

*Angel's Brother*

# ***ANGEL'S BROTHER***

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **The Milkman's Little Account**

IT was a dull little sitting-room on the third floor of a dingy lodging-house, in an unfashionable London suburb. The pale rays of November sunshine peeping through the window panes enhanced the shabbiness of the apartment with its cheap, much-worn furniture, and ugly wall-paper, its pretentious mirror in a tarnished gilded frame above the mantel-piece, and the ill-chosen ornaments which were doubtless supposed to add attractiveness to the whole.

The sole occupant of the room, at present, was a little girl of about eleven years of age. Her name was Angelica Willis, but she was always called Angel. She was a slight, pale child, with a gentle, sweet-tempered face, which, if not exactly pretty, was very pleasing by reason of a pair of honest, grey eyes—true reflectors of every thought which crossed their owner's mind. Now, the

grey eyes were misty and sad in expression, for Angel was thinking of her mother, who had died two years before, and recalling all that she had said the last time they had talked together. In imagination she could hear the dear, faltering voice murmuring feebly—

"You'll be loving and patient with Gerald, won't you, little daughter? You'll remember he's younger than you are, and be a good elder sister to him, won't you, dear?"

Gerald was Angel's brother, eighteen months her junior, and she had readily given her mother the desired promise. It was not difficult to be good to Gerald, for she loved him dearly; she had been in the habit of studying his wishes all her life; and she was capable of loving without selfishness, asking little in return. "Love feels no burden; thinks nothing a trouble," was true in her case.

Gerald had been the mother's favourite of the two children; but that knowledge had not caused Angel one jealous pang. She

was too fond of her brother herself to begrudge him the first share of any one's affection; and now when the dear, indulgent mother was no longer there to wait upon him, she faithfully tried to fill her place, and was his willing slave, darning his socks, mending his clothes, helping him with his lessons evenings—in fact, being generally employed either by or for him in one way or another. Angel regarded herself in the light of a failure. Her father, an artist, 'had named her Angelica, after Angelica Kauffmann, and had fondly hoped that she would inherit his talent for painting, and follow in the footsteps of her namesake; he had anticipated that she would be endowed with what he called "the artistic temperament;" but Angel had proved somewhat of a disappointment. She had never evinced the least taste for drawing, whereas she had early taken to a needle and thimble, and had learnt to sew, and assist her mother with her household duties at an age when most children show distinct dislike to such domestic

employments; but to "help mother" had been Angel's greatest pleasure.

Mrs. Willis had had rather a hard married life. She had married a man of undoubted abilities, but who had unhappily never succeeded in earning a sufficient income to adequately support his wife and children. She had believed in him, however, and had never complained because she had been obliged to work harder than any servant; only, once, Angel remembered, when something had been said about her lacking "the artistic temperament," her mother's face had brightened into a smile, and she had said, "Angel is my right hand. I do not know what I should do without my little daughter. Perhaps it is as well she has not 'the artistic temperament' after all!"

Later, when a woman grown, Angel recalled those words, and understood their meaning. But now, as she sat by the fireside, waiting for her brother's return from school, her thoughts turned from her dead mother to her father in his studio at the top of the house, where he

was painting the great picture which he believed was to bring him fame and make his fortune, and wished she was not such a disappointment to him. It was indeed sad that she, an artist's daughter, should be denied "the artistic temperament!"

"It is not that I don't admire beautiful things," the little girl thought, "because I do. I love flowers, and I should like to live in a pretty house in the country, and—"

Her reflections were interrupted by a sharp knock at the door, which subsequently opened to admit the landlady of the house, Mrs. Steer—a portly, middle-aged woman, clad in a purple merino gown, the front width of which was plentifully besprinkled with grease spots.

"I'm come to tell you the milkman wants his little account settled," she said abruptly, but not unkindly, casting a solicitous glance at the child. "It ain't no good my speaking to your pa, as you well know, Miss Angel; for though he listens



most politely, all I say goes in one of his ears and out the other."

"He forgets!" Angel cried hastily, her pale face flushing. "He is thinking so much about his great picture just at present."

"His great picture!" Mrs. Steer exclaimed, with an incredulous sniff.

"He will have plenty of money when he has sold it," Angel continued eagerly. "Oh, plenty! He was saying so only last night."

"But it isn't finished yet," Mrs. Steer remarked in matter-of-fact tones, "and goodness knows when it will be sold; and, meanwhile, there's the milkman wanting his little account settled. Will you speak to your pa, Miss Angel, and tell him what I say? Tell him the milkman positively refuses to supply you with any more milk till he's had his due."

"I'll be sure to tell father. But supposing he shouldn't have the money to pay? Will the milkman wait, do you think, if you tell

him about the picture?" was the anxious inquiry.

"I can't say, Miss Angel. You remind your father of the account like a good child, and perhaps he'll find the money to pay it. As to that same picture, now, I suppose it's to make all your fortunes, eh?"

Angel nodded smilingly, meeting the landlady's half-pitying, half-sarcastic look with one so bright and confident that the woman's eyes fell, and she said kindly—

"Well, my dear, I only trust it may do all you expect. Then, I should hope your father will be in a position to send you to school."

"Oh yes; won't that be nice? I have never been to school because of the expense. Mother taught me all I know. It will be delightful when I do go to school. Think what a lot of friends Gerald has—all friends he has made at school—whilst I don't know any one!"

"Ah, it's a bit hard on you, my dear! Master Gerald gets all the cake! I mean," Mrs. Steer proceeded to explain, seeing the little girl's look of surprised inquiry, "that Master Gerald has the best of everything. There was never any thought of keeping him home from school because of the expense."

"Of course not! Father says boys must be educated, and Gerald's so clever! See what prizes he wins! No wonder father is proud of him! I wonder if I should ever win a prize? I am afraid not." And Angel shook her head dubiously.

"You won't forget to speak to your pa about that account, will you?" Mrs. Steer remarked after a brief pause. "The milkman's an honest, hardworking man, and can't afford to wait for his money any longer. As he said to me this morning, he's got to pay for the milk, and what's he to do if his customers don't pay him? It's hard on the man, and no mistake!"

"Oh, I am sure it is!" Angel cried distressfully. "I am certain father will pay

him as soon as ever he can. I will speak to him about it directly!"

Mrs. Steer left the room, and went downstairs satisfied, whilst Angel sat still listening to her retreating footsteps, making up her mind that as she had a disagreeable task before her it had better be done at once. She hated reminding her father of his unpaid bills, though he always treated her with the utmost kindness; but he always expressed surprise that people should be in such a hurry for their money. Why could they not trust him? They would all be paid in due time.

Angel sighed as she went upstairs to her father's studio, where he spent most of his days. It was a large, low room at the top of the house, chosen by Mr. Willis on account of the fine light which shone through the north window. Though barely furnished, the room was artistically arranged with a view to appearances as well as comfort; an easel, supporting a large canvas, stood near the window, and a bright fire burnt in the grate, before

which, reclining in a padded, wicker, lounge chair was Angel's father. He was a very young-looking man for his age, which was forty; his eyes were blue and smiling; his hair, which he wore a trifle longer than is usual nowadays, was light brown; and his figure slight and graceful.

"Well, Angel, my darling!" he exclaimed, as his little daughter entered. "Are you come to see how the picture is progressing? I have not done much to it to-day, for I've been obliged to get on with some illustrations for a children's book which were ordered weeks ago. The pot must be kept boiling, you know! I have been hard at work all the afternoon, but the light has failed, and I'm taking a rest."

Angel did not glance at the canvas on the easel; instead, she drew a stool to her father's side, and, sitting down, replied gravely—

"I am come to tell you about the milkman, father!"

"The milkman!" he repeated wonderingly.  
"What about him, my dear?"

"He says he will not let us have any more milk without we pay our bill! Have you any money, father? Can you pay him, do you think?"

"Pay him? Of course I can—at least, I suppose so! Is the man afraid I am going to cheat him? I had forgotten we were in his debt. Dear one, child, how like your mother you are growing! Well, well I am glad of that! But you must not get into the habit of worrying, for I cannot bear to see you looking anxious. Why should you trouble? We shall have plenty of money one of these days, if all's well."

"I know, I know!" Angel cried, lifting her grey eyes to her father's handsome face and smiling, for she implicitly believed what he said; "but what are we to do about the milkman's bill, dear father?"

He laughed at her persistency; and rising, went to a desk on a side table, and turned out the contents of a private drawer.

"There's not so much money here as I thought," he acknowledged ruefully, "but still, more than enough to pay the importunate milkman, I dare say. You can tell Mrs. Steer to let me have the account—I suppose I must have had it before, but I've not the least idea where I put it—and I'll settle it, at once. How pleased you look, child!"

She was very pleased, as her glowing face showed plainly. The household bills weighed upon her now as they had weighed upon her mother in the years gone by. Poor Mrs. Willis had been a "veritable Martha," as her husband had sometimes called her; he had never understood, though he had loved her dearly, why she had allowed herself to be troubled about many things.

Angel flew downstairs in search of Mrs. Steer, whom she met bearing a laden tray to one of her lodgers' rooms.

"Will you please let father have the milkman's account and he will pay it," the

little girl said quickly; "he had forgotten about it."

"Oh, indeed!" responded Mrs. Steer. "Then I am glad you reminded him of it, miss. He shall have the account presently."

"I am going to make toast for tea," Angel explained, as she turned into her own sitting-room. "Dear me," she added to herself, "how very glad I am father is going to pay the milkman! I was so afraid he might not have money enough. It would be horrid to drink tea without milk; and I expect the poor man wants his money badly too. Oh, how I wish we never had to go into debt for any thing! Mother used to say she would be perfectly happy if she never owed any one a penny. Poor mother!"

Angel took a loaf of bread and a toasting fork from a cupboard in the sideboard, and proceeded carefully to cut some slices; then she knelt down on the hearth-rug, and commenced her toast making.



Presently Gerald returned from school, and, flinging his bag of books and his cap into one corner of the room, came to his sister's side. He was a fair, good-looking boy, very like his father, and tall for his age.

"What a jolly fire!" he exclaimed, as he stretched out his hands towards the glowing coals. "Make a nice lot of toast, Angel, for I'm as hungry as a hunter. What have you been doing all the afternoon?"

"Oh, much as usual," she answered in rather a depressed tone. "Darning your socks, and father's—and thinking."

"You're always thinking. I cannot imagine what you find to think about."

"About mother, mostly. I wonder if she knows how we are getting on, and how much we miss her. There are some things I should like her to know—but not all! I like to think she is very happy, never troubled or sorry, and—oh, I know she is really happy with God, but I keep on thinking, and wondering—"

"Well, don't!" he interposed affectionately. "You're moped, Angel, that's what you are."

"Perhaps I am," she acknowledged; "I've been alone all day, and I've been so dull; and—and the milkman wanted his account settled, and I had to speak to father about it."

"What a bother it is about money!" the boy exclaimed. "How I wish we were rich! I was going to ask father if he could let me have a shilling—I haven't a farthing of my last week's allowance left—do you think he'll let me have it?"

"He will if he can," Angel replied seriously, "but I'm afraid he is rather hard up at present. When his picture is finished—"

"Oh, what is the good of talking of that!" Gerald interrupted impatiently. "The picture may not sell for much, after all! I wish father was not an artist."

"Gerald!" the little girl exclaimed reproachfully, "how can you speak so? Mother used to say God had given father his wonderful talent for painting, and he must use it. Father is a genius. He will paint a beautiful picture which will be hung in the Royal Academy for every one to look at, and then some rich man will want to buy it, and offer father hundreds of pounds if he will sell it to him." Angel was allowing her imagination to run away with her, and in her excitement momentarily forgot the work in hand, so that she burnt a corner of the slice of bread she was toasting. This sobered her somewhat, and she continued more quietly—

"Then we shall pay all our bills, and live in a nicer place than this, and father will send me to school; and—oh, Gerald, it seems too wonderful to ever happen, doesn't it? Think what it would feel like to have money to pay for everything, and never to be in debt! How happy we should be!"

Her brother made no reply. His blue eyes were fixed thoughtfully on the glowing embers in the grate.

"Here comes father," he whispered presently; "will you ask him some time this evening if he can spare me a shilling? You will, won't you?"

And Angel promised she would, though she shrank sensitively from doing so, knowing how short Mr. Willis was of ready money; but it would have seemed unkind to refuse her brother's coaxing request.

## CHAPTER II

### **An Unexpected Visitor**

ANGEL'S life was a very monotonous one. She spent most of her days alone whilst her brother was at school, and her father was occupied in his studio. Sometimes one of her father's artist friends would pause at the door of the sitting-room to inquire if Mr. Willis was at home; but no one ever stayed to exchange more than a few sentences with her, and she spent her time in reading, or dreaming, or looking out of the window on the miles of roofs stretching before her eyes when there

was no mending for her father or brother to be done.

Occasionally Mrs. Steer took pity on the lonely child, and asked her to accompany her when she went out to do her shopping; and, on Saturday afternoons she now and then had a stroll with her brother; but Gerald usually spent his half-holidays with his school-friends, so that he had not much time to devote to his sister.

Angel liked Sunday the best day of the week, because she and Gerald always went to church with their father in the morning, and the studio was shut up altogether. Mr. Willis was very fond of his children, and thoroughly enjoyed the Sundays spent in their company, when he listened to Gerald's school experiences with great interest and amusement; but it never occurred to him to question his little daughter as to the way in which she spent her time, or to regret her neglected education and lack of congenial companions.

One cold afternoon towards the end of November, Angel, who had been on a shopping expedition with Mrs. Steer, returned to find her father had gone out, leaving a message to the effect that she must not wait tea for him. The little girl removed her out-door garments, and sat down with a book for company in the sitting-room to wait till her brother should come home from school. The book did not prove a very interesting one, so that when presently she heard a disturbance downstairs, she rose quickly, and, opening the door, stood on the threshold listening.

Mrs. Steer was apparently protesting against some one's entering the house, and was evidently both alarmed and angry. Actuated by curiosity, Angel slipped noiselessly downstairs till she reached the last flight, when she stopped short, keenly interested in the scene which met her gaze.

Mrs. Steer, with the maid-of-all-work of the establishment at her elbow, stood confronting a big, stout, red-faced man,

who was standing by several enormous trunks, which he had evidently assisted the cabman to bring into the house, for he was mopping his brow with a red silk handkerchief, and appeared in a state of breathlessness.

"I never knew anything to equal this!" Mrs. Steer cried angrily, her eyes flashing with indignation. "To come into a respectable house without so much as asking leave, and take possession of the place! The impudence of it!"

"My good woman," said the stranger in a deep, pleasant voice, "I don't think I've made a mistake, have I? Mr. Willis lives here, doesn't he?"

"He does," Mrs. Steer allowed, "but—"

"I'm all right then! I know I shall be welcome! Pray tell your master—"

"My master!" Mrs. Steer interposed sharply. "What do you mean? This is not Mr. Willis' house. It's mine! I'm mistress



here, and Mr. Willis and his children are my lodgers."

"Oh!" exclaimed the stranger. "Now I begin to understand the meaning of your indignation. I imagined this was my nephew's house—Mr. Willis is my nephew, by the way. My name is Bailey; I am—"

He paused abruptly, catching sight of the little girl standing on the stairs. Mrs. Steer followed his glance, and beckoned to Angel, who immediately came down and advanced towards the new-comer, her usually pale cheeks flushed with excitement.

"Did you want my father?" she asked. "He is out now, but he will be home before long. Is father really your nephew?"

"Yes, if you are John Willis' daughter," the big man replied. He caught her in his arms as he spoke, and kissed her heartily. "Why, my dear little girl," he cried, "you must be my great niece

Angelica! I'm your Uncle Edward, just come home from Australia."

"Oh!" exclaimed Angel, rather breathlessly. "Are you really Uncle Edward? Oh, I know all about you! I've read your letters to father often! How very, very glad he will be to see you! But—what can I do? This is not our house—we only lodge here. Perhaps you had better come upstairs to our sitting-room and wait till father comes."

"Perhaps that would be the best plan," he replied. Then he glanced at his luggage, and from it to the landlady. "What can I do about it?" he inquired.

"It can remain where it is till Mr. Willis returns," Mrs. Steer responded, speaking a trifle more graciously than she had hitherto done. "I suppose it is all right if you are indeed Mr. Willis' uncle. And if you care to stay here, there's a big bedroom unoccupied at present which you might like to take."

The stranger nodded; then turned and followed Angel, who was leading the way upstairs. On entering the sitting-room, he glanced around him quickly ere he turned his attention to his companion.

"Do you know you are taking me on faith, my dear?" he asked, as he seated himself in the easy chair, by the fireplace, which she offered him, and scanned her face with smiling, kindly eyes.

"On faith?" Angel echoed. "But I know all about you, I do indeed! I have often heard father talk of Uncle Edward! You wanted him to go to Australia with you when he was a boy, didn't you?"

"Yes; but he preferred painting to sheep-farming!"

"Father loves painting. He is very clever! His pictures are beautiful."

The stranger allowed his glance to travel quickly around the room once more, after which he said musingly in a low tone, as though thinking aloud—

"He has not made his fortune?"

"No!" the little girl cried, "but he will some day; Mother used to say—Oh, did you know mother?"

"No, my dear, I never saw her. Are you like her in appearance? I think you must be, for you do not resemble your father in the least."

"I am like mother, I believe," Angel replied, a smile brightening her face. "I want to be like her. She was so sweet and good."

"Ah! Now, suppose you tell me about her."

Angel glanced doubtfully at the big man in the easy chair, but meeting an encouraging look in return, she complied.

"Things were so different before she died," she said confidentially; "we had a little house to ourselves, and she used to work so hard to keep everything nice and comfortable, and we were all so happy,

though we were not any richer then than we are now. Then she fell ill—and died!" Angel drew a deep breath that sounded very like a sob. "Afterwards we came here and took these lodgings," she continued; "father has a studio at the top of the house, and he is painting a beautiful picture. He will show it to you to-morrow."

"What will he do with it? Sell it, I suppose?"

"Yes; he will send it to the Royal Academy for people to look at; I expect it will make a lot of money. I hope so, because there are so many things we want money for."

He smiled at her serious face; then looked thoughtfully into the fire. She watched him with great interest, and told herself she thought she would like him.

"Well, am I to be trusted?" he asked at length, turning to her quickly.

"Yes, I think so," she responded, blushing, and smiling.

"I hope so," he said gravely. "Who comes now?" he inquired as footsteps were heard outside the door. "Your father?"

"No—Gerald. Oh, Gerald, come here!" she cried, as her brother entered the room, and stopped short in great astonishment at sight of the stranger. "This is Uncle Edward, just come home from Australia!"

At first the boy was too surprised to say much, but as a rule he was not diffident, and soon he and Mr. Bailey were in the midst of an animated conversation.

Presently Mrs. Steer herself appeared with the tea-tray. She looked a little suspiciously at the visitor in the easy chair; but her face cleared as she listened to his pleasant voice; and when he laughed, she could not help smiling, for there was something so genial and hearty in the cheery sound.

Angel presided at the tea-table, and proved a good hostess, though she felt shy at first; but it was not very long before she was at her ease, and joining in the

conversation without the slightest restraint. And all the while she was thinking how pleased her father would be when he returned home and found who had arrived in his absence. She had heard many stories of Uncle Edward—how kind he had been to her father when the latter had been a boy, and how he had wanted to give him a start in life in that far-off land across the seas.

The meal was nearly finished when Angel's sharp ears caught the sound of her father's familiar footsteps on the stairs; and a few seconds later he came into the room, and advanced towards the visitor with outstretched hands.

"Uncle Edward!" he cried joyfully. "How good it is to see you once more! Why did you not write to let me know you were coming?"

"I wanted to take you by surprise," Mr. Bailey replied, as he and his nephew shook hands heartily. "Why, John, you don't look much older than when I saw you last!"

"I cannot say the same of you," Mr. Willis said, "for you have grown stout, Uncle Edward."

"Oh, father!" exclaimed Angel disappointedly, "I believe you knew who was here when you came into the room."

"I did," he acknowledged. "I saw Mrs. Steer downstairs and she bade me hurry to see if you were entertaining an impostor or not. Uncle Edward, we would have given you a better welcome if we had known you were coming."

"I have been well entertained," Mr. Bailey declared, "and I have made a most excellent meal. Your children and I are friends already, John; Your daughter, I find, is the soul of hospitality!"

Angel, who was looking wonderfully animated, smiled as she met her father's eyes, whilst Mr. Bailey explained how his sudden arrival had met with Mrs. Steer's distinct disapproval.



"It never occurred to me that you lived in lodgings," he said, "so I dare say your landlady had every right to be angry when I invaded her premises!"

"I gave up housekeeping when my poor wife died," Mr. Willis remarked, with a sigh.

"Yes, yes," Mr. Bailey assented, "I understand. I think your landlady said something about having a bedroom to let. I had better interview her again—that is, if you'll allow me a share of your sitting-room, Angelica?"

"Oh yes! That will be nice, won't it, father? But you must please call me Angel—every one does. Angelica sounds so stiff and proper."

"Very well," Mr. Bailey agreed, "Angel is an exceedingly pretty name, in my opinion."

"We shall be delighted to have you for our guest, Uncle Edward," Mr. Willis said, a trifle dubiously; "but—you see what the

place is like. Will you be comfortable here?"

"Far more comfortable than I should be at a grand hotel in the midst of strangers. Perhaps you think that because I'm an old bachelor I must be fidgety? Let me assure you I am not."

"You are greatly altered if you are! No, I did not think that," Mr. Willis returned. "Stay with us by all means, if you can make yourself happy here. Your company will be a real pleasure to me, and the children too."

"I have come back to England to make a home," Mr. Bailey remarked, looking thoughtful, "but I do not think it will be in London. Still, since you are willing, I will gladly remain here as your guest for the time."

Thus it was arranged. Mrs. Steer was glad to let the unoccupied bedroom, and her manner towards the stranger thawed when she found he was actually the person he professed to be; he further

raised himself in her opinion when he stoutly refused to allow her and her maid-of-all-work to convey his luggage upstairs, but carried each box to his bedroom upon his own broad shoulders, declining even his nephew's help. Gerald was so taken up with their visitor that he forgot to learn his lessons till it was nearly bedtime, and then had to call Angel to his assistance. She wanted to listen to the conversation between her father and uncle, but, as usual, she lent her help to her brother when requested to do so, and laboriously worked his sums for him whilst he wrote out his French translation. By the time the lessons were finished and the books put away, it was nine o'clock, the hour at which the children generally went to bed.

"Good-night, Angel," Mr. Bailey said, as the little girl offered him her hand, and said "Good-night." "I shall not soon forget how you welcomed me this afternoon. God bless you, child!"

She looked at him seriously, surprised at the solemnity of his tone; but he was

turning his attention to Gerald, and after kissing her father, she went away quietly to her own room.

Before she undressed for the night, she opened the window and listened to the roar of the great city, then lifted her eyes to the sky, where the stars were sparkling brightly, for the night was wonderfully clear. Her thoughts were all of the unexpected visitor, and she wondered if she would see much of him. She believed she would like him, for he possessed a countenance which inspired a feeling of trust. What would he think when he discovered their poverty? Was he rich himself? If so, she did not suppose he would remain with them very long.

The night air was chill, so presently she shut the window and commenced to undress. As she did so, she could not help wondering if Uncle Edward had noticed the shabbiness of her black serge gown; and she hoped, if he had, he would not blame her father for allowing her to wear such a dowdy garment, as Mrs. Steer had once done. The thought troubled her that

any one should blame her father, who would willingly have supplied her slightest want if he had only had the money to do so. When she knelt down to say her prayers, however, all uneasy thoughts fled from her mind, for her mother had taught her from her earliest days, when she could only lisp in baby fashion, to carry her cares to God; and had impressed upon her that nothing was of too trifling a nature to lay before her Father in Heaven. The troubles she could not speak to human ears were poured out to Him who never fails to understand and administer to our needs, so that when Angel rose from her knees her mind was at ease; and her last waking thought was one of gladness for her father's sake, because she knew he loved his uncle well, that Mr. Bailey had come to their home.

## CHAPTER III

### **An Overshadowed Happiness**

DURING the week which followed Mr. Bailey's arrival Angel saw but little of

him, for he was much engaged upon business of his own, and was in consequence away most of the days; but after a while he had more leisure time on his hands, and the weather being unsettled and chilly, was glad to be able to remain by the warm fireside. Thus one cold morning at the beginning of December found him seated in an easy chair near the fireplace reading the newspaper, whilst Angel pored over a story-book in which she was deeply interested.

For a long while silence prevailed, but by-and-by Mr. Bailey turned to his companion, and seeing how absorbed she was in her reading, observed her with closer scrutiny. Surely, he thought, it was unusual for a child of her years to be so very quiet. Had she no friends, he wondered, no companions of her own age? And why was it she did not go to school? Presently, becoming conscious his eyes were upon her, she glanced up, and met his earnest gaze with a look of inquiry.

"Is that a very interesting book?" he asked kindly, with his pleasant smile.

"Yes," she replied, "very. Mrs. Steer lent it to me."

"Do you do nothing but read all day long?" he questioned curiously. "Why, you are a regular little bookworm! But I think you spend too much time indoors! Little girls should have roses on their cheeks, and you have none. You are far too pale! Have you no young friends, my dear?"

"No, Uncle Edward; but I don't want young friends—at least sometimes I think I should like some, not many, just a few, you know! I have father, and Gerald, and—"

"But your father has his painting, so you really see but little of him; and Gerald is at school. Why, you must spend the greatest part of your days alone. How is it you don't go to school yourself?"

"I am going to school later on," she informed him hurriedly. "I—I don't mind



much not going now. You mustn't think I do!"

He surveyed her in puzzled silence, passing his hand through his thick, grizzled hair, as she had noticed he had a trick of doing if he failed to understand the situation.

"Youth is the time for learning," he remarked at length, "but, of course, children do not realize that themselves. I remember when I was a schoolboy how I used to idle the precious hours away; and many a time since, I've regretted the opportunities I foolishly lost. Now, my brother—your grandfather, you understand, Angel—was quite different to me; he was always studying, and if he had lived long enough he would have made a mark as a clergyman, for he was a fine preacher, and popular with all who came in contact with him, besides being most zealous in the work he had chosen. But it was not to be, as you know, my dear; God took him away from his earthly labours when he was barely thirty years of age."

"Yes; father has often told me how his father died when he was a baby, and his mother did not live many years afterwards. It was very, very sad!"

"It was God's will," Mr. Bailey said reverently, "and He knows best, though we cannot always see His reasons for all He does; but it was a great loss for your father to be thus bereft of both parents at such an early age."

Angel had put down her book, and taken a chair close to Mr. Bailey's. Already she was beginning to find out that he was a most interesting companion.

"I know how good you were to father when he was a boy," she said gently, "and that you paid his school-bills, and gave him pocket-money, and—"

"Pooh, child! That was nothing. I was doing well in Australia and could well afford to do the little I did for him. I must confess, though, I was disappointed and vexed when I came home to England—more than twenty years ago it was now—

and found your father so set upon being an artist. I would have liked him to join me in Australia, and he should then have had a partnership in my business."

"Father would not like to be anything but an artist," Angel replied. "He is a genius, and some day he will be famous!"

"Perhaps so, perhaps so! I am no judge of pictures myself, so I cannot say; but the road to fame is not an easy one, my dear."

"No, indeed!" the little girl agreed readily, with a mournful shake of her head. "We have always been poor," she proceeded with a sudden burst of confidence, "always! And it is not nice to be poor, and owe people money! Mother used to say our debts haunted her; she thought of them the first thing in the morning and the last thing at night! Oh, I ought not to tell you this, but—" And Angel broke off suddenly, a burning blush dying her face from brow to chin, whilst her grey eyes were suffused with tears.

Mr. Bailey laid a kind hand on her shoulder, and gave her a sympathetic pat; his ruddy face evinced much concern, but no surprise.

"Never mind, my dear," he said, and his voice sounded deeper than ever, "you're a brave little maid, and there are brighter days coming, I hope."

"I'm not brave at all," Angel responded, with a rather tearful smile, "but mother was. She never let father see when she was worried, because it troubled him if she was unhappy, and she never bothered him about things more than she could help."

"I should have liked to have known your mother," Mr. Bailey remarked thoughtfully, "I believe she and I would have been friends. I wish I had returned to England sooner; perhaps I might have made things easier for her, but as it is—" He paused abruptly for a moment, then asked, "Did you ever hear of a place called Wreyford, Angel?"

"No—yes—I am not certain. I seem to know the name."

"Wreyford is the town where your grandfather and I were born and bred, a quiet country town it was then; it may be altered now. Our home was called 'Haresdown House'; once it was our own property, but it was sold at my father's death. I've a mind to see the old place once again, and so I've determined to go and have a look at it, and ascertain if it is as desirable a residence as I used to consider it in my early years. What do you say to going with me, my dear?"

"Oh!" cried Angel in great astonishment, "do you mean it, Uncle Edward? Oh, I should like it! Is Wreyford near London?"

"No; it is a good distance away, in the west of England—in Somerset. I should like to have a look around the district, so we should be away several days. It would be a nice little trip for you, eh?"

"It would be delightful! Oh, I hope father will let me go! How kind of you, Uncle

Edward! I have never been away from London all my life."

"Is that really so, Angel? Yes, you poor child! Well, I will tell your father what I propose doing, and hear what he has to say. I suppose he and your brother will be able to get on without you for a short while?"

He spoke banteringly, but Angel took his remark seriously, and answered with great gravity—

"I don't know, but I should think they might. What will Gerald say when he knows where I am going? He will want to go instead of me." And a slight shadow dimmed the happiness of her face.

"He will not be so selfish, I should hope," Mr. Bailey returned, "and, besides, he has his duties at school to attend to. No, if you cannot go with me, my dear, I most certainly shall not dream of taking Gerald."

"And you think we shall be away several days, Uncle Edward?"

"Most probably. If the weather is fine, and not too cold, we need not hurry over our trip. Wreyford is beautifully situated, and has a mild climate. How strange it will be going back after so many years."

Angel was silent. In reality she was in a great state of excitement, but she sat with her hands clasped in her lap, and her eyes fastened on the shabby carpet, whilst she thought of the treat in store for her. The idea of a change of scene had all the charm of novelty. How wonderful to think that a month ago she had not known Uncle Edward! Already she trusted him implicitly, and felt he was her sincere friend.

By-and-by they went upstairs to the studio and unfolded their plans to her father. Mr. Willis listened good-humouredly; the prospect of his uncle and Angel going for a holiday together appeared to amuse him.

"Why, what makes you want to take Angel, Uncle Edward?" he exclaimed. "Oh, I don't mind her going in the least, but—"

"The change will do her good," Mr. Bailey interposed hastily; "she leads a dull life, I fear, with no companions of her own age. Give her into my charge for a few days; I will take good care of her."

"That I am sure you will!" Mr. Willis agreed readily. "Well, child," he proceeded, laying his hand on his little daughter's shoulder, "do you want to desert me?"

"No, father; but if you think you can spare me I should so like to go with Uncle Edward," she answered, lifting a pair of wistful eyes to his face. "I should like to see the house where grandfather lived when he was a boy, and—oh, it would be such a treat altogether! Do say I may go," she added coaxingly.

"Well, then, I suppose I must. Uncle Edward is right, you have a dull life; but it



will be different when I send you to school."

"Oh yes," she agreed happily, "you must not think I mind being dull. Of course, I can't help feeling lonely when you are at work up here and Gerald is at school. Have you ever been to Wreyford, father?"

"No, my dear, but perhaps I may go there some day. I, too, should like to see the place where my ancestors lived. You must keep your eyes open so as to be able to tell me all about it."

"Indeed I will. To think I am really going into the country! It seems too wonderful to be true! I wonder what Gerald will think!"

Angel was soon to know what Gerald thought, for when he returned from school she naturally greeted him with the news of her impending journey. She Was alone in the sitting-room when she heard him come running upstairs, whistling softly the while and as he entered she cried excitedly—

"Oh, Gerald! Guess where I am going! But no—you never will. Uncle Edward is going to take me to Wreyford with him—that's where grandfather was born, you know—and we shall be away several days."

"Uncle Edward is going to take you with him!" he exclaimed. "Nonsense, Angel! You're joking!"

"Indeed I am not! It's quite true! Father says I may go. Won't it be nice for me? Wreyford is in the country—in Somerset." Angel paused suddenly seeing a cloud upon her brother's brow. "I shan't be away long," she continued, "only a few days. And you won't miss me much, because you will be at school."

Gerald, who was reflecting that he would have to do his lessons without assistance during his sister's absence, made no reply. He looked rather sulky, wondering why Uncle Edward wanted Angel's company, and a feeling of jealousy crept into his heart, for he would have much

liked to go with Mr. Bailey to Wreyford himself.

"Aren't you glad, Gerald?" his sister asked, a trifle wistfully. "You don't mind because we are not both going, do you?"

"Of course not!" he snapped irritably. "But I can't think how you got around Uncle Edward to make him ask you instead of me," he added with a frown.

"I didn't get around him at all," she protested indignantly. "What do you mean? He said if I could not go he should not dream of taking you." Then, noting that he was considerably taken aback at this piece of information, she was regretful she had repeated Mr. Bailey's words, and said quickly, "I am so sorry you are not going too, Gerald."

"I don't believe you are!" he retorted. "Girls always get the best of everything," he went on in grumbling tones. "See what easy times you have when I'm working hard at school all day long!"

"I would far rather be at school," she assured him eagerly; but he only shook his head and declined to believe her statement.

She was disappointed, and hurt that her brother evinced no joy at the thought of the pleasant trip she was anticipating with such delight; but she reminded herself that it was quite natural he should be vexed at having to remain at home, and tried not to let his lack of sympathy damp her spirits. Perhaps Gerald was rather ashamed that he had allowed his sister a glimpse of the real state of his feelings, for he was more than usually gracious to her during the evening which followed; and after his lessons were finished, challenged her to a game of draughts, and showed no ill-humour, as he frequently did when she beat him.

Then the projected journey to Wreyford was discussed again, and Mr. Bailey waxed eloquent as he talked of his early home, and told amusing anecdotes of his young days, when he and the children's

grandfather had been mischievous spirited boys.

"I hope the place is not much altered," he said, "but I suppose I must expect to find it is. I sometimes think I should like to end my days in my native town."

"Do you mean you contemplate living there?" Mr. Willis asked, regarding his uncle with some surprise. "From what I have heard of Wreyford, I imagine it is a very quiet place."

"I do not care for bustle," Mr. Bailey answered; "but I shall see, I shall see! I have not yet settled what my plans for the future will be. To-morrow, Angel, you and I must decide when we shall go."

Angel met his kindly glance with a smile which faded, however, the instant she turned her eyes to her brother's face. Gerald was looking cross and envious again, as though he begrudged the pleasure in store for her, and her happiness was overshadowed immediately. She felt she would rather

remain at home, and let him take her place; but she did not like to suggest the change after Mr. Bailey's decisive remark to the effect that he should not take Gerald with him anyway.

Later in the evening she found an opportunity of speaking to her brother without being overheard by her father or uncle.

"Gerald," she whispered, "if you would rather, I will not go to Wreyford with Uncle Edward, I will stay at home."

"What would be the good of that?" he asked impatiently, never guessing what a sacrifice it was she was willing to make. "I shan't go if you don't. Oh, don't make a fuss Angel!"

She had no intention of doing that, but she felt as though Gerald had spoilt her happiness. She told herself he was selfish and unkind, and shed a few bitter tears after she was in bed at the remembrance of his manner and words; then her heart softened towards him, and

she determined not to be resentful to him the following day. Had she not solemnly promised her dying mother to be loving and patient with Gerald? Angel had a very faithful heart, and she meant to keep her word.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Mickle Family

WREYFORD was an old-fashioned market-town with one principal street, called Fore Street, where private houses intermingled with shops; and the eyes of passers-by were refreshed by glimpses of pretty gardens, a-bloom with flowers in summer-time, stretching in front of roomy, comfortable-looking, stuccoed dwellings.

The town lay in a valley between two sheltering hills, and the gardens at the back of many of the houses stretched to the river—the Wrey—which, as it flowed by Wreyford, was little more than a sparkling stream, though some ten miles further on its course it broadened considerably, and was navigable for small boats.



The town of Wreyford was flat, but it was impossible to walk far beyond in any direction without ascending a hill, when one was fully repaid by the extensive and beautiful views to be seen, look which way one would, of rich pastures and woods, the silvery river winding serpent-like along, and far in the distance the Exmoor hills.

On the summit of one of the hills, called Haresdown Hill, overlooking the town, stood the parish church—a grey, weather-beaten edifice with a high tower inhabited by hundreds of jackdaws, and bats innumerable; and encircled by a churchyard where many crumbling tombstones, with almost obliterated inscriptions, testified to the antiquity of the burying-ground. The church was nearly a mile from the town, and the winding road, which led to it up the hill, was a favourite walk of Wreyford people, who were justly proud of the fine old building standing in solitary stateliness, keeping watch, as it were, over the town beneath. It had been built and endowed in

the twelfth century by a famous follower of Richard I, as a thank-offering to God for his safe return from the Holy Land, where he had been engaged in the crusades; his tomb was on the north side of the church, within an arch with full-size effigies of himself and his wife in marble.

The old church could have told many an exciting tale of the years it had seen. Cromwell's soldiery had battered in the great west door, and had slain the parish clerk, who had vainly endeavoured to defend the house of God. At the entrance of the porch was a stone let into the pavement to the memory of the brave old man, which told that—

"Ezekiel Hassal, 46 years clark heere, dyed 19th February, 1631."

It was at this particular stone that two little girls were looking one fine Saturday afternoon in December as they sat side by side on a bench within the church porch. They were Dinah and Dora Mickle, daughters of Mr. Jabez Mickle, the owner

of the best practice as a solicitor in Wreyford. Dinah, the elder of the two children, was twelve years old, and she was in charge of Dora, who was only eight; they were resting awhile before going home, having been for a long walk.

The story of Ezekiel Hassal's fate always had a great attraction for little Dora, and she had insisted upon hearing it again from Dinah's lips, although she knew it quite well, and shuddered as she listened. She was a sensitive, imaginative child, and could easily picture Cromwell's fierce soldiery ascending the green slope of the hill, the figure of the old parish clerk stationed before the door of the church he loved so well, and the tragedy which had followed.

"Oh, Dinah!" she cried, "mustn't it have been a terrible, terrible sight! Are you not glad we did not live in those days?"

"Yes," Dinah returned, "because I shouldn't have known whether to side with the king or Cromwell."

"Oh, Dinah! Why, they cut off the poor king's head!" Dora exclaimed, almost in tears at the very thought. "That could not have been right, could it?"

"No," Dinah agreed, knitting her brows in a puzzled fashion. She had been studying the history of the troubles between King Charles I and his Parliament, and her sympathies were divided. "But don't let us speak of poor Ezekiel Hassal any more," she continued, conscious of the cloud of sadness on her little sister's face, "he died long, long ago, and thinking of him only makes you low-spirited."

"He was a hero!" the younger child declared with sparkling eyes. "I heard father say so to the boys the other day."

Dinah nodded, but did not prolong the conversation; instead, she rose, and, followed by her sister, walked through the churchyard, out by the lych-gate, and down the winding path towards the town.

The sisters were very unlike in appearance and disposition. Dinah, who

was a tall, well-grown girl, had a fresh, rosy face, a pair of dark blue eyes which shone with a steady light, and a firm mouth and chin. She was a sweet-natured child, gifted with an equable temper, and a fund of commonsense unusual at her age, and was a general favourite at home, as well as at the day-school which she attended. Dora was fairer, and much slighter than her sister; her eyes were a lighter blue; her hair golden brown; and her whole appearance was so fragile that people generally formed the idea she was delicate, which was certainly not the case. She was very impulsive, and easily led through her affections, making other folks' troubles her own, the result of an intensely sympathetic nature.

As the sisters descended the hill their way led past an old house with cob walls and a thatched roof, standing in its own grounds, the entrance to which was almost hidden from sight by shrubs so overgrown that one would have said they had not been trimmed for years. Usually

a board was to be seen in the midst of a mass of evergreens, announcing to passers-by that the house was to be sold or let; but to-day the board had disappeared, and as Dinah noted the fact she paused involuntarily, with an exclamation of intense surprise.

"Why, Dora!" she cried, "I do believe 'Haresdown House' is let! Now, I wonder who can have taken it!"

"Do you think it can be taken?" Dora questioned, looking quite excited, for no one had inhabited "Haresdown House" during her eight years of life. "Who is there in Wreyford that would live here? Every one says what a dull house it is!"

"I believe it is let because the board has been taken down," Dinah replied gravely. "However, we shall soon hear if it is; perhaps father may know. Come, it must be getting near teatime; we had better hurry home."

The Mickle family lived in a high, old-fashioned house in Fore Street. The

house itself stood back from the street, and had a trim flower garden before it, and a kitchen garden at the back which reached to the river.

The chief rooms on the ground floor were the lawyer's offices; but the house being three stories high, the family was not cramped for space. The dining-room overlooked the street, and was a pleasant, airy apartment with a comfortable, homely look about it, in spite of its well-worn Brussels carpet, and rather shabby, leather-covered furniture; there were a few good oil-paintings on the walls, some handsome bronze ornaments on the mantel-piece, and a bowl of chrysanthemums in the centre of the table in the middle of the room.

On this particular December afternoon the room had two occupants—Mrs. Mickle, who was seated near the window, bending over some plain needlework, and her elder son, Gilbert, a boy of nearly sixteen, who reclined on a sofa drawn near the fire.

Gilbert Mickle was a cripple, and could only walk with the help of crutches; but he was not in the least an invalid, enjoying really robust health. He was a very handsome boy, though the expression of his face was usually not a pleasant one, for he possessed an obstinate, cantankerous temper, which had already left its traces in two deep lines between his brows. One of his school-fellows had once declared in his hearing that his temper was as crooked as his legs, and he had been stung into a perfect fury of passion by the remark, conscious that every one recognized its truth, and had dealt the offender such a series of vicious blows with one of his crutches that he had cried for mercy and let him alone for the future.

With his brother Tom, who was a year his junior, Gilbert attended the Wreyford Grammar School; but, whereas the younger brother was universally popular, Gilbert was generally disliked, and feared, by reason of the cutting



tongue he never hesitated to use at another's expense.

"I suppose Tom will be back from the football match soon," he remarked at length, as he flung aside the book he had been reading, and yawned idly. "I wonder if the Grammar School will be beaten. I don't care if it is."

"Oh, my dear," Mrs. Mickle remonstrated gently, "think how disappointed Tom will be if his side loses."

"It will do Tom good to be on the losing side for once, mother. The Grammar School has had all the luck so far this season, and, really, to hear Tom talk you'd think it was mostly owing to him. Conceited young cub! He wants to be put under a bit!"

Mrs. Mickle laughed, then sighed. Certainly Tom was rather an important individual in his own estimation; but the manner in which his brother remarked the fact was not pleasant.

"You should have gone to watch the football match," she said, "it would have been better for you than lying there all the afternoon."

"Yes. It does me good to hear strangers say, 'Who is that lame boy on crutches?' or, 'What a pity he is a cripple!' It makes me simply furious. I overheard some one remark once that my legs were exactly like a spider's when I moved. I prefer to remain at home in peace and quietness."

Mrs. Mickle bent her head over her work more to hide the tears in her eyes than because the light was fading and preventing her seeing clearly. The sarcastic bitterness in her son's voice cut her to the heart. Of her four children, Gilbert was the only one who had ever given her much anxious thought; he had caused her many a sleepless night, for his had always been a most difficult character to understand.

"I am sure you dwell too much upon your infirmity, my dear," she said presently. "You are too self-conscious, too wrapped

up in yourself. Instead of always thinking of what people are saying about you, and regretting the cross God has given you to bear, do you not think it would be better and wiser to dwell on all He has blessed you with? Yes, I mean what I say," she continued, as he made an impatient gesture, "you are far in advance of most boys of your age in intellect, and if you use the talents with which God has endowed you, you may have many opportunities of doing good in the world, and benefiting your fellow-men."

"I don't know that I want to benefit my fellow-men particularly. I may have brains, but what are brains in comparison to legs? If my legs were straight and strong, I should be perfectly content."

"But as they are not, dear Gilbert, don't you think you ought to make the best of them?"

"Oh, mother, it's all very fine for you to talk, but you don't understand."

"I think I do, my dear; and if I do not, you know there is One who understands perfectly."

Gilbert knew whom his mother meant, but he vouchsafed no reply. He reached for his crutches, and, rising from the sofa, slowly swung himself towards the window, where he stood by his mother's chair, gazing out into the street. Mrs. Mickle proceeded with her needlework in silence, but presently she raised her eyes to her son's face, and he turned and met her gaze.

"I'm a wretch to make you look like that," he said repentantly, as he noticed her troubled countenance, and bent to kiss her, for he was really deeply attached to his mother; "it is too bad of me to be so disagreeable. Why, here come Tom and the girls!" And flinging upon the window he shouted to his brother, and asked the result of the football match.

"The Grammar School won," he reported to his mother, as he shut the window.

"And you are glad!" Mrs. Mickle exclaimed as she noticed the gratified expression on his face.

"Well, I suppose I am really. Here they come tumbling up the stairs!"

The next moment the door was flung open, and Tom, followed by his sisters, hurried into the room.

"Two goals and a try to nil!" shouted the former. "I say, Gilbert, old boy, I wish you'd been there to see us lick them!"

"Oh, mother! Oh, Gilbert!" cried Dora, "'Haresdown House' is let!"

"Yes, or we suppose so; at any rate, the board has been taken down," Dinah hastened to explain.

"It is let," Gilbert said calmly, smiling in a superior manner at his sisters' excitement; "it has been taken by an elderly gentleman called Bailey. The house belonged to his father many years ago, and he had a fancy to purchase it. Mr.

Bailey has lately returned from Australia."

"Where did you get your information?" Mrs. Mickle inquired.

"From Grylls, the chemist. Mr. Bailey's lodging at his house. You know, Grylls has lived in Wreyford all his life, so he knew Mr. Bailey before he went to Australia as a boy. Grylls says he shouldn't be surprised to hear he has made a big fortune, for when he found out 'Haresdown House' was to be sold or let he bought it at once. He has been in Wreyford for the last week with a little girl—a niece of his. I wonder you haven't noticed him about the place—a big man, with a jolly-looking red face."

"Oh!" cried Dora, "I believe I met him in the street yesterday, and the little girl too. I saw they were strangers. She was all in black, and—why, how extraordinary! Mother! Dinah! Boys! There they are!"

Every one looked out of the window at the very instant that three figures reached the garden gate—a tall, thin, clean-shaven man, who was no other than Mr. Mickle, in company with Mr. Bailey and Angel.

"Fancy father's knowing them!" cried Dinah. "Oh, he is actually bringing them in! Do you imagine they will come up here, or will he take them into his office? Do you think they would come on business on a Saturday afternoon?"

"Perhaps father has something to do with the transfer of the property Mr. Bailey has bought," Gilbert suggested sagely.

"Very likely," his mother agreed.

At that point Mr. Mickle's voice from below was heard calling for Dinah, and she hastened to obey the summons. In a very few minutes she returned to the dining-room, followed by a pale-faced, shy-looking little girl, whom she introduced to her mother, simply saying—

"Mother, this is the Australian gentleman's niece. Father says she is to stay with us, and we are to amuse her until he has finished his business with her uncle, whom he is going to bring upstairs to tea presently."



## CHAPTER V

### How Angel made Several New Acquaintances

IT was a trying experience for Angel to be the object of interest to five pairs of strange eyes, and she was seized with a perfect panic of shyness as she gave one hasty glance around the room, wishing she had been allowed to wait for Mr. Bailey downstairs. She blushed painfully, conscious of the dead silence which had fallen upon the group by the window; then

she felt her hand taken in a reassuring clasp, whilst a kind voice said cordially—

"I am very pleased to see you, my dear. I am Mrs. Mickle. Sit down in this chair by my side. That's right! Let me introduce you to my children. This is Dinah. She must be about your age; and this is my baby, Dora. The boys are Gilbert and Tom. Now you know us all!"

Angel shook hands with each member of the family in turn, not knowing quite what to say, and hoping her silence did not appear ungracious.

"If you will tell us your name, we shall start our acquaintance on a proper footing," Mrs. Mickle proceeded, pitying her visitor's evident embarrassment, and longing to put her at her ease.

"I am called Angelica Willis," Angel answered, "but every one calls me Angel."

"May we call you Angel, too?"

"Oh, please do! Angelica is such a long name, but father wished me to be called it after Angelica Kauffmann, the painter. Father is an artist."

"I understand," Mrs. Mickle said, grasping the situation at once; "you will be an artist yourself, perhaps, when you grow up?"

"No," Angel replied, shaking her head regretfully, "I am afraid not! I am certain not! I cannot draw even a straight line. It is a great pity, but I have not the artistic temperament."

She spoke so seriously that Mrs. Mickle refrained from smiling; but Tom began to giggle, at which sound Angel shot a quick glance at him, and saw that he was making merry at her expense. She was not conscious of having said anything funny, and had yet to learn that very little was sufficient to amuse Tom Mickle. Gilbert was still standing by the window, looking out, listening to the conversation, though taking no part in it.

"Are you going to live at Haresdown House with Mr. Bailey?" Dinah asked hurriedly, seeing that Angel had noticed Tom was laughing at her.

"Oh no!" was the response. "I live in London with my father and brother."

"Mr. Bailey is your uncle, isn't he?"

"My great-uncle. He was born at Haresdown House sixty-five years ago, and he says he hopes to end his days there. He has been so kind to me, giving me this nice holiday in the country! I was never in the country before!"

"Never in the country before!" Dora echoed, opening her blue eyes very wide.

"If that is the case, I am sure you are enjoying your stay at Wreyford," Mrs. Mickle remarked. "You have been here several days, have you not?"

"Just a week. I think it is a beautiful place; I never imagined it would be so lovely! You have sunshine every day!"

"It is exceptionally fine weather for the season, but we rarely experience very severe winters here. So you have a father and brother in London? Have you no sisters?"

"No; there are only father, and Gerald, and me!" Angel hesitated, and glanced down over her black frock; then she raised her eyes to Mrs. Mickle's face, and caught a look so full of motherly tenderness and sympathy that her heart gave a throb half of pleasure, half of pain, and she added simply, "My mother died two years ago."

"Oh, my dear!" cried Mrs. Mickle; and she gave her little visitor a warm, impulsive kiss, which was returned with goodwill. "You are going to have tea with us presently," she continued, "so you had better go upstairs with the girls, and remove your hat and jacket. Dear me, it is more than half-past four, and we have tea at five."

"Come!" said Dora, taking Angel by the hand, and leading her from the room,

whilst Dinah followed close behind. "We have a room between us," she explained; "I expect it's rather in a muddle because we had not time to tidy it before we went for our walk."

"Perhaps you'll excuse it?" Dinah asked politely.

"Oh yes!" Angel responded, "of course I will!"

It was impossible to be shy with the sisters long. They asked her dozens of questions, which she answered readily; and found herself putting questions to them in return. She looked around their bedroom with interested eyes—at the two little white beds side by side, the pretty pictures on the walls, and the ornaments, which she was told had been mostly birthday presents—and openly admired everything she saw. Dinah and Dora evidently had great pride in their room; they informed her they made the beds themselves, and took it in turns to do the dusting. "Jane, that is our housemaid, has so much work that

mother likes us to help her all we can," Dinah said in her matter-of-fact way; "there's plenty to do in this house, there always is where there are boys about. Tom is dreadfully untidy, and always forgets to wipe his boots thoroughly before he comes upstairs, and brings such a lot of grit into the place. Is your brother like that?"

"Yes," Angel answered, smiling, "and Mrs. Steer does get so cross with him!"

"Who is Mrs. Steer?" Dora inquired.

"Our landlady. We live in lodgings, not in a house of our own."

"Oh, I should not like that at all!" Dora cried.

"Because you are not accustomed to lodgings," Dinah put in quickly. She turned to Angel and asked, "Is your brother older than you are?"

"No, younger," Angel replied. "He is very clever, and has such a lot of friends. Every one likes Gerald."

Once set going on her favourite topic of conversation, her brother, she found a great deal to say. She told how many prizes he had won at school, and how proud her father was of him.

"Did you ever win a prize?" Dora asked, much interested.

"No," Angel acknowledged, her face, which had been bright and animated, becoming suddenly overclouded; "I do not go to school!"

"And yet you are older than your brother!" Dinah exclaimed in accents of surprise.

"Yes," Angel answered; and became suddenly silent.

The sisters saw that for some reason or other she did not wish to be questioned further upon the subject, and Dinah considerably changed the conversation.



When the three little girls returned to the dining-room, they found the cloth had been laid for tea, the lamps lit, and the curtains drawn; everything looked very comfortable and homely.

"Where are mother and Tom?" Dinah inquired of Gilbert, the sole occupant of the room, as she drew Angel to the fireside, and gave her a comfortable chair.

"Mother has gone to see about muffins for tea, and Tom's cleaning up," he explained, as he slowly crossed the room from the window to the fireplace.

It was then that Angel saw for the first time that the boy walked with the assistance of crutches; she had not particularly noticed him before. Her heart swelled with pity as she realized that he was a cripple, and her little start of astonishment was not lost upon him.

"What is the matter?" he questioned sharply. "Did you never see any one on crutches before? Look here!" And he

proceeded to swing himself up and down the room at a great rate. "You see how it's done, don't you? Now, you needn't stare at me any more!"

"Gilbert!" Dinah cried reprovingly, as he flung himself rather breathlessly into a chair, and allowed his crutches to drop on the floor with a crash.

"I—I did not mean to stare!" Angel gasped, aghast at the rage depicted in every line of the boy's face. "If I did, I am very sorry! It must have seemed dreadfully rude, but—"

"It is Gilbert who is rude," Dinah said severely, for though several years her brother's junior, she never scrupled to speak out to him.

"Never mind, Angel," whispered Dora consolingly; "Gilbert is always like that; you mustn't take any notice of him; we never do."

"What are you whispering about?" he asked suspiciously. He took no notice of

Dinah's reproof; perhaps he knew he deserved it. "When girls get together they're always whispering."

Angel thought him a most disagreeable, ill-mannered boy; nevertheless, her kind heart was very sympathetic; she picked up his crutches from the floor, and put them within his reach.

"I am so very sorry if I annoyed you," she said in tones of real distress, "I had no idea I was staring. Do forgive me."

"Oh, it's all right! You needn't apologize," he responded gruffly; "I suppose you were surprised to see I was a miserable cripple."

"I am very sorry," Angel murmured, almost in tears. "It must be dreadful for you."

"Oh, I don't want you to pity me. I hate pity! I say, you aren't going to cry, are you? There'll be no end of a row if you do. I didn't mean to make you cry."

"I am not crying!" Angel declared, which was true, for she had blinked away the tears which had threatened to fall.

At that point Mrs. Mickle appeared, and not long afterwards Tom came noisily into the room, almost colliding with the parlour-maid, who was bringing in a dish of muffins and the teapot. Then Mr. Mickle and Mr. Bailey joined the party, and after the latter had been introduced to Mrs. Mickle and the children, they all sat down around the big dining-table, and the meal commenced.

"I was acquainted with your husband's father many years ago," Mr. Bailey told Mrs. Mickle. He was sitting at her right hand, talking to her as easily as though he had known her all his life. "You have doubtless heard I have bought Haresdown House," he continued; "I hope you and your young people will often come to see me when I am settled there. I'm a lonely, old bachelor, but I'm inclined to be sociable, you must understand."

"You will have your little niece with you?" Mrs. Mickle suggested.

"Oh no!" Angel exclaimed.

"I am afraid not," Mr. Bailey said, shaking his head regretfully; "my little niece has a father and brother, to both of whom she is devoted; I am not sure that they would consent to my taking her away from them!"

"Your father is an artist, is he not?" Mr. Mickle asked, turning to Angel. "I saw a book for children the other day most charmingly illustrated by one John Willis."

"Oh, that is my father!" Angel cried, her eyes flashing with delight, her heart swelling with pride. "He illustrates books most beautifully, and paints pictures too."

Mr. Mickle appeared much interested, and questioned his little visitor further. Encouraged by his evident appreciation of her father's abilities, Angel lost all her

shyness, and told him of the great picture of which so much was expected.

"Indeed, I hope it will be a success," he said kindly; "if it is in the Royal Academy, I think I must run up to town in May and have a look at it!"

"How I should like to see your father's picture!" exclaimed Gilbert, meeting Angel's eyes across the table.

"Ah, Gilbert is fond of painting," his father remarked.

"Do you paint yourself?" Angel inquired, looking at the boy with friendly interest, momentarily forgetful of the uncomfortable five minutes he had given her before tea.

"A little," he acknowledged, "but I have never learnt."

"I have been remarking to your uncle that I hoped we should see more of you, my dear," Mrs. Mickle said to Angel; "but he

tells me you are returning to London to-morrow!"

"And I have been saying that I shall expect you to pay me a long visit soon at Haresdown House, Angel," Mr. Bailey broke in, "and then Mrs. Mickle and all our kind, new friends will have an opportunity of renewing their acquaintance with you." And he nodded smilingly at the faces around the table.

"Oh, are you really going to-morrow," Dora cried disappointedly, "just as we have got to know you? That is too bad!"

The remainder of the meal passed very pleasantly; and Angel was exceedingly sorry when, a little later, her uncle bade her put on her hat and jacket, for they must go.

"When you come to visit Mr. Bailey we shall hope to see a lot of you," Mrs. Mickle said hospitably, as she shook hands with her little guest at parting, and gave her a kiss. "Good-bye, my dear; I trust we shall meet again."

"Good-bye!" Angel replied softly, as she returned the caress. "How kind of you to kiss me! No one has kissed me quite like that since mother died."

Then she took leave of the children and their father, and went away with Mr. Bailey, waving her hand to the group of faces watching from the window, wondering if she would ever see them again.

"What very nice people they are, Uncle Edward," she said, as soon as they were out of sight of the house.

"Yes," he agreed. "Mr. Mickle is going to see to my affairs. I have been on the lookout for a reliable lawyer since my return to England; I am glad now I did not enlist the services of one in London. I knew this man's father, and I like the man himself."

"I like him too," Angel replied. "Fancy his having seen some of father's illustrations! He was very kind, so was Mrs. Mickle, and Dinah and Dora. Uncle



Edward, did you notice one of the boys is a cripple?"

"Yes; it is very sad. Such a handsome boy too, and remarkably clever, his father told me. Ah, it is a terrible cross for the poor lad to bear! He has been lame from birth. The younger boy looks full of life and mischief; Gerald would like him, eh?"

"I am sure he would."

"Gerald would enjoy the country as well as you, I dare say; if all's well, he shall spend his Easter holidays at Haresdown House next year."

The little girl slipped her fingers into Mr. Bailey's hand, and gave it a gentle squeeze. She was delighted at the thought of the pleasure in store for her brother.

"May I tell him what you say?" she asked. "He was a little disappointed at having to remain at home now."

"Was he? Yes, you can tell him, if you like. Are you sorry we are leaving here to-morrow?"

"Yes, although I shall be glad to see father and Gerald again. What a long time a week seems sometimes, Uncle Edward! And, oh, what a lot I shall have to tell when I get home!"

The following day Mr. Bailey and his little niece returned to London. Their visit to Wreyford had been a great success, for the weather had been mild and pleasant, and they had been thus enabled to spend most of the time out of doors; Mr. Bailey had been gratified to find a few old friends still living in the place, with whom he had renewed acquaintance; and everything had been so new and strange to Angel, that the week in the country had almost seemed like a glimpse into fairyland, so charmed was she with the quiet, old town, its ancient church on the hill, and the beautiful scenery which stretched around.

## CHAPTER VI

### Gerald's Jealousy

THE short December day was drawing to a close as the fast train from the west of England slowed into Paddington Station, and Mr. Bailey let down one of the windows of the compartment in which he and Angel were seated, and peered into the gloom without.

"Now for bricks and mortar once more!" he exclaimed. "What a dense fog to be sure! It looks as though one could cut it with a knife! I scarcely fancy your father will be here to meet us on a night like this."

But he was wrong in his surmise, for the moment after the train had stopped, and he had alighted himself, and lifted Angel

on to the platform by his side, she was in her father's arms, whispering how very glad she was to see him again.

"I did not expect to see you," Mr. Bailey said, as he shook his nephew by the hand, "but I am very pleased you have come. I hardly know my way about in a fog, so you must act as pilot."

Mr. Willis agreed, and a few minutes later found them seated in a cab, being driven slowly through the streets, for the fog was too thick to admit of faster progress.

"Are you sure our luggage is all right, father?" Angel asked anxiously. "Is the hamper there too?"

"Yes, your belongings are safe in front with the driver. May I inquire what the hamper contains?"

"Oh, it is a regular country hamper," Mr. Bailey replied, smiling, "and it contains—"

"Butter, and cream, and fowls," Angel broke in eagerly, "and other nice things to

eat. The hamper is a present from Uncle Edward, father. He says one always ought to take back a hamper from the country."

"Uncle Edward is very kind," Mr. Willis remarked, with gratitude in his voice. "I declare, Angel, in spite of your journey, you are looking much better and brighter than I ever saw you look before," he continued; "the light is dim, and I may be deceived, but surely those are roses in your cheeks?"

"Then they must be winter ones," Mr. Bailey said, laughing, "but they are none the less becoming on that account. I am glad you think she looks well, John. We have had a happy time together—have we not?" he asked, turning to Angel.

"Very happy." she answered readily. "Oh, father, I think the country is beautiful! The sky is so clear, and the sun shines so brightly, and Wreyford is a simply lovely place!"

Her father smiled at her enthusiasm, and regarded her tenderly with affectionate eyes. He had missed his little daughter during the past week—he had not anticipated he would miss her so much—and he was delighted to see her bright and happy. He had felt very dull of an evening during her absence, for since her mother's death he had fallen into the habit of talking to her of his plans for the future; if Angel lacked the artistic temperament, she was a most sympathetic listener, and she thoroughly believed in her father and his work.

"How is Gerald?" she questioned presently.

"He is very well. He wanted to come with me to Paddington, but I bade him remain at home and prepare his lessons for tomorrow, so that he might have a free evening with us to-night. I think he has missed your help in his lessons."

She laughed happily, for it was so nice to know she had been missed. Since her mother's death she had never felt so free

from care as she did now; for the time she had forgotten all the little worries and troubles of her home life.

The cab proceeded very slowly, sometimes stopping altogether for several minutes, so that it was more than an hour after they had started from Paddington before they reached their destination. Angel was the first to enter the house, and rushing upstairs ran into the arms of her brother, who had heard the cab draw up at the door, and was coming down to meet her. The two children hugged and kissed each other; then, being joined by their father and uncle, they all went up to the sitting-room, where a substantial high tea awaited them.

It made Angel's heart glow with pleasure to see how glad every one was that she had come home. Mrs. Steer brought hot water to her bedroom, and stood by whilst the little girl removed the traces of her journey, and explained how greatly she had been missed.

"Your pa's been like a hen that's lost its one chick, Miss Angel," the landlady said; "I'll be bound to say this last week has been a long one for him. I think he missed you evenings most of all. Master Gerald, for all he's so clever, will never be the same to your pa as you are, my dear. The boy has an aggravating way with him sometimes, and he's not as obedient as he might be. One night he and your pa had words about his lessons. It would never have happened if you'd been here."

"What happened?" Angel asked, a slight shadow of anxiety creeping over her face.

"Well, as far as I could make out, Master Gerald said he'd learnt his lessons, and your pa said he didn't believe he had, because he hadn't been long about them, and Master Gerald declared he knew them perfectly. Then your pa took up his books and questioned him."

"And couldn't Gerald answer the questions?"



"No, miss, he couldn't. Your pa was very angry, and Master Gerald turned sulky, but he had to learn the lessons properly. After that he went to bed without any supper."

Angel was troubled. She knew her brother must have annoyed her father greatly if the latter had been very angry, for he was usually most even-tempered, and never blamed without serious cause. If she had been at home there would have been no opportunity for disagreement, for she always went over her brother's lessons with him again and again till he knew them perfectly. It never occurred to her to question the wisdom of thus making Gerald's work easy for him.

Steer was a well-intentioned woman; and she had informed Angel of the unpleasantness between her father and brother in order to point out to the little girl her own importance in the family; but she regretted having mentioned the matter when she saw the effect of her incautious words.

"Your pa and Master Gerald were good friends enough next day, so there's nothing to worry about," she proceeded consolingly; "and I dare say a few stern words did Master Gerald no harm. A fine treat you've had, Miss Angel, to be sure! I'm glad you had good weather whilst you were away."

"The weather was perfect, and not the least too cold," Angel responded. "Wreyford is a charming place. Uncle Edward has bought a house there—the very same house he lived in when he was a boy—and he means to go there to live by-and-by."

"He'll want you to live with him, miss."

The little girl laughed and shook her head; she did not think Mrs. Steer's surmise at all likely.

It was very pleasant to be at home again, even though that home comprised only a few rooms in a second rate lodging-house. It was sweet to think how she had been missed, and that she was of

importance somewhere in the world. After tea she sat on a low stool by her father's side, whilst Mr. Bailey explained how he had found Haresdown House to be sold or let, and had purchased it for his future home.

"I shall remain with you till after Christmas if you'll keep me," he said to his nephew, "but with the new year I mean to settle at Wreyford. I dare say I shall be a bit lonely at first, but I don't feel I could live altogether in London. I could never be actually at home in a great city."

Mr. Willis nodded understandingly. Mr. Bailey's good-humoured, ruddy countenance was aglow with intense satisfaction; he was simply delighted at the prospect of living once more in his native town.

"Did you find Wreyford much altered?" Mr. Willis inquired.

"No, not much," was the reply. "The houses were smaller and the principal street narrower than I had pictured it; but

still the view from the churchyard on Haresdown Hill is finer, to my mind, than any I ever saw."

"It is grand!" Angel cried. "Oh, father, you would like to see it!"

"You must see it one of these days, John," Mr. Bailey said impressively. "I'm making my home at Haresdown House. You must understand my doors will be always open to you and yours. Come when you will, and remain as long as you like. Why should you not all spend Easter with me next year?"

"It is very good of you to suggest it, Uncle," Mr. Willis responded, "and I am deeply sensible of your kindness. But I hope to be very busy about that time," he added; "I shall be putting the finishing touches to my picture. Easter falls early next year."

"Well, then, you must come when it suits you," Mr. Bailey said hospitably. "There is plenty of room in Haresdown House; is there not, Angel?"

"Yes," she nodded. "It has gardens all around it, and an orchard leading from the kitchen garden. It is a thatched house built on the slope of the hill; the porch at the front door is covered with honeysuckle and roses. Of course there were no flowers, but I noticed the plants, and thought how beautiful they must be in the summer."

"What a grand time you must have had, Angel," Gerald remarked, with a touch of envy in his tone.

"And I hope you will have a grand time at Wreyford too one of these days," Mr. Bailey told the boy cordially; "perhaps in your Easter holidays, eh? Your sister and I met some people you would like to know—Mickle they are called. The father is a lawyer, and there are several children. When you come to visit me you will find congenial companions."

Gerald's face lit up with a gratified smile, and he and Angel exchanged pleased glances.

Now that the first excitement of coming home had passed, Angel was beginning to feel weary; she leaned her head against her father's knee whilst a sensation of perfect happiness and contentment crept over her. The fire made her drowsy, and she was half asleep when her father's voice, with a distinct note of displeasure in it, aroused her thoroughly.

"Gerald, what are you doing?" he asked.

She raised her head quickly, and glanced at her brother, who had gone to the table and emptied the contents of his schoolbag upon it.

"I am only going to learn my lessons for to-morrow, father," the boy answered promptly, but nevertheless appearing slightly uneasy.

"I thought I told you to learn them whilst I went to Paddington?" Mr. Willis said sharply.

"So you did, father, but I brought back such a jolly book from the school library, and—and—"

"And you read it instead of carrying out my instructions," Mr. Willis interposed, as Gerald hesitated to finish his sentence. "You had no right to disobey me; if you do so on another occasion I shall certainly punish you. You had better do your work now as quickly as you can, and mind you do it thoroughly."

Angel was surprised to hear her father speak so sternly. The fact was, during the week his little daughter had been absent from home, Mr. Willis had seen more of Gerald than he usually did, and had become aware of certain flaws in his character of which he had been ignorant before. Then, too, he had discovered how dependent the boy was upon his sister, and how he relied upon her assistance in his lessons; besides which, he had been struck by Gerald's selfishness in begrudging Angel the pleasure of her trip to Wreyford. It had been with both grief and surprise that Mr. Willis had

discovered his son's true feelings upon the matter.

Gerald opened his books, looking somewhat abashed, whilst Angel made a movement to rise and go to him; but her father placed his hands firmly though gently on her shoulders, and bade her remain where she was.

"Oh, father, may I not help Gerald with his lessons?" she asked in pleading tones.

"Yes, Angel, do come and help me with my French translation!" Gerald cried eagerly. "You might look out the words I don't know in the dictionary for me."

"I will, if father will let me," Angel replied, glancing coaxingly up into her father's face. "I expect Gerald did not learn his lessons this afternoon because he thought I would help him to-night," she added shrewdly; "do let me?"

That was the actual fact, but Gerald thought it wiser not to acknowledge it.



Mr. Willis did not remove his hands from his little daughter's shoulders; and when he spoke his words were a surprise to both children.

"Gerald must do his lessons by himself," he said quietly. "I shall not allow you to help him to-night, Angel, for he has most deliberately disobeyed me; besides which, it is selfish of him to want your assistance when you are tired with your journey."

"I am not very tired," the little girl declared, "only just a little! I can help Gerald quite well."

"But I would rather you did not, my dear."

Angel said no more, but she was distressed for her brother's sake. Gerald sulkily turned his attention to his work, a scowl upon his brow; when he had finished his lessons he put away his books, said good-night in an injured tone, and marched off to bed.

"Do not trouble about Gerald," Mr. Willis said, as Angel rose to follow her brother; "you do too much for him, and it is not right you should. He must learn to be more self-reliant. Are you going to bed too? Well, I know you are very tired, so good-night, my darling. Pleasant dreams!"

She kissed him lovingly, then turned to Mr. Bailey and kissed him too, lingering to tell him again what a happy time he had given her, and how grateful she was for all his kindness.

Gerald was already in bed when his sister peeped into his room. She went to his side, and bent over him to kiss him, but he did not return her caress, nor did he respond to her "good-night."

"I was sorry father would not let me help you with your lessons," she told him.

"You weren't!" he rudely retorted. "You didn't want to help me! You might have if you had liked."

"Oh, Gerald, you know better than that! And you know you were very wrong to disobey father. You ought to have done your work before."

"I am not going to be preached to by you, Angel! You think too much of yourself just because Uncle Edward's taken a fancy to you. It's not fair everyone should make so much more of you than me. Father's done nothing but talk of you all the time you've been away. And every time I've seen Mrs. Steer she's been just as bad. You've been enjoying yourself whilst I've had to go to school and work. You might have helped me to-night."

"But you know—you know father would not let me!" she cried tearfully.

"Father thinks more of you than of me," he declared; "yes, he does, he does, I say."

The little girl said no more. She turned away from her brother's bedside, and hastily left the room, amazed at the knowledge that Gerald was jealous of her. How unkind and unjust of him! Her

pillow was bedewed with bitter tears that night; but by-and-by she assured herself that Gerald did not mean all he had said; he would be ashamed of himself the next day. So she asked God to forgive him for his jealous temper, and fell asleep with his name upon her lips.

Gerald had gone to bed without a prayer, as he had often done of late; unfortunately he did not realize how much he had been to blame that day, so he experienced no desire for God's forgiveness, no wish for communion with his Father in Heaven.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **Uncle Edward's Offer**

GERALD came down late to breakfast the following morning when the meal was more than half over. One glance at his face was enough to show Angel that he had not overcome his ill-temper. He muttered a few apologetic words to the effect that he had overslept himself as he took his place at the table, and cast a look of disgust at the rasher of bacon upon his plate.

"You have only yourself to blame if your breakfast is cold," his father told him; "I am afraid it is not very appetizing now. If you don't care for the bacon, have some bread and butter and marmalade instead."

"I am not hungry," the boy replied, as he sipped his lukewarm coffee; "I don't want any breakfast."

"Are you not well?" Mr. Willis asked, with a glance of inquiry at his son's sullen countenance.

"Quite well, thank you, father."

"Then I am afraid you must have got out of bed the wrong side this morning," Mr. Willis remarked; "you had better change your mind, and eat something, or you will be starving long before dinner-time.— There seems very little hope of the fog clearing," he proceeded, turning his attention to Mr. Bailey; "I believe you will have to content yourself in the house to-day, uncle."

"I can do that very well," was the cheerful response. "Shall you be very busy this morning, John, or can you spare me an hour? I want to have a talk with you."

"I can give you as much time as you like, uncle, for there will be no light for painting. If you will join me in my studio after breakfast, we shall be quite undisturbed."

Mr. Bailey nodded; and as soon as the meal was over followed his nephew from the room.

"I wonder what Uncle Edward wants to talk to father about," Gerald exclaimed

curiously, the moment he was alone with his sister. "Do you know, Angel?"

"No, I haven't the least idea," she replied promptly, "How we shall miss Uncle Edward when he leaves, shan't we?"

"You will; you've seen more of him than I have. You're his favourite."

"Oh, Gerald, I wish you wouldn't say that!" Angel cried in vexation. "Of course I've seen more of him than you have, because you've been at school all day; but I'm sure he's quite as kind to you as he is to me."

"He took you to Wreyford with him, anyway."

"You know why that was."

"Because he likes you better than me!"

Angel made no response. She was deeply pained at her brother's jealous tone, and it was with difficulty she restrained the angry words which trembled on her lips.

"I suppose it's about time I started for school," the boy proceeded, "and I'm not perfect in one of my lessons. There'll sure to be a row, and it'll be all your fault, Angel, for being so selfish and disobliging last night."

Saying which, Gerald snatched up his bag of books and left the room, slamming the door after him. His sister listened to his footsteps descending the stairs, her heart full of indignation. Fond as she was of her brother, she could not blind herself to the injustice of his remarks; she had hoped he would have overcome his resentment against her by the morning, and her grief at the unkind spirit he was evincing towards her was eclipsed by her anger at his jealousy.

Mr. Bailey and his nephew spent the morning together in the latter's studio, whilst Angel remained disconsolately in the sitting-room. It was miserable, depressing weather, and as the little girl gazed out into the thick fog she sighed regretfully, thinking of the sunny days



she had spent at Wreyford, and wishing it was her lot in life to dwell in the country.

Towards noon the fog lifted somewhat, so that after the midday meal Mr. Bailey was tempted by the clearing atmosphere to go out. Angel was prepared to spend the afternoon alone, for she thought her father would desire to make the most of the short spell of daylight they were likely to have; but, much to her surprise and pleasure, he remained in the sitting-room, and, seating himself in the easy chair by the fireplace, called her to his side.

"I want to have a confidential talk with you, little daughter," he said affectionately, as she took her favourite place on a stool at his feet, and rested her head against his knee; "tell me some more about your doings this past week."

She obeyed willingly, delighted to find with what close attention he listened to her. She told him everything she could think of, and entered into all the trifling details of her visit, to all of which he lent

an attentive ear, occasionally asking a question, but for the most part allowing her to talk undisturbed.

"Would you like to live at Wreyford?" he inquired presently.

"Oh, indeed I should!" she replied readily.

"At Haresdown House, for instance?"

"Yes," she nodded; "I think it will be a lovely place when Uncle Edward has had the house done up, and the shrubs in the front garden cut down a bit. Mrs. Mickle said she thought it was rather lonely because it stands by itself, you know, with no other house in sight, but I am sure I should not be half so lonely there as here in London."

Mr. Willis gave an involuntary sigh, which caused Angel to glance up at him quickly. To her surprise he was looking unusually grave and thoughtful.

"Poor people are generally lonely in London," he remarked a little sadly. "You

are right, Angel. I wish I could afford to make a home for you in the country, but, you see, it is necessary I should be in town at present, whilst I have so much illustrating work and sketches for papers to do."

"Oh, I know, father. I dare say some day, when you are rich and famous, it will not matter where you live, and then we will have a beautiful home in the country too."

He smiled, and stroked her hair with a tender hand. Being naturally of a sanguine temperament himself, he always hoped for the best; and though success was long in coming, he believed it would come, so he seldom discouraged Angel when she began to build castles in the air.

"Ah, yes," he said, "but meanwhile I must remain where I am—until my picture is finished, at any rate. Now I want to tell you what Uncle Edward was talking about this morning. He was telling me what a lonely life you lead, my dear, and how wrong it is that your education

should be neglected, and that you ought to go to school like other little girls."

"Oh, father!"

"He is quite right, but perhaps I had not altogether realized these facts until he put them to me so plainly. You lead an unnatural life for a child of your years; if your dear mother had been spared to us it would have been different. I am afraid I am a bad manager, but really by the time the household accounts are paid, and Gerald's school bill, I never seem to have any money in hand." and Mr. Willis, who was one of the most unbusiness-like men in the world, shook his head dolefully. "Uncle Edward says I ought to send Gerald to a less expensive school, and that he is growing up selfish and extravagant," he added, after a slight pause.

"Oh, father!" Angel was commencing protestingly, when the remembrance of her brother's treatment of her since her return the preceding night made her pause, and reflect that there was some

truth in Mr. Bailey's remarks. Then, too, she knew that though Gerald was given a generous allowance of pocket-money every week, he was always asking for more, and rarely spent a penny on any one but himself.

"Uncle Edward is very fond of you, Angel," Mr. Willis told her; "he says you are so very companionable and sensible. Now, I am coming to the really important part of what he said. He wants you to make your home with him at Haresdown House, and then he will send you to school, and—"

"And what did you say, father?" Angel broke in impetuously. "Didn't you tell him it was impossible, quite impossible?"

"No, my dear; I don't know that it is."

"Oh, father!" the little girl cried reproachfully, "as though I could ever bear to leave you and Gerald! You don't want to send me away from you, do you?"

"No, certainly not; but I must think of your ultimate good. Uncle Edward is most

kind, most generous, and he would give you a happy home; you would go to school, and have friends of your own age, and—"

"Oh, father!" Angel interrupted again; "I can't bear to think of it. Nothing would make up to me for being separated from you and Gerald. I don't think mother would like it, I don't indeed," and her eyes filled with tears, whilst her lips trembled piteously. "Don't send me away from you," she said imploringly, as she rose and twined her arms around his neck; "don't! Who would mend your stockings if I was not here? And wouldn't you miss me? You said you did when I was at Wreyford for only one little week."

"Yes," Mr. Willis admitted, looking troubled; "but I must not be selfish, my dear."

"Oh, father, you couldn't be that! You never are! Then, there's Gerald. Think of him! Who help him with his lessons, and—"

"Ah, Angel, that is a mistake too. You help Gerald a great deal more than is good for him; if you remain at home, I must put a stop to your doing so much for your brother."

"Oh no, father! I like helping him. I do indeed. And I promised mother before she died that I would be good to him. But do say you mean to keep me with you. Oh, I wish I had never, never said how much I liked the country!"

"Don't wish that. Think over Uncle Edward's offer, child. You like him, do you not? Yes, I know you do. Of course you would feel the separation from Gerald and me at first, but consider what a pleasant time you would have at Wreyford. You would have everything that your heart could desire; it's my opinion that Uncle Edward would spoil you terribly."

"I could not bear it, I could not!" Angel cried, the tears coursing down her cheeks. "Oh, father, do let me stay with you! How can you think of sending me

away when you know it would break my heart?" And overcome with grief the little girl sobbed bitterly.

Much distressed at the sight of her emotion, Mr. Willis soothed her as best he could. He kissed her tenderly, at the same time assuring her she should not leave him against her will.

"I told Uncle Edward the acceptance or refusal of his offer must rest with you," he said, when, much comforted, she reseated herself on the stool at his feet; "still, I could do no other than point out to you the many advantages you would reap by going to live with him at Haresdown House; but I shall not part with my little daughter without she herself wishes it, because she is very dear to me, and though it wouldn't break my heart to send her away if it was for her good, yet I should feel doing so very deeply."

"How glad I am to hear you say that!" Angel exclaimed, her tear-stained face brightening into a smile. "Because, sometimes, I wish I was clever like



Gerald, and it makes me unhappy to think how stupid I am; but if only you love me, father, and let me stay with you, I don't care for anything else."

"You are not stupid," Mr. Willis told her with an amused laugh; "indeed, you have a very wise head upon a young pair of shoulders."

"But I can't draw," Angel said, "and I know you are sorry I can't. I have heard you say lots of times that I have missed the artistic temperament."

"Well, perhaps I am a little disappointed on that account," Mr. Willis allowed with an amused twinkle in his eyes; "but you have other excellent qualities which may serve you as well, if not better."

"Mother used to say God gave different talents to different people," Angel remarked thoughtfully, "but I don't know that I have any particular talent."

"I believe you have one—perhaps more; but I am certain you have one."

"What is it?" she asked eagerly.

"A talent for happiness," he replied, with a smile.

"Oh, father, that is nothing!" she cried in disappointed tones.

"Nothing, is it? I think it's something worth cherishing with the greatest care. To possess a talent for happiness you must be blessed with a contented spirit."

"Mother used to say that if we believed God did everything for the best we should always be contented."

"She was right. You must never forget her teaching. I love to hear you quote her so often."

Father and daughter spent the remainder of the afternoon very happily together; the time passed so quickly that both were surprised when Gerald returned from school, although he was later than usual. His temper had not improved, for he had been in hot water on account of his not

having prepared his home-work properly, and he had consequently a long imposition to do that evening, besides his usual lessons. When informed by his father of Mr. Bailey's offer to Angel, and her refusal of it, he expressed great surprise.

"I only wish Uncle Edward would ask me to go and live with him at Haresdown House!" he exclaimed. "Don't you think I might go instead of Angel, father?"

"I should not dream of suggesting it," Mr. Willis replied, at which the boy's face fell.

"You wouldn't like to leave us, would you, Gerald?" Angel questioned somewhat reproachfully.

"Wreyford is not so very far from here," he said evasively, refraining from giving a direct answer. "It would be so much jollier in the country. It's a pity we can't all leave London. What a silly you are not to want to go with Uncle Edward, Angel; still, I'm glad you've made up your mind to

stay at home; it isn't like the same place when you're away!"

The little girl's eyes shone with happiness at this remark; she failed to grasp the vein of selfishness running through it, but her father did, and his face expressed the displeasure he felt. A short while later Mr. Bailey returned, and Mr. Willis at once told him Angel had decided to remain in her London home.

"It is not that I don't love you," Angel said, as she saw the disappointment in her uncle's countenance, "because I do. But I can't leave father and Gerald; I can't indeed. Oh, please don't think I don't understand how kind you are, and how good—"

"Kind! Good! Nonsense!" Mr. Bailey cried. "I am nothing of the kind. I'm a selfish old man, my dear, that's what I am. I think I knew in my heart what your decision would be; I won't say though I'm not disappointed, because I am. I should have tried to make you happy at Haresdown House; but never mind, never mind. You

shall come and visit me—all of you—whenever you like. John—" turning to his nephew with a beaming smile— "when the great picture is finished you'll deserve a holiday, and I mean to see you take it."

Gerald had listened to all this with great interest, half hoping Mr. Bailey would transfer his offer from Angel to himself, but such an idea apparently never crossed his uncle's mind. The boy was very silent during the evening, but when his sister offered her assistance with his lessons, he was only too glad to accept it; and after his work was finished, he grew better tempered, and Angel, being not in the least resentful, was only too glad to make friends with him again, and thus peace was restored.

## CHAPTER VIII

## **Introduces Miss Goodwin**

"DORA and I passed Haresdown House this morning," Dinah Mickle informed her mother one afternoon early in the new year; "the windows were all wide open, and there were people at work inside, papering and painting."

The Christmas holidays were nearly at an end, and Dinah was assisting Mrs. Mickle in the making of some garments for her sister and herself, whilst the other children had gone off on pleasure bent, Dora and Tom for a long walk, and Gilbert on his own account, for he seldom fraternized with his juniors.

"There were two men in the garden pruning the shrubs and turning up the ground," the little girl proceeded, "so I expect Mr. Bailey will soon be here himself; don't you think so?"

"Yes," Mrs. Mickle replied; "in fact, I know your father heard from him a few days

ago, and he then wrote that he hoped shortly to be at Wreyford."

"I wonder if he is very rich," Dinah said meditatively; "Gilbert says Colonials generally are. Do you know, mother?"

"No, my dear; but I imagine he must be very well off. Your father says he means to spare no expense in doing up Haresdown House; and, as you know, he has subscribed largely to several Wreyford charities this Christmas."

"He will have a big house to live in!" Dinah exclaimed.

"I think his buying it was entirely a matter of sentiment; you see, it was his childhood's home, and it is curious how elderly people like to return to the scenes of their youth, even when—" Mrs. Mickle paused abruptly, and listened to the sound of voices on the staircase. "I believe Miss Goodwin is coming," she said, a slightly amused smile crossing her face.

The next moment the parlour-maid announced "Miss Goodwin!" and a queer-looking little person stepped into the room, and paused irresolutely, with her head on one side.

She was clad in an old-fashioned brown silk gown and a circular brown cloak, whilst a poke bonnet covered her head, the hair on which was as white as snow and arranged in little corkscrew curls. Her figure was slight, and as upright as a dart; her eyes singularly blue and clear, and so youthful in expression that they contrasted oddly with her wrinkled countenance, which was one network of fine lines. It was difficult to guess from her appearance what age she was, but she was known to be nearer ninety than eighty; she never thought of herself as old, though, and was so lively in her manner, and juvenile in her conversation at times, that she often proved a puzzle to new acquaintances.

"Do I intrude?" she asked in a high piping voice, as she stood just within the room, looking at the table laden with working



materials. "If so, I will go, and call upon you at a more convenient season."

"We are very pleased to see you, dear Miss Goodwin," Mrs. Mickle said cordially, as she took her visitor's little hand, encased in a baggy, brown kid glove, and pressed it kindly. "Come near the fire, and warm yourself; I am sure you must be cold."

"Oh no, not very," Miss Goodwin responded; nevertheless, she allowed herself to be placed in an easy chair by the fireside. "I left my waterproof and goloshes in the hall," she explained, for it was one of her peculiarities, however fine the weather might be, to be prepared for rain. "The sun is shining brightly now," she went on, "but who can say how long it will be before the clouds come? We never know."

"No, never," Mrs. Mickle agreed, smiling pleasantly.

"I remember once going to a picnic attired in a muslin gown," Miss Goodwin

continued, looking thoughtful, "and before the day was over the rain descended in torrents, drenching me to the skin; I had foolishly omitted taking my waterproof and goloshes with me. I learnt a lesson then which I have never forgotten, for I caught a severe cold, and spoilt my gown—a new one."

Dinah could not restrain a slight laugh, for she had heard this story so many times before; Miss Goodwin had a number of stock tales which she was in the habit of telling over and over again.

"Dinah, my dear child, you have not spoken to me yet!" the old lady exclaimed, as the little girl's laugh attracted her attention.

"I am waiting to do so, Miss Goodwin," Dinah answered, feeling rather ashamed of her merriment, though the visitor was quite unconscious of its cause. She bent and kissed the other's wrinkled cheek. "How do you do?" she said.

"I am very well, thank you, my dear. I need not inquire how you are, for you look blooming. Such a rosy face! Such bright eyes! Dear me, Mrs. Mickle, how old these young people make us feel!"

It was another of Miss Goodwin's peculiarities that she always spoke of herself as a contemporary of Mrs. Mickle's; and although she talked of feeling old, that was certainly not the case, for to the end of her days she was always young in heart.

"It is very nice for me that Dinah is of an age to be helpful," Mrs. Mickle remarked, with a smiling glance at her daughter; "she has remained at home this afternoon to assist me with this needlework."

"Please do not let me interrupt. Pray proceed with your work, and I will converse with you meanwhile." Then, as her companions complied with her wish, the old lady added: "I have just come from Haresdown House."

"Indeed!" Mrs. Mickle exclaimed. "Did you go inside?"

"I did, from curiosity I must admit, to see what the new owner is having done. I knew him when he was a boy, you understand; a masterful youth he was, but the owner of a kind and generous heart. Has he made his fortune, do you know?"

"I imagine he has, Miss Goodwin. He lived many years in Australia, it seems."

"Ah, I cannot keep count of time. Yes, Edward Bailey was a fine lad, and so was his brother. One went to Australia; the other became a clergyman, he always reminded me of that Nathanael Jesus loved, the one in whom there was no guile. He died, leaving a widow and one child—a son."

"That must be the father of the little girl Mr. Bailey brought here with him," Mrs. Mickle said, her face full of interest. "I believe I told you how we became

acquainted with them. You will like to meet Mr. Bailey again, I am sure."

"It will give me great pleasure to do so. I remember him so well—a tall, slight, fair-haired boy."

"But he is elderly now," Mrs. Mickle reminded her visitor gently; "some people would, I have no doubt, call him an old man."

"He is younger than me," Miss Goodwin said; "indeed, I can remember the birth of himself and his brother. I do not think any one could call him old."

There was a note of reproach in the clear, piping voice, which Mrs. Mickle was quick to remark; she hastened to change the conversation.

"You will remain to tea, will you not?" she asked brightly. "Oh, do! The children will be here presently, and you may rely upon Tom to see you home safely in the evening."

"Let me take off your bonnet and cloak," Dinah said; and after feebly protesting, Miss Goodwin gave in, and allowed the little girl to have her way.

"I am a very frequent visitor," the old lady remarked half-apologetically as she patted her snowy curls, "but you are such hospitable people, and so very kind, that I never can refuse your invitations. I am glad I put a clean tucker to my dress," she continued artlessly, "for, at any rate, I have the satisfaction of being certain I look tidy. It is another lesson to show that one ought always to be ready for any emergency."

"And how are they getting on at Haresdown House?" Mrs. Mickle inquired. "Will the workmen soon finish?"

"Oh, not for some weeks, I imagine," Miss Goodwin responded. "I went into every room, and looked at the wall-papers; and the workmen were most polite. They gave me all the information I wanted."

"Yes?"

"The house is to be thoroughly repaired and renovated. Dear me, it will be like old times to see the place occupied once more. It always made me sad to see it looking so neglected and desolate."

After a little further conversation, Dora and Tom arrived upon the scene. Their bright faces broke into smiles of welcome at the sight of the visitor, for she was a great favourite with all the children; even Gilbert generally laid a restraint upon his sharp tongue in her presence. But this afternoon Gilbert did not put in an appearance till tea was nearly over; he apologized for being so late, but promptly snubbed his brother for asking him where he had been all the afternoon.

"You needn't be so nasty," Tom said, adding in the teasing way which was always particularly irritating to Gilbert's touchy temper, "I suppose you've been up to no good, or you wouldn't make a mystery."

"I don't know what you mean," Gilbert retorted hotly. "I'm making no mystery."

"What do you call it, then? Dora and I have been for a fine walk across country, over hedges and ditches, and have had a simply splendid time. We don't mind telling where we've been and what we've been doing. Isn't father coming up to tea, mother?"

"No, my dear," Mrs. Mickle answered. "I believe he has a client with him; he told me after dinner that he would be particularly engaged this afternoon, so I have promised Miss Goodwin that you will see her home by-and-by."

"So I will!" Tom cried gaily. "I'll take good care of you, Miss Goodwin."

"I am sure you will, Tom," the little lady replied, her eyes dwelling admiringly on the boy's healthy, honest face. "What a blessing it is to be young and strong," she continued; "a little bird told me you were one of the best football players at the Grammar School."



Tom flushed with pleasure, and laughed in a flattered, self-conscious manner, which made his brother look at him with a sneer.

"Come and see me play in the next match, Miss Goodwin," the younger boy said eagerly, not noticing the expression on Gilbert's face.

"But I was never at a football match in my life," she told him. "I am not certain that I should like to see a game played. It would make me nervous."

"Yes, I expect it would," Mrs. Mickle agreed. Then, glancing at her elder son, she said, "You are eating nothing, Gilbert."

"I am not hungry, mother."

"I should have thought the keen air would have given you an appetite."

"I have not been out of doors."

"Not been out of doors!" Mrs. Mickle echoed in surprise. "Do you mean you have been in the house all the afternoon?"

Gilbert nodded, and looked as though he would rather not be questioned further. Tom stared at him in wide-eyed astonishment, for being open concerning his own doings, he never could understand his brother's more reserved disposition.

"I know where he's been!" the younger boy cried at length. "I have it now. He must have spent all the afternoon in the attic. He was there yesterday, I know, because the door was locked, and—"

"Well, what if it was?" Gilbert demanded crossly. "I didn't want you poking and prying about the place. I locked the door to keep you out."

"Don't wrangle, boys," Mrs. Mickle interposed pacifically. "I wish, Gilbert," she said with a slight sigh, "that you would get out more this fine weather."

Soon you will be back at school again, and then you will be obliged to remain indoors."

Shortly after tea Miss Goodwin left, and was escorted home by Tom, who carried her waterproof and goloshes, and made himself a most entertaining companion by good-humouredly listening to the little lady's chatter. She lived in a small, detached house close to the town, at the bottom of the road leading up Haresdown Hill, so they had not far to go. It stood in a sheltered spot, and a large myrtle flourished against the wall close to the front door, hence the name of the house, Myrtle Villa.

Whilst Tom was seeing Miss Goodwin home, Mrs. Mickle and Gilbert had been left in the sitting-room together, the little girls having gone upstairs to their own room. For a while there was silence between mother and son, but at last the former spoke.

"You must have been nearly frozen in the attic this afternoon," she said gently.

"Why do you make a mystery about what you do there?"

The boy made no reply. He had flung himself into an easy chair, and was gazing gloomily into the fire. Mrs. Mickle repeated her question, speaking sharply this time, annoyed at his silence.

"I beg your pardon, mother," he cried hastily. "I was doing no harm in the attic."

"I never imagined that for a moment. But why not be open? It is not nice of you to be so secretive."

"Tom humbugs so. If he knew what I was doing he would be always worrying around me."

"But what were you doing, my dear?"

Thus pressed Gilbert confessed that he had turned a part of the attic into a sort of studio, and was trying to learn to draw and paint.

"I did not want any one to know about it," he explained, "because Tom chatters so, and the girls are so inquisitive, and father wants me to be a lawyer. I don't want to be a lawyer. I would far rather be an artist."

Mrs. Mickle's face was expressive of anxious thought. She knew Gilbert had a liking for painting, and drew very well; but he was quite self-taught, and she did not know if he possessed real talent or not. Her husband had always intended the boy should follow his own profession, and hitherto Gilbert had raised no objection to the plan.

"I wish you were more open with your father and me," she said presently, "but you wrap yourself up in yourself, and seldom confide in us. If we were unsympathetic parents it would be different. I cannot understand why you do not open your mind to us, Gilbert. You know how dear you are to us, and how there is nothing, in reason, we would not do for your happiness. Why cannot you be frank with us?"

"I don't know, mother," the boy answered. "I think I am frank with you generally, because you're more patient with me than I deserve; and so is father, too, for that matter. But I hate Tom and the girls to know all I'm doing."

"Tom is a great tease," Mrs. Mickle allowed, "but he is a well-meaning boy and as honest and open as the day."

"I know he is, mother, and I'm not. Every one likes Tom, even little Miss Goodwin, and no one cares about me—I mean, no outsiders."

"Don't you think that's your own fault? You cannot expect people to like you if you persist in showing them the worst side of your character; if you are unsociable and reserved, no one will want to be friendly with you. Why did you not say how you were employing your time in the attic? The others would not have intruded on you if you had asked them not to. Instead of explaining, you act so as to arouse their curiosity. Oh, you foolish boy!"

Gilbert flushed, and looked rather ashamed of himself, but he did not resent his mother's plain speaking. His face softened as she continued talking to him, and presently he looked at her with a smile in his usually sombre eyes.

"Gilbert," she said tenderly, "I wish you had found the secret of happiness; perhaps you will some day. I pray you may. If only you could learn to put your faith in God, to forget yourself and think of others more!"

The boy made no answer in words, but he laid his hand on one of the crutches which rested against the arm of his chair, and his mother understood the action as a reminder of the heavy cross he had to bear. The tears rushed to her eyes, but did not fall. It was minutes before she could be certain of speaking steadily; then, when she could control her voice, she laid her hand on his, which rested on the crutch, and smiled into his face.

"Remember, dear," she said earnestly, "no cross, no crown."

## CHAPTER IX

### An Exodus from London

THE time was drawing near when Mr. Bailey intended leaving London to make his abode at Haresdown House; Gerald had returned to school after the Christmas holidays; and Angel was regretfully counting the days which had yet to elapse before Uncle Edward would take his departure for good, when Mr. Willis suddenly fell ill, much to the



dismay and consternation of all. He had been working very hard on his exhibition picture, but his illness had nothing to do with overwork; somehow he caught a severe chill which turned to pneumonia, and before his children realized that he was seriously ill, he lay at death's door.

On returning from school one dull, depressing February afternoon, Gerald found his sister, pale with anxiety, in earnest conversation with Mrs. Steer; and his heart throbbed painfully as the thought flashed through his mind that his father must be worse.

"Oh, Gerald, I am glad you have come!" Angel cried.

"How is father?" he asked, looking from the little girl's colourless face to the landlady's, which expressed deep concern and sympathy.

"Oh, he is very ill!" Angel answered, with a sob. "The doctor says he is much worse than he was in the morning; he does not know me now, and the nurse says I had

better not see him again till—till he is better. Oh, Gerald, suppose he should never get better?"

"You mustn't suppose that, my dear," Mrs. Steer remonstrated, speaking more cheerfully than she felt; "you must keep up your spirits, and hope for the best. You ought to be very thankful he is having everything done for him that human skill can do. Ah, it was a fortunate day for you all when your uncle came home from Australia!"

"Yes, indeed," Angel agreed. "Uncle Edward has gone to get another nurse," she explained to her brother; "he says father shall not die for lack of good nursing. Oh, poor, poor father!" And she broke into a flood of tears.

"There, there, don't take on so, there's a dear child!" Mrs. Steer exclaimed in much distress. "Think how much worse things might have been if your uncle had not been here! Come, cheer up, my dear; tears never did any good yet, and never

will; besides, you're upsetting your brother."

Angel dried her eyes, and glanced remorsefully at Gerald, who had thrown his bag of books into a corner of the room, and had sat down by the table on which he had laid his head, and was weeping without restraint. She went to his side immediately and tried to comfort him, but her tears broke forth afresh, and the two children clung together, overcome with grief.

Presently Mr. Bailey returned with the news that he had engaged a second nurse, who would arrive shortly.

"Now, look here, my dears," he said kindly but firmly, as he noticed the woe-begone countenances of his little niece and nephew, "I hope you will both try to be brave. Your dear father is very ill, it is true; but I trust he may recover. It would be far better to pray for him than to sit down and cry on account of your own unhappiness; don't you agree with me?"

"Oh yes!" they answered in one breath; and Angel added wistfully, "I am sure I could help in the nursing if only the doctor would let me."

"You may depend the doctor knows best. Your father is in good hands; perhaps, if God sees fit to spare his life, your help may be required later on."

For many days Mr. Willis lay at death's door; but at length he rallied, and one never-to-be-forgotten morning his nurses declared that he was better; the doctor confirmed their hopeful report, and Angel and Gerald's joy and relief was too great for words. That was a red letter-day for both children and Uncle Edward too.

"Now the crisis has passed, he will soon begin to gain strength," Mrs. Steer said cheerfully, when she heard the good news, "but we must not expect him to get well all at once after such a serious illness. It will be months before he'll be himself again."

"Then I am afraid he won't finish his picture in time for the Royal Academy this year!" Angel exclaimed, the brightness of her face becoming slightly overclouded at the thought.

"Good gracious, no, child, I should think not, indeed!"

"He will be terribly disappointed," the little girl said, "terribly! Never mind," she added smiling happily, "God has spared his life, and nothing else matters much."

"No, indeed!" Gerald agreed. "I wouldn't think about the picture!"

But Angel could not help thinking about the picture, for she realized more fully than did Gerald how all her father's hopes of success had been centred on this piece of work; after her brother had gone to school she crept softly upstairs, and unlocked the studio door.

The room was dusty, for it had not been touched during its owner's illness, so she fetched a duster and dusted it thoroughly,

taking care to keep every thing in place, that her father should find nothing altered. Then she turned to an easel pushed back into one corner of the room, and lifted the cloth which hid the unfinished picture. She had often watched the artist at work upon it; and, perhaps, from the fact of seeing it gradually grow beneath his touch, had never looked at it with the same comprehending eyes as she did now. It seemed to her very beautiful, the work of a genius, as she told herself proudly; and her heart swelled with pain at the thought of the keen disappointment it would be to her father not to be able to finish it in time for exhibition that spring.

The picture was to be called "Righteousness and peace," and the subject was an ambitious one representing two beautiful female forms clad in loose flowering garments in the act of kissing each other. As Angel stood looking at it, she heard some one, enter the room, and turning quickly saw Mr.

Bailey. He came to her side, and fixed his eyes scrutinously upon the picture.

"It still requires many finishing touches, I perceive," he said at length. "I fancy he cannot mean to do much more to the women's faces, to my mind they tell all he means them to express—'Righteousness and Peace have kissed each other.' He told me he had been at work on the drapery—ah, yes, I see! I wonder what your father's artist friends think of his picture. It seems to me good, very good; but, then, I fear my opinion does not go for much. I am sorry to think it will not be exhibited this year. The doctor says your father must not dream of work for many weeks to come, and advises he should live in a milder climate."

"But how can he?" Angel questioned, looking distressed.

Mr. Bailey was silent for a few minutes. He watched the little girl carefully recover the picture, then he replied—

"I want him to give up these lodgings altogether and make his home with me at Haresdown House; I should like you all to come and live with me, for you are the only relations I have in the world. One thing is quite certain, your father must not be allowed to spend the spring in town, and he could not find a milder, more salubrious climate anywhere than at Wreyford. I believe he would soon get well there. Gerald could attend the Grammar School, and you—"

"Oh, Uncle Edward!" Angel interrupted excitedly, "do you really mean it? Do you really want us all to come?"

"Yes, I do. Haresdown House is a big abode for one man; and I feel, child, that it would be for your father's benefit if he will only agree to my plan. We must manage to break it to him gradually; but he will not be strong enough to consider the matter yet."

The first time Angel was allowed to see her father after he had taken a turn for the better, she was shocked at the



alteration in his appearance, for he looked terribly ill, his cheeks had fallen in, and there were deep hollows beneath his eyes. He did not seem inclined to talk, but only smiled at her and whispered her name; and it was the same when Gerald went in to see him. But as the days glided on, he grew stronger, and the children were delighted when he began to ask them questions, and take an interest in things generally again. At last, there came a day when he broached the subject of his picture to Angel, and said he would not be able to finish it by the time he had intended it to be completed.

"I don't believe I could use a brush, my hand shakes so," he acknowledged ruefully, "and so end all my hopes of success for the present. I trust I shall soon get well, Angel, for we must have been running in debt during my illness."

"No, I don't think we have," she answered simply. "Uncle Edward has seen to everything, and he told me yesterday we didn't owe a penny!"

The invalid's wan face lit up with a smile, and he drew a deep breath of relief. "I would rather be indebted to Uncle Edward than to any one else in the world," he confessed; "my illness must have been a great expense. I must work hard when I am stronger."

"The doctor says you ought not to stay in London," Angel said, thinking this a suitable opportunity for telling him the truth; "he says you must go to a warmer climate, almost directly."

"That is impossible, my dear."

"Oh no, father, indeed it is not! Uncle Edward wants us all to go and live with him at Haresdown House; he has spoken to the doctor about the climate of Wreyford, and he says it will just suit you, for it is beautifully mild and dry. Oh, father, we want you to get well quickly, and you never will if you stay in London!"

"Is Uncle Edward in the house now?" Mr. Willis asked, his voice trembling with mingled weakness and excitement.

"Yes; I think he is in the sitting-room."

"Then, run and ask him to come here, say I wish most particularly to speak to him."

Angel obeyed, and in a few words explained the situation to Mr. Bailey.

"I am very glad you have mentioned the matter to him, my dear," he said; "I will certainly go and hear what he has to say, and I have little fear but that he will do as I wish him. He will see that for his children's sake his health ought to be his first consideration."

Angel sat down, and waited impatiently till Mr. Bailey returned. He was absent what appeared to her a very long time; but when he did at last reappear, his face was beaming with pleasure, and his manner triumphant. "It is all settled, Angel," he told her; "your father has promised as soon as ever he is well enough to leave here for Haresdown House. I must run down to Wreyford in the course of a few days, and see everything is in readiness. And I think

Mrs. Steer had better be informed of our plans, so that she may look out for fresh lodgers."

Mr. Bailey was evidently much elated at the prospect of having his own way; he told Gerald the news the moment the latter returned from school, and was pleased at the boy's intense delight.

"I shall have to leave school before the end of the term," Gerald remarked, "for Easter will not be here till the beginning of April, and it is only the middle of March now!"

"Never mind, never mind!" Mr. Bailey told him. "It will not be much loss for you to miss a week or so."

"But father will have to pay a term's fees, as he hasn't given a term's notice for Gerald to leave!" Angel cried anxiously.

"What a little woman of business it is!" Mr. Bailey exclaimed, laughing amusedly. "Don't worry that wise head of yours about details. Leave everything to me."

Angel was quite ready to do that, as was her father now that he had consented to his uncle's plan; he was still far too weak to be troubled about business matters, and appeared perfectly satisfied with the existing state of affairs.

The only person who was not entirely pleased at the prospect of the exodus of the Willis family from London was Mrs. Steer. She shed tears when discussing the subject with Angel, and only cheered up when the little girl promised to write to her when they were all settled at Wreyford.

"It isn't only that I'm sorry to lose you as lodgers, Miss Angel," she said, "for I take a real interest in you all. Your pa's as pleasant spoken a gentleman as I ever knew, and during the two years and more he's been beneath my roof, I don't think he's once spoken a cross word to me, much less complained that his food hasn't been properly cooked, as some folks are so fond of doing. And I don't know that I ever came across any one so hopeful when things go wrong as he is. I

wish him good health, and every success in the future, that I do; and I'm only sorry he wasn't brought to some good trade or profession, so that he might have had a chance of making a comfortable income, instead of having to paint for a living—and a poor living it is, I take it!"

"Ah, but some day, when father has finished his great picture, as he would have done before now if only he had not fallen ill, he will make a good living!" Angel declared, her eyes glistening at the thought.

"I am sure I hope he may," Mrs. Steer replied, her face expressive of the doubt she felt, "for I'm very certain he deserves success; but folks don't always get what they deserve in this world, and it's as well not to expect too much."

This was not a very cheering sentiment, but Angel was far too happy to allow herself to be depressed, or to be annoyed because Mrs. Steer did not fully appreciate her father's abilities.

Mr. Bailey paid a short visit to Wreyford within a few days, and on his return reported that everything had been done at Haresdown House according to his instructions, and the house was now fit to be occupied. He had been recommended a middle-aged woman as housekeeper, and he had seen her installed and left her with orders to prepare for the reception of his family.

"So our home is ready for us," Mr. Bailey said, "and we need only wait for the doctor's permission to allow you to travel, John. There is no necessity for you to worry, or even think about the packing of your belongings, for I will superintend everything myself."

By that time Mr. Willis was able to go into the sitting-room every day; his nurses had left him; and he was slowly but surely gaining strength. He had been sitting by the fire listening to his uncle's remarks, and there was deep feeling in his voice as he replied—

"You are our good angel, Uncle Edward; it seems as though God sent you home to be with us in our time of need. I dare not imagine what would have become of us but for you! I can never thank you for all you have done, and I can never repay you for your kindness—"

"Nonsense, nonsense!" Mr. Bailey interrupted. "I want no thanks—I have only done for you what, if our positions had been reversed, you would have done for me."

His face was very red as he spoke, and there was certainly a mistiness in his eyes, to hide which he blew his nose, and then went on to make plans for their move into the country.

They were all eager to leave London, Angel as much so as either of the others, yet when she came to say good-bye to the dingy lodgings which had been home to her for more than two long years, there were tears in her eyes. She thought how, in all probability, she would never more look out on the miles of roofs, and



listen to the city's roar; and she wept aloud as she kissed Mrs. Steer, whilst that good woman was not less moved, and declared that she had never had lodgers she had felt parting with before.

## CHAPTER X

### Spring Flowers

IT was a beautiful morning, towards the end of March, as Miss Goodwin, suitably equipped for gardening in a short skirt, shady hat, and thick gloves, bent over the diamond-shaped flower-beds cut in the grass plot in front of her house, and carefully hoed the rich mould between clumps of daffodils and various other spring flowers.

March, which had come in with blustering winds, was going out like the proverbial lamb. The air was balmy, and sweet with the delicate scent of hyacinths, and violets; and the gentle rain which had fallen during the night had washed all traces of dust from the budding foliage of trees and shrubs; whilst, save for a few fleecy clouds in the far distance, the sky was one great curtain of blue. It was what Miss Goodwin mentally called a "growing day;" the whole world seemed—astir with young life; and the sparrows twittered noisily beneath the eaves of the roof of the house, where they were busily

preparing nurseries for the reception of their broods.

Miss Goodwin's back was towards the garden gate, so she did not see a little girl and boy coming down the road from Haresdown Hill; but they caught sight of her as they were passing the house; and as they were unobserved, paused to look at the pretty garden with its show of gay flowers, and the small figure so busily at work.

"Oh, what a lovely place!" whispered the little girl. "I think I never saw such beautiful flowers growing before, did you, Gerald? But what a queer old lady! I suppose she lives here. Do look at her white stockings and elastic-side boots!"

At that moment Miss Goodwin glanced around, becoming suddenly conscious that she was being watched, and perceived the children. She guessed who they must be, the great niece and nephew of the new owner of Haresdown House, who had arrived only the preceding night; and as she knew all about them, she

jumped to the conclusion that they must know all about her.

Angel and Gerald were moving away with flaming cheeks, ashamed at having been caught staring, and afraid the old lady would consider them very rude, when she hastened to the gate and called to them to stop.

"Oh, wait a minute!" she cried. "How do you do, my dears? I am very glad to see you, very glad. I cannot shake hands because, as you perceive, my gardening gloves are earthy; you must take the will for the deed."

They paused, and looked in astonishment at the withered face beneath the big, shady hat; there was a distinctly friendly light in the old lady's blue eyes, and she nodded and smiled in a most genial fashion.

"How is your father?" she continued affably. "Was he much tired after his journey yesterday? I heard he had been

very ill; but I trust he will soon be set up in health."

"He was very tired last night," Angel answered, "and he is rather tired this morning, but Uncle Edward said he bore the journey very well, considering how ill he has been."

"Ah, he will soon get well in this beautiful air!" Miss Goodwin declared. "You have always lived in London, have you not?"

"Yes, always!" they answered.

"Ah, I was never there in my life; I have always lived at Wreyford. In London they tell me you might not know your next-door neighbours! I should not like that." And she shook her head decidedly.

"We did not know our next-door neighbours," Angel admitted with a smile.

"Really? How strange! I know every one in Wreyford, and every one knows me. Now, which of you is the elder?"

"I am," the little girl answered, thinking the old lady was very fond of asking questions, "although Gerald is so much taller than I am."

"Gerald, is he called? And you? What is your name?"

"Angelica."

"But we always call her Angel," Gerald explained; "Angelica, is such a mouthful."

"Angel is a very sweet name, to my mind," Miss Goodwin said gravely. "Are you on your way to the town?"

"Yes," Angel assented. She hesitated, and then said apologetically, "I hope you did not think us very rude for stopping, and looking in at the gate. We were admiring your pretty house, and beautiful garden; we never saw such lovely flowers growing before!"

"Come in, and I will give you some with great pleasure," Miss Goodwin said, with an inviting smile as she opened the gate

for them to enter. "I did not think you rude at all. You are fond of flowers?"

"Oh yes!" they both replied eagerly; and Angel added, "Father loves them too."

Suspended from Miss Goodwin's waist was a chatelaine, from which she detached a pair of scissors, and proceeded to cut some of her finest blooms.

"I am going to make a nosegay for your father," she informed the children, "because he is an invalid, and sick folks like to have little attentions paid them."

"Oh, he will be so pleased!" Angel cried, her eyes shining with gratitude, "How very kind of you!"

"Kind? Not at all! It is always a pleasure to me to give flowers to those who appreciate them. Some people do not care for flowers; once I heard them called useless. Useless! Would God have created them if not for some good purpose? He knew the longing of our

souls for beauty. Look at these wind flowers—anemones they are really notice how delicately they are made! And these daffodils—golden glories, I call them. Do you see how the tender green of the stalks is softly shaded off over the backs of the blooms? Here are wallflowers; we will have some of these for our posy because of their scent."

"Their colours are lovely, too," Angel said; "but are we to have all these flowers for father? Oh, how good of you! What pretty variegated grass!"

"It is called lady's grass or ladies' ribbons," Miss Goodwin told her, as she added a few strands to the bunch of flowers, and then tied all the stalks together with a piece of bass which she produced from the capacious pocket of the big, gardening apron she wore to protect her gown. "I am glad you like my garden," she proceeded, her blue eyes sparkling with pride as she noted the admiring glances the children were casting on every side; "will you come in and look at my house?"



"It is very kind of you to ask us," Angel replied, "but we must not stay any longer, for we have some errands to do for Uncle Edward in the town."

"Come again another day," said the old lady hospitably, as she placed the nosegay in the little girl's hand. "Pray give the flowers to your father with my compliments, and say I hope to have the pleasure of calling on him and Mr. Bailey before long."

"Who shall we say sent them?" asked Gerald, thinking this was a capital opportunity of finding out the name of their new acquaintance.

Miss Goodwin did not perceive the drift of his question, though she looked a trifle surprised as she answered—

"Why, say I sent them, of course!"

The children exchanged amused glances; then, after a moment's hesitation, Angel explained the situation.

"You see, we do not know who you are," she said. "Won't you, please, tell us your name?"

"You don't know who I am!" the old lady cried in amazement. "Well, I never! And I have lived in Wreyford all my life!"

"But we only came last night," Angel reminded her, "and we don't know any one in Wreyford yet, except the Mickles; I know them because I went to their house when I spent a week here with Uncle Edward before Christmas, but I did not see you then. Father will like to know who sent him these lovely flowers!"

"I am called Goodwin—Anna Goodwin—Miss Anna Goodwin," the little lady informed them with a slight stress upon the "miss." "I knew Mr. Bailey when he was a boy, and I knew your grandfather too! Well, if you really must go, good-bye! Come and see me again soon."

They promised, and took their departure with their faces wreathed in smiles, whilst Miss Goodwin watched them out of

sight, and then returned to her gardening. When they passed Myrtle Villa on their way back to Haresdown House, after having executed their errands in the town, the quaint little figure of the gardener had disappeared.

So far Angel had kept possession of the flowers, occasionally lifting them to her face to enjoy their fragrance; but as they commenced the ascent of Haresdown Hill, Gerald said—

"I say, Angel, I think it's about time I had a turn at carrying those flowers. You've had them all the way!"

"I didn't know you wanted to carry them," Angel responded quickly, as she willingly delivered them up to her brother.

He had had no desire to do so, but it had suddenly occurred to him that he would like to be the one to present the bouquet to their father; and in his eagerness to be the first to reach home, he got a few steps in advance of his sister.

"Wait for me, Gerald!" she cried. "How fast you are going!"

She was rather breathless, for she was unaccustomed to walking much, and the hill tried her. But Gerald, instead of waiting, only laughed, and hastened on ahead. They were now within sight of Haresdown House, which, situated on the slope of the hill, was bathed in sunshine; and with new blinds and curtained windows presented a very different appearance to that it had done when Angel had first seen it four months previously.

Suddenly Gerald commenced to run, and before Angel had reached the garden gate, he had disappeared under the porch into the house. She thought it was rather unkind of him to leave her, and tears rose to her eyes because she had so much wanted to witness her father's look when he caught sight of the nosegay, and now she would be too late for that; but the next moment she told herself how very foolish she must be, for Gerald could not have thought she would be disappointed.

She entered the house very soberly, and turned immediately into the dining-room, a long, low apartment, in which were two windows reaching to the ground. Mr. Willis lay on a sofa close to one of the windows, through which the sun was streaming and Gerald had already given him the flowers.

"Come here, Angel," Mr. Willis said as his little daughter appeared, "and tell me what good fairy sent me these. Gerald says they are a present from a lady!"

"So they are," Angel replied, her face brightening as she met her father's smiling gaze. "Are they not beautiful?"

"Most beautiful! And freshly gathered, I see. Then the scent—how fragrant! Wall-flowers! Hyacinths! Anemones! Scarlet japonica! How marvellously well the colours blend! And daffodils too!"

"That come before the swallow dares, and take The winds of March with beauty."

"Surely you must have met with some very kind-hearted person to get all these!"

"Oh, father, I wish you could have seen her, she was so funny!" Gerald exclaimed, laughing merrily at the remembrance of Miss Goodwin's quaint figure. "Such a queer little woman she looked with an odd, old face, and wearing a short frock, and a big apron!"

"And she has the kindest, bluest eyes I ever saw," Angel cried eagerly; "and a bright, clear voice—like a silver bell! She said we were to come and see her often; and she's going to call on you and Uncle Edward. Her name is Miss Anna Goodwin, and she lives in a dear little house called Myrtle Villa, at the bottom of the hill—we passed it as we drove from the station last night, only, of course, you wouldn't notice it in the dark."

"I am sure she must be a charming old lady," Mr. Willis said earnestly; "but what made her think of sending these flowers to me?" he asked, looking puzzled.

"Oh, because you are an invalid! She seemed to know all about us, and was quite surprised when we told her we did not know what she was called." And Angel repeated almost word for word the conversation they had held with Miss Goodwin.

"Well, I feel most grateful to her," Mr. Willis said, when his little daughter had finished her tale, "and I hope she will keep her word, and come to see me. Now, in what can I arrange my flowers?"

He glanced around the room, which was comfortably and substantially furnished; but there were no vases or jars to be seen. Angel went to the kitchen, and explained their need to the housekeeper, Mrs. Vallance, who told her to look into the china cupboard, and take whatever she wanted. Accordingly, she selected a big blue bowl, finding nothing more suitable, and returned with it to the dining-room. Mr. Willis declared it was just the thing he required, and when he had arranged the flowers in it to his

satisfaction, had it placed on a small table close by the side of his sofa.

The children were delighted to see how much brighter their father was looking; his voice was more cheerful, and he spoke hopefully of a speedy recovery.

When Mr. Bailey came in from the back garden, where he had been giving directions to a gardener the story of Angel and Gerald's interview with Miss Goodwin had to be told again.

"Goodwin—Goodwin," he repeated thoughtfully, "why, of course I remember there was a Miss Goodwin in Wreyford! Is it possible she is still alive? She must be a great age!"

"She said she used to know you, and grandfather too," Gerald said; "and I should think she is awfully old, her face is covered with wrinkles, and her hair is perfectly white."

"Then I dare say it is the same Miss Goodwin. Where does she live? At Myrtle



Villa? Of course I ought to have remembered! To think that she should be still alive!" And Mr. Bailey looked quite excited.

"She must be a dear old soul, I am sure!" Mr. Willis exclaimed. "I only hope she did not rob her garden of all its flowers!"

"Oh no, there were plenty left," Angel assured him; "you could hardly see where those were gathered. And she seemed so pleased to cut them for you."

"I wish she knew what pleasure they are giving me; I must tell her if she calls. I feel as if I have made a friend in Wreyford, though I have never met her yet." And the smile which lit up Mr. Willis' face as he spoke was full of gratification.

Angel met her uncle's eyes saw that he too had noticed how much brighter the invalid was looking; but neither realized how much the little old maid's spontaneous act of kindness had to do with his better spirits; perhaps he did not realize it himself, although his eyes

constantly wandered to the flowers in their fresh, spring beauty, and he repeated many times ere the day was done, "It was very good of her to send them to me."

## CHAPTER XI

### On the Bridge

THE Wreyford Grammar School stood in the main street of the town. It was a substantial grey stone building, with a large playground at the back, which, on a certain April morning, presented a decidedly uproarious scene, some sixty boys of all sizes and ages being assembled there, talking, shouting, and laughing at the top of their voices. Some of the boys were boarders, but the majority was comprised of day pupils, who represented not only the leading families of the town, but the small traders and farmers of the surrounding districts as well, for the Wreyford Grammar School was open to all whose parents could pay the very moderate fees demanded.

The boys had just been dismissed for the Easter holidays; and presently a door in the wall leading into a lane at the back of

Fore Street was opened, and they began gradually to disperse through that exit. Almost the first to leave was Gilbert Mickle: No one attempted to speak to him as he passed through the crowd of boys except his brother, who was talking to a group composed of his boon companions, and shouted to him to ask if he was going home already.

"Yes," answered Gilbert sourly; "I don't want to remain here in this hubbub."

"All right!" was the cheerful response. "Don't wait for me; I'm not coming yet."

Gilbert turned away, conscious that Tom's friends were whispering about him; he did not suppose their remarks were very flattering, and a dull angry flush rose to his face, whilst the ill-tempered lines between his brows deepened as he hurried between the knots of boys, and at last found himself in the lane. He moved more slowly then, and reflected bitterly on the scene he had left. Not one of his school-fellows had so much as wished him enjoyable holidays,

he was thinking, when the sound of quick footsteps behind him made him glance around.

"I say, Mickle," said a hearty, jovial voice, "I'm awfully glad you've won the form-prize as I haven't. I thought all along you would, although I tried hard to get it myself. But I was fairly beaten. I'd rather be licked by you than any of the other fellows."

Gilbert looked at the speaker—Richard Higgs, the son of a bookseller and stationer in Wreyford, and his chief rival at school—and made no reply. Higgs was a tall, wiry youth with a crop of orange-coloured hair surmounting a round, freckled face, out of which a pair of honest green eyes smiled good-naturedly at his school-fellow.

"I hope you'll have a jolly fine time these holidays," he proceeded; "I mean to."

"Thank you," Gilbert responded, speaking more graciously than usual; "it's awfully good of you to speak so—so generously

about the form-prize, for I know you worked very hard to win it."

At that moment several other boys overtook them; and, with a nod to Higgs, Gilbert turned away and proceeded alone. Presently he came to the end of the lane, and passed through a narrow opening between two houses into the main street. He had intended going straight home; but reflecting that there was still an hour before dinner-time, he took the opposite direction, and had soon left the town and reached the old stone bridge which crossed the Wrey.

It was a beautiful day; the river sparkled like silver in the sunshine, whilst the meadows stretching on either side of the water were yellow with cowslips. Gilbert leaned over the bridge, and gazed into the shadows beneath, watching the small fish which darted hither and thither as though at play. A red-breasted stickleback aroused his interest by turning viciously upon its companions every now and then with wide open mouth, making them flee out of its way at

a great rate, as though for their lives. Approaching footsteps caused him to glance up presently, when he saw the figure of a man coming towards him slowly, from the direction of the town—a stranger; he was clad in a thick overcoat although the weather was warm. When he reached the bridge he sat down on one of its low stone walls as if glad to rest awhile, and then Gilbert noticed he looked as though he had been ill, and knew he must be Mr. Willis. The lame boy had never seen the artist before, although Haresdown House had now been inhabited three weeks, and Tom had been there several times, having set up a friendship with Gerald Willis, who had been introduced to him, in the town one day, by Mr. Bailey. Mr. and Mrs. Mickle had called on the newcomers, and Dinah and Dora had renewed their acquaintance with Angel; but hitherto Gilbert had avoided Haresdown House and its inmates; he hated strangers, and would have certainly moved quickly away on this occasion if his curiosity had not prompted him to linger.

He glanced at Mr. Willis furtively from under his sullen brows for a few seconds, and saw that the artist looked much younger than he had pictured him; then, seizing his crutches, prepared to move.

"I hope I have not disturbed you," said Mr. Willis, smiling; "you are Gilbert Mickle, are you not?"

"Yes," the boy answered shortly.

"Then I think you and I ought to know each other," Mr. Willis remarked cordially, holding out his hand; "I believe I have met all the other members of your family. My name is John Willis."

"I thought so," Gilbert exclaimed. He could not refuse to grasp the extended hand, though his one idea was to get away as soon as possible. "I hope you are better?" he inquired awkwardly.

"Oh, much better, thank you. Are you in a hurry? Will you not sit down and talk to me for a bit?"



"Well—if you like."

It was scarcely a gracious answer. Gilbert seated himself a few steps away from his companion, and rested his crutches by his side; his self-consciousness made him nervous, so that he clumsily allowed one crutch to slip, and crimsoned with vexation as he stooped to pick it up.

"I can't go far without my props," he said, with the bitter intonation in his voice which it always pained his mother to hear.

"So I understand," Mr. Willis replied in matter-of-fact tones. Being a tactful man and a keen judge of character, he deemed it best not to enlarge upon the other's lameness, or show the sympathy he felt; but calmly changed the conversation by saying, "I have now come from the town, and whilst I was making a few purchases from Mr. Higgs, the stationer, asked him some questions about the Grammar School—I mean, my boy to go there after

Easter—and he told me you and his son have been rivals this term."

"Yes. Higgs and I both wanted to win the form-prize."

"And you won it, I understand! I congratulate you."

"Thank you. I thought Higgs would be mad—I know I should have been in his place—but he wasn't a bit. He spoke to me about it after the school had broken up this morning; said he'd rather be licked by me than by any of the other fellows, and I really believe he meant what he said."

"He has evidently learnt how to take a defeat in the proper spirit. I suppose you are very elated at being the victor?"

"No, I don't think I am. Mother and father are pleased, but I'm not so glad as I thought I should be."

The boy spoke in a depressed tone, as though he took a jaundiced view of things in general.

"Your mother was telling me the other day that you are fond of drawing and painting," Mr. Willis said, after a lengthened pause, during which he had been debating what subject would be likely to interest his young companion.

Gilbert's face brightened as he admitted the truth of his mother's statement.

"I haven't touched a brush for nearly two months myself," Mr. Willis continued, with a faint sigh; "my illness has been a great drawback, but now I am so much better and stronger, I shall soon be at work again: I have chosen a pleasant room at Haresdown House for a studio. You must come and see it."

"I should like to." Gilbert looked greatly pleased. He had heard of the artist's disappointment at not being able to finish his picture in time for exhibition at the Royal Academy that year, and longed to question him about it. "Your little girl told us about the beautiful picture you have been painting," he proceeded

hesitatingly. "Did you—did you bring it with you?"

"Yes," Mr. Willis answered. His face saddened for a moment, then brightened again.

"Yes," he repeated more briskly, "I brought it with me—we have no home in London now—and one day I hope to finish it. So Angel told you about it, did she? What did she say? But, there, I won't ask, for I know my little maid has an exalted idea of her father's abilities. Poor child, she has always kept her faith in me. Would you like to see my picture?"

"Oh, indeed I should!" Gilbert cried, a flush of delight rising to his sallow face at the thought.

"Then, you shall; but not to-day. I don't think I shall feel up to much this afternoon. How about to-morrow?"

"I could come then—any time."

"In the afternoon? We shall all be glad to see you."

"Thank you, so much. I will be at Haresdown House about three o'clock. Are you going to walk home?" Gilbert inquired, for his companion looked pale and tired, he thought.

"Oh no! I am going to wait here until my uncle joins me. He has set up a pony-carriage, you know, and will arrive from the town to drive me home. I can't face that hill yet."

"I should think not."

"But I hope to do so very soon. What a pretty place Wreyford is! This bridge is very old, I imagine?"

"Yes; it is one of the old county bridges. Have you seen the church?"

"Only from the distance; I have not been there yet—perhaps I may next Sunday. It is a grand old building, my uncle tells me,

and my little girl is simply charmed with the view from the churchyard."

"It is beautiful!" the boy cried. "You can see for miles and miles around from Haresdown Hill—the church is right at the top, you know. And the town looks so pretty in the valley, and the river—" He broke off abruptly, as though rather ashamed of his enthusiasm; and then added briefly, "But you'll see for yourself."

The artist nodded. He had taken a large size notebook from the side pocket of his overcoat, and was glancing through the pages of it.

"I am going to show you a sketch I made a few days ago," he said, smiling. "I wonder if you will be able to recognize the original!" And he handed the book open to Gilbert.

"Oh, I say, how awfully clever of you!" the boy exclaimed. "Oh, what a capital likeness!" With a few strokes of his pencil Mr. Willis had succeeded in depicting

Miss Goodwin's little figure in her old-fashioned cloak and poke bonnet, with her waterproof over her arm.

"I am glad you see whom it is intended to represent," Mr. Willis said, his eyes twinkling with amusement. "She was our first caller. I made that sketch of her from memory; of course it is a caricature, but not an unkindly one, I hope. She is a dear old soul!"

"Oh yes," Gilbert agreed. "Every one likes Miss Goodwin. This is a very good likeness of her, Mr. Willis—goloshes and all!"

It was wonderful how much better looking the boy's face appeared when he laughed, as he did at that moment. Mr. Willis told him he might look at the other sketches in the book if he liked, and as he turned over the pages, explained their contents to him.

"I wish I could draw like this," Gilbert said earnestly, as he at last closed the book and returned it to its owner. "I should so

much like to be an artist; but father wants me to be a lawyer like himself, and—"

He broke off in the midst of the sentence as the sound of wheels was heard, and a pony-carriage driven by Mr. Bailey, drawn by a strong Exmoor pony, appeared in sight from the direction of the town.

"We will continue our conversation tomorrow afternoon," said Mr. Willis pleasantly, as his uncle drove up, and brought the pony to a standstill. "I am afraid I have kept you waiting a long time, John," Mr. Bailey observed apologetically. "I was unexpectedly delayed at several places—How do you do, my lad?" he said, holding out his hand to Gilbert, who reached for his crutches and came forward to shake hands with him.

"I'm quite well, thank you," the boy answered. "What a nice little carriage! And, oh, I say, what a jolly little pony!"



"Yes," Mr. Bailey nodded complacently as his nephew took the seat by his side; "it's a trim turn-out altogether, isn't it? The pony is a rare one to travel, and such a strong, sure-footed little beast. Pixy, he's called. Why haven't you been to see us yet, eh?"

"He is coming to-morrow afternoon," Mr. Willis answered quickly; "I have been arranging it with him."

"That's right! That's right!"

Mr. Bailey gathered up the reins, and Pixy started off at a swift pace. Mr. Willis looked back and waved his hand to Gilbert, who, leaning on his crutches, stood gazing after the pony-carriage.

"That's a cross-grained boy, if I'm not much mistaken," the artist remarked shrewdly, "and a very unhappy one too. He is very different to the other Mickle children—perhaps his affliction has soured him."

"Perhaps so," Mr. Bailey agreed, "but I thought he looked bright enough to-day."

Meanwhile Gilbert had glanced at his watch, and had discovered that it was half-past one o'clock, which was his dinner-time. How the last hour had simply flown! What an interesting companion the artist was. And what good spirits he appeared to be in, considering his recent severe illness, and the disappointment which had attended it. Gilbert felt sure, under similar circumstances, he himself would be in a most depressed condition.

He turned towards the town, still thinking of Mr. Willis. He was glad he had met him, for now he had made his acquaintance he would not mind seeing him again, and although he had really desired to know him, he had dreaded the first interview. As a rule strangers were greatly struck by the boy's lameness, and if they did not remark on it in words, generally showed their sympathy for his affliction in their faces, which only annoyed him, for he strongly resented pity in any form.

Certainly Gilbert Mickle's character was a strange one. On his return home he found his family already seated at the dinner-table, and his father, who liked punctuality, reproved him sharply for his tardy appearance. Contrary to his custom on such occasions, Gilbert explained how it was he had been delayed, and told how the time had flown.

"Old Gilbert's in a rare good temper," whispered Tom to Dinah, for he was an adept at reading his brother's countenance, "you can see that by his face; I hope he means to keep in the same humour during the holidays. I expect he's more pleased at having won his form-prize than he pretends!"

## CHAPTER XII

### Gerald's Selfishness

"ANGEL, I want to speak to you!"

Angel, who was engaged in industriously weeding a corner of the back garden which her uncle had allotted to her as her own, turned her face towards her brother, and paused in her work as she asked—

"Well, Gerald, what is it?"

Both children had greatly improved in appearance since their arrival at Wreyford, Angel more noticeably so; already her cheeks were rounder, and their old pallor was giving place to a ruddier, healthier hue.

"What is it?" she repeated, as Gerald did not immediately reply. "I'm listening. But, be quick, and tell me what you want, for I'm very busy; Miss Goodwin is going to give me some flower seeds, and I must get the ground ready for them, because Uncle Edward says it's high time they were tilled."

"I want to know if you can lend me some money, Angel?"

"Why, what have you done with the sixpence father gave you yesterday?" she cried in surprise.

"Spent it, of course! It doesn't take long to spend sixpence!" he exclaimed irritably.

"No; but don't you remember father said he should give you no more this week?"

"I know, I know! That's why I want you to lend me some."

"I really can't. I'm very sorry, Gerald, but—"

"Oh, how selfish of you!" Gerald interrupted, his eyes flashing indignation upon his sister. "I had no idea you could be so stingy. Do you really mean to say you won't lend me some money?"

"I can't, I can't, indeed!" Angel cried distressfully. "I would if I could; but I haven't got any. Not a penny!"

Gerald looked incredulous for a minute, then he said—

"What have you done with it all? There was that half-crown Uncle Edward gave you the day after we arrived here—you can't have spent all that?"

"He gave you half-a-crown at the same time, and yours was gone a fortnight ago," Angel reminded her brother; "and you've had money from father besides, and I haven't."

"Well, you needn't be cross! Of course boys want more money than girls," Gerald declared in a lordly tone. "Are you sure you can't lend me just a few pence?" he asked persuasively.

"Quite sure. Do you think I would tell you a story about it?" she demanded, her grey eyes flashing indignantly.

"No, no," Gerald responded hastily; "I was only surprised to think you had spent all your money."

"I don't see why you should be. Let me see," said Angel reflectively, "I bought some notepaper with bunches of violets on each sheet because I wanted to write to Mrs. Steer, and I thought she would be sure to like my letter better if it was written on pretty paper—that was a shilling. Then, the little jar for flowers I

gave to father for his studio cost another shilling—that's two shillings. And threepence I spent in sweets one day when I was in the town with Dinah and Dora Mickle—that's two shillings and threepence. And—"

"Oh, I don't want to know how you spent it all!" Gerald interposed impatiently; "since it's all gone, it's no matter."

Angel proceeded with her weeding, her brother watching her with rather a dissatisfied expression on his handsome face. Presently he reopened the conversation—

"Angel, couldn't you ask father to change his mind, and let me have a little money?"

"Oh no, no, I couldn't," she answered hastily.

"Oh, you might. He always does what you ask him—" this in coaxing tones. "Don't be disagreeable, Angel."



"I don't mean to be disagreeable," the little girl said, looking troubled, for she rarely refused any request of her brother's, and it distressed her to do so now, "but I can't ask father for money when he hasn't earned any for months. I'm sure he hasn't much to spare."

"What a nuisance! Well, then, how would it be if you asked Uncle Edward instead?"

"Gerald!" Angel exclaimed, looking positively shocked at the idea. "You really can't mean it."

"Why not? I believe Uncle Edward has plenty of money; I'm sure he'd willingly give me a shilling or two if you asked him. He's awfully fond of you, he is indeed."

"Oh, I couldn't ask him. Think of all he has done for us; how he managed and paid for everything when father was ill, and how he has brought us to this beautiful place. Oh, I couldn't ask him for money! How can you suggest it? It would be dreadful. It would seem so greedy after all his kindness."

Angel spoke so emphatically that her brother saw it was useless to argue the matter. He stood with his hands thrust into his trousers' pockets, kicking the small pebbles in the path, his face a picture of discontent. He considered his sister very unkind and disobliging; but he had no intention of putting his petition to his uncle himself.

"Never mind," Angel said consolingly after a few minutes' silence, during which she had reflected that probably Gerald did not mean to be greedy, "you will have your usual pocket-money from father on Monday. It will not be long to wait till then. What are you going to put in your garden?" she inquired, with the laudable desire of changing the conversation to a pleasanter subject.

"I don't know that I shall till it up at all. I don't much care for gardening—it's too much work."

"But I thought you told Uncle Edward you wanted a piece of ground for yourself?"

"I've changed my mind. I don't care about it now."

Gerald was evidently in a bad temper, recognizing which fact, Angel wisely held her peace, and continued her work in silence.

"It's a nuisance father has asked Gilbert Mickle here this afternoon," said the boy presently in a grumbling tone. "I don't like him a bit, do you?"

"I—I hardly know," Angel responded, with some hesitation. "I am very sorry for him because he's lame, and I'm afraid he isn't very happy. I think he looks so sad."

"He looks awfully bad-tempered. Tom says the best way is to take no notice of him if he's snappy. Oh, Tom didn't say anything against him, only that when Gilbert's in a temper it's better not to answer him back because he's so sharp, you're sure to get the worst of it. Tom thinks a good bit of Gilbert, really—says he's most awfully clever! I don't believe

he'd hear a word against him. I wish Tom was coming this afternoon too."

But when Gilbert appeared, punctually at three o'clock, he was alone. He found Mr. Bailey leaning over the front gate; and Mr. Willis was walking up and down in front of the house, in the sunshine, with his little daughter. The lame boy was greeted very cordially, and made to feel welcome. He was shy at first, but when he was taken into the studio and shown some of the artist's work, he lost all feeling of self-consciousness and talked without restraint.

"Where is Gerald?" Mr. Willis asked suddenly, turning to Angel, who was herself wondering what had become of her brother.

"I don't know, father," she answered; "I have not seen him since dinner. I think he went out, but I am not sure."

"Perhaps he is in the house, and does not know our visitor has arrived," Mr. Bailey suggested; "he may be in his own room."

"I will go and see if I can find him," Angel said, seeing annoyance in her father's face, and rightly guessing that he was vexed at Gerald's absence.

But although she searched upstairs and downstairs, in the stable and outhouses, and even in the orchard beyond the back garden, Gerald was not to be found; and she was reluctantly obliged to return to the studio, and confess that he was not on the premises. Mr. Willis made no comment, but his face expressed his displeasure; he was showing his unfinished picture to his guest, who was standing before it with flushed cheeks and eyes glowing with enthusiasm.

"Isn't it beautiful?" Angel said softly. "Do you like it?"

"Like it!" the boy echoed; "I can't say how much I admire it. It is indeed beautiful! How sorry you must have been to have been obliged to put it on one side," he remarked, turning to Mr. Willis.

"Yes," the artist acknowledged, "but I have no doubt now it was for the best, though when I was first taken ill the thought of my unfinished picture was my one great trouble, for I meant it to do so much."

"But you will finish it some day," Gilbert said eagerly. "Is there a lot more to be done to it?"

"No, mostly finishing touches; but those I shall not attempt to put until I am quite well, lest I should spoil the whole."

The afternoon passed very pleasantly and swiftly, so that Gilbert was astonished when Polly, the rosy-cheeked maid who assisted the housekeeper, came knocking at the studio door to inform her master that tea was ready in the dining-room.

"Oh, how long I have stayed!" the boy cried apologetically, as he hastily seized his crutches. "I must have been here hours."

"Only two hours," Mr. Bailey said, with his hearty laugh, adding hospitably, "You must remain one longer and have some tea with us. Oh, you must; we shall not like it, I assure you, if you persist in leaving." And he laid his big, kindly hand persuasively on Gilbert's shoulder.

Gilbert yielded willingly enough, and followed his host into the dining-room, whilst Mr. Willis drew Angel aside, and questioned her about her brother. "I really don't know where he is, father," she said in uneasy tones, "but I fancy he may have gone away this afternoon because he knew Gilbert Mickle was coming, and he doesn't like him."

"If so, it is extremely rude of him," Mr. Willis replied; "he ought to have been at home to help entertain our visitor."

"Yes," Angel acknowledged; "I am so sorry, father."

"Well, my dear, it is not your fault, so you need not look so serious about it."

They had nearly finished tea when Gerald marched into the room, looking perfectly unconcerned. The minute he saw the visitor, however, his countenance changed, for it had not occurred to him that Gilbert would remain so long.

"Where have you been all the afternoon?" Mr. Willis inquired sharply.

"I've been fishing, father."

"Alone?"

"Yes," the boy responded, adding, after a moment's hesitation, "that is, part of the time."

"Sit down and have your tea now," Mr. Bailey interposed; "I dare say you are hungry."

No further questions were asked Gerald for the present, but the boy saw his father was annoyed with him. Later, when Mr. Bailey volunteered to walk part way home with Gilbert, Mr. Willis would not permit Gerald to accompany them. Angel



went with them as far as the garden gate, and watched them down the hill; and on returning to the dining-room, she found her father had been taking Gerald to task for his rudeness in absenting himself from home that afternoon, and Gerald was trying to find excuses for his behaviour.

"I don't like Gilbert Mickle," he was saying as Angel entered the room; "I don't suppose he wanted to see me; he scarcely ever has anything to say to me."

"Perhaps you scarcely ever have anything to say to him," Mr. Willis replied gravely; "but that has nothing to do with the matter. I consider your behaviour this afternoon both rude and selfish—particularly selfish. Where did you go fishing? In the river, I suppose?"

"Yes," Gerald answered sulkily. "Uncle Edward told me not to fish in the clay pits, so, of course, I didn't."

Mr. Bailey had presented him with a fishing-rod a few days previously, since

when he had spent many hours with Tom Mickle, fishing in the Wrey, with no very encouraging results as yet. The clay pits to which he alluded were old disused mines which had not been worked for many years, the supply of clay having failed; they were very deep, and full of stagnant water, where such fish as roach and dace bred, and supplied sport for the boys of the neighbourhood who were not content with fishing in the river.

That afternoon, being alone, Gerald had soon grown tired of fishing, especially as the fish declined to bite, so he had put aside his rod, and idly wandered along the bank of the stream till he had met a boy with whom he had entered into conversation. His new acquaintance had informed him that his name was Reginald Hope, and that his father was a doctor in Wreyford, and that he himself attended the Wreyford Grammar School; after which they had grown quite friendly, and had spent a very enjoyable time together. This Gerald told frankly enough; but he refrained from telling what the chief part

of his conversation with Reginald Hope had been about, for he had a very shrewd suspicion that his father would not approve of it. The fact was, his new acquaintance had rather amazed him by talking a great deal of betting, and boasting of the money he had won by that means; and though Gerald had considered him a fine, manly fellow whilst he had been talking to him, and had admired his free-and-easy mode of speech, yet now he was away from the glamour of his presence he was doubtful if Reginald Hope was the sort of boy his father would like him to be on very friendly terms with.

"I am sorry you think I behaved so rudely this afternoon," Gerald said presently, as he began to realize that Mr. Willis had just cause for his displeasure; "I—I suppose it was not polite to go away like that."

"That it certainly was not; but I think more of your selfishness. I wish you would try to consider others sometimes."

Mr. Willis spoke reprovngly, though with a softer tone in his voice now, as he noticed his son was really beginning to look repentant and ashamed of himself.

"I don't mean to be selfish," Gerald said in a low tone. "Shall I apologize to Gilbert Mickle?" he suggested doubtfully.

Mr. Willis shook his head, much to Gerald's relief. Angel began to give her brother an account of the lame boy's visit; but he did not appear much interested, not even when she told him how much Gilbert had admired their father's picture.

"And Gilbert draws himself," she informed him; "he is going to let father see some of his sketches, and father has promised to say what he really thinks of them."

"Tom says Gilbert's always drawing up in the attic," Gerald replied, "but he won't show any of them what he's doing. He's an awfully close sort of fellow. Tom thinks he's afraid of being laughed at."

"Perhaps Tom doesn't spare his brother's feelings," Mr. Willis remarked; "it strikes me that Gilbert is a very sensitive boy, and no doubt cannot stand ridicule. Poor lad! His is a sad affliction."

"It must be terrible to be lame," Gerald exclaimed. "But perhaps as he's always been like that he doesn't mind so much."

"I should say that is very doubtful," Mr. Willis said, with a grave shake of his head. "I think he minds greatly, and has not learnt yet that God generally compensates those He afflicts. I don't think he appreciates the bright mental qualities with which he is evidently endowed. He appears to me a very clever boy, and shrewd beyond his years. I am told he is one of the shining lights at the Grammar School."

"Yes, but the boys hate him!" Gerald cried.

"How do you know that, Gerald?"

"Oh, that fellow I met this afternoon told me so. He says Gilbert Mickle's temper is as crooked as his legs."

"What an unkind thing to say—" Angel was beginning when she suddenly paused, as the remembrance of the way in which the lame boy had behaved to her on their first acquaintance crossed her mind, and she had to admit to herself that there was certainly some truth in the speech.

When Mr. Bailey returned, he refrained from mentioning the subject of Gerald's absence from home that afternoon, much to that young gentleman's relief; he informed them he had parted from Gilbert at the bottom of the hill, and went on to say—

"He thanked me most gratefully for accompanying him so far, and I asked him to come and see us as often as he liked. He is going to bring some of his drawings to show you, John, the next time he pays us a visit. He appears deeply interested in your work."

Whilst the others continued to talk of Gilbert Mickle, Gerald was busy with his thoughts, which were of his new acquaintance, Reginald Hope. He felt he must see more of him, and hoped it would not be long before they met again. Reginald Hope had boasted that he was never without money in his pocket; and had hinted that perhaps he might, on another occasion, tell Gerald how that came about; and Gerald, as he reflected on his present penniless condition, thought he would much like to know the secret of the other's wealth.

"What are you thinking about so deeply, Gerald?" his father's voice broke in upon his musings.

"Nothing," the boy answered quickly, flushing guiltily as he met Mr. Willis' kind, inquiring eyes; "that is, nothing of any importance."

"I should have thought it was something of importance judging by your face," Mr. Willis returned good-humouredly; "but

never mind, my son, your thoughts are your own."

## CHAPTER XIII

### In the Meadows



ONE sunshiny afternoon found Angel with Dinah and Dora Mickle gathering cowslips in the meadows which stretched on either side of the Wrey, whilst Gerald and Tom fished in the stream. The little girls all had baskets, which, when they were filled with the golden flowers, they carried to the spot where the boys sat on the bank fishing, and commenced making cowslip bulls under Dinah's directions.

"To think you never saw cowslips growing before you came to Wreyford, Angel!" Dora exclaimed, as, having finished one ball, she threw it into the air, and caught it again and again. "You wouldn't like to go back to live in London now, would you?"

"No," Angel returned, her eyes wandering across the meadows with a great contentment in their grey depths. "What are those lilac flowers called?" she inquired.

"Oh, those are cuckoo-flowers," Dora answered. "We call them cuckoo-flowers because they begin to open about the time the cuckoo comes," Dinah explained; "some people call them 'ladies smocks,' but they are really a sort of cress, and always grow in rather damp ground."

"What a lot you know about flowers," Angel said. "I suppose that is because you have lived in the country all your life."

"I don't know so much about flowers as Gilbert does; he remembers their botanical names, and understands how to classify them. He would tell you the cuckoo-flower is a species of cardamine. By the way, have you heard the cuckoo this year yet?"

"Yes, when I was in the garden with father yesterday. I could not think what it was at first. I thought it must be one boy calling to another," Angel confessed, colouring slightly.

"Oh, you silly thing!" cried Tom, looking over his shoulder at the little girls who

were seated on the ground a few yards behind Gerald and himself. "What an ignoramus you must be!"

Gerald joined in the laugh against his sister, though he was conscious that he might have made the same mistake himself, knowing as little as she did of the sights and sounds familiar to country folks.

"I know it was silly of me," Angel acknowledged, good-temperedly smiling, for she was beginning to understand that Tom Mickle never meant his out-spoken remarks in an unkindly spirit; "father and Uncle Edward both laughed at me, and no wonder."

"But if you had never heard the cuckoo before you could not be expected to know what it was," said Dinah in her matter-of-fact way. "Everything in the country must seem strange to you, and to Gerald too."

"Oh, Angel," broke in Dora, "there's a robin's nest with three young ones in it in our back garden! I had nearly forgotten to

tell you. Gilbert found it yesterday; it is in a hole in the hedge close to the river—such a snug little home, made of moss and lined with horse hairs. You shall see it for yourself."

"Where did the robin get the horse hairs?" inquired Angel wonderingly.

"Picked them up, of course," Tom replied, with a laugh.

"Are you going to take the young ones?" Gerald asked.

"Take the young ones!" Dora echoed in horrified tones, whilst her sister turned a pair of reproachful eyes upon Gerald. "I should think not indeed. We wouldn't do anything so cruel. I don't know what Gilbert would do to any one who touched the nest, or the young ones either!"

"Gerald didn't mean it," Tom broke in hastily. "Every one knows robins won't live in captivity."

Gerald had not known it, but he wisely held his peace, for he had had visions of rearing the young birds in a cage, and he now saw such a suggestion would not meet with the approval of his companions.

"I should so much like to see the nest," Angel said, "and I wouldn't touch it. Robins are such dear little birds! There was one that used to come to our sitting-room window in London, and pick up crumbs from the window-sill. He used to arrive regularly at breakfast-time—didn't he, Gerald?"

Gerald nodded. Dora was still looking at him disapprovingly; she could not imagine how any one could want to rob a nest, for in her eyes a bird's home was sacred; she thought Gerald must be a very cruel boy, but there she was wrong, for he was only thoughtless, and had no idea of inflicting pain. Dora was very tender-hearted, so much so indeed that if her family heard a sad story it was always— "Don't tell Dora!" And her mother sometimes wondered how the

sensitive little girl would fight the battle of life in the years to come.

Soon several cowslip balls had been made, and the boys being weary of fishing, some one suggested a game of "Hunt the Hare" for a change. Tom was the first hare, and a fine run he gave the hounds across the meadows, over hedges and ditches, until it seemed he never would be caught. The Mickle children, accustomed to healthy, outdoor exercise, were fleet of foot, but Gerald managed to keep pace with Dinah and Dora; Angel, however, soon grew breathless, and fell behind the others, who pressed hotly upon their quarry, leaving her behind. She followed, at a slower rate, in the direction they had taken, until, after climbing a hedge, she found herself in a narrow lane, and sank, crimson and panting, upon a mossy bank, incapable of proceeding further for the present. When Angel had somewhat regained her breath, she glanced around, and saw that no one was in sight, neither could she hear the sound of her late

companions' voices, so she decided to wait where she was for a while, and rest a bit. It was cool and pleasant; the hedgerows were bursting into leaf, and the beech trees on either side of the road, meeting overhead, were tipped with foliage of the tenderest green, whilst fronds of ferns were pushing their way through the rich mouldy soil amidst a carpet of luxuriant moss. Angel heaved a sigh of perfect contentment. How happy she was! She felt at that moment as though she had not a trouble in the world. Her father was daily gaining health and strength; there were no worrying unpaid bills to weigh upon her mind; Uncle Edward was kindness itself, and she was growing to love her new home; and lastly, she thought how she was to go to the school which Dinah and Dora Mickle attended the coming term. Her life was to be a lonely one no longer, and she was to have the same advantages as her brother. How pleased her mother would be if she knew. The tears rushed to her eyes, gushed forth, and ran unheeded down her cheeks as she recalled the

tones of her dead mother's voice, and pictured the dear face she had loved so well.

Angel was so engrossed with her thoughts that she never noticed some one approaching, till a peculiar tap-tap broke upon her ears, and looking up hastily she perceived Gilbert Mickle swinging himself along on his crutches.

"Good afternoon," he said, as he came in a line with the little girl.

"Good afternoon," she answered.

He paused, and looked at her inquisitively, noticing the tell-tale tears upon her flushed cheeks and her quivering lips. The thought entered his mind that the boys had been teasing her, for he knew his sisters and Tom had gone to join her and her brother in the meadows.

"You've been crying," he remarked, frowning till his heavy brows nearly met.



"Yes," she acknowledged truthfully, glancing up rather shyly into his handsome, ill-tempered face. She could not tell that he was feeling sympathetic towards her. "It was very silly of me," she added, "but I couldn't help it."

"The boys have been teasing you, I suppose? You shouldn't take any notice of them. Tom's never happy without he's humbugging some one, and I dare say your brother is as bad!"

"Oh no!" she exclaimed, realizing he meant his advice kindly. "I've been having a lovely time picking cowslips, and we've been playing 'Hunt the Hare.' I got left behind, and—"

"Is that why you've been crying?" he inquired in accents of contempt.

"Oh no, no! It was—I was thinking how happy I was, and wishing my mother knew, and then—she is dead, you know."

She paused, having become somewhat incoherent. Her companion made no

response, though he thought he was beginning to comprehend the situation.

"I don't suppose you can understand," she proceeded, "because your mother is living—"

"Oh yes, I can," he interrupted. "I expect it makes you unhappy when you think of your mother, and that's why you cried?"

"No, not because I'm unhappy, but because I miss her so. Sometimes when I'm happiest I miss her most."

"Well, I wouldn't cry any more if I were you," he counselled, looking puzzled at her reply. A slightly sarcastic smile crept over his face as he continued, "Why should you cry if you are not unhappy? But, there, I suppose being a girl you can't help piping your eye. Girls are all the same."

Angel made no response to this, for though she was indignant, she thought it better not to enter into an argument with Gilbert. She felt annoyed that he should

have caught her in tears; but she was greatly surprised when his next remark showed how plainly he read what was passing through her mind.

"I say," he said, "you're vexed I came along just now, aren't you? You need not mind. I shan't tell the others you've been blubbing. You were very fond of your mother, eh?"

"Oh yes! You're fond of your mother, aren't you?"

He nodded, his face softening into a smile. Then he asked if she meant to follow the others, and receiving a reply in the negative, inquired if she knew her way home.

"No," Angel returned, "but I think I know my way back to the meadow where we picked the cowslips; I must go back to get my basket, and for certain the others will return there too."

"I may as well go with you. Oh, I can climb a hedge!" he told her as he noticed her

dubious look; "if my legs are not up to much, my crutches are strong, and I know how to use them to some purpose, I can tell you."

She was surprised with what dexterity he managed to swing himself up the hedge, and drop off it on to the other side. She followed with far less agility.

"Can I assist you?" he asked sarcastically as he watched her slow, cautious movements; "you are not such a good climber as I am, after all!"

Angel laughingly declined his help, and scrambled over the hedge as best she could, after which they crossed the meadow, got over another hedge, and so on until they neared the river's side. Every now and again they paused to listen for the others' voices, but no sounds were to be heard except the cooing of wood-pigeons and the lowing of cattle in distant fields. Angel made a nosegay of buttercups and cuckoo-flowers, whilst her companion watched her in silence.

"Are you fond of flowers?" she asked presently. "I suppose you must be, as Dinah says you know a lot about them."

"I like them," he said, "but I don't care about gathering them; I prefer to see them growing. When people pick flowers they mix them together regardless of their colours; but when you see them growing, the colours are sure to blend properly. Look at those buttercups and cuckoo-flowers springing up side by side in the grass—yellow and pale lilac—there's nothing to offend one's taste there. Nature doesn't make a mistake."

"It is all so beautiful!" Angel exclaimed, her appreciative eyes wandering over the fair landscape. "Do you know what I overheard Miss Goodwin say to father the other day? They had been talking of the pretty places about Wreyford, and Miss Goodwin said: 'Beauty of any description always makes me understand God's love.' I think I know what she meant, don't you?"

"Yes," he answered briefly.

They had now reached the spot where the boys' fishing rods and the baskets full of cowslips lay, in safety, on the river's bank; evidently no one had been there during the children's absence. A few minutes later Tom's voice was heard at no great distance, shouting lustily. The hare had outwitted the hounds, and was returning triumphantly to the starting-point.

"Didn't you follow, Angel?" Tom gasped, as he flung himself on the ground to regain his breath.

"Yes," she replied, "but I got behind the others and missed them, then your brother found me, and I thought we'd better wait for you here. I knew you'd return."

"I hope Gilbert has been making himself agreeable," Tom said in his teasing way.

"Oh yes," Angel answered simply; at which Tom laughed heartily, and Gilbert frowned.

"Where have you been all the afternoon, old chap?" the younger brother inquired of the elder.

"For a walk."

"You might as well have come with us; we've had such a jolly time."

"I don't care about gathering flowers, and I like fishing still less," said Gilbert disdainfully.

"In short, you prefer your own sweet company to ours. Oh, I say, old fellow, don't go!" Tom cried hastily, as his brother was moving away. "You're never going off in a huff, are you?"

"I'm not in a huff."

"No?" Tom said questioningly. "Well, then, don't be so much on your dignity. Wait a few minutes, and by-and-by we'll all go home together. Here come the girls. Where is Gerald, I wonder!"

Angel looked around for her brother, but he was nowhere within sight; she concluded he would return presently.

"So you're back," Dinah remarked to Tom. "What a chase we've had after you! We gave you too much start. Oh, there's Angel. We lost her altogether."

"I couldn't keep up," Angel exclaimed. "Is Gerald coming?"

"No; he has gone home."

"Gone home?" echoed a chorus of voices.

"Yes," Dinah nodded. "We followed Tom ever so far, and then, when Gerald found there was no chance of our catching him, he said he shouldn't play any longer, and it wasn't worth while to come all the way back here to fetch his fishing-rod; so he asked me to tell Angel to carry it back to Haresdown House for him."

"I am sure I wouldn't do any such thing!" Gilbert exclaimed. "The idea of his being like that!"



"Oh, I don't mind," Angel interposed hurriedly.

"I wonder you let him order you about like that," Tom cried.

The children gathered their belongings together and started for home, Angel with an uneasy sense that her companions disapproved of her brother's behaviour. She did not attempt to make excuses for him; he had acted as he usually did, and studied himself. On reaching the road which led to the town over the bridge one way, and to Haresdown House the other, Tom declared his intention of accompanying Angel home, and carrying Gerald's rod and her basket of flowers for her. It was in vain for her to protest there was no necessity for him to do so; he was persistent, so she had perforce to say good-bye to the others, and allow Tom to go up the hill with her.

When they arrived at Haresdown House they found Gerald at the front gate watching for his sister's return.

"What, you, Tom!" he cried in accents of surprise.

"Yes, me," Tom responded ungrammatically, as he transferred the fishing-rod and basket into the little girl's hands. "I've brought Angel home because you skulked away and left her," and his blue eyes flashed indignantly as he spoke. "I wouldn't treat either of my sisters so shabbily, nor would Gilbert!"

Gerald looked considerably taken aback, but Tom waited for no reply. Shouting back "good-bye," he turned on his heel and ran off down the hill.

## CHAPTER XIV

### The Fate of the Robins

"WHO is going to market with me?" Mr. Bailey inquired as he entered the dining-room at Haresdown House, where Angel and Gerald were holding an animated conversation. "Mrs. Vallance has given me a number of commissions to execute for her, so I shall take the carriage, and bring home my purchases. I thought a drive would do your father good, but it appears he is expecting Gilbert Mickle here this morning. You can both come with me if you like."

"Oh, thank you, Uncle Edward," they replied; but Gerald added, "I promised to meet Reginald Hope this morning;

however, that doesn't matter. I would much rather go to market. I can see Hope any day."

"Nevertheless, if you have made an appointment with him you had better keep it," Mr. Bailey said gravely. "I never encourage any one to break his word."

Gerald's face fell. Ten minutes later he watched his sister and uncle drive off in the pony-carriage-with a decidedly envious heart, and stood at the front gate gazing disconsolately down the hill until he saw Gilbert Mickle appear in sight. If the lame boy had not observed him, he would have retreated; but Gilbert, apparently guessing his intention, frustrated it by shouting to him to wait. Now Gerald had a reason of his own for not desiring to encounter Gilbert, and his countenance expressed decided uneasiness as he opened the gate for the other to enter.

"Look here," said Gilbert, fixing a stern, accusing gaze on the younger boy's face,

"how dared you interfere with that robin's nest?"

"I didn't!" Gerald cried quickly. "I never touched it!"

Gilbert's eyes flashed ominously, and he restrained his rising anger with an effort as he replied—

"Then you must have meddled with the young ones. I know you must have, though no one saw you. What a young idiot Tom must have been to show you the nest! How dared you touch the birds—you—you meddlesome imp?"

"I didn't do any harm," Gerald said sulkily; "and you've no right to speak to me like that, and call me names. I won't stand it. I suppose you think you can bully me as you like, just because you're older than I am? Besides, I didn't hurt the young birds; I only took them out of the nest to look at them, and I put them back again as gently as possible."

"You killed them!" Gilbert declared indignantly.

"I didn't!" Gerald retorted hotly. "How can you tell such a big lie? I'm not going to stand here and let you talk to me like this. I never hurt the young birds, I tell you, and you're very wicked to say I did. Tom never told you so, I'm sure."

"No, Tom did not see you touch them; but he remembers you went back to look at them again when he was at the other side of the garden. Perhaps you didn't mean to hurt them," Gilbert proceeded, "but you killed them nevertheless. Surely you must know that if birds are taken from their nest they never settle in properly again? This morning, when Dora went to look at the young robins, she found them all dead on the ground, having fallen out of the nest. So you see, indirectly, you did kill them."

Gerald looked really shocked, for he had had no intention of doing harm when his curiosity had prompted him to take the half-fledged birds out of their nursery; he

had promised Tom not to touch them, but he had thought it would never be known he had broken his word. He now recalled the anxiety the Mickle children had all evinced that the robins might save their brood, and he was conscious that they would view his conduct very unfavourably.

"I am so sorry," he said in a low voice. "I never meant to hurt them—truly, I did not. I would not have taken them out of the nest if I had known what would happen."

"Tom said you solemnly promised not to touch them."

Gerald made no response, but his crimson face plainly expressed that Tom had spoken the truth.

"What a young storyteller you are!" Gilbert exclaimed contemptuously. "I could understand your interfering with the robins if you had not given your word not to do so, because you did not know the mischief you were doing; but it was so

fearfully dishonourable to deliberately break your promise in that way."

Gerald felt bitterly ashamed of himself at that moment, but he considered the lame boy was taking too much upon himself in speaking to him in such scornful, reproving tones.

"I believe your father would be awfully mad with you if he knew how you have behaved," Gilbert proceeded, "and Mr. Bailey too. I—"

"Oh!" Gerald interrupted in an alarmed voice, "you won't tell them, will you? You can't mean to get me into a row! Father would be so angry if he knew. He isn't often angry with me, but when he is put out, he can be awfully stern."

"I won't tell. I'm not a sneak, I hope."

"I am so very sorry I touched the birds," Gerald said earnestly, "I am indeed. Do believe me."



Gilbert looked searchingly at his companion's disturbed countenance, and met a decidedly ashamed look in the bright blue eyes, which assured him that Gerald was, at any rate, now speaking the truth. He hastened to reply—

"I do believe you. No one guessed why the young birds fell out of their nest except Tom and me, and now I know how it was I promise you I will not tell any one but Tom. Dora was awfully upset when she found the young birds dead, and Dinah was sorry too, but they neither of them imagined how it happened, and Tom won't let them know if I persuade him not to. I say, don't meddle with birds' nests again."

"All right, I won't," Gerald answered gratefully. "It's awfully kind of you not to want to get me into a row. You won't tell Angel, will you?"

"No, but the girls are sure to speak to her about the birds. I do wish you hadn't touched them."

"I wish I hadn't."

"Is Mr. Willis in?" Gilbert inquired after a short pause.

"Yes, he's in the studio, expecting you. Shall I tell him you're here?"

"Oh no, thank you. I won't trouble you to go back to the house. I've only brought some of my sketches to show your father; they wouldn't interest you."

The lame boy, sensitive on the subject of his work, had no desire to exhibit it to Gerald. "You were going out, weren't you?" he asked.

"Yes, presently; I'm going to meet Reginald Hope."

"Reginald Hope!" Gilbert echoed in a surprised tone. "I didn't know you knew him. He goes to the Grammar School, and is in my form."

"Then you know him well?" Gerald questioned eagerly. "He's a jolly fellow, isn't he?"

"Humph! I dare say he may be in some people's estimation. I never found him so."

"Don't you like him?"

"No."

"Perhaps he doesn't like you?" Gerald suggested, with a knowing smile.

"Very likely not."

"I wish you'd tell me why you don't like him."

Gilbert looked at his companion, and hesitated a moment before replying—

"I don't know why I should give you my reasons for disliking Hope. You may go and tell him what I say; but there, I don't

care if you do! I dislike and mistrust him because he's not straight."

"Not straight? What do you mean?"

"He is untruthful; he uses bad language; and he bets. Have you seen much of him?"

"No, I have only met him a few times. I liked him—rather."

"I wouldn't have much to do with him if I were you. I don't think he's the sort of fellow your father would like. I shouldn't care for Tom to be very friendly with him. I don't call him a gentleman."

"His father is a doctor, isn't he?"

"Yes, and Reginald is his only son. Dr. Hope is very popular in Wreyford, and he's a very good sort of man, but he lets Reginald have his own way in everything."

Gerald would have liked to ask more questions about the boy whose companionship he found so fascinating,

but Gilbert moved away towards the house, thus bringing the conversation to an end.

Meanwhile, Mr. Bailey and Angel had reached the market, and were busily engaged in making their purchases. It was an amusement to the little girl to hear the market-women and hucksters gossiping with each other, and she lingered around the stalls, listening to the bargaining going on between vendors and purchasers. Mr. Bailey had bought some poultry, and was turning his attention to dairy produce, when Angel felt a light touch on her arm, and turned to find Dora Mickle at her side.

"I'm with mother," Dora explained; and glancing around Angel saw Mrs. Mickle standing before a stall a few yards distant. "I was looking out for you, Angel, because I have something to tell you."

"What is it?" Angel asked a trifle anxiously, noticing with dismay that Dora's blue eyes were full of unshed tears.

"The young robins are dead."

"Dead! Oh, how dreadful! What killed them?"

"I don't know," Dora replied, shaking her head mournfully; "it couldn't have been a cat or a rat, because then the birds would have been taken away. This morning I went out to have a peep at them, and they had fallen out of the nest, and were lying dead on the ground. The mother was weeping close by. Oh, it made my heart ache to listen to her! Isn't it sad?"

"Yes, indeed it is," Angel agreed, her own eyes slightly moist as she thought of the poor mother-bird's grief. "Oh, I am sorry! Gerald was telling me about the young robins this morning. Tom showed them to him yesterday, you know. They were half-fledged, were they not?"

"Yes, in a few days more they would have flown. Father thinks some one must have interfered with them, but who would do that? Come and speak to mother now."

Mrs. Mickle, having finished her purchases, turned to shake hands with Mr. Bailey and his little niece, remarking as she did so to the former—

"I believe Gilbert has gone to Haresdown House this morning to show some of his sketches to Mr. Willis. It is very kind of your nephew to take an interest in my boy. Gilbert makes so few friends."

"But those he makes he keeps, I expect, does he not?" Mr. Bailey asked. "I thought so," he continued, as she assented with a smile; "his friendship is accordingly worth having. He and my nephew seem to get on together; they have tastes in common, no doubt."

"Although Gilbert has known Mr. Willis so short a while, he has formed a very high opinion of him," Mrs. Mickle said earnestly; "but I hope he will not be too constant a visitor at Haresdown House for I fear your nephew may find his society irksome. Gilbert is not always a very genial companion."

"I defy any one to be ungenial with John!"

Mrs. Mickle laughed. She had found the artist, on the few occasions on which she had met him, most entertaining, and she did not wonder that his sunny disposition, which now that his health was better, asserted itself again, was a great attraction to her elder son.

A short while longer she stood talking to Mr. Bailey, whilst Angel and Dora continued their conversation about the robins, discussing by what means the birds could have met their deaths; and then they all left the market, and Mrs. Mickle and Dora went home, leaving Angel and her uncle to pack their purchases into the pony-carriage preparatory to making a start. Just as they were ready to leave, Miss Goodwin came up, and Mr. Bailey insisted on driving her to Myrtle Villa.

"I accept your kind offer most gladly," the old lady said, as she was assisted into the seat by Mr. Bailey, and Angel took her place opposite, with her back to the pony,



"for I find these spring days trying, and my basket is heavy. I always do my own marketing; such has been my custom for—I forget how many years."

She was childishly delighted at the unexpected pleasure of a drive, and chatted gaily as they drove down the main street, enumerating to her companions the various articles her basket contained, and bowing impressively to the few acquaintances they met on the road. She sighed regretfully when, after passing over the bridge, in a few minutes more Myrtle Villa was reached, but brightened perceptibly when Mr. Bailey suggested taking her for a drive on another day.

"Really?" she asked, as having helped her to alight he took his seat again. "Oh, that will be delightful!" and her blue eyes shone with pleasure. "Wait a moment! I must give you some of my lilies of the valley; they are now in full bloom."

She entered her garden, hastened to a sheltered corner shaded by a purple lilac

tree, and gathered a great bunch of sweet-scented flowers, which, returning, she laid in Angel's lap, smiling happily as she listened to the little girl's exclamations of admiration and thanks; then Pixy started afresh, whilst the old lady stood in her gateway till the pony-carriage was out of sight.

Arrived at home, Angel hastened to the studio in search of her father, to give him a share of her flowers; she found Gilbert Mickle on the point of leaving, and was surprised at the brightness of his face. The boy was in an unusually happy frame of mind, Mr. Willis having found great merit in his sketches.

"Only think, Angel," Mr. Willis said to his little daughter after Gilbert had gone, "he is quite self-taught. He never took a drawing lesson in his life. He has real talent, and I have been telling him that if his father will permit it, I will gladly give him some lessons; he would be a promising pupil. What are you looking so thoughtful about, my dear?"

"I was thinking what a disappointment it must be to you, father, that I have no talent for drawing," she responded gravely; "you were so pleased with those freehand drawings Gerald did at school."

"Naturally I was. We shall see what you do at school; if you cannot learn to draw, there are plenty of other things you can master, I am sure."

"Oh yes," Angel agreed, her face brightening. "It will be delightful to go to school. Only a week longer to wait. Dinah and Dora Mickle say they will be sorry when the holidays are over, but I shall be so glad. Gerald hasn't returned yet, has he, father?"

"I have not seen him since you left."

When Gerald strolled into the house a half-hour later, he was in a thoughtful mood. He listened inattentively to the account his sister gave him of how she had spent the morning, and offered no confidences in return.

"Wasn't it dreadful about the little birds?" Angel said, after she had repeated Dora's story of the tragedy.

"Oh, bother the birds!" he cried irritably. "What a fuss every one makes about them! First Gilbert, and now you—"

He paused, noticing Angel's look of astonishment. It was not that he was not sorry the birds were dead, but his feeling of guilt made him hate to hear of them. He turned impatiently away, muttering under his breath that girls were too soft-hearted for anything, and Gilbert Mickle was just as bad.

## CHAPTER XV

## **Commencing the Summer Term**

THE first day of his school life at the Wreyford Grammar School was an unusual experience for Gerald Willis. He found himself in the same form as Tom Mickle, and discovered he need have no fears of being beaten by him in his work, for Tom, though a bright, sharp boy, was rather given to idling, and at the present time his mind was far more interested in sports than in his scholastic duties, which it must be confessed he somewhat neglected, and considered of quite secondary importance to football and cricket. It gratified Gerald to find he satisfied the form master as to his knowledge; therefore, he was in a decidedly complacent state of mind when, on the first day of the summer term, he found himself in the playground for the twenty minutes' break' in the middle of the morning. Then it was he discovered how different were many of the boys to those he had had for companions at the private school which

he had attended in London. The latter had been all the sons of gentlemen, consequently Gerald was far from pleased when a big lad called Rabjohns, whom he knew to be the son of a Wreyford butcher, caught him by the collar and put him through a catechism as to who he was, what he was called, where he lived, and so on. Gerald felt vastly indignant at being questioned by this youth, and would dearly have liked to have told him to mind his own business, but the other boy was too big and strong to pick a quarrel with, so he wisely answered all his questions, though with no good grace.

"So you live at Haresdown House," said Rabjohns, still grasping him by the collar at arm's length, and surveying him from head to heels. "You're a relation of that old Australian chap, I suppose, who's bought the place? I know him by sight—drives a smart little turn-out, doesn't he, and generally has a little girl with him?"

"Yes—my sister."

"You haven't become chummy with any of the Grammar School boys yet, eh?"

"I know Gilbert and Tom Mickle, and Reginald Hope."

"Oh, the Mickles are well enough," Rabjohns allowed condescendingly; "certainly Gilbert's rather too high and mighty for my taste, but he's a clever chap, and keeps up the standard of the school for learning. Tom's a mischievous monkey, but he's a plucky youngster, and one of our shining lights in the football field. As to Reginald Hope—well, he's not likely to have much to say to a kid like you, and the less the better. There, you can go!" And the big boy gave Gerald a playful shake, dropped his hold of him with a good-tempered laugh.

Gerald was highly indignant. It was insufferable to be so spoken to and treated by the son of the man who supplied his uncle with meat. He wondered if Rabjohns knew that Mr. Bailey was one of his father's customers; he hardly thought it possible he could be

aware of the fact. Whilst he was still looking angry and red in the face, he saw Gilbert Mickle at a little distance, leaning on his crutches, watching him with evident amusement. Gerald felt humiliated at the sight of the sarcastic smile on Gilbert's lips, but he could not resist the temptation of speaking to some one he knew, so he strolled up to the lame boy and commenced a conversation.

"I'm in the same form as Tom," he informed Gilbert.

"Are you?" Gilbert said, apparently not interested. "How do you like Rabjohns?" he asked, after a slight pause.

"I don't like him at all. I think he's an impertinent cad."

"Oh no! He's not a bad sort—one of the rough-and-ready kind, you know. He's all right, in his way—though it may not be your way or mine—and so's Higgs. That's Higgs talking to Rabjohns now."



"I see. Who's he?"

"The son of Higgs the stationer."

"Are most of the boys shopkeepers' sons?"

"A great many of them are. This is a public school, and open to any one. You'll soon find your proper level here."

Gerald did not quite understand what his companion meant, but somehow the remark did not please him.

"I advise you to keep in with Rabjohns," Gilbert proceeded carelessly; "he's one of the biggest boys in the school, and it's better for a youngster like you to have him for a friend than not."

Gerald, who had no intention of being on friendly terms with a butcher's son, made no reply. At that moment Reginald Hope passed by, and Gerald called to him eagerly.

"Oh, Hope! Wait a minute!"

But Hope, though he certainly must have heard, elected not to stop, and hurried on without so much as a glance in Gerald's direction, and joined a group of boys about his own age.

"He's like that," Gilbert remarked in what he meant to be a kindly tone, for he was really sorry for his companion's mortification; "he doesn't want you now he's got his old companions. He found it all very well to knock about with you in the holidays when he'd no one else to chum with, but it's different now. Those fellows he's talking to are boarders. If I were you—"

Gerald waited to hear no more; he turned abruptly away, not desirous of listening to unpalatable truths; but after school hours, when he was hurrying down the street on his way home to dinner, Reginald Hope overtook him and walked by his side.

"I say, Willis, I wouldn't stop to talk to you in the playground because I can't stand

Gilbert Mickle," Hope said apologetically; "you understand?"

Gerald's face cleared; he felt he had been unjust to his friend. Of course Hope did not like Gilbert. He might have known that was his reason for passing without a word. The lame boy was not a favourite with any one.

"Oh, it's all right!" Gerald answered, thinking that it had been mean of Gilbert to try to put him against Hope. "I don't care for Gilbert Mickle myself; he's so spiteful."

"Was he spiteful about me? Oh, well, you needn't say; I can see by your face he was. But, never mind about him, now. How do you think you will like the Grammar School?"

"I hardly know. I haven't made friends with any of the boys yet. I only know you, and the Mickles. Rabjohns spoke to me."

"Oh, he's nobody! His father's a butcher, you know. If he was a lord, Rabjohns

couldn't think more of himself. I say, Willis, how much pocket-money are you to have a week?"

Gerald told him. It was a generous allowance for a boy of his age, for his father had lately raised the amount; but Hope appeared to consider it quite inadequate.

"Is that all?" the latter exclaimed. "Why, I get twice as much, and even on that I should have to be awfully close and mean if I did not increase it. You'll have to do as I do, and stretch your money a bit."

"I wish I could, but I don't know how to do that," Gerald said, laughing.

"Oh, I can easily tell you," the other replied seriously.

Whereupon followed a private and confidential conversation, carried on in low tones, until Gerald suddenly remembered that he must not dawdle any longer if he meant to be at Haresdown House by dinner-time.

"I must go," he declared hurriedly, "or I shall keep dinner waiting, and Uncle Edward hates any one to be unpunctual. I'll see you again after school this afternoon."

"Very well. Think over what I've said, and don't be a fool to your own interests. Good-bye!"

Reginald Hope turned on his heel and retraced his footsteps, whilst Gerald ran off homewards. He soon left the town behind him, and reached the bridge over the Wrey, where he paused a moment to take breath; then hurried on past Miss Goodwin's pretty villa, and up the hill. Angel was waiting for him at the gate to tell how she had fared that morning, for she had been to school for the first time to-day, and was longing to recount her new experiences. But he scarcely listened to her eager tale, and she was in consequence not a little disappointed.

It was the same in the evening, when, her lessons prepared for the following day, she would have been so very glad of a

confidant. Gerald, as soon as he had finished his work, which he had done after many grumbles because his sister was no longer allowed to assist him, went out to join Reginald Hope, thus destroying her hopes of a chat with him that night. She saw very little of her brother nowadays, and sometimes it almost seemed to her that he loved her less than he used to. In the old time, in the dingy London lodgings, though he had always domineered over her, he had been generally affectionate and kind; now he was often impatient, and vexed with her when she could not see everything in the same light as he did; and he resented the fact that she did not help him with his lessons, quite unmindful that it was their father who had set his veto against her doing so.

Mr. Willis was in his studio, busy over some illustrations for an order he had received by post that day; and knowing it would not do to disturb him, Angel put on her hat and strolled out to her own patch of garden, where she stood meditatively

regarding the plants she had potted out a few days previously. She was thinking of her brother, and wondering why, though he had the same home and advantages as herself and the same reasons for happiness, he was not as contented as she was. He grumbled as much or more now than he had done in their London lodgings. Then he had bewailed their poverty; now, though he had plenty of the blessings of life, he still wished for more. Only that morning he had borrowed money from his sister, as he had been in the habit of doing lately—money which she knew he never meant to return; and whilst he kept her poor, he yet appeared never to have enough for himself. She was certain her father would be greatly displeased if he was aware of this; and at the same time she dreaded his knowing it, and yet realized that he ought to know. But she could not tell tales of Gerald! She had grown up to hide his faults, and make much of his good qualities, not wisely, of course, but with the sincere desire of shielding him from all unpleasantness because he was younger than she was,

and the affection she bore him was a deep, protecting love. Besides, she had promised her mother to be good to Gerald, and she was trying to keep her word according to her own idea of what being good to him meant. Presently Mr. Bailey entered the garden, and interrupted her troubled meditation by calling to her to come and see how the apple blossom had opened during the last few days. She followed him into the orchard where the gnarled boughs of the old apple trees, so brown and bare a short while ago, were now one mass of pink and white bloom; and listened with the ready attention which always pleased her uncle whilst he pointed out the different spots where he intended planting new trees in the fall of the year.

"Not but what the old trees will last my time," he told her smilingly, "but one must look ahead, and not live for self alone. Ah, I knew these trees as saplings, for my father planted this orchard, and I've not forgotten the taste of the fruit, or the names of the different apples I used to



fancy when I was a boy. Butter-boxes! Quarantines! Barter's beauties! Ah, my dear, your grandfather and I knew the best sorts for eating, and I've no doubt you and Gerald will gain the same knowledge when autumn comes."

She thought it very possible. There was a rustic seat in one corner of the orchard upon which they sat down, whilst he turned the conversation to the subject of school, and inquired how she had done that morning; whereupon she told him that she was not as far behind other girls of her age in general knowledge as she had feared she would be, which happy state of affairs she put down to her having always assisted Gerald with his home lessons.

"I know I shall like it at school," she said earnestly, "and I mean to learn all I can. Dinah Mickle is such a kind girl; she has introduced me to several of her friends, and she has promised to help me about anything I do not understand."

"That is certainly very kind of her," Mr. Mickle agreed; "a helping hand is of great value sometimes. I am glad you like the Mickle children. Do you know it is settled that Gilbert is to take drawing and painting lessons from your father? Mr. Mickle called here this afternoon, and the matter was arranged. Your father wanted to give Gilbert the lessons, but Mr. Mickle objected to that, and insisted on paying, which, as a business man, I think quite right. So the lad is to come every Saturday afternoon for a couple of hours. Do you favour the idea?"

"Oh yes, Uncle Edward, if you and father do. Oh, don't you think father is ever so much better?"

"Yes, thank God! I have an idea it may turn-out that illness of his was for the best after all. It was a sad disappointment about his picture; but when Providence interposes and prevents our carrying out the work we had intended, I think we may rest assured that there's a wiser hand than ours guiding our affairs. What do you say, my dear?"

"I am sure you are right, Uncle Edward. Mother used to talk to me like that, and say we must have faith in God, even when we can't see the reason for what He does."

"And that happens so often, doesn't it, child? But God's sight is clear where ours is dim; and if He denies us something on which we have set our hearts, often it is to give us a greater blessing still. He knows best, that's certain. 'We walk by faith, and not by sight,' you know."

That night, when Angel pulled up her bedroom blind before getting into bed, she uttered an exclamation of delight. Her room was at the back of the house, overlooking the kitchen garden and orchard. The young May moon had arisen, and by its soft light the little girl could see the shadowy old grey church on the hill, and the stretch of green, flower-decked meadows which lay between it and Haresdown House.

"How lovely! oh, how lovely!" she exclaimed. "And, oh, how beautiful the

orchard looks! No wonder uncle loves the place so much."

Her heart was full of affection and gratitude towards Mr. Bailey for his goodness to her and those she loved. That her father fully appreciated his generosity and kindness she well knew, but she was not so sure about Gerald. The latter took everything as a matter of course; indeed, since they had come to Wreyford she had had many occasions to notice her brother's selfishness, and had begun to contrast his behaviour to her to the manner in which the Mickle boys treated their sisters—even with Gilbert it was always "girls first." Then she reproached herself for doubting her brother's affection, and jumped into bed with the determination to worry about him no longer. No doubt he was right when he said boys had more need of money than girls; but, nevertheless, she could not blind herself to the fact that Gerald was acquiring the habit of spending beyond his means. The more

money he had, the more money he wanted.

## CHAPTER XVI

### Gilbert's Suspicions

THE first few weeks of the summer term passed swiftly and happily for Angel; she became a favourite with governesses and pupils, but still Dinah and Dora Mickle were her chief friends, and she generally spent Saturday afternoons in their company, taking long walks and coming home laden with flowers and ferns.

How beautiful were the shady lanes around Wreyford in those early summer

days, when the foliage still retained the freshness of spring. The green corn in the fields was growing apace, honeysuckle and wild roses were bursting into bloom, and the grass in the meadows waved in the breeze, almost ready to be mowed.

Gilbert Mickle was making good progress with his drawing. He looked forward to the afternoons spent in the artist's company as the happiest in the week, and felt sincerely grateful to his father for allowing him to receive the lessons which he so greatly valued. As a rule, only Mr. Willis and Gilbert were in the studio on Saturday afternoons; but if it happened to be wet, sometimes Angel would venture to join them, and sit by the window as quiet as a mouse with her book or work, never uttering a word unless she was spoken to. Mr. Willis and Gilbert often conversed as they worked. Their talk was frequently beyond Angel's understanding, for they would discuss subjects about which the little girl was ignorant; on such occasions Gilbert's face would brighten, and his tongue

become fluent, his mantle of reserve would drop from him, and he would appear at his best. He was growing much attached to Mr. Willis, attracted by his genial disposition and his never-failing tact.

One afternoon he was returning from Haresdown House when he encountered Angel at the foot of the hill, and stopped to inquire if she had been with his sisters.

"No," she replied; "they told me they were going shopping with your mother. I've been to deliver a note for Uncle Edward in the town. He asked Gerald to take it; but Gerald wanted to play cricket, and so—"

"But Gerald is not playing cricket," he broke in; "at least, I think not."

"Oh yes," Angel assured him. "He told me he was going to practise bowling at the nets."

Gilbert looked incredulous, for he had his own reasons for doubting this statement, as on his way to Haresdown House that

afternoon he had caught sight of Gerald and Reginald Hope, with their fishing rods, walking in the opposite direction to the field where the Grammar School boys played cricket. He had imagined they were bound for the clay pits to fish, as they were going that way.

"What makes you think Gerald is not playing cricket?" Angel asked, a trifle anxiously, after a brief pause, adding, "He wouldn't tell me a story about it. He would have taken Uncle Edward's note himself if he hadn't wanted to play cricket."

"I—I suppose so."

"You suppose so? You don't think he'd tell me a story, do you?"

Gilbert made no answer. Angel looked puzzled and a little hurt.

"Well, good-bye," she said stiffly, casting a reproachful glance at him; "I mustn't stay talking any longer, for it's nearly teatime."



"Good-bye," he answered, and stood leaning on his crutches, gazing after her as she commenced to climb the hill, wondering what could have induced her brother to tell her a deliberate untruth, for that Gerald had done so he was certain in his own mind. He turned towards Wreyford, and, after crossing the bridge, was very soon in the main street. Within sight of his own home he met Gerald Willis himself, and stopped him.

"Hulloa, Willis!" he cried. "What sport, then?"

"What do you mean?" Gerald asked, growing crimson. "I don't understand you."

"Oh, yes, you do! I saw you with you and Hope with your fishing rods, and I perceive from the white clay on your boots where you have been. You've been fishing in the clay pits, haven't you?"

"Y—es," Gerald answered hesitatingly. "Hope has a new aquarium, and he asked

me to go with him and catch some fish to put in it—those in the clay pits are just the size and sort he wants. We didn't have much sport this afternoon, though; we shall have to go again."

"What have you done with your rod?" Gilbert questioned curiously.

"Oh, I left it at Hope's house."

"Because you didn't want your sister to see you return with it, I suppose," the other remarked with a slight sneer. "What made you tell her a lie, and say you were going to play cricket?"

"Oh, I say, I wish you'd mind your own business," Gerald cried hotly. "Why need you interfere? It's nothing to do with you. You've no right to say I told a lie."

"But you did!" Gilbert declared in cold accents of disgust.

Gerald's eyes fell beneath the other's accusing glance. For a minute the lame

boy hesitated whether to continue the conversation or not; then he said—

"Of course, it's nothing to do with me, really; but it's so—so dishonourable to wilfully mislead any one. Your sister told me you had gone to the cricket-field—I knew you had not. I was—"

"Did you tell her so?" Gerald interrupted in dismay.

"No."

"That's all right, then. It doesn't do to let girls know everything, and Angel's awfully curious."

"Why didn't you tell her the truth? There was no harm in your going fishing."

Gerald was silent. He had no intention of acknowledging that the neighbourhood of the clay pits was forbidden ground to him.

"I know Reginald Hope thinks lightly of honour and truthfulness," Gilbert

proceeded, "but I'm surprised you should let him influence you. I say, Willis, if I were you I'd knock off being so friendly with him, I would indeed. No good will come of your intercourse with him, I feel sure of that. I believe he has you under his thumb already."

"You mind your own business!" Gerald retorted rudely. "Hope's a great friend of mine, and I'm not going to stand here and listen to you running out against him. You're jealous of him, that's what you are, because he's so much more popular at school than you are yourself."

The passionate colour flamed to Gilbert's face, but he calmed his temper with an effort as he responded with unusual gentleness and forbearance—

"You're making a mistake, Willis, and you'll find it out some day."

Gerald uttered a wrathful ejaculation, and turning on his heel walked off with his head held very high, and his heart full of feelings of resentment and anger. How

he hated Gilbert Mickle for his interference. No thought of his sin in wilfully deceiving his sister entered his mind; no sense of the wickedness of disobedience troubled him. His conscience had pricked him when he had first begun to deviate from the straight path of truth; but by slow degrees it had been successfully silenced, and now it only troubled him occasionally.

Gilbert Mickle returned home in any thing but a tranquil frame of mind. He felt certain that Gerald's acquaintance with Reginald Hope was leading him into evil ways, and he knew that Gerald's relations were utterly unconscious of the fact. Ought he to tell them? That was the question which troubled him and brought a cloud of anxiety to his face. Indecision is always painful; and Mrs. Mickle, who was alone in the sitting-room on his return, was much struck by the troubled expression on his countenance. He generally came home in good spirits from Haresdown House. She told him she had been shopping with his sisters, and

then inquired how he had got on with his drawing lesson that afternoon.

"Very well, mother," he replied. "I enjoyed it as I always do; and Mr. Willis says I am making good progress."

"But something is amiss! What has gone wrong? Nothing about Tom, I hope?"

"Oh, no, no! It's nothing to do with us, really, but—well, you know, mother, I don't usually interfere with other people's business, but I like Mr. Willis and Mr. Bailey so much, and the girls are fond of Angel—in short, it's about Gerald I'm bothered. I believe if he isn't stopped he'll be ruined."

"What do you mean, Gilbert? Ruined? How?"

He proceeded to explain at some length how Gerald's spare time was spent mostly in the company of Reginald Hope and his friends; and how Gerald had deliberately lied to his sister that

afternoon, to all of which Mrs. Mickle listened in dismayed silence.

"What makes you have such a bad opinion of Reginald Hope?" she asked, when her son had finished his tale. "Of course, I know his father indulges him, and allows him to have his own way; but is there any real harm in him?"

"He will tell any lie if it suits his purpose, and he has such a plausible tongue that he would easily dupe a youngster like Willis. Then, he bets and gambles."

"Bets! gambles!" Mrs. Mickle echoed in accents of intense astonishment. "Impossible! You must be mistaken, Gilbert, surely."

"No, mother, I'm not. Tom knows it too. A great deal of betting and gambling goes on amongst a certain set of the Grammar School boys on the sly; and I believe Hope is one of the ringleaders. I can't prove it, but I know it's true, nevertheless. There would be an awful row if it was found out."

"Oh, Gilbert, you surprise and distress me. The masters cannot be aware of anything of the kind?"

"No, no! It's all done secretly. That's why it's so difficult to speak out. I couldn't charge Hope with betting, although I'm certain he does. I'm so afraid he will induce young Willis to bet too, if he hasn't done it already."

"Oh, do you think it's possible he has?"

The boy shook his head doubtfully.

He knew Gerald Willis had been short of money lately, and that he had tried to borrow from Tom, who, however, had not been in the position to lend, having spent his week's allowance. Tom was not as friendly with Gerald now as he had been during the Easter holidays, for the former was devoted to cricket, and the latter generally found other amusements.

"Dear, dear!" Mrs. Mickle exclaimed, shaking her head sorrowfully; "I am very grieved to hear such a report of Gerald



Willis. You have warned him against Reginald Hope, you say, and he would not listen to you? I am sorry for that."

"Perhaps I didn't go the right way about it," Gilbert admitted. "I dare say I bungled."

"How would it be to speak to his father?"

"Oh no, mother! That would be too presumptuous. I don't see I can do anything more at present, at any rate. I believe, Mr. Willis is the sort of man who would never think of suspecting evil of any one; I have not the least doubt but that he considers Gerald perfectly truthful and honourable; and Angel is so fond of her brother, that I'm sure it would take a great deal to make her think any harm of him."

"And yet the girls say he puts upon her in many ways," Mrs. Mickle said reflectively, "but I can understand how that has come about. She has always made his happiness her first thought; she told me she promised her dead mother to

be loving and patient with him. Angel is a dear, good child."

"Gerald is very selfish," Gilbert remarked. "I've often noticed how he manages to get everything he wants when I've been at Haresdown House, and wondered that Mr. Willis hasn't noticed it too. I believe Mr. Bailey sees it."

"It's a good thing if he does. Well, Gilbert, I do not see that you can interfere further in this matter; you have done all you can by warning Gerald against Reginald Hope, which I consider you were right in doing, though I have no doubt your intention was misconstrued."

"Yes; Gerald considers I am jealous of Hope; in fact, he said so. That's not true."

"No, dear, of course it's not." Mrs. Mickle crossed the room to her son's side, and leaning over the back of the chair on which he was seated, pushed back his hair with a gentle hand, and kissed him on the forehead. "I am so pleased to see you show such kindly interest in poor

Gerald," she said; "you are not the first well-intentioned person who has been misjudged."

"Oh, mother, I don't mind that! I'm really sorry for Gerald. Suppose it was our Tom? Besides, Gerald has no mother, and I'm certain if it wasn't for you I should be a great deal worse than I am in every way."

"Oh, my dear, don't say that! If you had not me you would still have your best friend to go to for help and counsel. I may fail you, but God never will. And don't you think we might ask Him to protect poor Gerald from evil, and to show him how wrong it is to be so untruthful? If you can't help the poor misguided boy, we know Jesus can."

Gilbert made no reply; but he looked up at his mother with the tender smile which she loved to see, and she was satisfied that Gerald would be remembered in his prayers. No one realized better than Mrs. Willis how much of Gilbert's temper was the result of a peculiarly sensitive disposition; and that he held himself aloof

from boys of his own age simply from fear of ridicule. He had always protested that he took little interest in other people, but that had been a pretence, as his mother had imagined; and she was certain now that had been the case, for he was as anxious to save Gerald Willis from the toils of evil companions as though he was his own brother, and would have done a great deal to serve him for his own sake, as well as for the sake of his relations.

Mrs. Mickle had a very tender, sympathetic heart, and she could not dismiss Gerald and the suspicions Gilbert entertained about him from her thoughts. If Gilbert's suspicions were correct, surely it was some one's place to open Mr. Willis' eyes to the state of affairs. Was it her place? She could not make up her mind. In her perplexity she consulted her husband, but he seemed unable to advise her, and pointed out that she had no direct charge to bring against Reginald Hope.

Mrs. Mickle had almost decided not to interfere in the matter when the remembrance that the Willis children were motherless caused her to reflect again, and she finally made up her mind that she would call at Haresdown House, and let circumstances guide her as to whether she should broach the subject of Gerald's undesirable acquaintance or not.

"God will show me what to do, and if I must speak, He will teach me what to say," she thought; "I will leave the matter in His hands." And having come to that determination she felt more satisfied.

## CHAPTER XVII

### At Myrtle Villa

"COME in! Oh, do, pray, come in! Oh, surely you were not going to pass my house without calling?"

The speaker was Miss Goodwin, who had waylaid Mrs. Mickle outside Myrtle Villa, on her way to Haresdown House. The old

lady was so persistent in her request that she would "come in and have a chat" that Mrs. Mickle complied, and followed her into the pretty, rose-scented parlour, the window of which commanded a view of the high road beyond the sweetbriar hedge that marked the limits of Miss Goodwin's domain.

"How nice it is to have you here!" Miss Goodwin cried, as she led her visitor to a comfortable chair, and seated herself close by. "You come to see me so seldom, and actually to-day you were going to pass without calling," she added in accents of playful reproach.

"I was going to Haresdown House—" Mrs. Mickle was beginning, when the other broke in—

"Oh, then I am so glad I stopped you, for you would have had a tiring walk for nothing! Mr. Bailey and his nephew are not at home. I saw them drive past here towards the town more than an hour ago, and I am sure they have not returned.

Now, you can remain here with an easy mind, and have tea with me, can you not?"

"Yes, if you will have me, Miss Goodwin."

"Oh, that will be delightful—delightful!" the little lady exclaimed, clasping her hands childishly.

"It will be delightful for me," Mrs. Mickle said. "How pleasant and cool it is here, and how quiet!"

"A little too quiet sometimes," Miss Goodwin remarked, "more especially in the winter; though, to be sure, seldom a day passes without a visitor to cheer my solitude; and now that Haresdown House is occupied again, I can watch the going to and fro between there and the town. Often Mr. Willis comes in and talks to me; he admires my garden, you know. And that dear child, Angel, as she passes by, always looks to see if I am at one of the windows. And I must not forget to tell you that a few days ago Mr. Bailey took me for a long drive in his pony-carriage."



"I am certain you enjoyed that!"

"Oh yes! It was a real treat. He is a very careful driver, and such a kind-hearted, pleasant man!" Miss Goodwin paused momentarily whilst a slightly puzzled expression crossed her face. "I fancy life in Australia must age people," she continued thoughtfully, "for it astonishes me to see how grey Edward Bailey has grown. He looks quite elderly, does he not? But it cannot be for his age, can it? I remember him as a boy, you know!"

"I think he has worked hard all his life till quite lately, and now he is taking a well-earned rest," Mrs. Mickle said gently. "He appears to have settled down very contentedly at Haresdown House; he is evidently much attached to his nephew and the children. Does Gerald Willis come to see you as well as the others, Miss Goodwin?"

"Very seldom. I often have a visit from Gilbert, though. Has he told you, I wonder, that he is going to paint me a picture? No?"

He is, then. Isn't it good of him? What a clever boy he is!"

"Yes," Mrs. Mickle agreed, smiling brightly. "God has given him great abilities, and I trust he will make the best use of them."

"You, may depend upon it he will. He is not one to let his talents rust: God bless the lad!" Miss Goodwin exclaimed fervently. "Now, I will tell you a secret, and it is this. Of all my young friends, Gilbert is my favourite. Tom is a dear boy, and I'm very fond of him, but I confess I do not always understand him. He is continually laughing, and joking, and making fun. But Gilbert is different; he talks so sensibly, and knows so much about flowers and gardening, and he never laughs at me."

"Laughs at you? Oh no! Who would do that? Not Tom?"

"Certainly not Tom! But there are those who do. There's Dr. Hope's son, now! He was whispering and laughing about me when he passed here yesterday with

Gerald Willis. Gerald tried to stop him, but I saw what was going on. Do you think young Hope is a suitable companion for Gerald, Mrs. Mickle?"

"I fear he is not. Look, Miss Goodwin; is not that Angel Willis passing now?"

Miss Goodwin rose from her seat, and going to the window, beckoned to Angel, who was lingering at the gate, to come in. The little girl obeyed the mute invitation, and flushed with pleasure and surprise when she entered the parlour to find Mrs. Mickle there.

"How well you look, my dear!" Mrs. Mickle said as she kissed Angel's bright face. "Isn't she looking much better than when we first knew her, Miss Goodwin?"

"Indeed she is!" the old lady answered. "Now, Angel, my dear child, you need not hurry home, as I know your father and uncle are away. Sit down and entertain Mrs. Mickle whilst I go and speak to Sarah about tea. You must stay, Angel, indeed you must!"

Without waiting for a response, Miss Goodwin flitted out of the room; and the next minute her high, piping voice was heard in the kitchen in consultation with her servant. The old lady was full of excitement and importance at having two unexpected visitors; and she was eager to give them the best she had to offer.

Meanwhile Mrs. Mickle and Angel sat in the parlour in close conversation. The former after a while mentioned Gerald's name, and inquired how he liked his companions at the Grammar School, remarking that she thought Tom did not see much of him nowadays.

"No," Angel answered hesitatingly, a slight shadow crossing her face, "Gerald is very friendly with Reginald Hope, and I think he spends most of his spare time with him; but he does not bring him to Haresdown House."

"How is that, my dear?"

"I—I scarcely know—that is—"

The little girl stopped in confusion. She was strictly truthful; but she could not tell Mrs. Mickle that she believed Gerald was afraid his father would not approve of his friendship with Reginald Hope, and that was the reason why he never invited him to Haresdown House, although he knew Mr. Bailey liked him to entertain his friends in his home. This was only what she surmised to be the real state of the case; she had drawn her own conclusions from a few incautious remarks her brother had let drop on different occasions.

"By the way," Mrs. Mickle said presently, "I want to tell you how dangerous the clay pits are, and advise you to keep away from them. I know boys often go there fishing, and if one fell in it would be almost certain death, and so—"

"Oh," Angel interposed, "Uncle Edward has forbidden us to go there. He told us all about them, how deep they are, and how a man was drowned in one of them some months ago."

"And yet Gerald does go there!" Mrs. Mickle cried involuntarily, now comprehending the reason why he had deceived his sister as to his doings on the preceding Saturday afternoon.

"What do you mean?" Angel asked quickly, her face paling. "Oh, Mrs. Mickle, surely you must be mistaken Gerald would not disobey Uncle Edward like that! Why—why—"

She paused, the anxiety and doubt on her expressive countenance giving place to a look of sad certainty.

"Oh, it is true!" she cried in great distress. "I understand it all now. That is where Gerald went on Saturday afternoon. Gilbert said he had not gone to play cricket. I noticed the clay on his boots when he came home, and—oh, dear, what shall I do? How wrong of him to disobey Uncle Edward like that, and to tell such a story too!"

"It was very wrong of him," Mrs. Mickle said gravely, "if he was my son I should punish him severely."

"But father doesn't know—oh!—you won't tell him? Oh, please, don't tell him!"

"Angel, my dear child, you have no right to shield your brother as you do. Oh, I mean it! Did it never occur to you that in glossing over Gerald's faults you yourself are acting a deceptive part? I know how you love him; and I do not encourage any one to tell tales of another, as a rule, but there are exceptional cases when it is right to speak out. Gerald has disobeyed his uncle, and been very untruthful, I fear; now such behaviour should be stopped, and—"

"I will speak to him! I will make him promise faithfully never to go near the clay pits again!" Angel cried. "He is so thoughtless! Oh, Mrs. Mickle, please, please don't say I ought to tell father! Gerald will be sorry when I point out to him how wicked he has been. And father

would be so grieved! You don't understand how fond and proud he is of Gerald."

"Oh yes, I think I do! Well, I won't say you ought to tell your father—that is, if you can be certain you can persuade Gerald to keep away from the clay pits for the future. Think how terrible it would be if there was an accident! But, there," she proceeded as Angel gave a shudder of horror, "we won't contemplate that. Do believe that I have spoken to you as I have because I care for you very much—you, and Gerald too. I have a motherly interest in you both."

Angel flung her arms impetuously around her kind friend's neck, and kissed her with great affection; whilst she whispered—

"I know, I know! You are so good to me! Oh, if only mother had lived! Oh, Mrs. Mickle, you can't think how much I want her sometimes!"



"Yes, dear, I think I can," was the sympathetic response. "I am sure you and Gerald must miss her dreadfully."

"You will have such a bad opinion of Gerald now," Angel said, with a sigh of deep regret. "I'm afraid you won't like him any more."

"There you are mistaken. I think Gerald is a very lovable sort of boy, but you must not help to spoil him by hiding his faults and failings, because by doing that you are not acting truly yourself. It is often very difficult to be quite true where others are concerned; it is so very easy to blind ourselves to what is blameworthy in those dear to us. Oh, Angel, pray for Gerald. You love him very dearly, I know; but think how weak and powerless your love is compared to the infinite love of Him who died for us all. It is only by His grace, and by His Holy Spirit in our hearts, that we can do aright. Ask Jesus to help and guide you in your dealings with your brother, and He will show you how to act, and what to say."

Angel made no response, for there was a lump in her throat at that moment which prevented her speaking; but Mrs. Mickle's words, so gently and kindly uttered, impressed her greatly, and she was deeply grateful to her for the interest she evinced in Gerald, although she did not realize that it had been an effort to her to speak so plainly as she had done.

Presently Miss Goodwin returned, followed by Sarah, who laid a dainty cloth over the small square table in the centre of the room, upon which she proceeded to place a big blue jar of lovely gloire de dijon roses, and sundry little glass dishes filled with different preserves, which the former had manufactured herself from the fruit grown in her own garden. Then a plum cake was taken out of a cupboard in the sideboard, plates of thin bread and butter were put on either side of the table, Miss Goodwin hovering around, and giving directions all the while.

It would have struck many people that the old lady was making a good deal of fuss about casual visitors; but Mrs.

Mickle knew how it delighted her hostess' hospitable heart to have an occasion to use her silver tea service and her best china tea set, so she sat quietly watching her move first one thing and then another on the table, until at last the silver tea urn was brought in, and Sarah declared the meal ready.

Miss Goodwin, with a guest on each side of her, took the top of the table; and in listening to her chatter, Angel forgot her troubles about Gerald for the time, and was amused and interested. Being really hungry, she made an excellent tea, much to Miss Goodwin's gratification, for the kind old soul liked to see that her visitors duly appreciated the good things she was so pleased to put before them.

Soon after the meal was over, Angel said she thought she ought to go, as no doubt her father and uncle had returned home by that time, and they would wonder at her absence. She found an opportunity to whisper, "I will remember all you said," to Mrs. Mickle before she left, and received

in return an understanding pressure of the hand and a motherly embrace.

As the little girl slowly pursued her way homewards she pondered over Gerald's disobedience and the lie he had told her, and grew very low and depressed. She was not aware that her brother had ever directly lied to her before, though she knew he had often prevaricated about different matters.

"It would make father very unhappy if he thought Gerald told stories," she reflected, "and I don't think he ought to be troubled now after his having been so ill. I know the doctor told Uncle Edward father must not be worried. I'll speak to Gerald, and see what he has to say before I make up my mind what to do. I wish I knew what was right; I must ask God to show me, as Mrs. Mickle said."

In spite of her desire to shield Gerald all she could, she was very indignant with him for behaving so deceitfully. Her cheeks burnt with shame when she remembered how Gilbert had looked at

her last Saturday afternoon, when she had informed him Gerald had gone to the cricket-field. She had failed to understand his surprise and hesitation at the time, but now she could understand it all even the look of embarrassment which had crossed the lame boy's tell-tale countenance when, in speaking of Gerald, she had said, "You don't think he'd tell me a story, do you?" Oh, how humiliated she felt! Of course, Gilbert had known that Gerald had told her a story, but he had not liked to say so. It was shameful of Gerald to have put her in such a position.

On reaching Haresdown House she found her father and uncle had come home, having returned by a circuitous route. Gerald was in the dining-room preparing his lessons for the morrow; but Angel did not join him. After explaining to Mr. Willis where she had been, she went upstairs to her own room and began to learn her lessons there, not wishing to encounter her brother till she felt more composed. She shed many bitter tears as she bent

over her books, and consequently it took her a long while to get over her work.

The lessons finished at last, she went to the open window and stood looking out; but she saw nothing of the fair landscape, for her eyes were misty, and her mind too preoccupied to concern itself with the beauties of nature. Presently she heard her brother's voice beneath the window calling to her.

"I'm going into the orchard, Angel," he said; "will you come too?"

"Yes," she responded quickly. "I'll be with you soon."

"All right!" he shouted back as he strolled away. "Be quick; I want a talk with you."

The tears had gone from her eyes now; but her heart was throbbing painfully. She knew the time had come when she must speak to Gerald of his misdoings; and with a fervent prayer to God for help, she went soberly downstairs, and a few

minutes later joined her brother in the orchard.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### In the Orchard

ANGEL found her brother seated upon the rustic seat, on the back of which he had been cutting his initials. He shut his pocket-knife as she sat down by his side, and turned his attention to her, remarking—

"Father says you had tea with Miss Goodwin and Mrs. Mickle at Myrtle Villa. Didn't you find it rather slow?"

She shook her head, but made no reply in words. Surprised at her silence, he looked at her scrutinously, and noted the signs of recent grief upon her countenance.

"You've been crying!" he exclaimed in accents of intense astonishment, for his sister was not of a tearful disposition as a rule. "What's the matter? Have you quarrelled with the girls at school, or—"



"Oh no, no! But I'm very unhappy, Gerald, and—and it's about you!"

"About me!" Gerald's face at first expressed nothing but bewilderment; then he flushed and began to look somewhat uneasy. "What me?" he asked. "What have I been doing to make you cry? Why, we've not been alone together for days. You're talking nonsense."

"I have heard where you were on Saturday afternoon," she said in low, reproachful tones; "you went to the clay pits fishing, and you told me that you were going to play cricket with the grammar school boys. Oh, what made you tell me such a story? And why did you disobey Uncle Edward?"

For a moment there was dead silence, then Gerald burst out wrathfully, "I know who told you! It was that sneaking cripple, Gilbert Mickle! But I'll be even with him yet! Oh, how I hate him! He's always prying into my business—and interfering with me! The wretched—"

"Hush, hush!" Angel interrupted indignantly. "Don't speak like that. How can you, Gerald? Besides, it was not Gilbert who told me."

"Not Gilbert? Who was it, then?"

"It doesn't matter who it was," she replied, "and I shall not tell you."

"Don't! I don't care! It was some meddlesome busybody! If I did go to the clay pits, what has that to do with you?" he demanded angrily.

"A great deal. How should I feel if you fell into one of the pits and got drowned?" And the tears welled into her eyes at the thought.

"Pooh! I'm not likely to do that!" he retorted scornfully.

"Did you forget Uncle Edward had forbidden you to go there? But, no! You told me a story, thinking it wouldn't be found out where you'd been."

"Well, you needn't make such a fuss about it. I won't tell you what isn't true again. I went with Reginald Hope to get some fish for his aquarium; I couldn't well refuse to go; if I had, it would have seemed so disobliging."

"Not if you had told him Uncle Edward had forbidden us to go near the clay pits."

Gerald was silent, not deeming it prudent to explain that he had informed his friend of that fact, and had been laughed out of the thought of obedience.

Gilbert Mickle had not been very far wrong when he had said that Reginald Hope had Gerald under his thumb.

"I didn't want to go," the boy acknowledged at length, "but Hope made such a point of it, and so—and so I went. Of course, I know it wasn't right of me, and I wouldn't have father or Uncle Edward hear about it for anything. You won't tell them, will you, Angel?" And he placed a coaxing arm around his sister's neck.

"I don't want to get you into trouble," she said gently, "but you have behaved so very badly, and—and I want to do what's right."

"You always do that, Angel," he told her with sincerity in his tone, "you're heaps better than I am; but then," he added, "you're only a girl, and it's easy for you to be good."

"It isn't easy at all. I don't know what you mean. Oh, I suppose you think I haven't as many temptations to do wrong as you have! I don't know about that; but I know I find it very hard to be good—oh, very hard! Oh, Gerald, why did you tell me such a story? Did you forget how wicked it was, and that God knew all about it?"

He turned his guilty face aside from his sister's accusing eyes as he replied—

"I—I'm sorry I told you that yarn about going to play cricket, I am indeed, though you mayn't believe it. You'll forgive me, won't you?"

"Oh yes, I will! And you'll ask God to forgive you, too, Gerald? You know," she proceeded timidly, fearful lest he should turn upon her and tell her "not to preach," as he sometimes did when she tried to speak to him seriously, "that when we do anything wrong it's really against God we sin. Don't you remember how mother used to tell us that? I remember once when I was quite small I had been naughty, and afterwards when I was really sorry, she taught me a prayer from the fifty-first Psalm, and I always say it now. It was this: 'Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.' Mother said that if we remembered that, we shouldn't fall into sin so easily. You see what I mean, don't you? You didn't mind telling me a story, but you would have minded if you had thought of God. You'll ask Him to forgive you, won't you?"

"Yes, I will," Gerald responded in an unusually gentle tone, momentarily impressed by the solemn words of the psalmist which his sister had repeated.

"And you'll promise never to go near the clay pits with Reginald Hope again?" she questioned eagerly.

"Oh yes! He's asked me to go on Saturday, but I'll make an excuse. I didn't enjoy myself a bit the other afternoon. You won't tell father or Uncle Edward now, will you, Angel?" Then, as she shook her head, he kissed her with a sudden burst of affection, recalling many occasions on which he had not been so considerate to her as he might have been. "You're a good little soul!" he cried. "If you were like some boys' sisters, you would only be too pleased to get me into a row! But you were never spiteful like that."

"I hope not," she replied, smiling, and flushing with happiness at his loving tone. "It hurts me as much as it does you, I think, when you're in trouble! And—and it makes me so unhappy if you're

disobedient—but we won't speak of that any more! What is it you have to say to me?" she asked, suddenly remembering that he had said he wanted a talk with her.

"Oh, nothing much," he answered a little evasively, "only about things in general. It's an age since we had a good long yarn together. Tell me how you are getting on at school."

Angel complied willingly, for she was pleased that her brother showed interest in what concerned her. She told him she was learning music; her mother had commenced teaching her, but she had never had a lesson till now since Mrs. Willis' death. She explained that it had been arranged for her to practise every afternoon at school, as there was no piano at Haresdown House.

"I wish Uncle Edward would buy one," Gerald remarked; "perhaps he will."

"Oh no, I should think not! Pianos are very expensive," Angel reminded him.

"I don't believe he would mind the expense! How well mother used to play, didn't she? Father used to say she could make the piano speak."

"Yes, and he used to ask her to play to him evenings, and she would sing to us, too. I do hope I shall get on with my music, I love it so. One Saturday afternoon, I was passing the church with Dinah and Dora Mickle, and we heard some one playing the organ—it was the organist practising. We went in and sat down in a pew, and listened to him for more than an hour. I think sacred music is grand, don't you? Dinah knew the names of some of the pieces he played; one was, 'Comfort ye my people.' Oh, it was beautiful!" And she began to sing the refrain softly under her breath.

Gerald had been listening in rather an absentminded manner, his mind occupied with wondering who could have told tales of him to Angel, since it had not been Gilbert Mickle.



"It's Dora's birthday next week," Angel said presently, "and I believe we are to be invited to the Mickles to have tea in the garden. Won't it be fun? Dora will be the Queen of the day. She will be nine years old. I know what Dinah is going to give her for a birthday present, she has been saving her money for it for weeks, but I've promised not to tell. I cannot think what I shall give Dora; I've only eighteen pence!"

"Eighteen pence," Gerald repeated thoughtfully. "And when is Dora's birthday?"

"Next Tuesday."

"Oh! Well, you wouldn't mind lending me sixpence or so, if I pay you again on Saturday, would you?"

"No—o," Angel responded doubtfully, looking aghast, and wishing she had not mentioned the subject of money; "but—are you sure you will be able to pay me then?"

"Quite—quite sure!"

She took her purse from her pocket, and counted sixpence into his hand in coppers, then paused. He looked at her a little impatiently.

"I've only a shilling besides," she said. "Isn't that enough?"

"Oh, you may as well let me have the shilling as well!"

She did so, and returned her purse to her pocket, looking very sober. Gerald's spirits seemed suddenly to rise.

"You needn't fear that you won't get it again on Saturday," he told her gaily, "I promise solemnly to pay it back this time."

"Oh, if you do, you needn't bother about the rest of what you owe me," she responded quickly. "I don't want to be mean, but I should be dreadfully put out if I couldn't give Dora a birthday present!"

"Of course you would. I think I must give her something myself; I'll see about it. I wonder what she'd like!"

Angel was quite unconscious that her brother had asked her to join him for a talk with the idea of inducing her to lend him some money, and that she had made the broaching of the subject easy for him. If he really repaid her on Saturday she would be pleased to think she had been able to serve him. The little girl would have been horrified if she had known how her money would be spent. The truth of the matter was that Gerald had fallen into the clutches of unscrupulous hands, for Reginald Hope had soon discovered the weak points in his character; and Gerald, flattered at being noticed by a boy older than himself, had been easily induced to indulge in betting on a small scale. Unfortunately, sometimes he had won—otherwise, perhaps he would not have continued in what he knew in his heart to be an evil course—but oftener he lost, and then found great difficulty in paying his debts. At the present time he owed

Reginald Hope several shillings, and the eighteen pence he had just borrowed from his sister he intended handing over on the morrow to the boy who was certainly his evil genius. He hoped by Saturday to win back some of the money he had lost, and by that means to keep faith with Angel.

Gerald, as may be imagined, was not at all happy at this period of his life. He was shrewd enough to see that the fact of his being under the patronage of Reginald Hope was quite enough to make many of the Grammar School boys regard him with suspicion; even the Mickles were not as genial to him as they had been at first, and Rabjohns had been heard to say that "Young Willis was a regular toady to Hope," a remark which had made Gerald all the angrier because he could not fail to recognize there was truth in it. It had been a great surprise to find that the butcher's son, with his plain unvarnished speech, was respected in the school far more than the doctor's son, with his fascinating manners and plausible

tongue; and that instead of Hope's refusing to know Rabjohns, it was Rabjohns who actually declined to have anything to do with Hope.

The brother and sister remained in the orchard till the sun set, and it began to grow chilly under the trees; then they rose, and walked towards the house.

"I wish you'd tell me who spoke to you about my having been fishing in the clay pits last Saturday," Gerald said coaxingly; "I should like to know who it was."

But Angel shook her head and refused to tell. "You'll keep your word, and not go there again, won't you?" she questioned.

"Oh yes, of course I will! You needn't think any more about it. You might tell me—"

"And Gerald," she interposed, "you'll remember to pray to God to help you to tell the truth, won't you? You'll—"

"Oh, you've said all that before! Yes, yes," he added hastily as he saw her

countenance fall, and her eyes fill with tears. "Don't you worry about me; I'm all right."

They found supper on the table when they entered the house. Mr. Willis noticed his little daughter's manner seemed unusually subdued; but he thought very probably the hot summer day had tired her. He was looking very bright himself, and was so much better that every one noticed the great improvement in his appearance since his arrival at Wreyford. He had taken up his work again with renewed energy, and declared, when his uncle warned him not to do too much, that there was little fear of that, for he felt nearly well.

After supper he sat down on the sofa, and drew Angel down by his side, as he generally did of an evening, and bade her give him an account of her doings that day. She obeyed, and they conversed together until it was time for her to go to bed.

Gerald had retired for the night early, and was firm asleep when his sister peeped into his room before going to her own. She stole to his bedside, and kissed him lightly on the forehead. He was utterly unconscious of her presence, for the pressure of her soft lips was not enough to disturb him, and he never knew that she knelt down and prayed God to forgive him his sins, and teach him to be a good boy.

So Angel's loving, faithful heart was lifted in prayer for the brother who, after all his promises, had neglected to pray for himself.

## CHAPTER XIX

### Gerald's Temper

THE following Saturday evening found Angel with her father and uncle in the churchyard on Haresdown hill. They had been for a walk, and now stood leaning over the churchyard wall admiring the view, and watching the sunset. The western sky was gorgeous in its colouring, its hues deepening from delicate shell pink to brilliant crimson and gold, the reflected glory of which lit up the old grey church, and cast a rosy glow over the meadows lying between Haresdown hill and the town, over which a faint grey mist was now rising.

There had been silence for some time when Mr. Bailey glanced from one to the other of his companions, and said with a smile—

"I wonder what we have been thinking of these last few minutes. Not one of us has spoken a word!"

"I was watching that cloud," Mr. Willis returned, indicating a snowy speck in the western sky, "and trying to remember a poem I once read called 'The Evening



Cloud,' written, I presume, after watching another such a glorious sight as this. The poet imagined the white cloud slowly floating towards the sunset an emblem of the immortality of the soul. I cannot remember all the poem, only these lines—"

"Emblem, methought, of the departed soul

To whose white robe the gleam of bliss is given,

And by the breath of mercy made to roll

Right onwards to the golden gates of Heaven.

Where to the eye of faith it peaceful lies,

And tells to man his glorious destinies."

"Is not that a beautiful idea most beautifully expressed?"

Angel slipped her hand through her father's arm, and met his eyes with understanding in her own. She needed no

words to tell her that he was thinking of her mother, whose faithful soul had reached the golden gates of Heaven, and was now safe in the presence of God.

"It is indeed a beautiful idea," Mr. Bailey answered, whilst Angel, after that one glance at her father, watched the white cloud with quickened interest. "Now, I will tell you what I was thinking of," he continued seriously, "and then Angel must let us know her thoughts too!"

The little girl looked somewhat embarrassed on hearing this. She had been thinking of her brother, and wondering where he was spending the evening, for he had left the house after tea without telling any one where he had been going, and had thus lost the walk with his father and uncle, which she felt certain he would have enjoyed. Gerald had not, as yet, paid her the eighteen pence he had borrowed from her a few days previously; and she had been considering whether there was the least probability of his doing so, or if she would be prevented from giving Dora a birthday

present after all. So her thoughts had not been happy ones, and she was most undesirous of making them known.

"I have been thinking how grateful I ought to be to God for giving me my heart's desire," Mr. Bailey said earnestly. Then, as the others looked at him inquiringly, he proceeded to explain— "I always wished to return to my native town to end my days, and I worked hard with the fixed idea of coming home and settling here. That ambition was always before me; but I never dreamt I should have an opportunity of buying back Haresdown House. It has been such happiness to visit once more the places that were familiar to me when your father and I were boys, John. And I cannot express how much the companionship of yourself and your children enhances my pleasure in everything. Think how lonely I should be but for you!"

"And think what would have become of us all but for you, Uncle Edward," Mr. Willis responded, with deep feeling in his tone. "I should have been sent to a hospital

when I was so ill, and I dare not contemplate what would have become of Angel and Gerald then!"

"God would have taken care of them," Mr. Bailey reminded him, "but I am glad I happened to be in England when you wanted me. Happened! Why, I'm talking as though it was just by chance, when we know all the while there was no chance about it. It was God's wisdom that planned the right time for my return."

"Do you think God plans everything for us?" Angel asked.

"Yes, my dear, I do; but sometimes we're foolish and think we know better than He does what is good for us, and we complain because He denies us something upon which we have set our hearts, and we put our will against His, and wonder because we are unsatisfied and unhappy; and then, maybe, He shows us why what He denied us was not for us, and we find He knew best. It saves a lot of fretting and worrying if one can only learn to trust in God."

"Yes," the little girl agreed thoughtfully, recalling that evening in the orchard when the apple trees had been in bloom, and Mr. Bailey had talked to her in a similar fashion with "God knows best" for his text—words which to him were the philosophy of life, the expression of his faith in the perfect wisdom and goodness of God. "Yes," she repeated, "but it is very difficult—often— isn't it, father?"

Mr. Willis nodded, his eyes still fixed on the sky, where the sun had now disappeared from view. Mr. Bailey pointed to the mist arising in the valley, and suggested the advisability of moving homewards.

"The fog is from the sea." he said, "and is evidently coming in with the tide."

"But the tide does not flow so far up the river as Wreyford, does it?" Mr. Willis asked, in surprise.

"No, but it is felt within a few miles of here," Mr. Bailey replied. "I remember we used to say at Haresdown House, when

the wind was blowing in a certain direction, that we could smell the sea."

"The air is certainly always beautifully fresh and invigorating," Mr. Willis said. "Well, I am loath to move yet, but I suppose it would be wiser to do so."

"Oh yes, father!" Angel cried eagerly. "You know the doctor said you must take care of yourself, and not run the risk of catching cold by being out of doors too late."

They passed through the churchyard, and out by the lych-gate into the road, Angel with her arm linked in her father's.

"I wish Gerald had been with us this evening," the latter remarked, "I believe he would have enjoyed the walk. I wonder where he has gone."

"I don't know," Angel answered, "I expect he is with Reginald Hope, he spends most of his spare time with him."

"Young Hope is older than Gerald," Mr. Willis said reflectively, "so it is rather strange they should be such close friends. I suppose they have tastes in common. I see very little of Gerald nowadays. I hope you don't help him with his lessons now, Angel?"

"Oh no!" she responded promptly; "he learns them quite by himself."

"That's well. You have enough to do to attend to your own. By the way, I am afraid Gerald is growing extravagant; he spends more money than he ought."

"Why do you give it to him, John?" Mr. Bailey inquired abruptly, whilst Angel started and grew red. "I thought he had a regular weekly allowance?"

"He has, but he always exceeds it."

"I don't think he should be allowed to do that," Mr. Bailey remarked gravely, "he should be taught to keep within his means. I suppose you allow him as much as you consider he ought to have?"

"Certainly. I expect he fritters away his money at the 'tuck-shop;' he has a great liking for sweetmeats, has he not?" Mr. Willis asked of Angel.

"Yes," she admitted, turning her face away from her father's gaze lest it should betray her uneasy thoughts to his observant eyes.

"But he cannot spend all his money in sweets," Mr. Bailey objected. "Why, one day last week he had half-a-crown from you, John; and I know the next morning he had not a farthing, because he came to me and asked me to give him sixpence."

"Asked you to give him sixpence!" Mr. Willis cried in surprise, and Angel, glancing at him quickly, saw he looked very vexed. "Did you let him have it, Uncle Edward?" he asked.

"No, I did not. I told him I considered he spent too much money, and lectured him on his extravagance! I really think, John, you should interfere; I believe he keeps Angel poor by borrowing from her."



"Oh, Uncle Edward!" the little girl cried, starting violently. "How did you find out that? I never told you."

"I overheard your brother asking you for money one day, my dear, and I have noticed that rarely spend any on yourself, so I drew my own conclusions. Ah, I see I am right!"

She did not know what to say. Her father watched the changing expressions of her face with growing wonderment, and noted that her grey eyes were full of tears.

"Angel, how long has this been going on?" he asked.

"What, father?"

"How long has Gerald been in the habit of borrowing money from you?"

"A—a long while," she confessed in low tones. "Ever since we have been at Haresdown House?"

"Yes."

"Before?" he questioned.

"Sometimes—not so often; you know, father, I did not have pocket-money regularly in London."

"No, poor child!"

"I didn't want any there," she assured him eagerly. "And I don't mind letting Gerald have it now—that is, generally. Oh!" she cried, turning a reproachful glance upon Mr. Bailey, "why did you say anything about it? You don't think I begrudge my money to Gerald, do you?"

"No, my dear, certainly not," Mr. Bailey responded gravely; "but I see no reason why you should be victimised."

"No, indeed!" Mr. Willis exclaimed. "But, Angel, if Gerald borrows your money, surely he pays it back?"

She shook her head; and her father frowned. He was very angry with his son.

Naturally easygoing and unbusiness-like himself, he had never calculated how much money went through Gerald's hands; now, for the first time, he was seriously considering the matter, with the result that he was quite dismayed. Better would it have been for the boy if his father had been of a more suspicious nature!

"Angel, why didn't you tell me about it?" Mr. Willis questioned reproachfully. "If I had known, I would not have allowed Gerald to treat you like that."

"Oh, father, don't look so sorry!" she cried. "You won't worry about it, will you? And—and please don't be too angry with poor Gerald. I dare say he wants money a great deal more than I do!"

"He evidently thinks so," Mr. Willis responded drily. "But what does he do with it all?" he continued, glancing in a puzzled fashion at Mr. Bailey, who shook his head, evidently unable to solve that problem. "I must have a serious talking to

him, and hear what he has to say for himself."

"You won't be hard on him, will you?" Angel pleaded, for she was conscious that her father was deeply annoyed. "I know he ought not to—"

"Pray don't try to make excuses for him!" Mr. Willis broke in, with unusual sharpness in his tone. "I see one thing very plainly, that he stands a great chance of being ruined by his sister."

"Oh, father!" she exclaimed distressfully.

"I am aware it is your affection for him that makes you so foolishly give in to his wishes," Mr. Willis proceeded, "but it's a great pity. Why cannot you stand up for your own rights? You are older than Gerald, and yet—there, child, don't look so hurt! One would think I was unkind to you!"

"Oh no, no!" Angel replied earnestly. "Oh, father, have I done very wrong? I did think that perhaps I ought to tell you how much

money Gerald was spending, but if I had, he would have said I was a sneak, and, of course, I did not want to get him into trouble."

"You should have told me your brother was in the habit of borrowing your money and never paying it back; he has not behaved with common honesty. Your silence was a mistake."

They had by this time reached the entrance to Haresdown House, where they found Gerald himself waiting for them. His father laid a hand on his arm, and briefly requested him to come to the studio as he had something important to say to him.

Angel and Mr. Bailey were now left alone together. The former's face expressed the deepest concern and uneasiness, whilst the latter's ruddy, countenance looked exceedingly grave.

"Father is very angry," Angel said in a sorrowful tone. "Oh, how I wish you had not told him!"

"My dear child," he replied earnestly, "it was right he should know—for Gerald's sake. Has your love for your brother quite blinded you to what the consequences of your always hiding his misdoings must inevitably be? Your father spoke truly when he said Gerald stands a great chance of being ruined by you."

"Oh, Uncle Edward, you don't understand! I promised mother I would be loving and patient with him. Neither you nor father know how I feel!" And she turned from him, her eyes swimming with tears, and rushed into the house, and upstairs to her own room, where she threw herself down by the bedside and wept without restraint. It was so bitterly hard to be blamed for trying to shield Gerald.

After a while she grew calmer, and, rising from her knees, went to the door and unlatched it, so that she might hear when her brother came out of the studio. She could hear the murmur of voices below, her father's grave and displeased; and Gerald's sounding rather sulky, she thought. After a while the studio door was

opened, and, straining her ears, she was able to catch what her father said—

"Very well, my boy. I hope you will keep your word. You must be more careful for the future, for the idea of your squandering money is most painful to me. Remember how needy we have been in the past! And you have treated your sister most unfairly—most dishonourably! I could hardly believe it when I heard about it. Let me see by your future conduct that you are serving her with greater consideration."

"Yes, father," Gerald's voice returned. "May I go now, please?"

"Certainly."

The studio door closed, and the next minute Gerald ascended the stairs. Angel stepped out on the landing, her tear-stained face brightening, for she had gleaned from the few words she had overheard that her brother and father's interview had come to a satisfactory conclusion.

"Gerald," she said softly under her breath as the boy reached her side, "was father very angry? Come in, and tell me what he said."

"Not likely!" he retorted, his face, which had been pale before, suddenly crimsoning with passion, his eyes flashing indignation upon her. "You've got me into a row, and that ought to satisfy you!"

"But it was not my fault! Oh, Gerald, listen to me!" she exclaimed in great distress. "Oh, tell me, was father very angry?"

"Much you care if he was! You mean thing! Just because I hadn't paid you that wretched eighteen pence to go and make this fuss! Sneak! Sneak!" he hissed between his clenched teeth as he turned away and entered his own room.

He did not expect her to follow him, but she did, and began to explain that she had not been instrumental in getting him into trouble, as he appeared to think; but he



turned upon her fiercely, and would not listen.

"Get out of my room this instant!" he commanded. "Go quickly, or I'll make you!"

"Indeed, Gerald—"

"Go!" he interrupted impatiently. "You nasty hypocrite, you!"

"Oh, don't call me such names!" she said pleadingly. "Oh, I am so sorry—so sorry—" She broke off with a sob. Had she been wise she would have left him until he was in a better frame of mind, but she could not bear to think that he had formed a wrong opinion of her, so she began once more to enter into an explanation. Completely losing his temper, Gerald turned upon her, and struck her a swift, stinging blow on the cheek with the flat of his hand, leaving the imprint of his fingers on her soft flesh; then, grasping her by the shoulder, he pushed her roughly out of the room and locked the door against her.

## CHAPTER XX

## **The Quarrel**

FOR a while after Gerald had locked the door against his sister, he paced up and down his room in a state of great excitement, his heart filled with anger and bitterness.

It had not occurred to Mr. Willis to explain how he had become aware that Gerald had been in the habit of borrowing Angel's pocket-money when he had taken the boy severely to task upon the subject, and had requested to be informed how the money had been spent. Gerald had hesitated, and finally had said that he really did not know how the money had gone, it had slipped through his fingers somehow; and, on the spur of the moment, he had owned to an insatiable appetite for sweetmeats and ices, artfully insinuating that the latter delicacies were very dear. He had been ashamed of himself for thus prevaricating, for though certainly he had spent a good bit at the "tuck-shop," it was

not there that he had parted with most of his money; but he had felt that he never could own the whole truth. He had listened patiently to all his father had had to say, and had promised he would never borrow Angel's money from her again. Mr. Willis had not scrupled to call his son's conduct both dishonest, and dishonourable; and Gerald, though he could but admit the justice of his father's anger, yet blamed Angel for having, as he considered, brought about so much unpleasantness. By-and-by, however, his wrath cooled down somewhat, and he began to feel a little uneasy at the thought of the blow he had given his sister. He had never struck her before; but then, as he quickly reminded himself, she had never before told tales of him; and, after all, he had only slapped her face; it was not his fist that had dealt the blow. Nevertheless, he was perfectly aware that it had been a cowardly, cruel act to strike a girl.

Presently he sat down on the edge of the bed, and fell to wondering how Angel would act now. Would she go and tell

their father how she had been served? He hardly thought she would do that. A crowd of memories of different occasions when she had shielded him from the blame and punishments which would have been the inevitable results of his misdeeds but for her interference, surged through his brain, and reminded him how often she had been better to him than he had deserved. And how had he treated her in return? Gerald's slumbering conscience was slow to awaken; still, some knowledge of the ingratitude and cruelty of his behaviour came to him then, as he reflected how he had promised Angel solemnly that she should have her eighteen pence returned to her that day, and she was naturally disappointed that he had not kept his word.

He had reached this point in his meditations when he heard footsteps on the landing; the following second there was a tap upon the door.

"Come in!" he cried, thinking Angel had come back to try and make peace with

him; then, remembering he had turned the key, he sprang to his feet, unlocked the door, and opened it wide. It was not Angel, however, whom he found outside, but his father.

"There was one thing I forgot to mention to you, Gerald," Mr. Willis said, "and that was, that Angel did not tell me you were in her debt; I ascertained the fact from Uncle Edward, who overheard you trying to borrow money from her. I believe supper is ready, so you had better come downstairs now, my son." And he laid his hand on the boy's shoulder with a kindly pressure as he spoke.

"Yes, father," Gerald answered. "I must brush my hair and wash my hands, then I shall be ready."

At that moment the supper bell rang, and bidding his son to be quick, Mr. Willis went downstairs.

The boy was quite overwhelmed at the knowledge that he had misjudged his sister, and now deeply repented the

hasty blow he had given her in his unbridled passion. He determined to ask her forgiveness the first opportunity that offered, not doubting but that it would be given him willingly and gladly. Angel was so fond of him, he complacently told himself, that she would forgive him anything.

When he entered the dining-room, he found his sister already seated at the supper-table with his father and uncle; he drew a breath of relief as he recognized that she had not told of his treatment of her. He slipped quietly into his accustomed place on the opposite side of the table to Angel. The dining-room was dimly lighted, so only Gerald's guilty eyes noticed that one of the little girl's cheeks was crimson, although Mr. Willis and Mr. Bailey saw that she had been crying, but they were not surprised at that, for they knew how distressed she had been on her brother's account.

Gerald could not keep his gaze away from his sister's face; that crimson check, which looked as though it might be

smarting still, was a silent reproach to him. He ate but little; in fact, no one seemed to have an appetite that evening, and it was rather a relief to all when the meal was over.

After supper Mr. Willis retired to his studio to search for a letter he had mislaid; and Mr. Bailey sat down in an easy chair, where he soon fell asleep, being tired after his walk. Then it was that Gerald ventured to approach his sister, who was standing by the open window, gazing out into the shadowy garden. The scent of nicotianas was wafted towards her upon the cool, evening breeze, which fanned her hot cheeks pleasantly. She gave a slight start when she became conscious of her brother's proximity, and would have gone back from the window if he had not laid a detaining hand upon her arm.

"Angel," he said, carefully lowering his voice so as not to disturb Mr. Bailey, "I'm so sorry I hit you, I am indeed! I thought you had been sneaking about me to father, and that riled me; but I know now



that it was Uncle Edward. I can't think why he need have interfered!" he concluded in aggrieved tones.

Angel turned her head slowly and faced him. In the dim light he saw that her countenance was quivering with some strong emotion; her eyes were dry now, and there was a strange, hard glitter in them.

"Don't touch me!" she cried sharply, shaking off his hand from her arm. "And I wish you'd leave me alone, and not bother me!"

"But I want to talk to you," he objected, surprised at her curt words, so different from her usually gentle mode of speech. "I'm so very sorry I struck you, Angel," he continued in a coaxing tone; "won't you forgive me?"

"No," she responded, "I won't. Why should I? And I don't believe you're sorry! I wanted to explain to you that I had not been telling tales to father, and you wouldn't listen to me. Do you think I cared

for the money, except that I wanted to give Dora Mickle a present? I'm not a sneak, and I'm not a coward like you are, or a—a storyteller!" Angel was trembling with passion. She pointed to her crimson cheek, and her voice trembled with indignation as she added decisively, "No, I won't forgive you, I won't!"

"Oh, come, Angel, don't be nasty," he said soothingly; "it's not like you to be that. You know I did not mean to hurt you. And I'm really very sorry—very!"

"You're not!" she retorted. "You don't care a bit! I wish you'd go away and leave me in peace!"

"I will—only say you forgive me first!"

"No; if I did say so, it would not be true. I don't forgive you. You had no right to strike me, even if I had told tales of you to father. No one but a coward would have done it. Do you think either of the Mickle boys would dare to hit Dinah or Dora? Not they! And they wouldn't want to! But you—"

Angel's voice ceased suddenly. She was actually too enraged to proceed. Gerald was aghast at the resentment in her glance; he looked at her with dismay. Was this his gentle, sweet-tempered sister, who was regarding him with such hard, unforgiving eyes? He was positively struck dumb with amazement.

Suddenly a sob broke from Angel's lips, which sound encouraged Gerald to draw nearer; but she stepped back from him, and bade him keep his distance.

"Don't come nearer to me," she said, with a bitter little laugh that was full of pain; "how do I know but that you mean to strike me again?"

"Oh, Angel, you know better than that!" he remonstrated. "I did it in temper!"

"That's no excuse!"

"No, no, of course not; but do forgive me, and let us be friends again. We never quarrelled like this before!"

"Well, it's not my fault that we've quarrelled now," she reminded him significantly.

This perverse, stubborn Angel was not like his loving little sister at all. He looked at her with pleading blue eyes, really anxious to bring about a reconciliation.

"Let us kiss and be friends," he said, with his winning smile. "Come, Angel, I know you mean to forgive me in the end!"

She deigned no reply, but turning abruptly away, left the room, whilst he followed. When, however, he saw she was going to the studio, he retraced his steps, and threw himself into a chair not far from the one in which Mr. Bailey still slept. Suddenly his uncle gave a loud snore, and awoke, exclaiming—

"Dear me, I think I must have been asleep!"

Ordinarily such a remark would have made Gerald laugh, but he now vouchsafed no reply. He considered Mr.

Bailey had done him an ill-turn that day, and he was disinclined to converse with him.

"Where is Angel?" Mr. Bailey asked, looking around, and missing the little girl.

"In the studio with father," was the brief response.

"Poor child, poor child! I was sorry to see her sad eyes and tear-stained face at supper. Ah, Gerald, there are very few boys who have such a loving little sister as you have!"

Gerald muttered something unintelligible; perhaps he thought he had ill repaid Angel for her love. Seeing he did not wish to talk, Mr. Bailey took up a newspaper and commenced to read. Presently Angel returned to bid her uncle good-night. He kissed her with great affection, and after saying good-night, added his usual "God bless you, child!" The little girl scarcely heeded the words this evening, so preoccupied was she with her own thoughts. She neither spoke

to nor glanced at Gerald, who, however, got up and followed her out of the room and upstairs.

"Aren't you going to say good-night to me, Angel?" he asked reproachfully.

She turned as she opened the bedroom door and looked at him as she replied coldly—

"Oh yes! Good-night, Gerald."

"Say you forgive me," he pleaded; "do, dear!"

But she shook her head decidedly, and, entering her room, shut the door in his face. He stood outside for a few minutes, thinking she would perhaps come out presently and make friends with him; but as the door remained closed, he went away, much disturbed in mind at his sister's conduct.

Angel, having quickly undressed and said her prayers, which were merely vain repetitions that night, jumped into bed,

and lay thinking gloomily of the events of the last few hours. She recalled the look of passion she had seen on her brother's face when he had struck her, and told herself she never, never could forgive him that blow. She was certain there was not the least spark of affection in his heart for her. He only treated her well when he wanted her to do something for him. He did not really love her. All this she kept repeating to herself over and over again; and her anger against him did not soften into better or kinder feelings to-night, on the contrary, she nursed the resentment which the blow he had struck her had planted in her heart, and exaggerated every little failing of his which she had regarded as trifling before.

How slowly the time crept on as she lay awake. She heard Mrs. Vallance and Polly ascending the back stairs, and a short while later her father and uncle bade each other good-night on the landing outside her door. The hall clock struck eleven!—twelve!—and still Angel

tossed restlessly about, her mind too disordered to admit of her sleeping. A feeling of utter desolation crept over her as she thought that, in all probability, she was the only member of the household who was awake; a sense of intense loneliness occupied her sore heart; she found no consolation in prayer as she usually did, not then realizing, poor child, that her unforgiving spirit stood between her and God; and, at last, she indulged in a fit of weeping, and finally sobbed herself to sleep.

Meanwhile, Gerald was lying awake too, thinking uneasily of his quarrel with his sister. Never had he known her so apparently hard-hearted before; certainly never had he begged for her forgiveness in vain until to-night. "It was cruel and wicked of me to hit her," the boy acknowledged to himself, "but she might have believed I was speaking the truth when I told her I was sorry. I might have known she wouldn't have sneaked to father about me. She was never a tell-tale. Oh, dear, how frightened I was when



father asked me what I had been doing with my money! I suppose it was wrong to deceive him, but what could I do? I did hope to be able to pay Angel that eighteen pence to-day. If only I had won that bet! I've half a mind not to bet any more; but then, I must pay Hope what I owe him, and I must get the money somehow."

Gerald sighed, and wished regretfully he had never been tempted to bet at all, and what with the thought of his quarrel with his sister and his other difficulties, he was quite as long in getting to sleep as Angel was, so that it was past midnight before either of the young people at Haresdown House obtained any rest that night.

## CHAPTER XXI

### Miss Goodwin's Brother

SUNDAY morning dawned with brilliant sunshine, and promised to be a perfect summer's day. Angel arose with a bad headache, no doubt caused by her fit of violent weeping the preceding night; and she was so pale and heavy-eyed when she appeared at the breakfast-table, that her father told her she had better remain at home and rest, instead of going to church. She was glad to do this, and as soon as she was alone, fetched her Bible, and settled herself comfortably on the sofa in the dining-room.

"How nice it is that father is strong enough to walk up Haresdown hill," Angel thought as she opened her Bible at a venture, and commenced to read. She found it very difficult to prevent her mind straying from the sacred volume at first to other matters; but presently her attention was chained.

"And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice;"

"And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

Angel shut her Bible and sighed deeply as she pondered over these verses. She wondered if her bitterness and wrath last night had grieved the Holy Spirit of God. She was not feeling nearly so much incensed against her brother to-day; the marks of his fingers on her cheek had

died out, and her resentment against him was slowly dying out too. She was beginning to see that though her indignation had been only just and natural, her refusal of forgiveness, when he had been really repentant, had been very wrong. If Gerald had been unkind to her, she had been unkind to him. She had scarcely spoken to him this morning, and had deliberately ignored and refrained from responding to the few hesitating remarks he had ventured to address to her. How wicked she had been! No wonder she had been so dreadfully unhappy.

Whilst she was meditating thus, Mrs. Vallance knocked at the door, and entering, inquired how she was.

"Oh, I think my headache's better," Angel answered. "Are you very busy, Mrs. Vallance?"

"No, miss. Polly put the bedrooms in order before she started for church, and there's only cold meat for dinner," was the reply. "I was never in a house where

there was less work to be done on Sundays."

"Uncle Edward says he likes Sunday to be a day of rest for every one. Do sit down and talk to me for a little while."

Mrs. Vallance willingly complied. She was a good-hearted woman, and she and Angel often enjoyed a chat together.

"I know what's given you such a bad headache, my dear," the housekeeper said shrewdly; "twas the fuss you had with Master Gerald last night."

"Yes," the little girl acknowledged, flushing, and looking confused. "But how did you know?" she inquired, with some anxiety.

"I was standing at the top of the back stairs listening to your raised voices, when suddenly I saw Master Gerald push you out of his room, and lock the door against you. Haven't you and he made up your quarrel yet?"

"No," Angel responded, relieved that Mrs. Vallance apparently was unaware of all that had occurred. "Gerald wanted me to be friends with him last night, but I wouldn't. He—he served me very badly, I think."

"I dare say he did, but I'm sure he was sorry afterwards. He's thoughtless and selfish, perhaps, but I don't like to hear of your bearing malice in heart, Miss Angel, dear. It's unchristian-like, that's what it is."

"Yes," Angel sighed, "I know, I know!"

"Let not the sun go down upon your wrath," Mrs. Vallance quoted. "That's a verse from the Bible we all ought to remember."

"I used not to be so unforgiving," Angel said; "but then Gerald never treated me before as he did last night. I—I can't tell you about it, Mrs. Vallance; but I think if you knew all, you would say he had behaved very badly."

"I have no doubt I should; still, however wrong he was, don't let him believe his sister has turned against him. You must be patient with him. I know you're that, as a rule, but don't let him tire you out. Didn't you tell me once that you had promised your mother to be loving and patient with him?"

"Yes; but I forgot that last night," Angel admitted. "I don't know how it was, but I never felt so wicked before. I couldn't pray—not properly."

"No one can pray properly when angry, Miss Angel."

There was a long pause, which Mrs. Vallance at length broke by saying thoughtfully, "I don't think I ever told you that I lived in service with Miss Goodwin once, did I?"

"No," the little girl replied, rather astonished at this sudden change in the conversation; "was that long ago?"

"Yes, miss. I was a slip of a girl of sixteen when I first went to Myrtle Villa. Miss Goodwin's hair wasn't white at that time, nor her face wrinkled as it is now; but even then her youth had long passed. She's very old, you know, for all she's so quick in her movements, and clear in her intellect in most ways, except that she's forgotten her age, and seems to have lost count of the flight of time. Well, as I was saying, I was only sixteen when I commenced to earn my living, and my mother was so pleased to get me such a good place, for Miss Goodwin was always counted a rare hand for training servants, having been accustomed to have a great many in her young days. Yes," Mrs. Vallance nodded, as Angel's face expressed her surprise, "she was brought up as a rich man's daughter, but after her father's death her brother—an only brother he was—squandered all his money, and most of hers too. Then it was she came to Myrtle Villa to live, and ten years later I went there as maid-of-all-work. I knew Miss Goodwin's brother had always been a worry and trouble to her,



and that after spending his fortune he had entered the army as a private, so of course I never mentioned his name to her until one day she spoke of him to me, and told me she had had a letter from some one in India telling her he was dead. What astonished me was that she didn't seem to be grieving, although I knew she had been very fond of him, in spite of his bad ways. 'Oh, ma'am!' I cried, not knowing what to say. 'Is he really dead? Perhaps there is some mistake.' 'Oh no!' she said. 'I will read you the letter.' And so she did. It had been written by an army chaplain; I forget a great deal of what was in it, but I shall always remember one part, which spoke of a message the dying man had sent to Miss Goodwin, and the message was this: 'Tell my sister that the remembrance of her love has taught me to understand the love of God. If she had not forgiven me, I do not believe I could have thought it possible God would.' It was that message which had brought a joyful look into Miss Goodwin's face, and prevented her grieving—the certainty that her love had been stronger than evil,

for he had been a bad man, my dear Miss Angel; his sister knew that well, but she had always loved him, and prayed for him, and had patience with him, and though the seas had divided them when he lay dying, yet it had been her influence that had led him to repent and turn to Jesus. The chaplain wrote that John Goodwin had died a humble, repentant Christian, and, as my dear mistress said to me, she had no cause to feel ashamed of him any more. It's an old tale now, my dear, and I've only told it to you to show you how we ought to forgive those who trespass against us. Sometimes it's very difficult, just because those who have injured us are so very dear to us; we feel on that account they ought to have treated us better; but, however that may be, we should never cease to love and forgive."

"Oh, poor Miss Goodwin!" Angel cried, her eyes full of tears. "Did her brother serve her very, very badly, Mrs. Vallance?"

"Yes, miss, I'm bound to admit that he did. He not only spent most of her money—

you know she has as much as she can do to make both ends meet, and I really think took up gardening herself because she couldn't afford to pay for a gardener—but he deceived her in many ways, and never showed the least consideration for her wishes."

"And she forgave him all?"

"Yes, Miss Angel, that I am sure she did."

"I think I understand why you have told me this," Angel said thoughtfully; "but I am afraid I can never be so good as Miss Goodwin."

"She is good," Mrs. Vallance agreed heartily. "I often say I never knew any one like her. I lived with her for more than ten years, and all that time, though I dare say I continually tried her, for I was a thoughtless girl, she never said an unkind word to me; and when she used to reprove me, would do it so gently that it used to make me a great deal more sorry than if she'd spoken crossly. When I left her it was to be married, and all through

my married life she was my best friend; then my poor husband died, and, having no children, I thought I'd go into service again, and Miss Goodwin, hearing your uncle wanted a housekeeper, advised me to offer for the post. I'd have liked to have gone back to live with my dear old mistress, but the servant she has suits her, and—well, here I am, and here I hope to remain, Miss Angel."

"Oh, I hope so!" the little girl said earnestly.

"Now it's about time I set about laying the dinner-cloth," Mrs. Vallance remarked briskly, for the folks will soon be out of church.

Angel watched the housekeeper's trim, black-gowned figure moving quietly in and out of the room, and pondered over the story she had heard from her lips. How thankful Miss Goodwin must be that her love had never failed her brother.

"I do believe you are feeling much better, are you not, Miss Angel?" asked Mrs.

Vallance, as she glanced at the little girl's thoughtful face.

"Yes, my headache is nearly gone," Angel replied, with a smile.

She sprang up from the sofa as she spoke, and, taking up her Bible, ran upstairs to her own room, where she brushed her ruffled hair, and then stood at the open window, from which she had a view of the road from the church down the slope of the hill. She meant, at the first sight of her own people, to hasten to the garden gate to be in readiness to greet them with a brighter countenance than she had shown them when they had set out for church two hours before.

Then she remembered that she had not asked God's pardon for the wicked, resentful temper she had been indulging in, and, sinking on her knees by the window-sill, she covered her face with her hands and prayed earnestly. When she rose from her knees she saw a stream of people descending the hill, and by-and-by was able to distinguish the

forms of those she knew. She noticed that her father and uncle had joined Mr. and Mrs. Mickle, and that Gerald was following behind with the Mickle children. She changed her mind about going to the gate, and determined to remain where she was, for she was shy about answering the good-natured, anxious questions she knew would be put to her concerning her headache if she encountered her friends just then.

So she drew back from the window, and allowed the Mickles time to say good-bye at the gate before she peeped out again; presently, hearing footsteps on the gravel path outside, she glanced out, and saw her father.

"Well, Angel, how's the headache?" he asked, as she appeared in sight. "Better, eh?"

"Yes, father, thank you," she answered, "much better."

"That's right. We came down the hill with the Mickles. Uncle Edward wanted them

all to come in, but they thought it too near dinner-time. Yes, you are certainly looking better—a little pale still, but you make a charming picture, standing there framed in roses and honeysuckle!"

She laughed, and, leaning her arms upon the window-sill continued to converse with him. He saw she was her usual cheerful self again, and was pleased that the shadow had gone from her face; he had guessed her pain had been as much mental as physical.

"Uncle Edward and Gerald have gone a short distance down the hill with the Mickles," he informed her. "Come out into the garden with me, Angel; or, do you think the sun will be too hot for you? I am considering your poor head, my dear."

"Oh, my head is all right now," she assured him.

She put on a shady hat, and running downstairs joined Mr. Willis, who had gone around to the front door to meet her. They strolled about the garden,

looking at the flowers, until Mr. Bailey and Gerald returned. The latter glanced at Angel rather dubiously; but his face brightened instantly when he met her eyes.

"I'm so glad your headache is gone!" he exclaimed heartily. "It is gone, isn't it?"

"Yes," she nodded.

"We have had many inquiries to answer about you, Angel," Mr. Bailey said. "Mrs. Mickle was much concerned to hear you were not well, and suggested several remedies for headache, which I see I need not give you now. You are looking almost yourself again."

Before going into the house to dinner, Angel seized an opportunity to draw her brother aside out of hearing of the others, and said earnestly: "Gerald, will you forgive me for being so unkind and ill-tempered last night? I know you didn't mean to hurt me, and—and—"



"Oh, Angel," the boy interposed, "it only served me right! It was very wrong of me to hit you. It was cowardly, and I don't wonder you were so angry. I'll never do it again—never! I feel so ashamed about it. You do forgive me, don't you?"

"Yes, indeed I do! I didn't last night, and—oh, I was so unhappy—simply wretched!"

"I was wretched too," Gerald admitted. "I knew I had behaved badly, and it was dreadful to think you wouldn't make friends with me. But it's all right now, isn't it?"

Angel nodded. The rest of the Sunday passed peacefully and happily, the sister and brother being on the best of terms with each other. They spent the afternoon together in the garden, and in the evening went to church with their father and uncle. Gerald had a knack of dismissing his troubles from his mind if they were not directly pressing upon him; and Angel, now that she was at peace with her brother, was perfectly happy once more.

The little girl made no mention of the story she had heard from Mrs. Vallance, concerning Miss Goodwin's brother, to any one; but she pondered over it a great deal, and her liking for the old lady deepened into reverent affection as she thought of the trouble her brother must have been to her, and how her patient love had triumphed in the end.

## CHAPTER XXII

### Dora Mickle's Tea-Party

ANGEL was enabled to give Dora Mickle a birthday present after all, for, knowing his little daughter's penniless condition, Mr. Willis presented her with half-a-crown as she was starting for school on Monday morning, in addition to her regular pocket-money.

"Remember, my dear," he said gravely, and Gerald, who was standing near, heard his words, "this is for yourself. There is to be no more lending. I hope you understand that?"

"Yes, father," she answered. "Thank you so much. If I am rather late home from school this morning, you will know I am in the town buying a present for Dora Mickle."

Accordingly, when Angel returned to Haresdown House to dinner, she exhibited a white and gold photograph frame, which she had purchased for her little friend.

"I asked Dinah what she thought Dora would like," she explained, "and she

suggested my buying this frame, because Dora admired it the other day—it was in the shop window, you know."

"It is very pretty," Mr. Willis said. "By the way, I have had a note from Mrs. Mickle, asking you and Gerald to tea to-morrow. Am I to accept the invitation for you?"

"Oh, please, father!" both children answered in a breath.

Gerald had said nothing further about making Dora a present himself; his sister rightly guessed that he had no money, and she generously suggested that the photograph frame should be presented to Dora in his name as well as hers. But Gerald would not hear of this. He stoutly negatived the idea, refusing to entertain it for a moment.

It was a merry, happy party that assembled in the Mickles' back garden on the following afternoon to partake of tea, and strawberries and cream, not to mention other dainties, including Dora's birthday cake. The principal charm of the

whole affair lay in having it out of doors. Dora, in the arbour at the far end of the garden, with her mother at her side, poured out tea, whilst the boys did the waiting, and the little girls of the party, amongst whom were several of Dora's school-fellows, sat on a long form, sheltered from the hot sunshine by a row of kidney beans. Gerald made himself very useful in assisting the Mickle boys, who had good-naturedly volunteered to help entertain their little sister's guests, thus winning Dora's approval, and doing much to obliterate the not altogether favourable opinion she had previously formed of him. She had not wanted to invite him, and Gerald little guessed that Mrs. Mickle had found some difficulty in persuading her to include him in her party, but now she was really glad she had done so.

The white and gold frame had been duly presented, and Dora had expressed herself delighted with it, and had declared her intention of putting her mother's photograph in it, and giving it a

prominent position on her bedroom wall. She had received several presents, including a dark tabby Persian kitten from Dinah, which had already been named "Ruffy" by its proud mistress. Only Angel, besides the members of the Mickle household, had known that the kitten had been coming, and great had been every one's anxiety lest it should not have reached Wreyford by Dora's birthday, for it had been ordered from a breeder of Persian cats in London; but Ruffy had come several days before it had been expected, and consequently had been kept safely locked up in an outhouse until the proper time for its appearance in public had arrived. How often Dora had been on the point of discovering the secret of the outhouse! And yet she had never had the faintest suspicion why the door was locked against her, supposing the boys had done it for some reason or other. After tea the children played games, and had a thoroughly enjoyable time. Gilbert joined his mother in the arbour by-and-by. He was looking very cheerful and happy to-

day, for in trying to amuse his little sister's friends he had forgotten his own grievances; indeed, it had seemed lately that his temper had improved, and he was more contented altogether. He had painted Dora a small picture of a pretty spot near the river, which she had once admired in his hearing—a mossy bank with a hawthorn tree in full bloom—and her pleasure had greatly gratified him, whilst his father had added to his happiness by declaring the sketch remarkably well done.

As he seated himself opposite to his mother on one of the benches which served as seats in the arbour, she looked at him with a smile as she said, "Tired, Gilbert?"

"A little. They're playing 'Last Touch' now, but that's not much in my line. I'm rather too much handicapped for a game of that kind."

She glanced at him in surprise, for he spoke quite cheerfully, with a touch of

humour in his tone, and without his usual bitterness.

"So I thought I'd come and talk to you a bit, mother," he added, after a brief pause; "I consider I've earned a rest."

"Yes," she agreed, "I'm sure you have. I'm glad Dora consented to inviting Gerald Willis; he is very amusing, is he not? Dora did not want to ask him, because she said he 'put upon' Angel, as she expressed it; but I'm sure he seems a very nice boy."

"He would be much nicer if only Reginald Hope would let him alone."

"He is very good friends with Tom now?"

"Oh yes, and always would be if Hope did not come between them. Tom can't bear Hope, and he's always trying to get Gerald to break with him; then, naturally, Gerald thinks Tom is prejudiced against Hope."

"I see!"



Mrs. Mickle watched Gerald thoughtfully. His face was flushed with exercise, his blue eyes sparkled with excitement, and his laugh rang out merrily every now and again. He appeared the life of the party.

"It's a pity he doesn't go in for sports more at school," Gilbert remarked, following his mother's glance, "instead of spending his time loafing about with Hope and his crew. Idleness is sure to lead a fellow into mischief."

At that moment the game came to an end by mutual consent, every one being hot and tired. The little girls strolled down to the river, which flowed at the bottom of the garden, and Tom, followed by Gerald, joined Mrs. Mickle and Gilbert in the harbour.

"There's plenty of room," Mrs. Mickle said smilingly, as Gerald stood hesitating at the entrance.

She moved her skirts nearer to her as she spoke, and pointed to the space by her side, which the boy immediately

appropriated, whilst Tom sat down opposite with his brother.

Conversation flowed easily. Gerald found Mrs. Mickle a very interesting companion; she appeared to know all that went on at the Grammar School, and surprised him by her acquaintance with several trivial incidents which had occurred during the term. Evidently she was the confidante of both her sons.

The following Saturday a cricket match was to take place between the first eleven of the Grammar School and an eleven from a neighbouring town. There would doubtless be a great many onlookers and Mrs. Mickle expressed her intention of being present.

"I shall expect you boys to come and talk to me, and explain how the game is going," she told them. "You'll bring Angel, won't you, Gerald?"

Gerald looked rather taken aback at this, for he had had no such intention, thinking that if he took Angel to watch the cricket

match he would have to devote his time to her instead of being able to spend it with his boon companions; so he made answer that his sister did not understand the game of cricket, and he did not know if she would care about it. The truth was, he did not mean to consider or consult his sister in the matter at all.

Mrs. Mickle could not guess what was passing through his mind; she looked at him, evidently rather puzzled, then said—

"Oh, but I'm sure Angel will like to watch the match. You must bring her with you, for Dinah and Dora will be there, and—"

"Oh yes!" Gerald interposed quickly, his countenance suddenly brightening as he reflected that if the Mickle girls were amongst the onlookers he would be able to leave his sister with them, and therefore she would not be in his way at all. "Oh, yes! I dare say Angel will enjoy it!"

Gilbert and Tom exchanged amused glances at Gerald's sudden change of tone. The former remarked—

"I don't want to miss my painting lesson next Saturday, but this will be the great match of the season, and I shouldn't like to miss that either."

"You must ask Mr. Willis to excuse your absence on Saturday afternoon," Mrs. Mickle said; "perhaps he will like to see the match too."

"I dare say he will!" Gerald cried eagerly, "And Uncle Edward! He's very interested in cricket. If he and father go to watch the match they're certain to take Angel with them."

"And you will be free to do as you please," Tom exclaimed involuntarily.

There was a short, awkward pause. Gerald grew crimson with annoyance and mortification. He was very vexed with Tom for so plainly reading his thoughts, and darted an angry look at him, which was greeted with a teasing smile.

"How fast the summer term is passing!" Mrs. Mickle exclaimed presently, wisely ignoring her younger son's remark. "Why, we shall soon have the holidays here!"

"Another month before that, mother," Gilbert reminded her. "Look! Here comes father. And Mr. Willis with him."

"Father said perhaps he'd come to fetch us," Gerald explained. "I hope it is not quite time for us to go yet."

Mrs. Mickle rose, and went to meet the newcomers. The boys now joined the girls, and suggested another game, leaving the arbour for the use of their elders. Very pleasantly the remainder of the evening slipped away, and the little party broke up regretfully at last.

"Having tea out of doors is lovely," Angel remarked on her homeward way; "it's ever so much nicer than in the house isn't it, Gerald?"

"Rather!" her brother responded heartily. "I had a spider in my tea," he added, "but I didn't mind that."

Mr. Willis laughed amusedly. They were now passing Myrtle Villa, and Miss Goodwin's piping voice addressed them from the other side of the sweetbriar hedge.

"Has dear little Dora's tea-party been a success?" she asked. "You see, children, I know where you've been. I saw your father on his way to fetch you."

"It has been a very great success," Angel replied; "we have had such a happy time! I saw your present to Dora, Miss Goodwin.—It is a beautiful little pincushion made of velvet, and embroidered in silks," she explained, turning to her father.

"I embroidered it myself," the old lady said, her face beaming with smiles. "It pleased the child! I am to drink tea with the Mickles to-morrow, and Dora will show me all her treasures. Ah, Gerald,

you've not been to see me for a long while. Do come in one day soon. Well, good-night, good-night."

Mr. Willis and his children passed on, whilst Miss Goodwin, who had only been waiting for them, now went into the house.

"What a dear old soul she is," Angel said; "the Mickles are all so fond of her. Dora wanted to invite her to the tea-party to-day, but Mrs. Mickle thought it would be too much excitement for her."

"I should think so," Mr. Willis replied; "you were rather noisy. Poor Miss Goodwin would have been quite bewildered if she had heard your tongues chattering."

As they neared their destination they were startled by the cries of a dog, evidently in pain, and a minute later came upon a scene which made Angel's tender heart throb with mingled indignation and pity. A big boy was holding a poor little terrier by the collar, and beating it most unmercifully with a great stick.

The next moment Mr. Willis had sprung to the rescue, and wrenched the weapon from the boy's hand, and smashed it in two pieces, which he flung into the hedge.

"You coward!" he exclaimed, clutching the boy by the collar and shaking him, whilst the dog, suddenly released, ran howling piteously down the road in the direction of the town. "How would you like to be thrashed as—"

He paused in intense astonishment as he recognized the scared face the boy turned towards him.

It was Reginald Hope. He had been fishing in the clay pits, and had, on his way home, encountered a favourite dog of his father's. The little animal, overjoyed at the meeting, had jumped against his young master, and had unfortunately knocked the pickle bottle he had been carrying, and which had contained a few prettily marked fish, out of his hand. Enraged beyond measure, Reginald had cut a stick from the hedge with his pocket-knife, and seizing the dog, was



giving it a heavy thrashing when he was suddenly stopped by Mr. Willis.

"Let me go! Let me go!" Reginald cried, wriggling to get free in vain.

"Not till I've had a few words with you," Mr. Willis replied firmly. "Wicked boy, to thrash a poor dog so cruelly!"

"Aggravating beast!" Reginald exclaimed vindictively. "Look at that smashed bottle, and those fish which I had trouble enough to catch! The dog belongs to us, and I can do as I like to it. Let me go, Mr. Willis."

But Mr. Willis would not do that until he had reproved him sharply for the cruelty and cowardice of his behaviour; and Reginald was obliged to listen to him, whilst Angel and Gerald stood by, the former as indignant as her father, and the latter no less so really, though he was afraid to show what he felt.

"I hope you will never treat any animal so viciously again," Mr. Willis said in

conclusion. "I am sure your father would be pained if he knew how you had served his pet."

"You will not tell him?" Reginald cried involuntarily.

"Not if you will promise never to thrash the dog so cruelly again."

"Oh, I promise that."

"Very well. I hope you will keep your word. Now I will let you go."

Mr. Willis released his hold of the boy, who picked up his fishing-rod, which he had flung on one side, and, without even glancing at Gerald, hurried away. The children and their father looked after him as he slunk down the road, the latter's countenance very grave.

"Oh, Gerald!" cried Angel, "how can you be friendly with a boy like that? How dreadfully he thrashed that poor dog! He must be very, very hard-hearted!"

"Perhaps he didn't mean to hurt it," Gerald replied, feeling he was called upon to make some sort of excuse for his friend.

"What nonsense, Gerald!" exclaimed his father sharply. "He did mean to hurt it! Children are often cruel when they are very young, because they do not understand the nature of pain; but Reginald Hope is a big boy, and he knew quite well the agony he was inflicting. Come, let us get home."

Mr. Willis looked upset. Cruelty to even the least of God's creatures was intolerable to him. When they reached the entrance to the grounds of Haresdown House, he paused and addressed Gerald again—

"My boy," he said gravely, "I shall put an end to your friendship with young Hope."

"Father!" Gerald burst forth in dismay, "you don't mean it?"

"I don't require you to break with him altogether," Mr. Willis proceeded to explain, "or say you are not to speak to him, but I forbid you to spend your spare time with him as you have done hitherto. Surely there are boys at the Grammar School more fitting to be your companions than Reginald Hope? I cannot imagine my son on a level with him. We should be careful in our choice of friends, remembering they are bound to influence us for good or evil. You need not avoid young Hope altogether, but I cannot allow you to be his constant companion."

Gerald made no response. He knew how difficult it would be for him to break off this friendship, and he foresaw much unpleasantness for himself if he did so. He shivered with apprehension as he remembered his indebtedness to Reginald Hope; if only he had not owed him money he would have gladly obeyed his father, and dissolved his connexion with him altogether. Poor Gerald's thoughts were very uneasy during the rest of the evening. He had enjoyed Dora

Mickle's tea-party as much as any one, but, as generally happened now when he had forgotten his worries for the time, Reginald Hope had crossed his path, and the mere sight of him had been sufficient to remind him of the reality of them.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### The Broad Road

"I SAY, Willis, I want a few words with you."

Gerald, who was lingering in the playground after morning school, talking to Tom Mickle, started when thus addressed by Reginald Hope, and glanced at him apprehensively, for he had not seen him to speak to for several days, and did not know if he resented Mr.

Willis' interference with his actions on the preceding Tuesday evening or not.

"All right!" Gerald responded quickly, endeavouring not to show the uneasiness he felt. "We've been talking of the cricket match. I hope it will be fine weather to-morrow. Mickle thinks we shall rain."

"Don't be too sure about it," Reginald said, with a laugh. "You're always sanguine, Mickle. I'm ready to face a beating."

"So am I," Tom replied good-humouredly; "so are we all, I expect; but I hope to see our eleven win, nevertheless!"

Another boy came up at that moment and engaged his attention; and Reginald, turning to Gerald, remarked pleasantly—

"If you're going home now, I'll walk a little way with you."

"Oh, very well," was the response, in rather an ungracious tone.

Quitting the playground by the back entrance, they soon left the lane for the main street. Very few words were spoken by either till they were out of the town; but when they reached the bridge the elder boy suggested they should sit down and hold their conversation there, which they accordingly did.

"You've been avoiding me these last few days," Reginald commenced, "and of course I know why. You're afraid I'm offended at what your father said to me the other night. It was very interfering of him, but you couldn't help it. I'm sorry for you, Willis, for you must have to walk a pretty straight path if he's always like that. He's awfully strict, isn't he?"

"Oh no, no! But he hates to see any one unkind. I can't think how you could have beaten your dog so cruelly."

"Well, I lost my temper, you know, that's how it was. I'm a little heavy-handed when I'm in a passion. But you needn't think that I bear malice in heart; I daresay your father was right enough, looking at

the matter from his point of view. I'm not resentful against him, anyway." Then, seeing that Gerald was not so much impressed with his magnanimous spirit as he had anticipated he would be, he determined to let the subject drop, and proceeded: "But that's not what I wanted to talk to you about. What do you really think about the cricket match to-morrow? Shall we win?"

"How can I tell? I only know Tom Mickle says he believes we shall."

"Oh, Tom Mickle!" Reginald exclaimed disparagingly. "Well, of course, he may be right, and, anyway, I suppose you'll pin your faith upon him, eh? I'm rather inclined to back the other eleven. I'll bet you half-a-crown that the Grammar School gets a licking. What do you say to that?"

"I don't think I'll bet," Gerald responded, shaking his head. "What's the use? If I lose I shan't have the money to pay."



"Oh, nonsense! Besides, very likely you'll win. After all, Tom Mickle's pretty shrewd, and he knows as much about cricket as any boy in the school, although he's not in the first eleven himself yet. I'll be bound to say he's backing the Grammar School himself."

"He doesn't bet."

"Not that you know of."

"I'm certain he doesn't. He told me he never meant to. He thinks it wrong."

"Well, you don't think it's wrong, I suppose?"

"I don't think it's right — exactly," was the evasive response. "I—I've been thinking a great deal about it lately, and I don't see the good of going on with it. I've never made much by betting; I've always lost more than I've won."

"You've been unlucky, there's no doubt of that, but some people make fortunes by betting, I've heard. You ought to try to win

back some of what you've lost, if only to pay me. Oh, I say, here comes Miss Goodwin! What a nuisance!"

Gerald turned his head, and saw the little lady coming towards them from the direction of the town; she lifted the skirt of her gown above the dust with one hand, whilst with the other she held a large green umbrella over her head as a protection from the too fierce sunshine.

"What an oddity she is," whispered Reginald, laughing. "Look at her white stockings and elastic-side boots! Well, I'm off, Willis, for she's sure to stop, and I don't want to be kept about by the old gossip. I'll see you after school this afternoon; and, meanwhile, think over what I've been saying. I may be able to put you up to a good thing." And with a knowing wink he jumped off the bridge just as Miss Goodwin reached it.

Reginald Hope took no notice of the old lady beyond a short nod as he passed her; but Gerald, ashamed of the elder boy's rudeness, lifted his cap as she

approached, and wished her good morning very politely.

"Good morning!" she said, a bright smile lighting up her withered countenance and shining in her clear blue eyes; then, glancing after Reginald Hope's retreating figure, she murmured, "Dear, dear! So young, and so ungallant!" She turned her attention to Gerald again. "I am going home; perhaps you will walk with me? Yes. Strange that you and Reginald Hope should be such friends!"

"Why?" Gerald could not refrain from asking.

"Because he lacks that thoughtfulness for others which always characterises one who is a gentleman at heart," she replied, with prompt decision.

Her companion was silenced, recognizing the truth of this statement. He walked along by her side, looking rather depressed, whilst she turned the conversation into other channels, trying in vain to interest him; at last, seeing he

was hardly listening to her, she startled him by asking abruptly—

"What is on your mind, my dear boy?"

"On my mind!" he stammered; "nothing—nothing!"

She shook her head, and there was a shrewd look in the eyes which scanned his face.

"I wish you'd tell me," she persisted, "for perhaps I could help you."

"You, Miss Goodwin!" he exclaimed, somewhat amused at the idea. "Oh no, I am sure you could not."

"You can't tell that. Once I had a brother of my own; when he was about your age he was very like you in appearance, and sometimes you remind me of him in other respects. Yes! You are a little impatient of control; you like your own way; and often, when you are with Angel, you treat her as my brother used to treat me—not unkindly, but a little indifferently, without

the consideration which, I think, a sister should receive. You will excuse my remarking this, my dear; I do so because perhaps you have never thought of it, and it may be a kindness to point it out—it would have been a kindness, I believe, if any one had pointed it out to my brother when he was a boy."

She spoke in a gentle musing tone, as though her mind had travelled far back into the past. It was impossible for Gerald to be annoyed, for her manner was so kind; but he flushed guiltily at her mention of his sister.

"Is your brother dead, Miss Goodwin?" he inquired, his curiosity aroused.

"Oh yes, he died—I forget when!" A doubtful expression crossed the old face, which suddenly changed to a look of gladness. "He thought of me at the last," she said softly, "and he died a Christian. That was what I had prayed for—that he might find Jesus—that was my heart's desire, which God gave me in His own good time. And so, Gerald, having had a

brother myself, and remembering his boyhood so plainly—oh, so plainly!—I do not forget the many temptations and troubles that beset every boy's life, and I can see you are worried about something. I want to ask you if there's anything you're keeping from your father that ought to be told? If so, tell him, my dear, tell him."

Gerald made no reply, and the old lady said no more; but he thought over all she had said after he had parted from her outside Myrtle Villa, and wished he could pluck up sufficient courage to tell his father of his indebtedness to Reginald Hope; but he shrank from the confession which he knew must follow.

"Father's so down on people who bet and gamble," he thought miserably; "he was angry enough when he found out I'd had Angel's money, and he'd be angrier still if he knew how I spent it. Hope will have to wait until I can save enough out of my pocket-money to pay him."

But this Reginald Hope was not willing to do. When he found that Gerald really hesitated to bet upon the result of the cricket match, he lost his temper, and for the first time allowed his victim a glimpse of him in his true colours. He declared he wanted his money, that he would have it, and threatened if he was not paid shortly, to apply to Mr. Willis. Gerald did not pause to consider whether Reginald would really take this plan of action or not; he was far too horrified at the idea to be in a fit state to view the matter with commonsense; and in sheer desperation made several bets with different boys in hopes of gaining money, and thereby being enabled to get out of debt. If the Grammar School won the cricket match he would be in a position to pay all he owed; if not—but he dared not contemplate that contingency.

There were many visitors to watch the match on Saturday afternoon, for the weather was beautifully fine, and the field presented quite a gay scene. The Mickles were present, and Angel with her

father and uncle; and they all seemed so happy and free from care, that Gerald felt as though he was out in the cold. They could not tell he was miserable; and the nervousness of his manner they ascribed to a very natural anxiety as to the result of the game. At first it looked as though the Grammar School boys would beat their opponents easily, and Gerald began to think that all would be well; but when their best batsman, in whom their highest hopes were centred, was caught out before he had made half a dozen runs, the unhappy boy's spirits fell and never rose again, for even Tom Mickle was obliged to admit before long that the Grammar School "hadn't a look in," as he expressed it.

The game was over at last, the strangers being the victors. Gerald was simply stunned, realizing that he was now in a worse position than ever. Reginald Hope came up behind him as he stood staring blankly at the deserted wickets with unseeing eyes, listening to the cheering, and touched him on the shoulder. Gerald



turned around with a start, and to his intense relief noticed that the other's face was beaming with satisfaction.

"So we're beaten," Gerald said; "it's an awful blow!"

"Not to me," Reginald replied, dropping his voice to a confidential whisper; "I've made a good thing of it to-day. I backed our visitors."

"I've lost!" Gerald exclaimed bitterly. "I don't know what I shall do. I haven't a penny to pay any one."

"Ask your father to come to the rescue. Get a draw from him. I see he's here! Or, how about your uncle?"

"That won't do."

Reginald stood thoughtfully whistling under his breath. Perhaps his conscience pricked him at the sight of his companion's dejected appearance, for after hesitating a few minutes, he put his

hand in his pocket and drew out half a sovereign.

"I can lend you that if it's any good to you," he said, "and you can pay me at some future day. I'm flush of money at present, wonderful to say."

Gerald was quite overcome with gratitude. After all, Hope was really a good-natured fellow. He accepted the loan with a profusion of thanks, and immediately went and paid his debts; after which he joined his own people, and was so merry and light-hearted, that his uncle remarked one would have thought the Grammar School had won the match.

Later in the evening, when Gerald found himself alone with Mr. Bailey, he asked him if he had known Miss Goodwin's brother.

"Why, yes," was the response. "I remember him as a young man when I was a boy. A fine, handsome fellow he was too, but no good—no good!"

"How was that, Uncle Edward?"

"He was a gambler. I believe he took to betting when he was a boy at school, and never gave up the habit. He squandered everything he could lay his hands upon, not his own money only."

"Do you consider betting very wrong?" Gerald inquired, wishing to hear what his uncle thought upon the subject.

"Do you consider betting right?" was the question Mr. Bailey put in return.

"N—o—o, I suppose not!" the boy admitted.

"You suppose not? I am certain it is not. And if it's not right, it's bound to be wrong. There can be no two thoughts about the matter. I've met many folks who've tried to persuade themselves there was no harm in betting and gambling, but they all went one way."

"What way was that, Uncle Edward?"

"The broad road which is so easy to travel because it's all downhill—the broad road which leads to destruction."

Gerald shuddered, for his uncle's tone had so much conviction in it. The broad road which leads to destruction! The words sounded again and again in his ears; he could not forget them.

"I suppose the chief idea of the gambler is to gain riches without labour," Mr. Bailey continued, "and that is wrong to begin with, for work is the salt of life; then, the gambler is generally a thief, for he always becomes unscrupulous as to how he obtains money. Never let any one persuade you, Gerald, that there is no harm in betting—it is one of the greatest curses of the present age, and is the cause of untold misery and sin. I believe people will bet on almost anything nowadays; indeed, Gilbert Mickle told me this afternoon that he suspected a lot of money would be won and lost over that cricket match we watched with so much interest. How terrible to think of turning a harmless recreation to such a purpose!"

Gerald mumbled some unintelligible reply. He regretted now that he had broached the subject of betting to his uncle at all, seeing how strongly he was set against it.

"If I could only raise the money to pay Hope I would never bet again," he thought; and then he remembered once more how Miss Goodwin had asked him if there was anything he was keeping from his father that ought to be told. What a sharp old lady she was; and how he wished he dared take her advice and tell his father his troubles. But, poor Gerald, though he had plenty of pluck in many ways, was a moral coward, and shrank from blame; besides which, his conscience was not wholly awakened even now. It is doubtful if the fact of his having betted would have weighed upon his mind if he had won his bets; he did not yet realize his sin.

The broad road which leads to destruction! How the words haunted him. Even in his sleep they must have been in his mind, for that night he dreamt he was

running down a steep, broad road, at the bottom of which was a yawning ravine. Terror was in his heart, for it appeared to him that he could not stop running; and he felt he was falling headlong into unknown depths, when, with a start and a cry of affright, he awoke, shaking from head to foot, but thankful to find himself safe in bed. Thank God, it was only a dream!

## CHAPTER XXIV

### Greater Depths

EARLY in July, Mr. Willis found it necessary to go to London to interview the editor of a magazine concerning a series of illustrations for a certain story; and, at his suggestion, Mr. Bailey accompanied him. Their intention was to remain away a few days; and, before leaving, Mr. Willis asked Gerald to spend his evenings at home with Angel during their absence, explaining that he thought Mrs. Vallance would be more satisfied to know where he was, as she was to be left in charge of the household.

"Very well, father," Gerald replied willingly, "I'll do as you say. We shall get on all right without you; but it will be very dull, I expect; and I hope you will soon come home again."

So Angel and Gerald were left, in a way, to their own devices. It was great fun at first to be the only two at the table at meal times, and both children enjoyed the novelty of the situation; but when, after Mr. Bailey and Mr. Willis had been away several days, the latter wrote to say that they did not intend to return till the

beginning of another week, Angel was very disappointed, and Gerald rather cross.

"Never mind, I expect they are having an enjoyable time!" she exclaimed. "I do hope they will go and see Mrs. Steer!"

"It's so dull without them," her brother grumbled, "and I think Mrs. Vallance is a great deal stricter than she has any right to be. She takes too much upon herself. The idea of her scolding me yesterday because I happened to get caught in a shower!"

"But she had told you to take your waterproof to school with you as the weather was so uncertain, and you wouldn't," Angel reminded him; "you ought to have obeyed her, you know. You came home drenched to the skin, and she had the trouble of drying all your clothes."

"She's only a servant! She has no right to dictate to us!"



"Oh yes, she has! Father said we were to do all we could to please her."

Gerald argued no further, for he well knew Angel never yielded a point which she considered right. The children were in the dining-room, where they were just finishing their lessons. Work ended, they put away their books and strolled out of doors, making their way to the kitchen garden, where Mrs. Vallance and Polly were busily occupied in picking raspberries for preserving. Angel at once volunteered her help, which was gladly accepted; and Gerald, after refreshing himself with a goodly quantity of the luscious fruit, wandered aimlessly towards the house, and finally went by the back door into the kitchen.

The kitchen at Haresdown House, the window of which commanded an uninterrupted view of the whole of the back garden, was a very pleasant room, and the picture of neatness. Gerald's roving eyes wandered from the gay prints which decorated the walls to the shining tin and copper articles on the

mantel-piece, and from thence to an open workbox and a desk on a side table. The desk was locked, but the key had been left in the lock. Gerald wondered what was inside; and impelled by curiosity, and never reflecting that his action was dishonourable, he unlocked the desk, opened it, and examined its contents—a few sheets of notepaper, a parcel of envelopes, pens, and a dainty little tortoise-shell box, which he lifted with careful fingers.

"I expect this was a present," he thought; "how pretty it is! I wonder if it belongs to Mrs. Vallance or Polly—to Mrs. Vallance, I suppose." He opened it, and to his astonishment saw it contained several pieces of gold and a crisp five-pound note.

Gerald's eyes sparkled enviously at the sight. How he wished one of those bright sovereigns was his, then he would soon be out of debt. A sigh broke from his lips as he counted the coins. One—two—three sovereigns, and one—two—three—four half-sovereigns! He wondered if Mrs.

Vallance knew how much money was there, and if it was hers, or if his uncle had given it to her for household expenses during his absence. If he had one of those sovereigns it would make him quite happy he thought, for Reginald Hope had hinted to him only that morning that he would require some money from him soon.

He glanced out of the window, and uttered an exclamation of alarm. Angel and Polly were still gathering raspberries; but Mrs. Vallance, having filled her dish, was coming towards the house to empty it. Acting on the impulse of the moment, Gerald hastily abstracted one of the sovereigns, replaced the tortoise-shell box where he had found it, shut the desk, locked it, and met the housekeeper at the back door as she was coming in. She looked at him sharply, struck by something peculiar in his expression; but he brushed by her, and went out into the garden without a word.

He was in high, unnatural spirits for the remainder of the evening; and at supper

kept up an incessant flow of conversation, making wild plans as to how the summer holidays should be spent.

"Tom Mickle is talking of camping out," he said, "but Gilbert doesn't seem keen to join him. I wish father would let me! Wouldn't it be fun?"

"Yes, if the weather's fine," Angel answered doubtfully, "not if it rains."

"Oh, of course it will be fine in August!"

"You don't see much of Reginald Hope now, do you?" Angel inquired abruptly.

"No—not a great deal. I—I don't like him so much as I did at first; but, still, he's not a bad sort of fellow, mind you!"

"He's a very cruel boy, at any rate. Dinah Mickle says he bets; does he?"

"What if he does, Angel? It's nothing to do with you."

Gerald looked slightly uneasy as he made this reply, for he saw his sister was regarding him with keen attention. His eyes fell beneath her steady gaze as she said—

"No, of course it's nothing to me, but I thought—I thought—"

She paused in embarrassment, hardly liking to put what she really thought into words; it had occurred to her that it was possible Reginald Hope had prevailed upon her brother to bet, and that he might have been squandering his money in that way; the idea had never entered her head until a few days previously, when Dinah had informed her confidentially that Gilbert and Tom wouldn't have anything to do with Reginald Hope because he made bets and used bad language, and was not a nice boy at all.

"Oh, Gerald!" she cried, after a short pause, "I hope you will never bet! You know what father thinks about people who do!"

"Don't upset yourself, Angel," he interposed hurriedly; "didn't you hear me say that I don't see a great deal of Hope now? I've hardly spoken to him for days, and I mean to see less of him than ever."

Angel looked decidedly relieved on hearing this, but she was not quite satisfied; however, she let the subject drop.

When Gerald retired to his bedroom for the night, he tied up the sovereign he had taken from the tortoise-shell box in the corner of his pocket-handkerchief, which he placed under his pillow for safety; then jumped into bed, and quickly fell asleep. In the stillness of the night he awoke with a start, under the impression that he had heard his mother's voice speak his name. He sat up in bed and listened, but all was quiet. How could he have heard his dear mother speak when she had been dead for more than two long years? Of course he had been dreaming. His eyes grew dim as he remembered how he would never really hear the loved, well-known voice again

as long as he lived; and he fumbled beneath his pillow for his pocket-handkerchief with which to wipe away his tears. Then, as he felt the sovereign, the events of the evening returned to his memory, and he trembled at the thought that he was a thief. He had committed a crime—such a crime as people were sent to prison for. There, in the darkness, with only the all-seeing eye of God to witness his terror, he realized the depths to which he had fallen. Supposing, when Mrs. Vallance discovered her loss, she sent for the police, and it was proved that he had robbed her? Oh, how he wished he had kept his prying fingers from that desk! He must have been mad to have acted as he had done. He would put the sovereign back at once. Swiftly he arose, and lighting a candle, untied the sovereign from the corner of the pocket-handkerchief; then silently opened the door, and stole softly downstairs. He hardly dared breathe properly, and when a stair creaked beneath his footstep, his heart almost stopped beating. But he reached the kitchen without disturbing

any one; the desk was there, but the key was gone, and the desk itself was locked. He could not put back the sovereign where he had found it, and he dared not put it anywhere else.

He returned to his room with his heart full of despair, and, shutting the door, pondered what he could do. The idea of paying Reginald Hope had become a secondary consideration now; the awful dread that the money would be found upon him, and that he would be arrested for theft was uppermost in his mind. He looked around the room for some place wherein to conceal the coin, and at last re-tied it up in his pocket-handkerchief, which he thrust behind the damper in the chimney. That done, he drew a breath of relief, and got into bed once more, hoping that the next day he would have an opportunity of putting the money back. If Mrs. Vallance had not startled him by returning to the house when he had not been expecting her, he would not have taken the sovereign, he told himself, trying to quiet his conscience; he had



acted impulsively, and if he had had time to consider the matter, it would have been different. Now he was a thief—yes, that was what he had come to be—a common thief! Was it not well that his mother had died rather than she should have lived to be disgraced by her son? That was the thought which appealed to him most, and brought him nearer real repentance than anything else could have done.

The following morning, Mrs. Vallance complained that candle-grease had been dropped upon the stair-carpets, and told Polly she was a very careless girl, and that she must learn to be more careful. Polly, of course, declared she was innocent of the offence, and the real culprit slunk off to school, feeling very guilty and mean. The housekeeper had evidently not discovered the loss of the sovereign yet.

In the playground, after morning school, Gerald was accosted by Reginald Hope, who clapped him familiarly on the

shoulder, and addressed him in friendly tones—

"Hulloa, youngster! One would think you were in the depths of trouble, judging by your woe-begone face! What are you looking so gloomy about? Come, cheer up! What's wrong, eh?"

"Oh, nothing!" Gerald responded, with palpable untruthfulness.

"Nothing!" the other echoed incredulously. "Oh, that's nonsense! What's up? Are you in some scrape or other, or what is it? You needn't let your indebtedness to me weigh upon your mind, you know."

"It's awfully good of you to say that!" Gerald exclaimed gratefully. "I shall pay you as soon as ever I can, but, you see—"

"Oh, I like to oblige a friend," Reginald interrupted, "and you'll oblige me in return, won't you?" he asked. He was in the habit of making use of the younger

boy on occasions, and hitherto Gerald had been satisfied to serve him.

"Oh yes!" was the ready response. "Do you want me to run an errand for you, or—"

"No, no; nothing of the kind. I want your company this evening. Come with me to the clay pits; several of the fish in my aquarium have died this week, and I must replace them. You always get better luck fishing than I do. You'll come?"

"I'm afraid I can't, Hope," Gerald answered, shaking his head. "I'll do anything else for you, but—"

"But I don't want you to do anything else! You said a moment ago you'd oblige me!"

"So I would in any way but this. You know I've been forbidden to go to the clay pits!"

"But you went there fishing with me once, and your father never found it out!"

"No; but Angel did," Gerald replied; then flushed hotly, and would have liked to be able to recall his words when he saw the look of intense scorn on his companion's face.

"Angel! And are you afraid of your sister?" Reginald asked, with a sneer.

"Not at all, not at all! That's not very likely! The fact is, father's in London now, and I promised him I'd spend my evenings at home till he returned. I'm afraid I can't go with you to-night, any way. I'm really very sorry, but you see how it is, don't you?"

"I hear what you say, but I don't see any reason why you should scruple to go fishing with me this evening if you choose, and I believe it's simply that you won't go. After all I've done for you, it's too bad for you to be so disobliging. Come, Willis, think better of it. If I hadn't lent you that half-sovereign the day of the cricket match, you'd have been in a pretty bad plight; I stood your friend then. Really, how you can be so ungrateful, I cannot

think. Well, will you go with me to the clay pits, or will you not?"

"I really can't. I'm very sorry, but—"

"Then as soon as your father returns from London I shall call upon him and tell him what a fine son he's got, one who makes bets when he knows he can't pay them if he loses, and—"

"Oh, pray don't go on like that!" Gerald cried distressfully. "Oh, surely you won't think of telling father about the bets? You've been so kind to me that I can't think you mean it!"

"You'll soon see if I do or not—unless you pay me what you owe me."

"You know I can't do that! Oh, what shall I do?" And the poor boy looked on the brink of tears.

"Don't be so foolish!" the other exclaimed impatiently. "I declare, you're almost blubbing! Come, say you'll go to the clay pits fishing with me, and let's be friends."

Thus pressed, Gerald at last gave way; and Reginald Hope, having gained his point, was satisfied, and left the younger boy to his thoughts, which were very unhappy ones.

"I say, what's wrong?"

The voice was Gilbert Mickle's. Gerald turned with a start and faced the lame boy, who was regarding him with a kindliness of expression in his eyes which made him answer impulsively—

"Everything's wrong! I'm utterly miserable!"

"I'm sorry," Gilbert said, looking as though he meant it. "Can I help you? Mr. Willis is away, I know, so you can't go to him!"

"No one can help me," Gerald declared, his face so full of unhappiness that the other's heart was touched with compassion; "it would be no good if father was at home, because I couldn't tell him what's bothering me."

This sounded serious. Gilbert's countenance was very grave as he wondered what Gerald had done that he could not tell his father. It must be something very bad, he feared.

The lame boy hesitated a few minutes, a flush spreading slowly over his face; then he said in a low tone, with a visible effort—

"Look here! I don't want to preach to you; but if you've done something wrong that you don't like to tell your father, don't forget there's One who knows all about it—it's no secret to God! I'd ask Him to help me, if I were you."

Having given this advice, he swung himself away on his crutches, whilst Gerald stared after him in astonishment, feeling he had been a little unjust in his dislike of Gilbert Mickle, who evidently was his well-wisher at heart.

## CHAPTER XXV

### An Alarming Experience

THE warm July evening was drawing in; heavy clouds were rising in the west, leaden in hue, portending a storm; and scarcely a breath of air stirred the leaves on the branches of the beech trees which completely overshadowed the narrow lane along which Dora and Gilbert Mickle were making their homeward way, the former's arms laden with bulrushes which she and her brother had obtained from a pond at a short distance from Wreyford for their mother, who had expressed a desire for some wherewith to decorate an ugly corner in the staircase.

"I am afraid your arms must be aching, Dora," Gilbert said; "those bulrushes are heavy, I know. I wish I could help carry them."



"Oh, never mind!" she replied cheerfully; "my arms do ache a little, but when we come to the next gateway we'll rest for a bit, shall we?"

"Certainly we will. How dark it's getting. It must be later than I thought; or perhaps it's only the branches keeping out the light."

The gateway reached, Dora put down her bundle of bulrushes on the ground, and perched herself on the top of the five-barred gate, against which Gilbert leaned whilst he surveyed the view—a stretch of pasture land, and beyond that the old disused clay pits, the water in which, being stagnant, appeared green and unwholesome even at that distance.

"See how dark the clouds are over there!" Dora exclaimed, pointing to the horizon. "It looks like a storm, doesn't it? I wonder if it's coming this way!"

"Perhaps it is; but, if so, it won't reach Wreyford for some time yet."

"Oh, Gilbert, there are two boys fishing in that clay pit—the one nearest here, I mean. I wonder if we can make out who they are. Yes—no—yes—I know!"

"I don't!" Gilbert replied. "What sharp eyes you must have, Dora. I can see two figures, but I can't recognize either. Your sight is better than mine. Who are they?"

"Reginald Hope and Gerald Willis."

"Hope and Willis? Are you sure?"

"Quite, quite sure."

"I believe Willis has been forbidden to go to the clay pits, and he certainly told me he had promised to remain at home evenings whilst his father was away."

"Do you think Mr. Willis can have returned?" Dora suggested.

"No. I wonder— Oh, what is that?" Shriek upon shriek from the direction of the clay pits fell upon their startled ears. Gilbert strained his eyes to see what was

happening, but it was Dora who was the first to grasp the situation.

"Oh, one of them is gone!" she cried. "He has fallen into the water, I do believe! Oh, how horrible! He will be drowned!"

Gilbert's face was ashen, for he knew that the water in the clay pits was fearfully deep. Seizing his crutches, he swung himself over the gate, and hastened across the meadow, Dora following. The shrieks continued, mingled with cries of "Help! help!" from the solitary figure standing helplessly on the brink of the pit where the two boys had been fishing side by side but a few minutes before.

"That's Hope!" Gilbert exclaimed presently. They had come at a great rate, and by this time had nearly reached the scene of the accident. "Then it's Willis who's fallen in! See! he's clinging to the rushes! If he can hold on a little longer we may be able to save him. What is Hope thinking of, that he isn't doing anything to

help him." Then, raising his voice, he shouted, "Hold on, Willis, I'm coming!"

Poor Gerald, who had slipped on the slimy bank above the pit, had, in falling, fortunately managed to grasp some of the rushes which grew around the edge of the pit, and so was enabled to keep his head and shoulders above the water. When Dora and Gilbert appeared in sight he was despairing of being rescued, for Hope, instead of coming to his assistance, was standing calling for help, afraid to stretch out a hand to the aid of his companion, lest he should share his fate.

"Oh, Mickle, save me!" Gerald cried imploringly. "Oh, I shall be drowned! I can't hold on much longer!"

This piteous appeal was too much for Dora. Never pausing to consider if she was acting wisely or not, she ran past Gilbert, and reaching the pit knelt down on the bank, and extended a hand to the terrified boy. He grasped it at once, and

the next moment there was a splash, and the little girl was in the water too.

Afterwards Gilbert had always a very hazy idea of what followed. Everything happened so quickly that he had no time for reflecting on the horror of the situation. He was conscious of a sickening sensation when he saw the two struggling forms in the water, but he did not lose his presence of mind.

"God help us! God help us!" he cried; then, "Oh, God, show me what to do!"

Gerald had again succeeded in clutching the rushes; and, flinging himself flat on the bank, Gilbert caught him by the collar, and with a great effort pulled him to the edge of the pit, where Hope, ashamed of his cowardice, lent his assistance, and in a very short while the terrified boy was on dry land.

Dora had gone under, but she rose again only a short distance from the bank. Gilbert saw by the look of appeal in her eyes, though her lips uttered no sound,

that she was not unconscious. Taking one of his crutches, he extended it towards her, telling her to catch hold of it. At first, he feared she was too frightened and bewildered to obey him; but, to his intense joy and relief, she succeeded in gripping it, and slowly he drew her by that means to the bank. Oh, how thankful he was at that moment for the infirmity which made his crutches a necessity! But for his lameness he would certainly not have been able to save Dora's life. His heart was full of exultation as he lifted the little form of his dearly-loved sister out of the water. He covered her pale, cold face with kisses as he held her in his arms, and implored her to speak to him. But Dora was quite unconscious now; her blue eyes were closed, and she showed no signs of life.

"Surely she is not dead!" Reginald exclaimed, as Gilbert laid her on the bank and began gently to chafe her hands. "She was not in the water very long. She can't be dead!"

"Dead!" echoed Gerald in a hollow tone. He was sitting on the bank, a miserable, dripping object, when the dread word fell upon his ears. Rising, he went to Dora's side, and gazed at her with a growing horror upon his face. "Oh, it is true," he wailed; "she is dead! And I have killed her!"

"No, no," Gilbert replied soothingly, "she is not dead. I can feel her heart beating. Oh, Dora, darling, open your eyes and look at me! Oh, my little sister!" And poor Gilbert's tears fell hotly, whilst he vainly tried to repress his emotion.

Perhaps his imploring voice reached Dora's dulled ears, for she really did open her eyes for a moment, and smiled faintly as she saw her brother; but she relapsed into unconsciousness, and Gilbert looked at the others despairingly, no whit ashamed of his tears, big boy as he was.



HE EXTENDED IT TOWARDS HER, TELLING HER TO  
CATCH HOLD OF IT.



**HE EXTENDED IT TOWARDS HER,  
TELLING HER TO CATCH HOLD OF IT.**

"What can we do?" he asked. "We ought to get her home as soon as we can. Oh, here comes some one! What a blessing! I know the man by sight; he's a farm labourer, I believe."

A big, good-natured looking countryman now appeared, and stood staring at the little group wonderingly, his ruddy countenance expressive of much concern. He had been going home from Work, he explained, and passing the gateway where Dora had left her bulrushes, he had paused to see if the owner of them was anywhere about; then he had become aware that something was amiss at one of the clay pits, and had hurried there to ascertain if he could be of any assistance. Gilbert briefly told him what had happened, and added that he was anxious to get his sister at home as soon as possible.

The man said he would gladly carry the "brave little maid," and lifting Dora in his strong arms, he bore her away without more to-do, whilst the boys followed in silence, each occupied with his own thoughts. Gerald found some difficulty in keeping up with the others, for his legs trembled and his clothes were heavy with water, besides which, he was getting colder and colder.

Reginald Hope was the first to speak, and certainly his words were an astonishment to his companions, coming as they did from one who had always held a wonderfully good opinion of himself.

"I am a coward," he said briefly, but with conviction in his tone. "I never even guessed it till to-day. I was afraid to go to Willis' assistance, but your little sister wasn't, Mickle. I'm a selfish brute. How you must despise me!"

"I don't despise you at all," Gilbert answered, "but—well, you were very frightened, and you lost your head."

At this moment Gerald, who was feeling very shaky, and whose nerves had received a shock, burst into a flood of tears.

"It would have been my fault if Dora had been drowned," he sobbed. "I never ought to have gone to the clay pits at all."

"Why did you, when you had been forbidden to go there?" Gilbert very naturally inquired.

"I made him," Reginald Hope acknowledged; "it was entirely my doing."

After that no more was said upon the subject. The high road was reached at length, where the party divided, Gilbert hurrying on ahead of the sturdy labourer, who carried his light burden with no apparent effort, whilst Reginald accompanied Gerald home, and thoughtfully promised, before parting with him at the gate of Haresdown House, to return later on and inform him what his father thought of Dora, for he felt certain

the Mickles would send for Dr. Hope at once.

The storm, which had been gathering all the evening, now broke. The rain began to descend in torrents, and streaks of lightning lit up the angry sky, whilst the thunder pealed overhead.

Angel, growing very anxious at her brother's absence, for she had not the least idea where he had gone, and a little nervous at the storm, had sought company in the kitchen, when the front door was opened, and Gerald himself staggered into the house. The little girl ran into the hall to meet him, and her startled cry brought Mrs. Vallance and Polly upon the scene.

At first Gerald was utterly incapable of giving an account of what had occurred, and it was not until he was safely in bed, and the hot milk the housekeeper had insisted on his drinking was beginning to bring warmth back to his chilled frame, that he was able to enter into any explanations.

Angel shuddered and turned pale as she listened to his tale; Mrs. Vallance made no comments, but her face expressed plainly what she thought of his conduct. She carried off his wet clothes to dry, and left the children by themselves for a while. When she was alone with her brother, Angel sat down on a chair by his bedside, and, laying her head on his pillow, wept without restraint. She was so disappointed in him; and beyond the fact that he had broken his word to her, and again been disobedient, was the thought that he had brought trouble upon the Mickles.

"Oh, poor, dear little Dora!" she cried presently. "How brave of her to try to save you! Oh, Gerald, how I wish I knew how she was! She was quite unconscious, you say?"

"Yes. Hope promised faithfully to come back and let me know what his father thought about her," Gerald replied; "but perhaps he won't," he added, with a miserable sob. "Oh, how the Mickles will all hate me if Dora dies!"

"Oh, don't talk like that! I can't bear to hear you."

"Can't you pray for her?" Gerald asked suddenly. "I daren't pray myself. I'm too wicked."

"Oh no! You must pray with me, Gerald."

Angel knelt down by the bedside, and put her earnest petition that Dora's life might be spared into simple words; then she repeated the Lord's prayer, and Gerald, though he uttered no sound, joined with her in his heart.

The storm increased in fury, so that the children thought it extremely doubtful if Reginald Hope would keep his word and return to Haresdown House that night. At last, when they had given up expecting him, there was a ring at the front door bell, and Polly went to answer it.

It was not Reginald, however, but his father, who explained that Mrs. Mickle had asked him to call and see Gerald, for

she felt very anxious about him, especially as Mr. Willis was from home.

"How's Dora?" asked Gerald, almost breathless with suspense, as the doctor entered his room.

"Better," was the prompt response, "and sleeping peacefully, I'm pleased to say. And how are you after your ducking, my boy? That son of mine ought not to have taken you to the clay pits. I had warned him not to go there."

"I had been forbidden to go there too," Gerald admitted.

"Humph!"

The doctor made no other comment. He felt Gerald's pulse, took his temperature, administered a dose of soothing medicine which he had brought with him, and then went downstairs, followed by Mrs. Vallance, who thanked him for calling.

"The boy will most probably be all right to-morrow," he told her; "you have done everything that was necessary under the circumstances; he is not in the least feverish, and very likely will not even have a cold as punishment for his disobedience. I shall send Reginald to a good, strict boarding-school next term, where I hope he will be taught to obey." And the doctor went out into the storm again, whilst the housekeeper returned to Gerald's room.

Now that his mind was easy about Dora, the boy was inclined to rest, so Mrs. Vallance and Angel left him to himself, and ten minutes later he had forgotten all his troubles in a deep, dreamless sleep. It was hours before Angel slept that night. She lay awake listening to the thunder in the distance, for the storm was passing away, and watching the lightning as it occasionally illuminated her room, whilst her tender conscience reproached her that she had not told her father of Gerald's disobedience when he had first gone fishing in the clay pits, and Mrs.



Mickle had acquainted her with the truth. By holding her peace when she ought to have spoken, she had allowed Gerald to disobey a second time, and thereby nearly brought about the loss of his own and another's precious life. Mrs. Mickle had warned her that she was wrong in shielding her brother from blame; but she had never fully understood till now the harm she had been unconsciously doing. She was greatly troubled at the thought of what her father would say when he returned home and found that his son was not to be trusted. How astonished and grieved he would be when he heard of that evening's work! And, kind and good as Mrs. Mickle had been in sending Dr. Hope to see Gerald that night, how she must blame the boy in her heart.

Bitter tears bedewed Angel's pillow as she turned these matters over in her mind; she tossed restlessly and wearily about, and could not rest. The storm had died away altogether, and the first pale streaks of daybreak were appearing in

the eastern sky before she at last fell into a troubled sleep.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### Gerald's Repentance

GERALD, as Dr. Hope had predicted, was quite well in health on the following day, though exceedingly depressed and unhappy; but Dora had taken a severe chill, so that Mr. Willis and Mr. Bailey had returned before she was well again. They reached Haresdown House in the afternoon whilst the young folks were at school; and, consequently, they had heard the story of Gerald's disobedience and its consequences before Angel and Gerald came home.

Mr. Willis' first words to his son were somewhat of an astonishment to both children, who had anticipated that he would be very angry and severe in his mode of punishment. Gerald had been dreading the meeting with his father for days; and Angel had been looking forward to it with little less perturbation.

"I know all that has happened during my absence," Mr. Willis said gravely, as the guilty boy stood trembling before him. "We met Mr. Mickle as we came through

the town, and he told us of your accident the other night. I promised him I would not punish you, for he believes the anxiety you have suffered on Dora's account to be sufficient punishment, and he begged me not to be harsh with you. I do not think I was ever that to either of my children. Perhaps I have erred in trusting you too far, but I am not likely to make that mistake again."

Gerald hung his head in shame at the sound of reproach in his father's voice; he had expected anger—punishment—but not this.

"Oh, father, you cannot think how sorry I am!" he murmured contritely, his eyes filling with tears.

"Yes, I think I can. But your sorrow would have been of little account if poor little Dora Mickle had lost her life. Say no more on the subject now; it makes one shudder to contemplate what might have been the results of your deliberate disobedience. I will have a talk with you by-and-by. Your uncle and I hoped to spend a happy

evening, and I do not wish it to be spoilt on your account. We will speak of something else."

"First of all, let us tell the children about their old friend, Mrs. Steer," Mr. Bailey suggested. He had been observing Gerald whilst his father had been speaking to him, and was much struck by his haggard appearance and the hunted look in his eyes. "Tell them of our visit to her, John."

"Oh yes, do, father!" Angel cried, her troubled face brightening somewhat. It was a great relief to know that Mr. Willis did not intend to punish Gerald, and her spirits accordingly began to rise. "Dear Mrs. Steer! How kind she used to be to me! How did you find her? Was she glad to see you? Had she many lodgers? Was—"

"Oh, stop!" Mr. Willis exclaimed. "Not so many questions at once. We found her just as ever—she wore a purple gown, I cannot say if it was the same we used to know—and I really think she was glad to see us."

"Especially to see you, John," Mr. Bailey interposed. "I thought she would never cease shaking hands with you."

"She really seemed delighted," Mr. Willis continued, "and declared I was looking remarkably well. She asked all sorts of kind questions about you, Angel—if you went to school, if you had grown, and how you liked the country. We were with her quite a long while, she had so much to say; she even inquired about my work, and wanted to know if the picture which was to make my fortune was finished."

"What did you say?" Angel questioned, flushing a little.

"Of course I told her it was not, but I hoped it would be some day. She shook her head at that, and remarked that pictures were all very well in their way, but no one ought to waste much time upon them."

"Oh, father!" Angel exclaimed; then, seeing he was smiling, she broke into a laugh. "Mrs. Steer doesn't understand,"

she said, "but she means well, and she's a good old soul."

Gerald was wondering if their old landlady had made no mention of him, when his father turned to him with the remark—

"She was very interested in all I told her about you, too, Gerald. Indeed, I believe she is really fond of both of you children."

After tea Angel took her father out to look at her own garden, to see how the geraniums had come into flower. She took the opportunity to speak to him about her brother.

"He is so unhappy," she told him; "ever since the night of the accident he has not been like the same boy. I think he is grieving very much. He has been to inquire for Dora every day, and yesterday he saw Mrs. Mickle, and they had quite a long chat together. I don't know what they talked about, but when he came home he said to me, 'Angel, I've been a worse boy than you know, and when I've told father

everything he'll never love or trust me again.' And, oh, he looked so white and wretched," the little girl concluded, almost in tears herself.

"Nothing Gerald has done could alter my affection for him," Mr. Willis replied gravely, "but trusting him is another matter. I can see he is miserable; I am sure that is not to be wondered at. There is no excuse for his behaviour."

"I know that, father, and I think he knows it himself."

Presently Mr. Bailey and Gerald joined the others in the garden. Gerald glanced at his father doubtfully; he dreaded to be left alone with him, and at the same time longed to get over the confession he had fully made up his mind to make. Mr. Willis sat down on a garden seat, and when Angel and Mr. Bailey strolled away in the direction of the kitchen garden, Gerald timidly approached his father, and ventured to place himself by his side.



"Father," he said huskily, "I have something to say to you."

He paused, as though unable to proceed further. Mr. Willis turned to him, and, as he remained silent, said gently—

"I suppose you want to ask my forgiveness, Gerald?"

"No," the boy replied, "no, not yet—not until you know all. Oh, how shall I tell you? Oh, what will you think of me?"

"Try not to excite yourself," his father said soothingly, pitying his distress. "If you have anything to confess to me, I am ready to hear it. Confide in me, my son, but let me have the whole truth."

"Yes," Gerald cried. "I am sick of lies. Oh, father, I have been so wicked—so awfully, awfully wicked!"

Mr. Willis scanned the boy's pale countenance with some anxiety. It was true that Gerald had been much worried about Dora; but in addition to that trouble

had been the fears he had suffered from having been unable to restore the sovereign he had stolen. The coin was still hidden in his bedroom chimney, for he had never had an opportunity of putting it back in the little tortoise-shell box, as Mrs. Vallance had not left the key in the lock of her desk again. Remorse had preyed upon his mind and left its traces in dark circles around his blue eyes, and in a nervousness of manner which was painful to witness.

"Tell me what you have done," Mr. Willis said gravely; "don't be afraid of me, Gerald," he added quickly, as the boy appeared to cower beneath his steady gaze.

"I will, I will tell you! Oh, father, will you quite hate me, I wonder? I have spent my money in betting, and—and—I am a thief."

Mr. Willis turned perfectly white, and a look of alarm crossed his face.

"Explain what you mean," he said, laying his hand on his son's shoulder. "Don't

spare yourself—or me. I must know everything. Tell me."

And Gerald did tell him. It was a miserable tale—difficult to relate, most painful to hear—of weakness and moral cowardice leading to deception and worse, but it was told at last. Dead silence followed.

"Does your sister know all this?" Mr. Willis asked at length.

"No, no! She guesses that I have been betting, but she knows nothing about the money I took."

"Gerald, you must give it back at once. That is the first thing to be done. You must tell Mrs. Vallance exactly how it was you took it, and restore it to her."

"Oh, father!"

"You assure me you are truly sorry," Mr. Willis proceeded, his voice full of pain, "and that you repented of your sinful act the very night you stole the money, and

would have replaced it if you had not found the key gone and the desk locked. You must explain all this to Mrs. Vallance. Go and get the sovereign, and bring it to my studio."

Gerald knew he must obey. Five minutes later he entered the studio, and found his father waiting for him. Mr. Willis rang the bell the instant his son appeared, and requested Polly, who answered the summons, to ask Mrs. Vallance to spare him a few minutes of her time.

When the housekeeper came in, Mr. Willis gave her a chair, saying Gerald had something to tell her; and Gerald, in a low, shamed tone, commenced his tale afresh, but, to his intense surprise, he had not proceeded far before he was stopped.

"I know all about it, Master Gerald," Mrs. Vallance interposed, her eyes fixed on the sovereign, which he had placed in her hand. "I missed the money the same evening you took it. I found I had left the key in my desk, and when I counted the

coins in my little tortoise-shell box—it was Mr. Bailey's money, by the way, what he had given me for housekeeping expenses and in case of emergencies—I found I was a sovereign short. Well, I knew only two people had had an opportunity of touching it—you and Polly. I thought Polly was honest, and, at the same time, it did not appear likely you would have touched it, so I hardly knew what to do. After pondering over the matter a long while, I decided to hold my tongue about my loss, for I couldn't bear the idea of accusing any one wrongfully. So I kept watch, and felt very uneasy, I can tell you. I couldn't find out whether it was you or Polly who had taken the money. Indeed, I am thankful to know the truth, for I've been very uncomfortable and troubled."

"I should have put it back, only you took the key out of your desk," Gerald said eagerly, "I went down in the night, and it was I who dropped the candle-grease over the stair-carpets—not Polly. You can't think how mean and wicked I've felt,

Mrs. Vallance. I hope you'll forgive me for prying into your desk, and—and—" He broke down completely, and hid his face in his hands.

"I do forgive you, Master Gerald. And, if you please, we'll never mention this matter again. I shall never speak of it to a living soul, I promise you that. I can see you're really sorry; and I shall pray that God's Holy Spirit may change your heart so that you may be better able to withstand temptation for the future."

Saying which, Mrs. Vallance rose and quietly left the room, shutting the door after her. By-and-by Gerald lifted his head and glanced at his father, who was watching him with an expression of mingled sorrow and affection in his eyes.

"Oh, father," sobbed the boy, "do you really love me still?"

"Yes, my son, certainly I do; and God loves you too, in spite of all, for His love is stronger and further reaching than mine. Deeply as you have sinned against Him,

He is ready with His forgiveness if you truly repent. Confess your sins to your Father in Heaven."

Mr. Willis paused. He walked up and down the room for some minutes, much agitated. The voices of Angel and Mr. Bailey were heard in the garden outside.

"Will you tell them—everything?" Gerald asked in a choked voice. "I want them to know—and, oh, father, don't look so unhappy! I will really try to be a better boy."

"I hope you will," Mr. Willis responded, with a deep sigh. "Think what a grief your conduct would have been to your dear mother if she had lived."

"Oh, I know! I know!" the boy cried distressfully; and, overcome afresh with grief and remorse, he rushed out of the studio, and ran upstairs to his own room.

Flinging himself on his knees by the bedside, he gave way to his sorrow. If his father had not been so kind, if he had

reproached him and refused him forgiveness, he would not have been so brokenhearted as he was now. How good his father had been to him!

By-and-by he tried to pray. He remembered how Angel had once said to him, "When we do anything wrong, it's really against God we sin," and he prayed earnestly. "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight." As he prayed a sense of comfort stole into his sore heart; he felt that God had forgiven him.

When the supper bell rang he rose from his knees, and after bathing his tear-stained face and brushing his ruffled hair, went downstairs into the dining-room, where he found the others seated at table. Angel rose the minute he entered, and putting her arms around his neck, kissed him with trembling lips. He took



her caress as an earnest of her unchanging love.

"Has father told you?" he whispered, noticing that she was very pale, and had evidently been crying.

"Yes," she answered.

"Everything? About my betting, and the money I stole from Mrs. Vallance?"

She nodded. Mr. Bailey, who was quietly eating his supper, now lifted his eyes from his plate, and beckoned to Gerald to take the chair next to him.

"Sit down, my boy," he said kindly; "your father has told us everything you wished us to know. You must have been very unhappy lately, with so much on your mind. But you are going to turn over a new leaf. You have been on the wrong road. Thank God you can retrace your footsteps and start afresh—not in your own strength this time."

Gerald cast a grateful glance at his uncle, who during supper did his very best to keep up the conversation which, however, in spite of his efforts, continually flagged. Mr. Willis looked depressed, and very different from his usually cheery self; Angel had great difficulty in restraining her tears; whilst Gerald was fully conscious that he had quite spoilt the happiness and pleasure of his father and uncle's home-coming.

The following morning Mr. Willis gave his son the money to pay all he owed to Reginald Hope, so he was able to free himself from debt at last, and returned home from school with a lighter heart than he had had for many weeks. He had another cause for which to be thankful—Tom Mickle had told him that Dora was much better, and able to rise from bed. In the course of a few days she was about again, and by the time the summer holidays arrived, had regained her health and strength.

Angel and Gerald had one long talk together concerning his delinquencies;

he confided in her how he had been led into the path of deception and lies, and promised her to speak the truth and act honourably for the future. Angel thought he meant to keep his word, and she was right. He knew it would be some time before his relatives and friends would regain their faith in him, and the thought that they were unable to trust him was very bitter and humiliating. The poor boy was learning by experience that evil-doing always brings its own punishment, and that we are bound to bear the consequences of our sins, even though we have repented and obtained forgiveness. Hitherto, Gerald had always thought of himself first, but now he was endeavouring to be thoughtful for others, especially with the sister who had borne with him so long. The Mickle children said amongst themselves that Gerald Willis was much nicer than he used to be, and accordingly treated him with far more geniality than they had done in the days when they had constantly been brought face to face with his selfishness and his

determination to insure his own comfort and pleasure at any cost.

Gerald had a hard battle to fight in the new path he had solemnly vowed to himself to tread; his old associates at school were not easily dropped, and the new ones he tried to make were shy of his advances. Many were the temptations that beset him; but those who loved him knew that he would not fall by the way, for he had gone for assistance to the one Friend who never fails us: he had found Jesus, and no longer stood alone.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### Five Months Later

IT was a December afternoon, and unusually mild for the season. The weather had been showery for days, and though the rain had kept off for several hours, heavy clouds still floated swiftly across the sky, driven by a westerly wind, throwing fleeting shadows over the emerald green meadows on the slope of Haresdown hill, and now and then obscuring the soft, pale rays of the setting sun.

In the porch of the old parish church were seated Dinah and Dora Mickle with Angel Willis. They had been speaking of the latter's first visit to Wreyford with Mr. Bailey a year before; but now the little girls had hushed their voices to listen to the glad, clear notes of a robin, perched on a tombstone not more than a yard or so from the porch. The sweet songster warbled happily for several minutes, by no means disquieted by his audience; then, his cheery song concluded, he spread his wings and flew away.

"I wonder if he was singing for our benefit," Angel said, smiling at the thought; "he seemed to be watching us with his sharp dark eyes—the dear thing!"

"Yes, so he did," Dinah replied. "Robins are my favourite birds, because they sing in the winter when all the others are silent. Let me see, what was it we were talking about? Oh, I know! Yes, it must have been about a year ago when we first met you, Angel; I remember so well

father calling me downstairs and introducing me to you."

"Yes. And he told you to amuse me, and give me some tea," Angel broke in eagerly; "and, oh, how shy I felt when you led me upstairs, and into the dining-room!"

"Yes!" Dora cried; "and Tom laughed at you, and afterwards Gilbert was nasty because he fancied you were staring at him because he was lame and walked with crutches. I'm afraid you didn't like us much."

"There you are mistaken. I liked you and Dinah, you were so kind; and I think I loved your mother from the very first moment I saw her. Little did I think then that I should soon get to know you so well, or that my home would be at Wreyford too!"

"It was that very day Dora and I discovered Haresdown House was taken," Dinah remarked reflectively; "I remember we had been for a walk, and

had rested here just as we are doing this afternoon. I had been telling Dora all about poor old Ezekiel Hassal, who was parish clerk here in Oliver Cromwell's time—you know his story—and as we were going home we noticed the board had been taken down from the garden of Haresdown House. Then, when we reached home, Gilbert told us the place had been bought by an Australian gentleman, and whilst he was explaining to us what you and your uncle were like, we looked out of the window, and saw you and Mr. Bailey and father at the garden gate. Oh, Angel, how you have altered since then!"

"Have I?" Angel exclaimed in surprise. "How? In what way do you mean?"

"You've grown, and become plump and rosy. You used to be such a pale little thing, with large grey eyes that looked too big for your face," Dinah responded promptly.

"Tom said they were owly, like a young bird's," Dora said, gazing at her friend



scrutinously; "but they're not a bit like that now, are they, Dinah?"

"No, indeed! Then, you had such an old-fashioned way of talking, as though you were a grownup person. I remember you told mother you had not 'the artistic temperament'; I have so often wondered what you meant by that.

"Was it an odd thing to say? Yes, I dare say it was." Angel laughed merrily, then became suddenly grave. "When I was a little girl," she said thoughtfully— "oh, long before my mother died!—father used to put a pencil in my hand, and try to get me to draw, but I never had the least idea about copying anything, and he would look so disappointed. One day I overheard mother and father talking about me, and father said 'She has not the artistic temperament.' Of course I had no idea what he meant, but I somehow understood from the sound of his voice that he was sorry. When I grew older, and knew I had been called Angelica after Angelica Kauffmann, the painter, I began to see why father couldn't help being a

little disappointed, and I never forgot his words; it seemed to me to be dreadful that an artist's daughter shouldn't have 'the artistic temperament.' I used to trouble about it, but I don't now. If I can't draw and paint, I can sew, and do other things."

"Yes, indeed!" Dinah agreed; "and you are getting on so well with your music. It's a pity there's no piano at Haresdown House!"

A smile crept into Angel's eyes; she hesitated a moment before replying.

"I can't help thinking we're to have a piano soon," she said confidentially, "because the other day I came upon father and Uncle Edward suddenly in the dining-room, and they were looking over an advertisement list of pianos; they put it away immediately they saw me, but not before I had caught sight of it. Neither of them said a word about it, so, of course, I didn't; but, oh, it would be splendid to have a piano! Gerald keeps on saying, 'What a very great pity it is that we have

no piano at Haresdown House for you to practise upon!" I know there must be a reason for his harping on the point like that."

"It's very evident your people can't keep a secret!" Dinah exclaimed, with an amused laugh. "Well, I suppose we ought to be moving homewards, though it's very comfortable and sheltered here, isn't it? How lovely everything looks when the sun shines out! Gilbert says the shadows are always so beautiful on a showery day! Oh, by the way, Angel, have you seen the picture Gilbert has painted for Miss Goodwin?"

"Oh yes! She called father and me in when we were passing Myrtle Villa yesterday, and showed it to us. I liked it so much, and Miss Goodwin seemed simply delighted with it, and so flattered that Gilbert had painted it on purpose for her."

"Gilbert hoped she would be pleased with it, he had heard her admire the old bridge over the river so often, and guessed she would like a picture of it. But what was

your father's opinion about it?" Dinah asked anxiously.

"He said it showed great talent, and that he was proud of his pupil."

"I am so glad!" the sisters exclaimed in a breath; and Dora added, "I shall tell Gilbert that!"

"He will be pleased, because he thinks so much of Mr. Willis' opinion," said Dinah. "Do you know, Angel, father has promised to let Gilbert be an artist if he really wants to be one. Isn't it good of father? He wished Gilbert to be a lawyer; but mother thinks if Gilbert has a talent for painting, he ought to use it; and if he's an artist, his lameness won't matter! I don't know if it would matter much if he was a lawyer," she added, "because he's not nearly so sensitive about it as he was. He says since that night when his crutch was the means of saving Dora's life he's never regretted being lame."

"Dear old Gilbert!" the younger sister exclaimed softly. "Angel, do you know

Reginald Hope is at home again?" she questioned after a brief silence.

Angel shook her head. At the commencement of the autumn term Dr. Hope had sent his son to a strict boarding-school, as he had threatened to do. Dora proceeded to explain that her brothers had met their old school-fellow on the previous day, and had had quite a long conversation with him, during which they had noticed that he had changed a good deal.

"Gilbert says he is improved, and he told the boys he had given up betting altogether," the little girl said in conclusion.

"I only hope he spoke the truth!" Dinah exclaimed severely.

"Gilbert thinks so," Dora reminded her sister, "and he does not make many mistakes," she added, for she had great faith in her elder brother's astuteness.

As the children passed out of the churchyard by the lych-gate, Dinah called the attention of the others to two figures ahead of them. With a throb of apprehension at her heart, Angel recognized her brother and Reginald Hope.

The boys kept ahead all the way, but on reaching Haresdown House the elder proceeded down the hill; and Gerald, looking back, saw his sister and her friends. Dinah and Dora only paused a few seconds at the gate to say "good-bye," after which they went on their way, whilst Angel and her brother slowly walked towards the house.

"You need not look so serious," Gerald said gravely, noticing Angel's clouded face; "I've done no harm in speaking to Hope. Father wouldn't wish me to cut him altogether!"

"Oh no, but—"

"I shall tell father I've seen him. I met him by chance; his school broke up several

days ago. Can't you trust me, even yet, Angel?" he asked a little wistfully.

"Reginald Hope had always so much influence over, you," she said half-apologetically. "I want to trust you, Gerald, but I can't help being afraid for you! Can you trust yourself? Are you sure you won't allow Reginald Hope to—to—" She broke off abruptly. Gerald sighed, but suddenly his countenance brightened, and he answered—

"No, but I can trust God, and that's better than trusting myself, isn't it?"

"Well said, my boy!" exclaimed a hearty voice close by, and turning hastily the children saw Mr. Bailey, who had crossed the grass and approached them from behind. "Come indoors," he commanded, "and see what has arrived this afternoon during your absence."

He opened the front door, and they followed him into the hall, where Mr. Willis joined them, looking "as smiling as a bundle of chips," as Gerald whispered

to his sister, who laughed at the absurd comparison.

"Now, shut your eyes, Angel," Mr. Bailey said, repressed excitement in his voice, "and don't open them till I tell you may. Give me your hand!"

The little girl was astonished, but she closed her eyes obediently, and Mr. Bailey led her into the dining-room. There was a brief silence; a movement at the far end of the room, and then a most discordant crash, evidently a few notes of a piano inadvertently struck, followed by a reproachful exclamation from Mr. Bailey—

"Oh, John, how did you manage to be so clumsy!"

Angel opened her eyes, and saw her father standing by the side of a piano, which he had evidently just opened.

"I am so sorry, Uncle Edward," he said somewhat ruefully, "I was trying to open the piano quietly so that Angel should not



hear, and I touched the notes with my elbow. It was indeed clumsy of me."

"Never mind!" Mr. Bailey, returned laughing, as he dropped Angel's hand and with a cry of pleasure she sprang to the piano's side. "But I thought the arrangement was for you to astonish Angel with a flood of melody!—Well, child, what do you think of my latest purchase? I hope it is a good instrument!"

"It looks a beauty," Angel answered, as she examined the pretty cottage piano in its rosewood case, and touched the notes softly.

"Sit down and try it, then you will be a better judge," Mr. Bailey said, watching her flushed, happy face with smiling eyes.

Angel complied, and played one of the simple tunes she had learnt at school, whilst the others stood by listening.

"It is a beautiful piano!" she declared enthusiastically.

"It is for you," Mr. Bailey told her, "for your very own, my dear. A present from your old uncle!"

"For me!" the little girl cried. "For my own? Oh, father do you hear what he says?"

"Certainly I do. You are very fortunate to have such a present given you," Mr. Willis answered earnestly.

"Oh, I am, indeed! Uncle Edward, I can never tell you how much I thank you," she said in trembling tones, and with heartfelt gratitude, throwing her arms around Mr. Bailey's neck and kissing him; "but I do thank you very, very much! I knew you must be thinking of buying a piano, because I saw you and father looking over a list of pianos one day; but I never thought you meant to give me one! Fancy, my having a piano of my very own!"

"Listen to that now!" Mr. Bailey said to the others. "We didn't keep our secret as well

as we imagined we were doing. Angel, you are too sharp for us."

"Gerald, did you know it was to be mine—really mine?" she asked, turning her bright, excited face to her brother.

"Yes, and I'm so glad," he responded heartily. "You'll get on splendidly now you've got a piano to practise on."

There was no jealousy in the boy's heart as he spoke; he sympathized with his sister's pleasure as he certainly would not have done some months before, a fact his father, who was watching him with secret anxiety, noted with a sense of relief and gladness.

Later in the evening Gerald told how he had met Reginald Hope that afternoon, and repeated the conversation which had passed between them. It appeared Reginald Hope had informed him he had given up betting, and had said he was sorry for having induced him to do what was wrong.

"Of course, he did influence me a great deal," Gerald acknowledged, his cheeks turning crimson as he thought of the past, "but he could not have done it if I had not been a foolish, wicked boy, and I told him so. He would argue that it was all his fault, but I know it wasn't. Hope seems altered somehow."

"That's what the Mickle boys say!" Angel exclaimed. "They consider he has improved."

"He was always very nice to talk to," Gerald said thoughtfully, "very amusing; I don't think I ever knew any one who could be nicer than Hope when he liked."

"Let us trust he has seen the error of his ways," Mr. Bailey remarked gravely. "I trust he is learning to be manly and straightforward, and will live to be a comfort to his father yet."

"What can I say to make you understand how happy you have made me, Uncle Edward?" Angel whispered after she had given Mr. Bailey her good-night kiss. "You

are so very good to me, and indeed to us all."

"I love to see you happy, child," he replied, as he returned her caress. "What a big girl you're growing," he continued, holding her at arm's length, and surveying her with smiling, affectionate eyes; "no one would recognize you for the delicate-looking little maiden who welcomed me home a year ago! I can always picture you as I saw you, on the stairs, gazing down at me with great eyes—"

"'Owly eyes,' Tom Mickle said they were," Angel broke in; "the Mickle girls were telling me so to-day."

They all laughed merrily at that, and then the young folks went off to bed, Gerald racing Angel up the stairs, and, of course, arriving first at the top. Needless to say, Angel's last thought that night was of her new possession; and when she fell asleep, it was to dream pleasantly of strains of sweet music, melodious and

soul-stirring, which came from a certain cottage piano in a rosewood case.

## Conclusion

THE winter passed swiftly and happily for the household at Haresdown House, and before the days began to lengthen, Mr. Willis had finished his picture. It was exhibited in his studio to the friends he had made in Wreyford ere it was safely packed for its journey to town. No one knew better than Angel how the artist had pinned his most cherished hopes on the success of this piece of work, once laid aside through no fault of his own, now completed in every detail with the greatest care. She and Gilbert Mickle had many a long talk about it, never doubting either of them but that others would be as appreciative of Mr. Willis' talent as themselves. Nor were they to be disappointed, for, in due course, the picture was hung on the walls of Burlington House in a most excellent position, and known to be the picture of the year. 'Righteousness and Peace' was declared, in artistic circles, to be the work of a genius, and Angel and Gerald's

delight knew no bounds, whilst Mr. Bailey felt vastly proud of his nephew.

One beautiful May evening, when the fresh spring breeze was sweet with the scent of hawthorn and wild flowers, a very happy party was congregated in the Mickles' dining-room—Mrs. Mickle and her four children, Miss Goodwin, and Angel and Gerald Willis. The two latter had lately arrived upon the scene: they had explained that they were going to the station to meet their father and uncle, who were returning from London that night, but that having half an hour to spare before the train was due to reach Wreyford, they thought they would pass the time with their friends.

"We wanted to tell you about the papers father has sent us from London," Angel said, her grey eyes sparkling with excitement; "they all speak so well of 'Righteousness and Peace,' and Uncle Edward wrote and told us that when he went to Burlington House there was quite a crowd around father's picture, and every one was admiring and praising it."



"It is a most marvellous piece of work, to my mind!" Miss Goodwin exclaimed. "How proud we ought to feel, dear Mrs. Mickle, that we were privileged to have a private view of the picture, which I am informed, is by far and away the best in the Royal Academy this year. We were indeed most fortunate!"

"So I think," Mrs. Mickle replied, smiling. "What is that, my dear?" she asked, as Angel pulled an envelope from her pocket.

"It's a letter from Mrs. Steer," Angel answered; "you know who she is—our old landlady in London. I should like you to read what she says, because it's mostly about father. Please read it aloud, Mrs. Mickle; I dare say the others would like to hear it too."

Mrs. Mickle took the letter from the little girl's hand, smiled into the eyes that met her own full of a great happiness; then turned her attention to Mrs. Steer's rather indistinct handwriting, and read aloud, slowly, as follows—

*"MY DEAR MISS ANGEL,—"*

*"I am sending you a few lines, because I think you will like to know I have seen your dear pa*

*twice. First, he called on Saturday, and asked me to go with him to look at his picture at*

*Burlington House; but, as Saturday is always the busiest day of the week with me, as I dare say*

*you remember, I couldn't go then, and so I told him. He said I was to study my own convenience,*

*being as considerate as he ever was, dear Miss Angel, and as nice, and good-tempered. Well,*

*I told him I could go on Tuesday, and on Tuesday he fetched me in a cab, and we drove off together.*

*One of my lodgers had told me as how  
your pa's picture is a great deal thought  
of by them who*

*understand such things, and that every  
one is talking of it, so you may imagine I  
was a bit*

*curious to see it, but I wasn't prepared for  
the fuss folks made about it. There was a  
crowd of*

*people around the picture, gang at it with  
all their eyes, and saying such flattering  
things*

*about your pa; one gentleman kept on  
repeating to himself— 'Beautiful!  
beautiful! What perfection*

*of colouring!' and after he had gone away,  
and I thought I had seen the last of him, he  
came back,*

*and stared at the picture again and  
again."*

*"Of course, as you know, dear Miss Angel,  
I had seen that picture times enough  
before it was*

*finished; I had watched it grow from  
shadows so indistinct that you couldn't  
make out what they*

*were meant for into those two women  
going towards each other to kiss; and, as  
your pa said,*

*I couldn't be expected to look at it with  
quite the same eyes as other people—it  
was like watching*

*a conjurer's trick when you know all the  
while how it's done—but I must say it's a  
most wonderful*

*picture—so real, I felt as though I had  
only to stretch out my hand, and touch  
two living women,*

*and I didn't wonder any longer that your  
pa is considered clever. I think it was very  
nice*

*of him to take me to see 'Righteousness and Peace;' but there, Miss Angel, I always did say your pa*

*meant well. He tells me as how it is better times for you now; that he is earning more money, and*

*that the success of this picture of his has made you all very happy. Dear Miss Angel, I am very,*

*very glad. I must say I think you understood what your pa could do better than I did, for you*

*always thought he would be famous some day, and it seems he is, and I am proud to speak of him as*

*having once lodged in my house—as kind a man as I ever knew, and a perfect gentleman."*

*"I send my best respects to Master Gerald and yourself; your pa says one of these days he may*

*bring you up to town, and he has promised we shall meet."*

*"I am, dear Miss Angel,"*

*"Your old friend and well-wisher,"*

*"MARIA STEER"*

There were amused smiles on the faces of the listeners as Mrs. Mickle read the above epistle; but the moment her voice ceased, Gilbert exclaimed, with some indignation in his tones—

"She evidently doesn't properly appreciate your father's talent, Angel! She must be a very ignorant old woman! Does she always speak of Mr. Willis as 'your pa'?"

"Always," Angel and Gerald responded together.

"It is a very kind letter," Mrs. Mickle said, "and if she does not appreciate Mr. Willis' talent—and I agree with you, Gilbert, that she does not—she appreciates his character, nevertheless. She remarks, you see, that he is as kind a man as she ever knew, and a perfect gentleman."

"Yes," Angel cried brightly. "I am very fond of Mrs. Steer; she was always good to me, and used to take me out shopping with her sometimes; and if she was not too busy, she would often come into our sitting-room and talk to me when father was at work in his studio, and Gerald was at school. Then, too, she used to lend me story-books to read. I hope father will take us to London to see her some day. Mrs. Steer was my friend when I had no others."

"You have a faithful heart, my dear," Mrs. Mickle said, as she drew the little girl to her side and kissed her; "you have many friends now, I am sure."

"Oh, yes!" Angel responded quickly; "and so has Gerald."

Her eyes rested contentedly on her brother, who was discussing the prospects of the cricket season with Tom; then she felt a light touch upon her arm, and turned to meet Miss Goodwin's gentle glance.

"Do you know, my dear, sometimes you remind me of myself when I was your age?" the old lady said seriously.

"Do I?" Angel exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes. I, too, had a brother whom I dearly-loved, and—"

"Oh, I never knew that!" Dora interposed quickly. "Oh," she cried, meeting her mother's reproving look, "do forgive me for so rudely interrupting you, but—I was so astonished! Is your brother dead, Miss Goodwin?"

"Yes, dear child. He died—a great while ago—in India."

"In India!" Dora repeated, her wondering blue eyes scanning the old lady's



withered face, which wore a pensive expression, that presently gave place to a look of trouble and doubt.

"It was long, long ago," Miss Goodwin said slowly, after a short pause. She sat with her thin little hands clasped tightly in her lap. "I was trying to remember the other day how old my brother would be if he was alive now," she continued, "but I forget—I have lost count of time."

"Never mind," said Mrs. Mickle gently. "don't worry about it. Time only affects the things which perish; love is for eternity. I am sure you love your brother now as much as you ever did."

"Yes!" Miss Goodwin cried, the cloud from her face suddenly clearing. "When I see Angel and Gerald, I always think of my brother and me. Circumstances parted us in life, but his last message to me was one of love. Yes, love is for eternity."

She fell into a train of happy thought, and a few minutes later Angel and Gerald took their departure. When they reached

the garden gate they turned and waved their hands to the group of smiling faces at the dining-room window, then hurried on in the direction of the railway station.

"Angel," said Gerald suddenly, "do you remember last summer, when father and Uncle Edward went to London, and all that happened whilst they were away? Of course you do! As though you would be likely to forget! It's a foolish question to ask."

"Yes, I remember," Angel answered gravely.

"How I dreaded father's return!"

"So did I."

"For my sake! Oh, Angel, how unkind I used to be to you sometimes! And so selfish too! I am ashamed to think how often I must have grieved you! Then, I was always terribly jealous when people liked you better than me. I am sure it was no wonder they did. That night when I slipped into the clay pit, and thought I was

going to be drowned, I remembered all the selfishness and wickedness of my conduct, and wondered what you and father and Uncle Edward would think of me when I was dead, and—"

"Oh, Gerald, pray say no more about it," Angel interrupted, with a shudder; "that is all past now. I do not believe you will ever behave so badly again."

"I hope not," Gerald responded earnestly. "I shall never forget how good father was to me then. Here we are at the station. Only just in time, too, for I believe I hear the train coming."

A few minutes later the train appeared in sight, and as it slowed into the station the children caught sight of their father. He sprang out on the platform, followed by Mr. Bailey; the bright faces of both showed they had had a happy visit to town. Their first questions were how Angel and Gerald had spent the time during their absence from home, and if all had gone well at Haresdown House. There was nothing to hide or be ashamed

of now, so the young people gave a detailed account of their doings.

Not until they had passed Myrtle Villa on their way home, and were walking up Haresdown Hill, did Mr. Willis mention that he had a piece of good news to tell.

"Try and guess what it is," he said, looking from his uncle to the children with a smiling glance; "it is something that indirectly concerns us all."

"What can it be?" Angel cried. "Do you know, Uncle Edward?" she questioned, turning to Mr. Bailey.

"I do," he admitted, his kindly face beaming with pleasure. "Don't keep them in suspense, John," he said, turning to his nephew, "better tell them at once; or, shall I? Well, then," he proceeded, as Mr. Willis nodded acquiescence, "our great piece of news is simply this—your father has sold his picture."

"Sold his picture!" both children echoed. "Oh, I am so glad, so glad!" Gerald cried

excitedly, whilst Angel flung herself, half laughing, half-crying, into her father's arms, quite unmindful of the fact that they were in a public road, where an outsider might come upon them at any moment.

Afterwards it was explained that "Righteousness and Peace" had been purchased by a rich man, who had already a fine collection of pictures, and who had willingly paid the amount of money at which Mr. Willis had priced his work.

"Why, father, we shall be rich!" Angel said, her face full of wonderment at the thought.

"Well, not exactly rich," he replied, smiling, "but we shall be better off, of course. I believe the long years I have worked are beginning to tell at last."

"Just as mother said they would."

"Yes," Mr. Willis agreed, with a faint sigh.

His eyes were dim as he thought of the wife who had always believed in him when others had doubted his capabilities, who had uncomplainingly helped him to bear the load of poverty, who had perhaps carried more than her share of the weight of care, which had been the result of small means, by reason of a temperament far more anxious than his. He knew the everyday worries of life, which to his sanguine disposition had been very small worries indeed, had oppressed her heavily, and it hurt him to think that though he had loved her so deeply, he had never been able to free her from them. It seemed hard that she, who had shared his disappointments and failures, should not be with him in the time of his success.

Perhaps Mr. Bailey guessed the thoughts which were passing through his nephew's mind, for by-and-by he said—

"I often wish your wife and I had met, John. I will not say I wish she was here now, for I know she is with Christ, which is far better."

Mr. Willis made no reply, but the trouble left his face, and when he spoke again it was quite cheerfully. The conversation turned to Mrs. Steer, and Angel took out her letter from her pocket and read it aloud amidst much merriment. By that time they had reached Haresdown House, where they found supper awaiting them, and Mrs. Vallance ready to assure her master that everything had gone well during his absence.

There remains but little of my story to be told. Mr. Willis' picture— "Righteousness and Peace" —made him famous as a painter, and he has often been heard to say that only one who has waited can understand the sweetness of the realization of hope deferred. He and his children still make their home with Uncle Edward at Haresdown House. Gerald is becoming a fine manly fellow, and the path he is humbly trying to walk is very different to that broad road he pursued on his arrival at Wreyford. Angel's affection for her brother is as deep and unselfish as it always was; but she has

real cause to be proud of him nowadays, when she knows she may trust in his sense of honour and believe in his word. Gilbert Mickle is in Paris, studying in a well-known art school, happy in the work he has chosen, whilst the other Mickle children are still at home, on the best of terms with the young folks at Haresdown House. Reginald Hope has lately entered a large London hospital as a medical student; he means when he has taken his diploma to join his father in practice at Wreyford; he has wonderfully changed of late for the better, so that those who are interested in him trust that, by God's grace, he will become a good and trustworthy man.

Miss Goodwin is much the same as ever; perhaps a few lines have been added to the network of wrinkles on her face, but the clear blue eyes retain their youthful expression. She still tends her flowers, and is, in short, the same odd mixture of shrewdness and childishness, incapable of understanding the flight of time as she was when we first made her



acquaintance. A few simple words Mrs. Mickle once said to her made a deep impression on her mind, and she has acquired the habit of repeating them softly to herself—

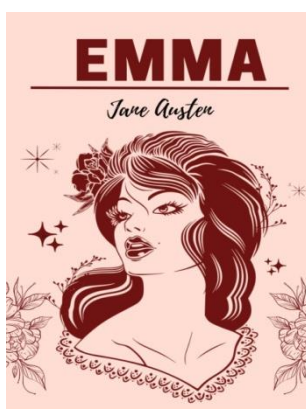
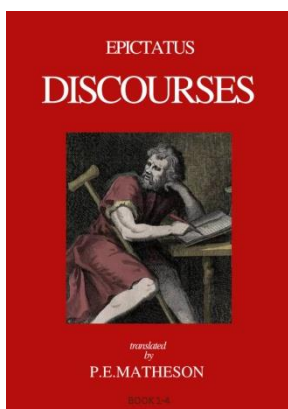
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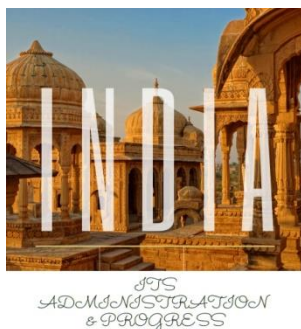
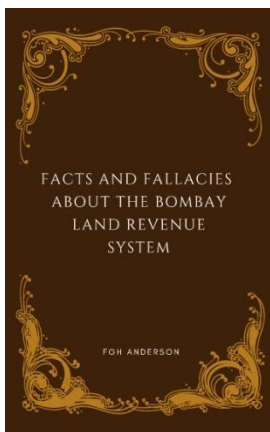
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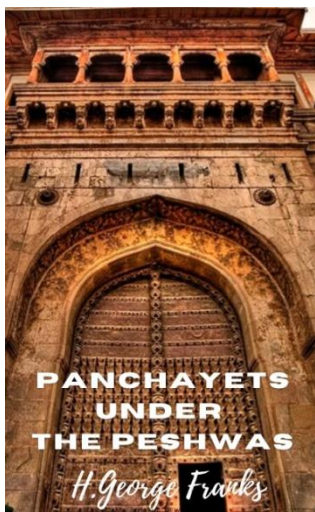
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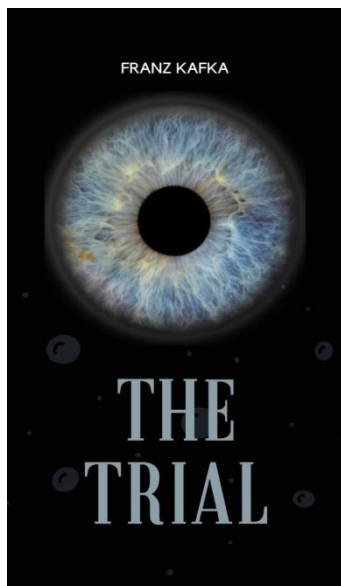


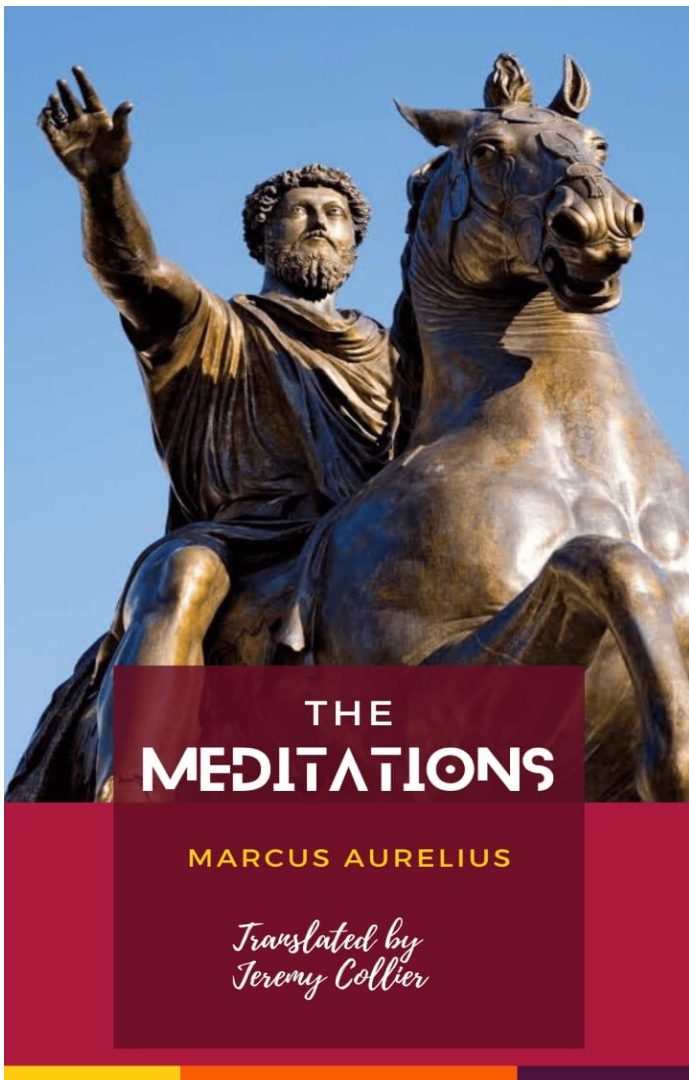
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THE  
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