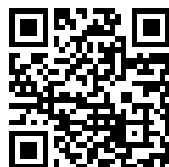


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Will Ransom's 5th book.

Not in Smith.





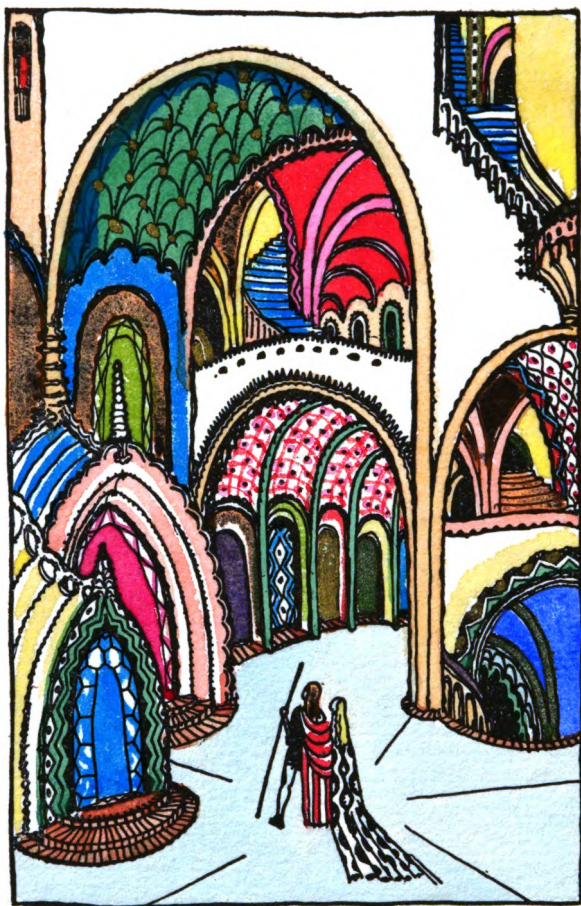








*The House of  
Endless Doors*

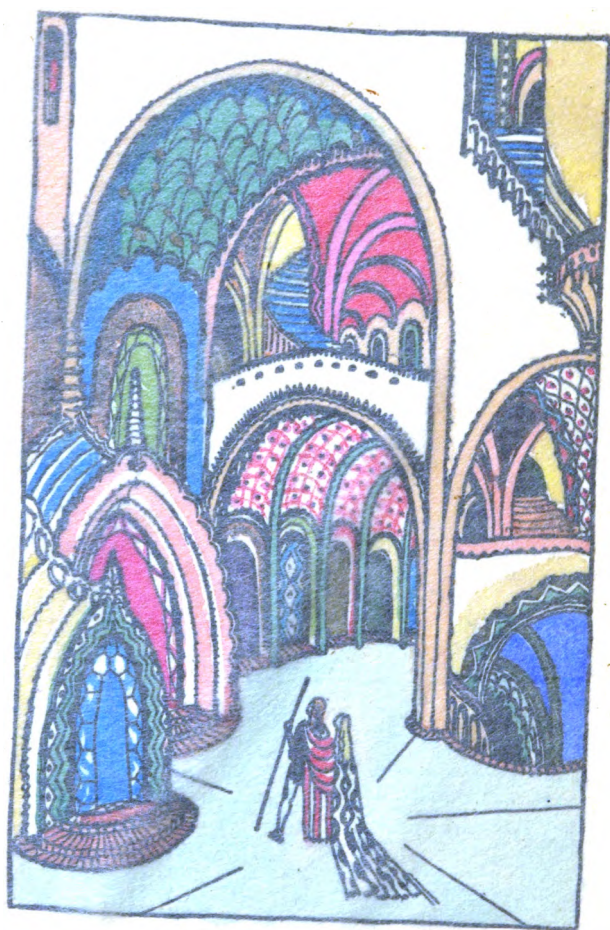


*The House  
of  
Mindless Doors*

*Mary Corse*



*Chicago*  
*Will Ransom*  
*1922*



*The House  
of  
Endless Doors*

*Mary Corse*



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*To Mary Vanderhoof*







## THE HOUSE OF ENDLESS DOORS



**L**ONG AGO, a fair queen and brave king ruled over a vast country. They lived happily in a white marble palace that stood like a pale mountain against the blue sky. In their wide gardens grew endless flowers. All day long they heard the sweet music of singing birds and the soft splash of waters from many fountains.

They had everything in the world to make them happy, but for the fact that they had no sons to rule over their kingdom after they were gone. Because of this they grew sad.

One day an old man stopped at the gates of their palace and, being tired and hungry after a long journey, asked for food and a bed on which

to sleep. He was treated with such kindness by the king and queen that he was moved to ask them the cause of their sorrow.

When they explained to him that it was because they had no sons, he told them about the Good Little People beyond the Moon, who had been looking for centuries for a prince to live in the House of Endless Doors.

"If," he said, "you will promise the Good Little People that the youngest of your sons shall be sent to the House of Endless Doors as a young man and stay there the rest of his life, they will grant your wish for many sons."

"But what is the House of Endless Doors?" asked the queen.

"Little is known of the House of Endless Doors," the old man replied. "I can only tell you that it was built long ago by the Bad Little People under the Earth. Afterward the Good Little People took it away from them and ever since they have been trying to find a prince who would go there to live. But so far they have not succeeded."

"Does no one want to go there?" asked the queen.

"Everyone is afraid to go," the old man said.

"But why?" the king inquired.

"Because it is understood that whoever lives there must leave behind the riches of the world, all pomp and power, and must suffer great hardships. Then, as it was built by magic and most people are afraid of magic, no one is willing to so much as pass that way."

For a long time the king and queen thought over the words of the old man after he left them to continue on his journey. And at length they decided that for the sake of having many sons they would agree to any pact the Good Little People wished them to make.

So a messenger went to the Good Little People beyond the Moon, telling them that if the king and queen had many sons, their youngest, when grown to manhood, should be sent to the House of Endless Doors, to stay there as long as he lived.

In reply the Good Little People promised that the king and queen should have ten sons, and that when the youngest came of age they would send their own messenger to lead him to the House of Endless Doors.

As time went on all this came to pass and the king and queen rejoiced in the number and the beauty of their sons. But when they looked at the youngest, who was named Abaird, they thought with pain of the day he would leave them and go on his strange journey to a house that had been built by magic.

When they told Abaird of their promise and how they had agreed that he should spend his life in the House of Endless Doors, he was happy and not afraid.

"I shall be glad to go," he told them. "And if it means danger and hardship, so much the better."

When he grew to young manhood the Good Little People sent their messenger and Abaird rode away with him, after saying good-by to his father and mother and all his brothers.

The king and queen were heart-broken at parting from him, for he was the bravest and fairest of all their sons, but a promise once made had to be kept, and so they let him go without protest.

**T**HE name of the messenger sent by the Good Little People was Jean. The road Jean and Prince Abaird followed took them far into the deep blue hills. One evening, when they slipped off their horses and seated themselves in the shade of a chestnut tree to rest, they saw a great crowd coming toward them.

There were old men and old women, young men and young women, and in front of these a row of children. They all stood staring at Jean and Abaird without saying a word. Abaird, wondering what they wanted, said to Jean:

"Tell them I have no gold, but if they will go to my father's kingdom he will give them whatever they want."

Jean stepped forward to do as Prince Abaird bade, but when he spoke the crowd called out in answer:

"We have come to see the prince who will unlock the Endless Doors!"

These words were said at once by so many people that they made a great rush of sound, echoing and re-echoing down the valley.

Abaird leaped to his feet and went toward them, asking:

"What are the Endless Doors? Tell me all you know!"

But instead of replying the people fell on their knees, and those nearest the prince kissed the hem of his cloak.

Then, though he pressed them with questions, they only shook their heads and said no more. Rising, they turned and started off down the hillside. Abaird shouted after them, begging them to talk to him, but they never glanced back as they went steadily on their way.

One child, however, who had hidden behind the bushes, ran out after the others had disappeared and called:

"I'll help you unlock the Endless Doors!"

Then he, too, ran away; and though Abaird tried to catch him, the boy hid again in the woods and Abaird was unable to find him.

Returning to Jean, he found that the latter had gathered fruit and nuts for their supper and

together they ate them, and then rode on long into the night.

A storm overtook them and they were compelled to seek refuge at the doors of a palace before which they found themselves.

The king who dwelt there bade Jean and Abaird enter the banquet hall and make merry with his guests. Abaird, after spending several days and nights in the open, found the gem-studded room, blazing with light and filled with noble company, a very wonderful place.

He described the road over which they had travelled with poetry and grace, so that soon all the others were silent, as they listened to him. But when he said he was on his way to the House of Endless Doors, the guests leaped to their feet and started in a mass for the doors. In their haste they knocked over their chairs. Then, at the doors, they fought with each other in their eagerness to escape.

Finally, Abaird, Jean, and the king were left alone in the banquet hall.

"Why were they afraid," asked Abaird.

The king himself was pale with fright, but managed to say through chattering teeth:



"The House of Endless Doors was built by magic, and we are all afraid of anyone who goes that way. Why do you do so?"

Abaird explained the promise made by his parents to the Good Little People, and the king replied:

"I believe my daughter, the Princess Hildgarde, could release you from that promise. Tonight you are tired and need sleep, but in the morning I will send her to you, and she may be able to help you. It would be a pity to have so young and brave a prince sacrificed to the magic of the Endless Doors."

Prince Abaird said nothing. He knew he must remain the night because of the storm, but he intended to leave the next morning, and never dreamed of giving up his quest. The more he saw how frightened the name of the Endless Doors made others, the more anxious he became to reach them himself.

**T**HE next morning he rose early and went out into the garden. All the world was particularly beautiful after the storm of the night before, because each little raindrop in falling had made friends with the flowers and the grass, and the flowers and the grass made themselves as beautiful as possible to please the raindrops.

Prince Abaird walked along the white path that wound in and out between the trees. He reached a deep pool covered with water-lilies and there he threw himself down on the ground and listened to the early morning twittering of the birds.

Suddenly, in the water across from him two beautiful blue eyes looked out. They were set in a fair childlike countenance framed by thick golden braids.

He continued to stare in silence for some time; then a musical voice said:

"Prince Abaird, the Good Little People promised to do anything I asked once in my life."

At the sound of this voice, Abaird jumped quickly to his feet, and doffing his hat, made a low bow.

"Who are you," he asked, not having heard what she said. "I've dreamed of you all my life, but I do n't know what to call you."

"I'm Hildegarde," she replied. "Some people call me 'Your Highness,' but that does n't fit me at all . . . I'm so little!" And she laughed gayly as she spoke.

"Then you're the Princess Hildegarde," he said thoughtfully. "How I wish you were one of your maids!"

"Why do you wish that?"

He could not tell her his reason. He had fallen in love with her at sight, and as he possessed no fortune, it would be impossible for him to marry a princess. But had she been a maid in waiting, he might have aspired to her hand.

Hildegarde said after a while, as he remained silent:

"You need not go to the House of Endless Doors. I will ask the Good Little People to

release you from your father's promise, for my father would like you to stay here and help rule over his kingdom."

Prince Abaird shook his head. "I can't do that," he replied. "But, tell me; would they release me from the promise at your request?"

"Why, you see, they have promised me to grant any wish I made once in my life, because they were pleased with something I did."

"What was that?" asked Abaird.

"I heard a little peasant girl singing a funny little song one day:

*I'd like to go to court, you know,  
And play with kings and queens;  
I'm sure it would amuse me so,  
The fresh and novel scenes.  
The queen could sit and sew with me,  
The king could talk of war;  
Prince Charming could make love to me,  
And that I should adore.  
We'd ride away, we'd ride all day,  
We'd ride o'er hill and dale!  
I think it would be very gay  
To ride a winding trail.*

*And then, you know, we 'd sup, you know,  
In splendid halls of state,  
And candles bright would shed their glow  
On all the silver plate.*

*Why I am just a peasant's child,  
I 'm sure I do not know:  
I think the Fates were rather wild  
To misdirect me so!*

And as long as she wanted to go to court, I invited her to visit me. The Good Little People were pleased with that, and they sent me word that, because I had granted the wish of a strange child, they would one day grant any wish I made myself. That was very generous of them, do n't you think?"

"It was very generous of you to ask the little girl to visit you," replied Abaird.

"Oh, but she was so nice!" exclaimed Hildgarde. "She made up another song:

*I danced on the edge of the moon,  
I did,  
All day.  
But I 'm not going to tell so soon,  
Oh, no!*

*Whether it 's old or whether it 's new,  
Whether it 's covered with silv'ry dew,  
Or round little hills just set askew,  
Or queer little lakes that always freeze,  
Or fairies' houses of shiny trees,  
Or odd little people sitting at ease,  
Dressed up in bright, remarkable clothes,  
Beside the path where the moonbeam grows  
Out of the heart of a big blue rose—*

*Oh, no!  
I'm not going to tell so soon,  
Whether it 's old or whether it 's new,  
Or what 's up there for children to do,  
But I danced on the edge of the moon,  
I did,  
All day.*

And she never told us anything about the moon. I think, perhaps, she visited the Good Little People, and they loved her, and that is why they made the promise. And so you see," said Hildegarde, smiling, "you need not go to the House of Endless Doors. My father would like you to stay here and help him rule his kingdom and . . . "

"And what?" asked Prince Abaird; but the Princess Hildegarde would n't say any more, and blushing ran away. However, the king, her father, told Prince Abaird that if he stayed he could help rule the kingdom and marry the Princess Hildegarde.

Now, that was Prince Abaird's dearest dream, as from the instant he first gazed upon her he loved her, at once and for all time. Troubled, Abaird sought Jean to ask the old man's advice.

"If the Good Little People have made the princess such a promise, they'll surely keep it," Jean assured him.

"Yes . . . I know . . . Jean, the reason I am so unhappy is because of all those people we met on the hill. D'you remember how much they wanted to see 'the prince who would unlock the Endless Doors?' Suppose, if I stay here, I . . . fail them some way. Who knows what may be behind those doors and how much suffering I might cause if I gave up this quest?"

"My Prince," replied Jean, "this much only I know; whoever goes to the House of Endless Doors and unlocks them will give great happiness to many."

"Then I shall go," said Prince Abaird; "then I *must* go!"

Jean knew the prince was right, but he was grieved to think how hard it would be for the brave and gentle knight to leave the lovely Princess Hildegarde.

That evening, when walking in the garden, Jean saw the princess sitting sorrowfully on the edge of a fountain, and approached her, saying: "O gracious lady, why are you so sad?"

Princess Hildegarde looked up and replied: "Because Prince Abaird refuses to stay and help my father rule over his kingdom." Jean knew what was in the princess' heart, and sitting down beside her he told her why it was that Prince Abaird would not stay: how he must keep faith with those who had waited so long for his coming. He told her of all the people, old and young, whom they had met on their journey, of the cruel disappointment they would suffer if the prince were to fail them now, and what joy would be theirs when the Endless Doors were opened. He told her that if Prince Abaird sought only his own happiness he would never think of leaving.



Princess Hildegarde smiled through her tears and said softly: "Ah, Jean, I would not have him stay." And to herself she said: "My Fearless Abaird! My Knight with a Golden Heart!"

❧❧❧ IV ❧❧❧

**A**GAIN the king urged Abaird to let Princess Hildegarde ask the Good Little People to release him from the promise, but Abaird said: "No, dear King, it cannot be; and now I must be on my way, for I have tarried over long."

Poor Abaird! He longed to stay, and at the moment of parting from Hildegarde he thought his heart would break.

For many days and nights he and Jean rode on through a strange country, until at length from a hilltop they saw what looked like a great sea of black rock lying in the valley below.

"All that black rock you see," said Jean, "is the House of Endless Doors."

"Why, it's not a house at all!" exclaimed Abaird, greatly troubled.

The sun shone brilliantly on the hills about them, which were exceedingly lovely and of various colors; they were saffron and rose and blue and green and purple. And the black sea of rock in the valley below them, that Jean had pointed out as the House of Endless Doors, seemed a hideous shadow in the center of a world where all else was fair.

"Jean," said Abaird, "I know why people are afraid to pass this way. I, too, am afraid. For the House of Endless Doors is a ghastly thing."

"It seems so to us from here," replied Jean, "but perhaps later we shall find it not so dreadful as it looks."

They rode on in silence for several days and nights more. Sometimes, in the winding paths of the hillsides, the House of Endless Doors was shut from view; then again it loomed out in the distance, as dark and forbidding as a great black dungeon.

When at the end of the fourth day they entered the valley and came within a few yards of their destination, they discovered that this mass

of black stone had no apparent openings—neither doors nor windows.

“Why do they call it the House of Endless Doors, when it has no doors?” asked Abaird of his companion.

Jean shook his head. “I learned only the road which has brought us here. I know little more than you of what we shall find on arriving.”

In the cool of the evening, they slipped off their horses and approached the great mass of black stone.

“There is no way of entering,” said Abaird. “Why are we here?”

But just then he saw a huge tunnel dug out of the earth, apparently leading underneath the mass of stone.

“Perhaps we must go in there,” he remarked to his companion, and after walking for miles around the stone mass and finding no other possible entrance, they came back to the earth tunnel and climbed down into it.

It sloped far into the earth underneath the stone. Jean and Abaird slipped and crawled downward, and in the pitchy darkness could see nothing of where they were going.

Then far above them they saw a light that shone like a star in the darkness. The tunnel curved abruptly and then they began to climb up toward the light instead of going farther down into the earth.

Suddenly they found themselves looking into what seemed an endless marble corridor lined on either side with jeweled doors and lighted by hanging lamps of exquisitely wrought metals. Neither had ever seen anything so magnificent, and speechless with amazement they stood gazing before them.

But curiosity soon took the place of amazement, and as they walked down the corridor they discovered there were doors of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and sapphires; doors of pearls, garnets, and crystal; doors of topaz, opals and amethysts, amber and jasper; doors of chrysolite, onyx, agate, and moonstone; doors of carved ivory, beryl, and jacinth; doors of jade, of glass, turquoise, and carbuncle; of brass and bronze and copper. There were doors of every jewel or precious metal, of every choice or common material known to man. Truly, these wonderful doors were endless!

Some were made of a single jewel, carved most strangely and with the rarest skill. Others were made of clusters of gems superbly massed and interwoven with threads of gold and silver. Rays of light caught from the hanging lamps made them glow with marvelous colors, and great pools of many shades of light, blood-red, purple, blue, green, and yellow, were reflected on the marble floor.

"But this is glorious," exclaimed Abaird; "the most beautiful corridor in the world! Surely, if this is all mine, I am rich enough to marry the Princess Hildegarde. Why, any one of these doors could be sold for enough to buy ten thousand chariots! Two doors, of rubies and diamonds, could purchase a kingdom! I am one of the richest princes living. How happy my father will be when he knows what his promise has brought me."

Jean, equally excited, said: "And there may be even greater treasures hidden behind the doors."

"Then, let's open them and see!" exclaimed Abaird. Eagerly he stepped forward and took hold of the handle of a door made from a single great diamond. But the handle, which was

of gold, felt so unbearably hot he had to let go quickly to prevent burning his hand.

"I'd forgotten for a moment it was magic," he said bitterly. "What if we find ourselves faced by all these precious doors, without being able to open them?"

Jean tried the handle of the ruby door. As he touched it, it fell to the floor and broke into many little pieces, each one as tiny as a grain of sand.

"Yes, this is magic," he agreed. "But there must be some way to open them. Let's try the others."

They went from door to door unsuccessfully. They could open none of them, and some they could not touch without freezing or burning their fingers. Finally, they discovered a wooden door, and this they decided to break down. However, after pressing against it with all their might, they were unable to move it.

They were tired after their long journey, and after many fruitless attempts to open the doors, they went out the way they had come, through the tunnel. For though the marble floor of the corridor was beautiful, it was too hard to make

a comfortable bed. So they gathered branches from the forest near by and made themselves beds of these. They slept again, as they had for many nights past, beneath the stars.



**T**HE next day they wandered about the countryside until they came to a farm, where they asked a man they found working in the fields for the loan of an ax. The man gladly obliged them and they returned to the House of Endless Doors, entered it through the tunnel, and tried to break down the wooden door with the borrowed ax.

But they only broke the ax against the door, and failed to so much as chip the wood. Discouraged, they returned to the farmer who had made the loan and asked him what work they could do to pay for the ax, as they had no money with which to pay him.

The farmer began questioning them, and when Abaird told him they had come to live in the House of Endless Doors, he displayed deep emotion.

"You are very brave," said the farmer, "and I'll do all I can to help you, for they say when the Endless Doors are opened all the people around here will be happier. One thing I can tell you; those doors were built by magic and can't be broken down or opened like ordinary doors. Each one will be moved back by some secret spell, and there is a different secret for each door until a certain number are opened. Then, they say, keys will be found to unlock many at once."

"How am I to learn these secrets?" asked Abaird.

"Well, there is a Wise Old Woman who lives in the hills," said the farmer, "who knows all about those doors. I would advise you to go to her and find out what you can."

"I'll go gladly," replied Abaird, "if you'll tell me the way."

"I'd take you there myself," the farmer told him, "if I had someone to stay here and plant



my crops for me. But I can't go now and leave no one behind to do my work."

"I'll stay and plant your crops," offered Jean, "if you will lead Prince Abaird to the Wise Old Woman in the hills."

The farmer agreed to this arrangement and he and Prince Abaird set out that very afternoon to visit the Old Woman in the hills. They had to walk all the way as the path was so steep and narrow a horse could not follow it. They went over jagged rocks and along high precipices, and at length they reached a vast palace set in the very heart of the hills.

Hundreds of servants came to meet them, and one who was spokesman for the others asked their errand.

When Abaird explained the object of his visit, and how he had come to ask the Wise Old Woman what she knew about the Endless Doors, he was taken inside the palace with his companion. But the farmer was not allowed to see the Old Woman. Only Abaird was taken into the great glass audience chamber where millions of colors, like so many rainbows, lined the transparent walls, and where thousands of

candles were lighted at once, so that Abaird was at first blinded by their radiance.

He felt terribly ashamed of his worn clothes and travel-stained appearance in the center of so much magnificence, but he bravely stood his ground, knowing he must find out all the Old Woman could tell him of the Endless Doors.

After he had waited a long time, the doors at the far end of the room were thrown open, and hundreds of black slaves dressed in cloth of gold and waving great feather fans to and fro, entered slowly, walking in groups of four.

Following them appeared hundreds of fair women dressed in white and carrying lighted tapers. They ranged themselves on either side of the room and stood like statues.

After a short pause six milk-white oxen appeared at the doors and came into the room, supporting a red and gold litter, in which was an old, old woman, dressed in black. She was so old she had shrunk to the size of a child and her face was all puckered up with wrinkles, like an apple that has been stored for the winter.

The oxen came to a stop in the center of the room, and the Old Woman called to Abaird

in a shrill voice to come to her side. When he had obeyed her order, she asked crossly:

"Now, what do you want?"

He did not know by what title to address her, and stood there dumb with embarrassment.

"Quickly," she said; "I am too old to be kept waiting. What do you want?"

"I want you to tell me the secrets of the Endless Doors!" he exclaimed. "I was told you know them."

She burst out laughing, and her loud cackling echoed and re-echoed through the room.

"If I knew them, I'd not tell you," she said tartly, after a while. "The secrets of the Endless Doors are not to be told for fools to hear."

Abaird felt himself growing very red. "Madame," he replied, "if I am a fool, that fact fails to release me from the promise made by my father that I should live in the House of Endless Doors. And as I must live there, I must also do my best to open those Doors, and came seeking you, trusting to your generosity to tell me what you could."

"My son," she said gently, "I spoke as I did to test you. You have answered bravely and

simply. But it is not in my power to tell you secrets you must wait in patience to learn."

"How shall I learn them," asked Abaird.

"In truth," the Old Woman replied, "they will be revealed to you all in good time. Go back to the great stone mass. Build yourself a hut in the forest near by. Live by the work of your hands, tilling the earth, planting and reaping. Accept the lot of poverty. Then every day go into the stone mass through the tunnel—don't harm the doors, nor attempt to batter them down. To such treatment they will never yield! But be patient—approach them again and again—feel for some secret spring—and *be patient.*"

She blew three long notes on a silver whistle suspended by a chain around her neck, and the white oxen turned and walked majestically from the room. Then the women in white filed out and after them the black slaves with their gold dresses and great feather fans, until Abaird once more was left alone in the glass room lined with many colors.

Sadly he turned and walked out to where the farmer was waiting for him in the entrance hall.

"What did she tell you," asked the farmer eagerly.

Abaird repeated word for word what the Old Woman had said, adding by way of conclusion:

"I was warned that in entering the House of Endless Doors I would find hardship and peril before me. But I had looked forward to a very different kind of hardship and a very different kind of peril. Evidently, hard work is the only adventure I'll meet."

"It looks that way," agreed the farmer. Then as they made their way back into the valley, he said:


"Prince Abaird, it is a strange life for a king's son to lead—to live in a house built by his own hands and to work the earth for his food. I shall help you in every way I can."

"Thank you," said Abaird; "you have proved yourself a kind friend."

When they returned to the valley, the farmer kept his word. He helped Jean and Abaird to build themselves a little house in the edge of the woods near the great mass of black stone, and aided them in tilling the ground and planting seed.

Then Abaird gave the farmer his horse in exchange for a cow, and Jean traded his horse for some chickens. So they came to live in true peasant fashion, supplying their needs by the work of their hands.

## ❧❧❧ VI ❧❧❧

FTER Jean and Abaird harvested their crops, the farmer took them with his own to sell in the village. He got a very good price and Jean and Abaird were as happy as children when he brought them back the money.

With it they bought furniture for their house and some new clothes, of which they were very much in need.

Every day Abaird spent several hours inside the House of Endless Doors, trying to move the handles of the various doors, feeling about for a secret spring, and often just walking to and fro trying to think of some secret spell.

One day, as he stood motionless before the great Diamond Door, he heard the voice he loved most in the world call softly behind him:

"Abaird!"

He did not turn, but buried his face in his hands and wept. He thought that he had been dreaming so much of the Princess Hildegarde that now he heard her voice in his imagination, and fear that he would never really hear her speak again tortured him.

Then, when he felt a light touch on his shoulder, he was compelled to turn, and there standing before him was the Princess Hildegarde. Still he could not believe, and thought she just appeared to be there by magic.

But, finally, when she spoke again, he knew she had actually come to him.

"Abaird," she said gravely, "it does n't matter to me what hardships we must endure, I can be happy only if I am here with you."

"How did you come?" he asked.

"I sent word to the Good Little People that the one wish they had promised to grant me, I would make to be brought here by your side. And I shall stay because I love you!"

Without a word he took her in his arms, and when they turned again, they saw that the great Diamond Door had swung open, disclosing a vast room lighted by many windows beyond.

*Love had opened the first door.*

Abaird and Hildegard entered the room together. He told her how long and how hard he had tried to enter any of the doors and how until she came he had failed.

They moved about the room, awed by its splendor. They noticed that all the furniture was piled high with what looked like great dark bundles of cloth, but at first they failed to examine them to find out what they were.

Abaird, looking through one of the long windows, saw Jean running toward them, and as he approached, Abaird opened the window and called out:

"The Diamond Door has been opened!"

Jean came to his side and said:

"I saw part of the black stone suddenly disappear and white marble walls, in which were set long windows, instantly take its place. I knew then a magic spell had been worked."



Hildegarde greeted Jean and told him she had come to marry Prince Abaird. A moment later she exclaimed:

"Look! Who are all these old men and old women coming toward us?"

Jean and Abaird glanced in the direction she pointed and saw hundreds of old men and old women, dressed in rags, coming toward them.

"Why," said Jean, "those old men and old women came to us once before!"

"Yes," replied Abaird, "I remember them." He recognized the old people who had been part of that great throng that met them on the hilltop shortly after they set out on their journey from his father's kingdom, and who had called out together:

"We have come to see the prince who will unlock the Endless Doors!"

"Have we nothing to give them?" asked Hildegarde. "They look so old and poor."

Abaird walked out through the open window and went to meet them.

"My friends," he said, "why have you come to me? Though the Endless Doors are fabulously beautiful, all but one are locked against

me. It is only today that this one has been opened."

"We know that," replied an old man, "but in the room that is now open are the gifts that have been promised us."

"Whatever is there that will help you, you may have," replied Abaird.

"Those things that are for us will be marked with our names," said an old woman named Sarah the Patient. "With your permission we shall find our own."

Abaird returned to the Princess Hildegarde and told her what had been said, while the old men and old women followed him into the vast room.

"Why," exclaimed Princess Hildegarde, "all these bundles must have been left here by the Good Little People for these old men and old women who have come." She lifted a bundle lying on a chest near her, and found pinned to it a piece of paper on which was written in gold:

*"For Sarah the Patient."*

"Are you Sarah the Patient?" she asked the old woman, who dropped a deep curtsey as she replied:

"Yes, Your Highness; so I am called."

"Then this is yours," said Hildegard, giving her the bundle. And the bundle proved to be made up of warm clothes of every kind, and in the pocket of a cloak was found gold, with a note attached to it which read:

*"This gold will meet all your needs as long as you live."*

Each bundle was made up of the same number of garments and in every cloak was found gold with the note attached:

*"This gold will meet all your needs as long as you live."*

When everyone had found his or her own bundle the rejoicing was great. The old men and old women gathered about Prince Abaird and Princess Hildegard and showered blessings upon them. Then, carrying their bundles, they departed and went on their way. But before they left Abaird asked:

"Where are the young people and children who were with you before?"

"Only the Diamond Door has been opened," replied Sarah the Patient. "In opening that, my Prince, you found all that we need as long as

we live, but later you will have other gifts for all the world."

After Sarah the Patient had departed, Prince Abaird and Princess Hildegarde discussed what she had told them.

"I'd rather live here than anywhere else in the world, if eventually we find behind the Endless Doors gifts for all the world."

Jean, who had been walking about the room, examining different pieces of furniture, joined them to remark:

"I think I have never seen a room as beautiful as this."

And it was true that, now the dark bundles that had practically hidden the furniture were removed, a room more glorious than in any king's palace was revealed to Abaird and Hildegarde as theirs.

Abaird said: "But, Hildegarde, I live in a tiny house made from logs and I have only one room like this to offer you."

But Hildegarde only laughed in reply.

They were not left long alone.

The king and queen, Hildegarde's parents, and the king and queen, Abaird's parents, with

all their courts, came to them that morning. The Good Little People had sent them word that if they would consent to the marriage of Hildegarde and Abaird they could all come to the wedding.

They had brought with them silk tents in which to live, and provisions of all kinds, so that the wedding took place amidst much feasting and rejoicing.

Then in a few weeks the kings and queens and all their courts returned to their kingdoms and Hildegarde and Abaird were left alone with Jean and Anna, Hildegarde's old nurse, who had come to stay with her.

## ❧❧❧ VII ❧❧❧

**H**ILDEGARDE worked in the garden with Jean and Abaird. But every day she and Abaird spent many hours in the room of the Diamond Door, and in walking up and down the great

jewelled corridor trying to open other doors. For over a year all their attempts failed, and then they forgot all about the doors in their delight in having a little baby boy, whom they named Jean after their faithful friend, comrade, and servant.

Then one day Hildegard found a piece of paper on which was written:

*"A sound will open the second door."*

She hurried to Abaird with this and together they set out to search for musical instruments of all kinds. Everyone they met along the road seemed only too anxious to help them.

Wandering minstrels with flute, violin, or harp came and played in the jewelled corridor. But the sound that held the secret spell they seemed unable to find.

Abaird and Hildegard were nearly in despair. They tried every sound conceivable in music or in song, but none of the doors moved an inch.

One afternoon they left the baby asleep in the room of the Diamond Door and went out into the jewelled corridor, where they walked slowly up and down, trying to think of some new sound which might open the second door.

"We have tried every musical sound I can imagine," said Hildegarde. "Surely, it is not a harsh, shrill, sharp sound which is needed to open the second door."

Abaird pondered. "Perhaps there is a strange instrument in some distant land that holds the magic spell which we are seeking. Must I leave you to go in search of it?"

Hildegarde sighed. "If it were for ourselves alone, there would be no need for you to go. We are so happy as it is. But when I think that behind these closed doors are stored gifts for all the world, it seems to me that no sacrifice would be too great to open them."

Tears came to her eyes as she spoke. "I think you will have to go, Abaird, and look all over the world for any musical instruments different from those we have already used."

"But I can't leave you!" he protested.

"You will have to leave me if that is the only way we can unlock the door. Think, my beloved, of what it meant to all those poor old men and women when the Diamond Door was opened. What if we are keeping hidden happiness for others?"

"Yes, I must go," he agreed. "I shall leave today."

They were both so wretchedly unhappy at the thought of being separated, neither could say another word.

As they stood there, suddenly they heard a delicious sound behind them. The baby had awakened and crawled out into the corridor, where he sat in the center of the marble floor in front of the Ruby Door, crowing gleefully and clapping his hands.

Hildegard rushed to him and as she gathered him into her arms she looked up to see that the Ruby Door had swung wide open, disclosing an even vaster room than that of the Diamond Door.

It was the sweetest sound in the world they had been looking for and which Abaird was about to seek far from home—

*A baby's laugh had opened  
the second door.*



**H**ILDEGARDE, carrying the baby in her arms and followed by Abaird, entered the newly opened room of the Ruby Door. The first things she looked for were dark bundles of clothes similar to those found in the room of the Diamond Door for the old men and old women.

But in this second room they found only priceless pieces of furniture, beautiful paintings, rugs, tapestries, ornaments, mirrors, and statues of great beauty.

"But there is nothing here we can give to the poor!" said Hildegard. "What shall we do if they come?"

Jean and Anna, Hildegard's nurse, came running to the long windows to see the second room. As before when the door opened, the black stone outside had fallen away, disclosing white marble in which were set windows reaching to the ground.

As Hildegarde opened one of these to let in Jean and Anna, she saw hundreds of young men and young women approaching, their faces all aglow with eagerness.

"See!" she exclaimed. "They are coming! What shall we give them? Even if each took a statue or a piece of furniture, there wouldn't be enough."

Abaird came to her side and looked out with her. He, too, was troubled when he recognized all the young men and young women who had been part of that throng which had met him on the hillside when he left his father's kingdom.

"They must carry some message from the Good Little People," he said thoughtfully, which will explain their coming."

None of these young men or young women were in rags. They looked healthy and happy. They all broke into a run as they came closer to the House of Endless Doors and the leaders arrived laughing and out of breath.

Hildegarde welcomed them graciously and invited them inside.

"Whatever the Good Little People wish you to take, we give you gladly," she said. "Perhaps

you can choose from among these things something that will please you." And she pointed out the contents of the room.

"I was told to tell you my name," said the first young woman to enter the room. "I am Mildred, the daughter of Sarah the Patient, and I have come to stay with you and help take care of the baby."

Anna, Hildegard's old nurse, spoke quickly and angrily: "The Princess Hildegard and I can take care of the baby!"

"The Good Little People want me to help you in any way I can," replied Mildred amiably. "Also, I am to assist in giving out the deeds."

"The what?" asked Hildegard.

Mildred led her across the room to a great ivory cupboard and opened the doors. Inside were rolls of parchment packed as tightly as possible together and filling all the shelves.

"All these young men and young women with me," explained Mildred, "have been promised deeds by the Good Little People. I mean by that deeds to pieces of property in some part of the world, which are to belong to them forever. They have been waiting until the Ruby

Door was opened. Now here are the deeds entitling each couple to a piece of land; they can marry and build their homes wherever the Good Little People have given them a farm."

She took down one of the rolls of parchment and sure enough it entitled the owners, a man and a woman whose names were written across the top, to a large piece of land in a country close by.

Then Hildegarde, Anna, Mildred, Abaird and Jean set to work distributing the parchments, until every one of the young men and young women had received the appointed land.

"Most of us will be your subjects," said one young man to Hildegarde, "as we shall dwell in land that really belongs to Prince Abaird."

"The land is yours," Abaird told him, "as the Good Little People have given it to you."

"But may we not call you our ruler?" asked the young man. "It is well to have a ruler who can settle our disputes, should any arise."

"You may call me your friend," said Abaird. "That's better than ruler and, whenever any disputes arise, I shall be glad to offer any advice that one friend might offer another. But at any

time I shall be glad to see you, should you wish to come to me."

All the young people loved Abaird for his promise of friendship and they went away to build their homes wherever the Good Little People had given them land.

But a very sad thing happened to Abaird and Hildegarde that night. Their little house at the edge of the woods burned to the ground and Abaird and Hildegarde and the baby, Jean and Anna and Mildred all moved into the two great rooms in the House of Endless Doors.

And although the rooms were magnificent and large enough to house a small army, they were not very comfortable, as it meant living in a makeshift way.

They built themselves beds from boughs in the forest, which were laid in the center of gorgeous drawing-rooms, where they looked quite out of place.

Jean was unhappy at the sight of his prince and princess living this way and he set out on a long journey to the home of the Good Little People beyond the Moon. He wanted to ask them to open more doors and give Abaird

and Hildegarde everything necessary to make them comfortable.

His journey was long and hard and lasted many months. When he finally reached the Good Little People they offered him a palace of his own in the center of the moon if he cared to dwell there.

"I shall never leave my prince and princess," he replied to this offer. "I've not come asking for a palace for myself, but to request the secrets of the Endless Doors, so that I may open all of them for the benefit of Prince Abaird and Princess Hildegarde."

The Good Little People refused to tell him anything about the Endless Doors and, bitterly disappointed, he set out on his return trip.

He was many months on the way and when at length he reached home he was nearly ill with exhaustion.

He found Prince Abaird and Princess Hildegarde in the jewelled corridor and told them all about his fruitless trip and his great disappointment.


But while he spoke a great Sapphire Door swung open—

*Friendship had opened the third door.*

The Sapphire Door led to a perfectly furnished bedroom with a tiny pool set deep in a marble court just beyond and a wee nursery leading from this.

So Jean, in opening the third door by his devoted friendship, had made it possible for his prince and princess to live in comfort again.

❧❧❧ IX ❧❧❧

BAIRD, Hildegarde, and baby Jean lived comfortably in the House of Endless Doors and big Jean built another little house at the edge of the woods for himself, Mildred, and Anna.

But they found themselves very poor, as they had barely enough to eat and wear. The crops that year were lost in a big storm. Their old friend, the farmer, was also poor, for his crops likewise had been killed by the storm.

The whole countryside was suffering.

Hildegarde wanted to sell some of the beautiful things in the House of Endless Doors, but the Good Little People sent her word that she must never do this, as what had been placed in this house by magic must always remain.

Just when they were at their wits' ends to know what to do, they received word that the king and queen, Hildegarde's father and mother, and the king and queen, Abaird's father and mother, were coming to visit them.

They were delighted at the thought of seeing their parents again, but it made them very unhappy to think that their parents would have to bring their own provisions and live in their own tents, as they did at the time of Abaird's and Hildegarde's wedding.

But what really happened was even more painful than this. It seemed that word had traveled far and wide that the House of Endless Doors had opened up all its treasures to Abaird and Hildegarde, so that they had become the richest prince and princess living at the time. Their parents failed to provide themselves with either food or tents and arrived expecting to



find rooms in a splendid palace and feasting and entertainment suitable to their rank.

They came with all their courts and entered the room of the Diamond Door, not suspecting for a moment that Abaird and Hildegarde had barely enough to eat, and that only three doors had been opened.

When Hildegarde learned how rich their parents supposed them to be and how word had gone abroad that all the doors were open, she said nothing about their actual poverty and welcomed her guests all the more eagerly.

The grandparents were so interested in baby Jean they failed to observe that Abaird and Hildegarde slipped away into the jewelled corridor a few moments after they came.

But various members of the courts murmured among themselves:

"Why are we left here like this?"

"Is not this a strange way to receive us?"

"Why are n't we shown at once to our rooms after a long journey?"

At the same time, in the jewelled corridor, Hildegarde said to Abaird:

"We must give them food and shelter, no

matter how poor it is. We shall build them beds from branches as we have done before for ourselves. But to whom shall we give our one bedroom—your parents or mine? That question troubles me.”

“It does n’t matter,” replied Abaird. “We’re glad to see them and they’re glad to see us. It’s good to be together again, and the rest does n’t count.”

Just then a Door of Jasper and Gold flew back, and in the room beyond they found many things.

*Hospitality had opened the fourth door.*



**T**HIS was the most marvelous room of all. The walls and furniture were of gold and jasper, and the hangings of gleaming cloth of gold. Everything had been made ready for a great banquet. Long tables were spread with

heavy lace cloths and on these were laid candelabra and glass and gold and silver dishes and service of every kind. At each place was found a package of seeds with these words written on the envelope:

*"Plant these at once."*

Hildegarde called big Jean, Anna, and Mildred and told them to gather together all the servants the kings and queens had brought with them, and to start planting the seeds immediately. There were hundreds of envelopes.

Then she and Abaird returned to the room of the Diamond Door and found their parents still absorbed in baby Jean.

Big Jean presently came running indoors and advised all the company to come and witness a wonderful sight.

No sooner had the seeds been scattered than far-spreading orchards of fruit trees sprang up where they fell, laden with fruit. Flower gardens, vegetable gardens, and fields of golden grain also appeared as if by magic as soon as the seeds touched the ground.

The whole company went forth and watched this magic planting. It was just like scattering

handfuls of gardens over the countryside; and never before nor since have there been such glorious fruits and flowers.

When the seeds from one package had been scattered on the ground, the fruit trees, flowers, vegetables, or grains that grew up stretched for great distances, so that before the next package could be planted the servants would have to walk several miles.

As far as the eye could reach, and over the hills beyond, stretched luxuriant gardens of all kinds. Abaird, knowing famine had settled all over the land, sent word far and wide for all to come and gather as much as they could and take it home with them.

Then they all set to work to prepare a feast for themselves from these things growing in the fields. While Hildegarde was gathering flowers to decorate the tables, Anna rushed to her, breathless, telling her to come and see the most wonderful garden of all.

The princess followed her old nurse to a garden of white flowers in which a fountain had appeared as the flowers grew. When they came to the edge of the fountain, they found in it •

hundreds of little gold and silver keys floating on the water.

Anna filled her apron with these keys and they returned to the House of Endless Doors. To their amazement and joy they discovered that each little key fitted one of the doors, and soon room after room was opened before them. There were bedrooms, drawing-rooms, libraries, kitchens, pantries, servants' rooms, and store-rooms without number.

Hildegard sent Anna to fetch Abaird and together, like happy children, they made a tour of their new-found splendor. There was still one key to be used and they tried this a number of times before they found just the door that it fitted. For, of course, there were countless doors that remained locked, though so many had been opened successfully.

The last key fitted a door made of silver and pearls, and inside they discovered great chests filled with precious jewels and clothing of all kinds. There were clothes for baby Jean, for Hildegard and Abaird, and for big Jean, Anna, and Mildred.

Then all their needs were satisfied.

In the meantime, from over the countryside, far and near, people were arriving in carts and wagons to gather the fruits of the magic fields.

Not only were Abaird and Hildegarde able to give everyone who came all they could carry of those things already grown, but to each family a package of seeds was presented, for these packages seemed endless.

"Mildred," said Hildegarde, "is this what Sarah the Patient meant when she said we would one day find gifts for all the world? With the magic gardens and orchards which spring from these seeds, no one need ever go hungry again. Is that 'Gifts for all the World?'"

"Ah, your Highness, there are still doors to be opened," replied Mildred. "I think you will always have gifts for all the world."


"Mildred," said Abaird, "where is the boy who once called out to me: 'I'll help you unlock the Endless Doors?'"

Before Mildred could answer, from over the hills came running a troop of youngsters led by the boy about whom Abaird had asked.

"Hello!" called the boy. "The Good Little People said we could come to your party!"

Sure enough, all the youngsters had been sent by the Good Little People to sing ancient and beautiful songs during the great banquet given that evening in the room of the Jasper Door.

❧❧❧ XI ❧❧❧

FTER the banquet was over, the boy, who said his name was Benjamin, came to Abaird and said to him: "I couldn't unlock my door until you'd unlocked yours. I mean, I had to wait until your generation was done."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Abaird.

"That's just what the Good Little People told me," replied Benjamin. "They said that the next doors must be unlocked by the children—the grown-ups were finished. So let's go into the jewelled corridor and I'll show you which one is mine."

Abaird went out with Benjamin into the jewelled corridor and they walked past many doors

until they came to one made of a single clear emerald.

"This is mine," said the boy, and he laid his hand lightly on the door, which flew open at his touch.

Inside was an enormous nursery, with everything in it which the heart of a child could ever desire. There were toy trains and doll's houses, tiny circuses and endless dolls—there were toys of every kind, size, and description.

"There are toys enough here," said Benjamin, "for all the children in the world, and the Good Little People will send them and they can take what they want. I know what I want, so I'll choose now."

Benjamin chose about fifty toys and Abaird asked him how he would take them home.

"Oh, the Good Little People will carry them home for me," Benjamin replied. "They said they would. Only you will not see them, for grown-ups never see the Good Little People, unless they're like Jean, who grew up in the moon right under their care. While you're asleep, the Good Little People will come and take the toys."





Benjamin ran back to the banquet hall and gathered together all of the children who had come with him, and led them to the nursery.

"Now, choose what you want," he told them, "and hurry up, because the Good Little People said they would whisk us home suddenly if we stayed late."

The children chose what they wanted eagerly and quietly. They were afraid to waste any time, as they knew if it got late the Good Little People would whisk them home by magic.

By the time they had chosen everything they wanted, it *was* late, and Abaird saw them all suddenly disappear as if swept out through the window on a gentle breeze and carried away.

That night, while the whole household was asleep, the Good Little People came and took to the children all the toys they had chosen.

For days afterward, children from all over the world came to the palace and chose the toys they wanted. At night the Good Little People would come and carry off the toys, taking to each child his own.

When all the children were satisfied there were still many toys left.

"What shall we do with them?" Hildegarde asked Mildred, after the strange children ceased coming. "There are still more than baby Jean could ever want."

"Yes, but you will have many children," Mildred replied; "and then there are all your little nieces and nephews."

And, indeed, it was an excellent thing for Abaird and Hildegarde that they had a large nursery filled with toys. For they had many children, and also all their numerous relatives came frequently to visit them, bringing their children, and the magic nursery was a wonderful place to play.

. . . . .

Now that so many of the doors were open, the House of Endless Doors was no longer a great black mass of stone, but the most beautiful white marble palace in the world.

The tunnel through which Jean, Abaird, and Hildegarde first entered had filled up, and now a marble court was built in the center of the palace, with wide, hospitable doorways opening from it.

And everyone who came there was always welcome, and for all time anyone who dwelt there found gifts for all the world.

Abaird's and Hildegarde's many children, as they grew up, opened more and more of the Endless Doors, and their children and children's children continued to open others.

But to this day there still remain countless doors to be unlocked.

Once, when Jean, Philip, Robert, and Elizabeth, the four oldest children of Hildegarde and Abaird, were playing in the garden, they saw a funny, wee little man sitting on the edge of a rose bush.

"Oh, nice, funny, little man," said Elizabeth, "who are you and what are you doing here? Will you stay and play with us?"

But the little man replied: "I'll have to run away pretty soon — as soon as I've told you a secret."

"Oh, what's the secret?" asked all the children together.

"It's the true secret of the House of Endless Doors," he told them. "I've come from the Good Little People beyond the Moon to tell

you that the House of Endless Doors is Good and Evil. And this you must remember all your lives; Evil is the black mass of ugliness in life, and Good is the shining white palace of the beautiful. When you unlock one of the Endless Doors by faith or courage or patience, or any fair and noble quality or deed, the black mass falls away and fine white marble takes its place. Then you enter great rooms where you find not only gifts for yourself but also gifts for all the world."


The wee little man suddenly vanished, and the children wondered whether they had been dreaming, but when they ran and told their father and mother what they had heard, Abaird and Hildegard said:

"Yes, truly, you have heard the secret of the House of Endless Doors."

And perhaps, some day, I'll tell you how Jean and Philip and Robert and Elizabeth unlocked many of the Endless Doors themselves by brave and kindly deeds.

*The End*



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