GOBLIN ISLAND

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COLLINS

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GOBLIN ISLAND

C. I. *Frontispiece.*

They played hide-and-seek among the bushes.

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BY

ELSIE J. OXENHAM

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CHAPTER I.
ALL ABOUT US.

I am the Author's daughter, and my name is Jean. But for a long time Jack and Jill would only call me the Girl, just as they would only call father the Author. When they spoke of us together they called us the Enemy, for they declared war on us even before we went to Strongarra.

Being an author's daughter, of course I tried to write stories too. I knew all about father's books and helped with many of them, and I always longed to write a book of my own. When I met the Colquhouns I was writing a novel, but it was a secret even from father, for I felt very shy about it. But before long my interest in the children from the island, and in the mysteries of Strongarra, grew so strong that I left the novel alone. I watched the story of Peggy Colquhoun and Somebody Else to the very end, and it seemed to me that instead of trying to write a novel I might make a story out of the things I had seen really happening.

Jack and Jill found this story the other day, and read it before I knew they had it. Their motto is—"All's fair in love and war," and in their dealings with us they have always carried it out very thoroughly. If they regard some one as an enemy that is an excuse for any conduct. Peggy has scolded and lectured them on the subject many times, but without effect.

It was not till quite lately that Jill really made friends with me, so she and Jack were not at all ashamed of themselves when I found them reading my story. They pretended to be very indignant at some parts of it, but were eager to be allowed to read the end, all the same.

A great deal of the story I only heard afterwards, for being the Author's daughter and one of the Enemy, much was hidden from me. But I heard it all in time, some from Peggy, some from Don, and some from Red Riding Hood and little Boy Blue.

Of course several of these names were nicknames, but once I had seen Sheila in her scarlet cloak and hood, or Robin in his blue overall, I understood them well enough. As for Jill, her name was Grizel, but she was born just a year after Jack and they were such constant companions that every one called them Jack and Jill.

When we went to Strongarra, Peggy had for two years taken the mother's place in the household. She had been at a boarding-school when Robin was born and their mother died, but when she was eighteen she came home to keep house for her father, and to mother the little ones.

Soon after she came home from school, their father died. From the tales I heard in the village, he must have been a fine man. From him undoubtedly came Robin's restless nature, and Jack and Jill's daring and adventurous dispositions. Peggy and Sheila must have been more like their mother. Their father taught Jack and Jill to swim and ride and fish and climb, but he would not have them sent to school. Time enough for that later, he said. So, in deference to Peggy's prejudices in favour of education, they went to the manse three times a week for lessons with the old minister, Dr. Kerr, and spent the rest of their time out of doors.

When the father died, the guardianship of the family passed to Malcolm. He was two years older than Peggy, and was already studying at the university, for he was to be a doctor. By his advice, and much against Peggy's wish, an aunt was asked to come and live at Strongarra, to give Peggy lessons in housekeeping, and to give an air of responsibility to the household. Peggy protested that it was unnecessary, but Malcolm insisted that he could not live and work

comfortably in the city, if the house was left in charge of a girl of eighteen, no matter how clever she was.

So Miss Colquhoun came to live with them, but it was Peggy who ruled the house and managed the children.

But a year later, in the autumn, their grandmother was stricken with paralysis, and Miss Colquhoun hurried away to nurse her. The illness left the old lady so helpless that her daughter could not leave her, and Peggy willingly took up the management of the house, and asked no other protection than Old Mother Hubbard. Everything went so easily and pleasantly that Malcolm had no cause to worry. He paid them occasional visits, and was always greeted with such praises of "Mother Peggy," that she blushed with pleasure.

So during the winter she kept house at Strongarra, and Malcolm ceased to talk of looking for a housekeeper. Old Mother Hubbard—she had been nicknamed at the same time as Red Riding Hood and Boy Blue—had lived with them for years, and under her care nothing was likely to go wrong.

It was in the spring of the next year that father and I went to Strongarra. Malcolm Colquhoun was twenty-two, and Peggy twenty. Jack and Jill were thirteen and twelve, Red Riding Hood was ten, and Boy Blue six. There had been another sister and brother, Helen and Jim, who came between Peggy and Jack, but they had been drowned in a boating accident on the loch just before Robin was born.

As for me, I was just twenty-one and had kept house for father for the last year, for, like Peggy, I was motherless. We lived in London, as father liked to keep in touch with people and to be near his publishers. But we generally spent the summer months in the country, and most often in Scotland.

Father and I were constant companions. I helped him in his work, acting as his secretary, and taking down stories from his dictation and then typewriting them. It kept me very busy, but without the work I might have been lonely. Don, my only brother, spent most of his time in Edinburgh. He had been studying medicine there for years, and was now walking the hospitals. I was very proud of him, but I did not often see him. However, my work for father gave me plenty to do, though I had not four little ones to look after like Peggy Colquhoun.

To be sure, there was the Mystery. I had to look after her while we were at Strongarra, but she was very good and gave very little trouble. She was quite content to be left alone for a good part of each day while I worked for father, and when I was tired of work I went to have a chat with her.

In the spring of that year we had never heard of the Colquhouns, and did not know there was such a place as Strongarra. But one day father told me he meant to look out for a country house in Scotland where we would spend the summer and work on a new story. The Mystery —it is Jack and Jill's name for her—was looking pale, and would be the better for the change. About the same time Malcolm Colquhoun and a lawyer friend of his went down to Strongarra with very grave faces to have a talk with Peggy.

CHAPTER II.
JACK AND JILL AND CIGARETTE.

"Drop that, Cigarette!" cried Boy Blue.

"Oh, dear! He has got Malcolm's pipe again!" sighed Sheila, and joined in the chase.

"Cigarette, put it down! Jack, come and help! Oh, he iss a ferry troublesome dog iss Cigarette!" said Jill, and ran to the door so that he should not escape.

"Malcolm shouldn't have left it there. He knows Cigarette always goes for it," Jack panted, as he wrenched the pipe out of the culprit's teeth.

"I neffer, neffer did know a dog who was so ferry fond of a pipe before. No, inteet!"

"Jill," said Peggy quietly, from the doorway, "if you talk that Highland talk we will have to send you away to school, and you would not like it."

"Oh, I won't do it any more! Really and truly, Peggy darling. But everybody does it, Peggy, and it *iss* so hard to remember! *Seall a mach*, Jack! He's after it again!"

"And the Gaelic is just as bad," Peggy said severely, as Jack pocketed the pipe. "You must try to speak like an English girl."

"But I'm not an English girl. I'm a Highland girl, and I like the Highland talk effer so much better than the English, and it iss a ferry pretty way to speak, whateffer! Well, I will try not to, Peggy," she cried hurriedly, as Peggy looked at her with distress in her eyes.

"If you vex Peggy, Jill, I'll thrash you," said Jack.

Sheila laughed, and took up her book again. She had heard it all before.

"What did Malcolm bring Mr. Sinclair here for, Peggy?" asked Jack.

Crash! bang! Boy Blue had found the tea-tray and was drumming on it with a spoon. Peggy put her hands over her ears. Jack and Jill turned angrily on the noisy one. Sheila quietly took the tray from him and placed it beyond his reach. He immediately began to hammer on the table, and had to be deprived of the spoon also before quietness was restored.

"I came here to tell you what brought Malcolm home so soon after the beginning of the term," said Peggy. "If you will all be quiet, and not make noises in the middle, I will tell you all about it."

"Put Cigarette and Boy Blue out into the garden. Then there'll be some peace," said Jack.

"No, Robin must stay, for I have something important to say, and it concerns us all."

"And here's Malcolm. If he'll smoke, Cigarette will be quiet."

"Out of that chair at once, Jill. Now, Peggy, sit down!" and Malcolm settled the cushions of the arm-chair for Peggy.

Jill perched on the table beside Jack. Sheila drew Boy Blue down in the corner of the sofa. Peggy in the big chair was on one side of the hearth, and Malcolm sat opposite on the arm of the couch. He lit his pipe, and the fox-terrier, Cigarette, who had been smelling about in the corners for it, stopped suddenly and gazed at him. Then he sat down in the middle of the hearthrug, and watched Malcolm without moving for the next half-hour. The clouds of smoke fascinated him, and always quieted him at once.

"Fire away, Peg!"

"I want to explain something, so you will please all listen in earnest," Peggy said seriously. "When father died, he left all his money in charge of his lawyer, old Mr. Macpherson, who was trustee for us. To-day Mr. Sinclair came to tell me of a dreadful thing

that has happened. Old Mr. Macpherson has died suddenly, and left all his affairs in great disorder. They don't know yet whether there will be enough money to pay off all he owes. He had been speculating, they say, and it depends on how some shares turn out. It may be all right in time, but it may not, and until we know how it turns out we don't know what we have to live upon. Now we can't live without money, can we?"

"Do we need so ferry—so *very*—much? I should think we could do without effer—*ever*—so many things we have just now."

"We can do without some, but there are things we must have."

"Must have porridge—and potatoes—and—and *puddings*," said Boy Blue, with round, serious eyes.

"And pinafores. And pillows," Sheila said, laughing.

"And boots," smiled Peggy. "Now, Malcolm and Mr. Sinclair and I have been talking it over, and this is what we think. We don't need to live in so big a house as this. Here we must have two servants to do the work, besides Mother Hubbard. In a wee house I could do the work and Mother Hubbard could cook. We are going to leave this big house and live in a wee one and do without servants. Then Mr. Sinclair will find some one who would like to live in this one, and the money they pay us for rent will buy our food and clothes and boots."

"What fun!" cried Sheila. "Peggy, may I help with the work?"

"I will want you all to help, and you will all have to be very good, for in a wee house, if you quarrel, think how horrid it will be!"

"In the summer-time, Peggy, it will be all right," said Jill. "But think of living in a cottage in the winter! That wouldn't be ferry nice, I'm afraid."

"Perhaps we could put up with it. But you see we hope things will be better by the winter, and we will only let this house for the summer."

"That's all right. It's a good plan," said Jack; "but won't it give you a lot of bother moving all our things, Peggy?"

"What wee house will we go to?" asked Boy Blue, and the others saw at once what an important matter that was.

"Have you thought about it yet, Peggy? It will make a ferry great difference what house it is."

"What would you say"—Peggy's eyes twinkled as she glanced at their eager faces—"to the cottage on Innis Beg?"

"Peggy! Do you mean it really? You aren't joking? Oh, how splendid! How jolly! Won't we have a good time! Think of living on an island!"

"But how will we get to church and the village?" cried Sheila, almost as much excited as Jack and Jill.

"Jack will row us in the wee boat."

"What fun!"

"It will be just splendid! An island iss the ferry nicest place in the world to live, I'm sure. But it iss ferry near to Goblin Island," Jill added thoughtfully.

Robin and Sheila looked serious, but Jack laughed.

"The Goblin never goes near Innis Beg. There's no need to be afraid of *him*."

"Don't be a goose, Jill," said Malcolm.

"You see, Innis Beg belongs to us, so we will not need to pay any rent for living in the cottage," Peggy explained.

"We'll go over after tea and see what kind of a state it's in," said Malcolm. "Peggy, I really think you'll have to make room for me somehow. How can I go off to Glasgow and leave you children alone on that island? Suppose something happened to you?"

"What would happen? Nothing that might not happen if we were living here in our own house. Mother Hubbard will take care of us. So will Jack."

"Suppose you wanted help suddenly? Suppose the Goblin came over from Innis Torr and attacked you?" Malcolm laughed. "Or suppose Jill set the cottage on fire?"

"Issn't it likely?" said Jill contemptuously.

"Jack would row ashore for help. The island isn't so very far away. There will be people living here, and they would help us. As for the Goblin, nobody believes in that nonsense now but old women and babies," at which Jill raised her eyebrows doubtfully. "We'll be all right, Malcolm, and really there will be no room for you. I have been thinking about it, and we can only just squeeze in. Besides, your fees at college are paid. But Jack and Jill must promise to be very good indeed."

"We are always ferry good!"

"Of course they must. No mischief, mind, Jack. I shall run down unexpectedly now and then to see how you are behaving."

"And if they are bad," Peggy said seriously, "I shall telegraph to you, and you will come and send them both to a boarding-school."

"Certainly." Malcolm looked severely at the wild ones, who gazed back at him with expressions of injured innocence.

"We are always ferry good, and most of all when Malcolm iss not here."

"Jill, I do wish you would remember to talk English," Peggy sighed.

"But it iss so ferry easy to forget! And everybody here says 'ferry,' so that makes me do it too. I will try, really, Peggy."

"Please do. To please me, Jill. Now suppose we have tea. Then afterwards we will row over to Innis Beg and look at the cottage."

Malcolm knocked the ashes out of his pipe and laid it on the mantel-piece.

"I expect there will be some repairs needed, so the sooner we see to it the better."

The disappearance of the fascinating smoke-clouds broke the spell which had held Cigarette. He jumped on to the arm of the sofa, and put his paws on the mantel-piece.

"Look out for your pipe, Malcolm," cried Jill.

Malcolm seized the dog by the stump of his tail, and held him up in the air, and Cigarette, who was used to this kind of rebuke, did not utter a yelp, but held himself stiff, with outstretched paws, till he was dropped on the rug. Then he sprang on to the sofa again, and Malcolm laughed and pocketed his pipe.

"I shall have to give you a pipe of your own, old boy. I never knew a dog so fond of smoke."

"He'll make friends with any one who smokes," said Jill, as they went in to tea.

Of course they could talk of nothing but the new plan. It was such a delightful idea. To live on a real island, and go shopping and visiting by boat! And think of going in a boat on Sundays! That, of course, had been strictly forbidden before, but now it would be necessary.

"We will take one of the cows, and some cocks and hens and ducks," said Peggy thoughtfully. "Then we will always have milk and eggs. But we will leave the horses and the pony here, for they would be no use on the island."

"Jack and I will catch fish."

"And I'll wash up the dishes every day. That will help, won't it, Peggy?" Sheila asked anxiously.

"Yes, Red Riding Hood. You can help very much, if you will. And Boy Blue must try to be more careful of his socks and overalls. I never knew a boy make holes so quickly. I shan't want to spend money on new clothes, you know, Robin, so please be careful. And I hope Jack and Jill won't climb trees and tear their things, for, if they do, they'll just have to wear them patched. Malcolm, I do wish I hadn't spent so much money on a new dress just a month ago! I could have done without it quite well. But we didn't know this was going to happen."

"My dear girl, if the money had been left in the bank, it would just have gone with the rest. Is it that pretty blue thing you showed me the last time I was here?"

"Yes. I've only worn it once because there has been so much rain."

"Then I'm glad you got it before this happened, for I must say, though I don't approve of telling my sisters they're pretty"—Jill jumped up to curtsey—"that dress suits you, and you really look awfully nice in it, Peg."

"Hear, hear!" cried Jack.

Peggy laughed and blushed.

"Then I'm very glad to have it, for I know it is a very pretty dress."

"Oh, Peggy!" said Jill.

"What is it?" asked Peggy startled.

"And you scold me! Do you know what you said?"

"No?" and Peggy looked alarmed.

"You said—just like this—'I'm ferry glad to haf it, for I know it iss a ferry pretty tress!' You talk as much like a Highlander as Mother Hubbard herself sometimes. Ton't you effer scold me again!"

Peggy laughed and reddened.

"I don't really, do I, Malcolm?"

"Never you mind, Peg. It suits your voice. If ever you talk just like an English girl it will be a great pity."

"What's become of Mr. Sinclair, Peggy?" asked Jack.

"He's away back to Glasgow. He had to see some one to-night, so he couldn't wait."

"Now," said Malcolm, "who's coming to Innis Beg?"

Peggy went to fetch her hat. Jack ran for his bonnet, and Jill for her tam-o'-shanter. Boy Blue rushed into the passage, crying, "Sheila! Sheila! Get my hat, quick!"

Mother Hubbard came out of the kitchen to remonstrate.

"You shoult run for it yourself, Robin. It iss a lazy boy that you are. Sheila she hass to do efferything for you, and she iss a good wee lassie to do it. You are shust a baby. I will tell the witches to come and fetch you."

"There aren't any witches, so there, Mother Hubbard!" said Boy Blue valiantly.

"Oh, yess, there are! Or I will call the brownie to run off with you."

"There isn't any brownie either."

"Oh, issn't there? When I came down this morning, there wass a creat pile of wood chopped reaty for the fire. Who woult do that but the brownie? Tell me that, Boy Blue?"

"Was there *really*?" asked Boy Blue, in an awed tone.

"Yess, there wass so. Of course there iss a brownie, and he will run away with you some day."

"I'm quite sure he won't. Come on, Sheila! What a long time you are!"

"The next time you come into the kitchen there will be nothing for you in my cupboard, Boy Blue," said Mother Hubbard severely.

"Pooh! You'll forget! Here you are at last, Sheila!"

Sheila came downstairs in her scarlet cloak and hood, and handed him his big straw hat.

"Come along, Boy Blue! Where are you, Red Riding Hood?" called Peggy from the door, and they ran off.

The house, Strongarra, stood on a grassy point running out into the lake, and Lios village lay on the shore of the bay behind. The garden of Strongarra took in the whole strip of land on which the house stood, and out in the lake, opposite the point and not far away, lay the island, Innis Beg.

Malcolm and Peggy followed their family across the lawn to the strip of shingly beach, where lay two boats. They were small and light, to suit the strength of Jack and Jill, and could not safely carry too many passengers at a time.

Malcolm launched one, and helped in Jill and Sheila. Jack, Peggy, and Boy Blue took the other. The family always divided thus, when they all went boating together, so that Jack and Jill should be separated.

Boy Blue was sober and puzzled, and lost no time in taking his trouble to Peggy.

"Peggy, Mother Hubbard says there's a brownie does work for her in the kitchen."

"But there isn't one really, you know, Robin. She only imagines it."

"But, Peggy, she says he chopped a pile of wood for the fire this morning! She didn't do it herself, and some one must have done it."

Peggy looked at Jack, who paid sudden attention to his oar.

"Jack, you're a bad boy! If you help Mother Hubbard, you should tell her. Why do you make her believe in brownies and such nonsense?"

"It's fun to hear her talk afterwards. If you tell tales, Boy Blue, I'll spank you."

"No wonder Jill believes in witches and goblins if you play such tricks. You're a bad boy to tease them."

"Malcolm's racing! It isn't fair! He knows he'll win," Jack cried.

Of course Malcolm's boat reached the island first, and his passengers were ashore before Jack's boat arrived.

The island was long and narrow, and covered with trees—towering firs and larches, feathery birches and rowans. The ground was thickly carpeted with grass and heather and fresh, green bracken. Looked at from the water there seemed no possible dwelling-place on Innis Beg. But the children knew the island well. It was a favourite place for picnics. That was why the thought of living there was so delightful. Malcolm rowed straight to a tiny bay, and they stepped ashore and pushed through the trees and bushes.

In among the trees was a clearing, and here stood the cottage. It was a tiny one-storied house, fortunately roofed with slates, not thatch. Once it had been white, but was now stained and weather-beaten. In front and behind were strips of garden, filled with tangled bushes and overgrown with weeds. At the side were out-houses—a wash-house, a tiny byre, a shed and kennel and hen-house. The whole place was untidy and dilapidated, and at present looked very uninviting. But that was only because it had been unoccupied for months. Peggy, looking at it as a future residence, grasped its possibilities at once.

"We'll have the house whitewashed, and the garden put in order. Then it will look much better. Now come inside and see what repairs are needed."

Some broken windows and loose slates proved to be all that was actually necessary. But the whole cottage was dirty and dusty, with cobwebs in the corners and stains on the walls.

After an eager exploration of every corner they gathered in the tiny sitting-room, their spirits somewhat damped by the desolation everywhere.

"It issn't ferry cheerful," Jill said doubtfully. "But perhaps it will be better when the furniture iss in."

"I feel as if I'd be a wee bit afraid to sleep here," Sheila admitted.

"Pooh! What would you be 'fraid of, Sheila?" asked Boy Blue.

"Brownies?" said Jack slyly.

"No, nor witches, nor the Goblin, nor anything like that. For there iss a rowan tree just by the house. I saw it," Jill cried eagerly. "Witches can't go where there iss a rowan tree, so we are quite safe."

Peggy laughed. "Jill, what nonsense! Don't be a little goose! Malcolm, if we are to live here, we must have the whole place painted and new paper put on the walls. I won't live in it all dirty like this. It would be a very pretty wee house if it was all fresh and clean."

Malcolm pursed his lips. "Money, Peg?"

"You will get some of my money out of the Savings Bank. Yes, you will, and you won't take any of your own, either, for if we don't get any more you will need yours to pay your fees at college. You will please get me some of mine as soon as you go back to Glasgow. I couldn't live in a dirty house."

"Well, we'll talk it over. Do you think you can manage to squeeze them all in? It will be a tight fit. Two bedrooms——"

"And the kitchen. It has two beds. Mother Hubbard will sleep there——"

"And me! Oh, do let me, Peggy! I've always longed to sleep in a bed in the wall!" cried Jill. "Do say I may, Peggy darling!"

"Poor Mother Hubbard!" said Jack.

Peggy laughed. "I'll think about it. Malcolm, if you come to stay with us, you'll have to sleep on the sofa. Now, how much furniture must we bring?"

Jack touched Jill's arm. "Come with me, I want to show you something."

He led her through the tiny garden to the landing-place. Strongarra lay opposite across the water, and Lios was half hidden among the trees.

"Look!" said Jack.

On the bank above the beach stood a great oak tree. Its trunk was so thick that when Jack and Jill together made a ring of their arms, they could not reach round it. A little way above their heads the great boughs branched out on all sides, and the leaves above were just opening. The bark was gnarled and notched and twisted. Jack put his toe into a hole, and with a spring was up where the branches divided, and Jill followed wondering.

"Now! Don't you see? This is our watch-tower—our hiding-place—our secret haunt. We can see all that goes on on the island, and at Strongarra too, and if any one lives in our house we'll watch them. No one shall come up but you and me. Peggy and the little ones can't climb anyway. We'll make plans here, and hide things, and watch everybody. What do you say?"

"Fine! I like it. It iss ferry nice up here."

"You can come up when you've been bad and don't like to face Peggy——"

"Thanks! It iss good of you! You are much more likely to need it yourself."

"We'll bring the little ones up sometimes for picnics, if they are good. It will be a way of making Boy Blue behave. We were just needing something to keep him in order. He bullies

Sheila dreadfully."

"If Sheila is to come up when she is good she will be here most of the time," Jill remarked. "She and Peggy have the goodness of the family. Oh, look! There's the evening steamer!"

From their perch among the branches they watched the little white steamer coming from Lios pier. It passed the end of the island, its paddles churning the quiet waters of the lake into foam, and headed for Balmona, away on the other side.

"I wonder what kind of people will come to live at Strongarra," said Jill, her thoughts travelling with the steamer from the loneliness of Loch Avie to the noise and turmoil of the cities not very far away.

"Yes. It will be odd to see strangers there. There hasn't been a visitor in Lios all winter."

"Whateffer they are like I am going to hate them," Jill said decidedly.

"Hello! Made up your mind already?"

"Yes. I shall hate them because they are strangers and living in our house."

"Oh, I see! But I don't know that that's fair, when we're going to get their money. Better wait till we know what they're like. There's Peggy calling! Just look at that hole in your stocking! How like a girl!"

"You needn't talk. Your kilt iss all green and brown," said Jill indignantly, as she scrambled down the trunk and tumbled into the boat to hide the hole from Peggy's observant eyes.

When the boats reached the shore at Strongarra the family separated into its natural divisions. Mother Hubbard carried Boy Blue away to bed, and Sheila went with him. Jack and Jill ran off to look for Cigarette, who had been left behind because there was no room for him in the boats.

"Come for a walk, Peg," said Malcolm, and they strolled along the shore together.

"The children are very well satisfied anyway," said Peggy.

"Of course. The thought of living on Innis Beg is joy to them. Not so long ago you and I would have felt the same."

"I'm glad they aren't upset about it."

"Why should they be? They don't think we are. They see you making plans for the future, and not troubling or grumbling, and of course they think there is nothing to trouble about. I'm awfully sorry it's happened, Peggy. I know it means heaps of extra work and worry for you. You haven't said anything, but you must be feeling bad about it. I was afraid you'd cry and make a fuss. I thought girls always did."

"Then don't think it any more! What would be the use? It wouldn't make things any better if I cried, would it?" Peggy said, smiling. "I am dreadfully sorry it has happened too. I wanted Jack and Jill to go to school this summer. Jack is a very big boy to have never been to school, and Jill ought to go, if only to learn to talk properly and not to believe in witches! I don't want them to grow up savages, but I don't see what we can do for the next few months."

"We must wait, and hope for the best. It's not the children I'm thinking of, but you, Peg. I don't like the thought of the extra work you'll have."

"Oh, but that doesn't matter! I like being busy. You really mustn't worry about me, Malcolm. There is no need whatever."

"Well," said Malcolm, opening the garden gate for her, "it's a great help to us all that you take it so bravely, Peg."

“I suppose the next thing is to find a tenant for the house. Mr. Sinclair thinks there won’t be any difficulty about it, doesn’t he?”

“Houses like this can always be let for the summer. The question is, what kind of people will take it?”

“Yes. It will be a change to have some neighbours besides the farmers and village folk. Sometimes it’s rather lonely, you know. I do wish a nice interesting family would come, with one or two girls about my age. I haven’t a single friend here, and now and again I do want some one to talk to so badly.”

“I’ll ask Mr. Sinclair to arrange it for you,” Malcolm said, laughing.

CHAPTER III.
"OH! FHAIRSHON SWORE A FEUD——"

Malcolm had to go off to college again by the early boat next morning. But a fortnight later he walked in unexpectedly during the afternoon.

The house seemed deserted. There was no one in the garden, or the hall, or the dining-room. Mother Hubbard was dozing in the kitchen. She was old and stout, and whenever she had nothing to do she went to sleep. So Malcolm stood at the foot of the stairs, and shouted, "Colquhoun ahoy! Is any one at home?"

"It's Malcolm!" and Boy Blue and Red Riding Hood came running out of Jill's bedroom.

"Where's everybody? Where's Peggy? What's the meaning of this unusual peace and quietness?"

"Jack and Jill and Cigarette are on Innis Beg——"

"Ah! that accounts for it!"

"They generally are over there just now. Peggy's busy turning out drawers, and we're helping."

"Sheila's helping. I'm watching," Boy Blue corrected frankly.

They found Peggy sitting on the floor with an open drawer before her, and piles of clothing all around.

"It is such hard work, Malcolm!" she sighed. "I'm very glad to see you! I'm just ready for a rest and talk."

"But, my dear girl, what are you doing?"

"Turning out drawers, and deciding what we will need on Innis Beg, and what must be packed up and left behind. All the drawers and cupboards and shelves have to be left empty, you know. Sheila, put these on my bed, please. Robin, you can carry those."

"Sheila will take them in a minute. I'm busy," said Boy Blue, diving into Malcolm's pockets.

"There's nothing for you to-day, young man. Too much Edinburgh rock isn't good for wee boys. Next time it will be Sheila that will get a present, if she does all the work. Yes, there's something in there, but it's not for you. Don't Jack and Jill help, Peggy?"

"When they can, but there's so much they can't do. Jack's always ready when I tell him just what I want and how I want it done, but it's often easier to do it myself. What's brought you home to-day?"

"News," smiled Malcolm.

"Oh, what?"

"Jack and Jill will want to hear, but they won't know Malcolm's come," said Sheila. "Shall I run down to the shore and wave for them, Peggy?"

But Jack and Jill had watched the little steamer from their oak tree on Innis Beg. She had to pass between them and Strongarra, and the passage was so narrow that they could have thrown an acorn on to the deck. So they had recognised Malcolm on the bridge talking to the captain, and had hurried home to meet him. They were delayed by Cigarette, who was searching for rabbits and refused to be caught and carried into the boat, or they would have reached the house first.

They rushed upstairs to greet their brother, and at sight of Cigarette Malcolm felt in his pocket.

"Master Cigarette Colquhoun! Prize for bad behaviour, biting, and barking," and he held out a pipe. "A new one all to yourself. Now, don't bite mine any more. I prefer to bite it myself."

Jack gave a shout of approval. But Cigarette just smelt the pipe, then turned away in disgust, and Jill cried indignantly, "Well, he iss an ungrateful dog! Cigarette, I'm fair ashamed of you!"

"I wonder why he won't have it?" Sheila pondered, and Jill looked puzzled for a moment.

"I know! How ferry silly of you, Malcolm! It doesn't smell of smoke, because it iss quite new. It's the smoky smell he likes."

"Think so? Then I suppose I must smoke it for him for a day or two. Can you put me up over Sunday, Peg?"

"Why, of course! Now, if these noisy weans will be quiet, perhaps you will tell us your news. Has Mr. Sinclair found some one to take the house?"

"That's it. I heard from him this morning, and came to tell you at once."

"Oh!—It hasn't taken him very long. And who is it, Malcolm? Are they nice people? And when do they want to come in?"

"His name's Donald Maxwell, and he's an author. I believe he's written several books. Do you know any of them?"

"I—don't—think so. Oh, yes! I knew I'd seen his name. I read some stories of his in a magazine, when I was at school in Edinburgh. Such pretty little stories they were! We all fell in love with them, and wished there were more. He must be splendid! Is he married, Malcolm? Has he a family?"

"He's a widower with one daughter. I don't know her age. Sinclair has done business with him for years. They live in London, but they often spend the summer in Scotland, and he has had to find them a house several times. He wrote to them about this place, and has heard they will be willing to take it. They'd like to come in in a fortnight."

"A fortnight!" Peggy cried in despair. "I can't be ready! There's ever so much to do, and the cottage isn't nearly ready for us."

"The painting and whitewashing are done," Jill said eagerly.

"But think of all there is to do here!"

"I don't see that there iss so ferry much to do."

"I don't suppose you do," Peggy sighed. "But I do. You'll all have to help. We'll do our best, Malcolm, but it's very short notice. Are they coming to see the house?"

"No, they'll take Sinclair's word for it that it's all right. He's done it for them before, you know, and it's a long way to come from London."

"I suppose so. Well, since you are here, you can help me to decide about the furniture, Malcolm. And do you think you can come again to help with the flitting? All the things must go by boat, you know. It will be a dreadful business."

"Fun!" said Jack.

"And think of taking over the cow and the cocks and hens in a small boat!"

Malcolm laughed. "I'll help. But do you really mean to take the cow, Peg? Who will look after her?"

"Mother Hubbard's Sandy," said Peggy.

"But where is he to live? There's no room for him on Innis Beg."

"Oh, he'll live here as usual, and come over to us every two or three days to do some things we can't do. One of us will milk the cow——"

"Me, Peggy! Oh, do let me!" cried Jill.

"Poor cow!" laughed Jack.

"But Sandy will clean out the byre and hen-house, and scrub the stairs and the step, and clean the windows. Mother Hubbard and I will be too busy."

"Busy or not, you're not going to do that sort of work. If Peggy even offers to clean the windows, Jack, you're to telegraph to me at once, and I'll never leave her alone again."

Peggy laughed. "Oh, I don't intend to. Mother Hubbard's Sandy will do all that."

The small boy was always called Mother Hubbard's Sandy, because Mother Hubbard was his grandmother. He lived at Strongarra in a cottage near the stables with his father, Big Sandy, and between them they looked after the carriage and pony trap, and took care of the horse and pony. When Peggy drove out in state to call on some of the strangers who very occasionally visited the neighbourhood in summer, Big Sandy put on his livery and drove her in the carriage. But it was Wee Sandy and the pony trap who carried them all along the shore of the lake for picnics. When Big Sandy was not required as coachman, he worked in the garden, and Wee Sandy helped Mother Hubbard in the kitchen. Mother Hubbard's Sandy was a great friend of Jack and Jill's, and was their devoted slave, and followed in any mischief they proposed.

The moving of the furniture was certainly a difficult matter, but with Malcolm's help was safely managed. Peggy begged for a few days over the fortnight, and she and Mother Hubbard and Sandy worked from morning till night. Sheila helped when she could, and when she could do nothing else she devoted herself to Boy Blue and Cigarette, and kept them out of the way. Even Jack and Jill did what they could. They did not like work of any kind, but they could not see Peggy looking tired and worried and not offer to help. Jack said it was all hands to the pumps, and made Jill do her share.

The cottage had been cleaned and scrubbed and painted, and the walls hung with fresh, pretty papers which Malcolm had sent from town. The garden had been dug up and put in order, and vegetables and a few favourite plants from Strongarra had been planted in place of the untidy shrubs. The grass of the tiny lawn had been cut and rolled by Jack and Jill, and the paths carefully weeded. The byre had been whitewashed and was ready for the cow, the hen-house for the cocks and hens, and the kennel for Cigarette. The upper and lower ends of the island were left in their wild state, for here were groups of firs and rowans and birches, and masses of rock, and tiny hidden corners for picnics, gay with primroses and green with bracken and heather. Innis Beg looked promising as a dwelling-place.

The moving of the furniture presented certain difficulties. The distance from Strongarra to the island was not great, but there was no boat in Lios that could carry some of the necessary things. The cottage was to be very simply furnished, but certain things could not be done without.

Peggy insisted that the nursery piano must go. The drawing-room one must be left for the Maxwells, but the old one could easily be spared.

"Oh, we don't need the piano!" Jill cried, when she heard this. "We could do without it ferry well indeed."

"That we couldn't! Not for three or four months. Not if I know it," Peggy said with spirit.

"You're just taking it so that you can make me practise," Jill grumbled.

"Indeed I'm not! I have a much nicer reason, but you shan't hear it just now. I could not possibly do without music for three or four months."

"There iss your banjo. What more do you want?"

"I want the piano, so that you can play my accompaniments, Jill," said Peggy, and Jill went off disconsolately. She hated practising, and only the thought of playing Peggy's accompaniments kept her to it.

"There do seem a lot of trunks, Peg," said Malcolm. "Are you sure you'll need all those clothes?"

"No, my dear, I'm not. But we *may* need them, and we must be prepared. To-day is fine, but to-morrow will probably be wet, and Monday may be cold enough for winter things again. You know the children never stay indoors for rain or mist.—I'm sure I don't want them to. They'd be in the house half the time.—But they must have dry things to put on when they come in. They wouldn't like to have to go to bed every time they got wet! I don't think I'm taking more than we're likely to need."

"Well, you've looked after them for two years, Peg. You should know."

Peggy nodded. "I think I do."

The piano, the trunks, and various other articles could not be carried across the strait in the frail rowing-boats of Strongarra. So after much discussion a great ferry boat was borrowed from Dunreoch up the loch, and made to do duty as a furniture van. Malcolm came from town to help and superintend, and every one had a very busy day.

So busy were they indeed that by the evening they were all both tired and cross. The furniture had been moved to Innis Beg in the forenoon, and the afternoon had been spent in putting the cottage in order. By tea-time the rooms were at any rate tidy enough to be lived in till Monday, though there was still much arranging of books and pictures to be done.

But they had worked so hard that they were all very tired, and even Peggy had very little patience left and scarcely tried to keep order round the tea-table.

So Jack and Jill quarrelled—a very unusual thing—and blamed one another for trifles. Boy Blue, who had done less work than any one, thumped on the table with his mug, kicked the legs of his chair, and talked and sang all the time. Sheila scolded him, for she had been running errands all day, and was tired too. Jill talked even more like a Highlander than usual, and Jack threatened to box her ears for worrying Peggy. Malcolm scolded them all in turn, and Peggy poured out endless cups of tea and listened to the noise and clamour in a kind of despair.

Even Cigarette helped to increase the uproar. He had been in distress all day, for his pipe, his own particular pipe, which Malcolm had smoked till it smelt delightfully, had disappeared in the confusion of the flitting. As a matter of fact, it was safe in Jack's pocket, but Cigarette did not know that. He poked anxiously in corners, nosed round baskets and boxes, and met every one with a questioning yelp, which seemed to say, "Please, *have* you seen my pipe?"

During tea-time it occurred to him that it was probably on the mantel-piece, since Malcolm always laid his there. So he sat for a time on the hearth-rug, gazing wistfully upwards. Then, losing patience, he jumped into the air, and repeated the performance again and again, hoping each time to jump so high that he could see if the pipe lay on the shelf. Each time he jumped he gave a yelp to encourage himself, but never managed to spring quite high enough. The children were too busy scolding one another to notice him, and Peggy was too tired and too hard at work with the tea-pot.

Sheila always sat next to the tea-pot, with Robin on her other side, so that she could spread his bread-and-jam. So she was close to Peggy, and only Peggy heard her sigh, while the noise was at its height,

"Oh, dear! I wish we hadn't come to this horrid wee house!"

This would never do! The child looked tired and miserable, and they all wanted something to cheer them up. Peggy resolutely put away thoughts of headache and a quiet restful evening, and stood up, rapping on the table for silence with the handle of her knife.

"Boy Blue, please be quiet one moment! Can you make that dog be still, Malcolm? Jack and Jill and Sheila, I know you are all tired. We have done a lot of work to-day, and we ought to be feeling pleased with ourselves. Just at present we are too tired for that, but I think if we had some fun before bed-time we might feel better. As soon as I have had some tea—I've only had one cup, because you are all so thirsty, and so you ought to be too—as soon as I've finished, we'll go out and sit on the beach and have sing-song."

"What's—that?" asked Jack.

"Whateffer iss it?" cried Jill, and Boy Blue demanded, "Sing what song?"

"Well done, Peggy!" said Malcolm.

"We'll sing all the songs in Malcolm's song-book—the songs they sing at college. We'll choose the very silliest ones we know, and they'll make us laugh, and then we shall all feel better——"

"Polly-wolly-doodle?" asked Boy Blue eagerly.

"Macpherson?" cried Jill.

"Solomon Levi?" asked Jack.

"Upidee?" said Sheila, beginning to laugh already.

"Every one of them, and as many more as you like. I'll bring the banjo, and Malcolm will keep time. Now, if you'll all go outside and choose the songs, I'll finish my tea. Please take Cigarette with you."

"You silly old boy!" said Jack. "I've got your pipe. Come away!"

He showed it for a moment, and Cigarette, with a yelp of joy, made a dash for it. Jack ran out of the house and down to the beach, with the dog barking at his heels, and Jill and the little ones close behind.

"What a stroke of genius, Peg!" Malcolm exclaimed. "But can you stand it? Think of the row! You'll have a splitting headache."

"I believe I have a little one already. But they were so miserable, Malcolm! They'll feel ever so much better after some singing. I shall propose it every time they get cross."

When they reached the shore, Peggy carrying her banjo, Cigarette was lying under the great oak tree, with his pipe between his paws. But at sight of Peggy and Malcolm he picked it up and sat with it sticking out of the corner of his mouth and his head on one side, and a look on his face which said plainly, "Did you *ever* see such a clever dog?"

Peggy was greeted with cries for "Polly-wolly-doodle," for it was a special favourite. Then one after another the songs they liked were called for. It did not matter that in many cases the words had very little meaning. The tunes were lively, the choruses noisy, and they knew them by heart. Some, Jack and Jill insisted on singing through a second time, and Peggy, whose only wish just now was to please them, raised no objections and did not hint that it was possible to grow tired of them.

But after a while she led them, by way of "Nelly Bly" and "Poor old Joe," to plantation songs, which were more to her taste and more suited to the banjo. And Cigarette sat

throughout the performance with his pipe between his paws until some one looked at him, when he immediately picked it up in his mouth, and sat looking as conceited as a dog well could.

At last Peggy brought the proceedings to a close with "Good-night, ladies! We're going to leave you now," and Mother Hubbard came hurrying to carry off Boy Blue.

"It iss long past seffen o'clock," she said severely, "and such a noise you will all be making! In Lios they will be saying we are all crazy."

"I hope they couldn't hear in Lios," Peggy said, laughing. "Good-night, Boy Blue."

"Sheila, you come too! I want you," Robin cried, and Sheila obligingly went with him into the cottage.

"Why does Boy Blue always want Sheila while he iss going to bed?" asked Jill, and Jack laughed.

"It's because Mother Hubbard tells goblin stories, and he feels as if Sheila was some protection. I wonder she goes every night."

"I don't like Mother Hubbard's stories after it iss dark," Jill said seriously. "In the daytime they are fun, but if I hear them at night, I keep looking over my shoulder for ghosts and witches and black cats. Jack, iss it likely we shall hear the Goblin at night, do you think?" and she looked nervously across at Goblin Island. "We are nearer to him than we were at Strongarra."

"No! I don't think it's at all likely," Jack said stoutly.

"Well, I'm glad I'm going to sleep in the kitchen with Mother Hubbard."

"Pooh! You're a silly girl."

"Put away the banjo, Peg," said Malcolm, when Boy Blue had gone, "and come into the house and rest. You're dead beat. You shall have your breakfast in bed to-morrow."

"Indeed I won't! On Sunday too! What next? I suppose you must go off again on Monday, Malcolm?"

"Rather! By the early morning boat, if you can manage it, Peg. It means breakfast soon after seven, but you mustn't get up so soon. Mother Hubbard will see I have some porridge."

"Isn't it likely! We'll row you over to Lios."

"I'm afraid I won't get down to see you again for a while, unless you have to send for me. I've been neglecting college shamefully lately. I'll have to work in earnest now."

"Yes, you must. But you'll find time to write?"

"Of course. And you must let me know what you think of the Maxwells."

"When is it they are coming, Malcolm?"

"Tuesday or Wednesday, Sinclair said."

"We'll write as soon as we have anything to tell you. I do hope we'll like them."

"Come up into the tree, Jill," said Jack.

"You said you meant to hate them?" he asked, when they were each settled comfortably astride a branch.

"Who? How you do jump into the middle of things, to be sure!"

"These Maxwells who are coming to Strongarra."

"I do hate them already, as hard as effer I can."

Jack laughed. "All right. I was going to propose this.—Let's declare war on them. They've committed an unfriendly act by coming to live in our house, so they must be enemies. We'll declare a feud, and——"

Jill laughed, and began to sing one of the songs they had just been singing, a great favourite of hers.

" 'Oh! Fhairshon swore a feud
Against ta clan Mac-Tavish,
March'd into their land
To murder and to ravish;
For he did resolve
To extirpate ta fipers,
With four-and-twenty men,
And five-and-thirty pipers.' "

"Yes, that's it. They are the enemy, and we'll treat them as enemies. We'll have nothing to do with them. We'll go over at night and spy on them—we'll peep through the windows and watch them—Mother Hubbard's Sandy will tell us all about them—we'll frighten them till they think the house is haunted—if they leave things lying about the garden we'll steal them. All's fair in love and war, you know. What do you say?"

"Fine!" cried Jill, her eyes sparkling. "How *did* you think of it all?"

"Oh, I just—just thought of it, you know. I think we'll get some fun out of it."

"But," said Jill thoughtfully, "we must be careful. You know how the feud ended:

'In this ferry way
Tied ta faliant Fhairshon,
Who was always thought
A most superior person.' "

"I know. Oh, we'll manage better than Fhairshon did," Jack said, laughing.

CHAPTER IV.
AN ISLET IN AN INLAND SEA.

One day, in the early spring of that year, father came to me, looking worried.

"I've just heard from Jack Lesley, Jean."

"Yes?" and I stopped work at once, for I could not listen to any one while I was typewriting, and did not like being interrupted.

Mr. Lesley was an artist, and a great friend of father's. He had illustrated some of his books, and was often at our house on business. So I knew him very well, and also his wife and little daughter.

"They're going abroad at once. Mrs. Lesley has been told she must not stay in England any longer. They are going to Australia by sailing ship for the sake of the voyage, and if it suits her they may settle out there for good."

It took me a minute or two to grasp all this.

"I knew Mrs. Lesley wasn't strong, but I had no idea it was so bad as that. And—oh, what about Marjory? They can't take the poor child with them?"

"That's the trouble. Such a journey would be out of the question for Marjory. They don't know what to do. They have no relations who can take her. As for friends——"

"They know us better than any one. Do they want us to take Marjory?"

"It would be a great relief to them if we could. What do you say?"

"I should be afraid of the responsibility. But if they are willing to trust her to us, I will do my best for her, poor child!"

"She is feeling very bad about being left behind, Lesley says, but he thinks she would be happy with you. Indeed, Marjory told him so herself."

That settled it, of course. Marjory Lesley became one of our family, and after her natural grief at parting with her parents had passed, I think she was very happy with us.

She had more reason than most children for being distressed at this change in her life. For she was only twelve years old, and she was a cripple. A fall, two years before, had injured her spine, and ever since she had had to lie on her back. Her parents and the doctors hoped that in time she might outgrow the injury, since she was young and strong. Marjory herself had no doubt of it. In the meantime she had to lie still and wait as patiently as she could.

But during April Marjory began to look pale, and we thought she needed a change. London in summer would not be good for her. So father said we would take a house in Scotland for four months, and one day he informed us that the arrangements were made. He had taken a house on the shore of Loch Avie, and it would be ready for us in the first week of May.

I was delighted, but Marjory sighed at the thought of the journey. She was very sensitive, and, as she said, "hated being looked at." But we promised to do all possible to make it easy for her, and I assured her that once she was settled at Strongarra she would say it was more than worth the travelling.

It was arranged that I should go first to see that everything was ready, and father should bring Marjory two days later. He was so very gentle, and so strong and able to take care of her, that she admitted that with him the journey might not be so bad after all.

I was not to go quite alone. We sent off two of the servants to make preparations, and I followed the next day, taking Tib with me. She was my kitten, and Marjory was very fond of her. She was pure white, with blue eyes, and no other colour on her anywhere. I put her in a big basket, and let her out in the train to run about the carriage till she had satisfied herself as to her surroundings, after which she slept in my lap the rest of the way. She shared my sandwiches and biscuits, for she was a curious cat and much preferred bread to milk. But when we went on board the steamer on Loch Avie I had to shut her up again, and she mewed piteously all the time we were on the water, fearing, I think, that she would never see daylight again.

I had never seen Loch Avie. Our travels in Scotland had taken us chiefly into Perth and Fife and Aberdeen, so we did not know the Western Highlands at all. Of course I had read of the loch and the islands and Ben Aan, and had always longed to see them. So when I left the train at the end of the long journey and went on board the tiny steamer, my mind was full of eager anticipations.

I was not disappointed. The loch lay before us, a shining stretch of water. Rounded green hills rose on both sides, while away in front was a great green-gray mountain, with three round shoulders humping to the sky. As the little white steamer cut her way through the silvery water, sending great rollers back to the shore, green hills and mounds began to appear on the water-line at the foot of the mountain. These soon showed themselves as islands, thickly covered with trees. Under the branches were nooks carpeted with grass and moss, primroses and wild hyacinths. What perfect spots for picnics!

There were islands on both sides. The steamer crept through narrow straits, and the waves from her paddles splashed and tore through the ferns that hung into the water. She stopped at a tiny pier, hiding among great trees on an outstanding point—Balmona. Rocks and cliff were hidden in green, a road from the pier ran up among the trees, but no village was to be seen. Did Balmona consist only of a pier, I wondered?

We set off again, this time right across the loch. Now I saw how big it really was—an inland sea, dotted with fairy islets, mostly tree-covered, but some mere rocks, and some with buildings or ruins upon them. The hills on shore had given place to mountains, thickly wooded at the base, bare and desolate above. To the north Ben Aan, the giant of the loch, seemed to fill the whole sky. His three shoulders grew bigger and bolder as we came under his shadow. He carried no trees, but was rugged and desolate from summit to water's edge, every bare crag and boulder standing out against the sky, his sides scored with deep furrows, where thread-like streams glistened in the sun.

The islands were covered with firs, all standing straight and pointed to the sky, like the crowded spires of a cathedral, one behind the other, and the inner ranks higher than the outer, as the ground rose gradually. Each islet looked like a tiny green church, and as we passed close by their shores I could catch glimpses of gloomy aisles and dark corners among the trees. The water was very still, and the clouds and islands and stately firs were reflected in it till there seemed two lakes instead of one.

We passed a large island, and then I could see how the loch stretched away to the north, sweeping into great bays and round tree-covered points, washing the feet of Ben Aan, and disappearing at last among the mountains.

We drew near to an islet so thickly covered with trees and rocks that I could not see whether any one lived there or not. And then, above Tib's frantic mewing, and the beat of the

paddles, and the splashing of the waves at the stern, I heard music—a girl's voice, singing to a banjo accompaniment.

She began suddenly, when we were near the shore, and I could hear the words:

"There was an old nigger and his name was uncle Ned,
But he's dead long ago, long ago;
He had no wool on de top of his head,
In de place where de wool ought to grow."

Children's voices took up the chorus:

"Den lay down de shubble an' de hoe,
Hang up de fiddle an' de bow.
Dere's no more hard work for poor old Ned,
He's gone whar de good niggers go."

The girl sang two more verses, and the last time the children shouted the chorus twice and evidently enjoyed it. As we left the island behind, I heard the singer beginning, "So early in the morning," and the noisy chorus followed us as we drew in to another pier.

I wondered who the children could be, and if they lived on the islet. But I had no time to ask the captain, for the purser came to me, saying, "Lios, miss," and I had to hurry ashore.

It was a tiny pier, very clean and very empty, and the village behind was just as tiny, and clean, and empty as the pier. Only a couple of farmers left the steamer besides myself, and on the pier there were only the pier-master and a boy. The farmers looked curiously at me, I supposed because of the terrified mewing from Tib's basket, and the boy came up, touching his bonnet.

"I will trife you to Strongarra, mem, if you will come this way. The pony iss waiting."

The Highland talk was very pretty, and suited his pleasant voice. He had an honest brown face and tumbled fair hair. He was not dressed in kilts, which rather disappointed me, but in a shabby suit, much too small for him. I liked his face, and asked his name by way of making friends.

"Sandy, mem," he said shyly.

As we drove through Lios I looked about me curiously. It was a quaint little place, but very neat and pretty. There was one wide street, with whitewashed cottages on each side, each with its garden enclosed by a rude stone wall. The gardens were gay with primroses and forget-me-nots, and the cottages had climbing rose-trees trained round the windows and over the porches. Many of the roofs were thatched, with over-hanging eaves, but the post-office, the manse, and the inn were quite large buildings, and the little church boasted a belfry tower.

The winding street was empty, till some bare-legged and bare-headed children caught sight of me and ran to tell their mothers. Then several women, some with plaids drawn over their heads, came out to look at us, and Sandy waved his whip as we drove past.

He seemed very shy, and did not speak till I spoke to him. But he was evidently curious about me, and kept glancing shyly at me to see what I was like. I opened Tib's basket and set her on my knee, and Sandy watched us with interest.

We left the straggling cottages behind, and drove down a lane, where great trees hung over the dykes on each side. A dyke is a low wall built of stones piled loosely on one another, and all the walls and fences round Lios were of this kind.

"What a very pretty road!" I said to Sandy, in the hope of making him talk.

"It iss a pretty road, and a ferry coot road, whateffer," he acknowledged.

I laughed. "I wonder if you can explain something to me, Sandy. When I was in the steamer we passed an island, and I heard children singing. Who do you think it would be?"

Sandy's eyes snapped, and he laughed.

"It woult be old Peggy Colquhoun and her chiltren. She iss an old witch, and she steals the chiltren, and they will neffer pe able to get away from her again whateffer. Effery efening we will hear them singing."

"Sandy, what nonsense! You don't mean to say you believe in witches?"

Sandy's eyes opened wide. "There iss an old witch at Ardtyre who hass the evil eye. If she looks at you, you'll be ill or die."

His face was quite serious, but his eyes twinkled, and I felt sure he was trying to make fun of me.

"I don't think you believe that, Sandy."

"Most folks do," said Sandy, without committing himself.

"Who is Peggy Colquhoun? An old woman? Does she live on the island? But I did hear children singing. And a banjo, too! Sandy, what nonsense!"

Sandy laughed. "From this hill you will see the loch and the islands. There iss Goblin Island—haf you heart the tale about the Goblin?"

"No! Who is he?"

"He comes out at night to carry off young ladies. And there iss Heather Island, and the Big Island, and the wee one iss Innis Beg——"

"That's where the singing was."

"It iss Peggy Colquhoun's island. And here iss Strongarra."

The house lay before us, and I forgot Sandy's nonsense as I looked forward eagerly. The boy jumped down and opened a white wooden gate, then drove on up a road between fields, one of which sloped down to the loch. The fields were divided by a dyke from the garden, where were lawns and neat flower beds, filled with daffodils and narcissus. On each side of the drive was a row of standard rose trees, and here and there on the lawn were great shady oaks and chestnuts.

The house itself was of white stone, with many big windows and a porch with seats in it. I did not wonder at the big windows when I glanced at the wonderful view of lake and mountains that faced them.

Katie, the housemaid I had sent before me, was waiting at the door, and I carried Tib up to the house, and forgot Sandy for the time.

So I did not see him, when he had driven the pony to the stables, hurry into Big Sandy's cottage and shout for Wee Sandy, who came, in much bewilderment, to change clothes again.

"Whateffer will you be doing it for, Master Jack?"

Jack laughed. "Give me my own things, Sandy. I can't stop now," and he hastily changed to his kilt again.

Then he sped through the garden, jumped into his boat, and rowed off to Innis Beg.

Sing-song was over. Peggy was indoors, putting Boy Blue and Sheila to bed, for Mother Hubbard was over in Lios. Jill was waiting with Cigarette by the oak tree, but at sight of the boat she came eagerly to the water's edge.

"Have you seen them? What are they like? Do hurry, Jack! I'm just dying to hear. I do wish I could have gone too."

Jack sprang ashore and threw himself on the grass, laughing.

"Such fun! Wish you'd been there. Only one of them's come. I talked to her. She thought I was Sandy, of course. She's all right—about Peggy's age—talks very English, and can't say her r's, but pleasant enough!——"

"Mind, she's an enemy! You mustn't get to like her!"

"Tuts! I won't forget. She'd heard you singing from the steamer—did Peggy ask where I was?"

"Yes. I told her you had gone over to see Sandy."

"Right! The Maxwell Girl wanted to know who it was singing. I told her it was a witch who lived here called Peggy Colquhoun——"

"Jack!"

"I did so. But she didn't believe it. Oh, it was fun!"

"But why?"

"Oh, just to scare her. It was fun to see her open her eyes. They were as round as saucers."

"What iss she like? What was she dressed in?" asked Jill, with feminine curiosity.

"Brown. Surely you don't expect me to describe it. She's not as tall as Peggy, but I think she has the usual amount of hair and eyes and teeth——"

"How stupid boys are! Did you wear Sandy's suit?"

"Of course. He thought I was crazy."

"I don't wonder. I *wish* I could have gone too. Did you talk like Sandy?"

"Rather! You shoult shust haf heart me, whateffer! It wass ferry funny!"

Jill laughed. "I'm sure it was."

"She thinks Lios is very pretty."

"Of course she does. Weren't you shy? I should have been. I don't like speaking to strangers."

"A bit," Jack admitted. "She'd got a cat."

"How—horrid! I don't like cats, do you, Cigarette? Witches always have black cats."

"This one was white, as white all over as the white bits of Cigarette."

"All the same, cats are horrid, and if the Girl has a cat she must be horrid too. What would Peggy say if she knew, Jack?"

"Peggy? She'd send for Malcolm at once. If you ever dare to tell her, Grizel Colquhoun ——"

"Tell her! Issn't it likely?" said Jill, with such scorn that Jack said no more.

I was delighted with Strongarra. Never yet had we found ourselves in a house that pleased me so well. Everything was very clean and neat, and nothing that could increase our comfort was wanting. Every window was draped with dainty white curtains, the beds had fresh pretty coverings, the linen cupboard held a plentiful supply of necessaries, whose whiteness delighted me and sent Katie into ecstasies. I had thought the things I had brought with me were clean, and so they were—as clean as London laundries could make them. But beside those at Strongarra they looked gray and grimy, and I decided to have a washerwoman up from Lios immediately, and to coax from her, if I could, the secret of that snowy whiteness.

I wondered what kind of mistress Strongarra had. Every room showed traces of her handiwork, dainty, finishing touches spoke of her everywhere. She was young, I was sure, and loved pretty things; probably she was pretty herself. I wished I could have met her, but she was sure to be away spending the summer elsewhere, though why any one should want to leave Loch Avie in summer was more than I could imagine. I knew we had taken the house from Mr. Colquhoun, but that told very little. Half the people in Lios were named Colquhoun,

as I soon discovered. Probably it was to Mrs. Colquhoun that we owed the freshness and prettiness of her house. Then she could only be a young wife, I decided. No old lady was the mistress of Strongarra.

I chose for myself a bedroom with windows looking up the loch, and was never tired of the view. The loneliness of it all surprised me. The great stretch of water, the desolate mountains, and the quiet islands, looked so utterly deserted. Only in the corner where Lios village crouched among its trees, or only when the steamer came creeping up or down the loch, was there any sign of life. It seemed impossible that such loneliness could lie within a couple of hours' journey of all the noise and bustle of a great city. I felt as if we must be a hundred miles from the nearest town.

I had not quite forgotten Sandy, and next morning I sent for him. But the Sandy who came was not the Sandy who had driven me the evening before, as I saw in a moment.

This Sandy was smaller, and had a shock of dark hair. He was even shyer than my Sandy, and I could hardly get a word from him. He said it was he who had driven the trap, then admitted that it was not. He said he did not know who it could have been, then stammered and hesitated, and finally took refuge in, "I ton't know, and t'at iss all apout it, whateffer!"

I gave it up in despair, and as every one else seemed equally ignorant, I could only hope that chance would bring the mysterious boy in my way again. In so small a place as Lios I was sure to meet him before very long. He must have wished to trick me for some reason. There had been a mischievous twinkle in his eyes as he told me that nonsense about the witch, Peggy Colquhoun.

I had no doubt that the real Sandy knew all about it, but I could not make him speak. So I waited and wondered, and decided to explore the island, Innis Beg, as soon as I could find some one to row me over, for we had no boat at Strongarra. And two days later father and Marjory arrived.

CHAPTER V.
GHOSTLY FOOTSTEPS.

I was waiting at the pier with the carriage, and father carried Marjory off the steamer and laid her gently in it. She was so tired with the journey that we said she must go to bed at once, but when she had rested she begged us to carry her for a few minutes to the sofa by the window.

There is at Strongarra, on the side of the house nearest to the loch, a little tower, giving, downstairs, a handsome rounded window to the library. Upstairs, the great window is part of a little room once used by Peggy Colquhoun as a sitting-room. I had chosen this little room for Marjory, and had done all I could to make it cosy. But I had not needed to do very much, for it was such a pretty room that it had delighted me whenever I saw it. For many reasons it would have been more convenient to have Marjory on the ground floor, but the outlook from the higher windows was so very much wider, and the windows meant so much to her, that we did not grudge the extra trouble.

Her bed was in the inner part of the room, but her sofa stood in the big window, which faced east, but had side panes looking north and south.

From the northern window she looked up the loch to Ben Aan, and could see the steamer creep slowly down the stretch of water from Dunreoch. She could see Lios, too, and the pier, and the road from the village. From the southern window she looked out over the islands, and could watch the steamer on its way to meet the train. The central window showed her the loch again—the steamer winding among the islands towards Balmona—and the islets, Innis Beg, and Goblin Island, separated from our garden only by a narrow strip.

The only thing she could not see from her window was the sunset, and no one in Lios ever sees the sunset. For that they must row out on to the loch or climb the hills behind the village. From Strongarra we could only see the glow in the water, and the eastern sky reddening the slopes of Ben Aan, and we knew that Balmona, across the loch, had quite half an hour more daylight in the evening than Lios, because the hills of Glen Lios shut out the sunset and throw their shadows over the village.

Marjory called the window her watch-tower, and never grew tired of lying there. The lonely loch stretched out before us surprised her as it had done me, and fascinated us both. There was always something to look at, and when she knew it all by heart she only seemed to enjoy it the more. She liked the central window best, because from it she looked straight down on Innis Beg.

I had told her of the singing, and the banjo, and of Sandy, who had disappeared so mysteriously, and she was greatly interested. She begged me to find out who lived on the island, as she would very much like some friends of her own age. But several things kept me from visiting the islet as soon as I would have liked.

For the first few days I was very busy setting our house in order, for we had brought many things with us to make it seem homelike during our four months' stay. And on Saturday evening we found the first traces of the ghost.

I was sitting in Marjory's room after tea, and the window was wide open, for it was a mild evening, and she was used to fresh air all the time. Suddenly she said "Hush!" and we both listened.

Across the water from Innis Beg came the sound of singing. We could not hear the banjo, but the children's voices came to us clearly on the still air, and we recognised the tune. It was "Polly-wolly-doodle," and how they were enjoying it! We could tell that by the way they shouted.

"What fun!" said Marjory wistfully. "I wish I could be there!"

"Massa's in de cold, cold ground" followed, and "I'se gwine back to Dixie." Then these gave place to college songs, and Marjory and I listened with appreciation, for we knew them all.

"I would like to know those children," sighed Marjory, when sing-song was over and the island lay silent.

"I'll make enquiries at church to-morrow. I'll soon find out who they are. Now I must go, Marjory. Father asked me to type some letters. You won't be lonely?"

"Of course not. Please give me my mandoline, Jean. I want to play some of those songs."

When Marjory's accident laid her on her back, she had to give up ordinary lessons and music. But her mother gave her a beautiful little mandoline, and for a little while each day she was allowed to be propped up with cushions, and practise. She had had lessons for more than a year, and enjoyed the music immensely.

I propped her up, and lit the lamp and left her.

More than an hour later I was finishing my work when father called me, and I hurried to his room. He had appropriated the library as a study, and already it was littered with books and papers. He could not keep his study tidy for three days together.

"Look here!" he said.

An ink-pot was upset on the table. A pile of books was knocked over. On some papers under the open window was a little footprint.

"I went out of the room for five minutes. Some one has been in through the window."

"Tib? But she was with me."

"She doesn't wear boots," father said grimly. "It's not one of the servants. It's a little foot."

"There's the gardener's son—Wee Sandy, they call him."

We sent for Wee Sandy, but he had been in the kitchen brushing boots all evening. We questioned Marjory, whose room was above, but she had been practising and had heard nothing. There seemed no one else to ask and nothing more to do. So father laughed, and said there must be a ghost, and after that he kept his window shut in the evening.

Next day we searched outside and found footprints under the window. But they disappeared in the grass and told us nothing.

Marjory was interested and excited, and talked much about the ghost. I questioned Wee Sandy again, both about this and about the unknown dwellers on Innis Beg, but could get no satisfaction from him. "I ton't know," he would say again and again, and I gave it up in despair.

I hoped to see my fair-haired Sandy on Sunday, for in so small a place as Lios there was only one church, and surely he would be there. But Sunday was so very wet that none of us went out all day.

The first three days of the week were wet also, and boating was impossible. How it did rain on Loch Avie! The clouds came down and covered the mountains and hid the loch and the islands, till Marjory could see nothing from her window but a strip of water at the end of the garden and a little bit of the Lios road. The rain poured down from morning till night, and we heard it still after the lamps were lit and the curtains drawn. The steamers crept out of the

thick white mist for a minute, then disappeared into it again, and we heard the beat of the paddles long before and after we saw the boats themselves, and sometimes when we saw no boats at all. Strongarra might have looked out on the open sea for all we could tell from our windows.

It was very dismal, but we made ourselves comfortable in the house and I spent much time in Marjory's room. She was always ready for a chat or a game of chess, though when I was busy she did not mind being left alone. She had inherited her father's talent, and was always happy with a pencil and sketch-book. Most of all, she delighted in making tiny sketches of every one she met, in the quaintest attitudes and with extraordinary expressions. Her father had taught her a great deal and she was very clever at catching likenesses, and would lie by the hour making caricatures of us all.

One sketch of the loch she made the day after she arrived. Ben Aan was represented as a gloomy old giant with a hump on his back, sitting by the loch and scowling down on the islands, each of which had the face of a mischievous boy or girl. They were dancing just beyond his reach, and he could not rise to seize them because the other mountains, which were all old women, held him back. Innis Beg was a roguish, fair-haired boy whom she had named Sandy, and he was making a face at the giant; and the steamers were tiny white mice creeping about among the children.

Another was a fancy sketch of "the old witch, Peggy Colquhoun, and her children." Peggy Colquhoun was an old, old woman, dressed in rags, with thin locks of hair hanging about her face. A black cat was sitting at her feet, and another on her shoulder, and she held a banjo under her arm. The children dancing to her music were of all ages and sizes, all dressed in little white nightgowns. These two pictures were very cleverly done, and we placed them on the mantel-piece in her room, where every one who came in would see them.

Marjory was disgusted with the weather, which kept me from visiting Innis Beg. I promised to go as soon as possible, but one evening as I sat by her bed talking, father came into the room.

"Ready for some work, Jean? Here's a new story. I'd be glad if you could get to it soon, for I'd like to send it off."

I was not ready for it, but I did not say so. It had to be done, and there would be no going to Innis Beg for me this week. Marjory said I should not give all my time to the work, but I felt otherwise about it. Father wanted it, and I would not keep him waiting.

So I set to it next morning, and worked hard for three days. The weather changed again, and there was no more rain. But I could never enjoy myself thoroughly while typewriting was waiting at home, so I did not try to go over to Innis Beg.

When Sunday came we had been nearly two weeks at Strongarra, and I had not found out who lived on the island, nor had I seen Sandy again.

Saturday was a fine day, but I worked in the house till tea-time. I was anxious, if possible, to finish the story before Sunday. So I sat at it all morning and afternoon, and by five o'clock had done five thousand words since breakfast and felt I had earned a rest. I was very tired of it, and, for the time, felt as if I never wanted to see a typewriter again. But the story was finished, and if I spent the evening in correcting it I might give it to father by supper-time.

How tired I was! I had been stooping too long over it, and my back ached. I needed some fresh air, and had been longing for a walk all day. So I went in for a few words with Marjory, and left Tib with her to keep her company, and then went out into the garden.

The island drew my attention as usual. Smoke was rising among the fir-trees. Some one must live there! I would go over early next week if work and weather permitted.

I strolled along the shore towards Lios, and came suddenly on a little bay, just outside our garden wall. It had a sloping beach, making a good landing-place. On the beach lay a boat, and by the boat sat two little children.

The girl was the elder. She wore a scarlet cloak and a little round hood tied under her chin. The boy was dressed in a blue overall pinafore, hanging loose to his knees, and a big straw hat. Both had fair hair, the boy's short and rough, the girl's curly and hanging over her shoulders. They were sitting on the shore, playing "chucks," each with five round pebbles.

I thought of Sandy as soon as I saw them. I was sure I could trace a likeness to him in each of the little round faces.

They were so intent on their game that they did not notice me. I wondered if they could have come from the island, and went to speak to them.

"Do you know a song called Polly-wolly-doodle?" For we had heard them singing the evening before, and they seemed always to begin with this song.

At sound of my voice they started up, and the boy scrambled into the boat with a frightened face, and hid behind his sister. She stood shielding him bravely, but looking very shy.

I laughed. "I won't hurt you. Won't you speak to me? I know what your names are—Red Riding Hood and Boy Blue. Aren't they now?"

The boy disappeared entirely under his sister's cloak, and she answered, in a timid whisper, "Yes."

"Really? I didn't know. I only guessed. You looked like it somehow. What are your real names?"

"Robin and Sheila," she said shyly.

"How pretty! Do you live on the island?"

"Yes."

"All the time?"

"Yes."

"Isn't that great fun?"

"Yes."

This was dreadful. I had never met quite such shy children before. Probably they were quite unused to meeting strangers. I tried again, but could only get one word at a time from Sheila.

"Have you a brother called Sandy, Sheila?"

"No?" She looked surprised.

"Oh! But haven't you a big brother about thirteen years old?"

"Yes," she said, looking puzzled.

"What is his name?"

"Jack."

"I think he must be a friend of mine. There's the tea bell. I shall have to run. Who is Peggy Colquhoun, Sheila?"

Sheila's big blue eyes grew bigger. "Our sister."

"Oh! And is there a witch living on that island?" I laughed.

"No, indeed," gasped Sheila, looking scared at the very idea.

"Of course not. Who are you waiting for now?"

"Peggy."

"And where is she?"

"In Lios." And growing bolder as she found me harmless—"Buying jam for tea."

"How jolly! I wish I could wait and speak to her. But if I do my father will be cross. He likes his tea at once. Good-bye, Sheila! I'll see you again some day. When Boy Blue comes out from behind you, give him a kiss for me, will you?"

I turned at the garden gate, and saw them both standing staring after me. So I waved my hand, and hurried off to the house.

Marjory was delighted. She insisted that I must go over to the island on Monday, and invite Jack and Red Riding Hood and Boy Blue to come and have tea with her. I said the little ones would be far too shy, but she was sure they would not be shy with her.

That night the ghost visited us again.

When I took the finished story to father's room, he said:

"Didn't you hear that dog barking outside a while ago?"

"Dog? No. What dog could it be?"

"Has the gardener one?"

"No. I asked Wee Sandy, because of Tib, and he said no one about the house had a dog."

"That's odd. I certainly heard one. He seemed to be scratching and barking at the foot of the tower. I opened the window, and he made off."

"It may have been a stray dog from the village. Now I'm going up to Marjory. She's been alone all evening."

As I passed the garden door, which always stood open, Tib suddenly rushed in and sprang into my arms, every white hair on her little body bristling with fright, and her tail as big as a Persian cat's. She clung to me with all her claws, and I held her tight and wondered what had scared her so.

In the darkness outside I caught a glimpse of a long nose and gleaming eyes. Before I could see what kind of dog it was, it disappeared, and I was sure I heard a stealthy whisper, "Come here, sir!" Then the soft pad of footsteps on the lawn, and silence.

I called father, and we went out together, but it was dark and we could see nothing. So I carried Tib up to Marjory to be comforted, but her tail did not become its natural size again till supper-time.

Marjory was delighted, though sorry for Tib.

"It's so interesting to have something to think about and puzzle over," she said.

Next day I saw the Colquhouns in church. They came up the aisle after father and I were seated, and filed into the pew just in front of us.

First came Red Riding Hood and Boy Blue hand in hand. But to-day, Sheila wore a dainty muslin frock and a big white hat, and Robin a tiny kilt and tam-o'-shanter. Then a girl of Marjory's age whom I had not seen before. She was very like Sheila, with long fair hair and a serious little face. How demure Jill could look when she tried! She generally put on her good behaviour with her Sunday dress, but, as Jack said, if you knew her you hadn't much faith in it, and you knew it wouldn't last till Monday.

After her came—Sandy. I knew him at once, though he was dressed in his Sunday kilt and a great plaid that hung down to his knee. He must have seen me, but neither he nor the others gave any sign of having noticed us. They were probably curious about us, since strangers in Lios must have been unusual, but Boy Blue was the only one who showed it. In the middle of the sermon he turned round and gazed at me fixedly for a minute or two. But Sheila noticed it

and promptly pulled him straight again, whispering something which had so much effect that he did not look at me again.

The last to come into church was Peggy. How pretty she was! I had never seen such a pretty girl before. She was tall and fair, with fair hair under a broad-brimmed white hat, and eyes fixed gravely on her brothers and sisters. For she had said to them before leaving Innis Beg, "The Maxwells will be in the church to-day, because it is so fine. If any of you stare at them you shall have no pudding at dinner."

I hoped to speak to Jack—but I felt I must call him Sandy—after the service. But at the earliest possible moment he and his sister disappeared in search of some friend, and Peggy leant forward to speak to a woman in the next pew, and I heard her asking how the baby was.

Dr. Kerr came down the aisle, and while father and I were speaking to him, the Colquhouns left the church. When we went outside they were already half-way to Innis Beg in the boats, Jack rowing one and Jill the other.

I questioned Dr. Kerr about them, and learned for the first time that Strongarra belonged to them. He spoke very highly of Peggy, but to my surprise shook his head smilingly at mention of Jack and Grizel. They were wild weans, he said. I would not have thought it from Jill's demure little face, but the old man assured me that the hours they spent with him at lessons were not altogether times of joy for any of them.

He thought Peggy would be very pleased to make my acquaintance, so I resolved to call on her as soon as possible. It was of course her duty to visit us first as we were new-comers, but it seemed foolish to stand on ceremony in a tiny place like this. I wanted to know the whole family, and so did Marjory.

But, unknown to us, Jack and Jill were already acquainted with us pretty thoroughly, and we had provided them with a mystery at least equal to our ghost.

CHAPTER VI.
THE HOUSE OF MYSTERIES.

It was the Saturday evening after our arrival at Strongarra—the evening when Marjory and I heard the singing on the island, and when we found the first signs of the ghost.

Sing-song on Innis Beg ended earlier than usual. One of Peggy's banjo strings broke in the middle of a song, and she set to work to mend it at once. The children sat round her on the grass for a time, and the conversation turned on witches.

"Mother Hubbard will be coming for you presently, Boy Blue," said Jack, "and we shall all be glad." For Boy Blue had brought his drum to sing-song and had insisted on playing an accompaniment to every song, to Peggy's despair and the disgust of the others.

"You'll come too, Sheila, won't you?" asked Robin, in sudden alarm. "Mother Hubbard told me this afternoon a most dreatful story about a witch. She turned into a wolf, and then into a hare, and then into a black cat. And there was another witch, and she just looked at a wee boy and it made him most dreatfully ill."

"She must have had the evil eye, like old Mother Molly at Ardtyre," said Jill. "What a silly boy he must have been to go near a witch without a bit of a rowan tree!"

"Does that keep you safe?" asked Sheila eagerly, for Mother Hubbard's stories scared her too.

"Of course. Witches can't hurt you if you carry a bit of a rowan tree. Look!" and Jill turned up her skirt and showed a little hard lump in the hem. "That iss a bit of our rowan tree. Now the witches can't hurt me. I always have a wee bittie in my dress or my pocket."

"Jill, what nonsense! What a silly baby you are!" cried Peggy, awaking suddenly to what was going on. "I wouldn't have believed you had so little sense!"

Jill was indignant. "Why, everybody says—

'Red thread and rowan tree
Keep the witches far from me.'

I'm sure it iss true."

"There are no witches, you silly girl."

"O-o-oh! Peggy, you know there are! Old Mother Molly at Ardtyre just looked at Mr. Macfarlane's cow, and it neffer gave them any more milk! And she looked at one of the weans and said, 'What a pretty wee lassie!' and the girl was ferry ill that same night. Of course she iss a witch! She has a great black cat too."

"I expect Mr. Macfarlane's wee girl had been eating green gooseberries," said Peggy practically. "Boy Blue, I'll tell Mother Hubbard she's not to frighten you. Sheila, if you say your prayers at night, that's more likely to keep you safe than dirty little bits of wood."

She carried the banjo off into the cottage, and Jill remarked:

"It iss all ferry well, but I know Mother Molly iss a witch. She has the evil eye, and I am frightened of her."

"Come up into the tree, Jill," said Jack, and Jill sprang up in delight.

"That always means fun! Have you made another plan, like the one about you pretending to be Sandy?"

"Listen," said Jack, when they were in the tree, "the Enemy have been at Strongarra for nearly a week. The Girl came on Tuesday and the Author on Thursday. It's time we paid them a visit."

"Whateffer for?"

"To find out all we can about them, silly. You always have to spy on the enemy. Let's go to-night. It's nearly dark. Come on!"

"What about the Goblin?" asked Jill doubtfully. "Do you think it iss safe?"

"Tuts, yes! He doesn't come over here. We won't go near Innis Torr. Don't come if you're frightened."

"Don't you be a silly," said Jill, and scrambled down the trunk and into one of the boats.

"Now," said Jack, as they reached the garden, "tread very softly. Don't make a sound. Follow me, and whatever you do don't giggle."

"Issn't it likely?" So they crept over the grass to the house.

But it was not Strongarra as they had known it. It had become a house of mysteries.

They avoided the tower, for the windows there were open and the blinds drawn up. So Jack led the way to the dining-room windows.

There was some one in the room, for the lamplight shone through the blind. And from inside came a curious sound—a noisy tap-tapping, then the ting of a little bell and a scraping sound, and the tapping began again.

They looked at one another. What could it be?

The noise ceased. A voice said, "Tib, *dear*! You really mustn't sit just on the book I'm using!" and Tib responded with a long-drawn "Miaou!" which made Jill shiver.

"That's the Girl," whispered Jack, as the curious tapping noise began again.

"Ugh! I heard the cat. Do you think she iss a witch?"

"Don't know, I'm sure. That's an odd noise she's making. Wonder what it is?"

But they could not find that out, so they passed on and left me to my typewriting.

Outside the kitchen window they paused, and heard cook and Katie both scolding Wee Sandy because he was so slow with the boots.

"I hate them," whispered Jill fiercely. "I hate them! They haven't any business to talk to Mother Hubbard's Sandy like that. He can't help being slow. He iss always the same. He was made slow."

"He'll get used to it," said Jack, and they passed on.

The drawing-room was dark and silent and uninteresting. So they ventured on the tower windows, and crept up to them, holding their breath.

They peeped into the library. Alas, for Peggy's tidy room! There were books on tables, chairs, and floor—papers everywhere. The big table was piled a foot deep with things, and to reach it one had to pick one's way carefully through the litter on the floor.

A big brown-bearded man sat in the armchair, a writing pad on his knee, a pencil in his hand, and a cigarette in his mouth. On a little table at his side were more books and papers, a box of cigarettes, half a dozen cigarette holders, and an ash-tray full of ashes. He was lying back in his chair, smoking and staring at the ceiling.

"That must be the Author," whispered Jack.

Presently the Author jumped up, put down his pad, and began to walk up and down the room. He did not seem to look where he was going, but he never tripped over any of the piles of books. Jack and Jill crouched close to the side of the window and held their breath, but the Author never looked towards them.

"I wonder why he doesn't sit still," whispered Jill, and Jack pinched her arm.

"Be quiet, goose! The window's open."

Then suddenly they caught their breath again. From somewhere came the sound of music, very sweet and clear, some instrument they had never heard before.

"What iss it? Who iss it?" gasped Jill.

That was the question, and it occurred to Jack at the same moment. The Girl was in the dining-room—they could hear the tapping of her mysterious machine through the wall. The servants were in the kitchen, and they were gazing at the Author. There was no one else in the house. Who was playing?

The music came from the upper room of the tower. The windows were open, and the light was streaming out. Who was there? A ghost? A mystery undoubtedly.

They looked at one another with startled faces. What did it mean?

"It is witchcraft and witch music! I said the Girl was a witch," whispered Jill. "It iss too sweet for real music. It iss made by magic. And she has a cat," as if that was certain proof.

"Tuts!" said Jack, but his tone was doubtful.

The magic music ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and the Author left the room. He went into the drawing-room, for presently they heard the piano—"John Brown's Body," and "The Harp that once thro' Tara's Halls,"—with big bass chords.

"What's that for?" said Jack.

"He's stuck. He doesn't know what word it should be next. When I stick in an exercise I always whistle Polly-wolly-doodle, and it helps effer so much."

The sight of the empty room and open window were too much for Jack. In a moment he was on the sill, and Jill followed eagerly, with no desire to be left alone in such a dangerous spot. The magic music might begin again, or the Girl, who was most certainly a witch, might come in the shape of a black cat and carry her off.

They wandered curiously round the room, touching, peeping, but always with one eye on the door. They read the titles of the books, and found several with the name Donald Maxwell upon them. They counted the cigarette ends on the little table—eight. Had he smoked them all to-day?

"Wouldn't Cigarette fall in love with him?" said Jack.

They picked up the pencils, and found them all sharpened at both ends. They looked at his manuscript, but the writing was so tiny that they could not make it out. They found that he only wrote on one side of the page, and on the blank page opposite were extraordinary little pictures—men in top-hats, pigs with square noses and curly tails, cats, made out of two circles, and curious curving designs that excited Jill's admiration.

"They're pretty," Jack acknowledged. "But just look at the wee pictures! See those dogs! They're perfectly square, with ears and legs and tails sticking out!"

"And see the row of wee men, with square bodies, and sticks for arms and legs!" giggled Jill. "And the cats with buttons all down their backs. He does them when he doessn't know what to write next, like we scribble when we can't do our sums."

At first they had no fear of interruption, for the noise of the Girl's machine went on steadily on the other side of the wall, and the Author himself was still at the piano. But in their interest in his things they did not notice a sudden silence in the drawing-room, and when a step in the hall alarmed them it was almost too late.

They fled to the window, but the handle turned as they scrambled through, and the door opened as they dropped to the ground. They crouched in terror, but the Author had not noticed

them. He had found the word or thought he had been wanting, and he lit another cigarette and resumed his writing.

It was only when he rose a few minutes later to look for something on the table that he discovered an overturned ink-pot. Then Jill's footprint on the papers by the window caught his eye, and he called me in to look for the ghost.

As Jack and Jill crossed the lawn on their way home, the mysterious music began again, and certainly came from the upper room of the tower.

"Whoeffer can it be?" said Jill, and they puzzled over it all next week.

They visited Mother Hubbard's Sandy, and questioned him closely. Was there any one living in the house besides the Author and the Girl and the servants? But Sandy did not know. He had only been in the kitchen, and had not heard of any one else. He could not ask the servants, for they scolded him all the time. He did not think there could be any one else, for he had to clean only four pairs of boots each day.

Big Sandy was away in Balmona, where his sister was ill, so they could not ask him. He had been sent for on the day of the Author's arrival, and had crossed the loch by the evening steamer. So he had had no time to tell Sandy whether the Author came quite alone or whether there was any one with him.

It was very puzzling. Jack called the tower room "the Mystery's room," and Jill and he spent much time in the oak-tree gazing across at it and discussing possibilities. Jack's theory was that the Enemy had some one imprisoned there. Jill insisted that there was no one at all. The music had been made by witchcraft, by some spell woven by the witch-girl who owned the cat.

If they could have discussed it with Peggy she might have suggested some explanation. But of course it would not do to tell Peggy anything about it.

"She'd be most dreadfully shocked," Jill said truthfully. "We won't tell Red Riding Hood or Boy Blue either. It wouldn't do any good, and they might chatter."

CHAPTER VII.
THE MYSTERY'S ROOM.

When Peggy came back from Lios on the following Saturday afternoon, Red Riding Hood and Boy Blue met her on the shore with the story of their meeting with me. Sheila's shyness had disappeared and Robin had found his tongue, and they could not chatter fast enough as they described the adventure.

Peggy listened with much interest, for she was as curious about us as Jack and Jill themselves.

"I would like to know Miss Maxwell," she said. "I'm just longing for a friend."

"You wouldn't have been shy, would you, Peggy?" asked Sheila. "Boy Blue and I were a little shy, I'm afraid."

"I must go and call next week," Peggy said thoughtfully. "I really ought to have gone before. It's very rude of me."

The story had to be told again to Jack and Jill, and when the little ones were away to bed, and Peggy was busy looking out clean clothes for next morning, they climbed into the oak-tree to talk it over.

"It's all very well," said Jack, "but it doesn't explain the mystery. Look at the windows! There must be some one in the room."

"There iss no one. It iss witchcraft," said Jill, with conviction.

"I'm not so sure. And I mean to know. I'm going over to-night to find out what it means, Jill."

"But—the witch-girl with the cat."

"Tuts! Will you come?"

Jill hesitated. But her loyalty to Jack overcame her fear, and she said reluctantly:

"If you go, I'll go. But I wish you wouldn't. The only thing I'm frightened for iss witches, but I am afraid of them. What are you going to do?"

"Climb up the ivy on the tower, and look into the Mystery's room. Then we'll know who's there."

"Oh—Jack! Aren't you just a wee bittie frightened?"

"Come on!" said Jack, and they pushed out the boat.

"Bother!" said Jill, as Cigarette scrambled into the boat at the last moment. "What shall we do? We don't want him with us, but if we leave him, he'll howl."

"We'll turn him loose in the garden. Maybe he won't follow us," and as they sprang ashore Jack said to the dog, "Go, find Sandy, Cigarette!" and Cigarette ran off into the darkness.

Jack and Jill crept noiselessly round the house, but everything was as it had been the week before. The servants were talking in the kitchen; the curious tapping noise from the dining-room told that the Girl was there, the Author was smoking cigarettes and writing busily in his room, with the window shut this time.

But there was certainly some one in the Mystery's room. The windows were open, the lamp-light was streaming out, and as Jack and Jill crouched at the foot of the tower they heard a voice, though they could not make out the words.

"I'm going up," whispered Jack. "You don't need to come."

But not for anything would Jill have stayed behind alone. The witch-girl, the cat, the magic music, the Mystery inside the open window—she feared them all and dared not lose sight of Jack. So she followed him as quietly as possible.

The stone walls of Strongarra were mostly bare, but the tower was thickly covered with ivy. More than once Jack and Jill had used the tough branches as a ladder to the windows of Peggy's sitting-room, and even in the dark they found no difficulty in reaching the Mystery's room, where the blinds were not drawn.

They peered into the window, then drew back and looked at one another.

The Mystery lay on her bed in the inner part of the room. She was a little girl, with a rather white face, short, dark, curly hair, and big, dark eyes. She wore a loose dress of soft, green silk, with fanciful embroidery on the yoke and round the wrists and hem, a prettier dress than Jill had ever seen before.

On a table by her bed were pencils, penknife, and india-rubber, some sheets of paper and a sketch-book, a story book and a little bell, a box of sweets, and some oranges. Her mandoline lay beside her, and on the bed at her side a white kitten sat on an open book. The Mystery was talking to it.

"Tib, you are a bad cat! I just put down my book for one minute, because my arms were tired with holding it, and, of course, you come and sit on it! I never saw such a teasing cat!"

She pulled Tib to her and kissed him, and Jill shivered. Then, before she knew what he was doing, Jack climbed on to the sill and jumped into the room.

The Mystery screamed, and reached for the bell. But Jack caught her hand.

"Don't, please! You'll get us into the most dreadful trouble. Boarding-school, and all kinds of things. We won't do any harm. We only want some fun."

She looked at him, then laughed.

"I think you must be Sandy."

Jack laughed too. "Did the Girl tell you? I'm Jack Colquhoun."

Then Jill scrambled through the window, and the girls stared at one another.

"Who are you?" asked the Mystery. "I'd heard of Jack, but——"

"She's Jill," said Jack. "I think she's shy."

"Are you shy? Won't you come and shake hands?" and she held out her hand with a smile. "I'm Marjory, and I am so glad to see you."

Jill placed her hand in Marjory's, feeling almost as shy as Robin himself.

"We called you the Mystery," she said, and Marjory laughed.

"Why?"

"We saw your light, and heard music, and we didn't know there was any one else in the house."

"Have you been here at night before?"

They looked at one another, and Marjory laughed again.

"Mr. Maxwell found a footprint in his study. We said it must have been a ghost."

"It was us," Jill said, candidly but ungrammatically. "But don't you tell. We were exploring. Iss any one likely to come in, do you think?"

"Not for an hour or so. Jean is busy. I said I didn't mind being alone."

"Why do you wait up here?" asked Jack, and Marjory flushed.

"I have to. I can't walk, you know."

"We didn't know. How dreadful! Why not?"

"A year ago I fell and hurt my back. It was in the gymnasium. I was swinging on the rings, when I missed one and fell on to the floor. I've had to lie still ever since. But I'm going to be all right again some day."

"It would kill me!" gasped Jill, with horrified eyes.

"I'm used to it now. But I can't go out much, you see, and sometimes I feel dull. I was just wishing I had some friends here, so I'm *very* glad to see you. Sit down on the bed, Jill. Won't you have an orange and some chocolates? They were sent to me from Edinburgh. Jack, mind you tread softly. Mr. Maxwell is just underneath."

Jack was wandering round the room, looking at everything.

"I'll be careful. Oh, Jill! Just look here!"

Jill looked over his shoulder at the sketch he had taken from the mantel-piece.

"Oh, how—good! How splendid! Did you do it, Marjory?"

"What is it? The sketch of the loch? Yes, I did it," Marjory laughed.

"Issn't it cleffer? How do you do it? Look at the wee mice!"

"They are the steamers, you see."

"Here's another picture," said Jack. "My gracious!"

Jill gave a shout of laughter, which he cut short in the middle by covering her mouth with his hand.

"Laugh in a whisper, goose! Did you make it up from what I told the Girl about the witch and her children, Marjory?"

"Yes, she told me all about it."

"I neffer, neffer saw anything so funny before! Peggy! Oh, goodness gracious!"

Jill nearly hurt herself in her efforts to laugh without making a noise, and Marjory watched her with much satisfaction.

"Of course I didn't mean it for your sister," she explained. "I didn't know who Peggy Colquhoun was when I drew it. Jack shouldn't have talked such nonsense to Jean."

"It iss ferry cleffer," Jill said, gazing at her admiringly. "How iss it you can draw so well?"

"My father taught me. He's an artist, you know."

"The Author, do you mean? Mr. Maxwell?"

"Oh, no! Did you think he was my father? My name's Marjory Lesley. I'm living with the Maxwells because my own father and mother have gone away to Australia."

"Good!" cried Jack. "Then you're not an Enemy!"

"An enemy? What do you mean?"

"We've declared war on the Author and the Girl, because they are living in our house. We aren't going to be friends, or have anything to do with them."

"All of you?" Marjory asked anxiously.

"Oh, no! Only Jack and me," Jill said quickly. "Peggy quite wants to be friends, and I think Red Riding Hood and Boy Blue would like to too, if they weren't so shy. Peggy would scold us or laugh at us if she knew, so she issn't going to know. But we can be friends with you, because you're not an enemy, you see."

"How can you be friends with me and not with them?"

"Only by keeping it a secret," Jill said eagerly. "We can come to see you secretly, like we have done to-night, if only you won't tell."

"How splendid! Of course I won't tell. I'd love to have a secret," Marjory cried, her eyes sparkling.

"Won't you really? We thought you'd want to tell the Girl."

“But can we keep it secret? You’ll have to be very careful.”

“We’ll only come when you’re alone, of course,” Jill explained.

“I generally am in the evenings, while Jean is working downstairs. I’ll signal to you when it’s safe. How can I manage it?”

They pondered this for a time, till at last Marjory said:

“I’ll pull the blind of the middle window half-way down when I want you to come. And if it’s dangerous—let me see! I know. You see that plant in a pot? It stands on my table in the daytime. When you mustn’t come I’ll have it put out on the window-sill. Can you see it from the island?”

“Easily. That will do fine. We won’t tell Peggy anything about you. She wouldn’t let us come without the Enemy’s leave.”

“I think Jean is going to call on your sister soon, and she’ll invite you all to come over and see me. What will you say?”

“We’ll say no, thank you,” Jack said promptly. “Then we’ll come after it’s dark.”

“All right,” said Marjory, laughing. “It shall be our secret. Suppose we shake hands on it?”

“The little ones will want to come, if they’re not too shy,” Jill said, as they shook hands.

“I’ll be delighted to see them. Will you let Tib out, Jill? I think she wants to go downstairs.”

Jill obeyed with alacrity. She had been keeping as far as possible from the cat all the time.

“Hello!” cried Jack suddenly. “That’s Cigarette!” as the dog began to bark outside.

“Cigarette?”

“Our dog. I’ll have to go and quiet him.” But just then Cigarette’s barking ceased, and Jill said:

“We needn’t go just yet if he doesn’t begin again. Iss it with this you will make the music, Marjory?”

“Yes, isn’t it pretty? My mother gave it me. I can play all the songs you sing,” she said, laughing.

“And how does the Girl make that odd hammering noise in the dining-room?”

“That’s Jean’s typewriter. She types all Mr. Maxwell’s stories, you know.”

“Is that it? Jill said it was some kind of witchcraft.”

Marjory laughed. “Do you believe in witches, Jill?”

“Why, yes! Don’t you? But, do you know, Peggy says there are no witches. It iss because she doessn’t know, of course. She will neffer be done scolding me when I say somebody iss a witch.”

“That’s very unkind of her.”

“Oh, no, it’s not,” Jack said quickly. “Jill’s a little goose about witches.”

“It issn’t unkind of Peggy,” Jill explained, “only she doessn’t understand. I don’t mind. You must neffer be thinking Peggy issn’t kind. She iss the kindest girl in the world.”

“How prettily you speak,” said Marjory, and Jill’s eyes opened wide.

“Was I talking badly?”

“You were,” Jack said promptly. “Just dreadfully.”

“Oh, I think it’s so pretty, and such a change from the way they talk in London.”

“Peggy doessn’t like it. She issn’t pleased with me for it, but it iss so ferry hard to remember.”

“How beautifully you say your r’s,” Marjory laughed. “English people can’t do that.”

“You should hear the cottage folk talk,” said Jack. “You wouldn’t be able to understand them. And most often they speak the Gaelic.”

“I wonder you aren’t frightened to wear a green dress, Marjory,” said Jill. “Green is the fairies’ colour, you know, and Mother Hubbard says they are ferry angry if any one wears it.”

She was sitting on the bed, fingering the fanciful embroidery on Marjory’s wrists with evident admiration.

“How pretty this is,” she said.

Marjory was pleased. “Yes, my mother did that. She made all my dresses. You see, she had only me to sew for, and she liked making my things as pretty as ever she could. I can’t make my clothes torn or soiled like other children, you know. I only wish I could. Mother is very clever. She has sewn all kinds of things on my dresses.”

“Look, Jack! It’s oak leaves and tiny acorns! And here are ivy leaves and blackberries. If I were you, Marjory, I’d have rowan berries to keep away the witches.”

Marjory laughed. “I have one with roses and buds and leaves. That’s the prettiest, I think. And another with primroses and blue and white violets.”

“They are ferry pretty indeed,” Jill said admiringly.

“Jack,” said Marjory presently, “I wish you could wait a long while, but I really think you had better go now, if you don’t want Jean to find you here. She’ll be coming up soon with my supper, for it’s nearly half-past eight.”

Jack and Jill looked at one another.

“Jill! You’d better run! You’ll catch it from Peggy. Half-past eight’s her bedtime,” he explained. “So I really think we’d better go.”

“But you’ll come back soon?” Marjory pleaded.

“Yes, indeed. I want to come again most dreadfully,” Jill cried. “Good-night, Marjory,” and they climbed through the window.

As they reached the foot of the tower, the white kitten rushed round the house, chased by Cigarette and terrified out of her wits. Jill sprang away and clung to Jack. The kitten dashed into the house by the open garden door, and Cigarette barked disappointedly.

Jack and Jill, peeping in, saw me standing in the lamp-light with Tib in my arms, trying to soothe her ruffled feelings.

“Ugh! She iss kissing it! Horrid! I am sure she iss a witch!”

“Come away! We’ll be caught in another minute, and it’s time we were home. Come, Cigarette! Come here, sir!” and they crept away across the lawn.

CHAPTER VIII.
WITCHCRAFT ON THE ISLAND.

On Monday afternoon I went to call on Peggy Colquhoun. Wee Sandy borrowed a boat from Lios, and rowed me across the strait to Innis Beg.

The landing-place was a tiny bay, nearly hidden by bushes and trees. I could not see any opening, but Sandy knew the way and steered straight in. I stepped on to the little beach and looked about me.

On one side was a great oak-tree, and, though I did not know it, two pairs of blue eyes were watching me from among the leaves. On the beach lay two small rowing boats. Above the beach was a strip of grass with a gravel path running through it, and under the cottage windows were flower beds. The cottage was whitewashed and very tiny, with windows and front door standing open, little white curtains at the windows, and smoke rising from the chimney.

Over the doorway was a wooden porch, with creepers trained up the trellis. In it were seats, and on one seat lay a white fox-terrier curled up in the sun. He had one black ear, a black nose, a big black spot on his back and a little one on his stumpy tail. He raised his head from his paws and looked at me, then jumped down and ran into the cottage.

On the other seat were traces of Boy Blue—a drum, a trumpet, a mouth-organ, a tambourine, and a whistle. But none of the children were in sight.

I knocked on the half-open door. Boy Blue, wearing a clean blue pinafore, appeared at a door on one side of the tiny passage, and gazed at me open-mouthed. Evidently visitors were rare on Innis Beg. Before I could speak, he fled down the passage, and disappeared.

"Peggy, some one's at the door!" I heard him cry—in the kitchen, I supposed.

Peggy appeared at the end of the passage. She wore a big apron over a fresh muslin blouse, and had evidently been working hard, for her sleeves were rolled up above her elbows, showing her round white arms. Her face was flushed with the heat of the fire, but it flushed redder still with embarrassment and dismay at sight of me.

She hurriedly pulled down her sleeves and came forward, and Robin watched admiringly from the kitchen door. Peggy was not a bit shy. He supposed big people never were.

But Peggy was shy. I saw it in her face as she looked at me.

"Will you come in, Miss Maxwell? It iss so good of you to have come. I have been meaning to go to see you, but I have been ferry busy. I hope you will not think I did not mean to call on you."

Such a soft voice she had, and the touch of Highland accent made it prettier still. Peggy imagined she had lost all her accent in Edinburgh, but that was a mistake. It was only a softening of the v's and s's, and a slight exaggeration of the r's, which all the family, down to Boy Blue, showed at times, but it was very pretty and just suited her soft shy voice.

"I don't want to disturb you. If you're busy just now, please say so, and I'll come again another day, Miss Colquhoun," I said, as I followed her into the room from which Boy Blue had come.

"I hope you will do that in any case," said Peggy prettily. "I am very glad to see you, really. I have been working hard, and I will just be glad to sit down, if you will excuse me for two minutes first. You see, we don't often have visitors, but I am all the more glad to see you.

Will you sit down? And will you excuse me just for one minute? I have been cooking, and I must see that my cakes are not spoiled."

She left the room, and I sat down and looked round. It was of necessity an untidy room, since of all the little ones only Sheila took the trouble to put away her things. Books and toys were on the chairs and open piano, Peggy's banjo stood in a corner. A copy-book and a much-sucked pencil lay at one end of the table, a pile of dolls' clothes, with needles and cotton and scissors, at the other.

Sheila rose as I entered, with a tiny white petticoat in her hand, and her face grew shy and troubled at sight of me.

"How are you, Red Riding Hood? Will you give me a kiss?"

She came timidly, and let me kiss her cheek, but looked as if she would have liked to run away had politeness allowed it.

Something knocked my foot. I looked down and saw the terrier, with a little hearth-brush in his mouth, trying to attract my attention.

"Cigarette, you bad dog! Don't tease so!" cried Sheila, seizing the chance to break the silence without speaking directly to me.

"What is his name? What do you want, old man? Is that for me?" as he laid the brush at my feet.

"He will always be bringing the brush when any one comes," Sheila explained shyly. "It iss to please them, I think. I don't know where he learned it. His name iss Cigarette, because he iss so ferry fond of any one who smokes."

"He would like my father. Thank you, Cigarette! Good dog," and I patted his head.

He ran off at once, and Sheila remarked:

"He will bring you his pipe in a minute. If any one iss pleased with the brush, he always brings his pipe next."

She put away the tiny garments, then picked up the copy-book.

"Is that Boy Blue's?" I asked.

"Yes. He couldn't do his lessons this morning, for it iss washing day and Peggy was busy. So he had to do them now. He issn't ferry good at his writing."

"He's not very big yet," I said, "but he's a fine strong boy," and I smiled at Robin, who was peeping at me from the doorway.

Then Peggy came in again, without her apron this time.

"Sheila, Mother Hubbard wants you. And if Jack and Jill are at home tell them to come in. I am so ferry much obliged to you for coming, Miss Maxwell. To tell the truth," she said, smiling, "I was rather afraid of going to see you the first time. I wanted to, but I was shy. Now you have saved me the trouble. And I really have been busy. I have been making summer blouses for Robin and Sheila and Jill, and that means a lot of work."

"I came partly for a selfish reason. I have a little friend at home, and she has been hoping your brothers and sisters would come and play with her. She's sometimes lonely, I'm afraid."

"I wish you had brought her with you!" Peggy cried.

So I told her all about Marjory, and begged her to bring the children over next day. She was full of sympathy, and promised they should come. But I did not tell her how often we had heard them singing, for fear of making them shy and stopping the concerts.

Cigarette scratched at the door while we were talking, and Peggy let him in. He came at once and laid his pipe at my feet, then, seizing it again in his mouth, sat up with his head on one side. Peggy laughed.

"He is ferry proud of his pipe. My brother brought it from Glasgow, where he is at college. Cigarette, you silly dog, you don't know how stupid you look."

Cigarette winked conceitedly, and glanced at me out of the corner of his eye, as if to say, "Did you *ever* see such a clever dog?"

Then Boy Blue opened the door, and Sheila entered, her eyes fixed anxiously on the tray she carried.

"Are Jack and Jill not coming, Sheila?"

"I can't find them, Peggy. I've looked and called, but they won't answer."

"Perhaps they are out in the boat."

"Oh, but they're not. I looked, and the boats are both on the beach."

"Perhaps they are shy and don't want to come," I suggested.

"We are all shy," Peggy confessed.

She fetched biscuits from the cupboard, and sent Sheila to the kitchen for scones and cakes and shortbread.

"I had just finished cooking when you came," she explained, as she poured out the tea, "so the cakes are only just made. I hope you like home-made things. As a rule we don't cook more than necessary on washing days, but this is Mother Hubbard's birthday, so I had to make shortbread for tea. We always have shortbread on birthdays for a treat. Mother Hubbard has lived with us for years, since before I was born, and she has nursed us all, so she is a kind of grandmother. I do hope you will tell me if the cakes aren't good, Miss Maxwell, for I have not tasted them, and one can never be sure they'll turn out all right."

But presently I was able to assure her I had never tasted such delightful scones and little cakes before, and she looked very pleased.

"But I like the shortbread best of all," I said.

"Now will you come outside and see our wee farm?" said Peggy, so we went out by the front door and round to the back of the cottage, Sheila and Robin following at a little distance.

We passed some cocks and hens and a family of chickens in a little enclosure. Behind the cottage was a tiny field sloping down to the loch, and here a black Highland cow was feeding. She had long shaggy hair and crumpled horns, and as she stopped munching the grass and stared at us through her tangled locks, I thought her a most fierce-looking beast. But Peggy went forward to stroke her fearlessly.

"We call her Bo-peep," she said, laughing.

Bo-peep swished a fly off her back with her shaggy tail, and I noticed a piece of red worsted thread wound several times round it.

"What is the red thread on her tail for?" I asked, and Peggy laughed.

"That's Jill's nonsense. She iss a most dreadful child. It's to keep away the witches. Didn't you notice the horse-shoes and bits of rowan wood above the cottage door and the door of the byre? Jill is as superstitious as an old woman. I've tried everything I can think of to get her out of it. I've talked to her, laughed at her, argued, and scolded, but it's no use. Mother Hubbard has told them all kinds of tales about witches, you see, and Jill believes them all. She'll have to go to school. The other day I discovered that she always carries a wee bit of rowan wood about with her, to protect her from witches and the evil eye!"

I laughed. "Oh, she'll grow out of that. What a very fine cow Bo-peep is!"

From among the fir-trees sprang Jill, who had refused to appear before, and sped into the cottage. But she was back in a moment, with a cup full of milk.

"Would you like to taste Bo-peep's milk?" she asked politely.

Peggy looked astonished. “Miss Maxwell has had some tea, Jill.”

But Jill persisted. “I think she would like to taste Bo-peep’s milk.”

What had prompted this sudden hospitality I could not imagine, but I took a drink to please her, since she evidently wished it. There had been an anxious look on her little face, but it changed to one of relief as I drank.

“It’s very nice. Thank you, Jill.”

She seemed satisfied, and carried the cup away into the house again.

“Now I wonder what was the meaning of that?” said Peggy. “It meant something, I’m sure.”

“I’m sorry not to see Jack,” I said, and Peggy sent Sheila again to try to find him.

But Sheila came back saying that Jack and Jill had just rowed away in one of the boats, and Peggy was much annoyed.

“It iss very rude of them,” she said. “I shall give them no shortbread at tea.”

“Oh, you mustn’t do that. It’s a birthday, you know. I’ll see them to-morrow.”

“Do you want the whole four?” Peggy asked doubtfully.

“Of course, and you too. Marjory is longing to see you all.”

Next morning, as I sat typing some manuscript for father, a sound at the window made me look up. There stood Jill, gazing at me and all my things—the papers strewn about the table, the typewriter with its dancing keys and bars, and Tib sitting on a newly-finished page and watching me gravely. It was Tib’s habit always to sit on the piece of work she thought was the most important. She was very interested in the typewriter, but occasionally in her excitement she put out a paw to catch the keys, and then she had to be banished from the room.

Jill’s face was very serious as she looked at us. I smiled at her, and went to the garden door to call her in.

“Good-morning, Jill! I’m very glad to see you. Come in and speak to my kitten. I hope you are all coming this afternoon?”

She wore her everyday dress—a short navy blue skirt, a blue cotton blouse, with a big frilled collar, and a scarlet tam. She came to me slowly and shyly.

“I want to speak to you, but I don’t like the cat.”

“Come in. Tib won’t hurt you.”

“It issn’t that. It iss because witches always have cats,” Jill explained.

She followed me into the room, but kept at a safe distance from Tib.

“Boy Blue’s ill,” she remarked gloomily.

“Oh, I am sorry! What’s the matter?”

“Peggy thinks it was the shortbread. She says perhaps it was too rich. But *I* know it’s not that. I wasn’t a bit surprised,” and she scowled at me.

“Oh? What do you think it was?”

“It was *you*, and you know it was. And now you must help me to make him well again.”

“I? What do you mean, Jill? How could I make him ill?”

“Yesterday you looked at him, and you said, ‘He’s a fine strong boy.’ Sheila told me. You neffer said, ‘God bless him,’ and Sheila hadn’t the sense to say, ‘No, he’s not a strong boy,’ or he might have been none the worse. I just guessed——”

“Do you really mean to say you think Robin is ill because I made a remark about him, Jill?” I asked, amazed at this proof of what Peggy had told me yesterday.

“Yes!” she said, with a fierce outburst of temper. “It iss enough to make him ill. I said you were a witch, when I saw you kiss the cat, but I didn’t know before how bad you were. You

must have the evil eye, like old Mother Molly, and you can do harm to people by just looking at them. Why did you choose Boy Blue, the littlest of us all? You tried to bewitch Bo-peep too. I heard you. You said she was a ferry fine cow, and if I hadn't been there to make you drink some of her milk, she would have been ill by this time, like poor Boy Blue. I hate you! Issn't it enough that you are living in our house? Do you want to harm us all with your magic? I suppose you have bewitched Marjory, and that iss why she can't walk."

I laughed. Then seeing she was thoroughly in earnest, I said:

"I'm really very sorry, Jill. I never meant to do Robin any harm. I don't think I'm a witch. I have never been accused of it before, nor of having the evil eye."

She looked at me doubtfully.

"Perhaps you didn't know you had it," she admitted. "Mother Hubbard says people can have it without knowing, and they do harm without meaning to, but I wasn't sure if it was true. Are you sure you didn't do it on purpose?"

"Quite sure. I'm inclined to agree with Peggy, you know, and blame the shortbread."

But Jill brushed aside my remark as unworthy of consideration.

"Then if you didn't mean to do it, will you help me make Boy Blue well again?" she asked eagerly.

"Is there anything I can do? I'll be delighted."

"I wanted to put tar or salt all over him. That would have made him better. But Peggy wouldn't let me. The next best thing iss to burn something of yours—something you wear. Mother Hubbard says that always does good. That's why I've come."

I nearly laughed. "Would an old glove do, Jill? I have a pair you're welcome to."

"That would do ferry well," she said condescendingly, so I went to fetch the gloves.

"Here you are. I hope Boy Blue will soon be better. He's a dear little chap——"

"No, he's not! He's a bad boy, always teasing and making a noise!" Jill cried hurriedly. "Don't you see?" she explained, as I looked surprised. "You nearly did it again. You mustn't praise anybody or anything, or every one will say you are a witch. I believe it iss true too," and she looked at me suspiciously.

I laughed. "I'm very sorry. I'll try to remember. Do you think Boy Blue will be able to come this afternoon?"

"Peggy says no, he iss not to go out all day."

"I am sorry. Well, Jill, you and Jack and Sheila must come, and Peggy too. Tell Peggy I want her for a very special reason. Mother Hubbard will take care of Robin. I shall be expecting you all, and so will Marjory. Will you come upstairs and see her at once? She would be so pleased."

"I must go home now. Peggy iss sure to scold me for coming at all."

She ran off across the lawn, with my gloves in her pocket, and I went upstairs to tell Marjory the surprising news that I was a witch and had the evil eye.

CHAPTER IX.
THE GOBLIN TALE.

My reason for being so anxious that Peggy should come with the children was that in the morning we had had a note from Don, my brother, saying that he was coming to Lios that afternoon. I was very proud of Don, and I liked Peggy Colquhoun, so I wanted to introduce them. We would send the children up to Marjory, and Peggy, Don, and I would have a long talk in the garden.

Don brought good news. He had been offered, and had accepted, an appointment in Edinburgh, for which he had been hoping for some time. But he was not to begin work there till October, and was undecided how to spend the summer months.

"Come and stay with us," I suggested.

"Oh, do!" cried Marjory.

"Too slow. I wouldn't stop in a house with father and Jean for anything. Father's so wrapped up in his stories that he hasn't a word for any one. As for Jean, she's in love with her typewriter and the cat."

"But I'm here! You can talk to me!" Marjory cried indignantly.

"You! You only care about the books and sweets I bring. You pretend to be glad to see me, but your eye's on my pocket all the time."

"Mean thing! All right, stop in Edinburgh. We don't want you."

"I just won't then. I'll come here to tease you. You know old Tom Buchanan, Jean? He's doctor at Balmona, across the loch, but he wants to spend a few months in town, if he can find any one to take his place here. There's really very little to do. He says he's sometimes not wanted for days together. These mountain folk are so terribly healthy. I'm going to take on the job. It will oblige Buchanan, and I shall have a fine holiday. He has a boat, so I can go fishing. I may even get over to see you once or twice."

"We don't want you. We'd much rather you didn't," Marjory pouted.

"All right, miss. No more fairy tales and French chocolates for you."

"You won't get them in Balmona anyway," I said. "It's a tiny place."

"I'm just afraid it will be dull. Hello! Who's this?"

A boat shot out from Innis Beg. We all watched it, Marjory with great eagerness, for she was very anxious to see Peggy and the little ones. About Jack and Jill, to my surprise, she did not seem to care.

Jack and Jill and Peggy were in the boat. But when it reached the shore only Peggy stepped out. The boat put off again, and passed quickly out of sight among the islands.

"A friend of mine, come to see Marjory," I explained for Don's benefit, and hurried away to meet her.

"How is Robin, Miss Colquhoun? And where are the others?"

"Robin iss better, thank you, but I did not think he should come to-day. Sheila is keeping him company. I hope you will excuse them," Peggy said anxiously. "I am really very sorry."

"Oh, it couldn't be helped. They must come another day. And Jack and Jill?"

"I am so vexed with them," said Peggy, looking really annoyed. "They wouldn't come. I did my ferry best, but they wouldn't listen. As a rule they aren't bad children, but they were rude to you yesterday, and again to-day. I can't understand it."

"They evidently don't want to be friends," I laughed. "Do you mind coming up to Marjory's room? She is so anxious to see you."

Peggy and Marjory were delighted with one another. And I saw from Don's face how surprised he was to find a girl like Peggy in so wild a place as Lios. He looked at her whenever he thought she would not see, and while she was in the room he did not consider Marjory or me worth speaking to.

Our conversation turned at once on Jack and Jill. Peggy apologised again for their absence, and admitted that they seemed to have taken a dislike to us.

"We almost quarrelled about you at dinner," she said, in distress. "They not only refused to come to-day, but said they would not come at all. I can't make it out."

"Perhaps they look on us as enemies, because we are living in their house," Marjory suggested, with twinkling eyes.

"Jill did say something of the kind. But I can't believe they'd be so silly."

"I know why Jill objects to me," I laughed. "She says I'm a witch, because I'm so fond of Tib, and she has discovered that I have the evil eye. Do you know she says I made Boy Blue ill by looking at him?"

"She told me all about it, and I scolded her," said Peggy. "She's too big to believe in such nonsense."

We told Don of Jill's visit in the morning, and he laughed, but was greatly interested.

"I didn't think any one believed in witchcraft nowadays."

"Oh, don't they? You should talk to the country folk up the loch. They have all kinds of stories, and Jill believes them every one."

"I must make her acquaintance. If I could get enough material I'd write an article on 'The Belief in Witchcraft in the Highlands.' Then perhaps I'd see my name in print again," he laughed.

"Do you write too?" Peggy asked, with interest.

"Only now and again for the medical papers. Just for fun."

Peggy turned on me. "And you, Miss Maxwell? I'm sure you write too," as Marjory laughed. "Iss it a secret?"

"I only try, to amuse myself. Nobody is allowed to read it but Marjory. It's mostly rubbish," I admitted, "but I have so much to do with father's work that sometimes I long to do it too. I'm going to write a book some day."

"She's begun already," Marjory laughed. "I'm doing the pictures."

They begged for a sight of my manuscript, but I would not produce it, and to change the subject I said:

"Jill will probably have nothing to do with you, Don. She'll look on you as an enemy too."

"That's possible. Then she mustn't know I'm one of the enemies, that's all. You must all promise not to tell them anything about me, and I'll try to make friends with them as a stranger. Do you see?" he said to Peggy. "If they know I belong to these people"—nodding at Marjory and me—"they won't have anything to do with me. But I'll meet them by accident and make friends, and then I may find out their objection to these others. And if I can make Jill tell me all about the witches, I may be able to show her what nonsense it all is."

"If you can do that I shall be very grateful to you," Peggy said earnestly. "It bothers me very much that she should be so silly."

"I'll see what I can do. Then you won't tell them you've met me, and if the little ones come here Marjory must not speak of me."

"And if I should see Jack and Jill themselves, I won't tell them either," Marjory said, laughing.

"I'm afraid you won't see them. When they make up their minds about a thing they stick to it. But they will soon find out that you are living here," she said to Don.

"I'm going to live at Balmona for a time, in Dr. Buchanan's place. Where can I meet Jack and Jill? Do they spend all their time on your island?"

"Oh, no! They are neffer at home for one whole day. They row off to Lios, or another island, or they go fishing. There iss a wee island north of Innis Beg that iss their favourite place to play. They are on Innis Torr nearly every day."

"Thanks! I'll sail across from Balmona and meet them."

I wondered if Don's anxiety to meet Peggy Colquhoun's little brother and sister arose wholly from his wish to gather material for an article on witchcraft, or if it did not come rather from a feeling that friendship with them was the surest means to friendship with her also. If it was so I would be very glad. And that evening, he remarked:

"I think perhaps Balmona won't be so dull after all."

I did not mention the incident of Sandy to Peggy, for I knew it would annoy her. And Marjory and I begged her not to scold Jack and Jill any more, nor to try to force their friendship with us.

For several days Marjory's plant stood on her window-sill, and Jack and Jill saw it and kept away. For a while I was not busy, so I spent much of my time with her.

We sent for Red Riding Hood and Boy Blue, and they spent an afternoon with us. They were very shy at first, but I left them alone with Marjory for an hour, and when I went back they were all good friends.

They sat on Marjory's sofa, and told her all about Innis Beg and Lios; about Malcolm and Mother Hubbard; about Cigarette and Bo-peep; about their games, and about sing-song. They told tales of witches and ghosts and goblins and fairies and brownies, and evidently half believed them all. They looked through Marjory's sketch-books, and begged her to play to them, and were delighted when she played the songs they knew.

I let them have a tea-party in her room, Sheila pouring out and Robin playing waiter and carrying Marjory's cup to and fro. And when Peggy came to carry them off, Marjory would only let them go on condition they came again very soon. She did not know when she had enjoyed herself so much.

Then father gave me more work, so one evening I asked Marjory if she would mind being left alone for a time. She assured me she would not mind at all, and asked me to pull down the middle blind.

"It's too high up. I don't like it right at the top. That's enough, thank you."

She tried to amuse herself with a book, but could not enjoy it. So she threw it aside and lay waiting eagerly, her eyes fixed on the dark window. But no one came, and at last she took up her mandoline and began to play, "Will ye no' come back again?"

Jill jumped through the window.

"Go on! That's ferry pretty."

Marjory laughed. "No, I want to talk. I'm so glad to see you. I was hoping you'd come. Come away, Jack. What have you been doing lately?"

"Oh, boating, fishing, long walks—just the usual thing."

"I wish I could do those things too!"

"We went up Ben Aan one day," said Jill, curling herself up on the bed beside Marjory, like a kitten.

"What, right to the top?"

"Oh, we'd been before," Jack said loftily.

"But it iss worth going ofer and ofer again. It iss so fine at the top. You can see Edinburgh ——"

"Not really!"

"Yes, truly. And hundreds of mountains and lochs."

"How splendid!" Marjory sighed enviously.

"And we have had picnics on the islands, and up the Glen——"

"How I'd love to go for a picnic!"

"And then there iss our camp on Innis Torr. It is that wee island north of Innis Beg. You can see it from your window in the daytime. Most people call it Goblin Island. There are ruins there, and we have hiding-places for our stores, and secret cupboards, and buried boxes of provisions, and all kinds of things. We are ofer there most of the time. Oh, it iss great fun on Innis Torr!"

"I'm sure it is. It must be splendid," sighed poor Marjory.

"Peggy iss such a dear! She gives us heaps of things to play with—tea, you know, and oatmeal, and flour, and sugar, and salt. I cook, but we haven't ferry good dishes, and my porridge pot leaks. But we've a jolly wee kettle."

"What fun! I would like to be with you there."

"Jill's far too fond of messing over a fire," Jack said, with lofty scorn. "She's never so happy as when she thinks she's cooking. If she made things fit to eat it would be all right, but she doesn't."

"You should be glad to eat them whateffer they are like," Jill said indignantly, "and they're not really so bad after all. Some day, Marjory, we are going to have a party ofer there, and invite Red Riding Hood and Boy Blue."

"I can never have fun like that."

"We catch fish there," Jill chattered on thoughtlessly. "One day——"

"Look here, Jill! Talk of something else. It's not fair," said Jack, understanding Marjory's wistful look. "Can you hear us when we have sing-song?" he asked. "We've often wondered."

"Sometimes. Why do you always begin with Polly-wolly-doodle?"

"Because it's such a fine noisy one."

"Do you know how we sing it?" asked Jill, who could not sit quiet for more than one minute at a time. "We each sing a verse, and the chorus all together. Peggy sings the first, of course. Then—'I jumped on a nigger, for I thought he was a hoss'—is mine. The one about 'A grasshopper sitting on a railroad track'—is Jack's. Sheila's is—'I thought I heard a chicken sneeze,' and Robin iss so fond of the last one:

'He sneezed so hard wid de hooping-cough,
He sneezed his head and his tail right off!' "

Marjory laughed. "And can Peggy play all the songs?"

"All that we——"

"All right, Katie. I'll come down to Cook in a moment."

A voice in the passage, and a hand on the door-handle.

"The Girl!" gasped Jill.

"Jean! Oh, dear!" cried Marjory.

Jack seized his sister, whose wits had deserted her when she needed them most, and dragged her to the floor.

"Under the bed, quick!"

Marjory began to laugh, and they disappeared hastily, only just in time. Jill's feet slipped out of sight as I entered.

"Marjory, I've brought you Tib. She's been trying to investigate the under parts of my typewriter again, and I'm afraid she'll get a paw chopped off. Will you have her?"

I threw Tib on to the bed, but she jumped to the floor and walked about, lashing her tail indignantly. Suddenly she jumped and arched her back, and spat, at sight of something under the bed.

"What frightened her, I wonder?"

"Perhaps I moved and made the shadows jump. All right, Jean, leave her here."

So I went back to my work, and Jack and Jill crept out. Tib spat furiously again at sight of them, and Marjory laughed.

"That was a narrow escape!"

"I think we had better go home. I don't want the Girl to find us. Peggy would be so dreatfully angry."

"Think she'll come back?" asked Jack.

"It's not likely. Why don't you like cats, Jill?" For Tib was offering to make friends, to Jill's evident dismay.

"It's because witches have black cats," said Jack.

"It issn't only that. Cats are horrid. They make it rain."

"How?" asked Marjory, laughing.

"If they sit with their backs to the fire, you know, or sneeze, or wash behind their ears, or ____"

"Do you *really* believe all that, Jill?"

Jill nodded. "Don't you? Efferybody here does. Some day we'll tell you the Goblin tale of Innis Torr, and frighten you so that you'll scream."

"Tell me now! Oh, do!"

Jill was nothing loth. But she hesitated.

"Are you sure the Girl won't come again? I don't like being frightened."

"She's busy downstairs. She won't come again, Jill."

"Ferry well. Put down the lamp so that it iss quite dark. Leave the blind up and the window open, Jack, so that we can see the Goblin's eyes glaring at us out of the night. Now sit down and don't move."

"You'll make her scream, and then the Author will come up."

"No, she won't. I'm ready, Jill."

Marjory stroked Tib into quietness, as she settled down in the hollow of her arm, and she folded her tail over her nose and went to sleep. Jack lay across the foot of the bed, and Jill curled up close to Marjory, yet at a safe distance from Tib, and began to speak in a low mysterious voice.

"Once upon a time, more than a hundred and one years ago, a boat came sailing down the loch to Lios. It had no oars nor sail, and in it there sat a witch. When it came to the wee island, Innis Torr, it stopped, and she landed. There was a watch-tower there, belonging to the chief, who lived in Lios Castle, and the witch went and lived in it. This made the chief and his men

ferry angry, and they were still more angry when she began to work magic spells and do all kinds of harm. She raised dreatful storms on the loch, she bewitched the cows, she had the evil eye and she looked at the children and made them ill. She turned into a wolf or a hare, and ran about all ofer the country. She used to ride on a broomstick ofer the roofs of the village. So effery one hated her, and the chief told her she must go away.

"She was ferry angry, but when she found he would kill her if she stayed, she sailed away. The people were ferry glad, and on Hallowe'en night there was a great feast at the castle, because she had gone. It was a dreatful night—thunder and lightning and hail, and a great storm on the loch, but they were all dancing and didn't care. But in the middle of the dancing, just as the clock struck twelve,"—Jill's voice grew solemnly impressive—"there came a great knocking on the door, louder than the music of the pipes. When they opened the door, there stood the witch.

" 'I haf gone away,' she said, in an awful voice, while they all stared and trembled, 'but I haf sent some one insteat of me. To-morrow night at midnight he will come!' Then she disappeared in the darkness again.

"Well, the next night they all expected something dreatful to happen, so they stayed in their houses and bolted the doors. And when it was dark, and efferything was quiet, and the children were in bed, they all waited and waited and waited, and nobody dared to go outside. From the chief in the castle to the poorest old woman in the village, they were frightened, and if a dog barked or a door banged, they shivered. So they all waited till the church clock struck twelve. And then—and then"—her voice sank to an eerie whisper, and she paused impressively and looked fearfully over her shoulder. Marjory gripped her hand, and glanced at the dark corners and the dark open window—"then they heard a splashing noise by the loch—and then they heard Something out in the street—soft slow steps, going up and down, under the windows and past the doors—stealthy creeping steps, and a dragging noise, like great heavy feet and a big heavy tail. Then a snuffling breathing sound under the door or against the windows, and they knew It could smell them and was trying to get in."

"I—think—you might shut the window, Jack," Marjory said tremulously.

"Hush! Don't speak! It still goes about at night. Well, in all the houses the people listened and shivered and hardly dared to breathe, and no one would look out of the window. But in one house where there was a slit in the shutter, they peeped through, and saw two great blazing eyes go past. And effery night it was the same. The Thing—they called It the Goblin—only came after dark, and effery night he came, and they heard his soft heavy feet and tail, and his horrid breathing under the doors. Sometimes he pushed against the windows, as if he would break in the shutters, and sometimes he rattled the door-handles."

The handle of Marjory's door turned suddenly. They all started, and Marjory gave a little scream. Then some one came in.

Jill jumped up, in terror of the Goblin. Jack seized her, and they slipped behind a curtain.

"Why, Marjory, all in the dark?" I asked in surprise.

The lamp stood on the table by the bed. Marjory turned up the light, and looked round the room, feeling dazed and bewildered, and half expecting to see the Goblin's eyes in every corner.

"I turned down the light for a little while," she said.

I laughed. "You look as if you'd been seeing ghosts. Were you lonely, dear? I'll stop work, and come and sit with you."

"No, please don't. I know you want to finish that chapter. I'm all right. I like being alone. I'd really rather you didn't, Jean."

"I think I must have left my little brush here. My letters are getting full of dust. All the e's are coming out as o's."

Marjory laughed. "Oh, you shouldn't let it get like that. Use a pin and an old toothbrush."

"Here's my own brush. Is Tib behaving well?" and I stopped to stroke the kitten.

"She's very good. Now go back to your work, or you won't get it done, Jean."

So I went away, and Jill jumped out indignantly.

"The mean thing! She's spoiled my story! It was just getting creepy."

"It was dreadful," Marjory confessed, shivering. "I thought she was the Goblin. Tell me what he was like, Jill."

Jill put down the lamp, and curled up on the bed again.

"It was the chief's daughter, Helen Colquhoun, who was brave enough to look at the Goblin. None of the men would do it, but Helen was a brave lass. She looked out of the window, but all she could see in the dark was a huge black body, and a great head, with eyes on fire, and a big heavy tail. Nobody effer saw more of the Goblin than that, but effery night he stalked up and down the streets in the dark. And once he killed a man, who was coming home late from the fields, and once he caught a boy, who had to go out for an errand, and he was neffer heard of again.

"The people were in a dreatful state, and didn't know what to do. So the chief's daughter, Helen, who was as cleffer as she was brave, and as brave as she was good, and as good as she was pretty—she went to a wise woman who lived up the loch at Dunreoch, and asked what they must do. It was a dreatful thing she was told! The Goblin would go on haunting Lios streets effery night and always, unless a girl, who must be young and good and beautiful, went out willingly to meet him. She would be killed, but the Goblin would do no more harm. Well, Helen thought about that for effer so long, and then one night, without telling anybody, she went out, all alone, to meet the Goblin."

"Oh, Jill! Not really?"

"She did so. It iss true. She was our great-great-grandmother, for—that iss what makes it so dreatful and so ferry good of her—she had been married for a little while, and she left a tiny wee baby boy behind her. He was our great-grandfather. What she did has neffer been forgotten in Lios, and neffer will be. There iss always a Helen Colquhoun in effery family, just as there iss always a boy called James after the old chiefs."

"There isn't in yours."

"There was. Helen and Jim came between Peggy and Jack. They were drowned in a storm on the loch long ago, before Robin was born. That is why Peggy will neffer let Jack and me go sailing alone."

"Oh, I didn't know.—— And what about the Goblin?"

"He neffer troubled Lios again. He went away to the wee island, Innis Torr, and he iss still there at night. In the daytime it iss quite safe, and we play there, but there iss no one in Lios would go to Goblin Island after dark."

"Do people *really* believe he is still there, Jill?"

"Why, of course! You wouldn't find a Lios man send his worst enemy there at night. Once a man went ofer there in the dark, and he was neffer seen again. Most of all, no girl would go there, for a man might escape, but a girl neffer could. If a girl stayed on Innis Torr all night she would certainly be eaten up before the morning."

“Does Peggy believe that?”

“She’d say no, but I don’t think she’d spend the night on Goblin Island.”

“Not she!” laughed Jack. “If you asked her to, she’d say, ‘The Goblin is all nonsense, but all the same I’d rather not risk it.’ Jill, my child, do you know the time?”

“No, iss it late? Oh, dear, we ought to be home. The time’s gone ferry quickly. I wish you could hear Mother Hubbard tell the Goblin tale ofer the kitchen fire, Marjory. That makes you shiver. I can’t tell it properly.”

“It was quite bad enough,” said Marjory, laughing.

“Some nights after hearing Mother Hubbard’s stories, I have gone to bed and listened, and listened, till I heard the Goblin’s feet and tail outside. Yes, really! He often goes about on dark nights. Lots of people have heard him. I never dared to look out of the window while he was about, or I’d have seen his fiery eyes.”

“I wonder you aren’t afraid to go about at night.”

“We don’t wait very late, you know. And of course we neffer go near Innis Torr.”

“She’s sometimes frightened on the way home,” said Jack. “If a fish jumps, she screams.”

“Oh, what a story! We must go, really, Marjory.”

“But you’ll come again soon? Jean has begun a long story, so I shall be alone most evenings. If you don’t come soon, I shall tell her all about it.”

I was in father’s room consulting him about a word I could not read in his manuscript, when we heard a noise at the foot of the tower.

“The ghost!” I said, and ran out by the garden door.

A broken branch of ivy lay on the ground, but there was no one to be seen. We questioned Marjory, and she admitted having heard a noise.

“What could a ghost want up in our ivy?” asked father.

“Perhaps he was peeping at Marjory. We’ll have to shut her window after dark.”

“Oh! please don’t! I do so like it open.”

“It’s very curious,” father said. “So long as the ghost only puzzles us it’s all right, but if he takes to doing mischief, we’ll have to set a trap for him.”

CHAPTER X.
AN ADVENTURE ON GOBLIN ISLAND.

One morning Sheila found a letter lying beside her porridge plate. This was most unusual, for the postman never came to Innis Beg. Jack and Jill rowed over to Lios regularly to see if any letters were waiting at the post-office, but they never went before breakfast.

It was addressed to "Miss Sheila Colquhoun. Innis Beg. By Lios. Loch Avie." She opened it with a puzzled face.

"GOBLIN ISLAND.

"Red Riding Hood, Boy Blue, and Cigarette are invited to a tea-party on Innis Torr this afternoon at three o'clock. A boat will call for them at a quarter to three. The feast will be held at half-past four.

"By Order of
"THE GOBLIN."

"What effer does it mean?" cried Sheila, and looked round in much surprise.

Jack looked conscious, and Jill began to giggle. Robin gazed at them with round eyes.

"I don't want to go, if the Goblin's going to be there! I'd rather stay at home with Peggy."

"It iss just some game of yours, Jack and Jill," Sheila cried eagerly. "You have been busy over on Innis Torr for ever so long. Have you been making a surprise?"

Jack nodded, and Jill said eagerly,

"There issn't any Goblin in the daytime, you know, Robin. Jack would put that in. There's nothing to be frightened of."

"I am the Goblin—in the daytime," said Jack. "We never stay after dark, and the Goblin only comes out at night, you know. In the daytime it's quite safe. There's going to be a grand feast, so of course Boy Blue will come. Peggy, we didn't ask you because we thought you were going over to Strongarra."

"Miss Maxwell asked me. I did hope you and Jill would go with me, Jack. It is very rude to refuse so often, and it is troubling me very much that you won't do what I wish."

"Some other day, perhaps, Peggy."

"But you always say that!"

"Well, we couldn't possibly go to-day, because of our party. Some day we are going to have a great feast and invite you."

At half-past two, Red Riding Hood and Boy Blue and Cigarette were waiting on the shore, and presently a boat put off from Innis Torr, the tiny islet lying north of Innis Beg.

But what a strange boat it was! Branches of trees, little bushes, bunches of leaves and flowers, were stuck into holes or tied to the oars and sides and rowlocks. Boughs of hawthorn in full flower, of elder and rowan with great flat heads of blossom, long trailing branches of wild rose and bramble, covered everything but the seats. Jack and Jill sat among the flowers and greenery like birds in a nest, but little more could be seen than a bonnet and a scarlet tam. It was Jill's idea. Jack had scoffed and called it silly, but had yielded to her remonstrances that they could not go in an ordinary everyday boat.

"Jump in! Now for Goblin Island!"

As they drew near to Innis Torr, Jack's tone became commanding, and Jill's unconsciously grew respectful. Jack sat in the stern to steer, and Jill rowed her hardest, while Sheila sat with her arms round Cigarette, for he did not like the water.

It was a tiny island, with a broad beach and a tangled mass of bushes in the centre. A few rowan or birch trees rose out of the undergrowth, and in the middle of the island was a ruined tower. The walls were still standing and overgrown with ivy, but the roof had fallen in. There were long narrow window-slits in the walls, and all around lay piles of stone covered with moss.

The boat grounded on the beach and they sprang ashore. Cigarette ran off at once in search of rabbits.

"Now, Jill, go and make sure it's all ready. Then come back and we'll have a game. You know," he explained, "on Innis Torr I am the captain and Jill is the servant. But the work's all done to-day."

For a while they played hide-and-seek among the bushes and heaps of stone, and paddled in the loch to cool themselves at intervals. When they were playing ducks and drakes with flat stones, Cigarette, who had found no rabbits, came running back to join them. He tried to catch the stones, and barked furiously as they sprang beyond his reach. Then he gave it up in disgust, and ran off again.

"It's time for the feast," said Jack at last, and Robin gave a shout of delight.

"Where is the feast to be?" Sheila asked curiously. "I don't see anything to eat."

"Ah! Follow me, if you please!"

Captain Jack led the way down a narrow winding path among the bushes. It was damp and gloomy, and Boy Blue clutched Sheila's hand, remembering that this was Goblin Island.

A little doorway in the tower opened before them. It was so low that they had to stoop to enter, and the passage was nearly blocked by a mass of fallen stone. Jack scrambled over this and crept under the arch.

The walls of the tower made a cosy little room whose roof was the sky. The carpet was grass and ferns and flowers, and the arm-chairs strewn about were great moss-covered stones. Ivy wreaths adorned the walls, and here and there stood hawthorn bushes with clouds of sweet white flowers.

The table for the feast was a flat stone slab, raised a little above the grass. Close by was a fire burning bravely on another stone, and a kettle hung over it from three sticks gipsy-fashion. The table had no cloth, but was set with tin cups and plates, and dishes of cakes. And on the table sat Cigarette.

Jack and Jill gave a howl of dismay, and rushed at him. He fled round the table, and escaped through the doorway. Sheila and Robin ran up to see what damage was done, and Jill began to cry.

The dishes were knocked over, and cakes and sweets lay all about the table. Several cakes and scones had one great bite out of them, as if the thief had tasted but had not liked them. A mug that had held primroses, and a little sugar-basin were upset.

"Oh, the brute! The beast! The thief! It's a good thrashing he'll get to-night!" Jack stormed.

"My pretty table! And all our cakes! It was such a splendid feast!" wailed Jill.

Sheila began to gather up the fragments.

"He hasn't eaten so very much, Jill, dear. We'll soon make it all right again. Issn't it a good job he didn't spill the milk?"

"That's so. It might have been worse, Jill. Cheer up, old girl, and let's make the best of it."

"He's eaten all the shortbread!" Jill said dismally. "I hope he'll be sick to-night—I just do! I shan't be sorry for him. Greedy pig!"

"Greedy dog, you mean," said Robin.

"There! It looks all right again, and I'm dreadfully hungry. Where did you get all the things, Jill? From Peggy?"

"Yes, issn't she a darling? Shall I make the tea, captain? The kettle's boiling."

"All right. We're ready."

As they sat down, Cigarette's head appeared in the doorway, in search of his share in the feast. Jack indignantly threw a stone at him and he disappeared.

"This is jolly!" Sheila sighed contentedly. "Where did you get all the dishes, Jill? That tea-pot came from our kitchen, I know. And the wee jug—I thought it must be broken! Did you run off with it then?"

"We had to have dishes, you know," Jill said, laughing. "We keep them in a secret hiding-place."

"What fun! How Marjory would like to be here! But I forgot, you don't know Marjory. It's ferry silly of you, Jack and Jill. Robin and I like her effer so much."

Jack winked and laughed across at Jill.

"We'll maybe make friends with her some day. Jill doesn't like the Maxwell Girl because of her cat."

"She iss a witch. She made Robin ill."

"Oh, Jill! You know it was the shortbread. Miss Maxwell's very nice."

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, have you all got tea? Then"—Jack rose with his cup in his hand—"I drink to—the Goblin! Highland honours, please! There's plenty more tea. Hip, hip, hurrah!"

They all sprang up, and put one foot on the table while they drank. Then Jack, crying, "Three cheers for the Goblin!" threw his cup over his shoulder, and the others, cheering heartily, did the same.

"That's right! Now we'll have some more tea," and Jack gathered up the cups from the grass.

"Issn't it rather a waste of tea?" asked Sheila.

Jill laughed. "It was mostly water, Sheila. I made it weak on purpose."

"We're on the Goblin's island, so we had to drink his health," Jack explained.

"I'm very much obliged to you, ladies and gentlemen," said a voice.

They looked at one another. Boy Blue paused in the middle of a bite. Sheila laid down her scone and stared at Jack, who looked startled.

"Who iss it?" gasped Jill.

"The Goblin himself, to be sure, and he wants to know what you're doing on his island," said the voice.

Robin screamed and fled to Sheila for protection. She put her arm round him, but trembled herself. Jill dropped the tea-pot, and Jack sprang up and gazed around.

"I can't see any one," he muttered. "Who can it be?"

The voice had seemed to come from one of the narrow windows high up in the wall, but there was no one to be seen. Robin began to cry. Sheila nearly did the same. On the other side of the ruined wall Cigarette began to bark furiously.

"There must be some one there!" Jill cried. "Go and see, Jack."

Jack hesitated. Cigarette rushed through the doorway, barking excitedly.

"There iss some one coming after him," cried Jill, trembling and terrified.

A man entered the ruin. He was young, and dressed in a tweed suit and cap, and he carried a fishing-rod. He came straight to them, laughing at their consternation.

"Won't you give me a cup of tea? I want a share in the feast. Don't look at me like that, Red Riding Hood! I'm not your friend the wolf. You see, I know your names—all of them. Perhaps a witch told me. Boy Blue, come and feel in my pockets. There's something good in them."

Robin disappeared hurriedly under Sheila's red cloak. Jack approached the stranger.

"Who are you? Why did you try to frighten us? What do you want here?"

"Fish—or fun. At the present moment, I'm waiting for a cup of tea. My pockets are full of good things, which I'm willing to exchange for a share in the feast. But don't look at me as if I was a wild beast, please. It makes me feel bad."

He sat down and lit a cigarette. The little ones looked at Jack, and Jack looked at Jill. Jill picked up the tea-pot.

"What iss it you have in your pockets?"

Don laughed, and pulled out a paper bag.

"Peppermint rock—from Edinburgh."

Jill poured some milk into a cup. "Anything else?"

"Nuts!" and he laid another bag on the table.

Jill put in two lumps of sugar, for she had never heard of any one who did not take sugar. "Anything else?"

"Let me see—no, those are cigarettes. Ah! I thought there was something more."

He opened a bag and showed a handful of chocolate animals—hens, fish, dogs, cats, and horses' heads.

"How fine!" Jack cried admiringly. "I never saw those before. You didn't get them in Lios."

Jill poured out the tea and offered the cup.

"We're ferry glad to see you," she said graciously. "Will you have a scone? I'm sorry to say the dog has eaten all the shortbread—the beast!"

"Boy Blue," said Sheila softly, hoping not to be noticed, "just look at the funny wee cats and dogs! You neffer saw anything so pretty."

Don laughed. She reddened and looked frightened, so he took no more notice of the little ones.

"Aren't you going to ask my name?" he enquired.

"Of course not," Jack said promptly, as he divided the chocolate animals, and Jill explained:

"In the Highlands we will neffer be asking a gentleman's name unless he tells it us himself. He might be an enemy, you see, and then it would be so awkward. I suppose you are English?"

"Oh, dear no. My name's Donald Macdonald, and I'm the doctor at Balmona. But nobody there is ever ill, so to-day I'm out for a sail. Hello! Look at the dog!"

Cigarette had for some time been watching from afar. He had crept gradually closer, drawn by the cigarette smoke, but keeping one eye on Jack all the time. At last he plucked up courage to place himself beside Don, sitting with his head thrown back and gazing in rapt attention at the smoke clouds.

"Whatever's wrong with him?"

Jack laughed. "It's your smoke. He loves any one who smokes."

"His name iss Cigarette, and he has a pipe of his own at home."

"Sheila," whispered Boy Blue, "I'm not going to eat my choco cat and hen and horse. I'm going to keep them for always, and take them to bed with me."

"I think I shall eat two and keep two for Peggy," Sheila whispered back.

"Who is the Goblin?" asked Don. "I really don't know anything about him, except what I heard you say, you know."

"Oh, it iss a dreatful story. It was more than a hundred and one years ago——"

"Jill, don't tell it while Boy Blue's here!" cried Sheila. "You know he'll cry after he goes to bed."

"I forgot. But it shouldn't be told in daylight anyway. The right time iss when it iss quite dark, and you sit round the kitchen fire, and Cigarette's eyes are like green lights, and Mother Hubbard whispers it up the chimney. Then you shiver and nearly scream, and are afraid to go to bed. That iss the proper way. And when you do go to bed you put your head under the bedclothes for fear you will hear the Goblin's heavy feet and tail outside the door, or his breathing at the window, or see his blazing eyes in the dark corners."

Don laughed. "No wonder Boy Blue is frightened! You must tell me some time when he is not here. How would you like to go sailing with me the day after to-morrow? I find sailing alone dull work, and I hardly know my way about yet. We might go away up the loch."

"How simply splendid!" Jill cried eagerly, and Jack exclaimed,

"It's awfully good of you! We just love sailing, but Peggy—she's our sister—won't let us go alone."

"We'll show you everything!" Jill cried. "Ben Aan, and the Alps, and Old Man Mountain, and Rob Roy's waterfall, and the Cave, and the place where he used to duck his prisoners in the loch."

"We ought to have a jolly time," Don laughed. "The day after to-morrow, then. I'll sail across for you early in the morning."

"Now we ought to be going home," said Jack. "I suppose you weans will want another tea from Mother Hubbard, and it's half-past five already. If you'll come home with us," he said to Don, "we'll be delighted to give you some tea too. I'm afraid Cigarette didn't leave very much."

"That's very good of you. I should like——"

"Peggy's not at home, but that doesn't matter. We'll get on fine without her."

"I don't think I'd better come to-day. It's time I was getting home too. But some other day I will come, if you will let me. Just look at that dog! He hasn't moved."

"And he neffer will, unless you stop smoking. He iss always like that."

"Sheila!" cried Boy Blue. "Oh, just look!" and he began to cry.

"What iss it, Boy Blue? What iss the matter, dear?"

"My choco cat—I was keeping him for Peggy—he's gone all soft! What shall I do?"

"Eat him quick!" Jack cried, laughing. "Of course he's gone soft if you kept holding him in your hand."

"I wanted Peggy to see him! Now he's all squashy and horrid."

"I'll give you one of mine for Peggy, Robin," said Sheila. "See, mine are all right. I wrapped them up in paper," so Boy Blue was happy again.

"That's just like Red Riding Hood," Jill remarked, as they went down to the boats.

“Good-bye till Wednesday,” cried Don, and they parted company near Innis Beg.

CHAPTER XI.
THE FAIRY OF INNIS BEG.

"You and Jack have been playing ghost again," said Marjory one evening.

Jill's eyes twinkled. "I'm not denying it. Why shouldn't we have a bit of fun?"

She was lying stretched on the bed, her chin in her hands, her eyes fixed on Marjory.

"Have you heard the Goblin yet?"

"No. I don't believe in him. But somebody has told our servants about him."

"It would be Mother Hubbard's Sandy. Good boy!"

"So now they won't go out after dark. Somebody has been frightening them, and I'm inclined to think it was you and Jack."

"It's just possible," Jill admitted. "What happened?"

"When Katie went out to the wood-shed one night, she saw something white run across the yard. And when cook went to bring in some things that were hanging out to dry, she found the line cut through and the clothes fallen in the dirt. One night they heard a great noise near the hen-house, but were too frightened to go and see what it was. Mr. Maxwell and Jean say they are going to set traps for the ghost."

"It would be the brownie!" Jill exclaimed, with round serious eyes. "There iss a brownie living in the kitchen. He used to do work and help Mother Hubbard, because he was ferry fond of us. But if he doesn't like your servants he will always be teasing and making trouble. I expect he iss angry because he finds we are all away."

"I don't believe in brownies—or witches or goblins either. Are you sure it wasn't you and Jack?"

Jill laughed, and changed the subject.

"We've found such a nice man! He's the new doctor at Balmona, and his name's Don Macdonald. We met him on Goblin Island, and he scared us out of our wits by pretending to be the Goblin. He always has something good in his pocket—nuts, or chocolate beasts, or Edinburgh rock"—Marjory laughed. "And he has a sailing boat, so the other day we went with him away up the loch past Ben Aan, and had a picnic at Rob Roy's waterfall. Have you read Rob Roy?"

"Yes, since we came to Loch Avie."

"I have read it nine times," Jill said solemnly.

"Dear me! And did you all go to the picnic?"

"No, just Jack and me. We took *him* home with us, and Peggy gave him tea. He seemed to enjoy himself ferry much, and he iss coming again. We talked all the way about witches and goblins and ghosts and fairies. He didn't know much, but we told him effer so many things. We told him of old Mother Molly at Ardtyre who has the evil eye, and he wants to see her. But if we go he will have to carry a bit of rowan wood, like I do, or he won't be safe. That iss Jack whistling! I must go."

"Why didn't he come with you to-night?"

"He came to the house, and then said he had something to do. I don't know what he iss after. He said I was to go when he whistled like a blackbird. Good-bye!"

She kissed Marjory, and hurried down the ivy ladder.

"Well? What iss it? What have you been doing?"

"Come with me," and Jack led the way to the tiny summer-house near the water.

"You know I said we'd been playing ghost long enough. It's time to do something else now."

"I heard you say it. What do you want us to do? I'm ready. Marjory says the servants are scared already."

"So much the better. Look what I found lying here."

He showed a couple of books which I had carelessly left there in the afternoon.

"I'm going to take them home and hide them. They shouldn't be lying about anyway."

"But that's stealing!" cried Jill, with round eyes.

"Well, they're enemies, and living in our house. All's fair in love and war."

"That's so. All right. Issn't there anything else we can take?"

"Yes. I've been searching. Come with me."

He led her across the lawn in the dark, round the house, and into the conservatory, and struck a match.

On a shelf lay some packets of seeds I meant to sow when I had time, so that we might have mignonette and sweet peas in September. Jill put them in her pocket.

"Next, captain. Oh!" she gasped. "Here comes some one with a light! They must have seen your match."

Jack rushed to the door, and ran into—Mother Hubbard's Sandy.

"Oh! It's only you! Thank goodness! What do you mean by it, Sandy?"

"Cook will see a light, Master Jack, and she will send me to see if it wass ta Goblin."

"Because she was afraid to come herself. Just like her. What will you be telling them, Sandy?"

"I sall say it wass ta Goblin, and I saw his eyes, and heart his teet, whateffer. I sall say he iss at the toor now, and they will scream."

"That's fine. You stick to that."

"Do those two bully you, Sandy?" asked Jill sympathetically.

"They will always pe scolting, but I don't mind. I frighten them and they squeal, and then I am glad. They say they will see ta Goblin, but it wass only me with two lanterns, creeping apout in ta tark."

"Good for you!" said Jack, laughing. "But don't frighten Marjory."

"I haf not seen her, whateffer."

"Don't tell any one you've seen us, Sandy."

"I sall say it wass ta Goblin, Master Jack."

"That's right. Good-night! Now, Jill, we'd better get home. Next time it might be the Author."

"I want to look at those books," said Jill, as they stepped ashore on Innis Beg. "Bring a lantern up into the tree, Jack."

One of the books proved to be "Rob Roy," which I had been re-reading. It had pictures, so they looked through them, criticising each one unfavourably because my name was on the front page.

The other was one of father's books, which I had been looking over again. Of course I knew it nearly by heart, but I was very fond of it, and liked to read over my favourite chapters.

At sight of the name on the cover, Jack cried, "It's by the Author! Then it must be rubbish. I wouldn't think of reading it."

"Oh, of course not," yet Jill looked at the book curiously.

“Where shall we hide them? Here, I suppose, or Peggy’ll find them. We must take good care of them.”

The books and packets of seeds were wrapped up in a plaid which always lay hidden inside the hollow tree. Then they were placed carefully inside the trunk.

“That is the beginning of our secret hoard. We’ll get more whenever we have the chance,” said Jack.

That evening as Jill lay in her bed in the wall, she thought of the new book lying in the tree. She was fond of reading, but just at present new books were rare. The title had looked interesting. What could it be about? Perhaps it had pictures. What kind of books did the Author write? He was the first author she had ever seen. She would like to read a book written by a man she knew, even if he was an enemy.

And in the morning, when the dishes were washed and the bedrooms tidied, and Peggy gave her leave to go, she stole up to the tree, after a cautious look round lest Jack should see her. As she reached it, Jack jumped down from a branch and ran off without speaking.

“I do believe,” said Jill to herself, “he has been looking at that book.”

She climbed up and unearthed the book from its hiding-place. Yes, there were pictures. They looked exciting. And soon she was deep in the first chapter.

“Hello!” said Jack, coming up an hour later. “You are a nice one! Thought you weren’t going to read it?”

“Didn’t you begin it this morning? I know you did. It’s awfully exciting,” said Jill, with a gasp of enjoyment. “It’s mysterious too. I must know how it goes on.”

“He’s an enemy——”

“Then we ought to know what kind of books our enemy writes,” Jill cried triumphantly. “I’m going on with it now I’ve begun, anyway.”

“But I say! It’s a proper grown-up novel. I know, for I looked at the end——”

“Oh, you disgraceful boy!”

“I must read it first to see if it’s fit for you. You’re only a girl, and not old enough——”

“Go on!” Jill said contemptuously, and buried herself in the book again.

Jack came up the tree hurriedly.

“Where’ve you got to? Oh, I was in the next chapter. Hurry up, and we’ll read it together.”

“Go and get a piece from Mother Hubbard for lunch. I’m hungry, but I can’t move. Don’t bring bread and jam, it’s too sticky.”

“Peggy’ll give us scones. She’s baking fresh ones. Dr. Macdonald’s coming to tea. He’s just been over to say so. Didn’t you see him?”

“No, I wasn’t looking. All right. Don’t bother me.”

At the moment Jill had no interest in Dr. Macdonald, or in anything else but the book. The author would have felt highly flattered if he could have seen her.

When Jack returned with the scones she had caught him up, so they sat close together, with the book between them, and only spoke to say “Ready?” before turning a page.

“You have been ferry quiet all day, Jack and Jill,” said Peggy at tea. “Where have you been? Over on Innis Torr? But the boats have not been out. What have you been doing?”

“Plotting and planning in some corner,” suggested Don.

Peggy looked anxiously at Jill, who said, with an injured air,

“We’ve been busy, that is all. There iss no need to worry, Peggy. Issn’t that good shortbread, Don?”

“The best I ever tasted.”

"Jill, it issn't very polite to call a visitor by his name like that."

"He told us to. Have some of this cake, Don. It's from the shop in Lios, not home-made stuff," said Jack.

"I prefer the home-made stuff, thanks," said Don, laughing.

As soon as tea was over Jack and Jill retired to the oak-tree again. If the first part of the book had been exciting, what could be said of the second? They read breathlessly, skimming the pages, and were half-way through the book when the light began to fail.

"Oh, dear! I want to know what it all means. I must know! I shan't be able to sleep. Do let us look on a few pages, Jack. I must know what's going to happen."

"Nonsense! You can wait till to-morrow. You've got to anyway," and Jack rolled up the book in the plaid.

"Let me take it to bed with me, and read it in the early morning."

"Likely, isn't it?"

"Well, promise you won't."

"I wouldn't do anything so silly. Oh, I'll play fair. We'll finish it to-morrow. We ought to have been talking to Don Macdonald, Jill."

"Bother! Neffer mind. Peggy's been looking after him. He likes talking to her because she's grown-up. I wonder if the Maxwells have missed the books?"

"Sure to have. They'll put it down to the ghost. Marjory and Mother Hubbard's Sandy will guess, but they won't tell. There's Peggy calling. Come and say good-night to Don."

The unusual quietness of the noisy members of the family had been troubling Peggy, but she had had no time to worry. The visitor had to be entertained, and she found entertaining him very easy. As Jack and Jill came down the tree, since they could no longer see to read, she came with Don along the path from the northern end of the island. She had been asking him the names of some curious ferns that grew in the crannies of the rocks, and found that he seemed to know them all.

As for Don, if he found the cottage and tiny farm interesting because Peggy lived there, how much more delightful were the wild parts of the island, with the lonely hidden nooks, and no one but the birds to overhear their talk! They had been enjoying themselves exceedingly, and had quite forgotten Jack and Jill.

But after Don had set sail, and the children were all away to bed, Peggy sat sewing, and puzzling over the strange quietness of the usually noisy pair. They had spent the whole day in the oak-tree, only coming down for meals. They had never left the island once. It was most unusual. What could they have been doing?

As a rule, she never tried to find out their secrets, but to-night she could not help feeling suspicious and rather anxious. They must have been up to some mischief. What could it be?

At last, with a sudden resolve, she threw down her work—one of Robin's blue pinafores, which were always in holes—and, jumping up she hurried into her tiny bedroom, where Sheila lay asleep. She changed her muslin skirt for a short morning one, and kilted this up, with safety pins. Then she ran out, and stood doubtfully under the big tree.

Could she do it? Once she would have thought nothing of it, but now she was not so sure of herself. She looked round anxiously, then laughed at herself. No one could possibly see her but Mother Hubbard.

"But even Mother Hubbard would be *very* much surprised, and she might be shocked!" she thought, smiling.

She placed her toe in a hole and sprang up, and at the second attempt succeeded in grasping a branch and drawing herself up. She laughed a little, as she sat panting among the leaves. How Jack's respect for her would increase if he could see her now!

It was full moon. She could see Strongarra, and the garden, and Lios, with its dark masses of trees. The loch was a sheet of silver right up to the feet of Ben Aan, and between Innis Beg and the shore lay a shining strip of water.

"What a very lovely place I live in, even when it iss all black and white and no colours!" said Peggy to herself, and turned to investigate.

A tin box, containing three scones, saved from lunch or tea; another with a few biscuits and some pieces of oatmeal cake; a packet of peppermint rock, a bag of chocolates, and another of almond toffee—presents from Don Maxwell. He was far too good to them. An old doll, and a pair of pistols; Boy Blue's mouth-organ and penny whistle—and Peggy laughed. Jack had confiscated those at sing-song the other night.

That was all, except the old plaid, bundled into the hollow trunk. Peggy did not look twice at it. She herself had given it to them in case they should want shelter from a sudden storm.

She found nothing more, and no explanation of Jack and Jill's strange behaviour. So, more puzzled than ever, she turned to climb down again.

From the shadowy arch of a great weeping willow that hung over the bank and dipped into the water, a little boat shot out, and the rower lay on his oars, and looked up into the oak-tree.

"Good evening, Miss Colquhoun."

Peggy gave a cry of dismay, and gazed down at him from among the leaves.

"Dr. Macdonald!—Dr. Maxwell, I mean."

"I hope you will excuse me. I really didn't mean to disturb you," he said, smiling. "But I'm spending the night at Strongarra, and I found they had that book I promised you. So I thought you might like to have it at once."

"How long have you been hiding there?" she demanded severely, though her eyes twinkled.

"Only three minutes, really."

"What was I doing when you came?"

"Admiring the view."

"I didn't hear you coming."

"I brought the boat across from Lios and round the end of the island, and I came very quietly for fear of frightening you."

"How good of you!" she said, laughing. "You should have gone away when you saw I was —busy! But it iss good of you to bring the book at once."

She settled herself comfortably on a branch, keeping her short skirt well out of sight, and hoping the unusual exertion had not shaken her hair nearly down. It had certainly loosened it, for she could feel the wind blowing it about, and she feared she must look a fright.

"You are thinking I have gone crazy?" she said, looking down at him.

"Indeed I'm not. You're trying to find out what kept Jack and Jill so quiet."

"But I can't. There's nothing suspicious here at all."

"Shall I come up and help?"

"No, you needn't mind," she said, laughing. "Thank you effer so much for the book. We all love reading, but we hardly effer get any new books here. I don't know when Jack and Jill had anything new to read. Put the book down on that big stone, please. Now you must go away again. Good-night!"

“Are you sure you can get down without hurting yourself?”

“Quite sure, thank you! I shall get down as soon as you’re away. But—Dr. Maxwell! I don’t often do this kind of thing, you know. It iss quite unusual.”

Don laughed, and waved his hand as he rowed away. Peggy jumped down, picked up the book, and fled to the cottage.

“Of all the annoying things! He must have thought me quite crazy!”

But Don came back to Strongarra with a story of a tree-fairy on Innis Beg, with fair hair blowing in the breeze and laughing confused eyes.

Next morning Jack and Jill had to go over to the manse at Lios for lessons. But the moment they returned to the island, they disappeared up into the tree, and once more would come down only for meals. In the afternoon soft rain or mist began to fall, but they pulled the plaid over their heads and sat through the shower.

After tea, Peggy, puzzled and rather worried about them, called for sing-song. For once they went unwillingly, and escaped as soon as possible.

“We must finish it to-night,” Jill sighed. “I couldn’t sleep another night,” and they settled into quietness again.

“Done!” cried Jack.

“Done!” echoed Jill. “Issn’t it splendid?”

“He’s an enemy.”

“But his book iss just fine. We must steal another.”

“If we can. I wonder what they’re thinking about this one? Wouldn’t we catch it if they knew?”

“Peggy would be dreadfully shocked. I’d mind that most. Last night I dreamt they’d found out, and were coming across from Strongarra to catch us. Jack!” she screamed. “Here they come! The Author and the Girl in a boat!”

CHAPTER XII.
WHO IS THE THIEF?

"Once more, Sandy," I said, "do you know anything about those books?"

"No, mem, I ton't," said Sandy sulkily.

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yess. I haf tolt you so seffen times alreaty," and Sandy's tone showed plainly that he was offended.

"If he says he doesn't, you must believe him, Jean," said Marjory.

But I was not convinced.

"We know he was in the garden that night. Cook saw a light in the greenhouse, and sent Sandy to see what it was. He came back with this silly goblin tale, and won't tell us what the light was. Either he took the books—I don't see what he could want with them—or it was the person who had the light."

"Nopoty wass t'ere! It wass shust ta Goblin herself, whateffer."

We questioned and argued till he grew sulky, and would only repeat:

"I ton't know. T'at iss all I haf to say about it."

I was suspicious, but Marjory insisted that I must believe him. So my thoughts turned to the children on the island.

Perhaps Jack and Jill were to blame. Surely they would not steal my books? I could not say, but I was sure they were ready for any kind of mischief. I had long suspected that they could have explained our ghost. But I was certain Peggy knew nothing of these doings.

When Don appeared late in the evening and informed us that he had been spending the afternoon on Innis Beg, and had come to stay the night with us, I asked his opinion on the subject. He was inclined to think with me that Jack and Jill were capable of anything.

"They look on you as enemies, you know, and they hold that all's fair in love and war. I've heard Jill say so more than once. And she considers you a witch. In fact, she's certain of it."

I laughed. "What shall we do? We must put a stop to this kind of thing."

"Set a trap for them, and give them a good fright."

"That would need some thinking. We never know where to find them."

I consulted father, and he suggested that we should go over to Innis Beg. We would not ask directly if they knew anything about our books, unless we had a chance to speak to Jack and Jill alone, for it would not do to tell Peggy we suspected her brother and sister of theft. But we would try to lead the conversation towards the subject, and then watch the faces of the suspected ones.

We invited Don to come too, but he reminded us that Jack and Jill must not see him in our company at present, so, early in the morning, he set sail for Balmona.

It was not a fine day, and father and I were busy, so it was nearly seven o'clock before we set out in a little boat Wee Sandy had borrowed from Lios.

He brought it round to the end of the garden, and sat waiting to row us across. But father turned him out and took the oars himself, and Sandy, who had been under the impression that authors from London knew nothing about boats, watched us open-mouthed.

Father had not visited the island before, and he was anxious to see it. He was interested in Peggy, whom he had met at Strongarra several times when she was visiting Marjory. He

guessed that Don was interested in her too, so he was curious to see more of her.

As we drew in to Innis Beg we heard music. Sing-song was over, and Jack and Jill had retired to their tree to finish the novel, but Peggy was still playing and singing to amuse the little ones. And a curious medley of songs it was.

"The shades of night were falling fast,
Upidee, Upida!
As thro' an Alpine village passed—
Upidee-i-da!"

Then, without any warning:

"Down in my old cabin ho-o-ome,
There lie my sister and my brother;
There lies my wife, she was the joy of my life,
And the child in its grave with its mother."

Father rowed gently in under the branches of a weeping willow, and held up his hand to me for silence. As soon as Robin and Sheila recognised the verse, they joined in, each trying to be first. Peggy changed the tune continually without warning, trying to puzzle them.

"When I was young I used to wait,
On massa's table lay de plate,
Pass de bottle when him dry,
Brush away de blue-tailed fly."

Then suddenly:

"I'se gwine back to Dixie,
No more I'se gwine to wander,
My heart's turned back to Dixie,
I can't stay here no longer,
I miss de old plantation,
My home and my relation,
My heart's turned back to Dixie,
And I must go."

Boy Blue and Sheila shouted vociferously, but Peggy, after one verse, changed the tune again.

"His fingers were long as de cane in de brake,
He had no eyes for to see,
He had no teeth for to eat de corn-cake,
So he had to let de corn-cake be."

"Give us 'Polly-wolly-doodle,' Peggy!" cried Robin.

"No, no, weans. We've had that once already to-night. Just one more, and then you must go to Mother Hubbard. It iss high time Robin was in bed. All together, please! 'Over the sea to Skye.' "

As the chorus ended father and I stepped ashore.

Such a pretty picture they made! The white cottage behind, with its creepers over the porch. On each side the bare stems of the fir-trees, and in front, the water gleaming through

the bushes. Peggy sat in a low basket chair on the lawn, her banjo in her lap, her eyes fixed seriously on the strings. In her dainty muslin frock and shady garden hat she was the prettiest part of the picture, and I wished Don could have been there to see. Robin and Sheila lay on a plaid at her feet, Sheila gazing up at a bird on a branch, Boy Blue keeping one eye on the cottage door, for it was past his bedtime. The terrier, Cigarette, lay curled up on the plaid beside Sheila. Jack and Jill were nowhere to be seen.

I went forward, and Red Riding Hood stopped singing suddenly, and pulled the frill of Peggy's skirt. At sight of us Peggy sprang up, and came to greet us, banjo in hand.

"Good evening, Miss Maxwell! I do hope you didn't hear that dreadful noise we were making. It was just to please the children. Sheila, run for chairs. It is very good of you to have come over to see us again, Miss Maxwell. Boy Blue, you run away to bed."

For once Boy Blue went quickly. Even bed was better than speaking to strangers.

"You come too, Sheila," he whispered, and disappeared.

Cigarette had run off into the house at sight of us. Now he came running back to offer the hearth-brush to father. When it had been accepted and his head patted by way of thanks, he ran off again and brought his pipe to lay at our feet.

"What a teasing dog he is," said Peggy. "Look, this is the way we punish him."

She seized his stumpy tail and held him up in the air. Cigarette was used to it and did not even protest. He hung head downwards with his paws stretched stiffly out till she dropped him, then seized his pipe in his teeth and sat with his head conceitedly on one side.

Our talk with Peggy yielded no results. We enjoyed the chat, and were more delighted with her than ever. But Jack and Jill did not appear, and when she went in search of them she found that they were not on the island. She was very vexed at their rudeness, and apologised again, but we begged her to say no more about it.

"I hardly know what to do with them sometimes," she said anxiously, "they are so ferry big for me to punish, and it iss only in this one thing they give me trouble. In everything else they are quite good."

"Leave them alone," said father; "they'll get used to us in time."

"It is very silly of them," Peggy said, looking worried. "I would so like them to know Marjory too."

"Yes, I wish they would come to see her. But she always says we are not to press them to come till they wish to. She enjoys visits from Red Riding Hood and Boy Blue so very much."

"They like to come. I must show Mr. Maxwell all over the island. Then he can make a story about it," Peggy laughed. "Won't you smoke, Mr. Maxwell? I know you would like to. Please do! Cigarette will enjoy it so much. When my brother is at college there is no one to make smoke for him, and he misses it so."

Father laughed and lit a cigarette, and the dog gave a yelp of excitement and delight, then sat at his feet and gazed in silent fascination at the smoke-clouds, with a glance out of the corner of his eye every now and then, as if to say, "You *are* clever! I do wish I could do it!"

Before it grew dark, Peggy took us over the island, and then said if we would rather sit inside she would tell Mother Hubbard to light the lamps. But we preferred the open air, so we sat in the porch as the twilight deepened to darkness, and talked and laughed and enjoyed Peggy's company greatly. We begged her to sing and play for us, but she was very shy, declaring she only did it to please the children. However, I made her promise to bring the banjo over to Strongarra next time she came, so that Marjory might hear it too.

We had hoped that if we waited a while Jack and Jill would come home, but there was no sign of them, and Peggy confessed that they were probably hiding somewhere near in the dark, and would not appear till they knew we had gone.

"I shall give them a good scolding for being out so late on the water," she said. "It iss no use scolding them for being rude to you. I've done that before, and they don't listen."

"Perhaps they are over on Innis Torr," I suggested.

"Oh, no, not after dark. They would never go there after dark," Peggy said quickly. "There iss the Goblin, you know. Have you heard the story?"

"Yes, the little boy Sandy told us. But you don't believe in it, Miss Colquhoun?"

Peggy laughed. "Oh, dear, no!—But I wouldn't go to Goblin Island after dark."

"Really? But what would you be afraid of?"

"I have been brought up in Lios, you see, and everybody believes in the Goblin. My father used to. Oh, yes, really!"

"Of course. And you don't want to run any risks. Very wise!" father said, smiling.

"Now you are laughing at me," Peggy said, with a reproachful air.

As father and I stepped ashore at Strongarra we heard a gentle splash near the island.

"Jack and Jill getting home," laughed father. "I hope Miss Peggy will scold the little rascals well. We must just wait, Jean, and see what happens next. I quite expect they have the books, but they'll do them no harm."

As the days passed we heard no more of my books, but from time to time we missed various things. Anything left in the garden disappeared, so the thief evidently visited us often after dark. The ghost had ceased to trouble us, and we took no steps against the thief, for I was convinced that Jack and Jill were the culprits, and I knew how vexed and grieved Peggy would be if she heard of their tricks.

Father only laughed when told that the watering-pot or trowel had disappeared from the greenhouse, or the clothes-peg or line from the wash-house.

"Don't leave anything lying about," he said. "If you give the little rascals opportunities, of course they make the most of them."

But I was forgetful, and several times left trifles in the summer-house—pencil-box, scissors, or books, for I often sat there when not working in the house, and when I looked for them next day they were gone.

CHAPTER XIII.
A VISIT FROM THE GOBLIN.

With a fresh wind coming down from the mountains, and the afternoon sunlight dancing on the waves, Don's trim little yacht came racing merrily across the loch from Balmona. And it was not only the bright day, or the beauty of the loch, which gave Don his high spirits, for he was going to Innis Beg and had good hopes of a chat with Peggy, and perhaps an invitation to tea. A chat with Peggy had come to be one of his highest pleasures in life, and a day spent without a sight of her was a blank.

He looked critically at each island as he passed through their midst, for he was hoping to plan a picnic for Peggy. Here were islets large and small, green and gray, grassy and rocky, crowded with towering shadowy firs, or carpeted with the fresh growth of the young bracken. But he was not quite satisfied. The spring splendours of the hawthorn and wild hyacinths were over; the glories of the heather were still veiled in green; even the starry beauty of the wild rose thickets was lacking as yet. The elder bushes indeed held masses of heavily-scented blossom, but Don looked for richer treasure on the island before he took his lady thither.

So he decided to wait a little while, that everything might be of the best before he invited Peggy to his picnic. But perhaps she and the children would go fishing on such a fine fresh afternoon.

The sail came down with a clatter, and he sculled in to the landing-place.

Robin and Sheila, barelegged and wrapped in towels, were washing Cigarette in a great tub on the shore, Robin striving to hold him down, while Sheila scrubbed. But at sight of Don they released their victim, who fled to the shelter of the bushes, and ran eagerly to meet the visitor. And down the trunk of the big tree by the side of the landing-place came Jack and Jill.

"We are all so ferry glad to see you, Dr. Macdonald! It is so good of you to come so often."

"Oh, Don, you are a dear!" cried Jill.

"You see," Sheila explained, "Peggy has gone off to Glasgow shopping, and she's going to stop all night with a girl she was at school with. She's not coming home till to-morrow, and we're all feeling so dull and stupid without her."

"Especially poor Cigarette," laughed Jack. "What's the matter, Don?"

Don's hopes had fallen suddenly, and his face had shown it, but he tried to hide his disappointment.

"I had hoped to take your sister for a sail, but as that's out of the question, suppose we do something to relieve this dreadful dulness. Will any one take pity on me and my empty boat, and come for a couple of hours on the water?"

Jill whooped with delight. The little ones fairly danced. Jack, who felt the responsibility laid upon him by Peggy's absence, cried eagerly,

"We promised not to take them out in the boat, but Peggy wouldn't mind if we went with you."

"Of course not! We're always all right with him," cried Jill indignantly.

It was the work of a very few minutes to pack a basket with loaf, butter, and a pot of jam —a gipsy kettle, and the necessaries for tea—and all that the cottage could yield in the way of cakes. Then, with shouts of farewell to Mother Hubbard and Cigarette, away they went to the

south, with white wings spread to the fullest, and the boat heeling over till the wavelets kissed the gunwale—little ones in the stern, Jill proudly handling the tiller in response to Jack's shouted directions from the bow, and Don amidships in charge of the sail.

After a wide graceful curve away into the sea-like expanse of the southern loch, the yacht came round sharply under Don's guidance, and sped away to the great islands by Balmona. Here it was easy to find a natural pier among the great boulders, up to which she slipped so gently, and once ashore there were numberless shady nooks to be found, where the tall stems of the firs shut out the sky, and every corner of the rocky walls held a different fern. The fire was built and the kettle boiled in one corner, the tablecloth spread on the ground in another, and Jill took her place at the tea-pot and set Sheila to satisfy the wants of impatient Boy Blue, while Don was ordered to attend to the loaf, and Jack to see to the jam-pot.

For though only the islands at their very best were good enough for Peggy to picnic in, their present condition was quite satisfactory for an informal little family party like this.

After tea they must hear tales of Edinburgh and London, and "what you used to do at college," and chatting, they sat so late that as they raced home at last the sky above Lios and Strongarra was crimson, and the hills all round seemed afire, and they sailed in a sunset pathway.

Red Riding Hood and Boy Blue must go to bed at once. Mother Hubbard was waiting indignantly on the beach as they came guiltily in, but softened under Don's blandishments and only bade them lose no more time now, but get to bed quick, or the brownies would get them, or mebbe the Goblin herself whateffer.

But when Don would have turned to go, Jack and Jill begged so hard that he would stay and keep them company, and painted so gloomy a picture of their loneliness and dulness wanting Peggy, that he, with some fellow-feeling for their deserted state, agreed to wait awhile, and drew his boat up on the beach.

Then Jill gripped his hand.

"Come away into the house! It iss ferry nearly dark. Come away in, and I will tell you the Goblin tale. You have neffer heard it yet."

Don laughed, and went willingly. But Jill had many preparations to make before she would begin. The blinds must be drawn up, the lamps turned out, and no light anywhere save the glow from the kitchen fire. The doors must stand open, so that if the Goblin was coming they could hear in time and run to bar them—Robin and Sheila must not know what they were about or they would scream—and they must all three sit crouched over the fire, while she told the story in a low, mysterious whisper, with constant glances over her shoulder at the open doorway.

Don watched her with interest. He was not particularly eager for the story, but was deeply interested in Jill's belief in the supernatural.

But nevertheless he found himself listening intently as she told the tale. For the silence, broken only by the rustle of the trees and the wash of the waves, was very eerie, and Jill and Mother Hubbard believed every word so thoroughly that their faith almost infected him also in spite of himself. Even Jack, bold enough in daylight, drew near into the firelight, and watched Jill spellbound and with a distinct touch of nervousness as she bent over the fire and spoke in a ghostly whisper, prompted now and then by a murmured ejaculation from Mother Hubbard in the corner.

"And then"—said Jill, "and then—they heard a noise—a strange new sound they had neffer heard before—a ferry dreatful sound—a rushing splashing noise from the loch, and a

cry like the hoarse deep bellow of a creat beast, and they saw a creat dark form, without any shape in the darkness of the night, ferry big and fearful, and two creat flaming eyes, away out on the loch——"

"Hist! What's that?" gasped Jack, and there was a fearful silence.

A sound came from the loch, an unmistakable noise of splashing and rushing, as of the swift passage of some large object, and a hoarse loud "toot-toot," which to Don instantly suggested an unwieldy motor-bus in difficulties in the city traffic, but to Jack and Jill and Mother Hubbard could be nothing but the roar of a giant water-beast.

Four startled faces exchanged bewildered glances in the firelight, then with one accord they made for the front door. Jack's only thought was to bar it against the monster, but Don held him back.

"Don't be foolish, Jack. I want to see."

"To see! Issn't it bad enough to *hear*?" gasped Jill, half sobbing with fright.

Don shook her gently.

"Don't be a little goose! Your Goblin's only a fairy tale."

"Then what iss it crying out there on the loch? What is *that*?—oh look, look!"

The night was very dark. The narrow strait between Strongarra and Innis Beg was in deep shadow. Through the gloom came two flaming lamps, casting great circles of light and showing dimly behind and above them a great dark form. The strait was filled with the sound of its swift passage as it rushed through the water, and the waves splashed among the hanging ferns and bushes of the bank and nearly set the boats afloat.

"*There!*" gasped Jill. "*There!* What do you say *now*? Oh, come inside! Perhaps It hasn't seen us yet. Perhaps It doesn't know we're here."

"Well I never!" said Don softly.

The great burning eyes and dim dark form disappeared behind Strongarra point, and Jill clutched their hands.

"Jack! Don! Do *please* come in, and we'll shut the door tight!"

Jack looked doubtfully at Don.

"You don't think it was the Goblin, I suppose? But what could it be then, Don?"

"As to that, I'm not prepared to say offhand. But Goblin—tut! Who believes in fairy tales at this time of day?"

"I might not, if it *was* day, but at night it's easy to believe anything."

"That's what comes of being born in the Highlands," said Don, with a laugh. "Come away in. It's going to rain."

"Rain!" muttered Jill. "Nobody cares for rain, but when it comes to Goblins"—and she bolted and barred the door, turned up the lamps, and closed the shutters.

"If it was the Goblin himself, it was your story that brought him, Jill," Don laughed. "You shouldn't play such games with people, you little scamp! Here's Jack, who's quite a man in daylight, turned into a regular old woman by your superstitious nonsense."

"D'you mean to say"—and Jill turned on him with wide incredulous eyes and a world of scorn in her grave little face—"d'you mean to say you don't believe in the Goblin *now*? After *seeing* him?"

"My dear child, your Goblin only exists in your own brain. It's all a pack of nonsense."

"Then what was that we saw? You did see it, I suppose?"

"Some kind of boat——"

"Boat!" cried Jill, with infinite scorn. "Boat! Oh, Don Macdonald, how can you?"

Don laughed. “I’ve a long cold sail before me, and you say there are Goblins about. Aren’t you going to offer me any supper before I start?”

He had hoped by taking up their thoughts to make them forget the mysterious apparition. But though Jill attended to his wants with the hospitality of her race, her thoughts were evidently far away, and she seemed all the time to be listening. As for Mother Hubbard, she sat huddled up in her corner, moaning with fright and shock, and never lifted a finger to help.

“I do wish Peggy was at home!” Jill said more than once, and Jack echoed the words.

They were plainly nervous of the night, and he wondered what to do. To leave them with only Mother Hubbard seemed cruel, for her superstitious fears were even greater than their own. But in Peggy’s absence he hesitated to invite himself to spend the night in her house.

It was necessary that he should be in Balmona early next morning to see one of his few patients, so he rose at last, giving them parting words of encouragement and advice. They listened in silence, Jill at least plainly considering him unworthy of serious attention if he could doubt the clear evidence of his senses, and all were decidedly reluctant to let him go.

But as he pushed down his boat, Jill clutched his arm again.

“*Now* will you believe it?” she gasped, then turned and fled into the cottage.

Down the strait from the point came the great lights once more, and the mysterious boat, having done its Goblin work so thoroughly, rushed away homewards up the loch, towards the north—“towards Goblin Island,”—as Jack murmured doubtfully.

Then he turned anxiously to Don.

“I don’t know—I don’t understand it! But whatever it is, Jill won’t sleep to-night if you go and leave us alone. Couldn’t you stop and keep us company, Don?”

“Yes, I’ll stop,” Don said thoughtfully, “if you and Jill will go off to bed as usual, and sleep like sensible children. I’ll take the sofa. It will be quite a joke to camp out. But you must go off to bed at once. We’ve had more than enough of nonsense for one night. Tell Jill I’m a good match for a dozen Goblins, and I should simply laugh at one alone if he came anywhere near, so she’ll be perfectly safe. Now get her off to bed as quick as you can, and tell her I say she’s neither to speak nor think the word Goblin till the morning.”

CHAPTER XIV.
THE GOBLIN BOAT.

Robin, always the first up in the morning after Mother Hubbard, was the only one to see anything of Don, for, mindful of his appointment, he was off in his yacht before either Jack or Jill, tired out with the night's excitement, appeared.

The tale of the Goblin provided thrilling conversation during breakfast-time. Jack, bold in the daylight, strongly upheld the view that the apparition of the night had only been, as Don had suggested, some new mysterious kind of boat they had not seen before. Jill, however, was still very scornful of this view, but rather proud, now that day had come again, that at last she had really seen the Goblin for herself. The little ones listened open-mouthed, and expressed their intention of never going to bed again on Innis Beg unless Peggy was there.

What Peggy could have done in the event of a midnight visit from their bogey, they could hardly have explained, but they felt that, failing Malcolm, her presence would at least be reassuring. Sheila indeed suggested that Dr. Macdonald should be invited to take up his permanent residence upon the island, as he could easily sail over to Balmona in case of need, but Jill asked what he would do if a storm came up and he could not cross the loch just when somebody was ill and wanted him, so that proposal was considered useless.

But the Goblin had never been seen by day, and Peggy would certainly be home by night.

"We are to meet her at Lios at three, and row her home. Let's go up the loch in the morning, Jill. We haven't had a good row for days, and we could do with some fish too."

"You think it's quite safe? You're sure?"

"Certain," said Jack confidently, so in spite of remonstrances from the deserted little ones, they set off at once.

Mid-day found them five miles from home and not far from Dunreoch, where is the great hotel to which the English visitors flock. And so intent were they on their fishing that they never noticed the gray ghosts stealing down from the north to wrap the mountains in mist and blot out Ben Aan and Old Man Mountain altogether. The first raindrops made Jill look up. She called to Jack and seized her oar, and they made for shelter.

Among the bushes of the shore they lay for a couple of hours, covered with a plaid and not suffering greatly from the rain. Then, thinking of Peggy, and finding the storm giving way to a steady fall of fine mist, they set out for home.

The mist lay thick on the water. They knew their way, but could not see many feet before them. And suddenly through the rain they heard again that warning roar and a shrill squeal, and behind the gray curtain of mist there crept past them the flaming eyes of the Goblin, and they heard Its panting breath close at hand.

They could see no more than they had done at night. With one accord they made for the bank, and lay trembling in cover again.

"In daylight!" groaned Jill. "The loch will neffer be safe again!"

"Wish it would come when we could see it properly!"

"Oh, I don't want to see it any closer!" wailed Jill. "I have seen quite enough. And now it iss between us and Innis Beg! How shall we effer get home?"

"It's gone now. Suppose we make a dash for it? We might get home——"

"No, no! I won't! I won't go on the water again while it iss about!" Jill cried in terror. "Jack, I couldn't!"

"But how are we to get home?"

"Walk. Then if it comes along we can hide. To-morrow we'll come back to fetch the boat."

"I can't. I've hurt my foot. I must have banged it somehow as we came ashore. We didn't take time to be careful."

But as Jill absolutely refused to take to the water again, there was nothing for it but to go by road. Fortunately they were on the Lios side of the loch. Jack's foot pained him considerably, having been badly bruised on the stones as they scrambled ashore in panic, but he bravely did his best. Jill gave him her shoulder to lean upon. They left the boat on the shore, and with the plaid wrapped round them both, trudged slowly on through mist and rain towards Lios.

Peggy, landing at Lios in the rain, found no boat waiting. Probably, she thought, the mist had made Jack hesitate, for the rain alone would not have stopped him. It would have been easy to borrow a boat from the village, but that meant a long row in the rain, and there in the street was the Strongarra pony-trap with Wee Sandy taking our letters to the post. Peggy carried some small commissions I had asked her to see to for me in town, also some flowers and sweets as gifts for Marjory, so she hailed Sandy and demanded a lift. From Strongarra it would be easy to summon Jack from the island when she had delivered her parcels.

Marjory and I were sitting together expressing our disgust at this change in the weather, when Peggy, wet and tired and cold, was ushered in, and we greeted her with enthusiasm.

I especially was glad she had come on her way home, as I had news for her, but until she had rested, and was sitting over the fire in dry slippers borrowed from me, I would tell her nothing.

But at last Marjory broke out, "Now tell her all about it, Jean," and I explained.

"Last night, Peggy, quite late—about supper-time, a visitor arrived to see you."

"A visitor? But was it someone who didn't know we were over on Innis Beg, then?"

"I went to see him, and really I got quite a fright. He was a huge man, wearing kilts, which of course made him look even bigger, and your tartan."

"Not John Colquhoun from Loch Tummel?" cried Peggy sharply, a distinct shade of annoyance crossing her face.

"He announced himself as your cousin, and certainly called himself John Colquhoun."

"Bother! *Bother!* Oh, what a dreadful nuisance!" groaned Peggy.

"But why? Don't you want to see him? He'd been up to Glasgow for a week, and stopped at Dunreoch on his way home to have a sight of you all. Who is he, Peggy? And why is he a bother?"

Peggy sat gazing into the fire, her lips pursed, her brows frowning. But at last, as if repenting that she had given such clear expression to her feelings, she said quietly:

"He iss our cousin, and has a castle in the Highlands, on Loch Tummel—a ferry beautiful spot—in Perthshire. He was here at Christmas time. I did not think he would come again so soon. You see, we neffer told him we were not living here; it was none of his business, but he'll be cross. Oh dear! Why do folks need to have relations?"

We laughed, and she knit her brows again.

"You are ferry unkind, and John Colquhoun is an absolute nuisance. I wish he'd stay on Loch Tummel."

We did our best to bring her to a better frame of mind regarding her cousin, but I suspected strongly that something lay behind to cause her such keen annoyance at his sudden appearance. He had declared his intention of visiting Innis Beg during the day, so no persuasion of ours could coax Peggy to remain with us. The mist still lay heavily on the loch, but the rain had slackened, so I walked down the garden with her and together we called across the strait for Jack.

But when at length a boat came creeping through the mist, it was Don himself from Balmona who was seated in her. At sight of him Peggy gave a cry of surprise, then reddened at some sudden thought.

"Dr. Maxwell! Surely you are neglecting your patients shamefully? Where iss Jack?"

"We don't quite know. He and Jill went out fishing this morning, and haven't come home yet. I came across to see if they were getting on all right without you, and found the little ones in distress because you had not arrived."

Peggy took her seat in the boat.

"I am ferry much obliged to you. Where do you suppose the bad children have got to?"

"Oh, they'll turn up all right. This mist would delay them. I have a confession to make, Miss Colquhoun," he said, laughing. "I trespassed on your property last night," and he gave her a vivid account of the visit of the Goblin.

Peggy listened with startled eyes, and a touch of nervous doubt.

"How good of you to stay! They would neffer have slept a wink all night. And what do you suppose it could be?"

"As I told Jill—hello!"

They were close to the landing-place, where the children were waiting eagerly to welcome Peggy. As the boat touched the shore the little ones gave a scream, and Peggy a gasp of dismay, and through the mist from the north came the blazing lights and hoarse roar of the Goblin. Don held his boat steady and waited, and with splashing and panting and another warning cry, a long low boat rushed through the strait and into the creek, and lay there with snorting, coughing noises.

It was a new beautifully fitted motor-launch, painted black, with eager panting engine and great flaming head-lights, and two men in the stern—a chauffeur, and a big burly Highlander.

"I thought so!" Don said triumphantly. "Here's our Goblin! Pity Jill's not at home."

Peggy, stepping ashore, offered the new-comers as cordial a welcome as her feelings would permit. John Colquhoun's first glance had shown him his pretty cousin in a boat with a young stranger who was decidedly good-looking, and the sight did not please him. He brought his boat up to the rocks and sprang ashore, hoping the other would have the sense to depart, but Don had no idea of doing anything of the kind. He stood talking to Robin and Sheila of this explanation of the Goblin's visit, while Cousin John explained his sudden appearance to Peggy.

He had been in Glasgow buying and testing the new launch, which would be of great use to him on his Highland loch. On his way home he had stopped at Dunreoch hotel, to take the chance of calling upon his cousins and of trying the new boat on Loch Avie. He had a distinctly bullying air, Don thought, as he demanded full explanation of the family's change of residence, and asked what Peggy and Malcolm had been thinking of to conceal the state of their fortunes from their relatives.

But that point Peggy resolutely refused to discuss.

"Malcolm and I did what we thought best. You can talk it over with him if you like. We are having a delightful time here. The children enjoy the island, and it is quite a holiday for me. Now if you'll come inside we'll have some tea. I've just come from Glasgow, and I'm wearying for it. Dr. Macdonald, you will stay too? Please do! Then you can tell Mr. Colquhoun how he frightened the children last night."

There was a distinct sense of constraint about the tea-table that afternoon, which was most unusual on Innis Beg. Robin and Sheila were shy; Peggy made the guests welcome and presided very prettily, but was conscious that there were clouds about. John Colquhoun was brusque and short when he spoke to Don, and plainly questioned his right to be there; and Don, who till this moment had found his way with Peggy plain sailing, resented the interference and looked on this undesired kinsman as an interloper.

The coolness still remained after tea, when the elders sat discussing the continued absence of Jack and Jill. Peggy's pretty face grew worried as she wondered how she was to entertain two stupid men all evening, if they were so inconsiderate as to wait so long. She had never before found any difficulty in talking to Don Maxwell, but to-night he was different somehow, and John Colquhoun was an absolute nuisance.

The unwelcome cousin, however, earned her gratitude presently in one direction at least, for he rose to go soon after tea, explaining that he had found friends staying at Dunreoch and had been persuaded into a promise to dine with them that day. Even in the launch the journey up the loch must take a little time, so, unless Peggy saw any reason to feel anxious about Jack and Jill, he would say good-bye for the present.

"Oh, indeed no! They often stay out on the water for hours together. They will come home in time, but they are ferry bad to be away so long—yes indeed!"

"I shall come along to-morrow morning, and if it's fine maybe you'll care to try the launch. She's a beauty, goes like a bird."

"I will see in the morning," said Peggy non-committally. "It is ferry kind of you, to be sure."

Even when John Colquhoun had gone, Don was conscious of a touch of constraint about Peggy. He had hoped to return to the old friendly footing when they were alone, but Peggy was unusually reserved, and he mentally wished the big Highlander had stayed in the Highlands. Then he thought of the castle and estate, to which he had heard reference, and wondered if these would weigh with Peggy, but blamed himself instantly for the thought, and finally relapsed into a state of moody disgust.

He would not leave the island till the children returned, lest there should prove to be some trouble afoot. But about seven o'clock a boat came down the loch from Lios with the culprits on board. The walk through the mist and rain had taken them all afternoon, thanks to Jack's bruised foot, and they were utterly worn out. They had borrowed a boat in Lios without difficulty, and arrived home in a state of mingled exhaustion and terror, having seen their Goblin creeping home up the loch through the mist as they trudged along the bank.

The explanation of the mystery gave them much relief, but they were anxious to see the launch for themselves before they accepted it as sufficient to do away entirely with their fears. But they hailed with delight the thought of a visit from their cousin on the morrow, and wondered rapturously if there was hope of a trip in the launch for them. The descriptions given by Robin and Sheila excited their curiosity to the utmost, and they longed for the morning with an eagerness of which Peggy certainly showed no sign.

CHAPTER XV.
WHITE WINGS *V.* MOTOR.

"Do you approve of cousins marrying one another?" asked Peggy Colquhoun.

She had come across early in the morning, evidently craving for a chat. We were sitting under the trees near the loch, for the morning was bright and fresh, and she was on the look-out for the launch from Dunreoch.

She had despatched Jack and Jill in the borrowed boat to fetch their own forsaken one from the upper loch, much to their disgust. They would have preferred to wait at home for the promised visit of the launch, and were desperately afraid that John Colquhoun would pass them on the way and not stop to speak to them. But Peggy was firm. The borrowed boat must be returned as soon as possible, so they had better fetch their own at once and lose no more time about it. Rowing was excellent exercise for a boy with a sore foot, who did not want to walk too much.

Under the circumstances, Peggy's question seemed so very suggestive that I looked at her in surprise, and then began to laugh. It was only what I had suspected, certainly, but I had not thought she would speak out so soon.

But Peggy did not laugh. She looked at me very seriously, and began earnestly once more.

"Please tell me what you think, Miss Maxwell? Indeed, I want to know. But after all, I don't believe it makes ferry much difference."

"What I think? No, I don't suppose it does. I should say it distinctly depended upon circumstances."

"Well, I don't! I don't approve of it at all," said Peggy, with some heat, "and I've told him so already."

I laughed again. "And, I presume, Mr. Colquhoun does approve? But perhaps he's prejudiced."

"He's a nuisance," sighed Peggy again. "I told him at Christmas what I thought, and I'm more sure about it than ever now. But here he is again, and I don't believe he's satisfied yet."

"Perhaps you are prejudiced also," I suggested.

Peggy gave me a quick look. "I've quite made up my mind about it anyway. What had I better do, do you think?"

"Tell him so," I suggested brilliantly.

"I don't like doing it——"

"A good many people don't. I believe some few enjoy it."

"Horrid creatures!"

"If you don't get the matter settled he will just keep worrying you."

"Yes, I know. Oh, he *iss* a nuisance!"

"It must be a lovely place he has in the Highlands," I suggested, for I had been questioning her on the subject.

"I wouldn't have him if he had fifty lovely places! I wouldn't have him if he was the Duke himself!" cried Peggy heatedly.

"Oh, well, if you feel like that, I think you had certainly better tell him so as soon as possible. The sooner you send him off home the better, for everyone's sake."

"I ton't like the job," Peggy murmured.

"He iss coming to-day to ask me to go in the launch with him," she said, after a pause. "I thought I'd take some of the weans with me."

"You'd better not. If you do they'll be in the way, and he won't get a chance to give you a chance to—squash him," I warned her.

Peggy laughed. "I'll see. But—here he comes. I wonder if he'll see I'm over here?"

I had not much doubt of it. She went down to the water's edge and waited there, and the launch changed its course and came dashing up to the bank.

I retired discreetly, and watched the pretty little boat lie panting by the shore, while John Colquhoun offered his hand to Peggy as she stepped daintily across the stones. From my corner among the trees I saw them set off, and waited with interest to see what would be their direction. But the launch crossed straight to Innis Beg, and presently I saw Robin and Sheila come down to the beach, a mixture of shyness and eagerness in their faces, and be received on board with welcome relief by their sister and with less delight by their cousin. So I knew that after all Peggy's courage had failed her. I waited till I had seen them go racing off up the loch after Jack and Jill, then I laughed and went into the house to tell Marjory all about it.

We had our own opinion as to what had helped to lend such vigour to Peggy's protestations against family marriages, but it was too early to say very much about that. But during the morning Don, who felt his affairs at Lios more pressing at the moment than those at Balmona, arrived at Innis Beg to see how matters stood to-day, and finding no one there but Mother Hubbard and Cigarette, he came across to us for consolation.

His remarks on the subject of Highland cousins were pointed and vigorous. I reminded him that John Colquhoun's right to Peggy's company was prior to his own, and that relations must be allowed some privileges. Marjory, unsympathetically but suggestively, quoted poetry regarding the course of true love, for we felt that the circumstances demanded a certain measure of teasing on our part. If I was to lose my only brother, I might surely be allowed to find a little amusement in the process.

Marjory and I could afford to laugh and tease, as we had had the benefit of Peggy's very definite opinions, which Don had not. Feeling that there was no fear of mishap to his hopes from John Colquhoun, we did not betray Peggy's confidences, thinking it might perhaps be good for him not to find things altogether too easy. So we did not give him much comfort, but counselled him to patient waiting, and Don left us in disgust and went for a lonely sail among the islands, with a frown for every one, and only black looks for all the beauty of the loch and hills.

It was dusk before we saw the flaming lights of the launch come speeding down the loch again, and Marjory and I, watching from her window, did not wonder greatly at the terror of the children on Innis Beg that first night. For their superstitious faith in the Goblin of the legend made them ready to receive anything unusual or incomprehensible with fear and dismay, and certainly the noise of the launch's swift passage, its warning roar, and blazing eyes, fitted with terrifying exactitude the description of the monster as we had heard it from Wee Sandy.

Then, watching from the upper windows of Marjory's tower, we saw strange sights, which puzzled us exceedingly till we guessed their meaning, and had our suppositions confirmed next day by Robin and Sheila. For the lights of the launch, after lying for a short time by the landing-place of Innis Beg, shot away through the strait and across the loch, and circled and twisted among the islands, with weird squeals of the siren and uncouth bellowing of the horn —made visible continually by the great flaming eyes—now passing out of sight behind the

trees of an islet, then flashing into view again in the open water between—spreading, we were sure, amazement and dismay among the superstitious villagers on shore.

Don, who had returned for a word with us before crossing to Balmona for the night—for there were two or three cases he felt it necessary to look up, and not to neglect entirely—watched the curious proceedings of the Goblin boat gloomily and with scathing comments on the silliness of some people. He openly expressed his hope that the launch would come to grief on some of the islands, and so be punished for the distress it would no doubt cause to the country folk till the matter was explained to them. But John Colquhoun had sailed among those islands before and knew what he was about, and Don's uncharitable wish was not gratified.

As we heard from the little ones next day, the launch on its way north had met Jack and Jill toiling along in search of their boat, and had taken them on board, with the boat in tow. It had been left at Lios, and the whole party had been carried off to Dunreoch for lunch and tea at the big hotel by the masterful cousin John. Jack and Jill, at least, would greatly have preferred to remain in the fascinating launch, but their host saw the possibility of separating his party once they were ashore, and so securing the desired *tête-à-tête* with Peggy, which would have been quite impossible while they were all cooped up in the small boat together. But Peggy had taken fright, and had kept Red Riding Hood and Boy Blue beside her all afternoon, so matters had not advanced greatly.

On the way home they had sought out the Innis Beg boat, which still lay disconsolate on the shore, and had brought it home in triumph. The children's talk had turned again on the Goblin and their fright of the last two days, and John Colquhoun, after putting them all ashore on Innis Beg, had set himself to amuse them by playing Goblin among the islands, till the cottagers and farm folk on the hill-sides shivered in terror, and the shores of the loch were full of legends of the Goblin for days afterwards.

Late that evening, when Don had returned gloomily to Balmona, and the flaming lights of the Goblin boat had carried John Colquhoun away up the loch to Dunreoch once more, I begged father to row me over to Innis Beg in the boat we had hired from Lios. I was curious to know if the day had yielded any definite result, but Peggy looked at me guiltily as she greeted us, and hurried off to fetch Jack and Jill to come and speak to father. The little monkeys were not to be found, however, having again seen us coming and made off in the boat, by way of expressing their unchangeable dislike to us, and Peggy was once more full of apologies and annoyance. But it was Peggy herself I had come to see, so while father smoked on the beach for the amusement of Cigarette, I coaxed her to stroll with me among the bushes in the wilder part of the island.

She was rather shy, and not so willing to talk of the matter as she had been in the morning. But I gathered that the presence of the children had been sufficient to keep John Colquhoun from coming to the point, and that the question was no nearer settlement than it had been. I scolded her gently, and suggested that it would have been better done with, but she turned on me with, "How would you like it yourself?" and I laughed and left it to her.

But next day matters came to a crisis on Innis Beg.

Early in the forenoon Don arrived, determined to assert his rights and make a bold bid for Peggy's company to-day. He would not consent to be left out in the cold a second time without at least making a vigorous protest.

It was a fresh breezy morning, when sailing was a delight, and a motor-launch, said Don to himself, a contemptible kind of craft. As he trimmed his sail to catch the wind from the hills,

he even pitied any man who could find enjoyment in a noisy rushing contrivance which, after all, was only a motor-car afloat. It must be so mechanical, so utterly unresponsive to the moods of wind and waves—a mere bit of machinery, built for speed, but lacking in all the beauty and poetry of his favourite, and he looked up at the snowy sail and was sure Peggy must feel the same.

The younger children were on the lawn before the cottage. Peggy, in a low basket chair, sat mending the family stockings and socks, a pretty picture, in a loose morning blouse and big shady hat. Jack and Jill were up in the big tree, obviously on the look-out for some one. The four gathered round him as he stepped ashore, but Peggy bundled her work into a basket and slipped it behind her chair before coming forward to greet him.

Jack and Jill were giving an excited account of their day with the Goblin, but Don did not seem interested, did not indeed seem to wish to hear, but turned to Peggy as she came up.

"Good-morning! Isn't it delightfully fresh and bright? They are all telling me of your long day on the water yesterday, Miss Colquhoun. I hope you didn't have too much of it. Are none of you overtired to-day?"

"With being on the water?" Peggy laughed. "Oh, no, indeed. We could never have too much of the water, any of us. We are all so fond of sailing."

"Good! I came across this morning on purpose to beg you all—or as many as we can make room for—to come for a day's sailing with me. It's a perfect day. The wind's just right. I don't know when I found it so pleasant on the water as it is to-day. I do hope you will come," he urged, and Peggy knew that the invitation was especially for her.

But she hesitated. "Indeed, I don't think we ought to——"

"Peggy! Oh, Peggy, don't be mean!"

"But really, weans, there's so much to do, and all day yesterday we were out enjoying ourselves, and the two days before that I was in Glasgow. The work has all had to wait——"

"Let it wait a little longer, Peggy darling!"

"I second that," murmured Don. "Any to the contrary? Carried!"

Peggy tried to look severe. "There iss heaps of mending to do, and a dress half made for Sheila——"

"Let her wear it so. I'm sure she doesn't need another new dress yet."

"And the house iss getting into a dreatful state, really and truly."

"Yes, indeed. Going to rack and ruin! I should say it's decidedly too late to attempt to do anything with it now. Better let it go to pieces and then build a new one," said Don, looking the cottage up and down.

"Oh, it's all ferry well to tease, but I have to do the work, you know."

"Come on, Peggy! I believe you mean to go all the time. Don't keep us in suspense. It's painful," said Jack. "Let's go at once. I'm sure it's doing us all good to be out on the loch so much. Isn't it now, Dr. Macdonald? Aren't we getting healthier every day?"

"You're getting freckleder," said Boy Blue, who at the shout of laughter retired behind Peggy in confusion.

"A browner, healthier set of bairns I never saw, I must say, and all due to the loch, of course! But mind, you must keep it up, or I shall come across to doctor you all. I'm a terror when folks are ill. I'll give you a wrinkle, Jill. The best way to keep healthy is to take plenty of fresh air exercise—preferably sailing. Sailing is absolutely the best way to keep well. The smell of petrol is most harmful."

Peggy turned away hastily to consult Mother Hubbard. The children pressed round him, and Red Riding Hood asked innocently,

"Is that the funny smell there was in cousin John's dear little boat yesterday? I wondered what it was."

"Yes," Don said gravely, "that was it. Motor sailing is not nearly so good for people as real sailing."

"Truly? Are you sure?"

"Certain. There's nothing like a white-winged yacht. You were all on the look-out for me just now, weren't you? That's a clear proof you were needing a sail."

"No, we weren't," said Jill. "We were looking for the launch. He said perhaps he'd be down some time to-day to take us out again."

"Oh, well, you can't stay at home on the chance that he may turn up."

"No," said Jill, and added candidly, "The launch iss nicer than your boat because it goes so quick, but then, you see, you're here, and he issn't, so we may as well make sure of you."

"Quite so! A bird in the hand——"

"Here comes Peggy! I knew she'd go after all," cried Jack, as Peggy came out from the cottage again.

"I wish you had a motor-launch, Don," sighed Jill. "Our cousin's iss just splendid! Wouldn't you like a sail in her? Oh, here he comes!" she cried. "Here he is! Oh, how ferry fortunate! Peggy, issn't that lucky now? In five minutes we would have been away!"

Don muttered something which made Jack look at him quickly, and which suggested that he at least did not consider the arrival providential. The children ran down to the beach as the launch came snorting in, and John Colquhoun scowled at Don and Don at John Colquhoun.

He came up the lawn to Peggy, as she stood in dismay in the porch, with a masterful stride for which Don longed to kick him.

"Here's the launch, and here's the fine morning, and here am I to take you all for that promised run to the head of the loch, Peggy."

Peggy's eyes met Don's in dismay.

"I didn't promise. Last night we only said perhaps——"

It seemed to Don that her eyes asked for help in this awkward dilemma. He strode up the lawn to them, as resolute as if he also had claimed cousinship.

"I have already invited Miss Colquhoun to go sailing with me."

"But she hadn't promised!" cried Jill, jumping with impatience to be in the launch again.

"Then I claim the first right to an answer. My invitation was given last night," said the big Highlander stiffly.

"I think it is for Miss Colquhoun to say if she prefers sails or petrol. My boat is at her disposal."

"Oh, Peggy! Peggy darling!" pleaded Jill, and Don could have shaken her with enjoyment. "Peggy *dear*! You can go with Don any time, and you know what a simply splendid time we had yesterday!"

But that was precisely what Peggy did not know. All the day before she had been on thorns of suspense, and she had no mind for a second day like it.

"Come, Peggy, choose! Let us know your mind on the matter," said John Colquhoun, and the three elders knew that the question of that day's picnic was a very small part of the matter which her answer would decide.

"Speak up, Peggy!" said Jack.

"Do, do, *do* say you'll go in the launch!" pleaded Jill.

"Robin and I like Don's boat best," said Sheila softly, and slipped her hand into Peggy's.

"Come, Peggy!" said John Colquhoun impatiently, once more.

Peggy looked from one to the other. She shared all Don's feeling for the graceful white-winged yacht, but was conscious that it was only the outward sign of what he could give her—was conscious also that the noisy expensive launch was a very fair emblem of the life her cousin offered.

"I'll go sailing," she said quietly, and gave Colquhoun a look which ended the matter.

Don could have kissed her. But Jill was bitterly disappointed.

"Oh, Peggy!" she cried, in dismay. "You are mean!"

"We'll take the children," said Peggy, looking at Don, while Colquhoun stood as gloomily silent as Don had been the day before.

"I don't want to go. I like the motor," grumbled Jill.

Don could have been very well content to dispense with the children's company for that day. But he feared to ask too much. It would not do to hurry her. For the moment he had more than enough to be grateful for.

"Suppose we take Red Riding Hood and Boy Blue, since they are fond of sailing," he said.

Jack looked blank. But John Colquhoun, putting the best face he could on the matter, turned to him.

"Would you and Jill care for one more run up the loch? I shall be going home to-morrow."

Their exclamation of delight at the one prospect mingled with their cry of dismay at the other.

"Oh, you *are* a dear. We shall be so ferry sorry when you go. Couldn't you wait a wee bittie longer?" cried Jill.

He shook his head. "I have done my business here now. It's time for me to get home again. Come along, and we'll have a fine long day before we say good-bye."

"We must get some dinner——"

"Never mind, I'll see to all that."

He hurried them into the launch, and they sped away to the north, and spent a long, delightful day in the lonely upper stretches of the loch, where the hills grow into mountains, and draw so near together that when the steamer creeps up between them, the loch from shore to shore is filled with the wash and turmoil of her passage. Past Rob Roy's cave they went, past his waterfall, where the creamy torrent plunges over the rocks into the loch below, and on till the massive bulk of Ben Aan shut out the wide southern loch, where Peggy and Don and the children were dallying among the islands in the sunshine.

Here, even on a bright day, the mountains were gloomy and forbidding, with rocky, desolate slopes, and no sign of life save some lonely sheep at times—the rugged gray and brown of rock and heather, broken here and there by a flash of silver or a thin white thread, high up the mountain side, where stream or fall made its way to the parent loch away below.

This part of Loch Avie was unfamiliar even to Jack and Jill, for Peggy would not let them go so far alone. These upper reaches fascinated them, and they enjoyed their day to the full. John Colquhoun was inclined to be silent, but left nothing undone which could add to their pleasure. Their description of the lunch he ordered for their benefit at the Hotel of the Waterfall, and of the tea they enjoyed at Dunreoch, made the little ones inclined to be envious at night. But Robin and Sheila were faithful to their first friend, and declared that they would

rather spend the day with Don than with cousin John, no matter what good things he could give them.

And Peggy thought so too.

CHAPTER XVI.
THE THIEF ONCE MORE.

During those few busy days of John Colquhoun's visit we at Strongarra had heard very little of Jack and Jill. For the time their evening rambles about the garden and round the house ceased, and their thoughts were so fully occupied that they had no attention to spare for us.

But in the quieter time following their cousin's departure for the Highlands they wanted some amusement, and we began to suspect that they were paying secret visits to us once more.

Then, foolishly, I gave them the very opportunity they had been wanting, and they naturally made the most of it.

One day I spent the afternoon in the summer-house, for I was having a half-holiday from my typewriting. Father had taken the manuscript I was at work upon to make some alterations, and for a few hours I was free to turn to something else. Marjory was deep in a new book and did not want me, so I took my own story and retired to the summer-house.

I was very fond of my story, though rather ashamed of it too. I was quite willing to admit that it might be worth nothing, and I felt too shy about it to show it to father and ask his opinion. Besides, it was not nearly finished, for I could give very little time to it. But I had worked at it for several months in my spare time, and my characters were very real to me. So even when I did not mean to write any more I enjoyed reading it over, for it was like meeting old friends again.

Marjory had read it, and was enthusiastic in its praise. When I grew despondent her admiration encouraged me to take it up again. She had already illustrated the manuscript as fully as I would allow, but on one point I had for a long time been firm; she was not to draw the heroine. Any of the other characters she might imagine as she liked, though if her pictures did not please me I made her alter them, but I had my own idea of my heroine and would not have her spoiled. Marjory had pleaded that she would make her very pretty, and she knew just what she was like, but I did not think so.

"When I meet some one pretty enough to be model I'll let you know, and you can sketch her," I had said.

And after we came to Loch Avie, I gave her leave, to her great delight, to complete the work and scatter sketches of the heroine through the book.

So I carried my story to the summer-house, to read it through and criticise the new pictures.

I seemed to have been sitting there for only a few minutes, when I heard father calling out on the lawn, "Jean! Jean! Where are you? Are we not to have any tea to-day?"

I knew what that meant and what would happen if he was kept waiting, so I dropped my book and hurried to the house.

"That manuscript is ready for you now," father said, so after tea I took out my typewriter and set to work again.

Tib came to keep me company. She jumped on the table and walked about among my piles of paper for a while, unable to decide which to sit upon. At last she fixed on the manuscript I was copying, and settled down comfortably in the middle of it. That would not do, of course, so I moved her gently, and she retired to a pile of clean white paper. But when I wanted to begin another page I had to move her again, and this time, waving her tail angrily, she seated

herself on my sheets of carbon paper. That was no better, for I had to disturb her again in ten minutes. So she walked away in great disgust, lashing her tail and sending my papers flying. She sat for an hour or so on a high chair with her back to me, deeply offended, but at last relented, and came back to watch me at work.

The moving bars, and keys, and carriage interested her greatly, and she watched intently for some time. Then, very gently, out came a soft little paw to feel for the noisy moving thing underneath. But the sharp claws inside the fur caught the paper and tore it right across, and I jumped up, offended in my turn.

"That is too bad, Tib! Now I'll have to do that page again. I've no time for such nonsense!"

I opened the window and dropped her on the grass, and with an indignant questioning "*Miaou!*" she sprang away.

At bedtime I could not find her anywhere. She was not in the kitchen, or Marjory's room, or on my bed. I searched through the garden, and remembered suddenly that I had left my story lying in the summer-house.

But it was not there now. My story, with all Marjory's pictures, was gone, and search as I might I found no sign of it, nor of Tib.

CHAPTER XVII.
THE EVIL EYE.

Peggy lay reading the book of poems Don Maxwell had lent her. Jack and Jill had gone off to bed at last, and for once she had nothing to do. So she lay enjoying an hour's rest and quiet reading before supper.

On the rug lay Cigarette. On the arm of the sofa sat Tib. Jack and Jill had brought her home an hour ago, saying they had found her wandering about the shore. Cigarette had been much surprised at sight of her, and had promptly chased her round the cottage. But Tib had her revenge. She hid behind the door, and next time Cigarette came running past a little paw shot out and hit him in the eye. Cigarette ran off yelping, and after that treated Miss Tib with distant respect.

Peggy sat up and looked at the clock. Half-past eight—she need not have supper for a little while yet. She scratched Tib's head to make her feel at home.

"It was very foolish of Jack and Jill not to know you belonged to Jean Maxwell, Tib. But of course they haven't been to Strongarra since the Maxwells came. I suppose they had never seen you before. I'll take you home first thing in the morning. What silly weans they are, to be sure. They might be such good friends with Marjory. I'm sure they would like her. But they won't even go to see her. Whatever is the matter with the dog?"

Cigarette was stretched on the rug asleep. He gave a little whimper, and kicked feebly with his hind legs. Then he gave a sharp bark and another whimper.

"He's having a bad dream, Tib. Just watch him kicking at nothing. I'll have to wake him."

But the dream passed, and Cigarette slept quietly again.

Tib gazed down at him with unwinking blue eyes. She evidently found him deeply interesting. Presently she jumped to the floor and crept stealthily up to him. Peggy watched, wondering what would come next. For a moment Tib sat looking at Cigarette's outstretched body, then bent, and cautiously, very cautiously, put out her tongue to the big black spot in the middle of the white back.

"What is she doing?" Peggy cried in amazement.

Tib drew back and looked at Cigarette. But he did not move. So she bent again, and began gently to lick the black spot. The dog slept peacefully, and thereafter Tib sat patiently licking, in the evident hope of removing the stain and leaving him as white as herself.

Peggy laughed softly, and rose to prepare her supper, for by this time Mother Hubbard would be away to bed.

Then she dropped a plate and stood in great surprise, at sound of a tap on the front door. Cigarette sat up, and the startled Tib fled to the sofa again, spitting angrily.

A visitor on Innis Beg at this time of night! What could be the matter?

She hurried to the door and was amazed to find Don Maxwell there.

"Why, Dr. Maxwell! Iss anything the matter?"

"I hope I didn't startle you, Miss Colquhoun. I've been spending the evening at Strongarra, and as I had a message for Jack and Jill I thought I might as well call in on my way home. I hope you'll forgive me if I frightened you."

"Oh, I wasn't frightened!" Peggy would not for anything have admitted it. "It iss just that we do not often have visitors here at night. And what is your message for the children? They

are away to bed, but I will tell them in the morning."

Don had hoped she would ask him in, but she evidently did not mean to do so. His message was of no great importance, but had served as an excuse for a visit.

"I'm going to sail up the loch to-morrow morning to visit a sick boy at Dunreoch, Miss Colquhoun. I wondered if Jack and Jill would care to come and make a picnic of it. I know they are fond of sailing."

"Oh, I'm sure they would be delighted. But it iss very good of you. You are always taking them out sailing."

"I enjoy having them. It's dull alone. If you could come with us?" Don suggested.

"I couldn't to-morrow, thank you. I have promised to go over to Balmona to see Mrs. Lennox's wee baby, and she'll be expecting me. Some other time perhaps. You won't let the weans catch anything, Dr. Maxwell? What iss the matter with your wee boy?"

"Bronchitis. Quite harmless—for Jack and Jill. He's a sickly little chap, but his parents won't see it, and treat him like one of the others. He went out to bring in the sheep and got wet through, and of course this is the result."

"Is it wee Tam Macfarlane?"

"It is. Do you know every child in the neighbourhood?"

"It iss not a crowded neighbourhood," Peggy said, smiling. "I am very fond of all the weans. Then I'll tell Jack and Jill, and thank you very much again. Shall they meet you on Goblin Island?"

"Oh, I'll come here for them. It's no trouble."

"It iss good of you. Good-night, Dr. Maxwell!"

"Peggy," said Jack at breakfast next morning, "Jill and I want to go up to Ardtyre to-day for a picnic. I suppose we must row all the way?"

"Do let us put up the sail, Peggy darling! Oh, please! We know how to manage it quite well!" pleaded Jill.

"I can't let you go sailing alone, and you know that very well. Malcolm would never trust me again. But I can tell you something better than rowing twelve miles, if you must go," Peggy said, smiling. "Dr. Macdonald was here last night, and——"

"Last night? He must have come very late," Jack exclaimed, and Jill cried,

"He iss always coming to this island. I do wonder what he means by it. He seems to like Innis Beg ferry much indeed."

Peggy peered into the coffee-pot to hide her rosy face, but the children were not thinking of her.

"Does Don want us to go sailing, Peggy? What luck!"

"He is going to Dunreoch to-day, and he will take you with him. Then you can walk over to Ardtyre. What is it you are wanting there?"

"Oh, something! How awfully good of Don. He's a brick."

"It is hardly polite to speak so of him. I was hoping you would take the cat back to Miss Maxwell and explain how you found it lost on the shore. I'm afraid she will have been very anxious about it."

Jill winked at Jack under cover of her cup.

"I wouldn't touch the nasty beast for anything! Ugh! I do hate cats!"

"Yes. Coming home in the boat last night she insisted on rowing, because I said if I rowed she'd have to hold the cat," Jack said, laughing. "Come away, Jill. You've had quite enough to eat. I want you."

“Let’s have a look at this,” he said, when they were up in the oak-tree. “It was too dark last night.”

From out of the plaid he pulled my bundle of manuscript. It consisted of three exercise books filled with writing. Between the pages were slipped leaves from Marjory’s sketch-book.

“It’s—I do believe—it’s a story! Written by the Girl! Oh, what a joke! I thought it was a stupid diary.”

“It’s sure to be silly——”

“You said that about the Author’s book, my child.”

“And pictures! Marjory did those, I’m sure. Yes, there’s her name—M. Lesley. They’re very good. I don’t mind looking at them. How cleffer she is. But just fancy the Girl trying to write a story!”

They looked through it critically, and Jill exclaimed, pointing to a picture of my heroine—

“That girl is ferry like Peggy! Find another picture of her, Jack. There, that’s still more like Peggy!”

There certainly was a likeness to Peggy in Marjory’s sketches, and presently Jill discovered that the pictures of a certain little boy and girl in the story were remarkably like Robin and Sheila.

“What cheek!” Jack said, laughing. “I wonder they haven’t put in you and me.”

“If they had I’d tear up the page. Put the silly thing in the bag, Jack. I don’t want anything to do with it. We’ll get rid of it as soon as we can. There’s Peggy calling me to help wash the dishes. Oh, dear! I do hate dirty plates!”

She ran off, and Jack stuffed the manuscript into the satchel in which they carried their books to the manse.

When Don arrived an hour later, Jack carried the satchel slung over his shoulder, and Jill a little bag in one hand and a milkcan in the other.

“These are some new-laid eggs, and this iss some fresh milk from Bo-peep, Don. Peggy thought wee Tam might drink an egg beaten up in milk, but she thought Mrs. Macfarlane might not be able to spare the milk.”

“It is so very strengthening,” Peggy explained, coming down to the landing-place. “Tell Mrs. Macfarlane I’m very sorry, Dr. Macdonald, and I’ll come to see Tam as soon as effer I can.”

“I hope you will let us take you in the boat some day soon,” Don suggested.

“That’s very good of you. Some day perhaps I will,” Peggy said, smiling.

“And what have you got in that satchel, Jack?” Don asked, as they set sail.

“Shall we tell him, Jill?”

“I suppose we’d better. But he’ll laugh. He doesn’t believe in the evil eye.”

“I never said so,” Don remarked gravely.

“You see, Jill says if a witch looks at anybody with the evil eye, that person will die. If she looks at a thing, that thing will never come to any good, and will bring harm and disappointment to its owner. She believes it, but I’m not so sure——”

“Oh, you wicked boy! You know you believe it just as much as I do. Do you say you don’t? Then give me your bonnet and I’ll show it to Mother Molly at Ardtyre, and she’ll put a spell on it that will make you ill or die! Will you let me, now?”

“No-o-o. I won’t.”

“There! You do believe it, you see. And it iss true. Oh yes, you may laugh, Don, but I know it iss true.”

"And we have an enemy," Jack went on.

"Oh? What has he done to you?"

"Nothing," Jack admitted, "but——"

"He's a she," Jill interrupted, "and she's a witch. She came to Innis Beg and tried to bewitch Boy Blue and Bo-peep, and she has a cat."

"Dear me! How awful! Well?"

"We've got something of hers—something she cares a lot about—and we're going to ask the witch to cast a spell over it, so that it will never be of any use. It's Jill's idea, and she won't be content unless we carry it out."

"Don't you think it iss a splendid plan?"

"But do you really expect the spell to work?" Don asked gravely.

"Why, of course! It iss sure to!"

"And what is the thing?"

"Something of hers," said Jack evasively.

"And where did you get it?"

"We—er—found it."

"We took it," Jill corrected, "but we aren't going to keep the horrid thing. We'll give it back as soon as Mother Molly has bewitched it."

"I see," Don said relieved, and decided not to interfere. "How is it you are not afraid the witch will cast her spell over you?"

"Oh, she's a great friend of Jill's."

"Besides, I have this," and Jill pointed to a bunch of rowan leaves and flowers in her belt. "She can't hurt anyone who iss wearing rowan, you know. Haven't you got any? Then you'd better not go where she can see you. Or you could wear your coat inside out, then she would be sure not to say, 'What a nice young man!' or something like that. If she did you'd be done for, you know."

Don laughed. "I must be careful. Why do you look on Miss Maxwell as an enemy?"

"Oh! How did you know it was the Girl? Peggy told you, I suppose! We just don't like her, that iss all. She iss a witch, and she has a horrid cat," and Jill would say no more.

Just where Ben Aan sits, keeping guard over the loch, a glen opens between the hills on the opposite side of the water. It is as if the giant of Marjory's picture had lifted his hand and split the hills apart. From the loch a road winds up through the glen, rising gradually, and overhung with fir-trees, which open occasionally to give glimpses of the loch and Ben Aan, or of the great hills rising on each side. The glen begins and ends with a little white village, Dunreoch and Ardtyre, but the road between is lonely and half asleep, with scarcely a cottage or farm all the way.

As the path rises to its highest point, before dipping again to another loch, one sees, looking forward, Old Man Mountain, standing out clear against the sky. For a thousand years he has sat there, bending over his work, cobbling a shoe which is not finished yet. A rugged gray figure, he has more of human likeness than any of his brothers, who sit in a ring frowning down on Ardtyre. And the strangest thing is that if you see him from the other side, by the Duke's castle in the City of Herring-Boats, he is no longer a crooked old man, toiling at a never-ending task, but a smooth-faced old woman sleeping under the open sky.

As she reached the top of the pass Jill stopped to air her knowledge.

"The rainiest place in all Scotland iss just ofer there. They say it iss always raining at Ardtyre, but I have been there when the sun was shining. Issn't Old Man splendid? The chiefs

here used to say no one might belong to their clan till he'd climbed to the top and touched the Old Man himself. But—issn't this funny?—Malcolm and Peggy once climbed right to the top with father, and when they got there the Old Man had vanished! It iss true! They couldn't find him anywhere. There were lots of rocks about, but they couldn't tell which it was made him. Wasn't that annoying? Now come and find the witch!"

CHAPTER XVIII.
THE WITCH'S PROPHECY.

"Business first, witches afterwards," Don said. "I've come here to see wee Tam Macfarlane."

"Oh, all right! Then we'll get rid of these eggs. Perhaps it's just as well. Mother Molly might have turned the milk sour."

They followed a path from the road, leading up to a farm on the hillside, and were received by Mrs. Macfarlane with evident relief. Tam had coughed all night, and she was very worried about him, but very much obliged to the doctor for coming so far when he had been only the day before.

Jill delivered Peggy's messages and gifts, and received grateful thanks in return. Then she and Jack stood on one side, and watched with keen interest while Don, transformed suddenly into a sober-faced doctor, examined, sounded, felt pulse and took temperature, listened with his ear on the small boy's chest and back, and made him say "ninety-nine" over and over again.

He prescribed constant poultices, and presented the distracted mother with a tin of linseed meal. He left two kinds of medicine and many directions, made sure that she understood what to do with Peggy's eggs and milk, and promised to return next day.

As they returned to the road Jack and Jill eyed him curiously. He had changed somehow since they had perceived that he was a doctor in earnest as well as in name. He had been so very serious while bending over Tam, and so unlike himself as they knew him, that they feared his usual light-heartedness and high spirits might not come back. Until now he had seemed a fit playmate, hardly any older than themselves. But now he had suddenly grown up, and they wondered doubtfully if he would be able to enter into their feelings and games as he had done before.

"I wonder how it feels to be ill?" Jill said soberly. "I neffer haf been ill in my life. I rather think I would like it for a change."

Don laughed. "You! I hope I may never have you for a patient, Jill. I know you'd be a very bad one—not at all like poor wee Tam. He puts up with anything I want, and never complains. Just be thankful you're as strong as a little horse.—Now for that witch! Where does she live? In a cave under a hill?"

"No, we'll show you," Jill said, much relieved. "Are you very frightened?"

"Not very. I won't run away."

"Remember, you must speak politely, and if she asks for anything you must be sure to give it to her. You must neffer say no to a witch."

"Really? I rather think I'll turn witch myself. She must make quite a good thing of it."

"Are you sure you won't turn your coat inside out?" Jill asked anxiously. "We'd really be sorry if anything happened to you; or will you carry some rowan leaves if Jack gets them for you?"

But Don declared himself prepared to face the witch without any safeguard whatever, much to Jill's distress.

"There iss one thing you must do," she begged. "Close your hands—this way—with the *thumbs inside*! Oh yes, you really must! Nobody will effer go near a witch without doing it.

Even Boy Blue knows that. But your thumb must be inside your fingers. Now come along. That's Mother Molly's house."

The cottage stood against the hillside, which rose behind it in a great rocky cliff. It was a tumble-down hut, with overhanging thatch, very unlike the white cottages of Lios. The doorway was low, and through the open door could be seen only gloomy darkness. All around the cottage were tangled bushes, gorse, heather, and bracken, standing so high that they covered the windows. Among the trees there was not a rowan or an ash to be seen. A few yards away a thin line of water trickled down the cliff and splashed in a rocky basin.

In front of the cottage was a bare patch of ground. Here a fire of twigs and branches was burning, and a great black pot stood in the midst of the flames. On a three-legged stool close to the fire sat a black cat, and another was stretched on the ground beside it. Their eyes gleamed yellow in the light of the flames, and both were big and had a wild, fierce look.

Jill stopped short. The witch was nowhere to be seen, only those nasty cats. Jack drew back. This was Jill's business, not his. Don waited, amused and interested.

While they hesitated, the black cat on the stool sat up, arched its back and stretched its claws, sneezed, and began to wash itself.

"There! Behind its ears that time, Jill!" said Jack.

"Ugh! The nasty beast! It iss sure to rain to-morrow. I thought she had only one. I neffer saw the other one before. I do hope—witches do sometimes——" and she looked suspiciously at the cat on the ground.

"Jill, you little goose!" cried Don.

Just then the second cat woke up, and stalked off into the cottage. In another moment the witch came out. Jill's startled eyes grew round with fear, and Don looked at her anxiously.

The witch was a little old woman, bent nearly double, and leaning on a stick as she walked. But her bright black eyes were keen and quick, and glanced restlessly about. She was dressed like any other old woman, in a dark gown and a gray shawl crossed on her chest. On her head was a sunbonnet, and her gray hair hung down from under it in thin locks on her shoulders.

She stood looking round. Then, at sight of Jack and Jill, she sat down on the stool beside the black cat, which crept into her lap. She beckoned to them with a skinny finger, and they went forward slowly, both clutching branches of rowan, with leaves and flowers. Don followed, anxious to miss nothing.

But before the old lady would speak, she pulled out a short black pipe, filled it, and lit it at the fire. She puffed away for a minute or two, then looked enquiringly at Jill.

"Mother Molly," said Jill nervously, "we haf brought you a present."

She produced a small packet of tobacco. The witch stretched out a thin arm and bony fingers, and grabbed it eagerly. She smelt it, then nodded graciously.

"And what will you pe wanting to-tay, Miss Jill?"

"You see, we have something here belonging to an enemy of ours, and we thought perhaps you wouldn't mind bewitching it, so that it will neffer be of any use again. It iss in that bag. Fetch it out, Jack!"

Jack produced what looked to Don like some old exercise books, and the witch regarded them seriously for a moment.

"It will neffer pe of any more use t'an it tesserfs to pe," she said solemnly.

"Oh, thank you *so* much! That iss just what we wanted."

"T'at will pe a shilling, Miss Jill."

“Of course! Here it is. We’er ferry much obliged to you, Mother Molly.”

“Will t’ere pe anything else I can do to please Miss Jill? Will I raise a creat storm on ta loch this night——”

“Oh no, please don’t, mother! We have to go home by water.”

“Or cast a spell ofer someone, so t’at he will fall sick and tie?”

“N-no, thank you.”

“Iss t’ere some farmer’s cow Miss Jill woult like ta efil eye to look upon, so t’ere will pe no more milk, or no butter for ta churning? Molly will do anything for Miss Jill——”

“Or for a shilling,” interrupted Don. “Come away, Jill. There’s been enough of this nonsense. We shan’t get home before dark, and your sister will be anxious.”

“Eh, the bonny shentleman! T’ere will pe something Mother Molly can do for you, sir. Will you haf a charm for a young lady, so she will look glad when she will see you? Or a witch’s stone to put unter your pillow, so you will tream of her? Or a ring to tell her what you ton’t like to say to her with your lips? Gif me a piece of silfer, sir, shust a little piece, and I will gif you a magic ring.”

“He hasn’t any young lady, mother,” Jack said scornfully. “I thought you knew everything.”

“Hass he not? An’ how will you pe knowing that, Master Jack?”

She grabbed Don’s hand and began to examine it. He laughed and waited curiously.

“T’ere is a laty—she iss young an’ ferry pretty—you haf not known her ferry long—you like her ferry much inteet, but you haf not taret to tell her so—you will be marriet to her in t’ree months.”

“Goodness me!” cried Jill, looking at him curiously.

Don snatched away his hand, laughing and reddening.

“That’s enough for one day, mother.”

“When you are marriet to her you will pe ferry happy,” the witch nodded. “An’ you will haf one of my magic rings, my bonny shentleman?”

“He isn’t bonny! He iss not a bit nice-looking!” Jill cried, in dismay. “Now, mother, he’s one of my friends. If you do him any harm I’ll neffer come here again.”

“Tuts! It’s all nonsense, Jill. But I’d better have one of those rings. It seems I’m going to want it sooner than I expected.”

The witch chuckled, and produced a ring of twisted bracken threads, dried and yellow.

“If you gif it to her she will unterstand.”

Don solemnly paid over a shilling and pocketed the ring.

“Now, come away, Jack and Jill, or our tea will be cold before we get home to it.”

CHAPTER XIX.
SOMETHING ABOUT PEGGY.

The morning after the disappearance of my story, I went up to Marjory's room to discuss the matter with her. We had spent an anxious night, thinking not only of my precious manuscript, but of poor Tib. Had she spent the night out on the hillside alone? Had anything happened to her? Or was it only some trick of Jack and Jill's? If so, I felt that this time they had gone too far.

"You had better tell Mr. Maxwell, and ask his advice, Jean," said Marjory.

But that would have meant telling father all about my story, and I was unwilling to do that if I could help it. When it was recovered, he would be sure to insist on seeing it, and at the thought, I became suddenly conscious of its imperfections and shortcomings. I had always hated being laughed at, and I felt that I could not bear to have my story made fun of. The thought that it was probably in strange hands and being criticised unkindly, worried me exceedingly.

"I don't know what to do," I said, for the twentieth time.

"If Jack and Jill have it they won't hurt it, Jean."

"Perhaps not, but I don't want them to have it. I've a good mind to go over. Here's a pretty picture coming up our lawn, Marjory."

It was only Peggy Colquhoun, wearing a fresh muslin dress and big shady hat. I had never seen any girl wear such dainty frocks and blouses as Peggy. She seemed to have a never-failing supply of new ones. But I knew by this time that she made and washed and ironed them herself, so they cost her very little and she always looked fresh and pretty.

Sheila, in the Red Riding Hood cloak, was on one side of her, and Boy Blue, completely covered in a blue pinafore and with his straw hat on the back of his head, was on the other. Peggy carried something in her arms—something soft and white and furry, with a bushy tail lashing furiously in protest at having been forced to travel for five minutes in a boat.

I ran down to meet them, and Peggy explained how Jack and Jill had found Tib, and had not known that she belonged to me.

"It was very silly of them. I told them so, but they didn't seem a bit ashamed," she said.

I did not believe that the children could have made such a mistake, but I did not say so to Peggy. I felt sure they had been over to Strongarra more often than she imagined.

She never mentioned my story, so I supposed she had seen nothing of it, and I did not like to ask her. She explained that she was on her way to the pier, and asked if I would allow Mother Hubbard's Sandy to row Robin and Sheila home again.

"I'm sorry to ask it, Miss Maxwell, but, you see, I am leaving these weans alone for the day, and they will have to spend all the time on the island. They begged so hard for one walk in the day that I thought I would take them as far as the pier. Then, if you wouldn't mind, Wee Sandy can row them home again. It will only take him a few minutes."

I was assuring her that Sandy would be ready when the children came back, when Robin remarked:

"Jack and Jill are away off for a sail with Dr. Macdonald, and Peggy's going over to Balmona, and Sheila and me are to have dinner all alone. It's dreatfully dull on the island with only Mother Hubbard and Bo-peep and Sheila."

"Now, Boy Blue, I call that ferry unkind and naughty," Peggy said reprovingly. "You know Sheila always plays with you. You don't deserve that she should be so good to you. And I can't take you with me."

"Why, Robin, you know we're going to have a dolls' wash out on the lawn, with real water and soap and soda and blue!" cried Sheila. "And you're going to iron the dresses when they're dry."

"But it's dull with only you," said the ungrateful one. "And Bo-peep can't talk, and Mother Hubbard goes to sleep all the time."

I promptly invited them to spend the day with Marjory, and Boy Blue's face cleared instantly.

"I was just *hoping* you'd ask us," he said, with a sigh of relief. "That's why I said it."

Peggy struggled hard to look shocked, but had to give in and laugh.

"Miss Maxwell, I'm ashamed of him! He's a disgrace to the family. Boy Blue, you deserve a good whipping, that you do!"

"The steamer iss in sight! You'd better not waste time, or you'll have to run, Peggy!" cried Robin, to change the subject, and Peggy had to hurry away.

It was such a glorious day, and Marjory's room in the tower was so hot, with the sun streaming in, that father and I carried a sofa out into the garden, and installed her there under the trees near the water, to her very great delight. At Boy Blue's suggestion, Wee Sandy was sent over to Innis Beg to fetch the dolls' clothes from Mother Hubbard and to tell her that the little ones would not be home to dinner. Then the washing proceeded on the lawn with water from the loch, and Marjory superintended and enjoyed it as much as Red Riding Hood herself.

Next morning, as I was in the garden, cutting irises for the table and for Marjory's room—great purple ones and little yellow ones, with brown spots and splashes—I went into the summer-house for a basket.

On the table, where I had left it, lay my story.

I touched it doubtfully, wondering if I was dreaming. Then I examined it anxiously, but found it unharmed. No pictures were lost, no pages torn. It was just as I had left it. But it had certainly not been there yesterday.

I could not understand it, and hurried up to tell Marjory. We puzzled over it all day, but found no explanation. Perhaps Jack and Jill had just wanted to read it. But they had kept other things—why not this?

When Don arrived that same evening after dark to give us an account of his visit to the witch, we at once told him the whole matter. I was afraid he would laugh, for he had never heard about my story, but I felt that someone ought to be told. Father was very busy to-day, and I did not care to worry him. And all Don said was—"Then *that's* what they were taking to the witch!"

We demanded explanations, and he told us all about the expedition to Mother Molly at Ardtyre.

"The woman's a regular old fraud, of course, but she must make it pay. She had two shillings out of us for absolutely nothing. I asked Jill on the way home if she did much business, and she said, 'Effer so much! Efferybody goes to her.' I told them she was a fraud, but Jill was very scornful, of course. I think Jack is rather doubtful about it all, but doesn't like to say so because he isn't sure. They ought to be sent to school. Listen to this. You know it is part of these witch tales that the witch can turn herself into an animal—a wolf, or a hare, or a black cat. I'd learnt that from Jill already. Well, the first things we saw at the cottage were two

great black cats. Jill had thought the witch had only one, and I saw by her face that she suspected the other of being the old lady herself."

"Not really in earnest, Don?"

"Really and truly, and very much in earnest, my child. She looked at it in a scared way that made me want to shake her."

"She couldn't be such a little goose!"

"Oh, yes, she could. The cat got up, and stalked off into the cottage, and in another moment the witch herself came out. You should have seen that child's face! She was convinced that the beast had gone out of sight, turned into its proper shape, and come out again as an old woman. Now, you know, if she can believe such a thing, it's time it was put a stop to."

"Yes," I said thoughtfully. "I wonder what Peggy would say about it."

"She'd be very much annoyed, of course. Don't mention all this to her, Jean. It would only worry her, and she has enough worry with those children on her hands."

We sat thinking—I, wondering how Jill could be cured of her foolishness—Marjory, hoping they would soon come to see her again—Don, I suppose, thinking as usual of Peggy.

It was a very warm evening, and Marjory's windows were wide open. She had asked me to put her plant out on the sill, saying it needed fresh air. Jill's expected rain had not come, in spite of the black cat's toilette, and the air was close and sultry, and felt like thunder. There had not been a breath of wind all day, but a slight breeze had sprung up since darkness fell. We could hear the water of the loch washing gently among the stones of the beach, but we could see nothing outside, for there was no moon. Innis Beg lay like a dark shadow, silent also, for sing-song was over long ago, and the little ones were away to bed. Marjory, looking out into the darkness and silence, remembered the Goblin tale, and shivered fearfully.

Suddenly Don sat up.

"Listen! Your ghost, Jean, or I'm much mistaken."

Another sound above the lapping of the waves—the gentle grating of a keel on the shingle. We could see no boat, but we all heard the hastily-checked rattle of an oar in the rowlock, as it was drawn in and laid on the thwarts.

"Shall we go for them?" asked Don, as I sprang up.

"Of course. Come along!"

"Think how annoyed Peggy—Miss Colquhoun—will be! You'll simply have to tell her, if you catch them red-handed, you know. You can't pass it over after all they've done."

I hesitated. "I don't want to worry Peggy, of course, but I would like to know what they're up to this time."

"We can find that out anyway. But tread softly," and we hurried off, leaving Marjory in suspense.

Don led the way across the lawn, then drew me quickly behind some bushes, as Jack and Jill crept stealthily past. If we had not been expecting them we should still have recognised Jack's kilt and Jill's tam, even in the dark.

We followed them across the grass, till they stopped beside a great round flower-bed. Many a time lately I had looked at it, and had promised Marjory a rose from it as soon as they were open. From a matted bed of leaves rose a multitude of fine brown stems, crowned by clouds of tiny pink stars. Marjory and I with strict botanical accuracy called it London Pride, and did not know its more fanciful name. The tiny flowers in their thousands covered the sloping bank like a coverlet, and in the midst of them stood a white rose bush, with half-open

buds. They were the earliest roses in the garden, and I hoped to cut some for Marjory in a few days.

Jack and Jill paused, and Don drew me behind a chestnut-tree, where we could hear every word but could not be seen.

Jack stepped into the middle of the bed, and Jill cried softly,

"Oh, be careful! Do be careful, Jack! I *know* you'll step on some."

"Tuts!" He examined the rosebuds.

"That's good! They're coming on fine. By Tuesday there will be plenty."

"Oh, I *am* so glad! It would have been dreatful to have no flowers. Shall we take them at once?"

"What would be the use of that, silly? We couldn't hide *them* in the big tree. No, no, Monday night will be quite time enough."

"And you don't think Peggy will guess? She would be ferry angry if she knew."

"Why should she? White roses don't grow only at Strongarra."

"They are not out yet in Lios. Ours are always first."

"Peggy won't know that. She must think they come from the village, of course."

"And None-So-Pretty neffer grows so fine anywhere else."

Jack laughed. "That's nonsense. The None-So-Pretty by Mother Molly's cottage is every bit as fine as this."

"It issn't! Oh, you bad boy, how can you tell such stories? You just say it to tease me. Our None-So-Pretty iss the finest on the loch, and I believe Peggy will know it is from Strongarra."

"Well, we'll see on Tuesday. Come away now. Peggy thinks we're in bed, you know. If she catches us, we shall catch it."

Jill giggled, and they ran off to their boat.

We went back to the house, and repeated the conversation to Marjory, puzzling over the questions it raised. What did they want the flowers for? Why did they want them on Tuesday? Why did they not get them from some of their friends in the village, instead of stealing them from us? London Pride, at least, was in every garden in Lios.

"None-So-Pretty?" said Marjory. "What a very pretty name! It would just suit Peggy herself."

I nodded and looked at Don. He was thinking hard.

"I suppose you would like to put a stop to these little monkeys' tricks, Jean?"

"I certainly should. We've had about enough of it. I'm going to pick those roses for Marjory on Monday afternoon."

"Oh, Jean, please don't! Jack and Jill wanted them for Peggy, you know. I'd like her to have them."

"Jack and Jill ought not to steal them. They're welcome to them if they'll only ask for them."

"Don't pick them, Jean," said Don. "I may want them. Marjory won't mind. Well now, we must capture our ghosts. We know when to expect them this time. So let's lay our plans, and be ready for them. This is Friday, so we have plenty of time."

At last we concocted a scheme that satisfied us. Marjory listened and laughed and assented, but took no great part in the discussion. She was thinking of Jill and Mother Molly and the black cat, and when presently drops of rain began to fall, she laughed.

“Jill will certainly believe it is because the cat sneezed. Don, I thought you said Jill paid a shilling to the witch?”

“She did. Why?”

“You said she had two shillings from you. What was the other for?”

He laughed. “You want to know too much, miss! The old lady insisted on telling my fortune.”

“Oh, what fun! What did she say?”

But Don would not tell, though we coaxed and teased him.

“I shall ask Peggy. She’s coming here to-morrow,” said Marjory.

“Then you won’t be any the wiser, for I made Jack and Jill promise not to tell.”

“Goodness me! It must have been something very serious.”

“Something private, my child. That’s all.”

“Something about Peggy?” said Marjory, laughing.

CHAPTER XX.
FOUND OUT.

Jill took her seat in the boat, and Jack rowed stealthily back to Innis Beg. There was even more need for caution than on the way from the island. Then only the Maxwells were to be feared. Now the danger was from Peggy.

"I have a feeling," Jill whispered suddenly, "that something iss going to happen. I feel it here," pressing her hand against her breast.

"What kind of thing?" Jack asked, with interest.

"I don't know. Something horrid. It may be the Girl, or it may be the Goblin, or it may be Peggy. There iss something wrong. It iss like the second-sight. Oh, dear! I wish I'd stayed in bed."

"How did you manage to cheat Mother Hubbard?"

"Oh, she was snoring. I got into bed with my nightgown ofer my dress while she was away talking to Peggy, and when she was sound asleep I crept out to the big tree to meet you."

"Peggy would be most dreadfully shocked. Would you rather be caught by her or by the Enemy?"

"Oh, the Enemy! We could be rude to them and neffer care, but Peggy would look sorry and worried, and maybe she'd cry, and I couldn't stand that."

"Just so. Same with me. If Peggy ever hears of all these goings-on, I shall run away and hide," said Jack, guiding the boat carefully into the tiny bay.

On a great stone by the landing-place sat Peggy.

"Oh! Let's run!" gasped Jill.

But Jack ran the boat up on the beach. He would have liked to hide, but it was no use hiding from Peggy.

They stepped guiltily ashore, and Jack pulled up the boat. Jill ran to her sister.

"Peggy, dear! Don't look at us like that. We haf been ferry wicked, but you'll forgive us surely, Peggy! We only went for a wee bit of fun, Peggy *dear*!"

"Come into the house, Jack and Jill, and tell me where you have been. I didn't think you would play tricks on me like this."

Her voice trembled between anger and disappointment. The culprits looked at one another, and followed miserably.

Peggy turned up the lamp.

"What is the meaning of this? It is ten o'clock, and Jill went to bed at half-past eight. Jack, you kissed me good-night, and I thought you were going to bed too. I thought you were both asleep, and you have been away out in the boat. Have you cheated me this way before? How many nights have you been out when I didn't know?"

Jill began to cry. Jack stared at the floor.

"Have you ever done it before? Perhaps," she said hopefully, "this is the first time?"

Lie to Peggy Jack could not. He shook his head, and Peggy's face fell.

"You have done it before? How many times?"

"Not ferry often, Peggy!" cried Jill desperately. "Truly, Peggy *dear*!"

Peggy looked at her. "I don't know if it is true, Jill. How am I to believe you now? You have been tricking me all the time. Weans, I wouldn't have believed you'd treat me so. I

wouldn't have cared so much if you'd been really bad, teasing, or up to mischief, like you used to be, but you haven't. You haven't given me trouble, and I thought it was so good of you to help me just now. I wrote to Malcolm yesterday and told him so, and now I find it has all been a trick. You have been good when I was watching you, and then have cheated me when I did not know. Jack and Jill, I didn't think you'd do it. It has made me sorrier than anything else. To know that I cannot trust you, or believe what you say—could anything be worse? Now you'd better go to bed. It is too late for you to be up. Take something to eat before you go, if you're hungry after being on the water."

She went to lock the front door. Jill put her head down on the table and sobbed. Jack went into the room where Robin lay sleeping, and shut the door.

Jill's tear-stained cheeks and heaving shoulders touched Peggy's heart. She put her arm round her sister and kissed her.

"Jill, why did you do it? It has made me so unhappy and disappointed."

"We didn't think—we didn't mean——"

"Didn't think! Didn't mean!" and Peggy went wearily away to bed.

Jill crept into the kitchen, where Mother Hubbard lay snoring in her box-bed.

"And it was all for Peggy we went to-night! Just because Tuesday iss her birthday, and we wanted her to have roses and None-So-Pretty as usual!" she sobbed, throwing herself on her bed.

Next morning, Peggy went over to Lios to do her Saturday shopping, saying to Jack before she went, "I am going to post a letter to Malcolm, Jack."

Jack nodded gloomily, and he and Jill retired to the big tree to talk matters over.

"What do you suppose will happen when Malcolm comes?" Jill asked apprehensively.

"Don't much care. Anything's better than to have Peggy look like she does just now. Malcolm will be wild, of course. I shall get a thrashing, I suppose. You'll have bread and water and not to leave the island for a week."

"I don't mind bread and water, but I can't stand the other!" Jill cried in dismay. "I should go crazy mad on this wee island all the time."

"And we'll have to apologise to the Enemy."

"I won't! I neffer will! Oh, Jack, you wouldn't, surely!"

"If Peggy and Malcolm find out everything—about Marjory, and about the books and things, and how often we've been over there—we'll have to. Malcolm will make us."

"I hate them—the Enemy, I mean. I wish they'd neffer come. I hate them all."

"You liked the Author's book."

"Ye-es! But I hate the Girl and the cat. I will neffer apologise to the Girl, not for fifty Malcolms."

"Well," said Jack, scowling at Strongarra across the water, "if I have to apologise, I'll pay someone out for it afterwards."

"Let's pay them out first, not wait for afterwards," suggested Jill, with sparkling eyes, their disgrace and Peggy's distress forgotten in a moment.

Jack laughed. "How?"

She pondered a moment. Then—"I know! A most splendid plan!" she cried, jumping with delight. "Just to pay out the Girl, and no one else. Jack, let me whisper."

"Do you really think anything would happen to her?" Jack asked doubtfully, when he had heard the plan.

"Why, of course! Efferybody knows that. If we went back in the morning we'd only find her bones left, and perhaps her boot-buttons," giggled Jill.

Jack laughed too, but asked, "Without joking, what do you think would happen?"

"I don't know. Nobody knows. If anything happened, no one could blame you or me. We wouldn't have done anything."

"But it would be our fault."

"Bother! Don't interrupt. She'd get a real good fright, anyway, and that would serve her right. We can say we're sorry afterwards, if Peggy wants us to, but we'll have punished the Girl first. When shall it be, Jack?"

"To-night. Malcolm will be here on Monday."

"But to-night Robin and Sheila are going to tea with Marjory."

"So they are. Then we must wait till Monday, and see if we have a chance then. Malcolm may not come till the evening boat. He and Peggy will scold worse than ever, you know."

"We may as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb," said Jill vigorously. "We'll have had our revenge on the Girl, anyway, and if they make us beg pardon afterwards, we'll feel so bad that we'll be glad we did it."

"We can beg pardon for everything at once. May as well give 'em something worth scolding about while they're at it."

"It *iss* good of you!" Jill said, laughing. "I do hope Peggy won't feel ferry bad, but we *must* punish the Girl. I can hardly wait till Monday night."

However, before Monday night came, she had something else to think about, for Malcolm arrived by the mid-day boat. Jack and Jill saw him on the steamer before it reached the pier, and retired to the farthest corner of the island, and let Peggy and the little ones go to meet him alone.

Presently they heard vigorous ringing of the dinner bell outside the cottage door, and looked at one another.

"Shall we go? I—I think I'd rather wait here."

"Come on! It's cowardly to hide. I'll stand by you, old girl. Be a man!" and Jack took her arm and led her off to face the offended head of the family.

Malcolm stood before the cottage playing with Cigarette. He had taken the beloved pipe, by this time much chewed and broken about the mouthpiece, and stuck it into the trellis over the porch. Cigarette, in his anxiety to reach it, was jumping up and down and barking furiously, to the great delight of Boy Blue, who sat counting his leaps in the air and encouraging him to greater efforts.

"He has jumped twenty-seffen times without stopping, Jack and Jill!" he cried, at sight of them.

"Come away, you two," said Malcolm, "you're keeping us all waiting. We want to get dinner through quickly. Peggy and I are going for a picnic."

The culprits stared at him, and then at one another. Malcolm chuckled, and led the way into the cottage.

"Dinner ready, Peg? So are we. Sit down quickly, all of you. Boy Blue, say grace."

"Jill," burst out Sheila, "Malcolm says we are going to live at Strongarra again."

"What? How?" Jack and Jill looked up quickly, forgetting they were in disgrace.

"I didn't quite say that. But I heard from Mr. Sinclair on Saturday that old Mr. Macpherson's affairs are likely to turn out better than he expected. Some mines he'd put money into are turning up trumps after all, and he hopes things may come out nearly straight."

"And shall we get all our money back again?"

"Nearly all. So there's no need for you to live in this poky little hole any longer. But we can hardly turn the Maxwells out of Strongarra, can we, Peg?"

"Not till the end of August. We are very comfortable here, Malcolm."

"Well, now, term will very soon be over, you know, so I propose we take a house at the coast for a couple of months, and then come back to Strongarra in the autumn."

"Hear, hear!—How fine! How soon can we go?" cried Jack and Jill together.

"We must find a house first. How would Rothesay do? Plenty of sailing there. Or Arran—live on a farm and climb mountains? We'll talk it over this afternoon."

"Are you and Peggy going for a picnic alone?" asked Jill, in great surprise.

"We're to meet some friends and go up Glen Lios with them."

"Whoever can it be? Who iss it, Malcolm?"

"Red Riding Hood and Boy Blue, would you like to come too? Sure Boy Blue's legs are long enough and strong enough? Run for your hats then."

Jack and Jill looked at one another in amazement. Were they to be left behind alone? Perhaps this was by way of punishment.

Peggy went off to change her dress. Robin came rushing back into the room.

"Jill, undo my trousers, quick! Peggy says I'm to have on my kilt. Jack, what have you done with my whistle? Sheila iss getting my hat, Jill. Mother Hubbard, where are my shoes? Jill, my socks must be changed too. What a ferry long time you take! Issn't it fun, going for a picnic with Malcolm?"

"Jill," said Sheila soberly, as she changed her shoes, "would you like me to stay at home with you? I will if you'd like it."

"No, indeed. Jack and I will have a ferry fine time without all the rest of you fussing about. There iss something we want to talk about as soon as effer you are away. Thank you all the same, Red Riding Hood.—That child has all the goodness you and I ought to have, as well as her own share, Jack," she said, as they sat watching the boat on its way to Lios.

Jack nodded. "Wonder who they're going with? Malcolm wouldn't say."

"Didn't Peggy look pretty? I do think she iss prettier effery day. I don't know how she manages it. And to-morrow she will be twenty-one."

They soon began to feel lonely. Mother Hubbard and Bo-peep did not prove very good company. As soon as Mother Hubbard had washed up the dinner dishes and tidied the kitchen, she settled herself in an armchair and went to sleep. Bo-peep stood ankle-deep in the water of the loch, swishing off the flies with her tail, still ornamented with its bunch of red thread. Jack and Jill prepared their lessons for the next day, and then climbed into the oak-tree to discuss a point they had almost forgotten.

"Malcolm neffer said a word about Friday night. What *do* you suppose iss the matter with him?"

"I can't think what it means," Jack confessed. "Even Peggy looked puzzled."

"She would tell him all about it in the boat coming from Lios. So he must have known."

"Then why didn't he scold? He didn't even look sober like Peggy has done ever since."

"No, he was quite happy. He can't be so ferry angry surely."

"Well now, what about to-night?"

Jill nodded, her eyes sparkling. "Efferybody iss away. It is a most splendid chance."

"We shall catch it from Malcolm, you know. It won't make matters any better."

"Oh, *please* don't come if you are frightened!"

He would be a strange boy who could stand that, and no Highlander. Jack said quickly—
“Don’t be a goose, Grizel Colquhoun! When shall we go?”

CHAPTER XXI.
REVENGE.

"I wonder if it iss the Enemy Malcolm and Peggy have gone with," said Jill suddenly, as they pushed off from the island an hour later. "For if it is, it issn't much use for us to go looking for the Girl, you know."

"But Malcolm doesn't know the Maxwells. Nonsense! It will be some one who's stopping at the hotel at Dunreoch and who wants to go up Glen Lios with some one who knows the way."

"That *iss* more likely! Then it's all right. I was afraid we were going to be cheated of our —our revenge, after all."

Jack laughed. "It's the Girl who'll have her revenge to-morrow, my child, when she tells Peggy and Malcolm. And unfortunately we shan't be able to deny it."

"Neffer mind. It will only make things a wee bittie worse," Jill said comfortably. "Goodness me now, if that issn't lucky! There iss the Girl herself on the shore. Then we won't even need to look for her."

When I saw them rowing across the strait I really thought they had come to make friends at last. They did not turn away, as they had done so often, but came straight to the shore. Jack jumped out and steadied the boat for Jill, and they came up the beach towards me, Cigarette bounding along beside them, delighted at being ashore again. It was the first time I had met them on friendly terms, but they showed no sign of shame or penitence, but seemed quite at their ease.

"Miss Maxwell," called Jill, as they came up the bank, "will you come for a row? The others haf gone and left us alone. Come for a row, and then we'll take you home for tea."

"That's really very good of you," I said, delighted at their sudden surrender. "I would like a row very much, but I've had my tea."

"*Had* your tea? Why, it iss only four o'clock!"

"It's half-past four, Jill. We always have tea about four—afternoon tea, you know."

"How ferry funny! We have tea at five always."

"You'll be ready for another by the time you've had a row," said Jack. "Come along, don't waste time."

I laughed. "I must get my hat. Won't you come in and see Marjory? I would like you to make friends with her."

"Not to-day, thank you," Jack said gravely, and scowled at Jill, who showed signs of giggling. "Hadn't you better get your hat if you want it, Miss Maxwell?"

By asking too much I might lose all. It was enough for one day that they had made friends with me. They would soon be willing to come to Marjory too. So I thought, and did not press the matter.

Jack and Jill took an oar each, and Cigarette curled up at Jill's feet. When I was ready, they rowed me out on to the loch and round Strongarra point, leaving Innis Beg and Goblin Island behind. In the narrow Lios straits our boat, tiny as she was, sent ripples splashing among the heather and ferns that hung into the water—on the one side the shore, on the other the Big Island. Jack and Jill rowed energetically, keeping excellent time, and we sped away to the south. Occasionally at my request they drew in to the shore under the shade of the trees, where

the air was heavy with the scent of the firs, and thickets of wild rose hung over the bank, dotted with golden-starred flowers.

When we came to the southern end of the Big Island we turned the corner and sped north again on the lakeward side, catching the wind coming full across from Balmona. But Jack and Jill did not mind that, but rowed on untiringly, chattering all the time. They told me many things I had not heard before—of the great massacre at Lios hundreds of years ago—of the raiders who lie buried on one of the islands—of the old saying about the loch, "Waves without wind, fish without fin, and a floating island."

"Waves without wind we have effery day," laughed Jill, as we reached the northern end of the Big Island and met the five o'clock steamer, "but the other two I haf neffer seen. Now we'll lie here and catch the wash from her paddles, and then go home for tea.—There! Issn't it fun?" as we swung up and down on the rollers.

"Ready for another tea, Miss Maxwell? Shall we go home to Innis Beg, Jill?"

"Have you effer been to Goblin Island, Miss Maxwell? Then we'll go there for tea, and show you our storehouses and have some fun. Have you heard the Goblin tale?"

"Yes. Wee Sandy told me," at which Jack laughed. "When you and Jill come to see Marjory, Jack, don't tell her the story. I haven't let her hear it, for fear she might be nervous."

For some reason I did not understand Jack laughed and Jill giggled. Then Jack said quickly, to change the subject,——

"Got everything you want for tea on Goblin Island, Jill? Then we needn't go to Innis Beg at all. Now for Innis Torr!"

"It iss quite safe, Miss Maxwell," Jill cried quickly. "The Goblin neffer iss there till after dark."

"I'm not afraid of him," I laughed, and a glance passed between Jack and Jill.

They introduced me to Goblin Island with an air of ownership which was amusing. Cigarette rushed off at once to explore his favourite haunts, and we followed more slowly.

"That goose Cigarette will neffer be sure there are no rabbits here. He looks each day he comes over, but he has neffer seen a rabbit yet," said Jill contemptuously.

They took me to every corner of the island before allowing me to enter the ruined tower, and showed off various damp and rather dirty nooks under the bushes with evident pride. These, said Jack, were their hiding-places, when danger threatened.

At last they led the way into the open space within the tower, and Jack made me sit down on a fallen block till tea was ready. Then he brought wood from a corner where it was piled under a great tarpaulin for shelter, and set light to it with matches from his pocket. Jill fetched a little kettle and an armful of groceries in paper bags from a recess in the wall, where bricks had been pulled out and the spaces used as cupboards. Jack ran to the loch to fill the kettle, and cut the bread Jill had set on the big stone table, while she fetched tea-pot and mugs and tin plates.

They had everything they needed, and it became evident to me that they must have intended from the first to bring me to Goblin Island. For out of corners and cracks in the wall came tin boxes, and from these Jill produced cakes and scones and shortbread which had certainly been made no later than that morning. Milk in a little jug, butter on a tin plate, and a dish of pansies which obviously came from Innis Beg, were placed on the table. Jill warmed the tea-pot and made the tea, and Jack invited me to take my seat.

We had a merry meal, and I enjoyed their company exceedingly. They had large appetites, and seemed distressed at first that I was not as hungry as they. But Jack reminded his sister

that this was my second tea, and she was satisfied.

Cigarette begged steadily all through the meal, but only to me. He sat gazing at me, and whenever I glanced at him he sat up promptly, with paws crossed and eager snapping eyes, but Jack begged me not to feed him till we had finished, saying it was bad for his morals. So we let him wait, and he watched every bite I took hopefully.

Jack and Jill told me much that interested and amused me. I had hard work to keep from laughing when Jill described their meeting with Don, and Jack told of the many delightful sails and excursions they had had with him.

"He's the jolliest fellow I ever met. I don't know how we'd get on without him now."

"If he should effer go away I shall go after him! The loch would be dreatfully dull without him now," cried Jill.

"But if we should go to Rothesay or Arran"—and they told me the news Malcolm had brought.

"Oh well, that would be different. We'd be in a new place, and we'd have fun all day long. I just love steamers, don't you, Miss Maxwell? But a sailing boat iss better still."

So we were all very friendly, and I was relieved to find that their objections to me had apparently vanished. But I was puzzled, and decided to consult Peggy on the subject. Perhaps this was the result of Malcolm's return. Yes, that was very probable.

We sat talking for a long time, and then Jack produced a pack of cards and insisted on teaching me 'Patience.'

"It iss a ferry good game to know," said Jill, collecting the tea dishes. "If you should effer be alone on an island you could amuse yourself, you know."

I laughed. "I don't expect ever to be alone on an island, but——"

"You neffer know what will happen!"

"But you can teach me if you like, Jack. Marjory knows where I am, at least she thinks I'm on Innis Beg, so she won't trouble about me."

"We mustn't wait late because of the Goblin," said Jack coolly. "He comes here every night, you know, and if you or Jill stayed here after dark he'd carry you off or crunch you up at once."

"It iss true!" Jill cried indignantly, as I laughed. "Oh well, you wait and see.—But there iss time enough for a game or two. Teach her 'Patience,' Jack, while I wash these things, and then we'll have 'Old Maid' and 'Snap.' "

The grass was growing damp, so Jack fetched a great plaid from another corner of the mysterious ruin and spread it on the stone slab.

"We have everything here we need. With the fire and the plaid you could spend a night here very well, if it wasn't for the Goblin."

"I don't want to spend a night here," I laughed. "But it's not because I'm afraid of the Goblin."

We played several games, and Jack and Jill laughed and joked so much that I did not notice the shadows filling the corners and creeping over the sky. The sun had gone down, but they had made me forget the time. I trusted to their fear of the Goblin, and left the time of departure to them.

Suddenly Jack threw down his cards.

"Can you play 'Chucks,' Miss Maxwell?"

"No, Jack. I've seen Robin and Sheila playing, but I don't know how they do it."

“We must teach her, Jill. She might like to amuse herself when she’s alone some time,” at which I laughed. “Come and help me find wee round stones on the shore. We’ll be back in three minutes, Miss Maxwell.”

They ran off, and I noticed how dark it was getting. It was time we were going home. Peggy did not like the children to be out on the water after dark. The air was chilly, and the wind was blowing strong down the loch from the north. I remembered that Jill had no jacket, but only a thin cotton blouse. As soon as they came back I would suggest going home.

From the shore came Jack’s voice calling, “Cigarette! Cigarette! Here, old man!”

Cigarette, who had been sleeping on the plaid beside me, rushed off and left me alone. I waited, wondering that they took so long to find five little stones. It grew darker, and I began to feel sure they were stopping later than they intended on Goblin Island. So at last as they did not come I followed them, thinking we should certainly not have time for another game.

I picked my way through the stones and rocks of the ruin, wondering at their silence. I could not even hear them chattering as I had done at first. The narrow path through the bushes was hard to find in the twilight. I struggled out to the shore and looked round in surprise.

The boat was gone. Jack and Jill had disappeared.

Away out on the water near Innis Beg was a tiny speck, scarcely visible in the gathering darkness. In a moment I understood.

They had left me alone on Goblin Island.

CHAPTER XXII.
IN THE GOBLIN'S CLUTCHES.

"This is getting past a joke, you know," said Malcolm, jumping up. "Where can those two have got to? It's high time we were home."

"Yes," Sheila said seriously. "I should have been in bed an hour ago, and as for Robin, he's half asleep."

"I'm not! I'm not a bit tired! Sheila, it is ferry wicked to tell stories. Do you think Peggy and Dr. Macdonald have lost themselves up the hill, Malcolm?"

"No, but I think they've forgotten the time. It will soon be dark. Suppose you begin putting up the things, weans, then we'll be ready when they do come. Peggy!" he shouted through his hands, and his voice echoed among the rocks of Glen Lios. "Peg—gee!"

"You bring the cups to me, Boy Blue, and I'll put them in the basket," Sheila suggested.

But Boy Blue was not agreeable.

"I'm tired. You get them, Red Riding Hood. I want a rest. It iss a ferry long way home."

"You weren't a bit tired three minutes ago."

"You monkey!" said Malcolm. "Don't let me hear any more of that nonsense. Help Sheila at once. I wish the others would turn up."

"Dr. Macdonald iss always talking to Peggy. He hasn't had a game with us to-day; nothing but walk with Peggy all the time. I can't think what he finds to say to her," and Malcolm chuckled.

"Here they come.—Well, young people, what have you to say for yourselves?"

Peggy and Don Maxwell came hurrying round the shoulder of the hill. Peggy's face grew rosily conscious under her brother's look of amused enquiry, and she hurried to help Sheila to pack the basket.

"Whateffer have you been doing all this time, Peggy?" asked Sheila.

"Don looks as if he'd been having a good time," Boy Blue remarked, and looked critically at his sister. "And Peggy looks as if she'd got a secret."

The elders laughed, and Peggy sprang up.

"The basket is ready now. Will you two carry it? Then come along, weans. It's time we were home. Let's have a race down the Glen."

She ran off with the children, leaving Don to tell the secret to Malcolm as they followed with the picnic basket.

Jack and Jill rowed hurriedly away from Goblin Island in the gathering darkness.

"Do you really think anything will happen to her?" Jill whispered. "I'm not sure that I want the Goblin to eat her now. You don't feel the same somehow when you've had tea with a person."

"She's sure to be frightened, and she'll maybe catch cold, if she hasn't the sense to make up the fire. She may get wet too; the wind feels like rain. But as for the Goblin—tuts! she's all right, Jill. It's all nonsense. But something will happen to *us* to-morrow. Shall we go for those flowers for Peggy? It doesn't seem much use after what we've done to-night. She won't forgive us for a few roses and some None-So-Pretty."

"We'll get them anyway. Perhaps she'll be pleased. I do hope she won't look sorry, like she did on Friday night. I neffer could stand that. I'd much rather have Malcolm cross than

Peggy."

"We shall have both," Jack said gloomily.

"But we must go for the flowers for her birthday. She can't be ferry cross on her birthday, Jack! And we must put Cigarette ashore. He iss always in the way," and she steered to Innis Beg, which lay dark and silent before them.

"Peggy and the weans can't be home yet, and Mother Hubbard must be still asleep in the kitchen. They *are* staying late at the picnic! Red Riding Hood and Boy Blue ought to be in bed. I wonder who Malcolm's friends were!"

"We may meet their boat as we cross to Strongarra," said Jack. "We must mind and go quietly."

Cigarette was bundled ashore and told in whispers to go and lie down and be a good dog. He set up a whimper at being left behind, and tried to scramble back into the boat. But Jack fiercely ordered him to go and find his pipe, and he ran off at once. Then they pushed the boat away, and set out for Strongarra.

The islands lay all asleep. Innis Beg, Innis Torr, the Big Island and the Lios shore were only dark masses of trees, the wind playing in the branches. There were no lights in the windows of Strongarra; the only signs of life anywhere were the lamps on Lios pier and the glow from the village windows.

The boat crept softly across the strait, and grounded almost noiselessly on the beach. Jack jumped out and moored her to a post on the shore. Then they stole up the bank and across the lawn.

It was very dark, but they found their way without difficulty to the None-So-Pretty bed. The roses were just opening, to-morrow they would be in full bloom. Jill waited to hold the flowers, and Jack bent and began to cut the wiry stems with their crowns of dainty pink stars.

Then there was a shrill scream from Jill, and a sharp cry from Jack, as heavy hands grasped their shoulders and arms. Jill struggled fiercely. Jack wrenched himself round to see who were their captors. But it was very dark, and he could only make out two great black figures.

"The Goblin!" he gasped, and Jill looked, gave another terrified scream, and began to cry hysterically.

One of the black figures picked her up in his arms. The other dragged Jack by the shoulder across the lawn. Before they realised it they had passed through a doorway and were being carried down a dark passage. Through another door, and Jill found herself lying on the top of Jack, and the door was locked behind them.

For a while they were too dazed to speak. It had all happened so quickly. Jack lay panting on the floor, still grasping a bunch of London Pride. Jill cried till she was worn out and lay sobbing breathlessly.

But at last Jack sat up.

"Jill, stop that! It won't do any good. What was it had hold of us? What did you see? Perhaps we're frightened for nothing at all."

"The Goblin!" gasped Jill. "I know it was the Goblin!"

"But there were two," Jack said practically. "There couldn't be two Goblins. And why would the Goblin bring us here? Where are we, do you suppose?"

"*I* don't know! But I know it was the Goblin!"

"Don't be a goose! Listen to me. We must be in Strongarra. There isn't anywhere else. Very well then, it's nonsense to talk about the Goblin. It was just the Author dressed up, and

you needn't cry any more. Don't be a baby!"

Jill sat up suddenly.

"Do—you—think—so? Then I—I *hate* him! But there were two, Jack."

"The other would be Big Sandy."

"No, he is over at Balmona again, you know, Wee Sandy told us so."

Jack was puzzled. "And the Girl's on Goblin Island. Well, it was somebody helping the Author. We'll catch it now, Jill. He'll send for Peggy and Malcolm, and they'll find out all about the Girl and go and rescue her, and—I think we'd better escape if we can."

They looked round for the window, but the shutters were closed and the room was very dark. And at that moment the door opened and some one came in.

He carried a taper, and held it high above his head, so that his face was in shadow. They saw a black-hooded figure, but could distinguish nothing more.

Jill began to tremble again. Her thoughts flew Goblinwards, and she clung to Jack, speechless with fright. He slipped his arm round her, and waited, not a little frightened himself.

"John and Grizel Colquhoun," said their mysterious captor, in a hoarse voice, "you are summoned to appear at once before the Goblin. Come! Lose no time."

Jill gave a little sob. Jack's arm tightened round her.

"Humbug!" he muttered. "It's all right, old girl. I'll stand by you—— Wish I'd got a stick."

Her terror had infected him. He was not very sure what he feared, but it was only the necessity of defending Jill that enabled him to face the danger bravely. If it had been daylight, he thought angrily, it would have been different. In the feeble light everything looked strange and terrible.

They followed the black-hooded figure out of the room. His taper was just enough to show the way. They did not know where he was taking them, but at last they found themselves in what seemed a great room or hall.

It was nearly dark there also. The only light came from two tapers burning on a table placed across the top of the room. Behind and around were gloomy shadows, at which Jack glanced nervously.

Their conductor stopped before the table, and stood beside Jill. Out of the darkness came another shadowy figure, and silently took his place beside Jack. And in the gloom behind the tapers on the table Jack thought he could make out a third mysterious figure.

Jill had never looked up. Her face was hidden in his plaid, and he put his arm round her to keep her from raising her head. It was bad enough for him. He knew she would be terrified.

For two or three minutes there was dreadful silence. The house was very still. No one seemed to be moving anywhere.

Then the figure behind the table spoke.

"John and Grizel Colquhoun, you are here to answer for your misdeeds. Why have you gone about like thieves in the dark? Why have you left your beds at night? Why have you deceived your sister? How often have you been out secretly? Where are the books you have stolen? Where are all the other things you have taken? Why did you come to-night to steal? Why did you steal the white cat? *What have you done with Jean Maxwell?*—You do not speak? You will not? Then I shall *make* you!"

Jack clutched Jill in his arms.

"You'd better not come here!" he muttered through his teeth. "Jill!"

Jill looked up. She saw the mysterious black figure, the Goblin himself surely, and with a wild scream she fainted in Jack's arms.

"Look here!" Jack said hoarsely, coming suddenly to his senses. "You may think this is only a game, but it's killing Jill. I—I think she's dead."

CHAPTER XXIII.
THE WITCH'S RING.

One of the black figures bent hurriedly over Jill. The other sprang to light the lamp, and throwing off his hood and cloak showed himself as Don Macdonald.

"Give her to me, Jack. Call Peggy, Malcolm," he said, and Jack saw the other was his brother.

Relieved of Jill's weight and unnoticed by the others for a time as they bent over her, he sank down on a chair, dazzled by the sudden light. He felt suddenly tired and almost as limp as Jill, who lay still in Don's arms. He had done his best to take care of her, and now that the need for it was gone he felt worn out and was glad to rest.

But he recovered slowly and began to look round curiously. They were in the big dining-room at Strongarra. Now that the lights were turned up there was nothing to be afraid of. The mysterious figure behind the table was only the Author, dressed like Malcolm and Don in a loose dark travelling cloak, with a big hood drawn over the face.

They had all thrown off their costumes and were busy round Jill. But as soon as the Author saw that she was likely to be all right, he went over to Jack.

"Where is Jean—Miss Maxwell, Jack? What have you done with her?"

"On Goblin Island," said Jack, too tired to make any difficulty.

"What, Innis Torr? What is she doing there at this time of night?"

Jack reddened. "We left her there. We thought—maybe—the Goblin, you know——"

Father laughed grimly. "You did, did you? Then you deserved all this after all. I was thinking perhaps we had been too hard on your sister, but now I'm not so sure of it."

He hurried off, and Jack sat puzzling over several things. How did Peggy and Malcolm come to be here? How had they known he and Jill would come to Strongarra that night? They must have known, for they had been prepared. Most of all, what was Dr. Macdonald doing at Strongarra, and apparently quite at home? He was on very good terms with Malcolm, and, when they came in presently, with the Girl and the Author also. Could he have made friends with them all this afternoon? What was the meaning of it?

Peggy had come running in at Malcolm's call, and had at once taken possession of Jill, scolding the men roundly for carrying their trick too far.

"You great clumsy things, to frighten the child so! I thought you'd have more sense, Don. Couldn't you remember she was only a wee thing and easily scared? Malcolm, you might have known——"

"We didn't think they'd take it so much in earnest. And they've left Miss Maxwell alone on Goblin Island for the night, Peg."

"Oh! The monkeys! Has some one gone to fetch her?"

Then Jill sat up, her face white, her eyes staring wildly.

"Jack! The Goblin! Why, Peggy? Oh, Peggy *dear*!"

She began to cry, and Peggy took her in her arms and soothed her like a baby.

When father reached Goblin Island he found me waiting for him. I had not greatly troubled myself, feeling sure some one would come before long. Marjory knew where I was, and when Peggy and Malcolm and Don returned from their picnic she would certainly send them to see why I had not come home. And I knew Don's plans for the evening, and knew that

if they captured Jack and Jill they would soon ask after me. So when I found they had really left me I knew I should only have to spend an hour or two on Goblin Island.

Acting on the hints Jack had so kindly given me, I made up the fire, and, wrapping myself in the plaid, sat down to wait. But under the circumstances I felt no wish to amuse myself with either Patience or Chucks. I had quite enough to think about.

I was really very angry with Jack and Jill, and hoped Don and Malcolm would give them by way of punishment a fright they would not easily forget. Not that I minded spending an hour or two on Goblin Island, or the whole night for that matter. It would have been interesting, and I certainly was not afraid of the Goblin. But their conduct all afternoon and evening seemed to me so deceitful. They had pretended to be friendly and hospitable, while really their only desire had been to draw me into their trap. It was treacherous, underhand, and I was surprised at them and very angry.

I wondered if they believed in the Goblin story. Did they really think I should be in danger? Jill might possibly believe it—she had often said she did—but I hardly thought Jack would be so silly. Well, they would have enough of the Goblin to-night, if Don and Malcolm carried out their plans.

When I heard the splash of oars I went down to the beach, and was waiting for father when he rowed in.

"Jean?"

"All right. Who told you I was here?" I asked, as he helped me into the boat.

"Jack. What little rascals they are! But we frightened them nearly out of their wits to-night. The little girl fainted, and I think Master Jack was pretty scared too, though he probably won't admit it."

"Well, I think they deserved it. But I suppose if you have punished them I must forgive them. And Peggy and Don?"

"That's all right. They only came home half an hour before Jack and Jill arrived, so we kept them all, and we'll have supper together if Jill has recovered, and you have forgiven Jack."

"Tell me all about it," I said, and we were at Strongarra by the time he had finished the story.

When we reached the dining-room Jill was sitting up asking questions.

Several matters had been explained, and she and Jack were in a state of profound amazement and some disgust. Dr. Macdonald was the Author's son and the Girl's brother, and was therefore one of the Enemy. They were very indignant at his concealment and inclined to be offended, till Jill cried,

"Well, if the Girl iss angry because we cheated her to-day, it seems to me *you* can't say ferry much, for you have cheated us for weeks."

"Hear, hear!" said Jack. "It's six of one and half-a-dozen of the other."

"That's so," laughed Don. "We'll say no more about it."

"Besides, she iss an Enemy," and Jill scowled at father and me in the doorway. "Anything iss fair with an Enemy. If you can cheat them, so much the better. They should look out."

"I don't quite see," said Jack quickly, to change the subject, feeling somewhat doubtful of Jill's argument, "how you managed to turn up here to-night, Don. Was it with you Peggy and Malcolm went up the Glen?"

"Yes," said Don, and Peggy blushed.

"Well, why? When did you arrange it? You're not a friend of Malcolm's?"

"Oh, yes, I am. Malcolm and I made friends at college long ago, though I was an old boy and he was a new one. I planned this—er—little business for to-night, and went up to Glasgow to-day to borrow these things"—pointing to the black cloaks with the big loose hoods—"from some fellows I know. We used to dress up as monks and give concerts——"

"Monks! Bogey-men, I should say," cried Jill wrathfully.

"As you like, my child. On my way home I met Malcolm on the steamer and explained the circumstances and my plans. He was very much annoyed with you, let me tell you——"

"Why didn't he scold when he got home, then? We were quite prepared for it, in fact, we were rather looking forward to it."

"Jack!" Peggy looked up in distress. "I wish you'd tell the truth."

Jack looked at Malcolm, and Don explained,

"I told him to say nothing till to-night. I also proposed the picnic."

"Did you do anything else?" Jill asked sarcastically, and Don laughed.

"Yes. I saw that everybody had a good time up in Glen Lios, and I took Peggy for a walk."

They looked at him quickly, and Jill remarked,

"That isn't ferry polite. You speak as if Peggy was your sister."

The laugh that followed was interrupted by a noise in the hall—a little scream, the sound of a fall, and a squeal. Then violent spitting, and Tib rushed into the room, her tail like a brush, and sprang into my arms.

We all hurried out, and found Sheila sitting disconsolately at the foot of the stairs.

"I fell over the kitten," she explained, "and it spat and ran away. I think it iss frightened."

"I quite forgot you weans!" cried Peggy. "Where is Boy Blue, Sheila, and what were you doing on the stairs in the dark?"

"He iss lying on the sofa by Marjory, and I think he iss asleep. I was listening to what you were saying—to tell her, you know. She sent me to find out. I had to listen, Peggy dear, she wanted to know so ferry badly."

Peggy kissed her. "All right, Red Riding Hood. We have left you three alone too long. It's too bad. I had forgotten Marjory. Come away up to her room and be introduced, Jack and Jill. You can't refuse now. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves for refusing so often."

Jack and Jill looked at one another, and reddened uncomfortably. Don eyed them keenly.

"Well, what's wrong now? Why don't you want to see Marjory?"

"We saw her long ago," Jack exclaimed, with a touch of triumph. "So you hadn't found that out, though you think yourself so clever, Master Don? We came to see Marjory weeks ago, at night——"

"And we have been effer so many times since!"

"We came in by the window and the ivy on the wall."

"And once the Girl came in—no, twice, the same night—and nearly caught us. It was great fun!"

"We were under the bed——"

"And behind the curtain——"

"We were telling Marjory the Goblin tale," said Jack, with a glance at me.

"Well! I hope you are ashamed of yourselves, for I am quite ashamed of you," Peggy exclaimed, looking very vexed. "Malcolm, I think they deserve a whipping, I really do."

"Not to-night, Peggy. You'll let them off to-night," Don said quietly. "And to-morrow is your birthday. Come away up to Marjory's room and tell her all about it."

“Why, Peggy!” said Jill, as we sat round Marjory’s couch. “Where did you get that? Look, Jack! On her finger. You hadn’t that at dinner-time, Peggy. Why, it’s the bracken ring old Mother Molly gave to Don that day! She said—*Peggy!*”

Peggy blushed and laughed.

“It’s my first birthday present, Jill——”

“Jill, my dear,” said Don, “I’m very sorry for you, but you really must not look on my family as enemies any longer. For, you see, Peggy is going to become one of the family, and would therefore become an enemy too. In fact, Peggy intends to marry *me*. We settled it this afternoon. And she is going to wear the witch’s ring till I bring her a prettier one to-morrow.”

CHAPTER XXIV.
THE PEACEMAKER.

Marjory lay staring at the open window and wondering why Jack and Jill had not come to see her. It was the evening of Peggy's birthday, and Peggy and Malcolm were downstairs dining with father and Don and me. Robin and Sheila had been over at Strongarra during the day, but Jack and Jill had not come, and Marjory was disappointed.

She took up her mandoline and began to play, "Will ye no' come back again?" and, as once before, Jill appeared suddenly at the window.

She scrambled out of the ivy on to the sill, and sprang into the room, followed by Jack. Marjory threw down the mandoline laughing.

"I'm so glad to see you! But why did you come that way? Why didn't you come in the afternoon?"

"We were otherwise engaged," Jack said solemnly, sitting down on the sofa.

Jill stood at a distance.

"Put that cat away, please! I can't come near it, nasty beast!"

Marjory laughed, and lifted Tib to the other side near the wall. Then Jill curled herself up beside Jack, and gazed at Marjory.

"We came just to let them see we could do it," she explained. "It iss ferry much more fun coming through the window than through the front door."

"And what were you doing this afternoon? I hoped you'd come to see me."

"Malcolm took us ofer to Goblin Island, and gave us *such* a talking to! He was as solemn as a minister——"

"Yes," Jack said soberly, "he said a lot of things I'd never thought of. Made me feel rather bad. We didn't want to be mean, or—or dishonourable. We just hadn't thought about it that way. We're both to go to school in September, but not because of this business," he added quickly. "They say I'm not clever enough for my age——"

"What a fib! Peggy said you were far too cleffer, but not about the right kind of things. I'm sure she was quite right. You don't know ferry much Latin, and as for arithmetic—pooh!"

"I can talk English, anyhow, and I don't believe in witches and Goblins——"

"Have you heard that Peggy iss to be married ferry soon—almost at once?" Jill asked, to change the subject.

"I haven't heard much yet. You see, Jean has been busy all day getting ready for this evening. She says she doesn't give state dinner-parties every night. And Don has been in Glasgow all day buying birthday presents for Peggy. Here are some chocolates he brought me. Help yourself, Jack. So I want to hear all you can tell me, Jill."

"Well, Don says he iss going to live in Edinburgh in October, and he'd like to settle down in earnest with Peggy to live with him. So he wants to be married almost at once, and go off with Peggy to France or somewhere for a holiday. Peggy and the Girl are going up to London to buy all kinds of things, and Sheila and I are to be bridesmaids."

"And where are you all going to live?"

"Malcolm's to take us to Oban for a month. Issn't it splendid? Then Jack and I will go to school, and Robin and Sheila will live with Peggy in Edinburgh, and this poor old house will have only Mother Hubbard to look after it."

"She's been crying all day at the thought of Peggy getting married and going away," said Jack.

"How nice of her!"

"I dare say, but it isn't nice for us. The porridge was all watery this morning, because she'd cried into it so much, and the pudding tasted quite salt."

Jill kicked at him. "*Don't* try and be funny and cleffer. You can't do it, you know."

"And are you glad Peggy is going to marry Don, Jill?"

"I like him," Jill said guardedly. "Of course I don't want her to marry any one, but I suppose she iss too pretty and good not to be married sometime. But, you see, she's been like our mother always, and now efferything will be different. I wish it was Dr. Macdonald she was marrying, not Dr. Maxwell."

"Why, whatever difference can it make?"

"Won't it make the Girl a kind of sister?"

"I suppose it will," Marjory laughed. "Why don't you like her, Jill? You'll really have to like her now."

"That iss just the trouble. She may be all right herself, but she's an Enemy, and I don't like being told I must be friends. I don't like giving in. You see, we began it really. I wonder if people who begin quarrels always get the worst of them?" she said mournfully.

"They ought to, of course. Jill, you must be nice to Jean."

"Oh, I'll be ferry polite, but that issn't being friends. I can't really be friends with her till I feel like it."

"Girls are funny things. They think far too much——"

Jill threw a cushion at him, and as he dodged it, Marjory cried,

"Here come Peggy and Jean! Are you going to hide?"

"No," and Jill curled herself up again, and Jack sat down on the edge of the couch.

"Whereffer did you weans come from?" cried Peggy, at sight of them.

"Window," said Jack, and Peggy sighed.

"You are a wicked pair. The sooner you are off to school the better."

Jill jumped up and ran to her, and seized her left hand.

"Let me see it, Peggy! O-o-oh! What a beauty! Jack, just come and look. I wish somebody would get engaged to me."

When they had all gone home together to Innis Beg, Marjory repeated to me Jill's words about our friendship. I laughed at the time, and thought no more of it, but I soon found that she had been in earnest. She was never rude to me, but never friendly. With the rest of the family, with father, and of course with Don, she was on very good terms, but she treated me always with distant politeness, and nothing more. I tried hard to win her friendship, but without success. In her eyes Tib and I remained as objectionable as when we first went to Strongarra, and she obstinately refused to give way.

The following summer we were all at Strongarra together. Don indeed could not leave his work in Edinburgh for very long, so we saw him only occasionally, but Peggy and the little ones were there, and also father and I. Jack and Jill were home for the summer holidays, but Marjory was with her own father in London.

It was just a year from Peggy's wedding-day. The loch was at its loveliest, hills and islands blazing with heather, rowans heavy with berries, bracken just turning yellow. Ben Aan was no

longer green and brown, but vivid purple, with gray streaks and splashes where the crags were bare of heather.

We had had a delightful holiday. Father, Jack and Jill, Malcolm Colquhoun and I took long walks and excursions nearly every day. Peggy and the little ones enjoyed themselves more quietly near home, or rowed lazily about among the islands with Wee Sandy, and stopped to picnic in tempting spots.

Then one day Don arrived from Edinburgh, and our circle was complete. Mother Hubbard was very busy providing for us all and very glad to have us all back after her lonely winter, and Cigarette, who had spent the winter in Edinburgh and had not enjoyed it, hunted rabbits from morning till night and was the noisiest and liveliest of the party.

Then one evening, to the children's delight and intense astonishment, I proposed that the four of them and Cigarette should go over with me to Innis Beg for a night or two. Mother Hubbard had made preparations and the cottage was ready for us. They wanted Peggy to go too, and were not at all content to have me in her place, but she preferred to stay at Strongarra.

And in the morning I had great news for them. For a baby boy had arrived in the night, and we were all to go over to see him and Mother Peggy as soon as breakfast was over.

Jill's first question, when her surprise and delight had subsided a little, was characteristic.

"Has he sneezed? Oh, do you know if he has sneezed, Jean?"

"Sneezed? Not that I know of, Jill. I'm sure I hope not. Why?"

"He's not safe from the witches till he's sneezed. Peggy must tickle his nose or something. If he sneezes, it will show he is all right, with all his senses, you know. No baby who was going to grow up an idiot ever could sneeze."

I laughed. "School doesn't seem to have done you much good, Jill. Don't let Peggy hear you talk that way." '

As we bent over the tiny baby, lying so close to his mother, Peggy said softly, "Kiss him, Aunt Jean. Now, Auntie Jill. That's right. You both have a share in him. Now you really must be good friends."

Jill looked at me, and stretched out her hand.

"Yes, we'll be friends, since Peggy's baby wants us to," she said.

And just then the baby crumpled up his little red face and sneezed.

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.
[The end of *Goblin Island* by Elsie Jeanette Dunkerley (as Elsie J. Oxenham)]