

Sea-Thrift

Dollie Radford

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Sea-Thrift

Dollie Radford

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Sea-Thrift

SEA-THRIFT: A FAIRY TALE

TO LUCY AND JOHN

CHAPTER I.

**SEA-THRIFT grows by the summer sea,
Till the summer's close,
On a grassy cliff, 'neath a radiant sky,
While sun and summer and wind go by,
Sea-thrift blows and blows.**

THE Sea-thrift about which I am going to write was not a flower growing on the cliff, it was a cottage standing in a garden at some distance from the sea; but, like the sea-thrift growing on the cliff, it was full of joy all the summer through.

One hot morning in August, at one of the great London stations, three children were struggling with bundles of rugs, umbrellas, tennis-rackets, and countless packages, while their parents tried to take tickets at the booking-office.

Such crowds of parents and children were running away from the airless town: the station people were distracted.

Perhaps the intense heat tried them, and perhaps they were all longing for a seaside holiday themselves. The porters, especially, were dreadfully cross, and the three children decided that one of themselves would be beheaded or befooted, or have some important limb broken, in the violent rushing of overladen trolleys and men.

The children were called "The Three Rs" because all their names began with an R—Roger, Rachael, and Ruby.

The Three Rs, then, who were determined children, had no intention of being left behind this hot afternoon at the station, so they pushed vigorously through less determined families and, by degrees, conveyed their smaller bundles and belongings to the train.

Ruby, the youngest of the three, was not quite satisfied with the manner of their progress.

"It seems so rude," she said, when at last they breathed freely in front of an empty carriage, "to push and poke like that." She had begun by saying "I beg your pardon," politely, each time she was knocked by somebody against somebody else; but this had happened so often she grew tired of repeating it, and when at last a deaf old gentleman—on to whose hat her umbrella by some strange manoeuvre had hooked itself—asked in a loud and angry voice why she was muttering, she gave it up altogether, and finished her scramble like the others without any attempt at apology.

"Never mind," said Roger, "we've found a carriage, and that's the chief thing: one **must** push and poke if one wants to go. Here we are, father—mother—and there are your corner seats."

"You wonderful children," exclaimed their father. "I went back to find you and decided you were all lost! I never expected such luxury as this," he continued as he stepped into the carriage and leaned back in one of the precious corner seats. "I thought we should probably travel in the guard's van, or on the engine."

"Well now," said Roger, when they were seated comfortably in the carriage, and the last package, a bursting hamper, had been placed on the seat beside him, "let's shut the door and have dinner."

"My dear son," began his mother; and as she spoke a crowd of faces surged round the door, and three more than its proper number of passengers suddenly filled the compartment.

"Must get in somewhere," explained the extra ones as they squeezed themselves in beside Roger, Rachael, and Ruby.

The Three Rs contrived not to be quite squeezed out of their seats, but they inwardly resented the situation.

"There isn't room to eat any dinner," sighed Rachael, holding out her arms stiffly in front of her.

"Don't let us be like the porters," whispered Ruby anxiously.

"I wonder what the porters have for dinner?" she went on aloud. "I hope they have it comfortably all together."

"That is unlikely," said her mother, from her safely-secured corner. "I expect they snatch it in picnic manner between whiles."

"Poor porters!" Ruby looked compassionately at the great army of them disappearing now along the platform.

"We're off."

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"Yes; we're off."

"We shall soon be at Sea-thrift—hurrah!"

And in a few minutes the children had forgotten the porters, and the noisy station, and the crowded, uncomfortable carriage, for they were really on their way to the sea, to the fresh air and the fields—to their long-promised Sea-thrift. Nothing is so sweet as the first few miles of country when one travels out from the town on a summer holiday. The spirits of the Three Rs rose higher and higher, as the train hurried along through miles and miles of green fields, and left the miles and miles of houses behind them.

Their train was determined to lose no time on the journey. It flew through the little country stations and across the narrow bridges without stopping, and it swayed from side to side in its haste like a ship at sea. But the Three Rs only laughed, and said: "We shall be there directly."

It was a flat country through which they were whirled, and it showed them a great stretch of summer sky, and they thought, as they looked at it, how clear and blue it was and how delicate and beautiful the little fleecy clouds were away on the horizon.

By—and—by the banks on each side of the line grew red and yellow with poppies and hawkweeds, and beyond the banks, on each side, cornfields shone like gold in the sunshine.

Then they came to a land of rivers, where white sails shone upon the water and danced gaily along in a light wind; but their train never stopped. On and onward it rushed, regardless of the pleasant things by the way.

"How dreadfully tired it will be," said Ruby, after a longer silence than usual.

"What is 'it'?" asked Roger.

"The train; don't you think it must be out of breath by now?"

"Oh dear, no," answered Roger, laughing; "and if it were it would have to hurry on just the same to keep its appointment."

"Appointment!"

"With the station clock," explained Roger. "It's obliged to dash along with its eyes shut."

When at last the train, after many hours, did stop, it was at the prettiest little station the children had ever seen. Flower-beds, full of blossom, stretched along the gravel platform, and behind the flowers were leafy trees. It was more like a cherished garden than a station.

"We've come, we've come." The children clapped their hands and sprang up and danced with delight in spite of the limited space.

"Rachael, Rachael," cried Ruby excitedly, quite forgetful of their fellow-travellers, "I **do** hope we shall find fairies here; don't you think we shall? **Do** say you think we shall!"

Rachael looked critically at the flowers and trees.

"I know you will find them here," said a white-haired old gentleman whom they had not noticed in the carriage before. "I know you will," he repeated, while Rachael still looked doubtful. And in the bustle of leaving the closely-packed compartment, the white-haired old gentleman slipped away without further explanation. He was wise, perhaps, in doing this, for Ruby had thought of some searching questions, while the bundles were being collected and the door handle turned; and when Ruby asked questions she insisted upon clear answers.

"Who is he?" asked the children eagerly, as they passed through the little booking-office into a sweet country road. "What a dear old man! Does he live here—shall we see him sometimes?"

"I hope not," smiled their mother. "He is the doctor."

A sudden silence fell upon the party. Measles and whooping-cough, and lesser complaints, had interrupted several terms and obliged them to put aside their books; and once Rachael had been so ill-advised as to have bronchitis on a Christmas holiday, and thereby missed a Christmas tree and a bran pie. These misfortunes, however, had been borne without complaint, especially the interruption of the school work; but the idea of being pursued by illness on a seaside holiday had never before been presented to them, and they dismissed it in serious silence.

Then they jumped, light-hearted once more, into the trap which had come to meet them, and bowled along grassy roads, across commons, and through sweet-smelling lanes, till they came to a cottage with "Sea-thrift" printed neatly on its garden gate.

The cottage was covered with fuchsia and white jasmine, and over its porch roses and honeysuckle hung in masses of blossom.

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The children opened the gate and stepped soberly into the garden—their very own garden—they could not believe in it now they saw it. So long had they imagined and talked of a garden of their very own—a garden by the sea, a garden full of flowers and birds and butterflies—that when they actually saw it they could scarcely believe in its reality. Until now the Three Rs had spent their summer holidays in seaside lodgings; and, however nice seaside lodgings may be, and however kind a seaside landlady may be, there never can be anything so lovely as a garden of one's very own.

The father and mother of the Three Rs went quietly into the cottage, leaving the children to accustom themselves to this happier new arrangement; and the children walked up the broad gravel path, hand in hand, and looked round their garden without speaking.

There was a great deal in it at which to look. On each side of the path was a wide border of flowers: giant thistles, sunflowers, hollyhocks, and scarlet gladioli; making a flowery hedge at the back of each bed; with marigolds, larkspurs, love-in-a-mist, old man, sweet-peas, and masses of bloom for which the Three Rs had no name, filling in the spaces between the hedge and the thick row of pink flowers which ran along the bed close to the path. This was the "sea-thrift," from which the cottage had its name, and this they knew and greeted joyously. Their seriousness vanished as they stooped down to touch it.

Then they walked up the path to the porch, and here, on the other side of the flower hedge, was a big lawn for games and sports, and along one side of the lawn was a row of leafy trees. Beyond the other border of flowers was a vegetable garden, stocked with vegetables and fruits, and in the middle of this was a well. To the well they, of course, rushed, and were much disappointed to find its lid securely fastened.

"Why, where is the bucket," exclaimed Roger, "and the rope, and pulley? Why, it isn't a proper well after all."

"It dried up," said a voice from the cottage; "it is a deep pit now. We had the lid fastened because we didn't want anyone to tumble in: it is very very deep."

"Oh! what a pity," came in chorus from the well.

"I can't agree with you," answered the voice. "But come in now, tea is ready; you have not seen the inside of your house."

Roger and Rachael ran in to make further discoveries, but Ruby lingered thoughtfully beside the well. She stood so long and so quietly beside it, that a robin flew from the ivy on the wall and perched upon the bar, from which the bucket should have been hanging, and began to sing. He looked at Ruby, as though he expected her to understand what he was saying.

"You are a little dear," she said gently; "but what **is** the use of a well that has no water in it and doesn't work?"

The robin stopped singing and put his head on one side.

"Of course, **you** don't know," she laughed, "and if you did you couldn't tell me; but I can't think of anything else to say to you."

Ruby always talked to the creatures with whom she came in contact, and she held out her hand to the robin, expecting him to come and be stroked like her pets at home; but he made no more advances. He was offended, perhaps, at having his ignorance so quickly taken for granted. Whatever may have been the reason, he suddenly flew off and disappeared among the bushes.

"Good-bye," called Ruby after him, "I'll play hide-and-seek with you to-morrow." And she turned to the house to join the exploring party indoors.

Indoors, there were many things to discover. Though there were but few rooms in the cottage, there were, in all the rooms, and up the steep little staircase, the funniest little shelves and cupboards in the world. They were in all kinds of unexpected places, and it took the children quite a long time to find them.

From the window at the top of the stairs they looked across a barley field to the sea. How big and blue and beautiful it was! Far away two or three ships seemed to be sailing from it into the clouds. The children stayed at the window a long time, until their father called them into a room overlooking the garden in front of the cottage.

"There is the ruined Priory."

And there, beyond another barley field, in a great meadow of ripening wheat, was a pile of old buildings overgrown with ivy. The wheat field was on rising ground, and at the top of the slope stood the Priory church, looking down upon the village and over the spreading country around it.

"Is it **very** old, father?"

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"Hundreds of years old. I will tell you all about it one day. How sweetly that robin sings!"

For Ruby's little friend was again perched on the top of the well, singing with all his might.

"I think I know all about it now," said Ruby suddenly.

"About which?"

"The well."

"The well!" By this time everyone had forgotten the well.

"I think the fairies live in it, and the robin knows, and is trying to tell us about them."

The Three Rs leaned eagerly out of the window to listen more attentively to the singer, but although they listened patiently for some time none of them could translate his song.

CHAPTER II

THE children next morning were up betimes. Before eight o'clock they had explored the village, climbed all over the ruined Priory, and set up their bathing-tent upon the sand, ready for occupation; and they had carried down to the seashore a real shrimping net, two small camp-chairs, a good-sized wooden bench, and a boat of Roger's own making, which last was believed capable of carrying the whole family in safety, and in turn, through smooth water.

"Well now," said Roger, as soon as the family was assembled that morning at breakfast, "let's plan out the day. Directly we've finished we'll have footer on the lawn, then we'll bathe and try the boat, then we'll have rounders, then we'll come up and go for a bicycle ride, and then—well—what shall we do then, mother?"

"It may, perhaps, be dinner-time by then," suggested his mother.

"Oh yes, of course." Dinner seemed a remote possibility at this time of day, and Roger dismissed the thought of it lightly. "Well, dinner won't take long, and we can go for another ride directly afterwards, and I must get in a second bathe in the afternoon, and we mustn't forget tennis. You'll soon be ready to come down to the sea, won't you, mother?" he continued, still busy with the porridge course.

"There is the housekeeping—" began his mother from behind the coffee-pot.

"Oh, **that** won't take more than a minute," interrupted the children simultaneously; "we can all help."

"Thank you, dears, very much; but I can't help believing I shall do it more quickly alone. When you have had your footer you had better go down to the sea and I will come as soon as I can."

So when breakfast and football were over the children began packing up for the beach. It was an elaborate packing, there were so many things to take. First of all there were biscuits and fruit; the fruit had to be first picked from the garden bushes, and the selection of it, with attendant discussion, took a long time. Then bathing-dresses and towels had to be rescued from the depths of unpacked boxes, and books had to be drawn up through masses of clothes, in case the party should want something to read if it happened to be resting for a few moments. Then Ruby insisted upon finding her knitting, and Roger undertook the discovery of the bicycle foot-pump. Each of these last quests took a long time, and proved so exhausting, that when, at the end of two hours, the children were ready to start for the beach, they declared they must be revived by a first lunch before anything more could be done. At last they really were ready, and made a start, and as they reached the gate they discovered their mother had been writing letters for ever so long at the open window.

"The housekeeping is done," she said, smiling.

"But, mother, to-day doesn't count, you know, we had so much to do. We shall be ready in a few minutes to-morrow. Where is father?"

"On the beach, waiting."

Then they did all set out for the bathing tent; and in about ten minutes were standing beside a smooth, blue sea. They were splendid sands which ran along there below the cliffs; on either hand they stretched as far as the eye could see. The children looked and laughed for joy.

"We can see the North Pole from here," said Rachael, who had lately won a prize for geography. "It's over there," she added, pointing to the horizon.

"What is it like to look at?" asked Ruby severely.

Ruby never could see objects which were pointed out to her in views, and at home always missed the Crystal Palace in the landscape which was shown to visitors from the top windows.

"I don't want to see it, thank you," she always said when they pointed and explained. It tired her to search the distance for things which could not be properly seen when discovered.

"I do hope we can't see it," she said again a little anxiously; "but, of course, we can't, except on the map."

"No; of course we can't **really** see it," interposed Rachael hastily; "but if we **could** see it it's nice to know we should see it from here."

"I don't feel sure," said Ruby.

Then Ruby looked thoughtful and turned to Roger; and from her expression Roger divined she was about to ask him questions concerning the poles and the equator and the circumference of the earth, so he caught hold of her by the shoulders and made her run briskly to the tent.

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"Be quick and undress, Ruby, you shall make the trial trip in the boat; there's a treat for you!"

Ruby looked even more thoughtful as she passed Roger's boat, and saw the gaping cracks in its keel and sides. The boat was of Roger's unaided manufacture, and, in form, resembled a washing-tub. It had a stern at each end, and it was puttied lavishly, and painted all over, though not very evenly, with white paint.

It was called The Recruit, and its name was printed boldly in red letters on one of its sterns.

In a few minutes The Recruit was launched by Roger and his father, and all the family ran to the water's edge and wished it well.

"You think The Recruit is safe, don't you, father?" said Ruby as she came up conscientiously for the trial trip.

"Well, it won't carry you far," he answered, lifting her in, "but you sha'n't be upset."

"Make way there, heave ahoy!" shouted Roger, giving The Recruit a mighty shove, and the boat, so it seemed to Ruby, glided out for yards and yards and yards, into the vast ocean.

The Recruit was not very comfortable. It heaved over dreadfully to one side, and each time Ruby moved the water came welling up through the cracks in the bottom. At last she put her hands nervously to the sides and tried to turn it round.

"Quite safe, Ruby; we're all here. Don't get out; we'll hold it up till you're in your depth again." And Roger, Rachael, and her father laid hold of The Recruit and swam with it to the shore.

"We were close all the time," said Roger; "but I thought she would have floated better than that!" Roger was a little depressed; he had spent so many half-holidays, and worked so hard, in making his boat.

"So did I," said Ruby as she stepped out of it; "but I did enjoy some of it," she added as she noticed Roger's disappointment. "I really did enjoy some of it, and perhaps she will go better next time. You won't mind if I like an ordinary bathe best, will you?"

"Not a bit," cried Roger, cheering up. "Come along and let's have an ordinary bathe."

And he picked up the football, which had accompanied them to the beach, and threw it at Rachael. Rachael caught hold of it and swam with it to their father; then their father threw it to Ruby, who missed it; and finally their mother caught it and swam away with it, pursued by all the others.

"It isn't quite like ordinary bathing," said Ruby, as she scrambled up after being knocked down for the third time by Roger, Rachael, and the ball; and Roger, to make amends, begged her to let him swim with her on his back, and tried to persuade her to sit on the ball and be pushed into really deep water; then he implored her to try diving from his shoulder, until at last their mother took Ruby away and gave her a swimming lesson in a quiet pool by herself.

A little later in the morning, as the children sat in the sun drying their hair and enjoying a second luncheon, they observed The Recruit beginning to float out to sea uncommanded, and Roger, of course, had to dash to its rescue and drag it up the beach above high-water mark.

"I can't help thinking," said his mother as she looked at it critically, "The Recruit would make an excellent wheelbarrow. We badly need a wheelbarrow for the garden."

"O mother! It's such a beautiful boat." The children were shocked at the idea of such abasement for Roger's handiwork. Even Ruby, who had so nobly proved its un-seaworthiness, defended its present profession.

"Oh no, mother! **Not** a wheelbarrow! Perhaps when it's more accustomed to the water, and has more putty in the cracks," she added hopefully, "it will be all right, and, you see, we shall never want to go far in it."

"That will be wise," said their mother, smiling.

"You **won't** have anything done to it, will you?" implored Rachael.

"No, certainly not; but I can't help thinking, as I sit here and look at it, what a nice, useful wheelbarrow it **would** make."

"Then please, mother, don't look at it," cried Roger; "it makes me anxious—you seem to be dooming it."

"Well, I'll try not to look at it," laughed his mother; "but such an object—"

The children rushed at her in a body and prevented the sentence from being finished. Then they ran to the threatened Recruit and laboriously buried it in the sand, lest their mother's thought should develop into a determined plan for its transformation.

When this was over they began "rounders," according to the morning's programme; and they played, and they played, and they played, until Ruby sat down beside the tent and said she was too tired to move any more.

"We must put off the ride, I'm afraid, till after dinner," said Roger, sitting beside Ruby and gasping for breath.

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"It is dinner-time now." Their mother looked at her watch and rose hastily, and in a few minutes they were all clambering up the cliff to the loke, leading to Sea-thrift, Ruby seated on her father's shoulder.

A "loke" in the land of Sea-thrift is the name given to a roadway which is too narrow to be a proper road, and too wide to be a proper lane; it has no footpath, and it has hedges on either side, with cottages at irregular distances.

As the children came to it they looked up the flag-staff which stood at the head of the sandy slope, and there, perched on the very top, was a robin, and his red breast shone brightly against the blue sky.

"It is our robin," said Ruby, from her father's shoulder.

"He quite dogs our steps," said Roger.

"He isn't singing," said Rachael.

"Perhaps he's just **had** his dinner," suggested Roger; "one can't sing immediately after a meal."

But as he spoke the robin began to sing as sweetly as he had sung in the garden the day before.

"He's telling us something very important," said Ruby drowsily from her father's shoulder.

"Is he? then I wish we could understand," began Roger; "but see—who are they?" as two grown-up figures stepped through a gap in the hedge—"they are Ethel and Charlie. No! Yes!" And Roger and Rachael ran excitedly towards them.

"Where have you come from? Are you staying here? Are you going to stay long? **Do** stay a nice long time! Isn't it jolly? We've got a boat—Roger made it—but you can't stay in it for long. Ruby made the trial trip: Ruby's very tired, so father's carrying her."

All the news of the morning was poured into Ethel and Charlie's ears before they met the rest of the party.

"I'm so sorry I'm tired," said Ruby, as she kissed them.

"Oh, don't mind being tired," laughed Charlie, "that's soon cured; I expect you want your dinner."

But when they reached Sea-thrift Ruby couldn't sit up to dinner. She lay, instead, in her own little room and looked at the yellow wheat and ruined Priory, while the others had their meal; and after dinner her mother thought her so poorly that she undressed her and put her to bed.

Roger and Rachael were greatly troubled and disappointed, and, after some debate as to what they could do for Ruby, decided to pay a long call on Ethel and Charlie, whose lodgings were near by, and to come back every now and then to see if she were better. They were sure she would be better by tea-time.

But little Ruby grew worse and worse as the day went on.

CHAPTER III

AT half-past six the next morning Roger and Rachael walked to Ethel and Charlie's lodgings, to see if they were up, but although the window of their room was wide open its curtains were drawn. Then they walked down to the beach to see if they could bathe.

It was a beautifully sunny morning, and the sea was as smooth as it had been yesterday, so they hastened back to Sea-thrift and filled a basket with tennis balls. Then they went back to Ethel and Charlie's lodgings, and, the curtains being still drawn, Rachael threw one of the balls at the window; but the ball merely shook the curtain gently and tumbled into the jasmine, so she threw another, which bounced off again from the window-sill and lodged on the top of the porch.

"Let me have a shy," said Roger, and he shied furiously. His first ball went over the house into the potato patch behind, but his second and his third ball dashed in boldly through the curtains.

"That wasn't a bad shot," he whispered to Rachael, as the sound of shattered glass fell upon their ears.

"No, it wasn't," she answered; "I'm afraid they are chimney ornaments."

Notwithstanding the three balls and their evident effect upon some object, or objects, unknown, no sign came from the window.

"Perhaps they've gone for a walk," suggested Rachael.

"Perhaps they have." Roger looked at his watch, but his watch had stopped, so he swung it round and round violently by its chain.

"I can't imagine what's come to it," he exclaimed; "it won't go at all unless I shake it like this, and then it only goes for a few minutes."

He looked at his timepiece critically, then he thrust it into his pocket with a gesture of despair.

"Well, let us come and find father." So they turned homeward again to see if anything could be done with their father, with regard to a bathe: but when they reached their own gate their father was starting off for the doctor.

"Ruby is worse," he said; "I'm going to find that white-haired old man who believes in fairies."

"Poor little Ruby! what a pity! and it's going to be such a lovely day!" Rachael lifted up her face to the blue sky, and her curls shone like burnished copper.

For a few minutes the children stood silent with disappointment—they had been so sure Ruby would be well to-day—then they turned and walked back to Ethel and Charlie's.

This time the curtains were drawn back, and Ethel's face appeared at the window.

"Good morning, Roger, good morning, Rachael; thank you for the balls."

"I'm so sorry, I'm afraid I've broken something," apologised Roger; "I do hope it doesn't matter very much."

"We shall hear what our landlady thinks."

"What was it?"

"It **was** a large owl, made of green glass, and he had a piece of blue ribbon tied in a bow round his neck, and he had a candle growing out of the top of his head."

"Poor thing," said Rachael, who had a passion for creatures of every kind and of all degree. "How tired of holding it he must have been."

"Well, he won't have to hold it any more. How is Ruby?"

"She isn't so well; father has just gone for the doctor."

"Poor little Ruby."

The children looked downcast for some time, and the conversation flagged until Charlie came running out with towels over his shoulder, then their spirits rose with a bound.

"Oh, is there time for a bathe?"

"Of course there is. When did you get up?"

"I don't know—exactly—my watch isn't going properly just now. I got up as soon as I woke, and called Rachael."

"Well, come along and let us see how far Rachael can swim."

So they ran down to the beach with Charlie.

Charlie was a painter, and Ethel was his wife. The Three R's had often wished for definite information about

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Charlie's profession, and this morning seemed to them an excellent opportunity for beginning his examination.

"I am going to be an artist," said Rachael suddenly, when a little later she was swimming along beside him. "Roger is going to be a millionaire; but I don't want many different kinds of things when I grow up, I only want to keep a few animals."

"What is Roger going to do to become a millionaire?" asked Charlie.

"Oh, he isn't going to **do** anything; he is going to be one right off."

"And are you going to be an artist 'right off'?"

"I'm afraid one can't be, there is so much to learn; there **is** a great deal to learn, I suppose?" she added, hoping for contradiction.

But Charlie was swimming out farther than she cared to follow, so Rachael reserved further questioning for the dry land.

"When did you begin to draw?" she asked, when, by-and-by, they were all toiling up the cliff to the lake.

"As long ago as I can remember."

"Did they make you draw wooden blocks, and cups, and jugs, and ornaments and things, and teach you perspective? We have done all the ornaments all over the house at home, and all the jugs in the kitchen, and oh, such a lot of candlesticks! Did you do candlesticks?"

"Oh yes; I did all that kind of thing."

"Did you like it?"

"Not much."

"What did you like best?"

"I liked doing things out-of-doors best."

"Yes, that is what I like," said Rachael approvingly; "father has given us all sketch-books, and Ruby and I are going to fill ours these holidays."

"I expect the sea is jolly difficult to paint, isn't it?" said Roger.

"It is."

"It must be awfully hard to get the right colours."

"It is."

"Now what **could** you mix together to get that?"

Rachael made them stop and look back at the sea. From where they were standing the water was clear grey along the edge of the sand; then, a little beyond, it was pale blue; farther off it was a beautiful transparent green; and farther out still it was a deep sapphire.

"I should have to think it over," said Charlie, "and then, after all my thinking, I shouldn't paint anything like it."

"But it would be like enough to remind us of it," said Rachael encouragingly; "when I haven't my little Winky with me I always look at the picture of a kitten in my animal book."

"Let's have a run," exclaimed Roger, hastily turning the conversation from Winky, knowing from experience how long the subject was likely to last. So they chased Charlie home to his breakfast, and then hastened along to their own.

After breakfast, at Sea-thrift, the white-haired doctor drove up to see Ruby.

"Well," he said, as he sat down by her bed, "is this the way to see fairies?"

Ruby was a polite little girl, and didn't feel able to begin a conversation in the middle like that, so she said: "How do you do?" and held out her hand.

"Thank you, I am very well, and I want to know what you have done to get ill so soon."

"I don't know," said Ruby; "but I am not going to be really ill, am I? Shall I have to stay in bed?"

"I am afraid so."

"But not for long?"

"For some time, I think," said the doctor, as he examined her.

"Oh dear!" Ruby was dreadfully disappointed, and, in spite of all her efforts to keep them back, tears filled her eyes; but she struggled bravely, and did not let them fall.

"You are a good child," said the doctor, holding her small hot hand in his big cool one. "There is a kind little neighbour already trying to cheer you," he said, as, through the open window, they heard the robin singing from

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his perch on the well.

"Yes; isn't he a little dear? He hopped on to the window-sill this morning."

"Perhaps he has something to tell you! Well, good-bye, I shall come again to-morrow, and then you may be able to tell me the secret."

"What secret?" asked Ruby.

"The robin's. I expect he has one, don't you?"

"Yes, perhaps," answered Ruby, smiling; but, when the door closed on the kind white-haired doctor, she turned her aching head away from the window. "I can't look any more, mother, it hurts my eyes."

And her mother drew the curtains and sat down beside her and soothed her to sleep.

"Poor little thing," she said, "she has had no sleep all night."

And then Ruby's mother lay down upon the other little bed and went to sleep too.

Ruby slept a long while. When she awoke the sun shone more brightly than ever, the room was full of beautiful warm air, and the scent of roses and jasmine reached her from the garden. Her mother was still asleep, and Ruby turned towards the window very gently lest she should wake her.

She lay still and listened to the birds in the creepers. There were several nests outside the window, and their owners just now seemed very busy. By-and-by her curtains began to stir, and suddenly a little shadow fell upon it. A bird had hopped on to the lowered window-sash, and presently began to sing: Ruby knew at once what bird it was.

"How kind of you to come so near," she said softly.

"Do you like my song?" asked the Robin.

Ruby, of course, ought to have been surprised by his sudden speech, but it seemed, just then, quite natural and usual.

"I like it very much, thank you," she answered.

"But you don't understand what I say?"

"No, I don't—at least—I think I know in a **kind** of a way what you are singing about, but, of course, I can understand better when you really speak."

"Well, if you like, I will come sometimes and talk to you while you are in bed. You are going to be in bed a long time."

"Oh, am I?"

"Yes; but you are going to be very good and cheerful. I can tell you many interesting things if you like to listen to them, and perhaps show you some," he added.

"Thank you very much—but—how long will it be?"

"How long will what be?"

"My staying in bed."

"Oh—I don't know exactly—it really doesn't matter—you will be so busy when you have once met—I mean when you know all I can tell you."

"I don't quite see how I can be busy lying here," said Ruby questioningly.

The robin pushed his head between the curtains.

"Being in bed makes no difference, **She** doesn't mind—"

But just then Ruby's mother stirred and woke, and the robin withdrew his head and flew away.

"Have you had a nice sleep, my darling?" she said as she arose. "Ah, I see you have. I have been having such a sweet dream, and in my dream you were dreaming sweetly too."

CHAPTER IV

RUBY was ill for a long time, too ill to think of the robin, too ill to see Roger or Rachael, too ill to do anything but lie in a half-waking, half-dreaming, unrefreshing sleep. All this while Roger and Rachael felt very dismal and anxious, but they went on bravely with the holiday and tried to keep cheerful. Each day they stopped the doctor to ask if Ruby would be better to-morrow, and each day the doctor smiled and said he hoped so. But at last, after patient waiting, one day Ruby really was better—so much better that Rachael that evening was allowed to have tea with her upstairs.

"O Ruby," said Rachael, as she followed the tray into the long-prohibited room, "it **is** nice you are better, you will soon be quite strong now, and oh, there is **so** much to tell you I don't know how to begin!"

"Begin in the middle," said Ruby, smiling.

"Well, we've bathed twice nearly every day, and I can swim ever so far; and I've made friends with the three setters at the big red house and with the greyhound from the post office; and the piebald mongrel at the bicycle shop is friendly too. Ethel and Charlie have taken us for such lovely picnics! One day we went on the river and brought back some water lilies: you **must** come there when you are up. Hasn't it been dreadfully dull lying here?"

"I don't think I've been dull," began Ruby reflectively.

"Well, never mind now," interrupted Rachael. "You'll soon be well, and we'll do everything all over again."

Then Rachael gave Ruby her tea, and waited upon her very carefully and gently.

"How cosy it is," she said when they had finished, and she had put the tray on one side and settled down at the foot of Ruby's bed, and begun the history of a Persian kitten which lived at one of the coastguard cottages. In the middle of the story, however, she remembered that her mother had cautioned her against too much talking.

"Am I tiring you?" she asked anxiously, breaking off in the middle of an exciting adventure of the Persian mother cat with the farm donkey.

"Oh no; do go on."

So Rachael finished her story and then opened a book she had brought with her.

"I'll read to you now; it will be quieter."

"Thank you very much. What are you going to read?"

"I thought of reading a story about a horse, from my animal book, it's so exciting."

And from her animal book Rachael read stories of horses, and of lions, and of tigers, and of polar bears, and of duck-bills, and of creatures which lived before the flood, until she couldn't see to read any more.

"Isn't it awfully interesting?" she exclaimed, as she closed the book. "I should like to see all those creatures; shouldn't you?"

But by this time Ruby was asleep, and Rachael, with a mixed feeling of disappointment and satisfaction, crept downstairs to tell her mother that she thought Ruby had settled down for the night, as, indeed, was the case.

Ruby had great arrears to make up in the matter of sleep, and to-night her rest was deeper and more peaceful than it had been since her illness.

"I don't think tales of lions and tigers would make **me** sleep like that," said Roger, as he stepped in gently to wish her good-night. "It must have been the sound of your voice, Rachael. I've often noticed—" And then Roger quietly and quickly disappeared, with Rachael in pursuit.

The next morning Ruby awoke very early and watched the sunlight shining in through the window. She had been too ill until now to notice sunlight or shadow; but to-day she woke feeling quite gay, and bright, with all the tiredness and headache gone.

"I wish the robin would come," she thought, and, before her thought was finished, she heard him singing outside her window. She listened eagerly: he was singing words:

"Wake, wake, Ruby, wake,
There is so much to see,
You've a journey to take,
And quite safe you shall be.
Wake, wake, and listen to all I am singing,

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And learn what the dawn and the sunlight are bringing.

The sun has just climbed
From the sea to the sky,
And my first song was rhymed
When the night clouds passed by.
Wake, wake, and listen to all I am singing,
And learn what the dawn and the sunlight are bringing."

Ruby crept softly from her bed.

"Come, learn what the dawn and the sunlight are bringing," repeated the robin, before she could get to the window.

"Yes, yes; I am coming," said Ruby, pushing her head between the curtains, "but I must put on my dressing-gown and slippers."

"Why?" asked the robin, and he fluttered his wings impatiently.

"Because mother says I must, in the early morning. I always do so at home when I sit up in bed to have a biscuit or banana."

"I see," said the robin.

"But he can't see," thought Ruby, looking at the drawn curtains as she buttoned up her dressing-gown.

"Oh yes, I can," repeated the robin in answer to her thought. "You are fastening the last button but two, and you are not being nearly quick enough."

Ruby bustled through the rest of her early morning toilet, and began to spread her bedclothes over the chairs, as she had been taught to do on rising.

"Why do you do that?" called the robin. "You will be back before anyone is awake. Come, be quick; the window is open wide; step on to the sill."

So Ruby stepped through the curtains and over the low window-sash on to the sill.

"Now," said the robin, "put one hand on my back, stretch the other arm out on the air, and fly along with me."

"But," began Ruby anxiously, "I have never learned—"

"Very likely not," interrupted the robin. "But it is wise to learn something new whenever one has the chance. We are not going far this time."

"I'm glad of that," answered Ruby, in a tone of relief "How far are we going?"

"As far as the well."

"Our well?"

"Your well."

Ruby was greatly disappointed and about to remonstrate, but the robin suddenly said:

"Are you ready? Go—"

And in a moment she had dived through the air and was standing beside the well, and saw the robin perched in his accustomed place over it.

"It wasn't difficult, was it?" he said, turning his bright eyes upon her.

"Oh no; very easy. I should like to try a long distance."

"You shall some time, but we have something more important to do just now." He tapped with his beak on the big lid.

When he had tapped three times the lid began to lift slowly, up and up, until it stood upright on the edge of the well, then it fell lightly over into the currant bushes.

"Here She is," said the robin; and up from the darkness came a wonderful figure, who stepped out and stood beside Ruby. She was tall and strong, and her face was so sweet and beautiful, Ruby thought, as she raised her eyes, that here was the most beloved of all the spirits of the earth. Her hair was the colour of ripened wheat, and it was wound in great yellow plaits around her head, and in it were bunches of scarlet poppies; her eyes were clear and deep and blue, like the sky on a summer day. Soft green raiment hung about her in deep folds, and between the folds the sun shone and sparkled on embroideries of flowers, and patterns set in precious stones: while butterflies, more bright than Ruby had ever seen, made a rainbow cloud about her feet. Ruby looked up at the beautiful lady and smiled.

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"I am not a stranger, then?" said the lady, smiling in return.

"No; I seem to know you quite well." As she spoke Ruby put her hand into the kind hand beside her. "But I have never seen you before," she went on. "I wonder—"

"Do not wonder about it, we are friends now—that is better than wondering. I watched you while you were ill; did you sometimes have pleasant dreams?"

"Oh! beautiful dreams—dreams about the fields and the lanes, and the wind and the sea. Oh yes; I can remember them all now. Do you know about them?"

"Yes; I know about them."

"Did you give me the dreams?"

"Yes. Ruby, look—"

And the beautiful lady held out both her arms, and, as her cloak spread open in the sunshine, Ruby saw wonderful pictures painted upon it—pictures which changed as she looked at them, and moved over the mantle as lightly as clouds over the sky.

"When will they come to an end?" asked Ruby, as she watched them.

"When my mantle is worn out." And the beautiful lady let the heavy folds fall once more about her.

"That will not be for a long time," said Ruby, gently touching its jewelled edge.

"Not for a long long time—not for a longer time than you, little Ruby, can think of or imagine." As she spoke the beautiful lady looked on the sweet summer land around her, and across the fields to the blue sea, and upwards at the morning sky, and as she looked she smiled lovingly. Then she bent down and looked earnestly at Ruby.

"Can you trust me?" she whispered; "are you sure you are in no way afraid of me?"

"Quite sure" answered Ruby, laughing; "why should I be afraid? You have been so kind to me."

"That is well. I shall be able to show you some of my secrets. I cannot show them to people who are afraid." Then she wrapped her mantle about Ruby and lifted her in her arms.

"Now," she said, "you shall know what is down the well. You have been wanting very much to know?"

"Very much."

Then the beautiful lady stepped back into the well, and Ruby heard the lid close upon them as they began their descent. She thought there must be darkness now the sky was hidden, but all about her was a warm, clear light; she could see distinctly, and felt safe in the strong arms which bore her down, down, she knew not to what depths.

They had descended some distance in silence when the beautiful lady pointed to the sides of the well.

"These are my sick children," she said.

Ruby perceived that all around them were banks of flowers; not healthy, full-grown flowers, like those in the lanes above, but delicate fragile blossoms of the same kind.

"I keep them here until they are strong enough to bear the night winds and the rains, then I send them back to the sunlight." She touched the flowers with her fingers as she passed, and as she did so the air became full of fragrance.

Then the banks grew green with ferns that shone and glistened with raindrops, and the scent of the wet ferny earth was sweeter than the flowers. Still they sank lower and lower.

"How deep it is," said Ruby.

"Yes; and we have not come to our journey's end."

Then all about them Ruby saw the roots of trees, like a mighty wall. Oak, elm, ash, sycamore, birch, poplar, and fir; all the trees she had ever seen had their roots here, and from their roots she was able to name them. Then deeper than the tree roots came piles of precious stones—diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, amethysts—and they lay as piles of stones lie upon the roads in repairing times.

"They are dreadfully precious," said Ruby, remembering the care with which her mother made her store her little jewels, in her trinket-box, at home.

"Not so precious as these." And Ruby knew that they had stopped; she was being freed from the kind arms.

"These are most precious of all."

Ruby looked round her. On either hand, as far as she could see, stretching away along paths on every side, and rising upwards and lost in the height above her, were walls and walls of seed; they were so marvellously made, she knew that not the smallest seed of them all could be taken from its place, without disturbing the entire structure.

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"What are they?" asked the beautiful lady.

"The seeds of all the earth," answered Ruby readily. Her mind seemed suddenly clear and strong, and she felt she was going to understand some of the great secrets about which she had so often asked in vain.

"Yes; the seeds of all the earth." The beautiful lady bent down and kissed Ruby on the forehead as she repeated her words, and as she did so the words were sung by a chorus of sweet voices:

"The seeds of all the earth, that all,
Both strong and great and weak and small,
May flower and flourish, fade, and fall."

"And now Ruby must go home."

"Not yet—please—not yet!"

But, as she petitioned, Ruby's eyes closed, and she felt numberless little arms tighten about her. When she opened her eyes again she was in her own little bed, with her mother standing beside her.

"What is it, my darling? You called me; you have been dreaming."

"Have I, mother? But I do not think it was a dream." Ruby sat up and looked about her. "Is it getting-up time now?"

"Yes."

Ruby's mother drew back the curtains and the full morning sun shone in upon them. As her hand touched the curtain, a group of dancing shadows passed across it and disappeared, and through the window with the sunshine came another verse of the song.

"That every valley, plain, and hill,
Their faithful promise may fulfil,
And all Her ways, by land and sea,
Be fair and sweet for you and me."

"Do you hear the singing, mother?"

"Yes; it is very kind of your little robin to sing as soon as we wake; we must give him some breakfast."

CHAPTER V

**"And all Her gates, by land and sea,
Will open to you, wide and free,
If you can turn the magic key."**

RUBY was roused next morning by the robin's song.

"Are you ready for another lesson in flying?" he asked through the curtain.

"Oh yes, please! I will be ever so quick." Ruby bustled into her dressing-gown and slippers with extraordinary speed.

"Would you like to see the fairy of the well again?"

"Oh yes; is that her name? "

"She has many names; that is one of them. She is waiting for us. Put your hand on me, spread out both arms, and fly."

And Ruby put her fingers on the robin's back, and threw herself on the fresh morning air. She sank into it as gently as she slipped into the sea when she bathed, and floated through it much more easily. She never thought of asking the robin not to go too quickly, or too far, or too anything, his little feathery back gave her all the support she needed. They flew much farther than the well this time.

"How beautiful it is," cried Ruby, "and how easy. Look, look, I should like to fly like that," she went on delightedly, as a lark fluttered from the grass beneath them and flew straight up into the sky.

"One must not want to do **everything**—" began the robin reprovingly.

"Of course not," interrupted Ruby hastily; "you are not disappointed, are you? I am enjoying this so much; oh, I do hope you are not disappointed. This is the most beautiful thing I have ever done."

"That's right," said the robin cheerfully again. "You see, I can't go up like that myself. Now shut your eyes, and don't open them till I tell you."

Ruby closed her eyes obediently, and everything grew suddenly dark and still, and she felt herself flying down—wards—down—down—down—farther down than the seed land at the bottom of the well.

"Open."

It was not the robin who spoke but the beautiful lady; and when Ruby opened her eyes she found herself standing beside Her in a wonderful garden—in a garden of magical flowers and perfumes—and playing in and out among the trees were groups of fairies. Ruby knew at once they were fairies, by their small stature, by their coats and caps of beetles' wings, by the dew which dropped from their feet as they danced, and by their cloaks of floating, shining gossamer.

"Are you ready to try the golden gate?" she asked, smiling at Ruby.

She was more beautiful, and her trailing skirts more splendid, than yesterday.

"The golden gate! I do not understand," said Ruby. And for answer the beautiful lady took her by the hand and led her into a wide avenue of blossoming trees; as they walked along it, fairies from all parts of the garden came and formed a shining procession behind them.

"While we are young," said the beautiful lady, "we should learn which gates are open to us, and which gates are closed against us, it saves our strength and tears when we are old. There are many gates," she continued, as Ruby looked up in surprise. "One person can open but a few of them; and, as some are better worth opening than others, I want you to try to open one which I consider the best of all. If you succeed, I shall no longer have a doubt concerning you; you will be safe and happy in whatever strange and barren land you may abide. But if you cannot open it easily, do not try; trying, in this case, will be useless."

As she spoke they came to a bend in the path, and there, just in front of them, Ruby beheld a great gate of gold. Its height was so vast she could not see the top, and it hung upon mighty crystal hinges, which shone like the sun, and its width was more than a dozen Rubys could have compassed. All over it were pictures beaten in gold, and she perceived that none of the pictures were finished. Each was the beginning of a wonderful story, which became, as soon as she read it, the beginning of another story, which in its turn gave place to another; and so on, all over the great gate, as far as she could see. Ruby turned to her guide in disappointment.

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"They are finished inside," said the beautiful lady; "come, try to open it."

Ruby put her little hand upon the gate. It had no handle or fastening, so she placed one finger on the petal of a buttercup, in a buttercup border that was worked round one of the panels, and the procession of fairies crowded closely round her, peeping eagerly over her shoulders.

"One, two, three," they sang. And Ruby turned and smiled—she felt sure of opening the gate.

"One, two, three," they sang again. And Ruby laughed for joy—the great gate swung back to the first pressure of her finger. Then the fairies clapped their hands, and threw their shining caps into the air, and danced round her so wildly, she could not see what glories were disclosed.

"She can open the gate,
All our treasure can see;
All the wealth she can take,
From the land and the sea:
She can learn all the wonder of days long ago,
She can hear every story and song that we know."

"Please let me see," she said, but for answer the fairies danced round her, until she was obliged to take hands and dance with them. So fast they danced, she could not see the gate for the shimmer and flutter of gossamer.

"Please—please," she began again, but they only danced more wildly than before.

"Oh, very well," she gasped at length, "I'll dance as long as you like, and go there afterwards." Then all the fairies ceased dancing and began to laugh.

"Why do you laugh?" asked Ruby, a little offended, for she had made a great effort to oblige them.

"Don't you see?" they cried, as they began dancing once more; "don't you see? "

"**Do** tell me what you mean," said Ruby, quite provoked.

"Don't you see you **are** there?" And the fairies clapped their hands and danced away, one by one, until Ruby stood alone and heard the shower of silvery laughter pass into the distance.

"**There!**"

Ruby looked about for the golden gate, but the golden gate was nowhere to be seen. The beautiful lady had disappeared, and Ruby stood alone in a world of blue. Above her head, beneath her feet, and on either hand, as far as she could see, a clear blue mist lay over a great country, in which no outline of mountain, or tree, or building, told what manner of country it was. She was a little afraid, and wished the fairies would come back. As she wished she felt a strong hand take hers, and the voice of the beautiful lady whispered in her ear:

"You are safe, Ruby; I am beside you."

"But I cannot see you."

"I am beside you none the less." And at the sound of the familiar voice Ruby's heart grew strong again.

"What would you like to see?" the voice continued. "You can go where you will. Shall we fly upwards, above the clouds, to the distant stars, and follow the planets in their courses round the sun; or shall we dive through forests of seaweed, into the cold still waters, that lie hundreds of fathoms deeper than the sun can send his rays? Or shall we turn to some bygone age which has passed away into the shadows, and travel backward through time, and see it truly?"

Ruby looked across the vast expanse before her to the farthest haze of blue; then she looked into the blue at her feet, and, as she gazed into its depths, it grew like the summer sea, bluer and bluer and more shining, until the sunny ripples broke over her feet.

"We will dive into the sea." Ruby spoke now as one in command. "We will dive into the still waters, and see the creatures that live beneath the sea forests."

Then the waves broke over her ankles and reached her knees, then they splashed against her shoulders, and sparkled over her head: and all the time a kind hand held hers firmly.

"How lovely, how lovely," she cried; "I have been thinking about the sea, and longing so much to be in it. Are we far from shore?"

"A hundred miles from shore," answered the voice, as Ruby slipped through the water; "a hundred miles from shore, in the sea valleys where the herrings hide."

And Ruby saw she was in a mighty forest of seaweed, of beautiful colours, and about her were wonderful sea animals, sponges, star-fish, sea-snails, and urchins, and hundreds of creatures she had never seen before: and

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rising and falling, at a short distance from her, was the great herring army, hundreds of millions in number, waiting in the shadows till night and darkness should come and help it to swim away unseen.

"Now deeper than the seaweeds," said the voice. And the water grew colder and colder, until it was icy cold; and deeper and deeper they went, till the movement of the waves ceased, and the waters grew still and dark, so dark that Ruby could not see.

"Down, down, three hundred fathoms down: it is a deep bathe, Ruby."

Then out of the darkness came strange fish, which swam about her, each creature carrying his own lamp. One held it on his head, another carried several along his sides, and another one's body shone all over, so that the darkness was illumined, and she could see the fashion of this silent world. How vast a world it was, so far away from the fresh air and the sunlight. She looked through miles and miles of dark waters, and on every side the darkness was made visible by gliding, shining fish. She was suddenly oppressed by the great silence.

"Nearer to the surface," she said; and immediately the hand which held hers tightened its grasp, and she felt herself rising upwards through the water. Upwards and upwards, until it grew warmer, and she saw seaweeds stirring in the waves; and up and up, until she came to the urchins and sea snails, to the feather stars and bright-coloured sponges.

"Up and up," she said again, for she began to long greatly for the whole warmth of the sunshine. "Up, quite up to the top." The strong hand answered at once to her words, and she was floating on the top of the water close to her own shore, with the warm sun shining upon her.

"Now, little Ruby, I must bid you good-bye." The beautiful lady took shape and floated beside her. "You can open the gate; you have but to tell me your wish and you shall see—"

"Everything! oh, everything!" cried Ruby, as the beautiful lady paused.

"No; not everything yet, but perhaps everything by-and-by, if you do not let the crystal hinges grow stiff from want of use. But the sun mounts high; shut your eyes, Ruby—Ruby—Ruby—"

And when Ruby opened them again she was in her own cosy bed, and her mother was standing beside her.

"O mother, so much has happened!"

"In your dreams, dear?"

"No; in the early morning, mother, while you were sleeping."

But her mother kissed her and smoothed her hair from her brow.

"Wake up, little Ruby, it is breakfast-time," she said, as she drew back the curtains from Ruby's window.

CHAPTER VI

RUBY grew so much better in the next few days, she was able, at the end of the week, to come downstairs and hear what the others were doing. And the others gave up their picnics and long excursions, and played in the garden, looking in every now and then to see how she was getting on, and to bring her flowers, gulls' feathers, cornelians, and other treasures.

Ruby had never enjoyed being up and dressed as she enjoyed it the first morning she came downstairs, to breakfast, after her illness. It was so comfortable to be wearing her frock again, so nice to have her hair tied up quite properly with her best ribbon, so pleasant to see everything in the little sitting-room.

"O Ruby, we've made heaps of friends. The coast-guards are jolly—we know them all—they have told us a lot about the coast, and wrecks, and being at sea, and we have wished all the time you could hear it, but we'll tell you all we remember."

It was afternoon, and Roger and Rachael were in the garden talking to Ruby through the window.

"But I haven't been a bit dull," cried Ruby. "I have a great deal to tell you too; so much has happened."

"I think I know what has happened most often," said Roger, laughing, "but it sha'n't happen any more." And he left the window abruptly and rushed upstairs, pursued, immediately, by Rachael.

Ruby wondered what their sudden departure portended, and when she heard them in her room overhead, laughing and talking excitedly, she wondered still more. Suddenly she heard a tremendous thump on the floor—Roger was evidently doing a high jump: then he jumped again, and again, and again, and again. It was impossible to sit quietly there under such a commotion. She crept upstairs and opened her bedroom door to see the fun. In the middle of the room she beheld all her medicine bottles arranged in a large circle. There were a great many—it gave her quite a pang to see **how** many she had emptied—and in the middle of the circle stood Roger waving the thermometer round his head.

Ruby was alarmed; she had come to regard the thermometer with respectful awe, it had ruled her life for so long. It was an object, she thought, with which it would not be wise to take a liberty. It had, she felt, her future health in its keeping, and if an accident befell it she herself must have a relapse.

"Roger, Roger!" she cried anxiously, as Roger continued his triumphant dance among the medicine bottles, and Rachael skipped around him.

"Children, children, what is the matter?"

"It's all right, mother, we're only bringing the thermometer down a bit. You said it had kept up in a provoking way; I'm giving it a lesson." Roger waved the instrument around him, and jumped about so violently that it slipped, at last, from his fingers and lay in several pieces on the floor.

"O mother, what **shall** we do?"

"You'll do much better without it," said the doctor's familiar voice, as he came into the room. "I'm glad Roger has been so high-handed with it, it has had its day. They have been having a fine time while you have been in bed," he continued, smiling at Roger and Rachael.

"Yes; but I have been doing nice things too."

"Have you? When?"

"In the early mornings, when mother was asleep."

"And Ruby dreaming?"

"No; I don't think I was dreaming. Is it true," she went on, as the doctor took her upon his knee, "that we are always trying to open gates?"

"Some of us are always trying, but it is of no use, I am afraid, unless we try when we are young."

"What is the most important gate of all?"

"Opinions differ."

"There is a great one made of gold that hangs on crystal hinges," said Ruby thoughtfully, "and all over it are wonderful pictures, which change as you look at them, and when you open that gate you see at first—" She stopped, and looked troubled. "Oh dear—I am so sorry—I cannot remember—but do you know its name?"

"There are many gates," said the doctor, smiling at her tenderly, "very many; and each gate has many names, but their names do not matter. I think that when your golden gate swings open on its crystal hinges, and you pass

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through, you can see and understand everything."

"Not everything," said Ruby, remembering the beautiful lady's words.

"Not everything," repeated the doctor thoughtfully, "but nearly everything. Some of the gates open into the past, some into the future; those which lead us to the past show us the great events of the world as they happened, and **then** we know and understand them as we could never know or understand them from books."

"I shall be a historian," said Roger, as the doctor paused; "history is awfully fine. Which gate would you like to open, Rachael?"

Rachael hesitated. After some deliberation she said:

"I should like to open one that would show me all the animals in the world, and all that have ever lived."

"Oh!" cried Roger, "what a crowd there would be; you couldn't see them all."

"They might pass in a procession," said Rachael. "Imagine an enormous procession, headed by—by—"

"The great Eft," suggested the doctor, "followed by creatures standing thirty feet high without their socks, pawing the air with their legs, and gnashing teeth in heads five feet long."

"I am sure I should be pleased to see them," said Rachael politely.

"But scarcely to tea," added her mother, as the gong sounded: and the doctor's talk turned from "gates" to directions concerning Ruby's daily life.

"Do not trouble your little head about the gate of gold," he said, as he bade her good-bye in the garden. "Let the dreams come and go—or the fairies come and go—we shall understand everything one day if we are patient."

"The doctor believes in fairies," said Rachael, when Ethel and Charlie came in and they sat down to tea.

"Perhaps we all should," said Ethel, "if the fairies gave us a chance."

"Or we gave them a chance," corrected Charlie.

"Well, I'm ready for them," said Roger, "whenever they like to come."

"So am I," added Rachael, "but I wish we could do something to **make** them come. Do think of something, Roger."

Roger plunged into thought for a few minutes, then he cried:

"I've got it—I've got it!"

"What—what?"

"Never mind; I will tell you directly after tea." And directly after tea Roger took Rachael into the garden, and they remained there so long, in excited conversation, that when they returned the tea-party was hopelessly dispersed, and Ruby fast asleep in her bed upstairs. Had Ruby not been fast asleep she would have heard a great buzzing and bustle, on the little landing outside her door, and the words, moonlight, sea, tide, towels, would have reached her ears, and she would have roused herself to learn what new plot was being made. As it was, she slept through all the buzzing till the plot was perfected, and silence reigned again on the landing. Then her sleep seemed to break up into pieces, and between the pieces she heard voices singing outside her window. Once she opened her eyes and saw the room full of moonlight, and through the half-drawn curtains she glanced at the Priory, and thought how clear and cold it looked in the sharp silvery light. Then again she opened them, and, as she did so, there was a rushing of little shadows across the curtains—fairy shadows every one, dancing, dancing, in a long procession. And as the last shadow danced by, Ruby heard them singing in the garden, and their song seemed to be of her.

"She has opened the gate,
And she must not delay,
Every step she may take
On the wonderful way.

Through the land and the sea,
She may travel at will,
And her eyes shall be free
From all shadow of ill."

All through the night Ruby heard fairies singing round the cottage. She did not rouse herself: it was natural now to hear them singing.

CHAPTER VII

IT was the beautiful lady herself who called Ruby next morning at dawn.

"I thought you would come," said Ruby, as she stepped out to her. "Where are we going?"

"It is for you to say."

"We will see what the Priory was like in the old times, when the monks lived there." Ruby looked across the wheat-fields at the ruins which had shone in the moonlight.

"Then put your hand in mine, shut your eyes, and wish." Ruby closed her eyes and wished, and at once felt herself borne upwards beside her companion. She could feel the touch of the soft mantle as they moved through the air. They flew a great distance, and Ruby could see beneath her lids that their flight was through darkness. She longed many times to open her eyes, and learn what manner of country it was they were passing, but the voice beside her each time said: "With closed eyes, Ruby," and she kept them shut obediently, until her feet touched ground, and the hand which held hers withdrew its clasp.

"You may open them now."

Ruby opened them and looked about her in wonder. She was in a great church, and she was standing at the end of it, with huge pillars on either side of her—immense round stone pillars with a great zigzag pattern cut deeply into them and running round them from top to bottom—and beyond the pillars, were the aisles of the church; but here the light was dim, for across them the huge pillars cast their shadows. Overhead were great round stone arches, reaching from pillar to pillar, resting upon them as if they had rested thus for ever. At the end of the building a great tower rose up, and the pillars turned off to right and left. The church was built in the form of a cross, and Ruby was looking up the nave to the choir, and to the great east window above it. She walked towards the window slowly, as a ray of sunlight shone through the lightly-stained glass, and the few pieces of colour in it sparkled like precious stones. Soon the sunlight grew stronger; and throughout the church it shone from pictured windows, painted in deep blues and reds; filling the building with a haze of colour, but through the jewelled east window the sun sparkled most beautifully of all. And upon the windows, and over all the walls, were pictures of Bible stories: and everywhere Ruby saw lovely draperies, embroidered with delicate silks and rarest gems, and figures and fruits and foliage carved in the stone.

The beautiful lady had disappeared, but Ruby did not miss her, so absorbed was she in all she saw: she felt quite safe in this fair place.

As she drew near the choir she heard an organ, and voices singing, and, on coming quite near, she saw that people were standing there, singing from sheets of parchment, on which the music was written in such large notes she could read it from where she stood. When the music ceased the monks left their seats one by one, and passed her silently in a solemn procession. Ruby knew they were monks, by their long black gowns tied in at the waist with leathern girdles, by their shaven heads, and bare feet. She hastened after them.

"Oh, please tell me all about yourselves," she was going to say, but stopped abruptly, as the last monk in the procession turned and looked at her, and put his finger to his lips to enjoin silence. He looked for a moment, then he held out his hand to her and led her after the others. The procession passed down the church to a door in the aisle, and through it each monk stepped slowly, Ruby's friend closing it behind him. She observed him curiously as he did so, and thought how sad and tired he looked.

"Are you happy here?" she asked, as he turned to walk again.

The monk bent a grave face towards her.

"I was happy long ago, and long ago I was unhappy: here we have peace only." Then in a lighter tone he continued: "We lead a busy life. We are in the cloisters now." And he pointed down the walk in which they stood. It was a long stone gallery, with a wall on one side, and on the other side a line of stone pillars, upon which rested round arches, open to the air: and overhead was a stone roof fashioned likewise in arches. Three other such galleries made, with this one, a long walk round a square lawn, in the middle of which a fountain played and sparkled.

"We work here," said the monk. And he led Ruby up to a group of monks who were writing at a table.

"They are illuminating books for use in our Church services," he said, as Ruby examined their painting and thought how delicate and wonderful it was. Farther on he showed her another group of workers, binding and

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mending books, and rubbing out the thumb marks upon the pages. Then, in one of the other galleries, he showed her a monk teaching Latin to a class of boys, and in another a group of choir-boys, practising the psalms for a later service.

In the last gallery she saw a number of monks writing at a long table. They were not illuminating like the others. Ruby looked at her guide for explanation.

"They are making notes for the great diary in the writing-room."

"Diary!" said Ruby, in surprise.

"Yes; we keep a diary in this monastery—you know, of course, you are in a monastery—a diary of everything that happens, not only here, but throughout the kingdom. In it are written all the deeds of our king and of his enemies."

"But," said Ruby, "how can you know about everything?"

"There are so many of us, you see, we each contribute different news and information. Any news we think important enough to be entered, we write on a piece of parchment and slip into the diary, and one, who is carefully chosen, reads the slips and decides whether or not they shall be entered. Then, if he approves, he copies them carefully into the big book."

"What a clever plan," said Ruby. She began to feel quite at home with this blackly-draped monk, he had so kind a smile and so pleasant a voice. "Please let me see where you live."

"We live here mostly, in the cloisters."

"But where do you sleep and have meals?"

"The names for the rooms are rather long; will you remember them?"

"Oh yes; I shall remember if you tell me." Ruby always remembered things after one lesson.

"These are the dormitories, where we sleep." He led her upstairs into a room over the cloisters.

Along the wall was a row of narrow beds, side by side, and of furniture in the room this was all. It looked very bare, and felt very cold, as the wind blew in from the open roof at the end.

"I suppose you have studies of your own?" said Ruby, looking about her with dissatisfaction.

"No; we sleep, eat, work, and do everything together."

Then her guide led her downstairs into the big dining-hall or refectory, and he told her to be sure to remember its name, as he showed her the big fireplace in the middle of the room. Then he took her into the chapter-house, or council-chamber, where the heads of the monastery met to discuss important matters; and then he showed her the great kitchen, with its army of cooks and scullions. After this he took her into the guest-room, which was richly provided with hangings and delicate furniture, and more carefully ornamented than any part of the monastery, except the church. And he told her the names of the kings who had slept there, and of the famous people who had accepted the monastery's hospitality.

"The poorest traveller, also, has a right to food and shelter from us," he said; "we entertain all who knock at our gates." And then he led her through several buildings into the wheat-field outside. "Now, Ruby, look at our church, at the ruin you have so often watched from your window."

Ruby looked, and there stood the Priory, perfect and complete: with its two rows of round-topped windows, and its strong tower, and its beautiful east window looking out over the sea. She could see clearly now that the great building was in the shape of a cross, and all around it stretched its fields, in which numberless servants of the monastery were working.

"And now, little Ruby, I must go, I must go, I must go." The monk's voice grew faint as he spoke, his black garments grew bright, the dark folds grew luminous and green and full of sweet embroideries. Then, raising her eyes, Ruby beheld the face of the beautiful lady.

"But the monk! Were you the monk?"

The beautiful lady smiled in answer to Ruby's question.

"Perhaps," she said. "Look, it will not endure longer."

And Ruby, turning her eyes again to the Priory, saw it fade and disappear in a golden haze: but the face of the beautiful lady grew clearer, and her raiment shone more brightly, as the mist grew denser.

"Rest in my arms," she said. And she took Ruby in her arms, and sprang upwards with her into the air. Up and up she flew, and the birds sang their morning song about her head; then upwards and upwards through the sunshine, and the birds sang at her feet; and higher and higher, to the delicate white clouds which the sea breeze

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had scattered along the sky, and the songs of the birds came faintly from the distance beneath.

"And up and up," said Ruby, "until I see the rosy world on the other side of the clouds."

But the beautiful lady shook her head.

"You have seen enough this morning; it is downwards now—down to your own Sea-thrift and another day. Shut your eyes, shut your eyes."

Ruby's eyes closed and her head sank on to the beautiful lady's shoulder. When she awoke, it was to the sound of the breakfast gong, and to find herself tucked up cosily in her own little bed.

CHAPTER VIII

AT breakfast that morning, Roger and Rachael were quieter than usual, and as soon as Ruby came downstairs they took her into the garden and said they must all go for a walk. Roger wheeled round the big basket bath-chair, that had been borrowed for their invalid, and began packing it with shawls, cushions, and biscuits.

"I don't think I want to go just yet," said Ruby.

"Oh, you must come now, please, Ruby," whispered Rachael; "we've something to tell you."

"It's about last night," said Roger, "about something which happened. Do you think it really **did** happen?" he added, turning to Rachael.

"Oh, it must have happened," exclaimed Rachael, "because of the—" She broke off abruptly, and nodded her head in the direction of the clothes-line outside the kitchen door, on which their bathing things were hanging. Ruby walked towards it and examined the garments, then she came back to Roger and the chair.

"I don't see anything strange about the bathing things!"

"Didn't you notice **anything** different?"

"They are not wet; you didn't bathe this morning."

"No; but they are not dry, are they?"

"Oh, I see, you had a bathe in the evening?"

"Not exactly in the evening."

"In the night! No; you didn't bathe in the night?"

Roger and Rachael nodded their heads solemnly.

"In the moonlight," they answered, as Ruby seated herself in the chair in obedience to their arrangements.

"We'll tell you when we get to the lane; but I wish I knew whether it really happened or not!" Roger spoke with a puzzled and rather worried air.

"It is difficult to be quite sure," said Ruby sympathetically, thinking of the golden gate, the deep sea, and the restored Priory. "But I am **sure** it all really happened," she added, as she remembered the beautiful lady.

"But you don't know," began Roger.

"I was thinking of things that have happened to me," said Ruby; "but mine will take a long time to tell, so tell yours first."

"Ours will take ever so long, too, so we must be quick," said Rachael, as she opened the gate. Then Rachael pulled, and Roger pushed, and the chair rolled away at a great pace through the village, until it came to Honeysuckle Lane, the prettiest of all the lanes leading to the sea. Here they stopped to take breath, and sat down under the hedge.

"Well," began Roger, as soon as he could speak, "you know how bright the moon was last night; we got up and dressed by it when everyone was asleep, and slipped out of the window."

"How did you get out?" asked Ruby, greatly interested.

"We fastened the strap of the big trunk to the bed, and slid down it; it isn't much of a drop."

"Did anyone help you?"

"Of course not; everyone was asleep. Well, we took our bathing things and went up the barley-field, to the flagstaff, and down by the coast-guard gap to the sand."

"Didn't the coast-guard see you?"

"No one was there—we were quite alone—everywhere it was still and bright. The only sound we heard was made by the cows on the cliff, crunching their food and moving about the grass."

"And," said Rachael, taking up the story, "the moon was so bright we could see everything clearly all along the coast, and along the silvery path across the sea we could see for miles and miles, much farther than we see by day."

"But," went on Roger, "although the sea was perfectly smooth, along the sand the waves were breaking, in that tiresome way they have, on the pebbles. Rachael was afraid of getting her feet cut, and just as I was going to carry her into the water we heard voices calling us. Everywhere, as the waves curled over, and the silvery foam rolled down their smooth sides, we saw faces nodding to us and hands beckoning us."

"Did they say anything?" asked Ruby.

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"But, Ruby, are you not astonished?"

"No," said Ruby; "do tell me what they said, or sang."

Roger and Rachael thought for a few minutes, then they repeated together:

"To the sea, the sea,
For a moonlit while,
For the path is free
To the Silver Isle;
And the waves now break on the shining sand,
But a fairy mile from the sleeping land.

He who comes must stay
From the dawn till night,
And from night till day
And the sun's first light,
If he comes to sail for a fairy mile,
To the sea-girt shore of the Silver Isle."

"We've both remembered!" they cried delightedly, as they finished. "Then it must be true!"

"Oh, please go on," said Ruby; "what did they do then?"

"They sang the words over and over many times, and beckoned to us more and more; then I carried Rachael as far as the first wave, and somehow she dropped, and I slipped, and we were both pulled under and borne out into the smooth water beyond the breakers; we felt little arms and hands all about us."

Roger paused, and Rachael took up the tale.

"They hid from us as soon as we began swimming about. We heard them sing the same song over and over and over, and we tried to find them; but we did not see them again until we tried to come in. Then the little hands and arms helped us back in the same way, and, as we stepped on to the firm sand, they all arose from the water and took hands, and danced away across the sea along the silvery path. We waited a long time for them to come back, but they did not sing or come any more, so we ran home and climbed in at the window again and went to bed."

"What do you think about it, Ruby?" asked Roger. "Do you think we both dreamed it?"

"No; it really happened," said Ruby. And then, of course, she told them of her own adventures in the early mornings. When the long story of them was finished Roger asked the same question.

"What do you think about it, Ruby? Do you think you dreamed it?"

"No; I am sure the things really happened," said Ruby, "but if one could stay for a day and a night—"
"From the dawn till night,
And from night till day," sang the others.

"Of course, then," continued Ruby thoughtfully, "there **could** be no doubt. I wonder if we could find the Silver Isle by ourselves."

After a long discussion they agreed it would be useless to try, but later in the morning, when they reappeared in the garden, they all seemed strangely preoccupied. Even the morning bathe did not rouse them. Ruby was allowed to go down to the sea this morning for the first time, and she stood beside the tent and looked at the sky and at the water, and at the line of ripples along the sand. There were no waves this morning, no hiding-places for fairies along the shore. She stood and wondered about the Silver Isle; and when Roger and Rachael ran races after their bathe, and Ethel and Charlie built the Coliseum at her very feet, she still wondered about it.

"The sea-birds must go there when they fly out to sea and disappear," she said, when Charlie told her the Coliseum was completed. Charlie, of course, was surprised.

"Must go where?" he asked—"to the Coliseum?"

"No; to the Silver Isle. I forgot you did not know about it. I'm afraid I have been thinking of it all the time. But the Coliseum is very nice; thank you for making it. I think the birds **do** stop at the Silver Isle, when they fly across the seas to the warm countries. They cannot fly for days and nights without resting, can they? I am so glad they have the Silver Isle."

"The albatross flies for weeks without resting, and some of the small birds must fly for days and nights, every

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year, to cross the seas they do cross. How strange it is that no one ever sees them set out upon their journey, or arrive at their journey's end."

"They rest at the Silver Isle," repeated Ruby.

"Where is the isle?" asked Ethel, looking up from her finishing touches to the Coliseum.

"I'm not sure; I'm going to find out."

"In your dreams, Ruby?"

"No; not in dreams," said Ruby decidedly. "By this time to-morrow I shall have seen it and know all about it."

Charlie took out his watch. "Very well, then," he said; "this time to-morrow I shall remind you, and expect a full description. If I like your account of it I shall take Ethel there on a visit."

When bedtime came that evening, Ruby wished Roger and Rachael good-night at the top of the steep little stairs, outside her door.

"I will tell you all about it to-morrow," she said.

"About what?" Roger and Rachael were sure now that their adventure of the night before had been a dream.

"The Silver Isle," explained Ruby; "I shall go and see it at sunrise."

"Well, you will be sure to tell us, won't you?"

"Yes; quite sure. I promise. Good-night."

CHAPTER IX

**When you have opened the golden gate,
You never more shall in longing wait,
You have but to wish, and to close your eyes,
And you go wherever your new wish lies.**

THE next morning, very early, Ruby heard a chorus of sweet voices in the garden. She stepped out of bed and drew back the curtains. All the world was grey—no blue was in the sky, no green was in the grass, no yellow was in the wheat—everywhere was greyness. In the garden a number of small figures were dancing on the lawn; these, too, were dressed in grey, but in greys which melted into rose colours and pale yellows. On their heads the singers wore silver caps, that changed from silver to gold as they danced and sang. Ruby stepped on to the window-sill, and saw a silvery-gold streak stretching across the big barley field, from the garden to the cliff.

"It is an army of silver-gold caps," she said, as she watched it.

"An army to take you prisoner," answered the voices from the garden, and the sound of the voices was as of silver bells.

"Prisoner, why?"

"Oh, we don't know why. We've come because we were sent."

"Who sent you?"

"The beautiful lady sent us to take you to the Silver Isle."

"The Silver Isle!" Ruby clapped her hands.

"He who comes must stay
From the dawn till night,
And from night till day
And the sun's first light," sang the fairies.

"I suppose I shall not be kept longer than that," said Ruby, somewhat anxiously.

"We cannot tell. Come, we are waiting." And suddenly the whole company drew up in military order, and each fairy touched his cap respectfully.

Ruby looked along their lines with great interest.

"I am so fond of drilling," she said; "and what beautifully even lines you make. I suppose you know all the exercises—skipping—ropes, and clubs, and balls. I never can do balls, they fly about so; can you do them?"

The fairies, for answer, stepped into position, and in an instant were all doing the double ball exercise beautifully. In all the company not one little silvery gold ball fell to the ground.

"Oh dear!" sighed Ruby, "I wish mine would keep up like that!"

"Practise," came from the company, in a tone of command that quite startled her.

"I do practise," she explained, "when I am well." Then, to bring them back to their respectful manner, she said: "I suppose you do not know how long I shall stay in the Silver Isle?"

The remark had not the effect she expected. Instead of touching caps in line, the whole company broke up in confusion and began dancing wildly.

"Be quick! Do not ask any more questions. We shall be late."

"We must be there before the sun is up."

"Before the first streak of light stretches across the sky."

"Before the sea-birds leave their footmarks on the sand."

The fairies crowded together beneath her window.

"Jump," they cried. And a soft grey something, looking like meadow mist, was unrolled.

Ruby had no time to examine it, she was urged so peremptorily to be quick. She jumped obediently into the midst of the dancing company.

Then they ceased dancing, and some behind, and some in front, and others at the sides, carried her across the garden.

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"I like going quickly," she said, smiling at them.

"We shall go quickly enough directly," they answered, as they skipped with her over the wall.

"It's a kind of tandem," laughed Ruby, looking at the long line in front of her.

"No, no! it is random—random—random—" And the fairies ran swiftly through the barley, through the big field to the edge of the cliff; but although they ran so swiftly and so lightly that the barley closed up again behind them as they passed, Ruby felt quite safe in her carriage. She moved along as smoothly as upon still waters.

At the cliff edge they set her upon the grass; and the company of twilight fairies called the sea fairies from the sandy grey shore. The sea fairies called again in answer, and the sound of their voices was as of sea-spray falling upon the rocks.

"We wait for Ruby," they said. And, from each wave that broke upon the shore, a silvery figure rose up out of the foam. All along the shore they arose, as far as Ruby could see, and as they ran towards her each stooped and picked up a gossamer mantle, grey, green, and blue. Ruby could not tell their colours; they changed continually as the fairies ran up with them from the sea.

"I have seen the spiders spinning them," she said, "from one pebble to another, all over the beach."

Then one of the fairies, on the cliff, pointed to a streak of yellow stretching from the east across the sky. The fairies below turned and looked, and beckoned to Ruby.

"The sails are set for the Silver Isle, and we must reach it before to-day's sun leaves the sea."

And, drawn up out of the water, on the dry sand, Ruby saw a silver boat, with silvery sails moving to and fro in the breeze. The boat was long and slim.

"Will she sail quickly?" asked Ruby.

"As quickly as the swallows."

Twined round the masts of the boat were garlands of sea flowers, and corals; and, as the light grew brighter, the inside of the boat shone like mother-of-pearl. Some of the sea fairies ran up the cliff and took Ruby's hands, and led her to the boat. She stepped in at once and put her hand upon the rudder.

"Where will you steer?" they asked in chorus.

"Across the sea to the sun."

As she spoke the sun showed above the water, a red arc on the horizon. Before her boat was launched delicate pink clouds spread lightly up the sky, up and up, over her head; and landwards farther than she could see: and, as the arc grew bigger, a rosy light filled the sky, and the sand-banks shone like rose petals.

Higher rose the sun, and, when the boat touched the water, orange and yellow cloud-ways filled the sky. Then higher and higher it rose, until blue and green shone between opal dyes, and all the glory of the dawn was about her. Then the wind filled her sails, and the sea fairies slipped into the sea behind her; and as the boat moved over the water the sunshine fell upon her face. She turned to wave her hand to the twilight fairies who waited still at the edge of the cliff.

"Good-bye; thank you so much for coming for me. I shall see you again?"

"Maybe, maybe; good-bye," they answered, as they waved hands in a long line.

As Ruby turned to wave hers again, she saw they were no longer the grey twilight company of the garden, but a brilliant army in golden armour, shining and sparkling in the sun.

"Good-bye, then," she said, waving her hand for the seventh time; "do not wait any longer."

"We wait till you return," said they on the land. And the shining company twinkled for a moment along the cliff, and disappeared.

"But they do not know how long I shall be," said Ruby to her sea friends—"at least, they did not tell me when I asked them—but that does not matter: this is so beautiful, I do not mind how far the fairy mile may be." And her boat went skimming over the water like a silver bird.

The sea fairies all the time swam round her. They were so many, they made a long shining track behind her, and as they swam after her they sang:

"He who comes must stay
From the dawn till night,
And from night till day
And the sun's first light,
If he comes to sail for a fairy mile,

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To the sea-girt shore of the Silver Isle."

"Shall I see all there is to see in a day and a night?" asked Ruby, of the fairies who swam beside the boat.

The sea fairies laughed. "Days and nights," said they, "cannot show you the stores of the ages."

"But you will bring me again," she said, "many times, and let me see by degrees?"

"That is for you to decide," they answered solemnly. "If you tell of what you see in the Silver Isle you can never visit it again."

"Oh dear!"

Ruby was dreadfully disappointed. She already longed for Roger and Rachael to share her delight. She began to argue the matter; but as she did so the wind suddenly blew more strongly, and more strongly: and more strongly it blew until the boat flew faster than her sea friends could follow: they lay back upon the waves and disappeared, leaving Ruby to sail alone to the unknown isle.

CHAPTER X

AT the moment Ruby beheld the Silver Isle, Ruby's mother opened her eyes and looked at Ruby's bed, and wondered to see it empty. As she wondered she heard laughter from the other room, and thought Ruby had awakened early and joined the others for company.

Now Ruby, although recovered from her illness, was by no means quite well and strong, and her mother rose hastily, fearing the doings of the other room. She had had a long experience of early morning pillow-fights, and sponge-matches; and she pictured the upheaved state of the other room, with Ruby sitting in the middle of damp washing materials.

"Ruby, you should not have come without asking me," she said, as she opened Rachael's door.

"Ruby, mother! Ruby isn't here."

Rachael was already dressed, and Roger had come in to tell her to look at a "purple emperor" from the window.

"Not here! She must be downstairs. Run down, Roger, and tell her to come up quickly."

Roger ran downstairs, but Ruby was nowhere to be seen.

Their mother grew anxious, and went back to Ruby's room. There were Ruby's clothes lying neatly on the chair by the bed: everything was there except the little dressing-gown and woolly slippers.

Ruby's mother dressed quickly and ran downstairs. Had the servants or the gardener seen Ruby? Was the door unfastened when they came down this morning?

No; no one had seen her, and the door had not been unfastened.

"O mother," said Rachael, "do you think anything has happened to Ruby? We told her about the fairies we saw—or thought we saw—in the sea, when we bathed in the moonlight; and last night Ruby said she was going to the Silver Isle: the fairies sang to us of the Silver Isle."

The children's mother sat upon Ruby's little empty bed, and put her hands to her head in bewilderment.

"My dear children, what are you saying? What moonlight bathe, what Silver Isle, and what do you mean when you tell me you have seen fairies?"

"We saw fairies in the foam, mother," began Roger confidently; "at least, I was sure we saw them until I began to question myself."

"And so was I," cried Rachael. "They called us from the waves, and sang the same song over and over many times."

"Yes, yes," added Roger eagerly. "O mother, we really did see them. Don't you remember the song, Rachael?"

"Yes, yes."

The two children repeated the words of the song:

"To the sea, the sea,
For a moonlit while,
For the path is free
To the Silver Isle;
And the waves now break on the shining sand,
But a fairy mile from the sleeping land.

He who comes must stay
From the dawn till night,
And from night till day
And the sun's first light,
If he comes to sail for a fairy mile,
To the sea-girt shore of the Silver Isle."

"We told Ruby the song," continued Roger, in distress. "She has been thinking ever since of the Silver Isle, and last night, when we wished her good-night, she said she was going to find it."

"Where do you suppose it is?" asked their mother quietly.

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"Across the water, at the end of the shining moonlight—way, where the sea touches the sky."

"Come, you must help me to find Ruby now," said their mother, rising. "Put the Silver Isle out of your heads."

"Wonderful things have been happening to Ruby, mother, during her illness," persisted Rachael and Roger. But their mother looked at them with anxious eyes, and told them to tell their story to their father, while she went to Ethel and Charlie's.

As she went, she had an uneasy feeling that she should not find Ruby there; and she did not find her. When she had retold Roger and Rachael's story of the moonlight fairies, and the Silver Isle, Charlie said:

"The children have dreamed, and imagined, and talked about fairies, until they can no longer distinguish between dreaming and reality."

"How does the second verse go?" he added, for Ruby's mother had told them the song. "Oh yes; I remember—"

'He who comes must stay

From the dawn till night,

And from night till day

And the sun's first light,

If he comes to sail for a fairy mile,

To the sea-girt shore of the Silver Isle.' How easily I remember, and you remembered it too: that is the way with fairy songs."

But Ruby's mother could no longer be patient.

"Come, come," she said, "you are dreaming too. We must **do** something; we cannot sit down and wait for a day and a night."

"It might be the wisest plan," said Charlie, beginning to roll a cigarette.

When Charlie began to roll a cigarette, in conversation, every one knew that his contribution to it had come to an end; so Ruby's mother turned from Ethel and Charlie's window, and went into the road again. There she met Roger and Rachael with their father.

"They have been dreaming," said the children's father.

"Charlie has been dreaming too," said the children's mother.

"And Ethel—"

"I am coming to help you look for Ruby," said Ethel cheerfully, running from the cottage. "First of all we'll go down to the tent; she may be there."

Ethel led the way with Rachael, along the loke and down the sandy hill, followed by Roger and his father and mother; Charlie watched them quietly from the window.

"Perhaps Charlie has seen fairies when he has been sketching. He gets up at all times to paint things—sometimes at sunrise, sometimes before it is light—and he is often on the beach in the moonlight. He finds out-of-the-way places along the cliffs, where no one ever comes. Perhaps he has been to the Silver Isle himself," said Roger, as his father and mother remained silent.

"My dear boy, this strong air has got into your heads. We shall find Ruby in the tent," said Roger's father, as they stepped on to the sand.

But Roger's father was mistaken. Ruby wasn't in the tent, or anywhere near the tent; neither was she in the big fishing-boat that lay upon its side at the water's edge, nor in the boat of Roger's making, that still eluded its wheelbarrow metamorphosis. Then the search party divided, and went in different directions: Ethel and Rachael turning southward to the next gap, where the beach-path ran up into the main road, while Roger, with his father and mother, climbed the steep road leading to the coastguard look-out, where the long-boat was kept. Then Roger and his party came down to the beach again, and walked farther north, to Honey Gap, at the end of Honeysuckle Lane. Then they went on farther, to the fishermen's storehouse; where the shrimping-nets and tarred ropes and sails and oars were kept. They asked the fishermen if any of them had seen a little girl, in dressing-gown and woolly slippers, on the sand that morning. The fishermen shook their heads and expressed astonishment; and this was all.

After a long, tiring search, the party turned back.

When they reached the tent, they found Ethel and Rachael waiting for them.

"We've had no luck," said Ethel; "we have been as far as the lighthouse, and have asked everyone we met."

Then the whole party sat down upon the sand and looked anxiously out to sea.

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"Here is Charlie," said Rachael, suddenly breaking the silence; "perhaps he knows something about Ruby. Mother, see, he is beckoning to us, and coming down the cliff from the barley-field."

Rachael rushed off to meet Charlie, and came running back with him, breathless with haste and excitement.

"Look, look!" she cried, holding up a woollen slipper crocheted in green and blue; "it is Ruby's, and Charlie found it in the middle of the barley-field."

CHAPTER XI

EACH of the party examined the slipper carefully. Yes; it certainly was one of Ruby's little bedroom slippers—the pair had been made for her last birthday by a kind friend. Each of the party questioned Charlie eagerly. Where exactly had he found it? Could he find only one? Was he sure nothing else of Ruby's was there? Was there any mark in the barley to show in which direction Ruby had strayed?

Charlie answered none of the questions.

"Come with me," he said, "I will show you."

He led them to the foot of the cliff down which he had just come.

"Look carefully," he said again, pointing up the steep footpath to the barley.

Everyone began to examine the path, Roger and Rachael more minutely than the others. After some minutes of close scrutiny, up and down, Rachael, from the top, called to the others:

"Here are marks of tiny feet, close to the barley, and they show among the barley, too, for a short distance." She knelt down to examine the marks more thoroughly.

"Bare feet," added Roger, quickly on his knees beside her. "Tiny bare feet."

"Well," said Charlie, from below, "what next?"

"They come down the path," continued Roger, crawling along on hands and knees. "There are so many, they cross and recross, all the time, down to the bottom." Roger looked up at Charlie for his explanation.

"Well," repeated Charlie, "they do not stop there."

"No; of course they don't. Look, look!" cried Rachael; "they are all over the beach."

"Not all over," corrected Charlie. "Do you notice anything peculiar in the position of the footmarks?"

"From the top of the path," said Roger, running up to it quickly, "many of the feet go backwards."

"Perhaps they didn't only come down," suggested Rachael; "perhaps they went up first."

"Precisely," said Charlie; "that is what happened. The marks are in perfect order."

He pointed to the little footmarks, stretching at regular intervals across the sand, from the water's edge to the cliff, and then up the cliff—path to the barley. The marks were so slight and delicate, they looked, at first sight, like the footprints of birds.

"These," explained Charlie, "were made by feet running up from the sea."

"Yes, yes," cried Rachael; "the sea fairies ran across the sand and up the cliff."

"Yes."

"But the other feet?" said Roger.

"The land fairies carried Ruby across the barley—field," explained Charlie.

All this time Ruby's father and mother, and Ethel, listened in silence. They were not sure that the marks down the cliff, and upon the wet sand, were not the footprints of gulls, and sand—pipers, and sanderlings.

Suddenly Rachael called from the water's edge.

"Do come quickly. Here are the prettiest things." She held out her hands full of beautiful little shells, red, yellow, blue, and dainty mother—of—pearl.

"They were all in one place," she said; "the tide must have left them. And here are seaweeds, and corals, and anemones, that we never get on this coast."

Roger went down on his knees beside her, and, in spite of the waves, examined the wet sand.

"Here is the mark of a keel," he said in a few minutes. "It is a longboat, and on either side of it are the tiny footmarks, going with it out to sea."

"And here," said Rachael, "is Ruby's handkerchief, with Ruby's name embroidered in the corner; it is the one Roger gave her last holidays. O mother, Ruby has certainly gone to the Silver Isle; the fairies have taken her."

Roger turned eagerly to his father, but his father shook his head.

"You have the shoe and the handkerchief, but—" Ruby's mother and Ethel came up as he paused.

"Let us go and make inquiries in the village," they said: and the three turned from the sea and went up to the village.

But Charlie, with Roger and Rachael, sat by the tent. They were sure Ruby was safe, and, this being so, inquiries were useless. They sat a long time watching the waves and the sky, and Charlie took a sketch—book from

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his pocket, and in it drew fairies and fairy boats. By—and—by he looked at his watch.

"Do you know we have been sitting here for two hours? We must go home at once and get something to eat."

Roger and Rachael, of course, were not hungry, and said they wanted to wait there, until the fairies brought Ruby back in the morning.

"That is impossible. We must have a meal immediately," insisted Charlie, and he took each of them by the hand, and made them run nearly all the way home.

At Sea-thrift they met the others, much depressed with unsuccess, having enquired in vain at the Inn, and at the Post-office, and at every cottage in the village. Charlie made them come indoors with the children. With much reluctance the three seekers obeyed, but, directly the meal was over, they set out again on their quest. They now made a long and searching examination of all the coastguards. The coastguards said that one or other of them had been at the "look-out" all night. Nothing like a little girl in dressing-gown and slippers had been seen, and as for a boat, or anything else, leaving the beach unnoticed by them, the idea was ridiculous.

"We are always on the watch," said the tallest of the men; "nothing can escape us." And he swept the horizon with his glass in a masterful way, defying the sea to keep any secret from His Majesty's servants.

Then the seekers returned to the cottage: and Ruby's mother said she would bicycle to the doctor's house, to consult him: and all the others, for differing reasons, decided to ride with her.

The doctor's house was about four miles inland. The bicycles were quickly collected, and, in about fifteen minutes, the whole party had left the village and were moving rapidly along the lanes, between hedges of blackberry blossom.

The doctor's house stood beside two fine old barns, and the doctor's front garden was full of flowers; and through an arch of roses, at the end of a gravel path, was a beautiful lawn, with a fruit-covered wall sheltering it on three sides; and overtopping the wall were poplars and great elms. The doctor himself sat reading in a low chair on the lawn. He put down his book and came towards them, apparently in no way surprised by their number.

"And how is little Ruby to-day," he said, leaning the last bicycle against his hedge.

"Ah, that is why we are all here!" exclaimed Ruby's mother. "Ruby has gone!" And she told him the story of Ruby's disappearance, and of Roger and Rachael's account of the fairies, before she and the doctor reached the lawn.

"Then," said the doctor, when at last she sat down in the chair he brought for her, "you must wait patiently until to-morrow morning; that is not difficult."

Ruby's mother looked at him in astonishment.

"You do not mean—" she began.

"Of course I mean the children are right," he interrupted, with a smile. "Wait patiently. Don't you remember, Ruby said she wanted to see fairies, the day she arrived? She is quite safe."

"Yes," said Rachael, delighted to find the doctor on her side, "yes; Charlie, Roger, and I, know she is safe."

"That is all right then," said the white-haired doctor, smiling at the children, and looking thoughtfully at Charlie.

"And your father, and mother, and Ethel," he continued, turning his kind eyes upon the doubting trio, "think that you, and Charlie, and I, are suffering from a delusion. Is it not so?"

He turned to the three doubters, and none of the three contradicted him.

CHAPTER XII

THAT night Roger and Rachael agreed to sit up in Ruby's room and watch for Ruby's return: they were sure she would return. The children's mother was worn out with the day's search and anxiety, and too tired to try to persuade them of the uselessness of such a proceeding. The children's mother had left the doctor with the conviction that he, too, had been dreaming, and was, like the others, suffering from a sudden hallucination; but, in spite of this, she kept the assurance of Ruby's safety in her heart, and lay down upon her bed with a faint hope that perhaps she would find Ruby safely asleep, in hers, in the morning.

The children's father had ridden, early in the evening, to the nearest town, to make enquiries; and Ethel, until far into the night, was searching the neighbouring villages, in spite of Charlie, who accompanied her, and told her all the time she would have no success.

"I have never been awake for long in the dark," said Rachael. "It will be fun to sit up a whole night."

"We shall see what Ruby calls the 'consternations,' in the sky," said Roger gaily, placing two chairs by the window.

"You won't mind if we have a little meal in the night, will you, mother?" he asked, as Rachael brought in an ample tray of biscuits, bananas, and milk. "We thought we might be hungry before the early morning, and we don't want to be eating when they arrive."

His mother smiled. "No, I don't mind; I'm afraid I'm nearly asleep. Wake me up, dears, if you feel lonely."

"We sha'n't feel lonely, mother. Need we draw the curtains? We shall see them much sooner—"

"No; you need not draw the curtains. Good-night."

Ruby's mother fell into a deep sleep as she spoke, and Roger and Rachael sat down quietly by the window.

"Mother believes in the Silver Isle at last," whispered Rachael.

"Yes;" said Roger; "and when Ruby comes back she can never doubt again."

"What time will they bring Ruby?" asked Roger, after a quarter of an hour's silence.

"Just before sunrise."

There was a long pause.

"It's a long time to wait, isn't it?" said Roger again. "What is that?"

They put their heads out of the window, as the gate closed behind their father.

"It is all right, father," they said, leaning out to him; "mother's asleep."

Their father looked up in surprise.

"Is there some news then?"

"She will be here in the morning, father; do believe she will be here! Mother believes it now, and has gone to sleep happily; we are going to sit up and watch for Ruby across the barley-field."

But their father opened the cottage door, and entered without speaking. They heard him walking up and down the little parlour for a long time, then he went into the garden again, and walked slowly down the path to the gate, and into the road.

The children sat and talked quietly, until the night was well advanced. The moon was clear and beautiful, and between the banks of fleecy grey cloud were patches of blue sky.

"They are lakes and rivers," said Roger, pointing to the blue.

"How nice to sail along them," said Rachael, looking up. "The clouds are continents and islands. I should like to land on that little isle in the middle of the biggest lake." She pointed across the barley-field, to a silvery grey cloud which hung over the sea. All about it the sky was clear and blue, and the cloud shone silvery in the moonlight.

"Perhaps that is the Silver Isle," she whispered.

"Or its reflection," suggested Roger.

By-and-by a mass of black cloud drifted up the sky from the west, and a wind blew over the fields; the children shivered, and began to feel the night-time long and lonely.

"Let's have something to eat," said Roger. They drew up to the tray and ate their midnight meal, and were quickly revived. The rain now began to fall steadily; it poured down in big heavy drops, and heavy thunder rolled across the sky. The storm came very near, the thunder-clouds seemed to break immediately overhead; but the

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children's mother did not wake.

"How tired mother must have been," they whispered, as they watched her sleeping peacefully through the storm.

"Where is father? he did not come back; he will be very wet!"

"And Ruby, poor little Ruby—I wonder," began Rachael, thinking of a change of dressing—gown and slippers for the traveller.

"They will know how to keep her safe and dry in the storm," said Roger; "don't be anxious. How much she will have to tell us," he went on. "I wish the morning would come more quickly; a whole night is a long time, isn't it?" Roger yawned. "I'm not sleepy," he said, when the storm ceased, "but I'll just lie down for a bit, it's rather dull sitting here now there's nothing to look at." And he curled up in a rug at the end of Ruby's bed.

"Don't—don't go to sleep, Roger," implored Rachael. "We don't know what time she will come; it would be a dreadful pity if both of us were not watching. Do wake up."

"All right, in a minute," murmured Roger, and he pulled the rug closer about him, and fell into a deep sleep.

Rachael stood beside him in a despairing attitude for some minutes, then she went and sat alone by the window. She was determined that someone should watch the night through. She managed to it watch for another hour, until the rain stopped and the sky began to clear; but it seemed an endless time, and she began to wonder if she should rest for a few minutes. She wrapped herself in a shawl, leaned back in her chair, closed her eyes, and wondered again if she should have he very shortest nap; and was, of course, in a few minutes, as fast asleep as Roger.

Ruby's robin woke her at sunrise. He flew on to the window-sill and looked at Rachael.

"Wake, wake," he chirped.

Rachael opened her eyes to the bright sunshine, and looked hastily at Ruby's bed. No; it was all right, Ruby had not come yet; only Roger lay there, still fast asleep. She jumped up and shook him briskly.

"Wake up Roger; be quick: it is sunrise, and Ruby will be here directly."

Roger opened his eyes slowly and stared at Rachael.

"What's up?" He looked about him in surprise; then he remembered. "Ah! she hasn't come yet; but look—look!" he cried excitedly, going to the window. "They are coming—over there—close to the cliff—I see bright little figures dancing about. See how they shine and sparkle! They are coming through the barley; look—look!"

"Yes," cried Rachael, clapping her hands; "how quickly they come. See, Ruby is in the middle; they are carrying her."

"She is in a chair of gold, and the chair has a canopy hung with curtains of gold, and golden draperies flow behind it as they come."

And through the barley-field the fairy procession came, with Ruby in its midst, and it set her down upon the grass beneath her window.

"O Ruby," cried Roger and Rachael, "how glad we are to see you, and how beautiful it all is!"

"Yes." Ruby smiled up through the shining crowd.

"May we speak to them?" asked Rachael anxiously.

Ruby nodded.

"What shall we say? May we talk ordinarily?"

"Of course."

"We are glad to see you," said Rachael, smiling and bowing politely.

The fairies drew up in line and bowed politely in return.

"We knew you would bring Ruby back safely," said Roger.

The fairies bowed again, and kissed their hands, but none of them spoke.

"We told the others, but they could not believe it," said Rachael.

The fairies nodded their heads, with a quick understanding of the difficulty.

"And oh!" cried Rachael, grown suddenly bold, "we do so long to hear about the Silver Isle; we want Ruby to begin at once."

At this, to her surprise, all the fairies put their fingers to their lips and solemnly shook their heads.

Roger and Rachael were alarmed. "Oh, you don't mean she mustn't tell us! Do you mean that?" they added

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anxiously.

The fairies nodded their heads.

"Oh dear!"

They were dreadfully disappointed. No time, however, was given for remonstrance. After again nodding their heads, and this time with great vigour, the fairies surrounded Ruby, and, jumping lightly on one another's shoulders, made a ladder from the window to the ground. Then the bearers of her chair climbed up with Ruby to the window-sill, and she stepped from it into her room. When the children had finished their greetings, the golden chair and every fairy had disappeared.

When Ruby's mother opened her eyes, on the morning following the dreadful day of anxiety, she saw Ruby sleeping peacefully in her own little bed, with her dressing-gown, and one woolly slipper, placed neatly on the chair beside her.

"My dear child," cried Ruby's mother, as she ran across the room and kissed her. "How strange and wonderful it is! What has happened to you? What has happened to us all?"

Ruby opened her eyes and smiled.

"Good morning, mother."

"Ruby, Ruby, where have you been? Father and I have been greatly troubled and alarmed. What has happened?"

Ruby sat up in bed. "I am so sorry you were frightened, mother; I was quite safe all the time. Rachael and Roger knew I wanted to see the Silver Isle. I am so sorry, I mustn't tell them about it; if I do I can never go there again."

"Dear little Ruby, I don't want you ever to go there again! I could not endure another such day."

"But, mother, I haven't seen it all—not nearly all—there wasn't time. There are so many wonderful things to see and learn in the Silver Isle, and the fairies are so kind and careful, no harm can come to me. Please, mother, don't be anxious! I wish I could tell you all about it, then you would not mind; it is such a beautiful place. Please, please don't say you do not want me to go there again."

And Ruby, who never cried with disappointment, looked at her mother with eyes full of tears.

Ruby's mother was much distressed. She went on to the landing, and called Ruby's father from the sitting-room below. He had wandered by the sea all night, and had come in, not long ago, tired out with his fruitless search. When the fairies were dancing through the barley with Ruby, Ruby's father was far away down the coast; but had he been in the barley-field he would not have seen her. He came upstairs quickly, and took his little daughter in his arms.

"My dear child, where have you been?"

"To the Silver Isle, father. I was quite safe; but I must not tell you about it, if I do I cannot go there again. You don't think me selfish do you, father, not to tell you? I do so much want to go back."

"Go back!" Ruby's father stared at Ruby in bewilderment. Then he looked at Ruby's mother for an explanation, but Ruby's mother only shook her head.

"No, no," she said decidedly; "I do not understand about this Silver Isle, but, whatever it is, and wherever it is, Ruby must never go away again as she did yesterday; we could not bear it."

Roger and Rachael came in as she spoke. "Well, Ruby," they said, "are you rested?"

"Yes; quite rested, and ready to get up." Ruby made a brave effort to hide her disappointment.

"My dear," said her mother, "you must not get up before breakfast, you are not strong enough yet, for a long day."

"I am quite strong since yesterday," explained Ruby. "I am quite well since yesterday—the fairies made me quite well—you will see I shall not be tired."

And when Ruby's mother examined her carefully, she saw that her looks, this morning, were quite different from those of the day before yesterday. She really did look quite well. Her eyes were as clear and bright, and her cheeks as rosy, as Roger's and Rachael's.

"And see, mother." She put out her arms and legs; and the arms and legs which had been, the day before yesterday, poor little thin arms and legs; were, this morning, round and plump as they should be.

"Do let me get up!"

"Very well." Ruby's mother was more and more astonished.

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"It is very strange," she said downstairs, when breakfast was brought in, and Ruby appeared with the others, bright and brisk and full of spirits,—Ruby who had been a pale, tired little girl, for so many weeks.

"It is very strange," said the maids in the kitchen, when, after breakfast, they heard Ruby running about the cottage.

"It is very strange," thought Ruby's father, as he sat outside in the garden; but he did not say anything, he only sat there and smoked. As for the milkman, and the baker, who came up the garden with the day's provisions, and the butcher, who had supplied gallons of beef tea, and the manager of the Post-office emporium, who had brought constant boxes of grapes from kind and distant friends, and the woman who had brought dozens of new-laid eggs, to be beaten up with brandy and milk,—they all declared, with astonishment, that Miss Ruby's sudden recovery was "past them altogether, but they was right down glad to see her about again, strange or no."

The news of Ruby's return, and complete cure, spread rapidly through the village: and, immediately after breakfast, many visitors presented themselves at Sea-thrift, hoping to hear the story of her day-and-night adventure.

One old man brought her a big bunch of roses, another a bundle of lavender, a third brought her an enormous basket of plums, big enough to keep a family in plum pies for a month. Ruby thanked each of them delightedly.

"How kind of you," she said. "I am quite well now, thank you, and I should so much like to tell you about my adventures, but I mustn't."

Quite a crowd of villagers had collected, before Charlie and Ethel came round. They were standing in rows along the low garden-wall, the front row having its elbows firmly established on the top of the wall. Ruby was talking to each in turn, and assuring each of her complete recovery.

"You will have to tell them about the Silver Isle," whispered her mother; "they will stay here until you do! But I don't suppose they would believe your story if you told it," she added, smiling. "I can't be sure that I should myself." She kissed Ruby's cheek lightly. She was so happy at having her child well and gay once more.

"Ruby!" cried Ethel, as she opened the gate, and Ruby ran to meet her.

"Well, Ruby," said Charlie, following, "did you have a good time?"

"Oh yes; a lovely time!"

"That's right. And how are you?"

"Quite, quite well."

"Yes; so you are. Come, this is evidence: here is your slipper." He gave Ruby the woolly shoe he had picked up in the barley-field.

"It is very strange," began Ethel.

"Oh, please, don't say that," interrupted Ruby, laughing; "everyone has been saying that—father and mother and all of them." She turned towards the audience along the wall. "It isn't really strange at all."

"Let us come indoors, then the crowd will disperse, and you can tell Charlie and me quietly by ourselves."

"Yes; let us go in, but I cannot tell you about it, Ethel; I am so sorry. If I tell you or anyone about the Silver Isle, I can never go back."

"Dear Ruby, we don't want you to go back. You must never, never go away again, as you did yesterday."

"Ethel!"

Ruby's father followed them into the cottage.

"No; you must never go away as you did yesterday, Ruby; we were very anxious and unhappy."

"O mother, were you very **very** unhappy?" asked Ruby, as they went into the parlour.

"Very."

"And you, father?"

Her father nodded his head, and smoothed some of the wrinkles out of his forehead.

Then Ruby looked serious and thoughtful. Roger and Rachael came and sat quietly beside her. They were very eager to hear of Ruby's adventures in the Silver Isle, but anxious she should not deprive herself of future visits, so they sat quietly beside her and said nothing.

Ruby sat with her elbows on the table, and her chin supported on her hands. It was her favourite position when she had a difficult problem to solve. So absorbed was she, she did not notice a tall figure come up the garden, nor hear the door open, nor see the white-haired doctor's smile as he looked at her.

"Well, Ruby, you are safely back, I see." Ruby roused herself.

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"Yes, yes; and I am quite strong again now. Isn't it nice?"

"Capital." He sat down and looked at her critically.

"Yes; you are quite well. You must tell us how it happened."

Ruby slipped suddenly from her chair to her mother's knee.

"You shall not be anxious about me again, mother," she said. "I have made up my mind to tell you."

As she spoke, the robin looked in from the window sill, and chirped a few notes of encouragement. When he had finished, Ruby began her story of the Silver Isle.

CHAPTER XIII.

"**THEY** came for me in the early morning," began Ruby, "just before sunrise."

"Who came, my child?" interrupted her mother, as she stroked Ruby's hair.

"The fairies, while you were asleep, dear mother," said Ruby. "They came in the early grey morning, and took me across the barley-field to the sea; and then the sea fairies led me down to their boat, and we set off as the sunshine began. At first the sea fairies came with me, and played round the boat; but soon the wind grew so strong, and carried the boat along so quickly, they could not keep up; so they lay back upon the water, and the waves covered them. Then for a long time I saw only miles and miles of blue water, and the boat dashed on faster and faster, until I was out of breath. I had to hold the sides of the boat, I couldn't steer it a bit."

"Were you not afraid of being upset?" asked Rachael.

"I never thought of being upset," said Ruby; "but I wanted to look about; and we went so fast, I could not see anything for the spray, and sun and wind."

"Like a trip in a life-saving apparatus," suggested Roger.

"After a time," continued Ruby, "the wind went down, and I looked back to see the land, but there was no land anywhere, there was nothing but the sea and the sky, and sunshine. Then suddenly I saw a great cloud overhead, that came nearer and nearer and lower and lower, until I thought it was going to fall upon me. It broke just above the top of the sail, and from it a flock of white swans fell lightly into the waves, and came swimming round me. They guided my boat into smooth water, where the waves broke only in gentle ripples, and we sailed along slowly for some time. Then by-and-by I heard overhead a great singing of birds."

"What kind of birds?" asked Rachael eagerly.

"Every kind I knew, and ever so many I did not know; they gathered from every part of the sky. Then they all made a great flight together, and swept along in front of me across the sea, singing all the time. I heard their song long after I could see them. The singing kept in front, growing fainter and fainter until it ceased altogether, and, as it ceased, I saw the Silver Isle."

Roger and Rachael leaned forward eagerly as Ruby paused.

"Yes, yes," they exclaimed; "did it come up suddenly out of the sea? Do go on."

"No; it didn't come up out of the sea. It had been in its place all the time, but the light about it was so bright I could not see through. When the song of the birds died away, the light lifted like a veil, and behind it the cliffs of the Silver Isle glistened like precious stones. It was a big, little island," said Ruby, in answer to their questioning eyes, "and its cliffs were high and steep, and ran right down to the water. There was no sand or beach, or landing place, as there is here, but all along the shore were birds flying in and out of the rocks and deep caves; and the rocks shone like pearls, and the caves looked like great sapphire stones hiding among the pearls. As my boat drew near a fairy figure stepped down the side of the cliff. 'Welcome, Ruby,' she said, and held out her hand. The boat answered to it quickly, and sailed to the spot where she stood. I jumped up, thinking she was there to help me land, but, when I held out my hand to her, she pointed to the water and said: 'One deep dive, Ruby, to make you quite well before you come ashore.' I looked into the water and wondered how I should do it, the sea was so deep and blue. As I looked she said again: 'Those who come to the Silver Isle must obey its rules, if they would land upon its shore,' so I shut my eyes and jumped. Oh dear,"—Ruby shut her eyes tightly at the recollection,—"it was such a long, long way down, I thought I should never come up again. I kept my eyes shut all the time, and, when at last I came to the top, my boat had gone, but at the edge of the rock stood the shining figure. As she held out both hands to me I recognised her face; she was the beautiful lady of the well. I felt quite safe then. She carried me up the cliff and gave me fairy clothes to wear, all bright and soft and shining; then she clapped her hands, and hundreds of fairies came running towards me, and made me dance with them in a great circle round the island. While we danced the beautiful lady moved about among the flowers.

"The isle was like a big garden, but the flowers and fruits in it were different from any I had ever seen before. Their colours were more beautiful, and their shapes more delicate. There were trees, and lawns, and paths winding between hedges of ripe fruits, and arbours of sweet-smelling blossoms, and fresh fountains playing and sparkling, and all the time I could see the sea shining beyond the rocks.

"Very soon the beautiful lady called me to her side, where she stood in the middle of the isle, and as I ran to

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her the fairies hid away again.

"Then she told me the Silver Isle was set there, far away in the sea, for her wandering birds. 'For my wanderers,' she said, 'who cannot bear the winter's cold, but fly after the sunshine, this is their resting-place—this is the garden at which they rest when they cross the seas.' She lifted one hand as she spoke, and, from the rocks and caves, the birds flew up like leaves blown by a sudden wind. When I asked her how they found the isle, she asked me how I found it, and, of course, I did not know. Then she laughed, and said: 'Neither do the birds know; it does not matter so long as they do find it.' She said some of the birds lived always on the isle—the weak ones, and those who had grown too tired to keep up with the others, on their longer journeys. I sat beside her, and she told me many wonderful things about their songs and travels. I cannot remember half the things she told me." Ruby looked dreamily out of the window. "But she said it would not matter if I forgot: I should remember again when needful.

"By—and—by she stood up and spread out her hands towards the sea, and as she did so the North Wind came flying over the water. He looked very big as he came towards us. His face was hidden in a great grey mantle, and his wings, as he spread them, swept away all the colour from the sea; but he moved very gently. As soon as his feet touched the isle, he came and sat beside me at the beautiful lady's feet. Then she put her hand on his cloak and drew it away from his face, and his eyes were so bright and blue and twinkling, and his smile so kind, and he looked so strong, I began to think of our very nicest, oldest friends; and to wonder who of them all he most resembled. The beautiful lady answered my thought as I wondered.

"'He himself is an old friend,' she said, and she again put her hand upon his mantle. 'Show her,' she said to him; 'Ruby will remember.'

"Then the North Wind rose, and looked across the water, and breathed some words through the air; and out of the air came the heroes of the northern seas, in shining coats of mail, with gleaming, winged helmets on their heads, and battle-axes in their hands; and the sails of their ships filled with the breath that he breathed. The heroes sailed round and round the isle, singing of their deeds in olden times. Some of the tales I knew and some I did not know till then. They were such splendid heroes, so big and strong; and as the breath of the North Wind blew upon them more strongly, their eyes sparkled and their faces shone more brightly from their ships. But suddenly the North Wind spread his wings, and flew out to the heroes and gathered them all up in his arms: then he dropped with them gently into the sea. When they had disappeared, the beautiful lady again rose and stretched her hands over the sea, on the other side of the Isle: and as I watched to see what would happen, over the waves came the South Wind. Her trailing blue raiment, patterned with gold, shone gloriously as she came. Her wings were golden and flashed across the water, and in her hands were garlands of myrtle and olive.

"She, too, stepped gently upon the isle and came and sat beside me at the beautiful lady's feet. Then, by—and—by, the beautiful lady said to her:

"'Show Ruby, and Ruby will remember.' And, as the North Wind had arisen, the South Wind arose, and stood by the sea and breathed through the air.

"As she breathed, the heroes of the Greeks, Theseus and Jason and Perseus, and all the mighty Trojan chiefs whom Roger loves, came sailing about us. They carried spears and bucklers, and wore helmets with waving plumes, and sang of the deeds we know so well. They were beautiful as they moved about in the sunshine; but in a little while the South Wind, too, rose and spread her wings about the heroes and sank with them beneath the waves.

"Then I asked the beautiful lady what the East Wind could bring us: and immediately, from the east, the sunshine spread like a cold clear flame, and the isle was full of daffodils. Through all the grass they shone, and at the beautiful lady's feet, and in her hair, and in the folds of her mantle; then suddenly, as they had come, so they were gone. When I asked for the West Wind, a rainbow shone in the sky, and a mist, like dissolved opal, surrounded us. Pearly drops of moisture fell upon us, and in the garden I smelt the sweet smell of ferns, and leaves, and woods, and earthy things, and I said: 'She is the best of all,' but the beautiful lady shook her head.

"'Each in turn is best,' she said.

"Then the West Wind rose as the others had risen: she was taller and stronger than them all. As she spread her wings the isle trembled.

"'Where shall I waft the Silver Isle? The seas are deep and wide,' she said to the beautiful lady. But the beautiful lady answered:

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"Let the isle this day abide in its place; depart gently as you came.'

"The West Wind then bent her head and flew away lightly, up the sky. Her raiment left a little ripple on the water as she passed.

"The beautiful lady rose and watched the waters, where the West Wind passed over them, then she turned to me and said:

"A day and a night, Ruby; and, see, the night is coming.' She pointed to the clouds into which the West Wind had flown. Their colour was fading, and the light in the sky was growing dim.

"A day and a night,' she repeated, and she drew me nearer to her and wrapped me in the folds of her cloak. Then, as I closed my eyes to think about Roger and Rachael, she pointed upwards, and I looked and saw the night had begun; the clouds were gone, and the moon and stars were shining in the sky."

CHAPTER XIV

RUBY made a long pause, and the company waited patiently for her to continue, but Ruby was busy remembering.

"I wish you had asked some questions about the winds," said Rachael at last.

"I didn't think of any," Ruby answered apologetically; "and I thought I should go again very often and in time understand everything."

"And if you hadn't told us," said Roger, "you might have gone back. O Ruby, would you like not to tell us any more? Is it too late now?"

"I shouldn't enjoy thinking about it alone," said Ruby, "I would much, much rather tell you."

"Well," said Rachael, "please go on; what happened when the stars came out? Was it cold?"

"No; not a bit, it was soft and warm under the beautiful lady's cloak. The fairies crept out again from the flowers and trees, and sang quietly, and danced slow minuet-like dances in the moonlight. The beautiful lady stroked my hair, and I think I was asleep for a long time.

"When I opened my eyes the fairies had again disappeared, and big purple clouds floated between us and the sky. The isle was full of mists and shadows, and the beautiful lady was walking to and fro among great white flowers. She moved her hands as though she were weaving, and, as she did so, pictures grew up out of the sea and out of the shadows of the isle, and upon the clouds above us. She turned and saw me watching her, and told me she was weaving dreams for the sleepers of that night. Then she came and took me by the hand, and my fingers weaved with hers. I wished beautiful dreams for Roger and Rachael, and father and mother: and the pictures grew as I wished, and came floating landwards over the sea. Don't you remember them?"

Everyone tried to remember, but without success.

"I wished such a sweet dream for you, mother. Can't you remember it?"

Ruby's mother shook her head. "I cannot remember my dream," she said, "but my sleep was deep and beautiful."

"I expect all the dreams came to you, mother," said Roger, "as father and Rachael and I did not go to bed. That was why you slept so soundly."

"Were all the dreams, the beautiful lady weaved, nice ones?" asked Rachael.

"Yes; no ugly ones are woven on the Silver Isle; they are made in a land to which we need never go. When they were all finished, the beautiful lady stepped down the rocks and lifted her head and sang softly, and as she sang flights of birds fell about her. They seemed to be shaken from the clouds that were drifting over the stars. She knelt down among them, and they fluttered their wings and waited for her to speak.

"I shall show you the path to-morrow,' she said to them, 'to-night you must rest.' And then they all flew into the trees and caves, and sang their thanks, as we hear them sing when the sun shines after rain.

"After this, mer-men and sea-maidens came up from their homes in the deep water, and played in the pools among the rocks, and every now and then a flock of sea-birds flew swiftly past.

"When the first streak of light showed in the sky, the beautiful lady waved her hand to the mer-men and sea-maidens, and they wished me good-bye.

"Good-bye, Ruby,' they said; 'don't forget us.' And they slipped back into the deep water. When they were gone, the fairies of the isle crept from the shadows, and stood in a large company awaiting orders.

"A day and a night in the Silver Isle,' said the beautiful lady, pointing to the yellow streak in the east.

"Please let me stay longer,' I said. 'The time has gone so quickly.' But she repeated the verse and shook her head.

"Then I begged her to let me come again, in the early mornings, and she said it could be only on the condition that I told no one what I had seen or heard in the Silver Isle. I promised to tell no one, but," Ruby added quickly, "I am sure the beautiful lady knew it would be too difficult a promise. She took both my hands in hers, and said:

"Roger and Rachael will want to hear; your parents will be troubled if they never know where you have been. Be careful of promises, little Ruby.'

"As she spoke the silver boat came gliding out from the rocks, and she lifted me into it in the early grey morning. I wished her good-bye, but she said it was not to be a good-bye, I should see her again very soon. Then

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the sails filled, and the boat ran along so quickly I could not see her any more. I sailed swiftly through miles of grey water, till we came to golden and crimson pools, and wells of sapphire blue: and the light in the east lengthened and broadened, till the cloud banks were broken down, and the sun climbed up out of the sea. As we came to our shore, I saw the fairies waiting along the cliff, as they had promised. They ran down to the water's edge, and helped me over the sand and brought me home."

"Yes, yes; we know," cried Roger and Rachael. "And what happened to the boat?"

"It sailed back across the sea."

"And for us," said Ruby's mother, kissing her, "you have given up seeing these wonders again."

"You are glad I have told you, mother?"

"Yes; very glad."

Then Ruby slipped from her mother's knee, and the party sat in silence for some time. At last Ethel rose and said it was all very strange, at which remark Ruby laughed gaily.

Then Charlie rose. "I wish I could remember the dream you made for me," he said to Ruby. "Can't I have it again?"

Ruby shook her head.

"Well, the great thing is that Ruby is now strong and well," said Ruby's father. Then he lit his pipe and walked up and down the garden, pondering Ruby's tale.

"How do we know she **is** quite strong?" said Ruby's mother.

"I'll soon find out," said Roger; and he darted at Ruby and lifted her in his arms. "Of course, we must test her. Hold tight, Ruby." And he rushed with her into the garden, pursued by Rachael. He dropped Ruby on the lawn.

"Let's have a regular examination," said Rachael. "We'll begin with running."

"Yes; that's capital. What about her weight, Roger?" asked the doctor, coming out after them.

"She weighs too much," said Roger, rather breathlessly. "She's as heavy as Rachael now."

"Come, that's evidence."

"Yes," responded Rachael; "but we don't know exactly how much she weighed yesterday morning, do we?"

"Near enough."

The sports then began in earnest, umpired by Charlie. And although Ruby did not, of course, win all the prizes—the children insisted upon prizes, and Ruby's mother ransacked the cottage for suitable knick-knacks—she held her own, as she had never done before; being even with Rachael in several runs, and above her in jumping.

"You are much more springy than you were," exclaimed Roger admiringly.

When the runs and jumps were over, there came a tug-of-war, the doctor being pressed into the service to side with Ruby; and, in spite of Roger's gallant struggle, Ruby and the doctor won, and pulled Roger and Rachael over at each trial.

But, through all the excitement of the sports, Ethel sat indoors by herself—thinking. She sat in the parlour, in spite of Charlie's and Roger's entreaties, through the window, to cheer up and join them; and when the sports came to an end, and the doctor went away, she walked through the barley-field to the sea, and there sat down to think again.

After dinner, when the children ran along the sand with their football, they found her still sitting close to the sea; but now Charlie was near by, painting busily.

"May we see?" cried Ruby, as they came up to him.

He turned his canvas towards them, and upon it was a picture of Ethel, standing beside the sea, surrounded by a band of fairies, who pulled her skirts and tried to make her look at them; but her head was turned away.

"Poor Ethel," said Rachael; "how they pull."

"Why doesn't she turn her head?" asked Ruby.

"We'll come and ask her," said Charlie. They all ran up to Ethel, and Charlie put his picture down in front of her. Ethel looked at it, and laughed.

"It isn't a good portrait, is it?" Then she turned to Ruby. "We must see the fairies at our own time, and in our own way, mustn't we, Ruby? We can't be made to see them: but I have finished thinking. Come, we will have a game while Charlie finishes his picture. The fairies are very pretty."

"But they are not a bit like my fairies," said Ruby.

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"I haven't seen your fairies," said Charlie apologetically.

"You have been trying to paint them," said Ruby.

Charlie laughed now, and, in spite of their remonstrances, tore his picture into little pieces.

"I must not paint Ruby's fairies until I have seen them," he said, "and perhaps I shall never see them. We must be content with those we see ourselves, mustn't we? And if we do not see any ourselves, we must wait patiently."

"But you have seen some," said Rachael; "you have, haven't you?" Charlie smiled.

"Perhaps—one cannot always remember—but come along, let us have this game."

So they played, and they played; until the champion Ruby was tired, and said they must rest.

CHAPTER XV.

ONE morning the children's mother looked up from behind the coffee-pot.

"Does anyone remember," she asked, "that we go home the day after to-morrow?"

The whole party started in alarmed surprise.

"No! Not so soon! Impossible! Must we really?"

"We must—really. To-day is Thursday, and schools begin on Monday, our duty is clear."

"Oh dear!" cried Ruby.

"Oh dear!" cried Rachael.

"Oh bother!" said Roger.

Ethel and Charlie, who had just put in their heads through the window, looked sympathetic.

"We must go home on Saturday too," they said, by way of comfort.

Then Roger's spirits rose with a bound.

"Mother," he exclaimed delightedly, "we can't be ready on Saturday—we haven't packed anything."

"Someone else has been doing that," came their father's voice from behind the paper.

"O father! Well, we'll help directly we've finished breakfast. How quickly the time has gone! It seems such a pity to leave everything!" Roger looked at the flowers in the garden, and at all the spreading country beyond.

Then he turned to his breakfast with a business-like air. "We must make a programme for the day," he said. "Let me see—there are the bicycles to clean—I suppose they **ought** to be cleaned," he added doubtfully; "then there is the tent to take down, and the boat to bring up."—Roger's handiwork still went by this name, although it had ceased to maintain any but an inverted position in the water. "And we must say good-bye to our friends."

"We must go in the afternoon to see our dear doctor," said Ruby; "he does not know we are leaving so soon."

The programme being settled, they all, after breakfast, busied themselves greatly; and, owing to their extraordinary exertions, the bicycles were cleaned, the tent taken down, The Recruit dragged up and stowed away in the woodshed, and a bathe squeezed in, before dinner-time.

"You have worked nobly," said Charlie, looking in early in the afternoon, on his way to the Post-office for luggage-labels, a strong cord, and other articles significant of departure.

After dinner, as had been arranged, they set off to bid the doctor good-bye. Roger and Rachael rode their freshly-cleaned bicycles, but Ruby, not having a bicycle or being able to ride one, accompanied them in a donkey-chair. The children had frequently been assured by the donkey's mistress, that that donkey was "as quick as lightning to go," so they decided to test its speed on this occasion.

"We can ride on either side," said Roger, "and if he goes too fast, we'll hold on to the sides of the chair, and act as drags. Ruby can drive, there's no traffic along the road, and a hedge on either side to fall into, so we're quite safe." And, as soon as Charlie passed on to the Post-office, the children set out with the lightning steed.

The steed did not justify his character even at first. He did, indeed, start off in high spirits with the bicycles, and for a few yards closely followed them, but as soon as the party turned from the main road into the blackberry lane, he became depressed. His loss of spirits may have been caused by the length of straight road suddenly presented to his view, or he may have started with the idea of following some plan of his own; whatever was the reason, as soon as they turned into the blackberry lane, he stopped, and refused to move.

Ruby used all the driver's art she had ever seen, or heard, or read of, to persuade him to change his mind and pursue his course. She called him by name, cheerfully and severely; she jerked and shook the reins until her arms ached; and at last she got out of her chair and tried to reason with him.

Of course, as we all know, one cannot reason successfully with determined obstinacy; and, when this last plan of Ruby's failed, she sat down in her carriage, feeling very helpless and disappointed. Roger and Rachael were ever so far away down the blackberry lane, speeding happily onward: the steed had made so fine a start, they took for granted that he was following in the same style.

"They might look round to make sure," thought Ruby, as the riders grew smaller in the distance; and, just as they began to look like two black dots upon the road, they did stop and look round. They came racing back.

"What has happened? What is the matter?" they asked breathlessly. "What are you stopping for?"

"He won't go any more," explained Ruby, rather dismally; "I expect I'd better turn back and let you go without

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me."

"Nonsense," said Roger, "I think I can make him go. Here, Rachael, hold my wheel and we'll see!"

Roger handed his bicycle to Rachael, and rushed at the steed in so threatening a manner that the creature plunged violently forward, and set off at a hand gallop, with the chair and Ruby swaying from side to side behind him. Roger ran excitedly beside them.

"He's all right now," he gasped. "I'll go back for the wheel."

"I'm afraid I don't like it quite so fast," began Ruby, as Roger dropped behind; but, before she could finish her sentence, the lightning steed twitched his right ear, and came once more to a dead stop.

When Roger and Rachael came up again, Ruby was nearly in tears with disappointment.

"I did think I could drive a donkey," she said; "we shall never get there at this rate."

"Don't trouble!" cried Roger cheerfully; "I'll ride at his head and keep him up to the mark that way." So Roger rode at the steed's head, and, by his masterful manner, threatening voice, and occasional reminder with a stick, obliged him to keep up a fairly good pace till the doctor's house was reached.

"Thank you," said Ruby, as she stepped out; "I hope he will be better going home."

"It has been rather a noisy drive hasn't it?" said Rachael. "Roger's throat must be sore."

"Not a bit," said Roger huskily; "but I shall want an explanation from his owner when we get back."

By the time they had fastened the steed to a post, the doctor was at his gate giving them a welcome.

"So you've come to bid me good-bye," he said, smiling; "that is nice of you."

"Did you know we were going to-morrow?" asked Rachael.

The doctor smiled. "A little bird told me."

"Was it our robin? He has not told us anything for a long time."

"It was one of my own birds," said the doctor, smiling again. "I have a great many, as you hear." And as the children walked down the path to the doctor's lawn, they heard a chorus of birds in the trees around it.

"How beautifully they sing," said Ruby; "but my robin's song—"

"Ah, your robin has been a useful friend," said the doctor.

Then, when tea came, the children asked him endless questions about his flowers and birds, and the creatures that strayed into his garden; and they gave a graphic account of the behaviour of the lightning steed, and besought the doctor never on any account to hire it.

During a short pause, that occurred between the plain cake and the fancy cakes, Rachael asked if the doctor remembered the day of their arrival at Sea-thrift—the very first day of the holidays—when he had told them they would find fairies in this part of the country.

The doctor said, of course he remembered.

"Will you tell us how you knew?" she asked again. "Have you been to the Silver Isle, or met the beautiful lady?"

The doctor smiled, and shook his head.

"Supposing I had been once, and might not tell without forfeiting the right to go again, would you think me very selfish in not telling?"

"No, no, no!" they all cried; "of course we should not think you selfish; of course you must not tell us."

"But I don't say I have been to the Silver Isle, or seen any fairies," said the doctor, "and I don't say that I haven't," he added, with a twinkle in his eyes. "In any case, it is kind of you to forgive me for wanting to keep such knowledge to myself. There are fairies, you know, all over the world for young people, but for old people—they can be found in only one place."

Ruby put her hand in his. "I am sure you see them, that is why you look so kind and happy."

The doctor did not answer; he just passed the fancy cakes round again.

When tea was finished, and the garden several times explored, the children said good-bye.

"We shall meet again next year," they said to him at the gate.

"Well, well, I hope so; a year is a long time."

"Oh, not so very long," said Ruby; "but won't you come and see us at home?"

"What would become of my poor patients?"

"We could send someone else to take care of them."

"A *locum tenens*," said Rachael, with a grand air, remembering the abstracted young man who had come one

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day at home, instead of their own cherished doctor.

"Yes; do come," they begged. And they begged until Ruby was seated in her chaise, and the others on their bicycles, and they left saying that they should send him an invitation to their Christmas party, and he **must** come.

On the return journey the lightning character of the steed was at last discovered. At the first shaking of the reins, it set off and headed for home, not at the wild hand gallop of the earlier part of the day, but at a quick, even trot, which showed a determination to get over the ground without break or hindrance.

"We shall have to settle down like that to lessons on Monday," said Roger, when they stopped at their own gate.

Rachael stroked the steed affectionately.

"Compared with his conduct at starting, this may, of course, be called a lightning speed; but I think we ought to tell Mrs Brown we think she exaggerated."

So they galloped the steed round to his owner, and gave her their kind, but conscientious, opinion of his character.

Sea-thrift was astir early next morning, for, in spite of the united family exertions, many things had been left unfinished the night before.

Ruby was awakened, as of old, by the robin. He was standing on the window-sill, singing sweetly. She listened attentively, and, although she could distinguish no words this morning, she knew he was bidding her good-bye, and a happy year, till she came again.

"You will be here, won't you?" she said, getting out of bed and going to the window.

The robin, for answer, hopped on her shoulder and sang more sweetly than before.

"You little dear," she said, "I wish you would come home with us! Can't you come home with us? It is not as nice a one as this, but there **is** a garden at home, with trees and bushes, and you will be quite free."

But at the mere suggestion of such a thing the robin ceased singing, and flew away to his old perch over the well.

Ruby leaned out of the window in great distress. "Come back," she cried, "please come back; I won't ask you to come home with us any more."

But he did not come back, and Ruby began to dress rather sadly. Presently she looked out of the window again.

"I have thought of a nice plan for you," she said cheerfully. "I will show you what it is as soon as I come out."

She completed her toilet quickly, and ran downstairs to the parlour. She took a small wooden box from the cupboard. It was a deep box, with half its lid left to it, and it was full of fine hay. A glass bowl had been carefully packed and sent in it from home. Ruby ran into the garden. The robin was still singing on the well.

"Do you see this little box?" she said, showing it to him, "I shall put it in the shed, it will make a warm bed for you in the winter. There is a hole in the roof of the wood-shed, and a little shelf near the hole, just big enough for the box." Ruby ran into the shed, and put the little box on the shelf near the hole in the roof. When she had done this, the robin flew in through the hole and hopped into the box, to show her he understood: then he sang cheerfully for a few minutes, and flew away again.

Oh, how busy everyone was that morning at Sea-thrift! Father and mother, Ethel and Charlie, Roger and Rachael and Ruby, and the maids in the kitchen, were all strapping and cording and labelling, until Mr Blogg drove up in his big cart for the luggage. Then, of course, many forgotten friends came, at the last moment, to say good-bye. The setters, and the foxhound puppy, came for a last petting from Rachael; and, after a safe interval, the big tabby cat and fluffy Persian kitten, dropped over the wall from the coastguards' garden, and purred round her legs; and, just as they were all packed safely into the trap, Mrs Mayes came up the lobe with cuttings from her garden for Roger.

At last, after several false starts, they set off, along the sunny road, and up and down the green lanes, to the station. As they drove along, and looked across the beautiful great stretch of country to the sea, they all felt sad at having to change this space and freedom, for streets and squares and parks. The drive was silent until they reached the little hill close to the station. Here a chirping in the elms made them look up.

"It is the robin," cried Ruby; "look, Rachael, look, Roger, he has come to see us off."

And the robin darted along from branch to branch, his red breast flashing in the sun. On the last elm he stopped and trilled his farewell notes.

"Good-bye," cried the children; "please be here to meet us when we come again."

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And he fluttered his wings, and sang a few notes by way of promise; then he flew back along the road through the elms.

At the station another friend waited to bid them good-bye. As their waggonette rattled over the stones, the doctor stepped out of the booking-office, and opened the door for them.

"Oh, how kind of you to come," they said; "how did you know we should go by this train?"

"Another little bird." Then he helped them out, and carried some of their packages.

"The train is full of children," he said, "all going back to school after the holidays. I wonder if many of them have had as good a time as you?" he whispered to Ruby.

"I hope so," she answered; "don't you think they have?"

"Perhaps; we'll hope so, at anyrate; and if they haven't, the wish may help them another time."

Then the train began to move.

"Good-bye—good-bye."

"Be sure you come to stay with us," said Roger.

"Please don't forget," said Rachael; "we'll write and tell you all about the trains, and meet you at the station."

The doctor laughed, and kissed his hand to them; and as the train steamed away there was a great waving of hats and hands, and handkerchiefs. Then the doctor turned homewards, and the train steamed faster and faster, back to the great station it had left seven weeks before.

I am not going to tell you what they did when they reached home; enough that they arrived there safely, and were soon happily busy in the old routine, with lessons and school companions; and Ruby kept well and strong as the others. There is much to tell about their home life, but I shall not tell it. The three Rs belonged especially to Sea-thrift, for they were never so happy as in its fragrant garden, and beside its sunny sea. But the beautiful lady watched them in their town home; their footsteps followed hers through many an autumn day, when the wind brought down the chestnuts from the park trees, and the brown leaves lay in heaps under the beeches. Through the winter days, too, she walked beside them in her snowy mantle, and they knew how to find the beauties and wonders to which she pointed. And when the spring time came round, ah! who shall say what sweetness and promise she showed them, in every square and garden, and plot of ground. I must not tell of this—it belongs to another story—and this story has to do only with Sea-thrift.

Sea-thrift grows by the summer sea,
Till the summer's close,
On the grassy cliff, 'neath a radiant sky,
While sun and summer and wind go by,
Sea-thrift blows and blows.