he felt really sorry for the old fellow, whose bravery he could not but admire, to let him go free was, he felt, impossible.

"I will tell you a secret," the old mouse went on in a hoarse whisper. "A most extraordinary secret, that has never yet been revealed to the ear of fairy or human being. You will be glad all the days of your life for knowing it."

This sounded so interesting that Melonseed hesitated.

"What kind of a secret is it?" he asked at length.

"No secret at all! Rubbish!" interrupted Bluepoint, contemptuously.

But Grey-beard scorned to notice the interruption. He fixed his sharp black eyes, twinkling in the moonlight, on the Prince, as he replied solemnly.

"I cannot tell you what kind of a secret it is, for that would be the same as telling the secret itself. Only this you may know: If you learn my secret you will be able to free an unhappy being from a life of suffering and misery. You will be able to do a great deed. You will be a hero."

The little Prince's eyes sparkled. To be a hero, to do something great and wonderful—why, that was his whole ambition.

"Will you promise to live peaceably with my father's people always?" he asked at length, after he had considered the matter for a time and found the temptation to hear this wonderful secret too great to be resisted.

"I promise," said Grey-beard, solemnly.

"And to make your followers—a few of whom have escaped in the bushes—do the same?"

"I promise."

"Then tell me your secret, and you shall go free."

"It is a secret. These reptiles must not hear it."

"The lizards are my friends. I have no secrets from them."

"You are a foolish fellow, Prince, to consort with such low creatures," said the proud old mouse, with great scorn. "But that is your concern. The secret is this: On a rock in the Sea River, beyond the country where the Great Beasts dwell, a beautiful Princess is chained. She has been there I do not know how many years—ever since she was a small infant—and she is a lovely young woman now, somewhere about your size, Prince—for she belongs to the Fairy folk. Well, there she lies by day and by night, in the sun and the rain, with no food except what the fishes bring her out of pity. She is waiting for some one to come to break the spell that binds her and to deliver her from her prison. You may be that person, if you care to."

"But tell me, how—" began the little Prince, eagerly.

But old Grey-beard, released from his captors and free from his promise, had already slipped away in the darkness, and they heard only the rustle of dry palm leaves, as he took refuge in his old quarters.

Melonseed's question died on his lips when he saw that he was once more alone with his three lizard friends.

"Rubbish! I told you so! And now the old fellow's gone for good!" snapped Greenback.

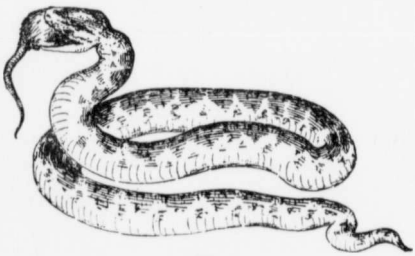
"Sly old Grey-beard! What a pity we let go his tail!" added the others.

"He is free to go, for he has told me the secret," said the Prince, thoughtfully. "And, in spite of what you say, my dear Greenback, I believe it is all true, and I mean to go to the Sea River and to deliver the Princess."

The lizards all laughed, as if they thought this a good joke, but in reality they were highly disgusted with what they called Melonseed's gullibility; still they were wise enough not to say anything more then, for after all their friend was a Prince and they were only lizards, with short little legs and tails.

So they returned to the rest of the company, and were soon all sound asleep.

The different regiments were encamped there, under the shadow of clumps of tall grass and broad-leaved flowers. The soldiers lay on the ground, but the Princes and officers had hammocks, woven of palmetto fibre, swung for them. And all night long a watchful guard patrolled the camp, to guard the sleepers from the Mosquitoes or other enemies who might be prowling about.



PART III.

THE DEATH OF PRINCE ORANGEPIP.

THE next morning, when the sun first came peeping through the bushes and grass in pale yellow gleams, the fairies began to stir and make preparations for their march. A party was sent out to forage for breakfast, and soon returned with a supply of sweet berries and grapes, enough for an ample meal for all.

Then the mice that had been taken prisoners the night before were given some grass-seed to eat, and afterwards they were muzzled again and led away by a detachment of twenty soldiers. The rest of the army soon followed, and they all made their way to the Bubbling Well, where their other prisoners awaited them.

As they neared the spot they were alarmed to hear sounds of great squeaking and scrambling. Whatever could be the matter with the prisoners, whom they had left so safely muzzled and secured?

Melonseed and Orangepip hurried on, and the lizards were not far behind, you may be sure. But when they saw the cause of the trouble, Greenback, Browntail and Bluepoint for once forsook their little Princes, and turning tail, scurried away as fast as they could go.

"A black snake! A black snake!" they screamed.

This kind of snake is the deadly enemy of mice and lizards, but the fairies do not fear them, because they have no poisonous fangs. One of them had evidently discovered the helpless mice, all tied to stakes and muzzled, and, beginning at one end of a row, he had eaten his way clean to the other! Not satisfied with that, he had just started on a second row, when the Twin Princes came up and rushed boldly at the greedy monster, who was so full of mice that he was stupid and not able to move faster than a crawl.

"Let me alone, will you?" hissed the snake. "You may have the rest of the mice for all I care. I've had a pretty fair meal."

But Melonseed and Orangepip did not listen to him. They climbed on his back, and, running along his body, each plunged his sword up to the hilt in one of the reptile's eyes. This killed him instantly, although his writhings and wrigglings for long afterwards were hideous to see.

When the soldiers came up they untied the terrified mice that still survived and led them away to water and feed. Afterwards they were counted, when it was found that the greedy snake had eaten no less than twenty for his breakfast! However, with the prisoners from the Cabbage Palmetto, they still had a hundred captive mice to take back to the Palace.

No time was now lost in setting out for home, but as it was slow work getting through the thick reeds with so many prisoners to lead, the sun had reached his highest point in the sky before they saw the green walls of the Palace in front of them. Very thankful were the little Princes to enter the cool shade of the Banqueting

Hall at last. There they found their father waiting for them, all eagerness to hear a full account of the adventure.

When everything had been related and the King had expressed his entire satisfaction with the way the expedition had been managed, except that he doubtfully shook his head when he heard that old Grey-beard had gone free, and said that Melonseed was a tender-hearted young fool, but would probably learn wisdom as he grew older—when all was told, the Court Dentist was summoned and ordered to draw all the teeth from the hundred captive mice.

The Court Dentist, you must know, was a very fierce-looking old Stag-beetle, with a pair of nippers three-quarters of an inch long.

"It's a big contract, your Majesty," he remarked, when he understood what was required of him.

"It must be done without delay, Mr. Dentist," replied the King. "Call your assistants and get to work at once."

So half a dozen more stag-beetles were summoned and the business was begun.

It was a big contract, as the Royal Dentist had said, and it took the best part of the day to do it. Moreover, the squeaking and squealing made by the poor mice was so atrocious that the King, after he had set the Court Carpenters to work to build stables for their new steeds, proposed that all the Court should go down to the beach and pass the afternoon bathing in the Palace Baths and listening to the music of the Royal Band.

It was delightful on the sea-beach. The sand was hard and cool like a marble floor. On one side was the

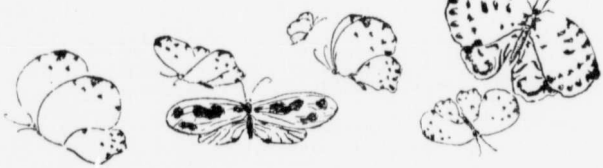
blue sea, on the other a fringe of green bushes against which flights of lovely butterflies slowly fluttered.

The Royal Baths were large excavations in the sand, lined with pure white shells, into which the salt water poured when the tide was high, leaving them full, for the fairies to swim and splash in at their pleasure.

While they played as happily as frolicsome children in the water, the musicians performed on the sands.

The instruments they used were not like any that human children have ever seen. They were made from every kind of sea-shell; some were tiny spiral things that made a delicate sound like a flute; some were broad and flat, of rosy pink or other beautiful colors, and these were beaten together, like cymbals; and besides there were conch shells of every size and shape, which gave out a variety of melodious sounds very delightful to listen to.

The Court ladies decked themselves with red and green sea-weed when they came out of the water, and while they sat on the sand and listened to the music the fairy children played about merrily.



Their great game was to chase the spider-crabs back into their holes, and when they were tired of that they sat down and watched the sand-beetles hop about.

But the Twin Princes were walking by themselves a little distance from the others.

Melonseed had been telling his brother all about old Grey-beard's secret, and they had resolved that the very next day they would ask their father's permission to set out to the rescue of the unfortunate Princess. For they both believed in her with all their hearts.

But, alas! Even the plans and hopes of fairies do not always come to pass.

As they walked along the sand, wandering farther away from the others all the time, and talking so earnestly to each other that they never noticed where they were going, they came to a spot near the water's edge where a brilliant blue jelly-fish had been washed up by the tide.

Before either of them had seen it, Orangepip touched it with his foot, and instantly a deadly shock went through his frame and he fell down, lifeless!

With a cry of anguish, Melonseed drew his brother away from the dangerous creature, whose slightest touch, it is well known, is fatal to the fairies, and

pulling out his sword, he slashed it into pieces in a trice.

Then he ran at full speed along the sands, towards his companions.

The three lizards met him half-way.

"What is the matter?" they cried.

"Orangepip!" Melonseed called back, not waiting to reply more fully. "A jelly-fish!"

The lizards hurried on. They knew nothing about jelly-fish, never having frequented the sea-shore much, so they could not understand the danger of touching one.

But very soon they came to poor Orangepip's body lying on the sand, and near it the pieces of blue jelly-fish, already shrivelling in the sun.

"I fear he is dead, poor fellow!" remarked Green-back, sadly.

"It will be a great blow to Prince Melonseed," added Bluepoint.

"I'm afraid it will kill him, too!" sighed Browntail. And then they all began to weep, and did not stop until Melonseed returned, dragging the Court Physician along with him.

The old doctor was puffing and panting, for he had come along at a great speed, most unwillingly, but Melonseed would not let him go more slowly!

He shook his head solemnly when he saw Orangepip, and as soon as he could recover his breath he spoke.

"I fear it is too late, my poor Prince," he said. Then, looking very wise, "Death has been instantaneous."

But Melonseed would not listen to that. He could not believe his dear brother was really dead.

So they carried poor Orangepip back to the Palace, and laid him in his own sleeping bower, on a bed of

softest moss, while they sent all over the country for the most wonderful and precious remedies that had ever been heard of. But even the ground powder of the Cherokee Coffee Bean, and the far-famed Rattle-snake Lotion, made from the green fluid of the rattle-snake's poison bag, were not powerful enough to bring Orange-pip back to life again. He was hopelessly dead.

So, since all was unavailing, they began very sadly to prepare the funeral.

In that country, you must know, the fairies do not bury their dead in the ground, as we do, and as some other fairy nations may do, for aught I know to the contrary. They have a strange custom of their own.

Whenever a fairy dies—and they do die sometimes, although they generally live longer than we mortals do—they make a couch of the loveliest flowers and lay the dead body on it. Then, when the tide is low, they carry it down to the edge of the water and leave it there for the waves to carry far, far away, when the tide comes in again. They do not wait to see the breakers lift the couch of flowers and carry it out to sea. That would be too sad—and fairies, of all creatures on the earth, hate sadness. They bid farewell to their dead brother or sister, sorrowfully, and then they go away, and do not come back again until it is low tide once more and everything looks the same as it has always done.

But Melonseed could not do like that.

When they had carried Orangepip's body and laid it on the sand, quite close to the edge of the water, and all the people—clad in pure white, for that is their mourning dress—had passed by the bier once, saying, each in turn, "Farewell, dear brother Orangepip!" and the procession had walked slowly and sadly back to the Palace,

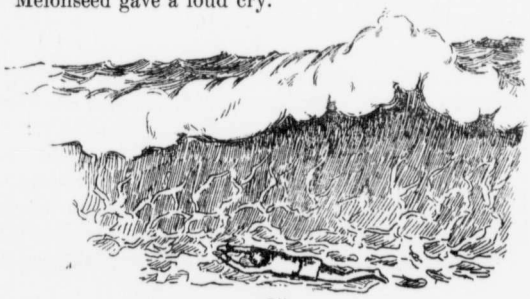
while the Royal Band played mournful music; then Melonseed alone stayed behind, and not all the entreaties of his father or his friends could persuade him to come away.

He stood gazing at the bier, with its fair white flowers, and watching the cruel waves as they crept closer and closer, to take his brother away from him.

But he was not alone after all. The three lizards had stayed behind, too, watching him stealthily. They were near him, out of sight, keeping their sharp little eyes on him—too kind and sympathetic to trouble him with talking then, but feeling that their help might be needed later on.

At last a great wave came and lifted up the couch of flowers and Orangepip on it, and drew it back into the sea.

Melonseed gave a loud cry.



"My brother! my brother!" he said, and dashed into the water after it.

But he could not reach it. Only a white flower floated back to him. He clutched it eagerly and kissed it, and then threw himself down on the sand, crying and moaning bitterly.

And soon the waves would have carried him away, too, had not his good little lizard friends come to his rescue again.

They pulled him out of reach of the water and talked to him kindly and sensibly until at last they persuaded him to go back to the Palace with them.

"Cheer up, Prince!" said Greenback. "Remember the old King is feeling pretty badly too, and it won't help to make him cheerful to have you in the dumps, you know!"

Melonseed had to admit that this was true, and so he resolved, like the brave little fellow he was, to hide his grief for his father's sake.

So back to the Court he went, and although for a week he could not bring himself to eat or drink, and grew so pale and thin that he looked even a tinier little man than he had been before, still he managed to talk cheerfully to his father and to look after any matters that required his attention the same as usual.

For some time after Orangepip's death he never once thought of the poor Princess on the rock in the great Sea River. But one night, when he was walking on the beach in the moonlight, he remembered her again, and then he was sorry he had delayed so long in getting to her rescue, for he now looked upon the release of the Princess as a solemn duty laid upon him.

The next morning, therefore, he went to his father, to

ask for his consent, before setting out on this, his greatest undertaking.

"If you please, Sir," he said, "I wish to go on a long journey."

"What now, Melonseed?" enquired the King. "Another war, eh?"

"No, Sir. We are, as you know, at peace with all our neighbors. If it were not for the Mosquitoes, who always need sharp measures to keep them within bounds, we should hardly need our standing army at all."

"Yes, we can never hope to kill them off—the Mosquitoes, I mean, not the army—more's the pity," and the King heaved a profound sigh. "Well, where do you want to go to, then, my boy?"

"I want to go to the great Sea River, to rescue the unfortunate Princess about whom old Grey-beard told me."

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried the King. "I don't believe there's any Princess there!"

"I shall never be happy until I go and see for myself, Sir. I seem to think of her there, lonely and unhappy, all the time."

"It is a dangerous country, by the Sea River; that is where the Land of the Great Beasts lies. I cannot let you go, Melonseed. You are all I have now." And the old King very nearly began to cry, but as that is something a King must never do, he coughed instead.

"I shall come back again, my dear father. I am sure of it!" said the little Prince, confidently. "Something tells me I shall be successful!"

"And something tells me that you won't!" the King answered crossly. "An alligator will swallow you whole and never even notice it; or a panther will step on you, and there will be an end of you at once. And no one to

be king when I die but your empty-headed cousin, Rattle-pod!"

"If you please, Sir," repeated Melonseed calmly, "I mean to come back. And I will bring you home a beautiful daughter! *Now,* will you give me your blessing and let me go?"

"You mean that you will marry this Princess of yours?"

"Yes, Sir, if she will have me."

"Well, well," said the old King, evidently much pleased with this idea, which had not occurred to him before. "I should certainly like to see you settled in life before I die."

"Oh, thank you, Sir! I will start to-morrow!" cried Melonseed, joyfully.

"I did not say you could go yet," retorted the King.

Melonseed held his tongue this time and waited.

Nobody spoke for a minute or two. Then the old King said, in a broken voice:

"Aren't you going—to—to kiss—your—poor old—father—before you go, Melonseed?"

Whereupon the little Prince kissed him affectionately and said, "Good-bye, dear father."

Then he went out to make preparations for his journey.

PART IV.

THE RESCUE OF THE PRINCESS.

HEN Prince Melonseed set out for the big Sea River he drove two of the late prisoners of war—coal-black mice, very sleek and fat, and handsomely adorned with gold and silver buckles and rings on their harness. They were attached to a light little chariot with two wheels, which had been built expressly for the Prince of the smoothest and strongest satin-wood to be obtained.

Wonderful to relate, his three friends, the lizards, had refused to go with him this time.

"It's the most absurd idea I ever heard of!" had been Bluepoint's angry comment.

"A perfect wild-goose chase!" was Greenback's opinion, and he added, "When you find your Princess—although I for one do not believe she's there—you won't trouble yourself about *us* any more—that's plain; and so I prefer to keep out of it altogether."

The real truth of the matter was the three lizards were jealous. They believed that the Prince would care more for the Princess than he did for them, if once he should

find her, and the thought of such a thing made them quite wild.

Melonseed was sorry to leave his little friends behind him, but as nothing he could say would make them change their opinion, he had to leave them to their bad temper, and set off without them.

All day he travelled through his father's dominions without encountering any important adventure, and by night he had reached the border of the Land of the Great Beasts.

He camped in the shade of a tall clump of pampas grass, and here he hung up a net woven of the finest spider webs, which had been given him by the ladies of the Court as a parting gift. It had taken twelve fairy maidens a month of days and a month of nights to weave it, and was as precious as if it had been studded with diamonds, on account of the difficulty and the fineness of the work. Under this he slept secure from the attacks of the wicked Mosquitoes till morning.

As soon as the sun was up he harnessed his gentle little steeds and drove across the border into the Land of the Great Beasts. It was a thick forest, full of tall trees and dense bushes. If it had not been for the tracks made by the wild beasts as they went backwards and forwards to the water-springs, Melonseed could not have found his way through the wilderness.

Here he expected to meet with some adventures. He quite enjoyed the prospect, and he was not to be disappointed, as you shall hear. Before long a huge panther came springing out of the bushes beside the trail, and with one leap stood right over him, without even seeing him in his little mouse-chariot, however.

The eyes of the great yellow beast were fixed with a

hungry glare on a poor little rabbit that was trembling with fright a foot or two away. Alas! it knew that its last moment had come, and it was to furnish a breakfast for its grim pursuer.

This was a terrible moment for little Melonseed. Another instant and he might be crushed under one of the great beast's paws; or else, if the monster should chance to hear or to see him, there was no doubt but he would swallow him down in the twinkling of an eye.

Prince Melonseed pulled up his steeds, and the mice, being wise little beasts, and frightened out of their wits beside, stood quite still, without even stirring a tail.

So they all remained motionless for a few seconds, until the panther gave another spring, nearly knocking Melonseed out of his seat as he did so, and seized upon the unhappy rabbit, which he carried off into the forest, where he was soon lost to sight.

But no sooner was this danger happily over than they met with another and a worse one.

A deadly moccasin snake lay stretched out in the sun a little further along the trail, and it was so much the color of the earth that Melonseed never noticed it, until suddenly the mice stood still and began to tremble.

At the same time the ugly reptile lifted up its head to strike at them, and Melonseed, seeing its cruel fangs, thought it was truly all over with him this time, and a pang went through his heart when he thought of the poor Princess, and that there would now be no one to rescue her.

But before the snake had time to strike, like a flash a bird flew down from a tree overhead, pounced on it and carried it off triumphantly in its claws.

They saw it fly high in the air, but soon the trees had hid both bird and snake from their eyes. Only the little Prince knew that his deliverer would kill their enemy by dropping it from a great height on the ground, after which a good many birds would make a fine meal off him.

"That was a narrow escape!" exclaimed Melonseed, while the mice carried him in great haste away from the dangerous spot.

Their next adventure was with a scorpion, which dropped out of a bush as they passed underneath, and lay directly in their path.

"Get out of my way, or I shall sting you so that you will die!" it said to the mice.

"We are drawing a Prince in this chariot," they replied, "and you should make way for us."

"I can kill a Prince as quickly as a mouse," retorted the scorpion, insolently, and it stuck out its tail to sting them.

But Melonseed had already sprung out of the chariot, and now, with one stroke of his sword, he cut the venomous little creature in two.

"They are evil beasts, those scorpions," he said to

Velvetskin and Sleeksides, the mouse-steeds. "I have often heard my father say that any one who kills one of them does a good deed."

At last they came in sight of a wide beach of smooth white sand, and then Melonseed knew that they had reached the Sea River.

What troubled him now was how to discover the rock on which the Princess was chained, for not a word about the situation of the rock had old Grey-beard told him. However, after considering the difficulty for a while, he came to the conclusion that he would make inquiries of every living thing he met, until he found some one who could tell him what he wanted to know.

First he saw a grey heron, standing in a pool of shallow water, fishing.

"Can you tell me," he called out as loudly as possible, so as to attract the bird's attention, for it seemed to be quite taken up with the fish it was eating, "can you tell me where the rock is on which the Princess is chained?"

"No, I cannot," answered the heron, promptly. "Can you tell me where is the best place to catch young mullet?"

That the Prince did not know, of course, so he said "Good evening," politely, and went on until he came to an uncommonly large mottled crab, to whom he repeated his question.

"Let me alone," said the crab, crossly, "or I'll pinch your nose!"

"The creatures in this country do not seem to be a very civil set, really," said Melonseed to himself as he drove on, for he considered that it would be unwise to trouble the crab further.

In spite of these rebuffs, however, he questioned a great many birds and beasts, one after the other, and though they were not all so indifferent as the heron, nor so rude as the crab, not one was able to tell him where the Enchanted Rock was.

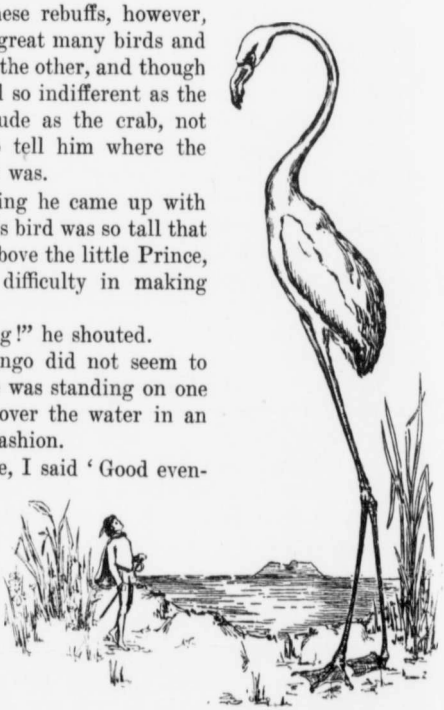
Towards evening he came up with a flamingo. This bird was so tall that he towered far above the little Prince, who had great difficulty in making him hear.

"Good evening!" he shouted.

But the flamingo did not seem to have heard. He was standing on one leg, gazing out over the water in an absent-minded fashion.

"If you please, I said 'Good evening!'" Melonseed called out at the top of his voice, once more.

"Eh! Halloo! Did any one speak?" inquired the



flamingo, suddenly looking down at his feet and catching sight of Melonseed, who had alighted from his chariot and stood looking up at the bird.

Then the Prince asked the same old question about the rock. He was quite tired of it, having asked it so many times.

"I can tell you where the rock is," replied the tall bird immediately; "but the Lord Alligator has the key that unfastens the Princess' chain, and you'll not get *that* from him in a hurry."

"I should be so very much obliged if you would show me where the rock is, and direct me to the Lord Alligator who has the key," Melonseed said eagerly.

"Well, I've no objection to that," replied the bird, and he stalked on along the beach, without another word, until they came to a sand-spit, which ran a long way out into the water.

"When you walk to the end of that point," said the flamingo, stopping suddenly and drawing up his leg under him again, "you can see the rock quite plainly. Though how you can ever get there—even if you get the key, which isn't likely—*I* don't see, for it is too far for you to swim, and you have no wings, poor thing." The flamingo looked at him pityingly, and then went on: "As for the Lord Alligator, he lives in that cave in the cliff," and he nodded to a hole in the rocky bank at the edge of the beach. "Every day he comes out on the beach to sun himself. He's a terror, I assure you. Take my advice and leave him alone."

With that the flamingo spread his wings and flew away. Melonseed called out, "Good night, and thank you!" but it is doubtful whether the big bird heard him.

Then, as the sun had already set and there was no

chance of seeing the Lord Alligator that day, the little Prince made a good supper of sand-beetles (which taste better than they look, I am told, having a flavor of oyster with a dash of red herring thrown in), and fed his mice, too, on salt grass and tied them up for the night. Then he hollowed out a comfortable resting-place for himself in the sand, and slept there soundly till morning.

Next day, when the sun had risen pretty high in the sky, Melonseed, who had been watching and waiting for hours already, saw the great Lord Alligator waddle slowly and clumsily out of his hole in the rock. The little Prince's eyes were ready to start out of his head with wonder when he appeared, for he was the most enormous living thing they had ever lighted on. And when the monster opened his jaws, which looked like the entrance to a cavern, and looked around him slowly, as if wondering what would be the first thing he should close them upon, Melonseed felt a shiver of dread trickle down his backbone!

Lazily and awkwardly the huge beast made his way to the end of the sand-spit, and once there he lay perfectly still, letting the hot sun pour down upon him, and looking like nothing so much as a great black log which the water had rolled up in the night.

The little Prince, who had kept well out of sight so far, now began to creep slowly up to him. He was on foot, for he had left Sleeksides and Velvetskin tied up to a couple of pampas stalks on the edge of the forest, thinking he should get on better without them and his chariot in his interview with the Lord Alligator.

Thus he crept along very warily, until he reached the end of the monster's tail, without being seen. Then he

sprang lightly on his back and ran along it very swiftly, until he was perched on the top of his head, between his two great, round, bulging eyes.

"Why! Why! Why! What's this?" roared the beast. "Jump down from there, till I eat you up! You impertinent little reptile, whoever you are!"

He tried to shake Melonseed off, but the little Prince held on tightly to the rough lumps over the alligator's eyes, and was not to be moved. Then the beast tried to scratch him off with his forepaws, but they were too short to reach to the top of his head, so he had to give *that* up, too.

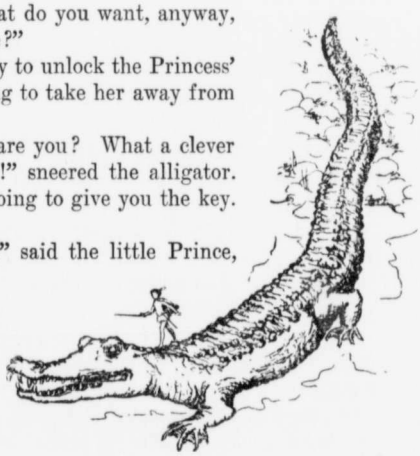
He wriggled around in a great temper for a while, but finding that he could not get rid of Melonseed that way, he grew calmer at last, and asked, in a very sulky tone, as he lay quite still:

"Well, and what do you want, anyway, now you are there?"

"I want the key to unlock the Princess' chain. I am going to take her away from the rock."

"Oh, you are, are you? What a clever boy you must be!" sneered the alligator. "Well, I'm not going to give you the key. So there!"

"If you don't," said the little Prince, "I will stick my sword into your eyes a hundred times, until you are quite blind."



"Oh, you wouldn't be so

cruel as that, would you?" whined the monster, suddenly changing his tone. Then he began to cry dismally, and such immense tears rolled out of his eyes that Melonseed had to be very quick in scrambling to a higher position, or he would have been washed away by them.

When he got into a safe place, he said again in a firm tone of voice:

"I shall certainly do just as I say if you do not give me the key."

The Lord Alligator went on weeping for some time.

All at once he stopped, and said, in very business-like tones:

"Well, now, look here. Let's make a bargain."

"What is it?" asked Melonseed, cautiously, for he was inclined to be suspicious of the monster's bargains.

"I will give you the key when you bring me a string of pearls as long as the chain that holds the Princess to the rock."

"How long is that?"

"Three feet long. And now, don't bother me any more, for I want to take my nap."

He seemed to go off into a sound sleep on the instant, for not another word could Melonseed get out of him. So, after waiting awhile, so as to be sure that he really *was* asleep and not shamming, he crept cautiously back to the end of the long tail, slipped to the ground, and then took to his heels at the top of his speed.

For he could not help half expecting that the Lord Alligator would suddenly wake up and turn around, and then gobble him up into his great cavern of a mouth!

As soon as he was safely away, he went to speak to the mice.

"My good Sleeksides and Velvetskin," he said, "I have work to do here that will take me a long time to accomplish, and as I shall not need your help, you had better return home through the forest, the way we came, for you will be more comfortable in the Royal Stables than here."

"Oh, my dear Master," they both replied, "do not send us away from you. We should die of fright, alone, if we chanced to meet any of the Great Beasts on the way. Let us stay here till you are ready to return to your father's Palace, and then we will take you there. There is plenty for us to eat along the edge of the forest."

You must know that from the time the mice had had their teeth drawn no gentler or more peaceable little animals could be found, and as a rule they grew much attached to their masters, by whom they were kindly treated.

Melonseed was not sorry to keep the mice near him, so he willingly granted their request and set them free to roam wherever they liked on the outskirts of the forest. They never wandered far, however, and did not attempt to escape.

After this the little Prince went down to the Sea River again, to look for a bed of oysters.

He searched all day, and almost despaired of finding any, when, towards evening, a mullet, who was springing gaily out of the water in the sunlight, called out to him to know what he was looking for.

"I want to find a bed of oysters," answered Melonseed.

"That's not hard," said the fish, good-naturedly. "Watch where I come up next time, and that will be the very spot."

With that the mullet disappeared under water, and Melonseed watched. Soon he saw him spring out again

in a little cove, not far off, and ran quickly till he reached the spot.

"Many thanks, you pretty little fellow!" he called after the silvery mullet, who went leaping along the water, evidently enjoying a great frolic.

But as it was then nearly sunset, the little Prince had to wait until day to begin to collect his pearls.

Next day, very early, he was on the shore, ready to dive into the water where the oysters lay. He could swim almost as well as a fish and could stay under water a long while, so he thought he should easily accomplish his task. But he found the oysters stupid, selfish fellows. He had to coax them, one by one, to give him their pearls. Some said they had none, while others were so cross they would not so much as open their lips to answer when he spoke to them! But others were more good-natured and let him put his hand into their shell to take out the precious pearl, which was no use to them, but was so valuable to the little Prince.

He was very patient and persevering, but it was slow work, and it took him one whole year to collect the three hundred and sixty pearls needed to make a chain three feet long. Whenever he felt like losing heart during this long, weary time, he remembered the unhappy Princess, who had been waiting so much longer for some one to deliver her, and this gave him fresh courage to begin again.

But one day the long task was ended and the last pearl was threaded on the strong black sea-weed hair, which Melonseed had found and used for the purpose. He rolled up the chain in a large coil, and putting it over his arm—it was quite a weight for him to carry—he went to find the Lord Alligator again.

The monster was lying on the sand-spit, taking a snooze, looking precisely as he had done a year before when the little Prince had left him there.

"I wonder if he's been asleep ever since?" thought Melonseed.

He crept cautiously, just as he had done then, to the end of the thick, scaly tail, and then he ran along the beast's back, until he was safe on the top of his head.

"Wake up, my Lord Alligator!" he called out.

"Who's there?" grumbled the monster, sleepily.

"I've brought the pearls," shouted Melonseed, "and I want you to give me the key."

"You've been a long time about it, young fellow," said the alligator, briskly, waking up all at once. "Bring them around here where I can see them. I'm rather fond of pearls."

But Melonseed was not so silly as to put himself within reach of the Lord Alligator's jaws.

"You shall see them when you have given me the key," he said; "not before."

"The key is tucked under my forepaw," the monster replied, fairly quivering with eagerness to have the pearls in his possession. "Here it is," and he held up a short, flat key, so that, by bending over, Melonseed could reach it.

"Now give me the pearls, quick! I am convinced that I shall look sweetly pretty when I have them around my neck."

Melonseed could hardly keep from laughing at the old monster's absurd excitement and vanity. He threw the rope of pearls as far as he could, so that they fell on the sand, right in front of the old fellow's nose, who was so delighted with them and so eager to put them

around his neck, as an ornament, that he paid no more attention to the little Prince, so the latter was able to slip away in safety.

He ran swiftly down to the end of the sand-spit, from which the Enchanted Rock could be seen. Only once did he look back, and there he saw the Lord Alligator lying in the same spot, with the chain of pearls around his neck and a huge smile of satisfaction on his face.

The rock was far out in the middle of the Sea River, and when Melonseed reached the extreme point of the sand-spit he could only look at it longingly and wonder how he was to get there. It was such a long, long way off that he knew he must be drowned if he attempted to swim.

"Oh, my dear Princess," he sighed, "how am I to get to you?"

"What's that you're saying?" inquired a porpoise, who came splashing along at that moment.

"If you will carry me over to yonder rock," the little Prince cried eagerly, without stopping to reply to his question, "I will give you my dagger with the jewelled handle!"

"Your dagger is of no use to me, my young friend. But climb up on my back, if you like, and I'll slide you off on the rock as I go past," said the good-natured porpoise. "I shan't feel your weight any more than a fly's!"

Melonseed lost no time in scrambling up on the creature's fat back. It was so slippery he thought he should never get to the top, where there was a fin to hold on by, but he managed it at last.

Then the porpoise went rolling and tumbling through

the water, splashing and puffing, and seeming to be enjoying himself immensely. At last they came to the rock.

"There you are, my fine fellow!" said the porpoise, as he rolled over and slid Melonseed off. "Any time you happen to want me, just sing out. I'll hear you, and come."

"What must I say?" asked the little Prince.

"Oh, anything, so long as it's in rhyme," was the hasty reply, as the porpoise disappeared under the water.

Melonseed watched to see if he was quite gone, and as he saw no further sign of him, he turned and began to explore the rock with great eagerness.

A bitter disappointment awaited him.

The rock was bare and desolate in every part of it, and although he walked around and around it a hundred times, not a trace of the Princess could he discover.

Nor was there any living thing on it or near it of whom he could ask a question. He called loudly to the Princess, but there was no reply. Everything was silent around the bleak spot.

Finally he sat down in despair, and thought of all the long year he had toiled, only to have his hopes dashed to pieces on this empty rock at last. He remembered how his father and the three lizards had said there was no Princess at all, and had laughed at him for going on such a wild-goose chase. And now it seemed that they were right and he was wrong, after all.

In the midst of these melancholy thoughts he seemed to hear a sound of soft singing.

It was hardly more than a breath, but he strained his ears and was able to catch these words:

"Though you cannot see me, dear,
I am near! I am near!
If you break the cruel spell
All is well! All is well!"

"Oh, my darling Princess, where are you?" he cried. "I can hear your voice, but I cannot see you! Reveal yourself to my eyes, for I have the key to unlock the chain!"

But there was no answer. Melonseed sat down again sadly to wait and to listen, but the singing seemed to have ceased altogether.

He sat there until it was dark, and he fell asleep. In his sleep he once more seemed to hear a voice. It sounded like a bell in his ears and woke him up.

"Are you in earnest, Prince Melonseed?" it asked. "Do you really wish to deliver the Princess?"

"I would give my life to save her," replied the little Prince earnestly. "But who are you, and where are you? for I cannot see you."

"I am only a Voice," was the reply, "that is why you cannot see me. I am here to tell you that if you desire to behold the Princess you must be willing to become blind for her sake. Only by becoming blind to everything else in the world can you see her, and save her."

"I am willing," said Melonseed, resolutely, for he was more than ever filled with longing to save the Princess since he had heard the sweet music of her singing.

Then the Voice told him that in a crevice of the rock, which he would find if he searched, there grew a rank, noxious nettle, the most deadly of all plants. He must take some of its leaves and press them to his eyes. After that he would see the Princess. But nothing else would he ever see again.

Melonseed hardly waited until the Voice had finished speaking, he was so eager to find the evil plant and to apply it. Already the day was beginning to break and there was light enough for him to see. He searched all over the rock, eagerly, and at last found the weed, growing as the Voice had said. So he plucked a handful of leaves and stood up to take a last look at the sun, which was rising, all rosy and golden, out of the river, in the east. Then he pressed the leaves to his eye-balls.

Sharp pains, like fiery needles, shot through his eyes and instantly everything became black around him, and he stumbled and fell on his face.

As he lay there he heard the same soft, sweet voice he had heard before singing:

"Oh, look up and see me, dear,
I am here! I am here!
Broken is the cruel spell,
All is well! All is well!"

He sprang up in an instant, and there, standing close beside him, he beheld a most beautiful little being, who was holding out her arms to him and smiling happily.

The Princess was tinier even than Melonseed himself and most radiantly beautiful; and though, on account of her long captivity, her clothes were nothing but poor, worn rags, she was not a whit less lovely for that in the Prince's eyes.

"My sweet Princess!" he cried, "this is the most joyful moment of my life! Take the key, dear one, and unlock the chain that binds you, for you must come away with me."

"Will you not do it for me, Prince?" she said. "The lock will be rusty and stiff, after all these years!"

"Alas! I cannot," said poor Melonseed, "for, except for your dear face and form, everything is dark and black around me! It was the condition."

"Do you mean that you had to give up your sight before you could save me?" asked the little Princess, sorrowfully, for she did not know what the Voice had bidden Melonseed do.

So Melonseed told her all about it, saying, in conclusion:

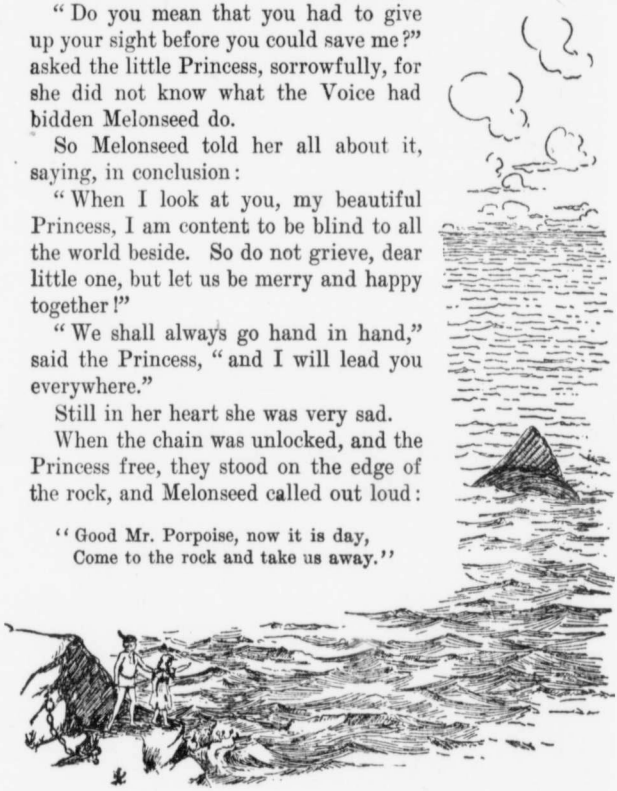
"When I look at you, my beautiful Princess, I am content to be blind to all the world beside. So do not grieve, dear little one, but let us be merry and happy together!"

"We shall always go hand in hand," said the Princess, "and I will lead you everywhere."

Still in her heart she was very sad.

When the chain was unlocked, and the Princess free, they stood on the edge of the rock, and Melonseed called out loud:

"Good Mr. Porpoise, now it is day,
Come to the rock and take us away."



Very soon the old porpoise came spluttering along and drew up beside the rock.

"So you've got her, have you?" he remarked carelessly, when he saw the Princess. "You're not the first one that's tried, young man, but you're the first that's succeeded in carrying her off. I told my wife last night I thought you would, too."

He landed them on the sand-spit safely, and as it was too early for the Lord Alligator to be out sunning himself, they ran up the beach, hand in hand, without fear, and were not long in finding the mice, who never strayed far.

"We shall sit together in the chariot, dear Princess," said Melonseed. "Sleeksides and Velvetskin know the way through the forest, and if we meet with any danger on the way they will give us warning."

So they set out on their journey.

Melonseed laughed and chatted merrily, and hardly seemed to remember that he was blind. But the little Princess could not forget it, and her heart grew heavier and heavier the farther away they went.

"Why are you so silent, Princess?" he asked when they had gone some distance into the forest.

"I was thinking that I must go back to the rock," she answered slowly, "I have forgotten something there."

Melonseed was surprised that she should value anything she had left behind her so much as to wish to go back again for it. But, to please her, he said, "Then let us go back and get it, Sweetheart, for we are not far on our way yet."

With that they turned and retraced their steps, but the sun was already setting when they saw the Sea River again.

Melonseed stood on the bank and summoned the porpoise with these words:

"Kind Porpoise, now 'tis eventide,
And on your back we want to ride."

And in a moment the old fellow came floundering up. He seemed surprised to see them, but made no remark. Porpoises are taught early in life to mind their own business. Only he grunted a number of times, and when he had landed them safely on the rock he disappeared again quickly, observing that it was late.

The Princess said, "I'm very tired, dear Prince; let us stay here to-night."

And Melonseed, although he was all eagerness to get home to his father's Palace, consented once more, because he did not like to refuse her anything. So they soon both lay down on the rock to rest, and the little Prince was asleep in a few minutes. But the Princess did not close her eyes.

When she was quite sure that Melonseed was sleeping soundly, she crept away to the edge of the rock and called out:

"Oh, dear, dear Voice, answer the question I ask you!"

"What is it?" came a clear, bell-like sound in her ear.

"Tell me how to get back my poor Prince's sight. I had rather be chained to this rock for a hundred years than have him blind for my sake."

"No need of that!" said the Voice, cheerfully.

"Then what must I do?" cried the little Princess, wringing her hands.

"The plant that took away his sight is the most hateful weed that grows. Only one thing has the power to

counteract its spell, and that is the flower, of all flowers that bloom, that the Prince loves best. Find out what it is, and then, while he sleeps, lay it on his eyes. It will break the spell and he will see again."

With that the Voice ceased, and the Princess, with a happy heart, went back and lay at the Prince's feet, where she slept till morning.

The following day, after their kind friend the porpoise had once more carried them to the land, the Princess lost no time in questioning the little Prince about the flower he loved best. She was bitterly disappointed when he answered simply:

"I like them all. They are all pretty."

"But some are more beautiful than others," she said.

"Yes, but I like them all in different ways. I have no favorites."

Then she begged him to choose a favorite.

Melonseed laughed at her earnestness. "You shall choose for me," he said. "If we pass any flower that you would like to have, dear little Princess, bid the mice stop, and let me pick it for you, for that would give me pleasure."

So after that, whenever they came to a flower, of whatever kind or color, the Princess stopped the chariot and, leading Melonseed to it, asked him to pluck it for her. The chariot was soon loaded with flowers, but they made slow progress through the forest.

At night, when the Prince was sleeping, she took the flowers one by one and laid them on his closed eye-lids, hoping that among them all there might be one that would restore his sight.

In the morning she asked him eagerly, "Can you see yet, dear Melonseed?"

But he only shook his head, a little sadly, and she was ready to weep with disappointment. But she never told him what she had been doing in the night.

During all that day they were travelling through the Land of the Great Beasts and only reached the border of it at nightfall. Fortunately they did not meet with any panthers or snakes or other dangerous creatures. They passed along the trail without accident, and the Princess once more collected multitudes of flowers, so that the chariot was piled high with them.

At night, as soon as Melonseed was asleep, she began again to try all the flowers by laying them on his eyes.

As she bent over him the little Prince stirred in his sleep.

"Orangepip, I have not forgotten," she heard him murmur, "I keep the flower." And he slipped his hand inside his tunic and seemed to feel for something near his heart.

When she heard the word "flower," how eagerly the little Princess unloosed his tunic and drew out a tiny bag of silk she found there. Opening it she saw it contained nothing but a withered flower. It was crumpled and brown, and it did not seem possible that this could be Melonseed's favorite flower. But it was the blossom that had floated back to him from the wave that had borne Orangepip's body away, and therefore it was precious.

"Now I have found his dearest flower," said the Princess to herself, and she kissed it before she touched it to Melonseed's closed eyes.

The lids quivered and a happy smile passed over the little Prince's face.

Then she knew that the spell was broken, and, full

of thankfulness, she put the flower back in its silken bag and restored it to its place near the little Prince's heart.

Next morning, what joy for them both when Melonseed opened his eyes and saw, not only the lovely face of his little Princess, but the blue sky, the trees and grass and flowers, and all the swarming living things he knew so well, with which the land was alive!

Then the Princess told him all that she had done, from first to last, and he told her about his twin brother and the reason why the withered flower was so dear to him. They were happy together and Prince Melonseed was his merry, cheery self again. He had said before that he was content to be blind, but now he knew that it was a great deal better to see.

The rest of their journey was made with great speed, and by evening they found themselves outside the city walls and within sight of the King's Palace.

To crown Melonseed's joy, who should appear, coming to meet them, but Greenback, Browntail and Bluepoint. They were walking all abreast, as usual, looking much the same as a year ago, only that the Court fare and idleness had made them a trifle stouter.

"These are my three best friends, Princess," explained Melonseed when they came up.

"What pretty little fellows they are!" the Princess exclaimed. Then she patted their heads and treated them so graciously and kindly that they all three fell in love with her on the spot, and were so jealous of each other in consequence that they never remembered to be jealous of Prince Melonseed!

Well, of course there was a magnificent Wedding Feast, the like of which had never been seen before.

The King was charmed with his beautiful daughter-in-law and vowed that if he had been a little younger he would have married her himself. As it was, he said, he could now die happy, since he had lived to see his son settled in life and ready to reign in his stead.

However, he lived for many years after that.

When at last he did die, of simple old age—as even fairies do, sometimes—King Melonseed and his Queen took their place on the throne and ruled their little subjects wisely and merrily, and were greatly loved in return. The three lizards assisted them in all their councils and continued to be the constant attendants of the Royal pair.

Indeed it may be, for aught I have heard to the contrary, that they are all living yet in that Fairy Land of the South.

THE ADVENTUROUS ROAD

The Adventurous Road

CHAPTER I.

THE BAY HOUSE.

A WEEK is such a short time when every day is brimful of things to do. Paul and Audrey Debbrey had been invited for just one week to visit their uncle and aunt at their beautiful summer cottage, and the time was drawing to a close.

The Bay House, as the place was called, was perched high up on a rock overlooking the loveliest little bay in the world. Rocks encircled it and protected it from the winds that swept the ocean outside, so that the water was nearly always as smooth as the looking-glass that Audrey stood in front of when she brushed out her wavy red hair of a morning. It was a very safe bay, and if Paul had only been able to swim their uncle, Colonel Gray, would have allowed him to go out in the row-boat by himself, which was his greatest ambition. Instead, they had both to wait until Soo, the Chinese gardener, was ready to go fishing in the afternoon, which he did every day about five o'clock, and always took the children with him.

The high rocks that reached out like arms around the bay were covered with trees and moss: fir, cedar and glossy arbutus with rich, red stems showing against the

green. Wild spiræa, loaded with white bloom, grew everywhere and took away from the sombreness of the steep cliffs, and between the rocks there were warm nooks where the children liked to play and climb about, but always within definite limits set by their Aunt Gray. A sandspit ran out in one place and made a good bathing beach. Here Paul practised swimming—but without much success, having no one to teach him, for Soo, their only companion, could not swim himself and was very timid about the water. All he could do was to sit in the boat and laugh at the children's attempts to dog-paddle in the shallow water, while he peered over the edge at the fish he was so clever at hooking on his line.

To the children their uncle's house was more like a palace than a cottage. Their own home was a farm three miles away, on the other side of the woods, and never before in their lives had they seen anything like the handsome rooms and wide porches full of beautiful rugs and cool, comfortable furniture, of the Bay House. There were terraced lawns and the gayest flower beds, which Soo kept in perfect order. The rocky ground underneath had been covered deep with rich wood-soil, brought from a distance, and now roses and geraniums bloomed in all directions; there were shrubs loaded with flowers of many colors, besides the hanging baskets all around the open porches, which drooped with fuchsias and ferns.

When it began to get dusk electric lights shone out of the most unexpected places. There were rows of them along the little pier and outlining the terraces; others were hidden in colored globes among the shrubbery or suspended from the trees. When the place was lit up

at night it seemed like Fairyland to the children—and small wonder, for it was magically beautiful.

But if it was Fairyland it must have been under the evil spell of some witch, for the owners of it were not happy people and took little or no pleasure in their lovely home. All that Colonel Gray cared about was to add more and more money to the fortune he had already, while his wife found life dull and lonely in spite of her elegant surroundings and the hosts of fashionable people who came to see her. Audrey thought her aunt was ill, because whenever they asked her to go walking or boating with them, she said it made her too tired, or she could not stand the heat of the sun. The truth was that she was tired of everything in the world, and if a witch had really put her under a spell, the name of it would have been "*ennui.*" She had cast her own spell, however; no one else had done it.

The very first time the children saw her smile was when she came out to them one evening with an open letter in her hand, while they were having their tea on the porch as usual.

"How long have you been here, children?" she asked, looking from one to the other in quite a friendly way.

They began to count, and after a little argument agreed that it was seven days since they came to Bay House.

"A week—a whole week; what a long, long time!" said their aunt cheerfully, and they looked at each other, a little surprised, and wondering whether the time had been long or short.

"Well, children," she continued, graciously, "your mother has sent a letter to say that she wants you home again. To-morrow you are to leave. I must say you

have been good children, and I hope you have enjoyed your visit."

"We've enjoyed it very much, Aunt Gray," said Audrey primly, and Paul, whose mouth was full of muffin and honey, nodded his head eagerly.

Just then Uncle Gray came in. He was a big, stout, peppery gentleman of whom the children stood much in awe because he always shouted at the Chinese servants, snapped at his wife, and growled at them—though not unkindly.

But when he heard that they were to leave the Bay House the next day, he stopped growling, for once, and spoke quite gently to them.

"You've been good youngsters," said he, very much as Aunt Gray had said, "but home's the best place for you; though I hope you've had a good time while you've been here. If I had time I'd take you over the road myself to-morrow, and see your mother, my sister, whom I haven't laid eyes on for more than a year—more than two years, now I come to think of it!"

"Do come, Uncle," urged Paul, politely. "Mother said when we were leaving how much she would like to see you again."

Audrey said, "Do come!" too, though rather faintly, for the thought of that long, long walk, with only their terrible uncle for company, really frightened them both.

"You certainly should go to see your only sister, Colonel," put in his wife.

"Couldn't, possibly!" snapped the Colonel. "Important business meeting in the city to-morrow. Going down on the launch to-night. Just looked in to tell you. Good-bye, children! You'll come again next year. Con-

founded nuisance children are generally, but you've been good kids; no trouble at all, eh Mabel?"

"They've been some anxiety to *me*," Aunt Gray replied stiffly. "How was I to know that the boy would not take the boat and get himself drowned—or the girl tumble over the rocks and break her neck?"

"But you wouldn't let us go in the boat; you wouldn't let us climb the rocks by ourselves!" both children interrupted eagerly.

"Yes, yes! But how was I to know you wouldn't do it just the same?"

"We couldn't, 'cause we promised mother to obey rules," said Paul in honest but regretful tones.

"Good lad!" Uncle Gray spoke quite gently again. "Good lad!"

He patted Paul's head and kissed Audrey before he went away, which surprised them both very much.

"You might say good-bye to *me*," his wife called after him, and he looked up as if startled.

"Good-bye Mabel," he said, still in that unaccustomed, gentle voice.

The rest of tea-time was spent by the children in making exciting plans for the next day's journey. They would start early and they would take their lunch with them; they would gather berries by the way and pick a bunch of flowers to take to mother—they would rest often so as not to be too tired, there were lovely sitting-down places on the way; and then at last they would reach home and find mother and father and Ruddy, the dog, waiting for them, which would be best of all.

"If you're *afraid* to go by yourselves, children; I'll send Soo with you," said their aunt, partly listening to

their chatter and partly engaged in thoughts of a large house-party she was planning.

"We're not afraid, oh, not a bit afraid. Father brought us all the way here and now we know the road and can go back by ourselves," Paul assured her.

"It's just one long road, oh, ever so long!" cried little Audrey, "and it goes so straight through the woods that we couldn't get lost if we tried."

"I suppose not," murmured their Aunt, "and Soo is needed here to get the place ready for my party. Well, children," she added, after thinking for a moment, "I'll tell Ching to put you up a nice lunch and that's all you'll have to carry with you, for your clothes will be put in a suit-case and be sent round by the steamboat to-morrow night."

Ching came in to clear away the dishes and was told all about their intended departure and received orders from the lady to get a lunch-basket ready, after which she left the porch.

"Me makee you heap nice cake and little pies," he said, nodding and smiling to the children.

"Please, Ching, put in two bananas!" Audrey begged.

"Ham sandwiches for mine!" cried Paul.

"You see! You see!" said the friendly Chinaman. "You good children, I makee you good dinner!"

CHAPTER II.

THE LITTLE BROWN HEN CARRIES THE NEWS.

NEXT morning the sun rose with a specially warm gleam, the water in the bay sparkled and rippled as if it was laughing, the flowers on the terraces twinkled and nodded amiably, too, and the very air was balmier than on any other day since June began—all to make things pleasant for the two little people who were just about to start on the Adventurous Road together.

Paul and Audrey had had an early breakfast and had said good-bye to Ching, who handed them the basket with their lunch in it—two white parcels neatly wrapped in paper napkins, with two very large bananas on top.

"Good-bye, Missie! Good-bye, Sonnie!" he said.

Then they took a last look at the pretty terraces with the blue water beyond them, and waved a farewell to the Bay House.

Soo and Aunt Gray went with them as far as the beginning of the road, which started at the foot of the rock on which the house was built. First there were steps cut into the stone of the cliff and then a steep trail that took them right to the woods.

Remarkably kind it was of Aunt Gray to climb down all those steps on their account—a thing she had hardly done since she and Uncle Gray came to live at the Bay House. The children were quite overcome by such unusual condescension, and Audrey admired the pale blue morning gown she wore immensely; she thought it

such a pity her aunt should let it trail over the sticks, stones and dirt on the path, but was much too shy to say anything.

"I'm sure I hope you'll get home safely," Aunt Gray said again as they all stood at the opening of the wood. "If it wasn't for my house-party to-morrow I'd send Soo with you, anyway, but there's so much to do I simply can't spare him."

"We know the way *perfectly,* Aunt Gray," the children assured her, and "Thank you for our pleasant visit!" Paul remembered to add.

"Good-bye! Good-bye!" they called back bravely after the first few steps into the woods.

"Good-bye, children," Soo answered, standing, watching them with a shade of anxiety on his wrinkled yellow brow.

Aunt Gray was part way up the stone steps but she paused to wave a farewell, and Audrey noticed how gracefully the lace hung from her blue sleeve as she did so.

Then they set their faces towards home and the dark trail in front of them.

The sun did his best to shine on them, for warmth and cheerfulness, but the trees were so thick just there, and the cliff so high, that in spite of all his efforts he could not reach them. The balmy air that had smoothed their cheeks when they got up that morning, was shut out of the narrow path where it still seemed to be night. It was damp and it was dark and it was chill.

Audrey drew her cloak around her and was glad her aunt had made her wear it although she had been near rebelling when told to put it on, because the June day seemed so bright and warm when they got up.

THE LITTLE HEN CARRIES THE NEWS.

Audrey was a little girl of eight—a sprite of a child—with bright golden-red hair and a thin, pink and white face from which a pair of clear, direct eyes looked at you in a friendly way. She also had remarkably long thin legs for her size, and these legs could seldom be persuaded to walk in ordinary fashion—but always had to dance, or prance, or skip on their way. All of her except the long, thin legs, was covered by the brown cloth cape, which had a peaked hood attached that was drawn over her head and fitted close around the delicate little face. Audrey liked bright colors and had wanted a scarlet cape, like Red Ridinghood—but her mother said because of her hair (which some people would have called plain red) she must wear brown. It was a very pretty, warm brown, and Audrey looked like a wood sprite in it.

Sturdy Paul, one year older than his sister, was clad for comfort, too—in blue sweater and tight blue breeches with stout shoes and heavy stockings, and on his head an old Panama of his uncle's which covered up every trace of his brown curls and made a white frame all around his sunburnt face.

Because it was so dark and chilly in the woods they held each other's hands at first and in the heart of each was the half wish that they had begged Aunt Gray to let Soo come with them after all. But that feeling did not last long. Very soon they discovered that in spite of the dimness and dampness of the path and the cold that had made them shiver at first, there was a friendly atmosphere all along the road and they began to feel safe and comfortable.

They did not know why they felt the way they did—but I am going to tell you the secret of it.

THE ADVENTUROUS ROAD.

The Adventurous Road, you must know, was nothing more than an old skid trail that ran for three miles through the woods and connected Crescent Beach, where the Bay House stood, with Curling Cove, where Maple Farm, the children's home, lay snugly among trees close by the sea.

A skid road has round logs laid across it at short intervals, like the rungs of a ladder, and this one had been used to bring out the timber of the huge firs and maples with which the little valley had once been filled. That was years ago, and now although the woods were still thick, the noblest giants of them all were gone and only enormous stumps remained to show where they had been.

If you had asked any of the folks at the Beach or the Cove, who lived on the Skid Road, the answer would certainly have been, "No one, except Mammy Rachel, the old colored woman, who makes her living digging roots in the woods." And yet I assure you, numbers of families lived all along the Skid Road—only as they were not on speaking terms with the people who passed that way, they were ignored.

With Paul and Audrey it was different, for all the creatures, big and little, who inhabited the woods, knew these two children and felt friendly towards them and had even agreed to help them on their way as far as possible.

Word had been passed at the first peep of dawn, while the children were still sound asleep, that they would be coming through that day and, strange to say, the news started from the poultry yard at the Bay House.

Dapple, the Plymouth Rock cock, being always an early riser, had hopped off the perch as soon as there

was light enough to see and was enchanted to find that the hen-house door had been left open.

"Cluck-a-luck-a-luck!" he called to his wives. "Get up every one of you! The door is open and we can get out in the yard to eat up the grain left from last night's feed."

Some of the hens were sleepy and some were lazy, but Dapple continued to call so persistently that one by one they stumbled down off their perches, and then jostled each other rudely, to get through the door and be first at the grain.

Dapple, like the gentleman he was, scratched and called, but would not touch a morsel for himself until all his wives were on the ground and eating as fast as they could; for Soo had scattered the wheat with such a generous hand that there was plenty for an early breakfast for all—even for the little brown hen who slipped in and out among the others, unobtrusively, and seemed a stranger to the flock.

Dapple had his favorite wife beside him and picked out the best grains for her, while he kept a sharp eye on the others and scolded them when they were greedy or quarrelsome.

"I hear, my dear," he said to the pretty little Andalusian, "that our two young visitors are leaving us to-day."

"Indeed," replied the Chief Favorite, "and where did you pick up that piece of news?"

"When the cook was gathering the eggs last night—robbing your nest, my dear, as he always does, without a word of apology—he remarked to the gardener over the fence, that he was going to make some little lemon pies for the children, who were leaving to-day."

"Well, if that's so, he's welcome to the egg I laid yesterday, a fine large one it was, too," said the blue hen with an amiable cluck. "The little girl often brought us fresh green stuff from the garden and was never rude nor rough, like some children I've known."

"She's welcome to my egg, too," another hen cackled eagerly.

"And mine!"

"And mine!" said one after the other.

"We're sorry they are going!"

All the time they were chattering the little brown hen slipped in and out amongst them, picking up a grain here and a grain there, and listening with all her ears to the gossip of the hen-yard. She was a little hen grouse whose nest was hidden in the grass and brush on the other side of the fence, and she had formed the habit of flying over in the early morning for a share of the grain which Soo distributed so lavishly. Beyond giving her a peck when she came too close to them, the hens paid very little attention to her, regarding her as a harmless creature not worth bothering about; and this morning they were all so interested in Dapple's news they never even noticed her;

However, the little hen grouse had relations living on the Skid Road, and what more natural than that when she had filled her crop with wheat she should pay them an early morning call and tell them the news she had just heard?

"The children from the farm are going home to-day," she cackled to her cousin the Golden Cock whom she met close to their cover.

He passed the news along and told the Robin who lived in the Maple Clump on the first rise, and the

Robin told the Mother Wren who was sitting on some eggs under a salmonberry bush. Father Wren was setting out on his morning hunt for grubs and he told the Snake who lived under the Sunny Stone, which was the first place he stopped at.

The Snake passed the word along to the Bees whose home was in the Hollow Stump.

After that, of course, everyone knew, for the bees flew in all directions, looking for honey—and wherever they went they told the news.

Then all the creatures, birds, beasts and insects agreed that because the children had always been kind to them, they would not frighten nor hurt them in any way, but would help them along if they could.

"That is, of course, if they behave themselves," the Chipmunk scolded, shrilly. "If the boy were to throw a stone at me, I'd—I'd tell the Rotten Tree to fall on him!"

"Don't talk so loud," buzzed one of the Bees, who knew the Chipmunk didn't mean half he said. "We don't want the Bear to know they're coming this way at all, because we're afraid he's not to be trusted!"

"Have you told the Cougar and the Wild Cat?" demanded the Robin from the branch of the maple tree where he was swinging.

"Yes, yes, they know; and the Wild Cat has promised not to interfere with them if they don't interfere with him. As for the Cougar, he would promise nothing, but he's such a coward he's safe to run away when he sees them coming!"

So, you see, the children had nothing to fear in the woods, and there was no reason why they should not feel safe and happy.

CHAPTER III.

THE WREN'S NEST.

HAND in hand Paul and Audrey advanced into the darkness of the trail, which was at its blackest and thickest under the shadow of the cliff. The little girl walked springily, on pointed toes, as she always did, glancing from side to side, while her brother looked straight ahead along the Skid Road.

"It's getting lighter," he said presently, and pointed ahead to a place where the sun was pouring white rays down through the trees.

Audrey let go his hand and danced on in front of him.

"How lovely and warm it is here!" she cried, as she stood in the little clearing a few moments later and clapped her hands. The hood slipped off her head as she danced up and down, letting her bright hair slip out and shine in the sunlight.

It was a pleasant place, where big, dry logs were tumbled about on either side of the road, with flowers and ferns and prickly blackberry creepers growing all over them. The black clamminess of the lower road was all gone.

"I'll begin to make mother's bouquet," Audrey announced, picking some long stalks of purple fireweed.

Paul very sensibly disapproved. "They'll be all withered long before we get home," he said. So she threw them away and began to explore among the logs.

Pretty soon she sniffed the air, with her little pointed nose held high.

"I smelt it first thing," her brother said with a laugh. "I guess he lives under that stump," pointing to a big fir stump, high and dry on a bed of sword fern.

"I've never seen a skunk," whispered Audrey. "Mother says they're pretty. I wish he'd come out and let us look at him."

"Better not wish that," said Paul, with another laugh. "If he scatters his scent over you, mother wouldn't let you sleep in the house to-night!"

"Yes, she would, Paul Debbrey! Mother would never turn me out, no matter what happened!"

"Wouldn't she, though?" he retorted knowingly.

While they were arguing about it, a charming little animal slipped out from under the log and stood looking at them while you could count thirty. Audrey saw it first and danced with delight. Whereupon it slipped in again.

"I've seen a skunk at last, and that's our first adventure! It was like the prettiest little black and white pussy, wasn't it, Paul?"

But Paul grabbed her arm and pulled her in great haste along the road.

"Better get away, for fear of an accident," he said. His sister trotted on obediently, but she kept her head over her shoulder as long as the log was in sight, hoping for another glimpse of the graceful little animal with the beautiful coat of fur.

The next living thing that aroused their interest was a ground lizard, a curious little creature neither of them had ever seen before. Nor had the lizard had any word of their coming through the wood, for he lived too much

underground to be sociable with his neighbors on the Skid Road or to know about the children of the farm. That was the reason he wriggled and squirmed and tried to get away from them, when Paul unearthed him with a stick which he was poking in the earth for no reason at all, the way boys do. Suddenly this strange little brown lizard ran out, as it seemed from under the point of his stick. It was the exact color of the dead bark that lay around, in strips, on the ground, and it had long thin brown legs, a funny little head with rather large black eyes and a square nose.

The children examined him a long while in delighted silence, and he eyed them in the same way once he stopped wriggling, though if the truth were told he was not delighted to see *them*, but very much the reverse.

"He's a new discovery," said Paul, finally. "I wonder if father knows about him. I've a great mind to take him home with us."

"Oh, don't do that," said little Audrey, "because this is where he belongs and perhaps he has a family who would miss him. He's a nice, gentle little fellow, and if he didn't look so—so queer, I'd like to take him in my hand."

"He'd be a bother to carry, so we'll have to leave him I guess," her brother decided at last, to the great relief of the lizard, who had a very good notion what they were talking about, as he looked from one to the other of them with his curious dull black eyes.

Paul moved his stick away and they watched him burrow under the ground again, which he did as quick as a wink, using his little blunt nose as a shovel. Then the lunch-basket was picked up again and the children made another start.

I'm afraid they did not get on very fast, because you see, there were so many things to look at and so many animals to visit on the way. It kept them stopping every minute or so. There were the many pretty caterpillars, for instance: yellow and blue and black and brown; besides inch-worms, green and brown, large and small; not to mention the ants and beetles and spiders. It was amusing to watch all these little creatures as they bustled about their business—all seemingly anxious to make the most of the fine Spring day, which was warm and bright now even where the trees grew thick.

Suddenly Paul called out, in low tones thrilling with excitement:

"A bird's nest, and four eggs in it!"

"Where? Where?" Audrey demanded.

He pointed in under a salmonberry bush at the side of the road, and there, about a foot from the ground, was a little round nest, neatly set in the branches and inside of it four creamy white eggs with brown spots.

"I'm going to take one," whispered Paul, as they peered into it.

"You'll do no such thing, Paul," cried Audrey in angry dismay. "Poor little bird! It would be dreadfully disappointed to find an egg gone when it comes back."

"No, it wouldn't. Birds can't count; and anyway Uncle Gray said one day that it didn't matter, if you only took *one*."

"I'm sure mother wouldn't say that. Besides, it's stealing, because the eggs all belong to the little bird and not to us."

"Huh!" grunted Paul, scornfully. "What about the

hens' eggs that are taken away from them every day? You ate one for your breakfast."

"That's—that's—different," Audrey stammered, much disconcerted by this argument. Then after a moment's thought, "*Of course* that's different," said she triumphantly. "Why, we *feed* the hens wheat and scraps and skim milk, and of course they have to pay us back with their eggs."

"Well, anyhow, I'm going to take just one egg," said Paul, stubbornly. "It's just a silly girl's notion to think there's any harm in it."

"I'll fight you for it!" his sister cried, standing in the middle of the road and clenching her small fists defiantly.

"Girls can't fight."

"I can fight as well as you!" stormed the little red-haired girl.

"Well, boys can't fight with girls, so it's all the same," and he reached a hand out cautiously to take an egg.

"Paul, don't, *please* don't! I'll clench hands with you, Paul, if you won't fight. If you can put me on my knees then you'll have won, but I'll still think you the meanest boy that ever lived if you take an egg!"

"All right. I'll clench you," he agreed, and they entered on their favorite contest of strength, in which Audrey, though really no match for her brother, sometimes won.

Standing face to face in the middle of the road they were just equal in height, because Audrey was on the upper slant of the ground. First they held up their hands and spread their fingers and then interlaced them,

palm to palm. The object was to bend back your opponent's wrists and force him to his knees.

Audrey, wiry and agile, twisted from side to side and struggled furiously. It was her nature to throw herself heart and soul into everything she did. Paul, on the contrary, planted his feet firmly in one place and never budged an inch. The contest lasted some time. Never before had Audrey been so desperately determined to win. Her way of fighting was to jump high in the air and fling all her weight on her brother's hands. Once she almost got his wrists back doing this—and then she tried it again and again, but always in vain. Paul was on his guard. At last, taking advantage of a moment when she relaxed after a brave struggle, he calmly bent back her little sinewy wrists with hardly any effort at all, and she dropped to her knees on the soft ground between the skids, vanquished in body but not in spirit.

"I don't care! It's a mean thing to do, even if you did beat!" she stormed.

"A bargain's a bargain!" replied Paul, with a short laugh of triumph.

But when they both turned to look at the nest, Audrey ready to cry, and Paul secretly ashamed of his easy victory, they had a surprise.

There, peeking at them with knowing little eyes, her head on one side, sat the Mother Wren, close on the nest and not an egg in sight.

"She heard us talking and came back to protect them!" whispered Audrey.

"I guess she can have her old eggs if she wants them as much as that." Paul's tone was careless, not to say rude, but in his boyish heart was a very tender feeling

towards the little mother-bird who sat there eying them so confidentially.

On they trudged along the road once more, and now they passed through quite a long stretch of boggy ground, where the water lay in little pools and they had to jump from skid to skid to avoid getting wet. Here the ferns grew thick and high and there were great tangles of salmonberry bushes, with large, luscious red and yellow berries hanging in full view as if asking to be picked. But the ground was too boggy for the children to venture off the road, and they had to be content with the fruit that was within reach of their stretched-out arms. They were careful not to miss a berry, and though salmonberries are tasteless things, they are juicy and refreshing on a hot day.

It was very quiet in this part of the woods and not a living thing in sight except the swarms of gnats and mosquitoes that danced around their heads.

"These are nice mosquitoes," Audrey said once, "for they don't bite us. I wonder why?"

Of course the children didn't know that the mosquitoes had entered into the compact with all the other creatures to treat them kindly on their way along the trail.

There were frogs, too, hiding among the ferns and in the pools of water—friendly frogs that looked at them as they passed with bulging eyes and didn't even take the trouble to hop out of their way. Audrey would have loved them, and so would Paul, but with their eyes intent on the salmonberries the children missed the creatures at their feet. Which was just as well, or else they would have been later still in reaching the high ground and the best part of the road.

CHAPTER IV.

THE QUARREL.

A LONG stretch of straight road led up the rise to the sunny knoll where they could see in the distance a large, flat granite boulder, and beyond that an enormous charred stump.

This was the part of the woods where the wild flowers grew best, for it was open and sunny and well-drained, though a little stream ran along the side and kept the ground moist. Flowers and pretty creeping plants grew luxuriantly here. Without knowing the names of all of them, the children knew their faces well and had their own way of distinguishing them. Green bunches of berries among glossy fern-like leaves, known to them as Oregon grapes, grew close to the lovely, waxy, Shallal blossoms. There were orange tiger lilies and golden daisies, besides many straight, upstanding flowers, pink, purple and white; and among the rocks, bunches of velvety lady's-slippers.

This was, clearly, the place where mother's bouquet must be made, so Audrey set to work with a will. Paul helped her for a while, but was more interested in picking up odd stones or in watching the funny little bugs and worms that swarmed around the logs and among the roots of the plants.

Presently he found a dead bird and held it up for his sister to see. It had blue wings and a soft grey body. They wondered what had killed it, until they discovered

a gunshot wound in its breast where a chance shot, meant for a grouse, maybe, had entered.

It took a little time to dig a hole to bury the bird in and while Paul hunted for a smooth stone to lay over the grave, his sister went on picking flowers.

"I pity the poor dead people!" sighed Audrey.

Paul looked up surprised.

"And why?" he asked.

"Because there are no flowers under the ground." "But then," she added, quaintly, as Paul did not reply, being fully occupied with putting the stone he had chosen in place, "they have the flower-roots close above them, and that should be some comfort to the poor things!"

"Now, Audrey, you've got to come along quick," her brother called out about ten minutes later. "Aunt Gray said we ought to have our lunch at eleven and be home soon after noon, and here we are not half way yet and it's long past twelve o'clock!"

"How do you know? You have no watch," and Audrey continued calmly to arrange her bouquet.

"I know well enough without a watch. Besides I'm awfully hungry. That big stump on the top of the hill is the half-way post, father said, and as soon as we get there I'm going to eat my lunch."

"Don't be in such a hurry," protested Audrey. "I want to make a great, enormous bouquet for mother."

In the big maple near the road, the biggest maple in the valley, a robin was singing loudly. It was the friendly robin who had carried the news of the children's coming up the Skid Road that morning. If only they could have understood his language fully he could have told them many interesting things about life in the

green woods, things they would have liked to hear. They understood that he was friendly, however, and that he meant to please them with his song. Audrey stood still to listen to it, but Paul hurried on up the hill, calling back as he went:

"I'll leave some crumbs of my lunch for you, Robin Redbreast, to pay you for your jolly little song!"

The little girl was in a dawdling mood. The sun high overhead was quite hot. She felt a little tired and moved along inch by inch, instead of skimming over the ground with her usual hop, skip and jump.

Far ahead she could see Paul sitting on the flat stone at the top of the hill—the Sunny Stone where the Snake lived.

"Hurry up," he shouted, beginning to be angry because she was so slow.

"I don't want to hurry! We've got all day!" Audrey shouted back. And then she stretched herself full length on a soft strip by the side of the skids. It was a bank, covered thick with a pretty creeping plant that had thousands of tiny pink bells on it—bells that were all moving, very softly, in the air. I am convinced that they made sweet and delicate music as they moved, but no human ear, not even Audrey's, which was sharper than most, could hear it.

Paul was highly disgusted. In his opinion Audrey only wanted to be aggravating when she threw herself down by the side of the road, and in another minute he was pretty sure that he would lose his temper.

"Come on, I say!" he shouted again, adding by way of a threat, "I'll eat up your lunch if you don't."

But Audrey only buried her head deeper among the pink bells.

"They have the loveliest smell, Paul, something like strawberries and honey mixed," she called back. "It's so nice and soft here I think I'll go to sleep," and with that she shut her eyes tight and put her fingers in her ears so that she couldn't hear half that her brother said as he scolded and stormed from the top of the hill and ordered her again and again to "Come on, Silly!"

Audrey liked to tease, but she didn't like being called "Silly," so she went on pretending to be sound asleep.

Then at last Paul really did lose his temper, which is a very bad thing to happen to anybody, big or little.

He was so furious that he never saw the little yellow and brown Snake which slid out from under the stone and watched him, with harmless darting tongue, and small cunning eyes, while the boy's face grew crimson with rage and his hands doubled up into fists.

"I'll wake you up pretty quick! You'll see!" and he tore down the hill, picking up a stone as big as an egg as he went.

Audrey saw him coming quite plainly, out of the corner of the eye she was pretending to keep shut, and she was frightened. Once Paul had hit her *hard* when he was in one of his rages; that was so long ago she had almost forgotten about it—but she remembered again now.

Quick as a flash she was up on her feet and running down the road—Paul after her.

"Come back! Come back, or I'll throw this stone!"

"I'll not come back!" she screamed defiantly over her shoulder.

Then, *bang* went the stone! It hit a tree behind her. Audrey heard the sound it made, a sharp thud, and sped on—a little frightened but much more angry.

As for Paul, all his temper went into the stone and didn't come back again. Of course he never meant to hit her—he had aimed short on purpose—but still, the stone *might* have struck and then—; he wondered whether Audrey would tell their mother or whether he would have to own up himself.

He turned around and walked up the hill again. When he got to the top he found the little snake coiled up on the warm, flat stone.

"So ho!" the Snake was saying if only Paul could have understood. "So that's the kind of a boy you are! I'm a pretty bad lot myself, at times, but when you're in a temper, young man, I fancy you could hold your own, even with me. Throwing stones at your sister! It won't be long before the whole Skid Road knows of it!"

Paul stood watching the snake for a moment or two, filled with his own thoughts which were not very happy ones. Then he looked down the road to see if Audrey was coming back yet.

No, she was not in sight. She had disappeared around the bend in the road, just where it dipped into the boggy flat—but at any moment she might re-appear.

"After all it was her fault more than mine," Paul went on, thinking to himself. "She ought to have come when she was called. I'll hide in the big hollow stump and give her a scare when she comes past!"

So he leapt over the Sunny Stone, with the Snake on it, and ran a few yards further on, to where the huge old cedar stump stood some feet off the road. It was charred by fire both outside and in. Mosses and ferns grew from its top edges and drooped gracefully over its weatherbeaten sides. The entrance to it was screened by a clump of bushes all tangled up with blackberry

trailers, now white with blossom. A grand old monument, hundreds of years old.

This was the stump which his father had told him stood half way between the Crescent and the Cove, and Paul had discovered that it was hollow by throwing a stone over the top and hearing it drop inside.

Now he made a dash for it, throwing penitence to the winds and only eager to hide in it before Audrey would turn the corner of the road and see him, when it would be too late for his plan.

Just in time Paul disappeared behind the screen of tangled greenery at the very moment when Audrey came dancing into view around the bend in the road.

She looked up the rise and saw no sign of her brother, but she was not in the least alarmed. Of course Paul was on ahead, out of sight. She would soon catch up. So she hurried on as fast as her nimble legs would go, deciding that her brother had been teased enough for one day, and quite of the opinion that it was lunch time after all.

The ribbon that tied her cloak around her neck had slipped into a tight knot, and the garment hung down between her shoulders heavy and hot. Hugged to her breast she carried the great bunch of flowers. Her upturned face was eager, flushed and perspiring, and the bright hair clung in moist ringlets about her forehead. Nevertheless Audrey was happy as she urged on those nimble legs—tired but willing legs. She bore no ill-will to her brother for the wicked stone or the angry words.

"It's so lovely in the woods and we're going home," said the little girl out loud, and laughed contentedly to herself.

The Robin, who heard her, gave a loud chirrup of sympathy.

CHAPTER V.

THE ANIMALS TURN AGAINST PAUL.

AS he tumbled through the bracken and the brambles that closed the entrance to the Hollow Stump, Paul received a shock and experienced a severe pain. You will be surprised to hear that the bees were the cause of these sensations.

Yes, the bees, from being friends, had turned into enemies. When they saw him throw the stone at his little sister an angry buzz circled round amongst them and their indignation was extreme. Nor were they the only ones to be angry on Audrey's account, no indeed. The Robin had seen, and the Chipmunk had seen what Paul did, and the Snake was ready to tell the whole story to anyone who would listen. And all who heard about it, and all who saw it, were full of indignation against Paul.

The bees were not long in deciding to drive him out of the Hollow Stump, which, you may remember, was their home. It had stores of honey hidden in its big cavities, but of course Paul had no idea of that when he planned to hide there.

As he ran for the opening the bees flew all around him, buzzing angrily, and just as he got inside, into the dearest little room, that would have delighted Audrey's heart, one bee gave him a sharp sting on the knee, and another did the same to his forehead.

Down dropped Paul on one knee, while he hunted round for the sting in the other. He knew if he could find it and pull it out it would relieve the pain. He knew all about bees and was not afraid of them, but these stings were very painful. The bees had been liberal with their venom.

Being only nine years old Paul had hard work to keep from whimpering as he hunted for the sting; but tears hindered him from seeing clearly, so he brushed them aside angrily, and presently found what he was looking for and pulled it out carefully.

There was a lump the size of an egg over his eye by this time, and no matter how gently he passed his fingers over it he could not find a trace of the sting in that bite. All this took time. He was five minutes or more inside the Hollow Stump. Luckily for him the bees decided that he was punished enough for this time, and although they continued to fly around his head in a threatening way he did not receive another bite.

It was while he was so intently examining his injuries that Audrey came up the long straight rise and passed by. Paul never heard her light, tip-toeing step and, of course, it never entered the little girl's head to look for her brother inside the Hollow Stump; so she tripped along all unconsciously—and that made all the trouble that followed.

When at length Paul came out on the road again Audrey was out of sight, being hidden by a tall tree farther on the way. Anyway, Paul never looked in that direction. He looked back, over the road they had come, for not once did it occur to him that his sister might have gone by. The bend of the road at the foot of the hill was in sight, and beyond that he knew was the dark

and wet part of the wood, but no little brown-caped girl was anywhere to be seen.

"The woods are thick down there. Perhaps she's afraid all by herself," thought Paul. "I guess I'll run back a piece and get her."

He wished now that he had never thought of scaring her by hiding. The lump on his forehead felt as big as an apple now, and how his knee did ache! Vaguely it occurred to him that he was being punished for his unkindness to his sister.

To make amends he ran as fast as he could down the sloping road and around the bend, for it began to seem strange to him that Audrey was so long in coming.

When, however, he reached the damp and boggy part, where he had to jump over puddles of water at almost every step, and still there was no sign of Audrey, he grew frightened.

"What has become of her?" he asked himself, over and over.

Oh, why had he been so rude as to scold and call her names? Why had he been so unmanly as to throw a stone at her? He began to think she must have run back into the woods, among the trees and then perhaps —oh, dreadful thought!—a cougar or a bear might have got her.

"Audrey! Audrey!" he shouted.

His voice rang through the woods and echoed from the great trunks that stood like palisades on either side of the road. But not an answering sound came back to him. For how could the little maid, speeding along the upper road as fast as her nimble legs would carry her, and always farther and farther away from him, how could she hear and answer? If a sound came to her at

all, she thought it was some lumberman at a distance calling; it was too far to distinguish her name.

On and on ran Paul, back over the road they had travelled together so gaily only a short while before. As he ran he gave great choking sobs, which he would not do for his hurt knee—and in between his sobs he called and called.

In the meantime what was Audrey doing?

When Paul came out of the Hollow Stump, she was not a great way off. She could have heard him call then, and he, her; but she was hidden from view by the trunk of a big fir that screened that part of the road, and besides Paul never even glanced in that direction, nor did she once look back.

Foolish children, both of them.

Those long thin legs flashed along the Adventurous Road at such a pace that their small owner was soon all out of breath and weary, but of course she did not overtake Paul. Audrey was hungry for her lunch now, and eager to see her brother and make up their quarrel. It was so seldom she and Paul quarrelled and then it never lasted long. Often Paul was the first to make it up. She could not understand why he had run so far away from her this time and left her to come all that long way alone. It was unkind and not like Paul. Then she thought of the lunch again, the neatly arranged basket with the two beautiful yellow bananas on top. Ching must have chosen the biggest he could find. He had always been so kind to them. Once she heard her Uncle Gray say that the "Chinks," as he called them, were always good to children and liked them. How nice it was of them to be like that, she thought.

Still no Paul. Oh, how tired she felt and thirsty, and what a long, long road it was!

Audrey's happy enjoyment of the woods and the flowers passed away in anxious hurrying to catch up with Paul. There was still no sign of him, and in her worry she never noticed the lively little Chipmunk that scurried along the side of the road, up and down trees and across logs—sometimes ahead of her, but never far behind. This was the friendly Chipmunk who had been so angry at Paul for quarrelling with his sister, and now he was doing his best to keep an eye on her and to see that she came to no harm. All along the way he chattered volubly—trying to make her understand that Paul had gone in the other direction. He quite lost patience and began to scold her shrilly when he noticed that she was not even listening to him or paying the least attention!

The Robin followed her, too, flitting from branch to branch and singing cheerfully all the way. Without knowing that she heard it the song stole into the little girl's heart and comforted her.

And if she had not been so full of other thoughts she could not have failed to notice the strange conduct of the bees, for they formed a body-guard around her, buzzing gently, making a show of lighting on the flowers they passed, but never stopping for more than a few seconds, then flying on so as to keep near her.

Even the Snake came quite a long way with her, rustling through the leaves and grass, slipping around logs and stones, never letting a bit of himself be seen. But after a little while he grew uneasy at finding himself so far away from home and turned back. It was

not long before he was curled up again on the smooth Sunny Stone.

All at once Audrey stopped short in the middle of the road, for she had come in sight of a wretched old tumbledown shack that stood in a small clearing close to where she had to pass. The hut was built partly of logs and partly of old bits of board and tin and sacking, while beside it and towering over it stood the Rotten Tree, enormously tall and straight and very aged in appearance. There was no bark left on its trunk, nothing but bare white wood all fretted into holes and ridges by the rain and the storms of many, many years; above, a few thin and feeble branches pointed crooked fingers at the sky.

In this funny old shack beside the Rotten Tree lived Mammy Rachel, the old darky woman, all by herself. She, too, was ancient and decrepit like the tree, and some people called her a witch for no reason at all except that she made her living in the woods by gathering roots and herbs, which she sold to the druggist.

Audrey, who was not afraid of any kind of animal, was afraid of Mammy Rachel. I don't know why, unless because she was black and ugly. To go past her house alone was more than the little girl had courage for, so she crept to the edge of the road, keeping a timid eye on the half-open door of the shack, frightened lest the old colored woman should come out and see her before she got out of sight of the road.

Still hugging her big bunch of flowers she slipped into a corner between two logs, where she could see without being seen herself, and peeping out through the tall fern leaves, watched the hut.

"When Mammy comes out," she said to herself, "she'll shut the door and lock it; she always does when she's away, and when she's gone I'll run past."

How frightened she was as she hid behind the sword fern, and how bitterly she thought of Paul's desertion! Paul would have laughed at her for being afraid of Mammy Rachel, but she would not have minded his making fun of her if only he had been there to go past that dreadful door with her.

For the first time that day Audrey's brave spirits deserted her. She had walked a long way; it was past lunch-time by an hour or more; she had given up all hopes of catching up to her brother. It was not surprising that she began to cry softly to herself.

The Robin, perched on the lowest branch of the Rotten Tree—just a short, gaunt stick—sang his sweetest song to comfort her, but she was too unhappy to care to listen. The bees buzzed in the flowers all around her; such a purring, soothing noise they made. If Audrey could have understood she would have known that they were singing a little song, too. Their song sounded something like this:

"Sleep, sleep; rest and sleep;
Rest, rest; sleep and rest!"

Nothing but that, over and over again.

But if she didn't understand their song it had its effect just the same, for in a very short time her head nodded drowsily and her crying became no more than an occasional pitiful little sigh. A few minutes more and her golden-red curls were pillowed on a cushion of dry bracken and she was fast asleep.

The Robin still sang bravely overhead, but the Rotten Tree made no sound, except an occasional involuntary "*Crack!*" which the heat of the sun forced from it.

Still, even the Rotten Tree had thoughts—and this is what he was thinking in his withered old heart:

"I'm old, very old, and some day soon I've got to fall down, and that will be the end of me. After that I'll be only a log and never more a tree. The Wind pushes me so hard I can't stand up against him much longer. But I'll not fall down to-night, no, not if I can help it, no matter how the Wind may drive and beat and blow upon me! I'm too old now to be very sure of myself, but this I know, I'll choose a time for my fall when old Mammy Rachel, who trusts her life to me, is not in her shack and when the two children from the farm are safe at home in their beds!

CHAPTER VI.

PAUL MEETS THE BEAR.

AS said before, Paul was a strong, sturdy boy for his age, and could run a long way without tiring. At first he went at the top of his speed, always peering ahead, expecting to come on Audrey every minute. But as there was no sign of her to be seen he grew more and more puzzled over her disappearance. Of course she might be running, too, and fast, but why should she try to get so far away from him? He could not understand it, and the thought of a Cougar or a Bear would keep coming into his head to frighten him.

At last a more reassuring idea occurred to him, which was that when Audrey had found herself so far in the woods with no brother near her to keep her from being frightened by the darkness and the gloom, she had decided to go all the way back to the Bay House, to ask Soo to come with her and take care of her. Yes, this must have been what had happened, Paul decided, as he slackened his steps. Quite likely something had scared her, he thought. She might have seen an animal among the trees and have been afraid to turn and go past it again all alone.

By this time Paul had reached the clearing where they had stopped by the wren's nest and wrestled over the egg. He peeped through the salmonberry leaves and saw the little bird still calmly sitting just as they had left her. But somehow it seemed to him she had a

reproachful look in her small bright eyes now, as if she knew what he had done.

"Where's the nice little girl you had with you before?" she seemed to say. "The little girl who was willing to fight to save my egg?"

Very sorrowfully Paul continued on the way back to the Bay House, where he was now fully persuaded that he would find his sister. But he no longer ran. There did not seem to be any need of hurry now.

After a while he remembered how hungry he was and that he was still carrying the lunch-basket in his hand, though it was a miracle he had not dropped it in all his excitement and hurry.

"I might as well eat my lunch," he said out loud; "I'm nearly starving and it must be awfully late."

So down he sat and ate every crumb of his ham sandwiches and lemon pie and walnut cookies and banana, after which he felt greatly comforted and refreshed. He could have eaten Audrey's lunch too, for his appetite was enormous after the long run through the woods, but being anxious to atone for his former misdeeds he did not touch a morsel of it, even though he was persuaded in his mind that by this time Audrey would be having a late lunch with Aunt Gray in the big cool dining-room at the Bay House.

He pictured it all to himself quite clearly and came to the conclusion that since Audrey was safe and he was very hot and tired he would sit still and rest for a while.

There were no Bees to sing him a lullaby and no Robin to keep watch overhead—the animals were all displeased with Paul and had turned against him. The mosquitoes and flies began to bite him; the ants swarmed over him and stung him; beetles and grubs tickled him as he lay

on the ground; but in spite of them all the poor lad was so weary that he soon fell sound asleep, just as Audrey had done, and he slept till the shadows had moved right across the Skid Road and the sun shone through the tree trunks on the opposite side.

A squirrel in a fir tree nearby began to scold him vigorously for sleeping so long in the daytime, and at last he awoke with a start and jumped up hurriedly.

"Why, it's late, almost evening; I must make haste to Audrey," and Paul, all his uneasiness returning to him at sight of the long shadows under the trees, started to run again. He was not far from the edge of the woods, and before many minutes he had reached the foot of the cliff and the steep trail that led to the stone steps and the lowest of the green terraces.

It so chanced that not a soul did he meet until he came to the stone wall below the terrace and heard the sound of voices over his head. He stood still, close to the wall, hoping to hear Audrey's light tones and thinking he would jump up then and give her a surprise—a pleasant surprise this time.

However, this was the conversation he found himself listening to.

"Well, Soo," said Aunt Gray, who had evidently come out to inspect the work in the garden, as she often did in the late afternoon, "the two children will be safe at home long before this. They were good children enough, but the place is quieter without them."

"Huh," grunted Soo in reply, "heap nice chillen; not velly big; I tink too little for go all alone. Maybe big bear eat 'em."

"How ridiculous, Soo," returned Aunt Gray, with a laugh in which there was a good deal of uneasiness. "As

if the Colonel would have allowed them to go alone if there had been the least danger! Besides, bears always run away—everybody says so; and no one has seen a bear in these woods for ages and ages."

"Not so long ago, Missee Gray; last week one man shoot bear, somebody tellee me."

"You shouldn't believe all the stories you hear," said the lady, severely.

Paul did not wait to hear any more. One thing was plain to him, and that was that Audrey had not returned to the Bay House. What, then, had become of her?

He had not the courage to face Aunt Gray and to tell her that he had lost Audrey. If his uncle had been there it would have been different; he could have helped to find Audrey; but in Paul's opinion his aunt's advice would not be worth much, and he remembered her party and that she did not want to let Soo go with them.

He tried to forget what the Chinaman had said about the bear, and told himself he must have missed her somehow and would find her on the way back. But he must hurry, and would run fast, much faster than before.

All the time these thoughts were hurrying through his brain, Paul was stumbling down the steps, down the trail, and on to the Skid Road. Once there he began to run in earnest.

Everything seemed to hinder him. The roots of the trees poked through the ground and tripped him more than once, causing him to fall flat. The sun was getting low, the shadows were long and the light dim, especially where the trees grew close together.

Strange noises arrested his attention, and he felt compelled to stop and listen, because sometimes the noises

sounded to him like Audrey crying away off in the woods. But after listening intently several times he decided it was only a wild cat mewing.

On he ran, until presently another noise reached his ears, different from the first—a mournful sound that was repeated over and over again. What could it be? Not Audrey moaning somewhere in the shadows?

Again he stopped and listened.

It was nothing but the cooing of the wild doves, after all.

In the very boggiest part of the dismal woods he had an unfortunate accident. Going headlong, as usual, he stumbled and fell, with the lunch basket under him. Audrey's white package rolled into the mud and the banana was crushed to pulp. Paul himself was scratched and bruised, but he hardly felt it. Jumping up, he wiped the mud off the little parcel and carefully put it back in the basket, but the big yellow banana he was obliged to throw away among the bushes.

When he reached the half-way stump, his breath gave out, there was a pain in his side, and he decided to sit on the Sunny Stone for a while and think the matter out.

The stone was not sunny now, although it was still warm and a nice seat to rest upon. There had been a change in the weather. Black clouds had gathered in the sky, and the day which had begun with such glorious promise seemed likely to end in rain and storm.

Already the wind was stirring the tops of the fir trees and there was a sound of shrill sighing going through the woods.

Looking straight overhead Paul could see the Eagle soaring against the sky. The Eagle was also a dweller

on the Skid Road, but he held himself aloof from the other animals and did not concern himself with the fate of the little boy and girl, in whom all the others were so much interested.

Paul watched the Eagle and the waving tree-tops, but the more he racked his brains to solve the mystery the more perplexed and unhappy he became.

Then all at once he heard a great crackling in the bushes behind him. Someone was coming, but it couldn't be Audrey, because she would never make so much noise.

He sprang up and looked around to see, and beheld a big brown Bear, coming in his direction, making straight for a clump of salmonberry bushes which were loaded with the fruit that all bears love.

Paul's heart almost stopped beating, with fright, and yet in some strange way he was more frightened for Audrey than for himself. He seemed to be feeling what he thought Audrey must have felt when she met the Bear, as he was now convinced she had done.

Yet he had sense enough to see that the Bear was not coming after him, in fact had not noticed him at all. It was the berries he was seeking, and while Paul watched he began quietly picking them, handling them deftly with his great paws and putting them one by one in his big mouth.

For the second time that day Paul took refuge in the Hollow Stump. It was the only place of safety he could think of. It would hardly have surprised him if he had found Audrey hiding there, too, so sure did he feel now that she must have met the Bear and that this was the explanation of her disappearance. Perhaps she had run away into the woods and hidden—unless the Bear had

eaten her up, which was the horrible thought that he could not keep out of his mind, try as he would.

But there was no Audrey in the Hollow Stump and it was dark and gloomy enough in there now, since the sun was low and the clouds heavy. But the bees left him in peace, for their day's work was done and they were quiet for the night. There in the dark he waited and waited to hear those heavy steps going away into the woods again. He strained his ears to catch the sound of crackling twigs and breaking branches, but except the wind soughing louder and louder through the trees he heard nothing. Had he been brave enough to look out instead of cowering in the darkness, he would have seen that the Bear, after making a good meal of salmonberries, took to the Skid Road, going in the direction of the Bay House, moving off so quietly on the open trail that it was no wonder not a sound of his retreat reached Paul's ears.

CHAPTER VII.

AUDREY MEETS THE BEAR.

THE log that Audrey was leaning against when she fell asleep marked the home of the Rabbit family that lived on the Skid Road. This family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Bunny and ten young ones. They took many a peep at the little girl before they ventured out of their burrow and came close to her, for bunnies are timid creatures; but she lay so still that after a while they lost all fear and gambolled around as if they had all the place to themselves.

The Chipmunk, who had stationed himself on the end of the log, chattered softly to Mr. and Mrs. Bunny, telling them all about the children's adventures and informing them in particular that Paul had turned into a naughty boy, but that Audrey was a good little girl and must be helped by all the animals, for, as the Rabbits were all underground when the bees were spreading the news earlier in the day, they had not heard of the children's journey. Now the two old bunnies listened with ears erect and with grave faces to the Chipmunk's account, while their young ones frisked and frolicked, playing leapfrog across Audrey's thin black legs that stretched straight out from under her short blue skirt and never stirred.

Had she been left to herself she would no doubt have slept as long as Paul did, but the friendly animals would not let her do that, as they knew that a storm was brew-

ing, and they were determined to get the little girl home before the rain if it lay in their power to do so.

So about the middle of the afternoon the Robin began to sing again his loudest, shrillest notes, and the Chipmunk ran up and down the Rotten Tree, calling noisily, "Wake up! wake up!" But Audrey never moved an eyelid, for all the noise they made.

Then the Rabbits tried what they could do, and every time a bunny took a leap over her body he gave a backward poke with one hind leg and touched her. Some of the pokes were so hard they might have been called kicks. Still Audrey slept quietly on.

A band of mosquitoes flew by and the Robin ordered one of them to sting her on the forehead.

"It's a severe measure," said the Robin, "but the child must be awakened."

The mosquito settled on Audrey's face, just above one straight golden eyebrow, and pushed his proboscis through the skin as far as he could reach, while the Chipmunk and the Robin and all the Bunnies and the Bees watched for the result eagerly.

"If that fails, don't ask me to sting her," buzzed a Bumble Bee as he hovered around. "I couldn't bring myself to hurt the dear child!"

A slight wrinkle appeared on the smooth forehead and Audrey made a movement with one hand, as if to drive the mosquito away, and then sank into deeper sleep than before.

The Robin in despair tried dropping twigs and leaves on her face, while the Chipmunk brushed his tail across her cheek and scolded her roundly, close up to her ear:

"Get up, you sleepy-head! get up!"

Who could have believed that Audrey would have been such a sound sleeper? But it must be remembered that she had had a great deal to tire her; besides which the afternoon was hot and close and the balmy scent of trees and flowers was very soothing. All the noises of the woods and even the Chipmunk's shrill scolding blended together, and did not disturb her.

Finally the Robin, in desperation, flew down and tweaked her hair. He took it in his beak, just a tiny curl on her temple, and pulled as hard as he knew how.

Audrey had always hated to have her hair pulled, and the effect was instantaneous. She sat bolt upright.

"If that is you, Paul, pulling my hair, I'll tell mother!"

Then she looked around her in bewilderment and wondered where she was, while she rubbed the sore temple gently, for it hurts to have your tiny lovelocks tweaked.

The Chipmunk stopped scolding and the Robin began to carol sweetly, and all the time the Bees were buzzing drowsily just as they were doing when she fell asleep.

Everything came back to her in a flash, and she remembered the half-open door of Mammy Rachel's hut, and jumped cautiously to her feet to have another look at it.

The door was shut, nor was there any smoke coming from the chimney, so she knew that old Mammy had gone out or was asleep.

Summoning all her courage, she crept cautiously into the road and then ran past the door and a hundred yards up the road as fast as the long black legs would carry her. Then she stopped, trembling, and looked back. Not a thing was changed. The door was shut as tight

as ever. Even the little window was closed and a clean white muslin curtain was drawn all the way across it.

After that Audrey went on her way quietly. She didn't trouble her head much about Paul, for she felt sure he was at the farm by now; but she thought a great deal about how hungry she was, and she stopped at every salmonberry bush and at every huckleberry bush and ate yellow berries and scarlet berries in great quantities. They were not very satisfying, and she found them a poor substitute for lemon pie and banana, though they did quench her thirst.

Poor Audrey could not help heaving a deep sigh when she thought of the banana, but her regrets were soon lost sight of in something more exciting. She had a notable encounter. All the friendly animals who were looking after her tried hard to prevent it, but they might as well have saved themselves the trouble, for the meeting was bound to take place.

That afternoon the Big Brown Bear—the very one that frightened Paul a couple of hours later—woke up from his nap feeling an immoderate desire for fresh berries.

"I'm going on a berry hunt," he said to his wife, and she replied that she would like nothing better than to go too, but that she had to stay at home to look after the babies.

Of course the Brown Bear knew as well as any one that the best berries grew beside the Skid Road, where the sun could reach them, and therefore he made tracks in that direction.

The Robin and the Chipmunk and the Bunnies were horribly afraid when they heard him coming, but Audrey was not thinking of anything but her lost

banana and the berries she was eating. She had just decided that she had had enough of these and must be getting on towards home, when, looking up, she saw a great big animal standing right in the middle of the Skid Road, not a dozen yards away.

She gazed at the Brown Bear and the Brown Bear gazed at her, and they were both very much surprised to see each other.

The Robin and the Chipmunk uttered shrill cries of warning, while the timid Rabbits crouched flat with fear. A cloud of Mosquitoes hung themselves in front of the Bear's eyes, to prevent him seeing Audrey, if possible; a Black Fly crawled into his ear and tickled him most unpleasantly, while a Bee gave him a vicious sting on the end of his nose. But all he did was to get up on his haunches and brush the Mosquitoes away with one big paw; the other creatures he scorned to notice; and all the while he kept on staring at Audrey, who looked straight back at him.

The Mother Grouse, with a large brood of half-grown chicks, tried to divert his attention from the little girl by stumbling across the road in front of him, squawking, flapping her wings and making a great commotion. She succeeded in attracting Audrey's delighted notice. Clapping her hands with pleasure, she began to count the chickens, which was no easy matter, for they scurried in all directions. But the Big Brown Bear was only interested in Audrey, and he was still standing stock still, looking at her, when she turned her eyes in his direction again.

"Well," said the little girl out loud, "If you're a bear —and I suppose you are—I'm *much* surprised. I thought a bear was almost as big as a house, from the

way people talked; but you're no bigger than Brindle's calf!"

It would not have been surprising if such impertinence from a small child had enraged the Big Brown Bear, and then the consequences would have been terrible indeed. But at that very moment a fortunate interruption occurred.

Bounding down the Skid Road came a four-legged beast—not nearly so large as the Bear, it is true, for it was only a sleek, red-haired dog. He was barking furiously, and he made straight for the Bear.

This was Ruddy, the Irish terrier from the farm, and the sight of him was like a bit of home to Audrey.

"Oh, Ruddy! Ruddy!" she called out joyfully.

As for the Big Brown Bear, it may astonish you to hear that he did not wait for any closer encounter with Ruddy, but at the very first sound of his bark he shambled off into the bushes at the side of the road and was out of sight in the twinkling of an eye. It was quite as if he knew all about Ruddy already and had seen as much as he wanted of him, which was indeed the case. Many an hour had the Irish terrier spent in baiting the Brown Bear, which was very good sport for him but poor amusement for Bruin. Being nimble and quick, Ruddy could keep out of reach of the great paws that could have killed him at one stroke had they touched him, and the Bear hated the teasing, worrying little dog with a deadly hatred, and always avoided him if he possibly could.

"Ruddy! Ruddy!" cried Audrey gleefully as she ran to meet him.

Alas! even the best of dogs do not always do their duty, and the temptation to torment Bruin was too

strong for Ruddy. Instead of accompanying Audrey home to the farm, like a trusty dog should have done, he stayed only long enough to lick her hand and give a brief wag of his tail. Then off into the woods he dashed, in the wake of the Brown Bear.

For more than an hour he amused himself by worrying the poor animal, a good deal as a naughty boy sometimes worries a snappish puppy; then feeling hungry, he ran home to the farm for his supper, leaving the Brown Bear to return to his search for salmonberries, which he was doing, as we know, when he fell in with Paul.

CHAPTER VIII.

MAMMY RACHEL.

AUDREY gave a little sigh as she saw Ruddy disappear among the trees, but it did not trouble her much, really, for she knew that she was close home now. From where she stood the road sloped gently down to Curling Cove, and the gate of Maple Farm was near the end of the slope.

Audrey started to run, for she was all impatience to see her father and mother and to tell them her adventures, especially all about the Bear.

She had meant to run all the way, but a stitch in her side made her slacken her pace before she reached the gate. Then she went along slowly, keeping close to the hedge, where she could peer through the holes into the hay-field and observe all the nice round hay-cocks dotted over it.

"Father has been making the hay to-day," she thought to herself, and the next moment she caught sight of father and mother themselves.

They were standing together near the gate, talking, and if their backs had not been turned to the road they would have seen Audrey as soon as she set eyes on them. As it was they did not observe her.

"A nice little crop," father was saying, and Audrey could hear every word plainly. "Enough to keep the cows going through the winter. A good thing I got it

cocked to-day, for if I'm not mistaken we'll have heavy rain before morning.

"Yes, the clouds are coming up fast and the wind is beginning to blow hard," said mother. Audrey noticed that the blue cotton dress she was wearing was the same shade as Aunt Gray's elegant morning gown, and she thought how young and pretty her mother looked in it —much younger and much prettier than her aunt.

"I wish the children were safe home," mother continued. "I expected them before dinner, thinking they would surely make an early start. Perhaps my brother may be coming with them after all, and if so he would wait for the cool of the day."

"He'll not take that trouble. But they're safe enough," father assured her in confident tones. "I'd have gone to fetch them myself if it hadn't been for the hay. But since they're so late it's more than likely your brother is sending them around by boat, and they'll not be here till nine o'clock."

Mother shook her head doubtfully. "That may be, but I said in my letter they were to walk through the woods."

Audrey heard every word of the conversation, and as she listened her eyes opened wide with horror. Paul was not at the farm after all. Father and mother knew nothing about him. Something must have happened to him.

Without a moment's hesitation she turned and ran back up the Skid Road.

Of course it would have been more sensible to have stopped and told her father all about it, but what would he and mother say if they saw her come back home alone without Paul? Audrey's quick fancy pictured her

mother's distress. Besides, she would have to tell how Paul threw a stone at her and frightened her so that she ran away from him, and father would be very angry, as he always was if ever Paul was unkind to her. He would punish Paul, and she would be to blame.

All these thoughts flashed through her mind as she ran back over the road, not knowing what to do, but determined to find Paul *somewhere*. Somewhere he must be, and if she hunted long enough and called loud enough she would surely find him.

"Paul! Paul!" she gasped, breathlessly, but something choked her and her voice would not carry. Running up hill left her little breath for calling, and besides it brought back the stitch in her side. She was panting painfully.

Before the top of the slope was reached suddenly she stopped short, and with one quick movement threw away the big bunch of flowers she had carried so perseveringly ever since the morning. They were withered and crumpled, no beauty left in them, and it had occurred to her all at once how useless they were and that she must be quite free and save all her strength for finding Paul.

"What you doin', honey chile, trowin' away all yo' purty flowahs?" said a voice close to her, a soft, pleasant voice it was, though a little cracked with age.

Audrey gave a scream of fear, for there, sitting on a low stump, was Mammy Rachel, with an old red sunbonnet tied under her chin and a clay pipe in her mouth.

Oh, this was far worse than the Bear! The little girl looked right and left for some way of escape.

"Don' be skeered, honey. Bress yo' soul, Mammy won' hurt you. Whar you runnin' so fas', lil' gal? I seen you comin' up the hill. Tell Mammy, honey!"

Audrey clasped her hands together, too frightened to reply.

"Ef you wan' some mo' flowahs, I know whar dere's a plenty. Tell Mammy, honey!"

The old woman hobbled up to her while she was talking. Audrey longed to run away, but was too terrified to stir. She covered her face with her hands and began to sob.

Then the black woman crooned over her softly, calling her all manner of pet names and patting her gently with her old, withered hands, for poor old Mammy loved children passionately, and it was many a day since she had had any of her own to squander her caresses on.

Many stories were told about this lonely old negress who lived in the woods and seldom came out of them. Some people said she must have done a wicked deed and was hiding from those she had injured. Others said she was a witch, but the only proof they could offer for this assertion was that she was known to have a black cat. Others again accused her of being a thief, and whenever they lost a chicken or missed a few plums or apples from their orchards, Mammy Rachel was blamed for it. If you asked them why? they answered that the old woman was a nigger, and that all niggers are thieves, and what more proof did you want?—which was as untrue as it was unkind.

The truth was that Mammy was a lonely old woman whose children were all dead and whose grandchildren had cruelly turned her out of doors, although she had nursed them and cared for them when they were young and crooned over them as gently as she was comforting Audrey now.

Her soft words reassured the little girl at last; she stopped crying and peeped at her through her fingers.

"Aren't you a witch?" she whispered.

"Land's sakes, no, honey, I ain't no witch! What for you say dat?"

"Sam said so."

"Den he's a low-down, no account ——. Who's dat ar Sam, honey?"

"He's the man that milks our cows. He said if you pointed at the cows it would stop the milk from coming."

"He's a wicked liah, dat ar Sam! Don' you believe no such a story about pore ol' Rachel, honey."

Then Audrey put down her hands and smiled up into the ugly old black face. "I won't any more," she said, "and I won't be afraid of you ever again. You're a good woman, aren't you?"

"Sholy, honey, sholy. And now tell Mammy whar you goin' so fas' with those thin little black legs o' yourn?"

The whole story of the day's adventures from beginning to end was poured into Mammy's sympathetic ears, and Audrey felt an immense relief at being able to open her heart to somebody.

Only once Mammy interrupted her, sharply:

"You ain't a-tellin' me, chile, as you ain't had nothin' to eat sence yo' brekfus this mawnin', an' you walkin' an' runnin' all them miles in between whiles?"

Audrey nodded wistfully and went on with her story.

When it was all told Mammy puffed at her pipe and considered for a few seconds.

"I'se agwine to take you to my home, honey, dat's what I'se agwine to do. Fustust we'll have some suppah, you an' me, honey chile; an' arter dat we'll talk some

mo', an' we'll connoberate some plans as'll sholy find yo' lil' brer fo' you."

"You're sure you'll find him?" Audrey demanded, eagerly.

"Sho' as eggs is eggs an' bacon is bacon," returned Mammy, as she took Audrey by the hand and led her back along the Skid Road till they came to the tumble-down shanty she had passed in fear and trembling before.

Audrey would have liked to find her brother first, but was too tired and too hungry to offer any resistance to Mammy's plans. Besides, the old woman's confident way of speaking impressed and comforted her greatly.

When they opened the door, out jumped the black cat, and as he emerged he turned the neatest handspring that ever was seen.

"Oh, what a funny cat!" exclaimed Audrey, laughing in spite of herself."

"Dat ar is a mighty fine cat, an' don' you forget it, mah honey!"

"What's his name?" asked the little girl as she seated herself on the doorstep and began to stroke the pussy affectionately.

"His name am Peg Leg," Mammy replied, impressively.

From the lowest branch of the Rotten Tree, where he had just alighted, the Robin kept a sharp lookout on everything that was happening, and I'm sorry to say that the sight of Audrey stroking the black cat filled him with jealousy.

"Do you see that?" he cried to the Chipmunk, who had run half way up the tree and was holding on to a knot hole. "After all the care we've taken of her this

whole long day, she is petting and stroking old Peg Leg, who is no friend of *ours,* as you know!"

"Oh, well, there's no use worrying about such things; everyone to his taste!" chippered the Chipmunk. "She's a nice child, and I'm glad she's safe with the old woman, who is sure to take her home to-night. As for the boy, he threw a stone at his sister, and I don't care if he never gets home."

"Oh, come now," chirped the Robin, who had tenderer feelings than the little beast with the bushy tail, "after all, he's only a child, and one mustn't be too hard on young people, boys especially. I'd be sorry to think he had come to any harm."

As for the Rotten Tree, he made never a sound, but he had thoughts all the same, and this is what he was thinking:

"I'm an old, old tree; there's not a growing thing as old as me in all the valley from the Crescent to Curling Cove. I'm so old that sometimes I'm tired of standing up straight, and I think I'll be glad after all to lie down and rest a while. The Wind is beginning to push me, to try to knock me down for he has a spite against me since I grew old. He'll push hard, hard, to-night. I feel him already, and it makes shivers run up and down my backbone. I'm tired of holding out against him; I'd be glad to rest a while. But I must brace myself with all my strength this one time more, for if the little girl from the farm sleeps in old Mammy's shanty to-night, 'twould be a terrible thing if I crushed it, and her, in my fall. No, no! No, no! I'll fight a fierce battle with the Wind to-night before ever I do such a thing!"

CHAPTER IX.

MAMMY RACHEL'S CABIN.

"YES, honey," said the old black woman, as she made haste to kindle a fire in her rusty stove. "Yes, honey chile, dat ar cat's name am Peg Leg, an' ef yo'll come in here an' watch me whiles I get suppah, I'll tell yo' why he am so called."

Audrey entered a little timidly, holding the cat in her arms, and looked around the funny, dark little room. There were flowers growing in pots on the sill of the one small window, scarlet and yellow flowers, which did much to brighten the place. Everything was clean and neat. Old Rachel's bed, in one corner, was covered with a quilt of fantastic patchwork, and in that the favorite colors were red and white, which gave a cheerful, home-like look to the room. Besides the bed and the stove there was nothing but one small table and two stools in the way of furniture, but the walls were covered with the most wonderful collection of things of all sorts that Audrey had ever seen. Every article hung by a piece of string from a nail, and every foot of space was made use of.

The old woman saw her eyes wandering up and down the sides of the room and noticed that they were growing round with wonder.

"You is s'prised at my c'lection," she said, with a good deal of pride in her voice, "an' I sho' has some mighty curus things saved up in dis lil' ol' shanty.

Heaps o' cloes I'se got, honey, some boughten ones and some what folks has give me, and no place to put 'em but jes' dese yere walls," and she pointed to an assortment of very old and faded garments that occupied one corner of the room. "Then thar's all my roots and yarbs; they's got to have a place whar they can be, so I jes' hammers in mo' nails, an' all I need's a piece o' string to hang 'em up by. Same wif my skillets an' pans and all my other possessments. My vittles am a sight safer hangin' up fum nails than ef dey wuz settin' 'round whar the mice could get to them. I keeps them all in cotton sacks, right handy to the stove. I picks up a sight o' stuff on de roads, too, honey—horse-shoes, and good boards, and leather straps. Seems like I got to hang 'em up so's not to keep stubbin' my toes agin 'em all the time. I reckon walls is handy places, honey."

As she talked Mammy Rachel pointed out all the articles she had mentioned. Audrey looked at everything, but her eyes came back to a row of magazines and one large book, all suspended separately from nails.

"Picked 'em all up on de road, honey," Mammy said, following the direction of her glance. "Looks like I had some eddercation, to see my liberry a-hangin' thar so handy, but de truf is, honey, I can't read a blessed word, let alone write! Them books does me a heap o' good all the same, honey, I c'n tell you. Dat ar big book's a Bible. Looks like I ain't los' all my 'ligion when I got the Good Book hangin' on my wall that-a-way."

"How do you know it's a Bible if you can't read?" Audrey inquired with curiosity.

"Jes' you look an' see fo' yo'sef, honey chile. Take de Good Book down fum de wall an' look inside!"

Audrey did as she was bid, and as by this time Mammy had a fine fire burning and her draughts all turned to heat the oven, she came over and stood beside the little girl, who laid the Book on the table and opened it.

It was full of colored illustrations, and Mammy Rachel beamed with delight as she turned the pages and showed them to Audrey.

"Look at dat now, honey! Dat am Jesus bressin' de lil' chillen; an' dar He is agen, feedin' all them hungry people. Look at Him hangin' on de Cross, honey chile; ain't that a purty picter? Bress de Lawd! An' look at them lovely angels, all dressed in dazzlin' white! Please God, dis ol' black mammy agwine to look like dat some day."

"Did you pick up this beautiful Bible on the road, too?" asked the little girl, who had been puzzling over the question for some time.

"No, chile, no. Kind lady give it to me once upon a time a long while ago. It's on'y paper books what folks drop on the roads. I nevah tol' dat lady I dunno mah letters," Mammy chuckled, "de picters look too good to me, and I jes' natchelly wanted dat Book real bad. So she gave it to me when I promised her I'd read in it every day as long as I live untel mah dyin' day."

"But you *can't* read; you said so," objected her listener.

"Sho' I c'n read *dat* book, honey. I read all them purty picters mos' every night, and they is powerful consolatin', missy; more consolatin' than de mostes' sermons as I hear preached."

Mammy Rachel turned away and began to mix flour, lard and water together for the biscuits, while Audrey

watched her with fascinated eyes. Mammy's hands were so thin and old that they looked like claws, but they measured and mixed the materials very deftly and quickly, having done the same thing many hundreds of times before in her long life.

"You haven't told me about Peg Leg," said Aubrey, after some moments of watching Mammy's cooking operations.

The black cat was stretched on his side in front of the stove, and Audrey had to admit that he was the most wonderful looking animal she had ever seen. Four long black legs were poked out straight and stiff, while his tail curved over his back and his head bent towards the tail till the two almost met.

"Is he having a fit?" she asked, anxiously.

"Peg Leg, git right up, honey, an' say howdy to little missy. You, Peg Leg, do as I tell yo', now!" ordered Mammy in peremptory tones.

The cat evidently knew his name, for he stood up and tried to stretch himself, but only succeeded in standing on his head—which seemed to surprise him a good deal less than it amused Audrey. When he walked over to his mistress his body writhed from side to side, but his hind legs came down stiffly, making a "*clump, clump*" with every step that sounded like a man walking on the wooden floor.

"Now I know why you call him Peg Leg," cried Audrey, laughing merrily.

"Peg Leg sho' is a mighty fine cat, but he done hab a heap o' misfortunes. Jes' you wait, honey, till I put my bistik in de oven, an' den I'll tell you all about it."

So Audrey waited, sitting perched on one of the stools and turning over the leaves of the picture Bible, but

mostly watching Mammy roll out her dough with a glass bottle for a rolling-pin.

When she had finished and had hung the bottle on its nail again, old Mammy began:

"Dat ar cat was once a kitten, honey, same as mos' cats is, only a sight purtier. I done save him fum 'struction, 'cos de lady cook down to de Crescent Hotel done speckillate to drown him count ob havin' too many in de fambly already. He wuz a powerful purty kitten, so I begged him offen her and brung him home. De time was winter, an' mighty col', wif snow deep on de Skid Road, but I kep' him snuggled up under my old shawl, an' he jes' purred an' purred all de way. He sholy was a mighty socialistic cat fum de fust day."

"Do you mean *sociable?*" inquired the little girl, puzzled.

"It am all de same meanin' chile, but my word soun' more eddicated, which is what I admire to be."

"Seem's if not havin' his mammy's milk didn't 'gree wif dat kitten nohow. I nussed him de bes' I knew how and fed him same's I et mysef, but he up an' took sick when he on'y a few weeks ol', an' I sholy reckoned as I was goin' to lose dat kitten. He'd lie thar screechin' wif de pains inside o' him, till look like it hurt me same as him. Yes, chile, he acted like a human, he did, screechin' out loud when a pain took him. So I treated him like a human, and tried all my roots and yarbs on him, conse*kew*tively an' all together, knowin' as some on 'em must sholy cure him ef de res' didn't kill him."

"And did he get well?" asked Audrey, who was intensely interested.

"Yas, honey, yas; I'se a-comin' to dat 'clusion bimeby. But fustest I was 'bleeged to set up nights wif

him, pourin' drops of whisky an' water down his throat to keep de life in him. Bimeby he stop screechin', but he couldn't move nary a leg to stan' up on, an' I 'llowed he wuz goin' to die for shore; but 'sted o' that he up an' got well!"

"How glad you must have been!" the little girl exclaimed, sympathetically.

"I sholy was, honey; I sholy was."

At this point Peg Leg tried to jump up on Audrey's lap, but instead he turned a back somersault and landed on his head. When he had picked himself up again he looked somewhat crestfallen, but not much surprised, for these disappointments were common occurrences with him.

"He isn't quite like other cats, is he?" inquired Audrey, politely, as she lifted Peg Leg gently up, to save him from making another unsuccessful attempt like the last.

"He am par'lyzed, dat's what," replied the old woman. "He done got well fum his sickness like I tol' you, honey, but his spine was par'lyzed as a sequencity, an' he can't seem to walk straight, nor yet seem to navigate his motions same as other cats. Mos' times, ef he want to go forrards he's 'bleeged to go backwards 'sted, an' seein' as he ain't got no *nobility* in his hind legs, he's got to walk *clumpety*, same's if they was made o' wood."

"What a wonderful cat!" Audrey exclaimed, admiringly, as she watched him try to scratch his ear. His frantic efforts caused him to whirl round and round on the floor, but nothing seemed to disconcert or discourage this heroic cat.

"He sho' is," Mammy agreed heartily, "an' likewise he am powerful socialistic, like I done tol' you."

By this time the biscuits were baked to a beautiful brown, and the smell of them made Audrey's mouth water. Her hands were clasped and her eyes glistened as she watched the supper being set out—a dish of honey, a pot of tea, the plate of biscuits, and, as a crowning delicacy, two pheasant's eggs, which Mammy had boiled in a tin cup on top of the stove, and both of which she made Audrey eat.

The child was famished, and never before had a meal tasted so good.

Mammy's old face was creased in benevolent wrinkles as she watched her eat.

"Pore lil' honey chile! Pore lil' starvin' lamb!" she murmured again and again.

CHAPTER X.

PEG LEG TO THE RESCUE.

"MAMMY, do you hear the wind?" said Audrey. She was listening to the sounds outside, and noticed for the first time how dark it was growing. The good supper had renewed her strength; she was rested, too, and now all at once the remembrance of Paul came back to her. A feeling of shame overwhelmed her when she realized that all the time she had been listening to Mammy Rachel's soft-voiced talk—all the time she had been enjoying her pheasant's eggs, the honey and the biscuits—she had not once thought of Paul nor of the danger he might be in.

Now she jumped up and ran to the window to look out. The trees were bending this way and that in the wind; there was a great roaring noise and the sky was black, but so far no rain had fallen.

"You promised to find Paul, Mammy; you *promised!*" and Audrey ran back to the old woman and threw her arms coaxingly around her neck, for she had got over every bit of her old fear.

"Yas, honey chile; I done go now."

"I'm coming, too, Mammy."

"No, chile, you stay right here wif Peg Leg, honey. Dat ar cat is powerful socialistic, an' he hate like sin to be lonesome, 'specially dis time o' day."

"Please let me go, Mammy. I'm not afraid of anything now, and I don't mind bears at all. Please, please,

let me go, because Paul knows me better than you, you see!"

Of course Audrey got what she wanted, for she had a very pretty way of coaxing. And Peg Leg got what he wanted, too, and joined the party. He followed them sedately along the road, stalking behind like a serious old gentleman with two wooden legs.

Mammy's confident manner comforted Audrey, but the old woman was secretly far from feeling hopeful; she was at a loss where to look for the boy.

However, she hobbled along bravely, peering right and left into the shadows among the trees, while Audrey tripped beside her, and the wind howled and raved up and down the Skid Road.

It was nearly dark now, though not quite, and the friendly animals had all gone to bed. Only the Cougar and the Wild Cat were prowling about, and sometimes the old woman thought she caught sight of slinking forms among the shadows and was afraid—not for herself nor the little girl, who were safe on the open road, but for the boy who was lost in the woods.

"There's a snake lives under that stone," said Audrey when they came near the top of the knoll and could see the flat white boulder in the distance. "It was curled up on top when I went by this morning."

"Dat so, honey?" Mammy answered absently, for she was just thinking they had better turn back and go in search of Paul's father at the farm.

She stopped in the road and pointed out the stump.

"Dar's a bees' nest in dat ar Holler Stump," she remarked, "an' some o' dese yere days I'se gwine to get me some mighty fine honey-comb outen dar!"

Then they both began to laugh at Peg Leg's antics,

for the wind was having an intoxicating effect upon him, and instead of stalking along sedately he suddenly began to cut capers, but, owing to his infirmity, his legs refused to carry him in any direction he aimed at. So his leaps generally ended in handsprings.

While they were watching him, Peg Leg made the supreme effort of his life. It had always been his ambition to climb a tree, and many a time he had attempted the feat, but had always failed sadly, and when only a few feet from the ground would fall back with such a hard thud it was a wonder his bones were not broken. Whereupon he would wag his tail angrily and walk away, crushed and despondent, but never utterly defeated.

This time the wind inspired him to do the impossible. With a wild dash he made straight for the Hollow Stump, scaled it almost at one bound, turned a complete somersault, and disappeared through the top.

They heard a yell that never came from Peg Leg, and the next moment Paul came tumbling out!

He had fallen asleep, for the second time that day, in the dim, warm hollow of the old stump, and now he had to rub his eyes hard to make sure he was really awake, for there stood Audrey right in front of him.

Audrey didn't stand still long. She rushed up to him, hugged him, and danced up and down on her springy toes, shouting:

"Here he is! He's found! He's found!"

Mammy Rachel left them to rejoice together and went in search of Peg Leg. She found him seated in the middle of the Hollow Stump, serenely happy because he had achieved the ambition of his life and had climbed

a tree, or at least a stump, which amounted to the same thing.

"To think that Peg Leg found him!" cried Audrey, after the old woman joined them with that noble cat in her arms.

"I done tole you, honey, he am a mighty fine cat," Mammy replied, proudly.

Of course Paul had to tell his adventures to Audrey and she had to tell hers to Paul. The recital took so long that they were back at the old woman's shanty before it was ended. Then Mammy pressed them to come in again, for, she said:

"Dat ar Paul am hungry, too. I reckon I c'n get him some suppah in less'n no time!"

But they were eager to get home to their parents. Besides, the clouds looked ready to burst and to pour down rain on their heads at any moment.

Mammy then said she would go with them as far as the gate, and they set out all together. It was not yet quite dark in spite of the storm, for this was the last week in June, you remember, when the days are at their longest. Still, the black clouds and the shadowy trees made it seem very gloomy on the Skid Road.

Before they had gone fifty paces on their way, however, they saw someone coming up the road towards them—a man who was taking big, long strides and who seemed in a tremendous hurry. He looked from side to side as if seeking for some one.

"Father! It's father!" screamed both children together, and leaving Mammy Rachel standing in the road, they raced to meet him.

This was what had happened to bring father to meet them. At nine o'clock the little steamer turned in to

Curling Cove as usual, and father and mother were there waiting for her in the hope that the two children might be aboard. But when all the passengers were landed, an old suit-case was all that they received—the suit-case which contained the small outfit of clothes Paul and Audrey had taken away with them. No letter, no message, nothing more.

"You're sure the children aren't aboard?" demanded father of the skipper.

"Certain sure," was the reply. "All I know is that the Chink put the suit-case aboard at the Bay House pier, when we stopped to land a crowd of tony-looking folks for a party they're having up at the big house."

Then father and mother exchanged anxious glances and turned away.

"They must have started to walk, as you said in your letter they should," said father.

"Yes," added mother, "and something has happened."

After that they didn't seem to care to talk any more, but they walked very fast away from the pier, and when they reached the farm gate father kissed mother goodbye and told her to "Never fear; he'd bring the kiddies back safe and sound, please God."

But mother couldn't answer him because something in her throat kept her from speaking, and she couldn't see him as he strode up the hill, for her eyes were blinded with tears.

Poor mother didn't have to be unhappy very long, however. Father walked fast, and it was not many minutes after he left her before he caught sight of the two children, walking one on each side of old Mammy Rachel, to all appearance well and happy.

It was a joyful meeting, indeed, and you may not be surprised to hear that mother joined it after all, for she found it so hard to wait alone at the gate that presently she decided to follow father instead. For after all, thought she, two are better than one when it comes to looking for anyone.

The wind was blowing a gale by now; branches cracking, twigs falling—such a noise all around them that it was no wonder they never heard her come up or knew she was there till she had the children in her arms.

"Don't forget Mammy!" cried Audrey when the excitement began to subside, "or Peg Leg, because he found Paul!"

Then Mr. and Mrs. Debbrey both thanked the old negro woman heartily for her kindness to the children, and mother stroked Peg Leg and said he was the handsomest cat she had ever seen.

In the midst of it all there was a report like the crack of a pistol, but louder, much louder.

Everyone was startled except Mammy, who only remarked, carelessly:

"You all don' need to be skeered; dat ain't nuffin' but de ol' Rotten Tree. He always creak he's ol' bones on a windy night, like he want to make some noise, too, once in a while!"

"The old tree will fall one of these days," said father, looking up to where they could still see it dimly, pointing like a white finger up to the stormy sky.

"So come dat ol' tree fall down, my ol' shanty goes too," said Mammy; "but I reckon he don' mean nuffin' when he make dose queer noises. It's jes' his way ob talkin', an' I ain't afeerd."

But the Rotten Tree was racked from top to root, for

he knew his last hour had come and he could no longer hold out against the Wind. For hours his old enemy had been pressing him cruelly. He had made his last stand, and had fought well and bravely, but in this final tussle his strength gave out, and with that one awful "Crack" —that loud and ominous report—he gave up the struggle. It was his cry of doom.

The Wind drew off for another onslaught, then came back with a rush and a roar, but met with no resistance this time.

The Rotten Tree—so old, so very old—tumbled down helplessly.

There was a great swishing sound as he fell through the air, then a fearful crash—and Mammy Rachel's shanty was flattened to the ground.

"After all, it's good to lie down and rest after one has stood up straight for many hundred years," thought the old Rotten Tree. "Ah, but I'm glad I was able to hold out against the Wind till the old woman and the little red-haired girl from the farm were safe away from the shanty! Now I can rest in peace, and there's nothing left to grieve over."

So the Rotten Tree's thoughts were peaceful.

Old Mammy Rachel was consoled for the loss of her home when her new friends begged her to come back with them to the farm, where they promised to give her a little hut to live in. There she stayed for the remaining years of her life, and went in and out as she pleased, and there the children loved to come and visit her and play with Peg Leg, whose famous discovery of Paul in the Hollow Stump they were never tired of recounting, and whose wonderful antics continued to be a source of entertainment as long as he lived.

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