BESIDE A NORMAN TOWER

MAZO DE LA ROCHE

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TORONTO

BESIDE A NORMAN TOWER

BY

MAZO DE LA ROCHE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
A. H. WATSON

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FOR

CHARLES CHANT
JANE BIRD
CISSIE BULL
NURSE BOWERMAN
AND
NURSE KENNEDY

WITH HAPPY RECOLLECTIONS

The books about children which I have read are always concerned with those of five years or more, when they have been urged, moulded, dragged into some semblance of adults. I have asked myself if it is possible to write an interesting book about those mysterious beings who live in a grand tempestuous world of their own into which we can no more than enviously peer. This story of two toddlers is an attempt to answer that question.

M. DE L. R.

Beside a Norman Tower

1

Above the moss-grown roof of the church the tower rises, strong, grey, embattled, against the windy sky. It is topped by a weathercock whose brazen beak points, now east toward Wootton and Beaminster, now south toward Lyme Regis and the sea, now west across the green valley of the Axe, and now north beyond dipping fields and clustering copses, to where Thorncombe hides.

The cock stares always outward, never deigning to look down at the one steep street of the village that climbs up from Wytch Green and, on the way to Lamberts' Castle, soon loses itself in furzy common and ploughed field. Does he remember with resentment the Rector who hated him, who questioned his ability to point out the direction of the simplest breeze, and who, after a day's shooting, always saved the last cartridge for a shot at him?

Excepting the church tower the children can see nothing of the world beyond their own garden, for it is surrounded by a high stone wall, and inside the wall a still higher laurel hedge makes an impenetrable glossy barrier. Among the laurel birds flit and talk softly in the subdued voices of autumn. Rabbits hide there. And sometimes, out of its darkness, emerges the white-and-black form of David, the Persian, his great tail gently waving, his secret deeds concealed behind an impassive front.

Gillian and Diggory have been put out on the gravel sweep, where it is dry, to enjoy the morning air. Nurse has provided them with toys for their amusement before leaving them, but they do not play, being content to stare up at the moving clouds and the rooks, blown like flying leaves across the sky.

They are dressed alike in fawn-coloured woollen suits and caps, but a glance is enough to show that the one sitting in the chair is a girl and that the one who occupies the perambulator will one day be a man.

"Caw! Caw! Caw!" cry the rooks, swimming along the wind, now dipping low toward the dark mass of the ancient yew tree, now rising high above the church tower and the invincible figure of the weathercock facing southward to the sea. The clock in the tower begins to strike, heavy,

clanging strokes on the heavy air. The children start, as the first strong stroke assails their sensitive ears and look at each other in alarm, but they recover themselves almost at once and gaze upward at the sky, thinking that somewhere in its grey vastness these hammer strokes are engendered.

Ten of them! It is ten o'clock. . . . The window of the nursery opens and Nurse's white figure appears far up, framed in glossy green ivy. Her low Eastern voice comes down to them.

"Here are your rusks! Come Gilly. Take Baby his. There—on the grass —don't you see?" She has thrown two rusks down to them like manna from the skies.

Gillian has risen from her chair and stumped to the strip of grass under the nursery window. She sees the rusks but she is not sure that she will pick them up. From the row of windows just above her head comes a pleasant warm smell. In there is the kitchen but she does not realize that, though once she is inside it she is very much at home.

Nurse leans out of the window, her strange rather flat face with its wide grey eyes, peering down at them. Diggory leans over the side of the pram to see the rusks lying on the grass.

"Pick them up at once," orders Nurse, "and give one to Baby."

Gillian picks up the rusks and, trotting briskly back to the pram, presents Diggory with his. They begin to crunch them, staring at each other. She has back teeth, which he has not yet achieved, so hers disappears the faster.

His rusk fascinates her, as everything he has fascinates her. The moment he possesses anything it becomes desirable to her. An almost mystic fascination gilds it.

She takes his rusk from him and gives him what is left of hers. He is puzzled but sets about crunching what is given him. He is interested in all she does.

The possession of his rusk makes her happy. She breaks into a gay trill of laughter and hops up and down. She takes her doll out of its pram and throws it on the gravel. She has a sweet sense of power. Diggory leans forward to look at the doll face downward in a puddle.

She crams the last of the rusk into her mouth and pulls off first one of her woollen gloves, then the other. She picks up the doll and dries its face with a glove. She kisses the doll.

"Deah dolly," she coos.

She holds the doll, wet and draggled, up to him.

“Kiss dolly,” she says.

A sweet tenderness comes over his face. He clasps the doll to him and presses his lips against its battered cheek.

She takes it from him and looks at it dubiously a moment. Then carelessly she tosses it under his pram. He leans far out, trying to see it. Only his leather harness keeps him from falling on his head.

Cautiously, with her back turned to the nursery windows, Gillian puts her gloves into the puddle. Firmly she presses them down. The water circling about her wrists is icy cold but she does not mind. She likes the look of her pink dimpled hands under it. . . . Still she is not satisfied. She goes to Diggory and draws off his gloves. His hands appear like two flower buds from their sheath. She places his gloves beside her own and stirs all four with a stick.

“Pudding!” she croons. “Pudding for Gilly.”

Diggory looks at the toys in front of him. Six wooden bricks, a lead horse, an empty talcum tin, a blue rabbit, several toy skittles. He does not like the rabbit at the moment and throws it out of the pram. It is caught in a wheel. He licks the horse all over, then tries to stable it in the talcum tin, frowning and sticking out his lips. But the opening is too small. He throws out the horse. He tries his teeth on each of the bricks in turn, gnawing off bits of the coloured pictures which cover them, and even a splinter of wood. Then he throws out the bricks.

Gillian turns and stares.

“Naughty! Naughty!” she exclaims and, picking up the rabbit, hurls it back into the pram.

Impassively he throws it out.

“Naughty! Naughty!” She hurls it back.

With a little growl of anger he again throws it out.

“Naughty!” She takes the rabbit by its ears and beats him on the face with it.

He closes his eyes, surprised.

But the blows continue, so he lowers himself in his harness till he is flat on his back, his woolly legs in the air. She cannot reach him.

She looks about her, pondering. She espies her own little chair and drags it to the side of the pram. She mounts it and again proceeds to beat him with the rabbit. He bursts into tears.

She looks up at the nursery windows, her blue eyes troubled. But no face appears there. She drops the rabbit and picks up the talcum tin.

"Nice drink for Diggory," she coos.

He struggles into a sitting position and leans wet-eyed towards the tin she presents. With a ministering air she presses it to his lips.

Deeply he drinks of the imaginary draught, sighing when she takes it away for her own refreshment. The tin to her lips, she throws back her head so far that her cap falls off and her fine fair hair falls about her neck. She drinks long, staring up at the trailing clouds.

From mouth to mouth the talcum tin moves till they have drunk to repletion. Then, each taking up a skittle, they beat upon it vigorously. The delight of the din makes them laugh. They laugh into each other's faces, showing all their pearls. Their hands are purple from cold.

Gillian breaks into loud song.

"The rooks fly to the tower. . . . Tower to the sky. . . . Tower flies to the sky. . . . Rooks and the tow—ah. . . . Tow—ah. . . . Tow—ah. . . . Tow—ah. . . ." She shouts till the blood rushes to her cheeks, making them red as her hands.

Long spears of rain shine out against the yew tree.

2

Along the curving driveway, between the high laurel hedges, Nurse pushes the pram, Gillian trudging alongside. She is thinking of the long steep hill she must climb before she too is put into the pram. Next month she will be three years old—not a baby any more—and she must accustom herself to walking on the road.

The gate looms enormous in front of them. Nurse leaves the pram standing and goes ahead and lifts the heavy latch. Slowly, powerfully, the gate opens toward them, relentless, as though it would crush them. But it comes to rest against the stone wall and they pass safely through.

In the street three objects of interest claim their attention. Just outside the gate the butcher's cart is drawn up and the butcher stands at the tailboard breaking bones with his hatchet. Red lumps lie about. Nurse and the butcher pass the time of day and the children see all they can as they go by.

The next thing to stare at is the pony fastened outside the whitewashed inn, above the arched door of which is the word Behold and the date 1539. In the old stage-coach yard fowls are pecking but Gillian and Diggory do not notice these things. They see only the patient drooping pony who draws an audible sigh when they are abreast of him.

"Nice little gee-gee," says Gillian. "Gilly would like a gee-gee, please, Nannie."

"Would you, dear? Perhaps, when you're bigger."

"Diggory wants a gee-gee."

"Some day, when he's bigger."

Always the urge to grow bigger! Gillian stretches her legs and strides out beside the pram. Slow steps sound behind them and they are overtaken by the Rector carrying a great bucket of water which he has got from the village pump at the far end of the wall that encloses the grounds where the children live.

To them the Rector is an immense figure, even more impressive than the church tower. From his broad shoulders his black cassock billows about him and a biretta covers his massive head. He walks alongside the pram for a space, smiling down at them.

“Good-afternoon, children,” he says, in his low resonant voice.

“Good-afternoon,” answers Gillian clearly.

“And how are you?”

“Quite well, thank you.” She does not hesitate. Nurse looks approving.

“And how are you, Diggory, my lad?”

Diggory has been leaning over the side of the pram to look into the water that moves and glances in the bucket. He looks up as he is spoken to and smiles shyly. But he cannot yet say a word. The Rector touches Diggory’s cheek with his finger. “Bless you,” he says, and moves on. They stare wonderingly at the flowing folds of his cassock.

Gillian chatters of what she sees but Nurse scarcely speaks, lost in thoughts of her young man and of her past life in India. Diggory sometimes makes a low chuckling sound between a coo and a laugh.

They have passed all the houses with their little cobbled yards and wallflowers still in bloom, and they are between high hedges where the holly leaves shine bright and red berries show. Dark ferns stand tall as Gillian. At a bend they have come upon two men and a boy. One man stands on the top of the bank, a gun in his hands. The man on the road is placing a net over the mouth of a burrow in the bank. In the boy’s hands there is something long and flat and pale like a dead fish. Diggory peers around the hood of the pram to see. Gillian stares.

“What those men doing, Nannie?” she asks.

“Bunnies,” returns Nannie, with her queer flat smile. “They’re after bunnies.”

“Wh-what’s that other thing?”

“A ferret. He goes into the hole after the bunnies.”

The men have stopped what they are doing to look after Nurse. The ferret lies still. Gillian trudges on, pondering. She watches a blob of earth that, stuck to the tyre of the pram, goes round and round. She envies Diggory.

They walk on interminably, then, at last, she is picked up and set at Diggory’s feet, the rug warmly tucked about her. Her lips part in a smile of bliss. Now the hills do not matter, for Nannie is pushing the pram, panting as they reach the top, holding back its weight as they descend the steep. The immense silken grey boles of beeches rise from the banks, their roots, clean

and strong, twist together in strange convolutions or strike straight and tapering into the deep soil. They are in a narrow green world between the hedges. Bend after bend they turn, seeing nothing new. On the road in front of them puddles flash in the sun and there are prints of hoofs and of motor tyres but they meet nothing. Sometimes at a gateway Nurse stops and suddenly there is spread before them a great panorama of country-side, woods and copses, clustering red-roofed farm buildings, valleys and hills, fold upon fold, to the horizon, and arching above all, the immensity of the sky. Across the sky the clouds press, some sombre, some golden in the reflection of the sun. Gillian looks impassively at all this but a troubled shadow lies in Diggory's eyes.

As they stand by one of these gateways a sweet sound comes to them like the ringing of silver bells. Now it is hushed and mournful, now it rises loud and full of joy. Now comes the sound of a horn. Nurse takes Diggory out of the pram and sets him on the gate, hugging him to her. Her wide grey eyes are alive.

"Look," she says, "the Hunt!"

Gillian is standing up in the pram clinging to Nurse. She sees two score of creatures, dappled liver and white, stream across the fields, stretched to their utmost from muzzle to tail, from their throats issuing the sweet wild singing as of bells. Behind them come horses galloping and on their backs men in pink coats and brown and grey and a little girl with flying yellow hair.

"Look! Look!" cries Nurse. "The fox! There on the hillside!" She takes Diggory's head in her hands and turns his face in that direction but she cannot make him see it. She turns Gillian's head but Gillian sees only the hounds running wild and cruel and free, scrambling over walls, breaking through hedges, now hidden and silent, now in the open again and baying into the wind.

They are gone and the horsemen flashing after them, all out of sight. All out of sight.

"Where is the fox?" Gillian asks.

"They may have caught him by now."

"What's caught him?"

"Come up to him. Caught him in their teeth."

"Wh-what will the men do to him?"

“Cut off his brush.”

“What for?”

“Oh—I don’t know. To mount, I suppose.”

“Mount a horse?”

“Don’t be silly.” Nurse sets her down and tucks them both into the deep comfort of the pram.

3

It is breakfast time. Thin sunlight quivers against the cottage china dogs on the mantelpiece and the gay-coloured cups hanging on the dresser. It lies palely on the blue-and-white table-cloth where are set the marmalade jar, the round loaf of home-made bread, the children's plates of oatmeal porridge and silver mugs of milk, and Nurse's own Brown Betty of tea.

There is an east wind this morning and that means that the fire does not draw well. It sulks under a veil of smoke which sometimes puffs forward into the room, making the eyes smart.

Smoke or no smoke Nurse is rigorous about fresh air. The breakfast table is drawn close to the deep casement window, which is wide open. The ivy flutters about it, the long fingers of the laurel reach up from below, and each moment Diggory's nose grows a shade more blue and his rounded thighs beneath his diminutive knickers more mottled.

Nurse's flat sallow nose looks cold too, and her large pale eyes water. Her thin white cotton dress is immaculate. Her thoughts are far away.

But mechanically she fills Diggory's expectant mouth at the very moment when he leans forward and holds it up like a young bird. While the porridge dissolves in his mouth he looks through the open window at the late autumn landscape. Beyond their own garden wall, beyond the graveyard, a man, with three horses harnessed abreast, is ploughing a field. The deep stony soil of a reddish tinge is turned over in wet lumps. One of the horses is brown with a blond mane and tail which stream out on the wind. Rooks follow the plough, hopping jerkily in and out of the furrows. Small birds twitter in the ivy and among the chimney pots the starlings chuckle together.

Diggory has been trying to make up his mind to say something. For several months he has talked to his own satisfaction but now he wants to say something which those about him will understand. He has something important to say to Nannie and Gillian. He swallows the last bit of porridge and turns his face earnestly toward them. His scant red-gold hair curls upward above his ears, his brown eyes have a sparkling light. Nurse smiles encouragingly.

"Well," she asks, "what is it?"

“Es—ta,” he says, going upward and then downward on the last syllable. “Es—ta.”

Now that he has got it out he is very pleased with himself. He hits the rung of his high chair with his foot and reaches for his milk. He gives Gillian a haughty look. He can talk now as well as she.

Downstairs on her way to put them out, Nurse steps into the kitchen. It is not often that she and Cook can exchange civil words and when they do it is generally about Diggory.

Now says Nurse—“He said a word this morning. I don’t know what he has in his head but he said a word.”

Cook comes forward, her small bright face all alive and admiring. “What do’ee say then?” she demands.

From his place on Nurse’s arm he looks down at her.

“Es—ta,” he says clearly, and repeats it to make sure, “Es—ta . . . es—ta . . .”

“I think he is saying—‘it’s there,’ ” says Nurse.

“No,” says Cook. “He’s saying—‘what’s that one?’ He’s looking right at it.” And she raises the cock-pheasant she carries in her hands.

The children stare at its russet-and-gold plumage. David, the Persian, comes under the table to sniff. Chad, the chauffeur-gardener, joins the group with uprolled sleeves. He swings Gillian to his shoulder. Audrey, the housemaid, leaves the lamps she is cleaning. All cluster about the children.

They love this domain of the kitchen, ruled over by Cook. On its stone floor small feet make a lively clatter, though it is hard to fall on. On the range, built into the great fireplace, savoury pots are always bubbling. Through the row of trefoil windows with the oak-panelled seat below, only the tree-tops can be seen. Iron hooks for the hanging of beef and game depend from the ceiling. In the corner stands Cook’s own chintz-covered chair and her work-basket and the gay-coloured biscuit-tin in which she keeps her reels of cotton.

From the kitchen lead mysterious stone-flagged passages to the scullery, the larder, the pantry, the boot-hall, and the cobbled yard—labyrinthine, chill chambers to get lost in.

The children look solemn as they pass through these until at the end they come upon stout, red-faced Mrs. Dibble, down on her knees with a great

puddle of suds on the flags before her. She raises a face, red and sweet-tempered, to greet them. She sees them with difficulty for her sight is going. They laugh delightedly at meeting her.

"Well, now, my dearies," she says, in her soft Devon voice, "and do 'ee want to get by? I'll lift 'ee over this gert puddle, then." She heaves herself to her feet, and, taking up Gillian, lifts her to the doorstep.

"Thank you, Mrs. Dibble," says Nurse, primly, preparing to pass.

But Diggory will not have it so. He stretches out his tiny hand and grasps Mrs. Dibble's moist red one. He leans forward looking into her face with an expression so gentle, so penetrating, that the two women stare at each other. Mrs. Dibble's face breaks up in a tender smile.

"He do like his old Dibble then, bless 'is 'eart! Oh, Nurse, tiddint often 'ee get a look like that in this world."

"Come!" cries Gillian from the doorstep. She thinks that Diggory is getting more than his share of attention.

4

It is five o'clock. They have had their bread and butter and jam and milk. They have been washed, and fresh white knitted suits have been put on them. It is time to go down to the study. Already the red sunlight lies on the trunk and lower branches of the yew tree. The starlings talk sleepily in the chimney.

Nurse takes them along the passage from the nurseries, up three steps, through a door into the upstairs hall, where the tall windows rise from the landing to the dark panels of the ceiling. An overpowering place, with the well of the hall below and the long slippery stairs.

Gillian clutches her doll and Diggory his rabbit. Their eyes shine as they near the door of the study. No sound comes from inside. Nurse taps, and sets Diggory on his feet.

"Come in."

Nurse puts them inside.

They look beautiful in the firelight, Gillian's face bright, an expectant smile on her lips. She runs in with fervour and flings herself on her mother.

"Mummie, mummie, mummie," she gurgles.

Diggory enters triumphantly, his brown eyes brilliant, his red-gold hair brushed upward above his ears. Proudly he keeps his feet, though there is a treacherous wrinkle in the rug.

Mother and Karen set about amusing them. Castles are built of toy bricks, rebuilt when they are knocked down. Great roaring bears appear from behind couches and gobble up, first one screaming child, then the other. Puffle-trains lurch and whistle across the rug. But through all this play, Gillian's mind is on the Hunt. She thinks of the hounds streaming across the fields, of the huntsman blowing his horn.

"Gilly saw the Hunt," she says.

"Yes? Did you like it?"

She looks doubtful. She cannot tell.

"Diggory saw them too," she says.

"Did he like them?"

“No. He’s rather little, really, sometimes.” These qualifying adverbs are favourites of hers.

She stares into the corner of the room with an hallucinated expression. “The hounds,” she says, “are over there.”

“Yes? Can you see them?”

“Gilly can see them. They’re lost.”

She stares fixedly into the corner for a space. Then she raises her voice and cries:

“Hounds! Come hounds! Tally-ho! Tally-ho!”

Her eyes are opened to their widest, her cheeks blazing. There is no doubt but that she sees them streaming toward her baying on the wind. She is almost frightening. Diggory stares at her, fascinated.

“Hounds! Come hounds! Come hounds!” She shouts, and she forgets where she is and that there are people in the room with her. She sees the hounds filling every space.

She is running with them now, scrambling over hedges, tearing across the fields, with the thud of hoofs close behind. She is the huntsmen too, straining in the saddle, shouting—“Hoich! Hoich!” And when, at last, she runs into the dark corner and hides—perhaps she is the frightened fox.

5

There are visitors for tea. A small boy and his smaller sister are visiting the Rector. Gillian is warned that she must not be selfish with her toys. She must be very nice to the visitors. Adam Black is four and Deborah is two and a half. Gillian talks about them all day. She likes to end words in "mant." She calls Exeter—Exmant. Father Christmas—Father Christmant. Now she calls Adam—Adamant. She talks endlessly of the coming of Adamant.

In truth she has named him well, for he is unyielding. He is a sturdy fellow who, the moment he comes in, takes possession of all that interests him. If the other children run against him, the impact knocks them down. If they get in his way he knocks them down. His sister is almost as aggressive. They have been to a nursery school and know how to take care of themselves. Directly Deborah has finished her tea (the four of them are seated at a tiny table in front of the fire while their elders sit at the large one) she picks up her plate, mug, and spoon and piles them together. She reaches for Diggory's.

"No, no," interrupts the Rector's wife, "you must not do that, darling." But Deborah is not easily controlled. She insists on stacking up the dishes.

Round and round the room she and Adamant range, throwing up the toy balloons that have been provided for the tea-party, blowing them up, bursting them, all but bursting the ear-drums of the grown-ups. They have clarion voices. Their yellow hair flies out about their faces. Their eyes glare.

Gillian and Diggory sit side by side on the floor watching them. They have forgotten how to play. When they are lifted up and placed on their feet, their legs give way under them and they feebly sit down. They watch their balloons being burst without protest. No matter what toys are broken, they make no remark. Adamant has overlooked a duck that squeaks; Gillian hands it to him. Her cheeks are bright red and there is a still look on her face. . . .

Now it is time for the visitors to go. Adamant has become dignified, polite. He shakes hands and says—"Thank you for the nice tea." Deborah is suddenly a baby, carried in the arms of the Rector's wife, wrapped in a woolly white shawl, her great blue eyes solemn, her loud voice still.

It is half-past five and dark night. What an hour to be standing in the open door looking out! The Rector carries an electric torch. A long bluish-white beam slants from it, across the gravel, on to the deep greenness of the lawn, glittering on the laurels. Through the brightness slides the white form of David, the Persian, a mouse, pale as metal, in his mouth.

Gillian and Diggory return to the scene of the entertainment. They stare at the scattered toys. His face lights with laughter. He thrusts out his chin. He crosses the room in his tottering run. Self-assurance returns to Gillian.

"Now," she says, in a you-and-me-together tone, "let's *really* play!"

6

What is this which has appeared inside the bow window of the dining-room? Gillian adventuring to that distant side of the house, peers in, for the window is low enough for her to see through. It is a tree, growing out of a holly-wreathed tub, its broad branches stretching into the room. She is excited. Never before has she seen a tree growing in the house. She runs to Diggory in his pram and tells him about it.

"A tree, Diggory! A hooge tree! Gilly saw a hooge big tree inside the window. It's as big—as big as that!" She stretches her arms to their widest. "A hooge tree."

His face quivers in his effort to understand.

"Es—ta," he says, eagerly. "Es—ta. . . . Es-es-ta."

With his one word he expresses wonder, and admiration of her exploit. He leans toward her.

She sees the fine whiteness of his skin, the dark depths of his eyes. She reaches up and takes what she can of his face in her hand. Her nails scratch him. He draws back. She grasps his cap and pulls it off, exposing the thin, red-gold silkiness of his hair. She tries to pull his cap on top of her own and, failing in that, decides to put it back on his head. She fetches her little chair and stands on it but, try as she will, she cannot get the cap on him again. He ducks his head to help her. Her hands, cruel in their small unrestrained strength, hurt him. He throws himself on his back in a rage, kicking and screaming. She drops the cap and looks up at the nursery windows. But no one comes.

She runs up and down, singing for joy. He sits up to watch her, a pucker on his brow. Rain begins to fall.

The next day strange fruit appears on the tree, golden and silver balls. Glittering streamers flow from bough to bough. Bright birds hover in its depths. Gillian stares long through the window but tells no one except Diggory what she has seen.

All through the house she is aware of a strange stir. She knows that Father Christmas is coming and sings about him in her play but she scarcely understands what it is all about.

Mrs. Dibble is here now every day, helping Cook. Sometimes she is in such a hurry to help that she forgets to take off her hat and its plumes nod as she does things in the kitchen. She is always delighted to see the children.

"Come then to Dibble and she'll show 'ee the gert turkey in the larder! 'Tis enough to frighten 'ee with its wattles and all!"

She carries them off to the chill larder with its flagged floor and slate shelves. Furred and feathered things and a side of bacon hang from hooks. On a shelf lies an enormous naked bird with upturned claws and closed eyes. Diggory draws back but Gillian touches the cold flesh with her finger.

"Look!" she cries. "What a brave girl Gilly is!" She takes a claw in her hand and shakes it.

Diggory points in wonder.

"Es—ta," he says. "Es-es-ta!"

Dibble rapturously kisses his white knee.

She is glad to be taking dinner on Christmas Eve with the servants in the house, for there is a stuffed goose and plum pudding. The children scarcely recognize her when she appears in a velvet blouse and lace collar and heavy gold chain. . . . But her plumed hat is the same and by it they are sure of her. Cook's married daughter and her husband are guests too, and Audrey's young man. The children hear laughter from below and toss about in their cots. There is an air of mystery all about.

It is almost midnight. They have been asleep for hours when they are awakened by the sound of singing. Diggory is the first to wake. He looks in fear toward the window where, between the curtains, a strange radiance pours. It is the first time he has seen moonlight.

The singing voices draw nearer and nearer. They are advancing along the curves of the drive. "Nowell, Nowell," they sing, the women's voices clear as the moonlight. The shadows in the nursery are inky black. Diggory whimpers.

Gillian wakes and scrambles instantly to her feet. Her head is thrown back. She looks like a startled flower. The singing is beneath the window. The voices come ringing up into the room. "Nowell, Nowell."

Suddenly there is silence save for a low murmur of talk. A door opens. Gillian remembers that she is a big girl. Three years old. She jumps up and down on her mattress and laughs across at Diggory.

“Look at me!” she says. “See me jump!”

“Es—ta,” he says, peering between the bars of his crib. “Es-es-ta.”

She jumps higher and higher, laughing loudly to reassure herself. She is three years old.

The singing begins again, more loudly than ever. The room rings with it. Diggory begins to cry piteously. Gillian suddenly sits down. She feels for the hollow in her mattress and curls herself up in it, staring round-eyed at the moon which, a great silver globe, hangs exactly opposite the window.

Diggory, seeing her disappear, scrambles hurriedly beneath his bed-clothes to the very foot of his crib, so that only a little hump shows where he is lying.

Scarcely have the carol singers departed when the midnight chimes begin. They rush in a great burst from the church tower, shattering the silver silence of the fields. Each one of the great bells has its own Latin inscription on it. Each one has its own ringer. In the chill darkness, lighted by a single candle, the six ringers stand in the bottom of the tower lustily pulling their ropes. Over six hundred changes are possible on the bells and they ring many of them. Up and down, and in and out the brazen notes hasten, now tripping on each others’ heels, now struggling as though to break the bond that holds them, now chiming in lively accord.

A white hoar frost begins to appear in the churchyard and on the lawn. Two small humps in the bed-clothes show where Gillian and Diggory cower.

She has on a new pale-blue bonnet of a soft fuzzy felt. Under it her face is like a Christmas rose. She is being led by her mother's hand through the churchyard to the Children's Service. She clings tightly, for frost has made the ground slippery. She feels immensely important. Bright holly berries twinkle in the bushes and a robin perches on a grey stone cross. She does not wonder what these gravestones signify. She has always seen them standing upright or leaning or lying flat and she has admired the pretty flowers that decorate the mounds beneath.

Inside the church candles are lighted. A humming sound comes from the organ. The pillars are wound in greenery. She is stood upon a fat red hassock, a prayer-book in her hand. She feels important and blissfully good. She looks like the Christmas Supplement to a magazine of fifty years ago.

Her eyes grow round when the Rector enters wearing his surplice and mounts the steps of the Chancel. She stands on tiptoe. With a supreme effort she remembers that she is now three and has promised not to speak in church. She kneels on the hassock, quite out of sight. She stands on it, pretending to sing. She is astonished at the new voice in which the Rector speaks.

The village children, grouped in the centre of the church fascinate her. She had not known there were so many children in the world. If one of them looks at her she smiles back. Her eyes grow still rounder when the children rise from their seats and march round the church, followed by the Rector. The tallest boy carefully carries a cross. Their faces are very serious, their heads droop as they sing. They stop in front of the brightly lighted Crib, and stare earnestly into its mystery. Gillian stands on tiptoe.

When the service is over she is lifted up so that she may see the figures about the manger. She would like to play with them.

On the way home, through the small thick gate that leads from the churchyard into her own garden, she steps out bravely, remembering the Christmas dinner she has eaten, remembering Diggory upstairs in the nursery, too small to go to church.

"Now we're ready! Open the door! Bring them in, Nurse."

They are herded into the dining-room where the tree stands brilliant with lighted candles. Mother and Karen are there and the servants.

"Isn't it lovely? Isn't it a splendid surprise? Aren't you excited, Gilly?"

Gillian walks judicially around the tree.

"It has more on it," she says, "than it had before?"

"Before! Before when?"

"Before—when Gilly saw it through the window."

Oh, to think of her! And she only three! Mother and Karen are genuinely hurt.

"But it's beautiful, isn't it?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Whom do you suppose that lovely doll is for?"

"For Gilly, please."

The presents in their gay wrappings are now handed off the tree. Gillian carries them to each recipient. Chad, Cook, Audrey, Nurse, all beam at her. This is delightful. Her cheeks grow bright pink as she flies from one to the other. At last she clasps the new doll with its auburn curls in her arms.

Diggory is interested in only one thing, the sturdy piebald pony that stands beneath the lowest bough. He goes straight to it and takes possession of it without delay. With difficulty he gets astride it. He tries to move forward but only falls off and bumps his head. Chad comes to his rescue and holds him on while he pushes the pony up and down the room. Chad's face is full of understanding. Diggory, looking up in it, sees something there which he finds admirable.

"Nice gee-gee," whispers Chad, encouragingly. "Good old gee-gee. Hang on and make your feet go. That's the way!"

"Es—ta," says Diggory. "Es-es-ta." His back is straight as a ramrod as he sits astride the pony.

The presents have been stripped from the tree. Silver paper is scattered over the floor. The candles are dripping. Gillian looks out of the tall windows across the valley where night is gathering.

“Where’s Father Christmant to?” she asks. She has picked up Devon turns of speech.

“Gone. Gone home to bed. And you must be off now. It’s half-past five.”

She casts herself on her back, howling. Diggory clutches his pony between his legs and will not dismount. He is carried to bed thus mounted.

Scarcely are they asleep when they are waked by the clamour of the chimes for evening service.

9

Gillian has reached the stage of asking questions. She has heard Nurse elicit the repetition of a statement by "Pardon?" Gillian admires this.

Karen says to her—"I'm going to pin these pretty violets on your coat."

"What's violets?"

"These. What I'm pinning on your coat."

"What you doing?"

"Pinning violets on your coat."

"Podden?"

She looks at Diggory sitting on the floor with his bricks. Gently he places one on top of the other. He picks up a third and looks long and speculatively at it.

"What's Diggory doing?"

"Looking at a brick."

"Why?"

"Because he wants to."

"Why?"

"Don't be silly!"

"Podden?"

"I said don't be silly."

"What is silly?"

"You are."

"No, I'm not silly! I'm nice."

"Yes—sometimes."

"Podden?"

"Sometimes you're nice."

"Why?"

“Dear knows!”

“Podden?”

A Christmas card from Canada interests her. She points a taper finger at the Arctic-looking scene.

“What’s that?”

“Snow.”

“Where is the snow?”

“In Canada.”

“Where is Canada?”

“Across the sea.”

“Where is the sea?”

“Down at Lyme Regis.”

“Where is Lyme Regis?”

“All along and up along and down along the road.”

“Where is the road?”

“Outside our wall.”

“Where is our wall?”

“Beyond the lawn.”

“Where is the lawn?”

“Outside the window.”

“Where is the window?”

“In front of your nose.”

“Where’s my nose?”

“Here!” With a sharp pinch on it.

She shrieks with laughter.

“Do it again!” she cries, her tiny nose pink.

“If I pinched it again it might come off.”

“Podden?”

She has developed a new attitude toward Diggory—a kind of condescending approval. At some new achievement she exclaims—"The clever boy!" or "You little scamp!"

He likes small iron toys. It is strange how, his flesh being so exquisitely fine, he loves to handle hard unyielding things. She likes to play with soft cushions, large stuffed poufs, anything soft and cumbersome that she can drag about. He will eat his tea with a legless lead horse lying on his plate or go to sleep with a cow pressed in his hand and an elephant resting on his velvet cheek.

Above all things the motor-car and red-faced Chad who drives it, fill him with wonder and admiration. Chad's face has been scarred in the War. Chad's arms are strong and tender. Held in them Diggory gazes into his face in complete fellowship. Chad puts on a different coat and cap for driving that makes him very impressive to the children. They shout and sing for joy when they are in the car. Diggory needs a new word. "Es—ta" no longer suffices. He says—"caw—caw"—and feels that he is now able to discuss the mysteries of the motor with Chad. Each day he gets stronger on his legs. It takes a hard fall to bring the tears to his eyes.

But if things go too badly he puts his forehead on the floor and cries bitterly. He discovers that the floor is cold, so now, when he feels anguish rising in him, he totters to the rug and there lays his face. Stumping up the back stairs Gillian hears him weeping in the day nursery.

"Don't cry, Diggory" she calls. "Gilly's coming!" He loves her more and more.

10

It is midwinter. Visitors are coming for the day. Not ordinary visitors but Nigel, his mother, and his two sisters. Gillian can scarcely believe that she is to see Nigel again. Long ago, in the far-off summer, she played with him. That is to say, she toddled after him, watching him do wonderful and important things, being domineered over by him, meekly worshipping him. He is six. A bright remembrance of him burns in Gillian's mind.

When she is put into her crib for her morning rest she cannot sleep. She lies staring up at the ceiling. She sings—"Nigel is coming! Nigel is coming!" She thinks for a moment of Diggory asleep out-of-doors in his pram. He will not be able to play with Nigel. He will have to stay with Nannie while she and Nigel run about the garden together. A happy smile curves her lips. She cannot sleep. She kicks off the bed-clothes.

She is so drowsy from sleep when Nurse takes her up that, for a moment, she cannot open her eyes. She lolls against Nurse's shoulder, hazy-eyed and flushed.

"Now we must get ready for the company," says Nurse. "They'll be here any minute."

That wakes her effectually. A shiver of delight runs through her nerves. Soon she will be running about with Nigel, laughing, shouting.

She and Diggory enter the drawing-room. There are flowers about, for it is Mother's birthday. Nannie propels them forward. There are many kisses. She and Nigel are facing one another. He is slender as a reed, erect, yellow-haired. He smiles at her. She can think of nothing to say or do. She stands stolidly, a plump little figure in a pale-blue knitted suit with abbreviated shorts. Her rounded thighs are delicately pink. She is three years old.

Everyone is crowding about Diggory. He sits on Nigel's mother's arm looking a little puzzled and aloof.

"Let me hold him! Oh, do let me hold him, please!" cry the girls of eleven and fourteen simultaneously.

Diggory is passed from arm to arm. He is pale, for he has been cutting a double tooth and he has been ill.

"Please put him down," begs Nigel. "I want to see him."

Diggory is set on his feet. The girls kneel on either side of him. “Show us your nice new tootie,” they cajole.

Nigel fetches the hobby-horse and sets Diggory astride of it. “Gee-gee,” says Diggory, pridefully, and struts off. Everyone looks after him admiringly. Gillian runs and slips her hand into her Mother’s. She is relieved when Diggory is carried off to the nursery.

She is one of the luncheon party. She is set at table beside Nigel, her best embroidered bib tied under her chin. She could sing for joy. She cannot eat her nice bit of breast of chicken for looking at Nigel. He is pleased by her admiration and shows off for her benefit, turning sideways in his chair and drawing up his feet. He does funny things with his table napkin. He says things that make the grown-ups laugh. Gillian is in ecstasy.

“Naughty!” she coos, “naughty Nigel!”

Again in the drawing-room she takes his hand.

“Come and play in the garden with Gilly,” she says.

He pulls away his hand and goes moodily to his mother.

“Gilly wants me to play in the garden with her,” he whispers, “and I don’t much want to.”

The elder of the two girls says—“May we please explore? We’d love to explore the house and gardens!”

They fly off, followed by Nigel. The grown-ups draw close together around the fire and begin to talk. Gillian stands in the bow window alone. For a week she has been looking forward to this visit!

After a while Diggory is brought back to the drawing-room, and he and she stand close together looking out of the window. He looks quietly and earnestly into her face.

“Es—ta,” he says. “Es-es-ta.”

But she makes no answer.

After a while they see the two girls flying across the green lawn, their fair hair streaming, Nigel in pursuit. They disappear into the shrubbery. Gillian and Diggory stand with faces pressed to the pane.

“There is Nigel,” says Gillian.

Diggory looks searchingly into her eyes.

“Es—ta,” he says, on a deep note.

It is time for the visitors to go. Their car is turned at the front door. Its engine throbs. Nigel and the girls appear and put on their coats and caps. Everyone goes to the door.

Diggory is in a transport of delight. He thinks he is going in the car.

“Caw-caw!” he cries, and struggles to mount the running-board.

One of the girls lifts him to the seat behind the wheel. He grips it in his tiny hands. His bare mottled thighs press against the chill leather of the seat. His fine red-gold hair is blown on the January wind.

“But where is Gillian? We haven’t said good-bye to Gilly!”

They search for her everywhere, and her mother finds her at last on the floor of the day nursery, sobbing in a little heap.

“But what is wrong, my pet?”

“Nothing.”

“Then why did you run away from your guests?”

Gillian chokes back the sobs. “I don’t know.”

She is carried down to say good-bye. She does it with dignity, hiding her distress.

But Diggory, when he discovers that he is not to have the expected drive, makes no attempt to hide his. He clings screaming to the wheel, and is lifted out, writhing and throwing himself about. The car glides away.

“Good-bye! Good-bye!”

Really Diggory and Gillian have not behaved very nicely.

He has a delicate dignity. She is a little madcap. She is beside herself with spirits. She stamps from room to room singing, banging doors, kicking over castles of toy bricks.

"La-la-la! la-la! la-la-la! la-la!"

As she passes him she sometimes brushes against him and he loses his balance and falls. He picks himself up and looks after her, his hand to his head.

"La-la-la! la-la!" On she goes. . . .

To take his mind off his troubles Diggory is stood on the window-sill to look out at the red wintry sunset that brightens the leaves of the laurels and shines on the weathercock facing it squarely. Four tiny birds have perched on the cock, one on his head, three on his arching tail. The clock in the tower strikes five.

"Me up! Me up too!" cries Gillian, "Gilly wants to see the sun!"

She is lifted up beside him. They look like cherubs under the trefoil arch of the window. Diggory is pleased to have her near him. He stamps his foot in delight.

"The darling!" exclaims Karen. "See him stamp his little foot!" He is kissed on his white knee.

"Me too!" cries Gillian. "See me stamp!" She stamps with all her might, almost shouldering him from the sill. They are both lifted down. . . .

But someone has come into the drawing-room, a caller with her little daughter, a half-head taller than Gilly.

"Alice needs someone of her own age to play with so badly," says the caller. "But living in the country it is difficult."

Alice and Gillian are introduced. They stand with drooping heads and arms rigid, looking strangely ashamed, as though accused of some crime. Their mothers look at them in despair.

But Diggory goes into the hall where his hobby-horse, Arterxerxes, is stabled. He mounts and rides without mishap into the drawing-room. His

back is straight. His eyes glow. He and Arterxerxes move pridefully about the two damsels who still find no word to say.

They find adventure on all sides. It is an adventure to stop in the kitchen on their way out and watch Cook kneading the dough, her small figure full of energy. Diggory loves Cook and he loves brown bread, which he is now allowed to eat from his own hand. He has two new words: Cook is "coo-coo," and brown bread is "Bom." He clasps Cook in his tiny arms and looks long and deep into her bright-blue eyes. She is seventy and he is a year and a half. When he comes in at tea-time cold from the February frost, he likes to be allowed to sit on a little stool at her feet and warm his hands in front of the great range. What an expanse of white smoothness is her apron behind him! David, the Persian, is curled in her lap. Already Audrey is lighting the hanging lamp.

Mother and Karen have gone to Town and the children are alone with Nurse and Cook and Audrey and Chad. Audrey is always lingering about the door of the nursery gossiping with Nurse. Often, Gillian knows very well, they are scolding about Cook. Often Cook and Nurse talk sharply to each other, exchanging looks that frighten the children.

One day Nurse says, with a horrid laugh:

"*You* call yourself a cook! Why, you can't cook any better than a cottage woman. The children's pudding wasn't fit to eat to-day. I had to throw it out!"

"Throw it out!" cries Cook. "That's a downright lie! Every bit that went up to the nursery was eaten. I know that very well."

Nurse turns to Gillian, "Nannie threw out all the pudding, didn't she, Gilly?"

"That's right," says Cook, "teach the child to lie! You'd do better to take her upstairs and brush her hair. She looks no better cared for than a village child!"

"Don't you criticize me!" returns Nurse, fiercely.

"I'm only telling 'ee the truth."

"And what I say about the pudding is true."

"Tiddn't!"

They glare at each other.

Audrey comes in from the scullery, her heavy face burning with interest.

Chad, in shirt-sleeves, comes in from the garage and gives them an amused look.

“You can’t cook! You’re only fit to work in the scullery!”

“And you’re not fit to look after gentlefolks’ children. I wish I knew your back history. ’Tis clear to me that ’ee comes from strange stock. You’re naught but a black woman, I do believe.”

Nurse is in a terrible rage.

“Here, take this child!” she says to Audrey, and thrusts Diggory into her arms. “I’ll run a knife into the old woman!” She snatches up a carving-knife.

Cook stands her ground. Chad interposes his big person and takes the knife from Nurse’s hand.

“Take the children up to the nursery,” he says to Audrey.

She leads Gillian and carries Diggory along the stone passage, up the three stone steps and on to the foot of the nursery stairs. There, in the dimness she pauses to listen. The children are too frightened to cry.

13

Nurse has disappeared into the world outside the garden wall. She is gone and the children do not give her a thought, though she wept when she parted with them.

A new nurse has taken her place. Instead of oily black hair, she has copper-coloured hair, twisted into a firm knob at her nape. Instead of large grey eyes, she has twinkling russet-coloured eyes. Instead of a short flat nose, a long sharp one. Instead of a full-lipped mouth and round chin, a thin, humorous mouth and a sharp chin. She is so extravagantly different that Diggory, sitting on her arm, is astonished. He feels her red hair, grasps her sharp chin. He likes the looks of her. She mumbles his hand and says—"You angel!"

A new delight has come into the lives of the children. Nurse is also a playfellow. Shrieks of laughter now come from the bathroom, squeals of joy wake the grown-ups in the morning.

"I'm a little bare girl!" cries Gillian, running naked up and down the bathroom to keep warm while Diggory is being powdered. He lies across Nurse's knees like a pink sea-shell newly washed up by the waves. The water has made his hair curl in little red rings on his crown. His eyes are like jewels. He grasps a foot in each hand and laughs up at Nannie. His pale-blue silk dressing-gown hangs ready.

Now he has reached the stage of "me too!" He wants to be into everything. With his small strength he tries to do all that Gillian does. He is persevering. If he is placing bricks, one on another, and the top one refuses to stay where it is put, he tries again and again, sighing at each collapse of the erection, his head on one side. He has the power to concentrate. He will examine the brick in his hand with complete absorption, turning it this way and that.

She flies from one thing to another like a butterfly, yet putting all her energy into what she does. "La-la-la, la-la!" she sings, rushing across the room, and he falls in her path. He gathers himself up and staggers after her. "Me too!" he cries. "Me too!"

Yet, at times, she is excessively polite. They have two little aluminium cups which they play with in the bath, filling them, emptying them, drinking from them, if they are not watched. He fills his, leans forward, and empties

it down her back. She looks over her shoulder, her hair gathered into a top-knot. She makes a deep bow.

"Thank you, Diggory," she coos.

To-night she must have a little medicine. She stands on tiptoe, her mouth open toward the spoon.

"Me too!" he cries, shouldering close.

He strains to share equally with her. She desires to possess what is his. There is always that glamour about what he holds in his hands. Sometimes she snatches it from him. But she is rebuked for that. Now she takes hold of it gently, her eyes on his.

"Ta—" she coos. "Ta-a."

He returns her look and wavers. She draws it away. She bows.

"Thank you, Diggory!"

He sighs and turns to what she has left him.

Oh, how happy she is! Up and down she flies, her lips parted in a smile. "La-la-la! La-la-la!" She brushes against him. He falls.

But now that she has it, of what use is the treasure to her? The glamour is gone. A puzzled shadow darkens her eyes. She drops the toy and turns to something else. "La-la-la! la-la-la!" How happy she is!

14

April is here. Up from the earth spring fresh ferns, violets, primroses. They crowd each other on the banks and in the hedges. All day the missel-thrush sings. Little streams chuckle in the grass. Flocks of sheep press down the road and Diggory leans to look past the hood of his pram at the timid lambs. Wallflowers bloom in front of the inn and the brown pony with its worn saddle stands outside it for hours. The rector owns the inn, and his tall figure in cassock and biretta is sometimes met by the children as he comes out of the cobbled yard.

The churchyard is a delightful place to walk in, for the graves are crowned by hyacinths and, in the spaces where there are no graves, the daffodils flutter their golden petals in gay procession. The daffodils would scent the air, but that it is already so scented by the hyacinths. The children peer through the opening in the squat oak gate that separates their garden from the churchyard. There are two new mounds covered by gay flowers.

"Es—ta," says Diggory, pointing to them joyfully. "Es-es-ta!"

No longer does he sit in his perambulator watching Gillian run about. He, too, can run about. He is twenty-one months old. He lifts his feet high as he runs across the grass, for he wears new shoes with sturdy soles, and they feel strange to him.

Chad is cutting the grass. . . . He goes up and down the lawn in strides, sometimes in the shadow of the deodar, sometimes in the bright sun, his tattooed arms showing below his uprolled sleeves. Daisy heads fly like white spray from the knives of the mowing-machine.

Gillian runs about him, often getting in his way, but he is never impatient. Sometimes she hurls herself on her back in front of the machine and kicks her legs in the air. The Spring is in her blood and she scarcely knows what to do with herself.

Diggory toddles far behind. When he reaches the side of the lawn where Chad and Gillian are, they are already far on their way toward the other side. Sometimes, when he falls, Chad comes and picks him up, brushing the grass from him with a large, tender hand.

Diggory looks searchingly into his face.

"Cha—" he says—"deah Cha."

“Chad, Chad,” shouts Gilly, rushing to hug Chad. “Dear, dear Chad!”

They follow him into the stable-yard, Diggory a frail craft in its sea of cobbles, then through the tall gate into the paddock. They see eighteen hens strutting and pecking among the daffodils. From somewhere Chad produces a tin dish with corn in it. He chucks to the hens, which come, stretching their legs, propelling themselves by their wings. Joyfully Gillian and Diggory plunge their hands into the dish and grasp what corn they can hold and throw it down to the hens.

David, the Persian, crosses the far end of the paddock, a rabbit dangling from his jaws.

A white-clothed figure comes from the house. It is Nurse, come to take them to their morning rest. It is eleven o’clock.

“Oh no, Nannie, please!” begs Gillian. Her eyes fill with tears.

But she is philosophic. To necessity she gives in with good grace. She puts away her outdoor toys in an empty stall of the stable and calls:

“Good-bye, Chad! Gilly will come again.”

But Diggory rebels. He screams as he is carried through the passage, works himself into a rage as they ascend the stairs. He glares up into Nurse’s face with hate. He continues to scream all the while he is being got ready for his sleep. He screams till he can only make a gurgling sound. Life seems a bottomless well of misery to him. Now he begins to talk of the injustice of life, ending each unintelligible sentence with the word “Nannie,” for it is she whom he chiefly reproaches.

But, when he is wrapped in his white shawl ready to go out to the pram, a change comes over him. His eyes shine like wet jewels. He laughs. He takes Nurse’s hand, which in his rage he struck, and raises it to his lips.

“Oh, my angel!” she exclaims, pressing him to her breast.

Cook comes out of her kitchen to see him pass.

“Do ’ee love old Coo-coo, then?” she asks.

He smiles at her. He is in a state of beatitude. His head emerges from the shawl like a bud from its sheath. Dibble looks up from the flags she is scrubbing. She is hungry for a smile. He bends his head to look down at her. She sits back on her heels worshipping.

Chad manages to pass near as Nurse lays Diggory in the pram. Diggory sees his red face far above.

“Me man, too,” he murmurs.

Birds fly about him bearing material for nest-building. From under the hood of the pram he can look into the vast spread of the deodar tree, a mysterious green world. The brazen beak of the weathercock turns toward the sea. The clock in the Tower strikes twelve. Diggory falls asleep.

15

Walking across a rain-soaked meadow with her Mother, Gillian says:

"Let me sit quietly in your lap, please."

When she is told that she cannot do that, she asks:

"Will you carry me then?"

"I'm a little tired."

"Gilly thinks you're a big tired," she returns. . . .

She looks on men as mere possessions.

"Chad," she affirms haughtily, "belongs to me."

She and Nurse meet a man in a lane. He touches his cap and says, "Good-morning."

"A nice civil man," says Nurse.

"Yes," agrees Gillian, "whose is he?"

She is not yet much interested in religion. She says her prayers with one mischievous eye open. Still, she has her ideas. "There are three Gods," she announces. "Gilly knows their names. Their names are One, Two, and Three."

She is often beside herself with high spirits. She scarcely knows what she is doing. She throws the sofa cushions about the nursery. She runs in circles till she falls. She throws herself on Diggory and they go down together. She feels the flower-petal firmness of his cheek against her mouth. She lies still for a moment clutching him to her. Sweet malicious thoughts tingle through her. She cannot stop herself. She bites him.

Nannie is standing over her, her eyes sparkling with anger. One, two, three, stinging slaps descend on her hand. She is shut in the night nursery to repent. . . .

She sobs till she can sob no more, rolling over and over on the linoleum. She lies still now with blurred eyes, looking up at the bottoms of the two cots and Nannie's bed, at the wardrobe, the cupboard, the washing-stand, the table with the lamp on it.

But she must not let herself stop crying for fear she may be quite forgotten. With a preliminary grunt she begins working herself up into another fit of crying, dragging the sobs from her chest with an effort. She hears Nannie's step at the door and instantly she becomes still as a mouse.

The door opens. She sits up and fumbles at the buckle of her sandal.

"I can fasten my own shoe," she says.

Nannie stands looking down at her with a severe expression.

"Are you going to be good?"

"Yes, thank you, Nannie."

"Never, never, again do such a thing as bite. Only animals bite. You have hurt your little brother very badly. Are you coming to tell him how sorry you are?"

Gillian scrambles to her feet. She puts a tiny hand into Nurse's and they return solemnly to the day nursery.

"Now, kiss Diggory and tell him how sorry you are."

Gillian clasps Diggory's head. Their soft mouths touch indifferently. She sees six little indigo marks on his milky cheek. She grips him tightly so that she may see better. He struggles. "No!" he cries. "No! No!"

They glare into each other's eyes.

"Sorry," she says.

16

A misguided friend has sent them a scooter. It is a bone of contention, but neither can ride it. Gillian can by an effort touch the pedals, but she presses on them both at once. She cannot understand how to work it. Diggory, who cannot touch the pedals, knows exactly how it should be done. Alternately his dangling feet reach toward them, while he wears a frowning baffled look.

He scowls while she has her futile turn.

Now, by sitting sidewise he can touch the floor with one foot. He does this, and with his small strength makes the scooter move. Though the effort is great he persists, caring for nothing else. He is enraged when she demands her turn. As he is dragged off the scooter he struggles and growls like a small animal. He bites the handle-bars. His irritation is increased by the fact that he is cutting a tooth.

All along he has gone serenely from bath to bed, laughing as he snuggles under the clothes, clasping his doll and his blue rabbit under one arm and an almost life-sized wire-haired terrier under the other. But now, at the same time every evening, he begins to cry. He cries broken-heartedly, with streaming eyes. Gillian is scarcely able to say her prayers because of his weeping. Nothing will comfort him. One after the other he throws the doll, the rabbit, and the terrier over the side of the cot. He cries himself to sleep. Nothing will comfort him.

Then one evening Nurse, standing by Gillian as she kneels in her cot, sees him struggle to his knees also, fold his hands and bend his head above them. As soon as Gillian's Amen is said, Nurse runs to Diggory. She supports him in the posture of prayer and leads his infant tongue through the God blesses. He is supremely happy as she tucks him up. He is now on an equal footing with Gillian. He, too, can say prayers. He lisps the name Jesus.

"Oh, my angel!" cries Nannie, gazing down rapt at him.

"I'm a hangel too!" shouts Gillian, bouncing up and down in her crib.

17

There are so many flowers that the children are bewildered. White daisy heads fleck the lawn. Violets heavy with scent crowd in the corners of the walls, wallflowers hang from the crevices. The paddock is a sea of daffodils. Polyanthus and forget-me-not make bright the borders. Clusters and wreaths of primroses bloom softly on the banks. Coo-coo flowers and White Sunday in the hedges. Cowslips in the fields. Gillian carries a little basket on her walks and fills it with cowslips. She picks them carefully with nice long stems.

From the lawn she runs under the green archway into the garden. She runs wildly along the garden paths, for the flowers excite her. She bursts into song: “Tra-la-la, la-la-la!” Narcissi and daffodils are so plentiful that she is allowed to pick all she wants of them. She runs along the garden paths, her arms full of them. She has so many that she does not know what to do with them. She hides them beneath a barberry bush and sets out to pick more. Diggory finds them.

“No, no,” she cries. “Don’t touch! They’re Gilly’s. Pick dandelions!”

He is allowed to pick only dandelions because he will not pick the stems of flowers but just their heads. He knows the dandelions very well when he sees them and that they are his for the taking, but his opinion of them is low. When trotting after Gillian, one presents itself in his path he stoops and, with a little growl of dissatisfaction, plucks off its head. But, once that he has picked it he will not throw it down. He trudges along clutching a handful of dandelion heads. He is also cumbered by several stuffed toys without which he seldom moves. His small arms ache with their weight. He sighs and shifts them, but he will not throw them down. Gillian, on the other hand, discards things as gaily as she appropriates them. Her path is strewn with the objects that have ceased to interest her.

It is Nurse’s afternoon out and Audrey is to take the children for their walk. It is an occasion for her, and she is full of importance. She is a heavy young creature. Not much more than a child herself. She receives many warnings, the principal one being that she must not keep the children out so long that they will be late for their tea. She stands listening impassively to directions. She is taking Gillian’s mackintosh and sou’wester in case it rains. She has tucked her alarm clock in the end of the pram, for she owns no watch.

In and out of the curves of the drive they wind their way, long pale-green fern fronds growing thickly from the banks above the low walls. The leaves of the sycamore are flung out, new and bright against the yews. The weathercock stands motionless in the misty air! Up through the village street, past the public-house where the pony stands waiting for his master and the wine-coloured wallflowers bloom against the cream-coloured wall, Audrey pushes the pram with the two children in it, for she good-naturedly allows Gillian to ride all the way. It is more convenient too when she stops to talk to friends, which several times she does.

They leave the road and enter winding green lanes like tunnels. Lapwings wheel overhead uttering their sad sweet cry. They pass a caravan and Diggory leans forward to see the gipsy woman stirring a pot at an open fire. Bundles of faggots neatly tied are piled high by a farm gate and the young labourer leaves his work of cutting them and comes, hook in hand, to talk to Audrey. She gives loud easy laughs and lolls against the handle of the pram.

They go on and on till they come to a big house set in a park where Audrey's sister works. The sister comes out, and the children are hugged and set down to run about. It seems a long time to them before they start for home. Audrey pushes the pram so fast up the hills that her breath comes in gasps.

Suddenly the alarm clock goes off, right at the children's feet in a terrifying shrill scream. At the next moment a low rumble of thunder sounds from a black cloud. The rain comes down.

Audrey struggles on till she can struggle no more. The storm is too much for her. She pushes the perambulator into a gap in the hedge, creeps in beside it and holds Gillian in her arms. The rain beats in on them. The wind lashes the trees above them and sends broken boughs down to the road. The thunder deafens them. And holly bushes in the hedge prick Gillian's bare legs.

The children do not cry. They are silent in fear and wonder. Diggory peers out at the storm and Gillian clings fast to Audrey.

Cook and Chad meet them at the door. They tell Audrey what they think of her and prophesy that she will lose her place. She listens stolidly, the alarm clock dangling, ticking coarsely in her red, wet hand. She leads Gillian up the back stairs, but Cook sets Diggory on a little stool by her chair, where he will get the full heat from the range. In front of him it glows hot and bright. At his back rises the snowy height of Cook's apron. She has

taken off his coat and cap, and his red-gold hair is ruffled. He places his hands on his bare knees and settles himself like a little man to enjoy the warmth.

A delicious understanding passes between the two of them. A sense of absorbing comfort, one from the other. They want no outsider. Each makes the other strong and warm and unafraid. They remember nothing. Look forward to nothing. The rain lashes against the tall Gothic windows of the kitchen. David, the Persian, drags a bit of fresh liver from his saucer and devours it with a hissing sound.

18

It is a foggy morning and the fog smells of the sea. The tender green fern fronds uncurl in its salt sweetness. The blackbird, sitting in the yew tree, flings out his notes on it and bends his burnished head to hear them fall. He stops singing while the church clock strikes ten, but soon he is at it again. A flock of starlings settle chattering on the weather-vane. They perch on each point of the compass. They sit on the tail, the back, the comb, the very beak of the cock.

When the sun has broken through the mist, the children, followed by Nannie, appear on the gravel paths. Nannie knits as she walks, but she keeps one eye on them.

The blackbird is still singing but now gravely, slowly, among the boughs of the yew. A tomtit sways on the branch of a fuchsia. Like Diggory he says, "Me too! Me too!"

As usual Diggory's arms are full of woolly toys, little animals and battered dolls.

Gillian carries nothing. She will not be hampered. She must be free to enjoy her new skirt to the full. It is the first time she has worn a real skirt. It is kilted too, and, as she bounds along, she feels the swing of it against her thighs. She cannot quite remember either "skirt" or "kilt," so she calls it "squilt."

"My squilt! My squilt! My lovely squilt!" she sings as she runs.

The fields are blue-misted with bluebells but in the garden the tulips are coming out. Gillian flies from flower to flower smelling them.

"Smell them, Diggory," she commands.

He grasps a green bud firmly by its stalk and exhales with a snuffly sound and an expression of distaste.

What a happy day it is! Gillian is to fill her little basket with cowslips when they go on their walk and bring it to her mother.

She carries it carefully to the study after tea.

There is a present for her, too. A tiny china tea-set. She is in a transport of well-being. The little tea-pot is filled with weak tea, and she fills cup after cup from it. She feels that she could do this for ever. She will not allow

Diggory to touch. No—quite definitely pouring tea is woman's work and he is a boy.

Gravely he carries cups of tea and presents them to Mummie and Karen. He stands sipping his own with the poise of a frequenter of drawing-rooms.

But now the tea has all been drunk—all but one cupful. Gillian pours this into her mouth, cherishes it for one delicious moment, then returns it to the tea-pot, ready to be poured again.

"Whatever are you doing?" demands her mother.

"Making it last."

"Me too, me too," cries Diggory. "Me make it lasht!"

19

The plumbers, the painters are working about the house, for it is Church property and once in every five years it is set in order, from the attic, with its slanting roofs and little stone fireplaces, to the cavernous cellars. The ivy and jasmine are cut back from the window, which have been half hidden by them. New panels of oak are set in where the worms have been busy. The gates, from the big gate that opens into the road to the little gate that divides the rose garden from the paddock, are freshly painted. Even the piggery and the poultry house have their doors painted. Only the thick little gate that leads into the churchyard is untouched. It hides unnoticed among the laurels.

Gillian and Diggory delight in the presence of the workmen. They trot after them as they stride past, swinging pots of paint. They stand, with upturned faces, gazing at them mounted high on long ladders. Gillian singles out Chad's handsome son Peter.

"Peter Chad," she observes, with an air of complacence, "belongs to me."

But to Diggory something profound has happened. He has discovered a strange bond between himself and these men. He realizes that one day he too will climb ladders, swing a hammer, stride in heavy boots that crunch the gravel. Among all "mens" he realizes that a fellowship exists. Though Gilly is bigger and stronger than he, she will never be a man. When the men notice him he gives them a look of grateful understanding.

Two visitors are leaving after the week-end, and the family are collected to watch the departure. The lady drives the car and is already behind the wheel. Her husband lingers for a last chat. The engine is started. Diggory looks anxiously at the lady. Like Gillian she wants the car all for herself. She is going off without the poor gentleman.

Diggory stands close by the wheel. He looks reproachfully up into her face.

"Man too, p'eashe," he says. "Man too."

Visitors have brought them delightful presents. Twin baa-lambs, white as milk. They are so filled with pleasure that they forget to say thanks. Upstairs in the nursery Nannie tells them what she thinks of such behaviour. "I was

shocked," she says. "I don't know when I have been so shocked. You took the presents and said not one word of thanks."

They hang their heads.

The next afternoon, when they are taken to the drawing-room, Gillian goes quickly to the visitor and holds out her hand.

"Thank you veddy much for the baa-lambs," she says.

Diggory gravely holds out his hand.

"Me too," he says. "Me thanks, p'eashe."

At bed-time Gillian says triumphantly to Nurse:

"You weren't shocking in the drawing-room to-day, Nannie."

Diggory kneels to say his prayers. An odour of sweet flesh and warm flannel rises from his tiny kneeling form.

"Gentle Jesus," prompts Nurse, touching the tendrils of his hair with her lips. She leads him through the prayer.

"Now," she ends, "God bless Diggory and make him a good little boy."

He opens his eyes wide. "But, Nannie," he murmurs reproachfully, "Chad an' me are *Mens*."

In truth he feels a new strength in him. He is becoming firm on his legs. He grows faster than Gillian. Every now and again their mother stands them against the wall in the study and marks their height on it, putting their initials by the marks. The G's creep up slowly, but the D's mount like a flight of birds.

Now it is necessary to strap him into his pram with thoroughness or he will soon set himself free. He helps Nurse to put on his harness with good intention written on his brow. He thrusts his arms into the arm-holes, ducks his head into the head-hole, wriggles his body into the clutch of the belt. He lies under his white shawl looking up, bright-eyed and aloof, in spite of his strapped-in condition, like a small animal in its burrow. Nurse gives the pram a comforting joggle, then tiptoes along the brick terrace and across the cobbled yard, into the house.

Above the hood of the pram he can see the bright-red buds of the fuchsia hanging as though about to drip from the tree. He can see the mauve plumes of the wistaria luminous against the grey stone wall. He is not aware of its perfume. He smells only the familiar leathery smell of his pram, intensified by the heat of the sun, and the clean stuffy smell of the woollen shawl.

He hears the sound of water sloshing and he knows that Chad is washing down the car.

"Caw-caw," he murmurs, and struggles into a sitting position, to see what he can see.

Under the arch of the gateway that leads to the stable-yard he can get a glimpse of dazzling sunshine gleaming on the enamel of the car. He can see Chad's shoulders in a blue shirt and his hand grasping the sponge.

Chad looks over his shoulder and sees Diggory, who at once ducks behind the hood of the pram. He hears Chad's heavy step approaching and lies down, snuggling under his shawl.

Chad, sponge in hand, bare arms brightly tattooed, looks at him:

"Now, you go to sleep," he says, "and no nonsense about it."

Diggory peers up over the edge of the shawl.

“You don’t care what you do,” pursues Chad, “you’re that full of beans, you need a man to manage you.” With a touch full of tenderness, he draws the shawl a little closer about Diggory and joggles the pram.

Diggory feels the blood dancing in him like new wine. But he lies down till he hears Chad back the car into the garage; then he sits up and looks about him.

The fuchsia buds still drip, the plumes of the wistaria quiver beneath the weight of bees. David, the Persian, lolls on the terrace, his white belly upturned, a look of indolent mischief on his face, his sharp teeth showing in something between a smile and a sneer.

Diggory pushes back the shawl and, gathering it into a bundle, drops it over the edge of the pram. He pulls off his socks and drops them over. They are caught in a wheel and hang there. He lies down and energetically kicks his bare pink legs. He manages to withdraw one arm from his harness. He wriggles down toward the foot of the pram, and, somehow or other, wriggles himself free. He grasps his jersey by the bottom and, with a supreme effort, pulls it over his head. His vest follows and his diminutive knickers. He is stark naked. The sun kisses him all over. A fuchsia bell falls and hits him between the shoulders. David, the Persian, grins and paws up at him.

“Mens,” murmurs Diggory. “Me and Chad mens.”

He gets to his feet and stands swaying at the foot of the pram. He looks up at the great sky, at the bright weathercock facing west, at the starlings hovering about the chimney. There is nothing he cannot do. He can jump. He can fly. He can sit on the church tower like the weathercock, if he so wills. He is free as air.

Audrey has long been gone, and in her place works Hannah, tall, pink-and-white, youthfully severe in feature, roguish in her smile. She looks through the pantry window and sees Diggory standing naked in the pram.

She drops the silver she is cleaning, runs through the scullery, the boot-hall and comes breathlessly across the cobbles. She snatches up Diggory and holds him to her.

Nurse appears at an upstairs window.

“Oh,” cries Hannah, panting, “what a turn he did give me! I looked out of window and there he was like the day he was born, ready to topple out on the bricks.”

Nurse comes running.

Hannah has set him on his feet and the two women stand gazing at him in wonder and delight. He picks up a garden rake that has been left by the border, and begins to drag it about.

“No, no,” cries Nurse, “if ever you fell on those teeth. . . .” She takes the rake from him.

In an instant he has discovered the decomposed body of a fledgling and presents it to her.

“Oh, dirty, dirty,” she exclaims, shaking it from his hand. “Oh, how quick he is! One can’t be up to him!”

“Me man,” he says.

Hannah takes his foot in her hand, dusts the sand from it and presses the pink sole to her lips.

21

They are going to a tea-party. They are dressed alike in new pale-green smocks with white socks and green slippers. Nannie leads them importantly to show them to Mother and Karen. The car is waiting for them, and Chad sits at the wheel dignified and important too, for he is to have a precious cargo.

Gillian sits beside Nurse, who holds Diggory on her lap, and now and again exchanges a pleasant word with Chad. The car winds in and out through narrow roads that each moment become more narrow and winding. They pass through Lower Holditch and at last come to High Holditch. They pass through a wide gate and up along a drive.

Alice, who is a year older than Gillian, lives here, and her baby sister. Before long there is to be another baby sister.

The two nurses talk together, keeping an eye on the little ones while Gillian and Alice run about together. It is surprising to Gillian to play with someone taller and stronger than herself, to be always behind instead of always ahead, to say—"Please, may I have that?" instead of, "No, you shan't have that."

After tea the children are taken to see the hunters. They have never seen so many horses together before. They are a little frightened by the stamping of hooves, the large rolling eyes. They are taken into a paddock and given rides on Alice's donkey. Alice is not at all afraid. She jogs round and round on him urging him to greater speed. But Gillian is a little frightened.

"Do you like it?" she is asked.

"Yes, thank you," she answers, "but I should like to get off, please."

Nannie holds Diggory in the saddle while the donkey trots on and on, and the ground seems far away, and the great ears standing up in front of him menacing, and the movement of the barrel-like body strange and unstable. He grips the rein and looks straight ahead, his face pale. When he is lifted down, the great dog jumps on him and joyfully kisses him. He screams.

That night in bed he wakes from a bad dream. He has been galloping across the world on a terrible rocking donkey, while all about him wild horses leap and neigh, great cows shake their horns at him, flocks of sheep

wait threatening for him, cats and dogs rage to bite him. It is long before Nurse can comfort him. She has to take him for a little while into her own bed. Now he is a new Diggory. He has lost his self-confidence, his trust in all about him. When they go for their walk they meet some cows on the road and he bursts into tears. When a dog runs to the side of his pram he screams.

All the household look at him in dismay. What has happened to him? He looks the same and yet he is not the same. He is afraid of all living things except people. He loves people more than ever before because he wants their protection.

Even when David, the Persian, who loves him, comes romping towards him, he holds up his arms to be taken up. He tries to climb up whichever grown person is nearest, as though he were climbing a tree in escape from a mad bull.

Their mother takes them for a walk in the meadow that slopes down past Wytch Green. Far away they see the Tower rising against the blue sky. Among the trees they see the chimneys of Wyld Court where King Charles once slept. Beyond and beyond lies the valley of the Axe. The meadow is gay with buttercups and the hedge surrounding it with foxgloves.

Gillian flies, leaping and dancing, after the flock of Dartmoor sheep that graze there. The sheep bundle themselves together, the little lambs skip. Diggory holds up his arms.

"Up, up!" he implores. "Me up!"

He clasps his mother's neck.

"But the pretty lambs are so gentle."

"Me 'fraid."

He will not walk a step. No use to urge him. He clings tightly, and only when they have passed through the gate into Lime Walk will he consent to be set down. He looks timorously up into the sombre black arch of the limes, under which, centuries ago, the monks walked and where even now, at twilight, a headless monk is sometimes seen. Is the tiny boy perhaps oppressed by the weight of that dim past lingering among the limes? Their foliage throws a greenish shadow across his face. A mysterious scent descends from their flowers.

The three pass slowly through the Walk and, at last, come upon two village boys hidden high up among the branches. Only the rustle of leaves discovers them. The boys peer down, inquisitive, a little shamefaced.

“What are they doing?” asks Gillian.

“They’re hunting for birds’ nests, I’m afraid.”

“I want to go next them.” She stares up eagerly at the boys, who smile back.

They pass on, across a field, where Diggory sees a distant cow and must be picked up, through a farm gate, on which they have a swing, and then, in a turnip field, they find a one-legged man hoeing.

“Where has he left his leg?” asks Gillian.

“On the battle-field.”

“I want to go next him, please.”

“No, no, we must go home.”

Gillian runs ahead, flashing like a bird across the sunny grass. She runs till she is tired. She runs back out of breath.

“Mummie, will you please carry my hand? I’m tired.”

In the winding walk between the wall of the churchyard and the wall of their own garden they come upon a little red hen scratching. Diggory holds up his arms.

“Up, up,” he begs. “Me ’fraid!”

22

Gillian has only one fear. That is the steam-roller that works on the road. At her play she can hear it snorting and growling down at Wytch Green where Mrs. Dibble lives. The noise of it vibrates on the summer air and fills her with fear. Nearer and nearer it rolls up the road, making it smoother, as Nurse says, for Diggory's pram. But, though its intentions may be beneficent, the sounds that come from it, the murky smoke that belches forth, fill her with terror. Nannie opens the door in the garden wall so that she may see it closely, yet from the safety of her own threshold.

Diggory steps out boldly on to the road. He is not afraid of the steam-roller. He fears nothing on wheels. He fears only what runs on hooves and paws and claws. Gillian clings to Nurse's apron.

As they watch, the steam-roller comes grinding up from Wytch Green—chug—chug—chug—flattening all before it. A man with a black face drives it. Other men walk beside it, and a sticky black liquid flows behind it. Gillian's face turns pink. A terrible sob shakes her.

"Oh, Nannie," she wails, "let us go in and shut the door!"

"Me man," says Diggory, and marches down the road.

The Rector is filling his bucket at the pump. The breeze fills his cassock like a sail. He strides after Diggory and raises him to his shoulder.

"Bless you, my boy," he says, and carries him back to the garden.

The garden door shut, Gillian says:

"I'm a big girl. I'm a lump to lift. When I am four in the autumn I'll not be afraid of anything."

But when she is safe inside the motor-car she looks on the steam-roller with tolerance, even amusement. As they flash by on their way to a picnic by the sea she looks out of the car window at the roller with a nonchalant smile. She grasps a spade and a bucket. So does Diggory. She wears a blue bathing-suit, he a green. Her skin looks white until you look at his, then hers looks only a pale buff.

They are crowded into the car, Chad and Nannie and Gillian and Diggory and Mummie and Karen, the picnic hamper, the thermos, the rugs, towels, and sun-shades as well. The children sing in unison from sheer joy.

They sing so loudly that no conversation is possible. But, when they reach the top of the steep hill in Lyme Regis, they stop singing and are silent in wonder during the descent. Down and down they go till the sea rolls out before them, and the white beach and the bright figures of people bathing. Chad lifts them out of the car, then turns it about and they watch him slowly begin the ascent of the hill.

Oh, what joy to be big enough to dig a hole! To watch the sea-water ooze into it and slowly fill it! To dig a hole big enough to stand in and feel the water covering first your feet and then your ankles, creeping upward to your knees!

The sea ripples blue to the other side of the world. There are little boats on it in which men sit and row. There are other children playing near by. Gillian and Diggory look shyly at them but they do not speak. There is a little boy named Timothy who talks loudly in a high shrill voice. His mother is always saying, "Oh, Timothy, don't scream so!" Nurse looks proudly at Diggory, proud of his dignity and his straight white back. She, too, is barefoot, and walks right into the sea to fill Gillian's bucket for her. Mummie and Karen lie prone, smoking cigarettes.

"Build me something," begs Gillian.

"What shall I build you?" asks Mummie lazily. "A castle?"

"No, a lady, please."

"This sand is rather coarse for making a lady."

"Make a *coarse* lady, please!"

Diggory has stepped on the edge of the hole Gillian has dug and broken it in. She is distressed and exclaims—"And it was such a *precious* hole!"

Nannie fusses about them, putting their jerseys on and taking them off, anxious for them to get the sun, yet afraid they will get sunburned.

What a lunch they eat! Diggory cannot stuff down brown bread fast enough. He snatches sandwiches without a thank you, but Gillian is invariably polite. Her eyes look blue as the sea.

There is a sign to the effect that sand must not be taken from the shore without the consent of the Lord of the Manor, but, in the face of this, the children fill their buckets with the finest and best and Chad, returning to fetch them, carries the sand to the car.

23

Nannie has a sore throat. She stands in her bodice and petticoat by the washing-stand, her head thrown back, gargling. From her throat issues the most wonderful growlings, more exciting than the best noises Mummie can make when imitating a bear or a tiger.

Gillian and Diggory stand on either side of her gazing up into her face with rapture. They, too, are just half dressed, but they do not give their breakfast a thought, so delighted are they. When she spits out and draws a deep breath, they cry in chorus:

"Again! Again! Do it again, please!"

With a hunted look Nannie takes another mouthful of the gargle and throws back her head. Again they stand enthralled, ecstatic smiles on their pink faces. They dance about her. They bump into each other and fall down. They rise, shouting with glee.

"Again! Again! Do it again!"

Never have they been better entertained.

But what is wrong with Gillian?

She cannot talk freely and crisply as she could. Every now and again she begins to stammer. Instead of saying—"What is that?"—she says—"Wh-wh-wh-wh—" and looks at you with pathetic impotence.

She seems always excited and often distressed. She talks more than ever but cannot get out the words.

"P-p-p-p-p-p," she begins and looks at you helpless.

She frowns, tries again.

"P-p-p-p-p—" It will not come out.

She clenches her hands, stiffens all over, and, at last the words come. But soon she is stammering again.

"Wh-wh-wh-wh—"

She pats her open mouth with her palm and so stems the inarticulate flood. Everyone pretends not to notice, but this new development is the

subject of much anxiety.

Diggory, on the other hand, talks more clearly each day, in deep unhurried musical tones.

For once he finds himself alone in the hall. He stands in front of the grandfather clock, staring up in its impassive face, his tiny green slippers close together, his smock, held back by his hands. He makes a little bow to the clock.

"Tick-tock, c'ock," he says. "Tick-tock, c'ock," and bows again.

Time flies. To-day he is two years old.

A birthday party is arranged to take place on the lawn, but the rain pours down so the children must play in the house.

First there is tea, and Diggory sits at table with his guests, not in his high chair but on an ordinary one with two cushions beneath him. In front of him is placed the birthday cake, its two lighted candles reflected in his eyes. He is the only little boy in the neighbourhood, so all those about the table are girls.

They have brought him presents. Bewildered he receives woolly toys and a jar of barley sugar into his hands. But best of all is a bright blue-and-white football with a little bell in it. When he tries to kick it he falls down, so he lies on the floor with it in his arms listening to the faint tinkle of the bell, which responds to the gentle heaving of his chest. He is too young to join in the game of musical chairs. He stands in the window with the smallest guest—Annabelle—who is his own age. When she cries, at what he knows not, his own eyes fill with tears. When she laughs, at what he knows not, he wrinkles his nose and laughs back.

When the fathers come in their cars for their children, rain dripping from their mackintoshes, he follows Annabelle to the door. He makes it known that he would like to kiss her good-bye. She is already in the car sitting on her nurse's knee, but he is rushed through the rain and held in a horizontal position, through the window. His face and Annabelle's bump softly together.

He struts in under the stone arch of the door. He is two years old. He is master of the house.

24

It is the day of the Horse Show. Since daybreak the sound of cart-wheels, the clatter of horses' hooves, have passed down the road outside the wall. A street piano has passed, filling the air with loud music. The air is vibrant with excitement. The children have known nothing like it before.

Never have they known so hot a day. Gillian's face is scarlet as she trudges along the dusty road holding fast to the handle of the perambulator. Diggory's face, under his white piqué hat, is a delicate pink, his hair curls closely about his ears. A policeman guards the entrance. The man who sells tickets makes a joking remark to Nurse about the cost of parking vehicles. Diggory, in his pram, is the youngest spectator.

The sun blazes down on the course. They press close to the rope barrier. Motor-cars, filled with people, are lined up behind those standing. Gillian sees faces which she vaguely remembers, the faces of the parents of her little friends. She sees horses held by grooms, ponies held by boys and girls in riding-clothes, great vans in which hunters have been driven to the show, a tent where refreshments are sold. She is bewildered by so much that is new. Her eyes fly quickly from place to place, never still.

Diggory stares straight ahead at the horses cantering around the course. He sees nothing else. He sees a dozen of them, far away down the course, leaping over gates, prancing about obstacles. Now they come nearer and nearer to him thundering over the turf. It seems that they will gallop right over him and his face quivers as the great bodies, shining with sweat, loom close.

But they are passing, their riders red-faced, the straining of leather and the breathing of beasts audible above the thud of hooves. Suddenly Diggory discovers that he is no longer afraid of horses or of any living thing. He is a man taking part in a horse show! He grips the sides of the pram and leans forward to follow with his eyes the riders down the course.

One class of hunters after another comes and goes. The sun blazes hot. The orchestra of five pieces in the centre of the course plays dance tunes, exciting the horses to strange caperings. A child rider is thrown from her mount and falls against a hurdle, but she picks herself up and limps gallantly after her pony, mounts him again and finishes in triumph.

Nurse bends over Gillian and looks into her eyes. She says:

“Just think, Gilly! That little girl was thrown from her pony and hurt yet she did not cry. She just ran after him and mounted again. Wasn’t that plucky? You’ll try to be like that in future, won’t you?”

“Yes, thank you, Nannie,” returns Gillian, staring.

Two boys of eight have been introduced to her. Their names are James and Richard. They are in grey flannel shorts, shirts, and hats. Richard has brothers riding in the events, but she likes James best. They stand on either side of her looking down at her. She says:

“In November I shall be four.”

James and Richard exchange tolerant smiles. Nurse sets Diggory on his feet. He passes under the rope on to the course and must be brought back. They all go to see the ponies which Richard’s brothers ride. About them is a confusion of grooms and horses and motor-cars. People are eating their tea in their cars, pouring tea out of thermos bottles into cups. Ladies and gentlemen laugh together. Gillian has a glimpse of her mother, who waves a hand to her. An enormous hunter is being led into his van.

She is led close to the ponies by Richard, and is made to stroke their smooth hard sides. Afterward her hand smells of pony.

“Just one glimpse now,” says Nurse, “of the flowers and vegetables before we go.” But the tent is so hot that they cannot endure it for long. Nurse thinks that she will faint. The vegetables stand the heat better than the flowers and the flowers better than the prize butter, which lies in a golden pool in its dish. James thumps the prize marrow with his knuckles. Richard gives the prize goose a smack. Everything they do is wonderful to Gillian. She follows them laughing to the very end of the tent.

A group is gathered about Diggory’s pram admiring him. Richard takes Gilly by the wrist and pulls her this way and that. She is not sure whether or not he is in play, but she laughs. She looks up in his face, but can make nothing of it. She tries to disengage her hand.

“P-p-p-please, don’t,” she says.

But he holds her wrist tightly and pulls her this way and that.

“P-p-p-please, don’t,” she repeats. Then, looking at him with dignity, she says clearly and sternly:

“Don’t do it!”

He lets her go.

How green and cool the lawn seems after the glare of the road! Nurse was never in her life gladder to be home again. She is carrying Diggory up the long, slippery stairs and Gillian following after, slips and falls down two steps. A terrible bump. But she scrambles to her feet and looks bravely up at Nurse.

“No tears,” she says, “I’m p-p-plucky too.”

They rejoice in their bath, after the heat of the afternoon. They splash in the cool water and make swimming motions in the limited space of the bath. The fresh sweetness of their bed linen is delicious. A thrush sings his evening song in the wistaria.

Nurse folds the sheet under Gillian’s round chin.

“Did you like James?” she asks, for James had once been her baby.

“Yes, veddy much, thank you, Nannie. And I like James’s daddy, too. He is quite rather tall, but he bent down low to talk to me.” After a moment’s silent complacence, she adds—“I like all men.”

25

Diggory loves Karen. Over and over he chants her name. At this time everything he does is repeated in terms of Karen.

"Karen sees me," he cries, as he straddles his hobby-horse.

"Karen can't see me," he says, as he creeps under the sofa.

But he must part with her, for she is going away. She and his mother are going to Scotland. A long month must pass before he sees her again. He hugs her fair head close.

"Bye-bye, Karen, bye-bye!"

"Bye-bye!" cries Gillian, "please send me twenty-eleven post-cards!"

The car, heaped with luggage, rolls away.

What a month it is!

The sun burns hot. The children run about the lawn naked. Gillian's body turns a pale-coffee colour. A golden flush overspreads Diggory's whiteness. They try to stand on their heads. They try to fly.

There is an air of devil-may-careness in the house, the front part of which is closed up. There are picnics to the sea, when Nurse and Cook and Hannah and Chad sit about the picnic hamper and enjoy themselves. But Gillian and Diggory are the centre of it all. Chad rolls up his trousers and wades far out into the sea, carrying one of them on each shoulder. Hannah goes in bathing and narrowly escapes being swept out by the tide. Ah, the excitement of it!

The hay in the paddock is, at long last, dry. A man comes with a pony and cart, and the pony is unharnessed and the children are given rides on his back round and round over the tumbled sweet-smelling hay.

The hay is made into a great stack and Hannah snatches up Gilly and throws her into the middle of it. Cook snatches up Diggory and throws him after. They feel themselves lost in the aromatic depths of the hay. They cry:

"Again, please! Do it again!"

They cannot be thrown into the hay too hard or too often to please them. It clings to their hair and their clothes. They sneeze and rub their noses. Yet they say:

“Again, please! Do it again!”

Now Chad stands them side by side in the stable-yard for setting-up exercises. He stands facing them with a severe expression, for he served in the marines. His arms in upturned sleeves are held horizontally. The tattooed designs on them stand out bright blue and red in the sun.

“Eyes front!”

“Now, then, watch what you’re doing!”

“Up with your arms!”

“Do just what I do!”

Diggory follows each motion, his eyes fixed on Chad, but Gilly’s gaze wanders.

Seven times they set out with Nurse for tea-parties, Chad spruce and with his best manner to drive the car. Now they know just what to do when they go to a tea-party. They are people of the world.

There are christenings too. The twin boys from the Court are christened. And the baby girl from Easthay. Gillian and Diggory stand solemnly side by side in the church while the infants are held at the front. She wears her pink coat, he his green. Only once does he speak out loud. When the Rector asks a question of a god-father, Diggory answers yes for him, in a full voice.

There is even a wedding, but they are not asked to that. It is a friend of Hannah’s who is the bride, and Hannah goes through the little gate into the church to blow the organ, while her sister from the Inn plays the wedding march.

26

The sunset is bright beyond the valley. It turns rosy the fleeces of the sheep clustered beneath the limes. It shines on the windows of the house, which are bright from polishing. Everything in the house is polished bright. There are flowers in every room. Only the night nursery is dark, for the children have been put to bed and the curtains drawn.

But they cannot sleep. They lie listening for the sound of the car, for the sound of footsteps coming down the passage. Little quivers of excitement run through them. Diggory's excitement comes from Gillian. He must experience all that she does. He lies looking up into the twilight, clutching close to him the kangaroo, which holds its young one in a real little pocket. He grasps the head of the young one and fixes it more firmly in its place.

"Gilly hears the car!" she cries, and sits upright.

"Me, too," says Diggory. "Me heah caw-caw."

But it seems a long while before the steps sound in the passage. Then they come with a rush and Gilly finds herself in her mother's arms and Diggory is hanging like a little limpet around the neck of Karen.

A sudden rush of love makes Gillian tremble. She clings close. Again and again she kisses the face bending over her, runs her hand through the short dark hair.

"Oh, Mummie," she sighs, "Gilly doesn't like it when you're away!"

But she is plump as a little bird and her stammer is a thing of the past.

It is hard to separate. The couples exchange, and Mother clasps Diggory while Gillian clings to Karen. But Nurse's figure stands white and straight in the twilight. It is high time the children were asleep. All this talking and cuddling can be done in the morning.

The morning is full of joy. Gillian can scarcely eat her breakfast, and Diggory thumps his spoon on the tray of his high chair. There are presents downstairs for them.

They stand on the gravel sweep outside the study window gazing up at it like two young birds.

"Good-morning, Mummie!" cries Gillian. "Open the window, please."

“Open, p’eashe,” echoes Diggory.

No answer.

“Mummie! Mummie!” They make the world ring with her name. They stare tragically up at the window.

It is thrown open and she leans out.

“Well, what do you want?”

“Won’t you come out and see us for a foo minutes?”

“But why?”

“Gilly wants to give you a morning hug.”

“Me ’ug, too,” echoes Diggory.

Miraculously the grown-ups emerge from the house. They have brought real garden tools, a rake, a roller, and a mower. Soon the children are marching up and down the lawn mowing and rolling, their heads thrown back, singing as they march.

But it turns out that they both like the mower best. They clutch it, dragging it this way and that.

“Nice roller,” cajoles Gillian, “Diggory go and draw the roller.”

“No, no,” screams Diggory, and clings fast to the mower.

Gillian grips his head in her arms, clasps it to her breast, makes herself rigid, then hurls him to the ground. He rolls over screaming in a transport of rage.

He rises and comes toward her, his face distorted. Again she grasps his head and throws him down. She stands solid, her feet well apart. A fine sense of her own power exhilarates her. Again he rises, but this time he goes toward the roller. He bends his back over it and begins laboriously to roll the lawn. The rake, teeth upward, lies unnoticed.

He discovers a mud puddle by the curve of the drive; with a slanting look at Gillian he goes and stands in it. He stamps and watches the black water trickling down his bare legs. He jumps up and down in it, and the water flies out in a black spray.

“Mens,” he mutters. “Me and Chad are mens.”

Gillian looks at him and shrieks with laughter. She runs eagerly to his side. He makes room for her in the puddle. They laugh and stamp together.

He gets out of it and goes toward the mower.

“No! No!” she shrieks. “Don’t touch! That’s Gilly’s!”

He returns to the puddle.

A thought strikes her. She fetches the mower and mows the puddle. He fetches the roller and rolls the puddle. Finally they get the rake and rake the puddle.

Nurse, with set face and snowy dress, discovers them. They are spattered with mud from head to foot.

27

Gillian is going to a dancing class. She does not in the least know what a dancing class is, but she wants very much to go. She wants to go anywhere, at any time. It is all the more exciting because Diggory is not to go. It is the first time she has been taken anywhere without him. She feels that she is getting to be a real little girl.

Nurse dresses her with unusual care. Her wheat-coloured hair hangs in a shining mist about her shoulders. She clutches a linen bag in which are her dancing-sandals, her hairbrush, and a warm little shawl. In the car she will not be parted from the bag for an instant. She sees Chad's blue-coated back loom in front of her. She has glimpses of trees and sky flying past the windows. She looks up into her mother's face and her lips part in an ecstatic smile.

Several other cars are drawn up in front of the Guild Hall. Chad lifts her out of the car and sets her on her feet. She is led into the great bare building. From upstairs comes the sound of a piano.

She finds herself sitting on a large table which feels particularly cold to her thighs. Her shoes are taken off and the new glossy sandals are put on. She gazes admiringly at these and her white silk socks. Her tiny coat and hat are taken off and hung among a row of others on the wall. Her hair, under the swift passing of the brush, flies upward electrically in the cold air.

Up the steep stairs she plods, clinging fast to her mother's hand. The sound of music grows louder, then stops just as they enter the room. A dozen children and nearly as many mothers and nurses turn to look at Gillian.

She stands gravely looking about her while her mother and the dancing-mistress talk in a low tone.

The dancing-mistress places her at the foot of the front row of children. She is the youngest of them all. She looks a little anxiously at her mother, who has seated herself among the long row of grown-ups with their backs to the wall. The music starts again. All the children except Gillian and two other toddlers begin to spring lightly from one foot to the other, swaying like flowers tossed in the breeze. They fascinate Gillian. She cannot hear what the assistant mistress is saying.

“Now, you three tiny ones, please watch me. Do just what I do. Point your toe, so! Well forward. Please look at me, Gillian. Now—point your toe, just so! Dick, Rosalie, please try to do it nicely!”

Dick tries manfully, though he all but topples over, Gillian tries too. Her leg moves in one supple curve, as though she were boneless. But Rosalie will not try. She runs to her mother, and neither coaxing nor threats can persuade her to return.

The lesson proceeds. Gillian prances, hops. She looks at Dick in his pale-blue suit with admiration in her eyes. Every now and again she has a little rest wrapped warmly in her shawl.

She is pleased when, toward the end of the lesson, the handsome dark-haired mistress comes to her and takes her hands. Together they fly round the room to the music. Gillian is supported, lifted upward by those strong hands. She does not know what she is doing with her legs but it is delightful. Her hair flies. Her cheeks are bright pink. Only they two are on the floor.

When she returns to her chair everyone is smiling at her. There is a pleased look on her mother’s face. Gillian snuggles into the fleecy shawl, smelling the sweet woolly smell of it, looking happily at her tiny black sandals.

Nurse has just lifted Diggory from his pram when they alight from the car. He is pink and warm from his morning sleep.

“Gilly was at the dancing class!” she cries, skipping about him.

He looks down at her from Nurse’s arm with masculine envy and disapproval of her brisk self-sufficiency.

“Me go danching cash, too,” he says loftily.

“You shall indeed, my angel!” cries Nurse, “and be the wonder of them all!”

28

Gillian has broken her own china mug, the one with the yellow ducklings on the side and the daffodils on the bottom. She knocked it off the table with her elbow and it fell into small pieces. Now she must drink from an ordinary nursery cup except at dinner, when they use their silver mugs.

She sits staring glumly at the cup beside her. Her bread and marmite has no taste to it. Her lips stick out. She thumps her foot against the table leg.

"Sit up at once and eat your tea," orders Nurse.

She sits up with rounded back and holds her bread to her lips, but she will not take a bite.

Diggory drinks long and sweetly from his mug, which has not even a little chip out of it.

"Come, come," says Nurse kindly, "you must just make the best of it and after this try to be more careful."

Gillian stares straight ahead of her. Her eyes fill with tears. Oh, how she longs for her mug, and, beyond that, for something unattainable! She is nothing but one sad limp longing in all her body. She is weak from misery. Her bread and marmite fall from her hand.

Diggory looks at her steadfastly. Then he says to Nurse, who, no matter how indistinctly he speaks, knows just what he says:

"Gilly have me's mug. Me have that one."

"Do you really mean it, my darling?" asks Nurse.

He pushes his mug toward Gilly, a beaming brightness in his eyes. Gillian can scarcely believe hers. With an almost imperceptible muscular change her expression is transformed into one of eager delight.

"Diggory's giving me his mug, Nannie! He's giving it me, instead of my broken one! Oh, thank you, Diggory! What a kind boy you are!"

She bows across the table to him, grasps the handle of his mug, and drinks long and happily. She drinks till the daffodil in the bottom peers at her brightly through the last drops.

29

Nurse has told Gillian to take off Diggory's nursery shoes and put on his outdoor shoes, as she herself is busy washing their woollies. But he will not sit down. And how can she change his shoes if he will not sit down?

"Sit down!" she shouts at him, as though he were deaf.

He pays no attention to her, but goes about his own business of pushing a large cardboard box into a smaller one. She looks at him in despair. What is she to do? Nannie will be coming in a moment and will say:

"I thought you were going to be Nannie's helpful little girl to-day."

"Please sit down!" she pleads, approaching him, shoes in hand.

He turns away with a determinedly absorbed air.

She lays down the shoes and puts both arms about his head. She sways him from side to side till, gaining sufficient impetus, she is able to hurl him to the floor. He falls with a thud.

"Sit down, my darling!" she exclaims.

He is “betending” to be Chad’s son Peter on his motor-cycle. He sits on a stool which he joggles continually in imitation of the vibrating of a motor. Now and again he alights and does things to the underpart of the stool.

“Me’s motor-cycle,” he asserts, with grave importance. “Me Peter Chad.”

There is a rapt unseeing look in his eyes. He feels the swift movement, is conscious of the fields and hedges rushing by. He is strong—a man. Gilly may have all the toys in the nursery. Only speed and machinery are necessary to him.

Perhaps something has gone wrong with the mechanism of the motor-cycle. Perhaps his mind is so held by the beauty of what he sees that he forgets to steer properly. However it may be, there is a crash as the stool falls, and he is thrown on his head. He is so dazed that for a moment he does not know where he is. A sympathetic voice says:

“Poor Baby!”

Now he remembers. He sits up and raises reproachful eyes to his mother’s face.

“Not poor Baby,” he articulates, choking back a sob. “Poor Peter Chad!”

Gillian appears on the scene. “What a dear little soul!” she exclaims, in Nurse’s very tone. “And quite brave too!”

31

Nurse has gone away. Not for her regular afternoon off, but for days and days—maybe a week, the children are told. She has gone away looking pale and sad to her own home. There is trouble there, but Gillian scarcely believes in Nurse's home or the trouble in it. She cannot imagine Nurse having a life apart from Diggory and herself. When Nurse goes away she is annihilated. When she comes back she is re-created for their benefit. Without them she is nothing.

Gillian promises to be good. "Yes, I will be very good indeed," she asserts, looking up out of candid blue eyes. "Yes, Nannie, I'll do everything that Hannah says. And what Dibble says and what Chad says and what Cook says and what everybody says."

And, for the first day, she is good, but on the second day she discovers, by accident as it were, how easy it is to upset Hannah and Mrs. Dibble. She sees a look exchanged between them—a flurried, almost baffled look. She is just being a little unruly. Nurse would quench her with a word. But these two look flurried. With a delicious thrill she realizes that they are afraid that they will not be able to manage her. She gives a wriggle of what looks like temper but is really bliss, sinks down on her backbone and refuses to eat another mouthful of breakfast.

She will not help herself in any way, but sinks to the floor like a sack of wool when she is being put into her outdoor things. Yet once outside she is as lively as one of the young rabbits that skip about the paddock. She is charming to Diggory, and hugs him to her as they romp on the lawn. She is charming to Chad and to Cook, but to Hannah and Mrs. Dibble who are in charge of the nursery she is a terror.

By the third day it is open warfare. Mrs. Dibble has her half dressed and has turned away to wash Diggory. When she looks around again Gillian has stripped off her clothes and is standing white and slim in the middle of Nurse's bed.

"Mercy on us, Miss Gillian!" cries Mrs. Dibble. "What a naughty girl you are to be sure! Get off that bed this moment and put on your clothes again!"

"I won't! I won't!" shouts Gillian, leaping up and down on the bed. "I won't! I won't!" Delightful words. She has just discovered the joy of using

them.

"My word, you're being a naughty girl! Your Nannie will be ever so vexed when she comes home and we tell her of you."

"I don't care!" cries Gillian, leaping up and down.

Stout Mrs. Dibble hurries to her, and Diggory takes the opportunity to squeeze the tooth-paste from its tube. Hannah is heard carrying the breakfast into the day nursery.

Gillian scrambles under the bed-clothes when Mrs. Dibble approaches her, draws them over her head, and flounders about underneath like a fish in a net. Mrs. Dibble has a time of it to get her out, and at that moment discovers Diggory with the tooth-paste and rushes to him. Gillian again scuttles under the bed-clothes. Hannah appears at the door.

"Dear, dear, dear," says Mrs. Dibble, wiping tooth-paste out of Diggory's hair. "Do come and give me a hand, Hannah, for it's more than one person can do to be up to them."

Hannah, tall, dignified, with a severe expression, pulls down the blanket. Gillian is discovered, rosy with laughter. She curls herself up in a ball and is lifted out so. She will not uncurl. It takes both Hannah and Mrs. Dibble to uncurl her and put her into her clothes.

The breakfast has got cold but she does not care. Food means nothing to her. She kicks the underpart of the table, she wriggles on her chair. She will not eat and, when toast is put into her hand, she throws it on the floor. Diggory looks at her in wonder and distress. He cannot enjoy his own breakfast, though food means a great deal to him.

It is the same all day long. She has to be pushed out to play and dragged in from it. She will not go for her walk until she is cajoled and threatened into it. She looks up into the hot flustered faces of Hannah and Mrs. Dibble with a blissful sense of power.

When she and Diggory are put into the bath at night she splashes so wildly that everything and every person near her is wetted. To dry her is like trying to dry an eel. Her wheat-coloured hair, done in a little knob on top of her head, is drenched. Diggory opens his mouth wide and roars all through the time of the bath.

She will not say her prayers. She kneels with her face pressed to Mrs. Dibble's apron but she will not say God bless anyone. She does not care about God or people or anything save this sweet sense of power.

She tries to turn somersaults in her cot. A dozen times she is tucked in, only to leap forth again, dancing and laughing. Her bed-time toys are thrown out on to the floor. Diggory peers through the bars of his cot at her. He laughs softly when she laughs, but there is a troubled look in his eyes. It hurts him to see the grey rabbit, the white one-eyed dog, and the doll, June, whom he loves but is not often allowed to touch, thrown to the floor.

At last she is too tired to fling off the bed-clothes again, too tired to jump up and down on the mattress. She snuggles comfortably into the warm depths of her cot. A glittering full moon looks in at the window above the dark bulk of the yew. With a sonorous clang, the clock in the Tower strikes seven. After that the most complete silence falls.

But the next day is the same as those preceding. Hannah and Mrs. Dibble look forward to the evening when Nurse will return and they will no longer be responsible for Gillian. They have a tale to tell of that young person. Yet they are ashamed to tell that they were not able to cope with such a baby.

Nurse arrives, looking white and tired but composed. Soon she has removed her coat and hat and taken Diggory into her arms. She comforts her cheek against the rose-petal smoothness of his.

Gillian stands close to her, stroking her apron. She is pleased to see Nannie. Now everything will go on properly, without disturbances. She is glad to see someone who is quite efficient take the reins in hand.

32

It has come at last, the day she has been looking forward to for months. It is her birthday! She is four years old to-day.

She cannot remember her last birthday. It lies far behind in the unreal shadows of the past. But to-day is real. It is filled to the brim with golden sunlight. She is four years old.

Everything in the nursery has a new glamour about it. A kind of golden rim outlines all the familiar objects. She smiles, first at Diggory, then at Nurse, all the while she eats her breakfast.

"It is my birthday," she says. "I am four years old!"

"Me's birsday too," says Diggory, "Me's fow years ode."

"It's not your birthday!" she cries, affronted. "It's mine!"

"Me's birsday," he repeats, doggedly.

"Nannie! Nannie! Diggory says it's his birthday!"

"You'll have to wait a long while for your birthday, old man," says Nannie, smiling at him.

He wrinkles his nose at her. There is a profound understanding between them.

"Now, Gilly," cries Nannie, "see what I have for you!"

She produces a tiny dust-pan and brush. Gillian is in rapture.

But, scarcely has she admired it, when Hannah appears with a box of crayons and a painting-book, and, close after her, Cook, with two pretty handkerchiefs, and then Chad tiptoeing up the stairs to present a kindergarten frame of coloured beads. Her face is flushed pink with happiness. She hugs all the presents to her and laughs up at those standing about her.

Her mother appears carrying a complete miniature cooking-set, a wooden rolling-pin and board, an aluminium kettle, saucepan, colander, and two earthen pudding dishes, as well as a perfect little meat-grinder. It is almost too exciting. She does not know what to say.

Scarcely has she examined these when Karen comes with a string of pearl beads and clasps them round her throat. They lie against her skin with a cool caressing touch.

Her friend James has sent her a cricket bat, which is now produced. She feels that her equipment for the great business of life is complete. . . .

Diggory is an outsider. . . . He realizes that he has no part in these celebrations. He stands outside the enchanted circle, an expression, pessimistic, almost cynical, on his small face. . . . Is he nobody, to be so ignored? Does he not exist?

He eyes Gillian's presents askance. He pushes out his chest and walks up and down. He stretches out his hand and tentatively picks up the cricket bat. Gillian is engrossed by her beads. He stands with feet crossed, leaning on the bat as though posing for a photograph. He regards her and her presents with a tolerant cynical air.

But, when they are turned out to play he will not give up the bat. It is in vain that Gillian points out to him that it is hers, that James sent it to her with the admonition that she must practise batting until he meets her in the next holidays. Diggory will not deliver up the bat. He clings to it with a distorted face when she tries to take it from him, so that she is obliged to throw him to the ground and so possess it by force. . . .

He lies prone on the grass beneath the deodar tree, his mouth square, strangled yells tearing their way upward from the very centre of his being. Tears pour from his eyes on to the cold grass. His woollen-gloved hands clutch at the white-faced daisies that, November though it is, push upward to the sun.

Gillian grips the bat. She has the wicket in position. She hits fiercely at an imaginary ball. How she wishes that Diggory would bowl for her!

She looks at him in despair. She looks up at a great flock of starlings that have just returned for the winter. She sees the hedge all russet and green, and the holly tree bright with a thousand berries. She is four years old.

The bell in the Tower begins to toll. It is tolling for the dead soldiers in Flanders. . . . Now comes the Two Minutes' Silence. The King is laying a wreath on the Cenotaph in London Town. . . .

All through the Silence, Diggory screams for the cricket bat. He rolls over and over on the grass, only now and again peering through his tears to look at Gillian standing by the wicket with a troubled expression on her face.

All at once her face clears. She makes up her mind and marching to Diggory she flings the bat at him. But, though he reaches out and grasps it, it is some time before he can stop crying. . . .

They are all dressed for the party though it is only three o'clock and the guests do not arrive till four. Gillian wears her first party dress of flowered pink silk and the pearl beads. She has on her dancing-sandals, too, and her hair gleams like silk. Diggory has on a pale yellow smock. Nannie sits beside them showing them a picture-book, but it is hard to give attention to pictures one has seen a thousand times already when one is straining toward the excitement of a party. Will the time never pass? Diggory yawns and his eyes water. Gillian looks a little wan. The early twilight is stealing out from the blackness of the yews.

At last there is the sound of a motor on the drive. Nurse shuts the book with a snap, picks up Diggory, takes Gillian's hand, and leads them down the stairs, not their own nursery stairs but the wide slippery ones that lead to the hall.

They stand side by side and shake hands with their guests. Everything has begun in earnest.

There are games, musical chairs, hide the thimble. There is dancing, when Diggory turns gravely round and round, clinging to his mother's hands. There are coloured balloons, red and green and gold, floating to the high ceiling. The smallest guest is Sheila, who cannot yet walk. But she takes part in the games, for her father carries her on his arm, singing, "Here we go gathering nuts and may," just as well as a man can. Sheila hangs tightly to his hair and directs his movements by imperative shouts of encouragement or anger. Her cheeks are blazing from excitement, her eyes are stars, her thick dark hair stands erect.

The grown-ups have tea in the drawing-room, but the children sit about the long table in the dining-room with the reflection from the wood fire making halos round their heads and the candlelight on their rosy faces. They gaze in wonder at the centrepiece which represents the Hunt in full cry. Over miniature hills and dales of moss, the red-coated horsemen are seen galloping with all the abandon of Jorrocks. The hounds race down a mossy slope to leap a little pond on which two ducks float and, up the other side, tough old Reynard kicks his heels as his burrow waits before him.

Hannah has made the cake, three layers of pink and white, iced, and decorated in pink and silver. Even Sheila, to whom Diggory has lent his high

chair, has a piece of the cake, stuffing the icing into her rosebud mouth with a blissful expression.

Outside the windows a purple bloom has risen from the Valley of the Axe. Now it spreads over all the landscape like the wing of a great bird. David, the Persian, leaps to the sill and peers in at the children, rubbing his plushy cheek against the pane.

It is night. It is time to go home. One after another of the children are collected by their parents and nurses. The last to go are Gwynneth and Hester. They must wait for their father to fetch them. They sit waiting in the drawing-room, talking like grown-up ladies. They tell how they are up at six every morning to feed their pet calf. They are six and eight and are condescendingly kind to Gillian. They know all about livestock. It is more important to them that their father is a farmer than that he is a Major, a V.C., and D.S.O.

He comes for them out of the night. He drinks a glass of sherry, then all crowd to the door.

"Good-bye, Gilly!"

"Good-bye, Diggory!"

The Major says, "Hop in, children, if you can find a place to stow yourselves! I've the week's groceries and a milk-can and a side of bacon and a ferret in already."

"A ferret!" cries Gillian, dancing in excitement.

He comes forward in the light of the doorway, holding out a sack in which something alive flops and wriggles. Diggory draws near, a look of fearful fascination on his face. But how satisfyingly feminine is Gillian! She shrieks in mingled laughter and fright, all her small teeth showing, her face turns pink. She backs away from the bag shrieking and laughing until she reaches the grandfather clock. Against it she hides her face.

33

It is the next day and Gillian feels rather sad. There is no special reason for feeling sad because she was good all day yesterday and she is still good. But she is sad nevertheless. Even the carrying of a piece of her birthday cake, wrapped in tissue paper, to Mrs. Dibble scarcely cheers her. When Diggory sees that she is carrying cake wrapped in tissue paper, he shouts:

"Me cake! Me cake, too!"

"No, you can't have cake to carry," says Gillian. "You're too little. He's too little, isn't he, Nannie?"

"I'm afraid he is," says Nurse.

"Me cake! Me cake!" cries Diggory, pattering with his feet and holding up his arms.

"You can't!" says Gillian. "It's my cake! It's my birthday cake, and I'm going to carry it to Dibble myself!"

"Me cake! Me cawy Dibble!" he screams, turning round and round.

"See, my precious, you shall carry your dear little white bow-bow that only goes out on Sundays. Won't that be a nice treat?"

"No, no," howls Diggory, lying down on the floor. "Me cawy cake. Me Dibble!"

Nurse picks him up and cuddles him. "Very well, old man, you may carry a bit of cake too, if you're so set on it. There, there now, don't cry any more!"

"Me cawy cake!" he gurgles, laughing through his tears. "Me cawy cake Dibble too!" He sits on Nurse's arm beaming.

Another slice of cake is procured from Hannah and wrapped in tissue paper. He is dressed in his little green coat and hat and set in the mail-cart, proudly holding the precious packet.

"Now sit quite still till Nannie comes back." She hurries back up the stairs to get clean handkerchiefs for the children.

He is left alone in the cloakroom, for Gillian has sauntered pensively into the dim stone-flagged passage, and is gazing up at the row of bells, at whose summons the inhabitants of these regions hasten.

He cherishes the packet in his tiny gloved hand and surveys the cloakroom—the mackintoshes, hats, umbrellas, the mysterious cupboard, the hand basin and taps, the table where Karen "does" the flowers. Some stalks and petals of chrysanthemums are scattered over it now. There is an old rubber ball and a toy locomotive on the floor.

He is a little bored and he thinks he will look at his cake. . . . Fumblingly he unwraps it, and it lies pink and sweet in his hand. The icing sticks to his glove. He licks it. Never before has he found himself in so intriguing a position. Alone with a piece of cake.

As Nurse and Gillian enter the cloakroom they see that he is devouring it.

"He's eating the cake!" shrieks Gillian. "Look, Nannie!"

Nurse takes it from him. He is all crumbs.

"Oh, oh," she exclaims, reproachfully, "how could you, Diggory!"

He wriggles down into the bottom of the mail-cart. Strangled sobs almost choke him.

"Cake . . . ca—ke . . ." he manages to articulate. But the cake is not returned to him.

He is set up, strapped in, Nurse wheels him through the passage and out the side door. The valleys and hills stretch out before him.

All the way through the curves of the drive, he cries bitterly: "Cake! Cake! Me take Dibble cake!" Even the clang of the church clock does not quite drown his sobs. Gillian trudges stolidly alongside, clutching her packet.

But she is pensive. All through tea she is pensive. She dallies with her bread and butter thinking of how, when she goes to the study after tea, she will play with her new cookery set which she has left under the desk there. She will make pretend bread, pretend cake, pretend pudding. Diggory shall not touch it.

"Eat up your tea nicely," urges Nurse.

But she droops in her chair.

"Come, come, you must sit up and eat properly."

"Siddup an' eat p'oply," adjures Diggory.

But she cannot bring herself to eat.

“If you won’t take your tea, you shall not go to the study,” says Nurse.

Gillian pushes out her lips and looks heavily at Nurse and Diggory as at two opponents.

The meal proceeds.

Nurse is getting Diggory ready to go down to the study. His hair gleams under the brush. He stands straight and alert.

“Me, too,” says Gillian. “Get me ready, please, Nannie.”

“No,” returns Nurse. “I warned you several times. You would not eat your tea. Now you shall stay here alone.”

It is too terrible. The outrage of it is almost more than she can bear. “Oh, Nannie, Nannie,” she wails, and casts herself on the floor. . . .

All by himself Diggory marches into the study. He suffers himself to be kissed, but he has important business on hand. As soon as he is freed he goes straight to where Gillian has put her cookery set. He drags forth the heavy box, and takes from it the pastry board, the rolling-pin, the kettle, saucepans, and mixing-bowl. His eyes are glittering. He has all these treasures to himself.

“Me make cake,” he says, serenely. “Me make cake and eat it too!”

What he fears most at night is the bells. On Wednesday evenings the bell-ringers practise from seven to nine. Without cessation they ring the changes, thundering their way in and out among the six brazen notes in a hundred variations. Chad's son is one of the ringers, and Ezra Spry and Sidney Gibbons and the Tooze brothers. John Hendy is the leader. He rings the heavy bass bell.

The ringing clangs through the darkness in a menacing torrent to where Diggory crouches in his cot. His sensitive ear-drums vibrate, his nerves are quivering like the strings of a delicate instrument. He feels himself alone in an abyss of darkness, pressed down by the thunder of the bells.

Nannie, at her mending in the day nursery, cannot hear his crying, but she knows he fears the bells, and she comes and leans over him and pats his back. He clings to her hand, sobbing against it in the darkness. He begins to feel safe and quiet. All this while Gillian has not waked. Her head is thrown back. Her hair makes a halo round her face.

Now he, too, sleeps, and Nannie's hand is withdrawn. But the ringers pull their ropes with more fervour. They are reaching the grand height and glory of the changes. There is a chill in the bottom of the Tower, the candlelight is pale and flickering, but the ringers feel nothing but strength and fervour. Their faces are set and noble in the candlelight. Their arms move up and down as though they drew strength from Heaven.

Soon the tiny boy is awake again and lies with hot cheeks and wet eyes staring into the darkness where the terrible notes stamp and rage and shout without ceasing.

But with the morning all his fears are forgotten. His mind is as fresh as a dew-washed flower. He sets out for his morning play in a woollen cardigan, leggings, and cap. Nurse carries him down the stairs, but, once in the passage below, she sets him on his own feet and flies back to do something for Gillian.

He stands on the stone floor staring up at the row of bells that hang near the ceiling. He likes these little bells, only one of which ever rings at a time, and that with a comfortable jangle. He wonders what makes them ring and why Hannah always hurries to the front of the house when they do.

He hears voices in the kitchen and struts in that direction, his back so straight that he looks amusing in his woolly suit. The kitchen seems very full of people. Cook is making bread. Mrs. Dibble is on her knees washing the stone flags. Chad has just brought in a scuttle of coals. David, the Persian, is sitting erect on Cook's chair, his great fluffy tail curled about him, his pink mouth stretched in a three-cornered grin. Hannah is standing in the doorway talking to Copplestone, the provision merchant, who has come for the week's order.

"Ah," cries Mrs. Dibble, sitting up on her heels, "here comes the little master! Bless his heart! Will 'ee say good-morning to Dibble, then?"

But Diggory ignores her and marches straight to the newcomer.

"Good-morning," says Copplestone, "no need to ask how you are, little man."

"Good-morning," says Diggory. "Come again."

"Oh, he'll do that without bidding," puts in Cook. "No need to press him."

There is laughter at Copplestone's expense.

"Well, there's not much use in me coming, if you're going to be so hard to get orders out of," he retorts.

"We've got to be saving in these days," she returns, thumping her dough.

Chad comes to where Diggory stands and looks down at him with a possessive air. He asks of Copplestone:

“What do you think of this one?”

“Splendid. I’ve not seen a finer.”

“Oh, he’s all right,” says Chad, bristling with pride, “only he talks too much.”

“Do I?” says Diggory.

Now there is laughter at his wit.

Hannah snatches him up and runs with him to the stable-yard. Out of the stable she gets his hobby-horse, his engine, and his cart. But he wants none of them. He wants the doll’s perambulator with which Gillian has just appeared. She pushes it across the cobbles with a flirt of her diminutive skirt.

In it rides Narcissus, a shapeless dun-coloured doll, whose painted features are obliterated by dirt and much washing, who is no more than a lump of stuffed rag. Yet, of all the dolls, it is the only one who ever gets a ride in the doll’s perambulator. Gillian herself has named it Narcissus. Not the lovely auburn-haired June, not the chiffon-frocked Fern, nor the baby dolls Anne and Mary ever ride in the perambulator, only the blank face of Narcissus stares dully from under the hood.

Under the arch of the stable-yard Gillian passes followed by Diggory, repeating in a heart-broken crescendo:

“Me awnt the p’ambulator, me do, Gilly!”

He follows her along the terrace, across the gravel sweep and along the path by the rhododendrons. She stops to place Narcissus more comfortably on the seat and Diggory draws near with streaming eyes.

“Me awnt Narcshus, p’eash, Gilly,” he pleads.

Gillian gives him a cold look.

“Her name’s not Narcissus any more,” she says. “Her name’s Alan.”

He cannot take it in.

“What you said, Gilly?” he asks, through his sobs.

“I say her name is Alan. I named her that this morning. It’s a nice new name for her.”

To him it seems the last straw. His breast is torn by sobs as he staggers after her along the garden path. He can barely articulate:

“Me awnt Alan, p’eash, Gilly!”

“No!” she shouts.

But now she sees Chad coming through the door in the wall, a basket on his arm. She must know what is in the basket. She flies to him, leaving Diggory alone with the doll.

He stands dazed for a moment scarcely realizing his good fortune, then his face clears, he takes up Alan and clasps her to his breast.

“Alanalanalan,” he croons.

He spies an empty talcum tin in the pram and turning back Alan’s dress gives her faded torso a pretend dusting. He puts her back on the seat then and arranges the ragged bit of blanket about her. Tenderness beams from his eyes. A sweet protectiveness is on his lips.

Gillian returns, swooping sideways as she runs, like a young gull on the wind. Diggory grips the handle of the pram and sets his jaw. But she does not attempt to take it from him. She dances alongside till they reach the house. Under the windows of the study they stop.

“Mummie!” she calls. “Mummie! Mummie!”

Diggory joins in: “Mummie! Mummie!”

Thus every morning they come for a kiss.

“Morning hug! Morning kiss, p’eash!” they cry together.

She opens the window.

“I cannot go to the door to kiss you this morning,” she says, “because I have a cold. You will just have to throw me a kiss through the window.”

Gilly’s head droops.

“I’d sooner,” she says, “kiss you through the head!”

After a while Nurse finds them playing on the sand heap in the cold shade.

“This will never do, on a December day,” she says. “There is a little sun and we must try to get it. I will take you for a walk outside the gate for a great treat.”

What a treat! Diggory, not in his pram but walking along the street just like anybody, Gillian prancing at his side, not going straight ahead through the village but loitering as they fancy!

Diggory has brought a toy accordion with him, and he stops in front of the shop to play on it. As he draws it in and out he gazes up at the bright jars of sweets standing in close rows against the little window-panes. Mrs. Tucket comes to the door, fat and red-faced from her baking. Her little daughter peers out from behind her apron.

"Well," says Mrs. Tucket, "and you're giving us some grand music, Master Diggory. And if I could dance as I used to I'd have a fine time footing it here on the street."

"I can dance!" cries Gillian, and she begins to skip and leap about to the sound of the accordion.

It is a great game. Everyone comes to the doorways to see them—the shoemaker, with his last in his hand; the blacksmith stops his hammering to admire them. The school children are having recess and a special performance is given for them.

On the way back the Rector overtakes them, his cassock spreading majestically about him as he walks. He walks slowly for his rheumatism is bad. Down the village street they progress together, Diggory joyfully playing on the accordion, Gillian dancing wildly on her toes, the Rector and Nurse talking together.

David, the Persian, darts at them out of the churchyard. His breast is white as the newest gravestone, his eyes shine large and luminous.

A flock of sheep is driven along the street. Diggory stands boldly in his own gateway and salutes them with a long-drawn wheeze from the accordion. They are not sheep so much as big young lambs, round and woolly. They look at him out of their black faces and bundle themselves along the road. Gillian dances after them, showing off her steps. A cow looks over the gate across the way and drowns out the music with her "moo."

David darts along the drive ahead of the children. He is always at the bend just before them, peering out from among the ferns, with his three-cornered laugh. Gillian makes a sudden rush for him, but he is too quick for her. With his tail like a great black plume, he darts away and hides in the chrysanthemum bed.

A flock of starlings are feeding on the lawn. They look askance at him, but continue to strut and peck. Suddenly he darts past them and leaps to the wall above the rose garden. He sits there serene, gazing across the valley where the mist lies.

36

Gillian and Diggory are in the study at night. The curtains are wide and a full moon is risen above the church tower. It shines with a large quivering brightness, as though it were magnified and intensified under water. Diggory is in his mother's arms, clasping her neck, looking out into the night.

Gillian bends at the table in the lamplight absorbed in some game of her own. David, the Persian, sits erect, his great eyes gazing reflectively into the fire.

"See how the moon throws lovely shadows on the lawn," says Mummie. "It throws the shadow of the yew tree and the deodar and the church tower."

Diggory's eyes look out, brilliant and dark as the night. His grasp tightens on her neck.

Oh, she will lead him in the ways of beauty! The flower of his sweet nature shall unfold in the light of poetry! She presses her cheek to his damask one and their eyes gaze into the night together.

"The moon shines on the weathercock, high up on the church tower. It shines on the sleeping flowers and on the frosty lawn. Down by the sea it shines on the sand and the dancing waves and the great white ships."

She looks eagerly into his face. It is all alight, exquisite in its joy. A quiver runs through his little body.

"What else," she urges, scarcely breathing lest the crystal of this lovely moment be shattered, "tell Mummie what other things the moonlight shines on!"

He gives a delicious chuckle.

"Motor-bikes," he says.

37

But what is wrong with David, the Persian? It is night, the moon is now old and bent and haggard, it is drooping to rest. He crosses the lawn slowly, his white belly brushes the frost from the grass. He goes straight under a certain window that is always open and begins to climb the thick stems of ivy that press against the wall beneath it.

He puts out all his strength and drags himself up by his broad white legs past the ground-floor windows, up and up. He reaches the sill and crouches there for a while to rest. Birds sleeping in the ivy hear him in their dreams and twitter.

After a while he gathers himself together and enters the room. He creeps into the middle of the unused bed and curls himself up shivering. The next afternoon he is discovered there.

Now he is carried to the kitchen and placed in his basket by the warm stove. He would like to lap the warm milk offered him but he cannot put out his tongue. The children come and stand close beside him.

"Poor David," they murmur, stroking him, and he purrs full and strong.

The next day the vet is sent for. He takes David out of his basket and feels him all over. He cries in pain, but he does not attempt to scratch. The vet does not know what is wrong with him, but says he may be better in a few days.

The medicine he leaves does no good. A terrible change comes over David. A curtain is hung over his basket so that the children may not see him. They go to the curtain and stroke it, saying, "Poor David," and a full strong purr answers them from within.

On Sunday another vet comes, a younger one, with a shrewd Scotch face. David has been poisoned, he says. David is a hunter, and the keepers do not like hunters. They want to kill the rabbits themselves.

The children hear the tramp of men's feet in the boot-hall, for Chad is helping the vet. Nurse and Hannah look sad, and Cook's eyes are red. The next morning Chad tells them that the doctor has taken David to the hospital in Exeter because he had a chill.

38

They are at breakfast. Gillian, her chin level with the table, looks out of the window as she munches her toast, and sees the church tower rise pale and lovely out of the fog. The church itself is not visible to her, only the top of the tower, and on it perched the weathercock, facing south, spying out the rain. Inside the tower the Rector is ringing the bell for early service.

Diggory, in his high chair, can see the great stretch of a turnip field beyond the laurel hedge, and it shows only as a bluish-green blur. He prefers to look at Nurse, smiling at him behind her tea-pot.

"I've finished my toast first!" cries Gillian.

Diggory looks her over. "You're a naugh*tee* girl, Gilly," he says.

Gillian has become sensitive. She exclaims:

"Oh, Nannie, he says I'm naughty! I'm not, am I?"

"He was only joking," comforts Nurse, her eyes twinkling at Diggory.

He gives her a supercilious look. "Oh, was I, Miss Nannie?" he says, in a drawling tone.

Nurse lays down her knife and fork.

"Well, I never!" she exclaims. "And, if I am Miss Nannie, I'd like to know who you are!"

He sticks out his chest.

"I am Diggory," he says majestically.

Nurse has told the children about Mrs. Dibble's poor little grandchildren. Their father has had no work for eight months. He is a farm labourer, so he does not get the dole. Ten shillings a week, a pension, support him, his wife, and four children. Five shillings of that goes for rent. These children will have no toys at Christmas.

Gillian does not understand much of this, but she does understand about those poor little children and that Nannie is asking her and Diggory if they will give them some of their toys. She is eager to do this.

Out from the cupboard they drag teddy bears, dolls, skittles, woolly animals, and heap them on the floor. Every moment one of them finds

something new to sacrifice to the little Dibbles' Christmas.

When Nurse appears on the drive pushing the perambulator full of toys, Diggory is astonished at such a sight. He plants himself in front of her and, imitating her tone at breakfast, exclaims:

"Well, I never!"

Down the street they trudge, full of importance, to Wytch Green. Under its thatched roof its walls are pleasantly irregular. The beamed ceiling is low. How cozy Mrs. Dibble is in her own house! Gilly wonders that she ever wants to leave it. She is pleased with the toys too, thanking the children again and again. They feel serious and good.

But, when it comes time to leave, Diggory refuses to part with Boo-boo, a one-eyed dog, which he sometimes takes to bed with him. In vain Nurse pleads with him. He only hugs Boo-boo the closer.

"Oh, let him be, do, Nurse!" cries Mrs. Dibble. "Don't 'ee urge the dear lamb, for he's been too generous already."

"Will you bring Boo-boo back to Mrs. Dibble to-morrow, if I let you take him now?" asks Nurse.

"Yes, me will."

He is lifted into the pram and he and Boo-boo ride home together.

He wears a little corded waist which he calls his “bodice.” He is very proud of giving the right name to everything connected with dressing or going to bed, though occasionally he mixes the words a little. For instance he will sometimes call his pyjamas, his “magnesias.” He has just been promoted to them from a nightdress. They are of a light-blue flannel, and when his head has been washed his hair curls in close ringlets. But Gillian’s hair is now long enough to braid in two little plaits that stick out behind either ear. Her pyjamas are off the same piece as his. Their talk as they get ready for bed is all about Christmas. Nurse is going out to tea and their mother is to put them to bed. They are to hang up their socks. They are growing up so fast that they are astonished at their own achievement.

They are taken to see the Christmas play given by the school children in the Village Hall. They sit, filled with amazement at the beauty of the Three Kings in their robes and gilt crowns. The singing of carols and hymns is wonderful to Gillian, and when she is being put to bed that night she sings with great reverence:

“Once in Royal David’s city
Lived a lowly cat till dead.”

Is the name David connected in her mind with David, the Persian, who is no more?

Again they are taken to the Hall, this time to the Parish School treat. There is tea and a conjurer.

When they enter the Hall children are already crowded about the long table set out with plates of bread and butter, Devonshire splits, heaped with raspberry jam, sponge cakes, a Christmas cake with white icing, and sticky brown parkins. Two ladies fill their mugs with weak tea from large jugs.

A table is set by the fire for Gillian and Diggory and their little friends Gwynneth and Hester. The four sit solemnly staring at each other, eating little, for they are overcome by the strangeness of eating in a crowd. Not so the village children. They sweep the plates clean. They pour down the good tea. The members of the Women’s Institute sit with their backs to the wall, drinking tea. The Rector and the Minister of the Chapel stand talking together, speculatively watching the children. The Rector looks huge in his cassock, the minister small in his spectacles.

Before eating, grace has been sung. The young minister, in an authoritative voice, has desired the children to stand. A thin piping comes from them, as with bent heads and faces gentle in the lamplight, they gaze longingly at the good food given by God. Only one little boy folds his hands and keeps his eyes shut throughout the singing.

When the meal is over the school children are told to run out-of-doors while the table is taken from its trestles and the forms set in order for the conjurer's performance. Gillian and Diggory stand on their chairs clinging to Nurse, staring in wonder as the children rush like a river in flood through the wide-flung door into the night. A chill damp air pours into the hall. Hester comes close to Gillian. She whispers:

"You're coming to my birthday party to-morrow, aren't you?"

Gillian looks into Hester's rosy face and smiles.

"Yes," she whispers back.

Nurse is afraid of the draught. She interposes her body between Diggory and Gillian and the open door. Her face clears when the forms are set in order and the children pour back.

Now the conjurer is on the platform. He is dressed in beautiful evening clothes, and his fair hair is wavy. He asks for a boy to help him in his first trick.

A sturdy fellow of eight marches to the platform. The conjurer thanks him effusively for coming and asks him what his name is.

"Edgar," he answers.

"Why, that's splendid," says the conjurer. "My name is Edgar, too. And my father's name and my grandfather's were Edgar also." The two Edgars shake hands.

He shows the children a blank slate, then wraps it in a newspaper and asks Edgar to hold it. Standing several yards away the conjurer writes on the air—A Happy Christmas—and, when the paper is taken from the slate, there are the words written on it in chalk! The school children clap their hands. Edgar clumps self-consciously back to his seat.

Then a little girl is asked to help with the next trick. The conjurer asks her her name.

"Laura," she stammers.

“Splendid!” exclaims the conjurer. “My wife’s name is Laura! We must shake hands.”

The next trick is done with rings.

Never did rings act so strangely. They fly through the air, they interlace and spin and fly apart again. They seem to grow larger and larger like eyes opening wide. Gillian feels dizzy watching them. Diggory’s head sinks to Nurse’s breast.

Round and round the gravel path they march, pushing the doll's perambulator between them, Narcissus, the rag doll, staring dully in front.

It is just two days before Christmas, but the air is mild as April, the lawn and the laurel hedges glisten green and, close against the wet earth, a few violets show their colour. Robins and thrushes sing almost as well as in mating time but with a less confident note. The rooks sweep across the blue sky in full strength.

Gillian and Diggory prance in the sunshine. For weeks the days have been dark. They sing together as they push the pram, but not of the sun. Gillian sings: "To-night, to-night, we come home in the dark! We come home in the dark from the party!"

And Diggory chants the refrain: " 'Ome in the dawk! 'Ome in the dawk!"

Oh, the joy in that thought!

As they near the puddle at the edge of the drive Diggory diverts the direction of the pram so that its wheels pass through the muddy water. Gillian shrieks with delight and throws him a roguish admiring look. His trot becomes a swagger.

They take a short turn so that they may quickly repass through the puddle. This time Diggory joggles the pram and a splash of black water sprinkles Narcissus. Gillian feels only joy at seeing her so defiled.

"Narcissus!" she shrieks. "Oh, look at Narcissus!"

The promenade progresses and, at each passage through the puddle Diggory looks sterner and Gillian laughs louder. At last he stands in it and stamps. Gilly's face is a grinning pink mask. Narcissus's face is black.

Word has gone through the house from mouth to mouth until it has reached Nurse. Along the walk past the hydrangeas she comes in her white apron, her red hair coiled smooth and firm.

Gilly sees her and her grin wavers to a deprecatory smile. Diggory sticks out his chin and advances a step to meet her. He tries to intimidate her with his eyes.

But she is not to be mollified or daunted. She feels their wet hands, their wet leggings. “You shall go straight to bed!”

He hurls himself on the ground.

Through the cobbled yard, through the flagged passages, she carries him, screaming as though pins were being stuck in him, gurgling as though strangled. Gillian, carrying Narcissus, marches stolidly behind.

He is undressed. He is washed. He sits naked on Nurse’s aproned knee, pink as a shell. He has never once stopped crying, but now he strives to speak.

“What is it, my darling?” she asks.

“ ’Awnt—’awnt—” he gasps.

“Yes? What do you want?”

“ ’Awnt to come ’ome in the dawk!”

All through the party that same thought is in Gillian’s mind—the joy of going home in the dark. The table is brilliant with lights, the children are pulling crackers, they have gay caps on their heads, the seven candles on Hester’s birthday cake twinkle, but Gillian thinks—“Home in the dark! We’re going home in the dark!”

All through the moving pictures, even though the hideous monkey faces of the comic film frighten her, she gloats over the thought of going home in the dark. She sees moving pictures of herself joining in a game of London Bridge, drinking milk from a mug, and she murmurs: “That little girl is going home in the dark.”

She snuggles against Karen and whispers:

“When are we going home?”

“Very soon. Are you tired?”

“Yes, a little. Is it dark?”

“Very. It’s a black night.”

“A black night,” she repeats, ecstatically. “Home in the black!”

They are the first to leave. The faces of the other children look strange and shadowy, glancing back at them from the doorway. They shake hands with Hester’s mother and thank her for the nice party.

Out-of-doors it is black as pitch. The great lights of motor-cars blaze on the drive. On the lawn Hester's big brothers are setting off fireworks. The drawing-room windows show little faces clustering. The rockets go off with a pop and a long-drawn swish, then stream rosy against the blackness.

Home in the dark! They are actually doing what they have dreamed of. Chad is steering the car carefully among the other cars. Lights are flashing. Fireworks springing up from the lawn. Gillian and Diggory are two important people going home in the dark.

Mrs. Seymour, their neighbour, is with them in the car, white-haired, dignified. Mr. Seymour, the children know, owns most of the fields and woods about. But he is much less powerful than Chad. They are sure of that. They feel that it is very kind of Chad to give Mrs. Seymour a lift. When she is deposited at her own gate and starts up her driveway in a brisk trot, Gillian looks after the plump figure patronizingly and remarks:

"Mrs. Seymour can run very well when she tries, can't she?"

They are hilarious. It is Christmas Eve. The day that had seemed so remote will be here after one night's darkness. They scarcely know what all the excitement is about, but they are hilarious. For one thing it is Nannie's evening out, and they are to be put to bed by their mother and Karen.

Up and down the study and the hall they run, shouting and stamping. It is a new world they are in, glistening with holly leaves, bright with berries. Ivy is twined along the banister. From the dining-room steals the scent of the Christmas tree. All the air is scented, mysterious, exhilarating to the point of madness. Two pairs of diminutive socks hang from the mantelpiece in the study. If the children are good and go to bed without protest the socks will be filled by Father Christmas.

Oh, but they are good! Gillian laughs when her ears are washed. Diggory laughs when his teeth are brushed. He bites the brush and holds it between his teeth, laughing. In the bath they frolic together in wet pink bareness. Karen dries Gilly, but Diggory curls up on his mother's knee and looks like the Christ Child. He is suddenly pensive.

Prayers must be said! Let us say our prayers quickly, for Father Christmas comes to-night!

"My new one is pinned to the basket!" cries Gillian. "You must help me with it!"

With two little plaits sticking out at the back of her head she prances to the basket which holds their toilet accessories. Pinned to the handle by a large safety-pin is the bit of paper on which the prayer is written.

"You must help me to say it right," she says.

Kneeling on her mother's lap with folded hands, her delicious little white nape showing beneath the pigtails, she says all her God-blesses and Gentle Jesus in a muffled small voice, but when she begins the new prayer she opens one eye, fixes it on the prompter, and recites in a clear sing-song. She thanks God for everything under the sun, ending with the words:

"Thank you for my thoughts of Thee—
Thank you, God, for loving me!"

She smells of soap and warm baby flesh. Diggory laughs and jumps on Karen's knee.

"Me p'ay, too!" he cries. "Me say bawsket p'ayer!"

Far in the night it seems to them when the carol singers come. In the white moonlight the voices rise from beneath the window in a strong flood.

> "While shepherds watched their flocks by night
> All seated on the ground,
> The Angel of the Lord came down
> And glory shone around."

Shepherds! Angels! Glory shining round! Gillian knows the words. Nannie has taught her to sing them, but now they sound strange and frightening. She stares into the moonlight, her heart beating quickly. One little pigtail stands straight up like a tiny signal of distress.

Between the bars of her cot she peers across at Diggory. He is sitting bolt upright, his hair bright in the moonbeams. She would speak to him, but that it would be of no use for the singing would drown her voice. She does not like the look on his face. She does not like it at all. She shuts her eyes tight and wriggles her body into the little hollow in her mattress. Scarcely have the waits departed when she falls fast asleep.

The moonlight moves across the quiet nursery. Now it shines on the tall ewer standing in the basin and is reflected by the mirror. Both children are sleeping soundly but Nannie's bed is still empty. It is the hour of midnight. The chimes peal out to herald the birth of Christ. The frosty air is shattered by the wild ringing. The ivy quivers against the stone-mullioned windows.

Diggory springs up in bed, galvanized by fear. He stands rigid, his eyes distended. He looks at Nannie's empty bed, across at Gillian whose face is distinct in the moonlight. She is sleeping deeply——

He calls her, in an agony of fear: "Gilly! Gilly! Gilly!" But she does not hear. The bells beat down his voice. They come rushing into the room in a torrent of praise.

Diggory's face is distorted by fear. He dives under the bed-clothes and draws them over his head.

It is Christmas morning.

42

It is over. It is gone. The great golden balloon of the day is collapsed into a tree-scented memory.

But the toys are still there. Safe and sound, all the new shining toys. The boy doll in green velvet coat and knickers, his name, Montie, fixed to his jacket. The baby doll in her basket with her little pursed-up face and enormous head. The new pink and blue dressing-gowns trimmed with bunny rabbits. The toy piano. The toy carpet sweeper and baking set. Best of all the miniature farmhouse and stable in their own walled yard, with horses, cows, pigs, sheep, and poultry set about them. The picture books and bewildering small toys. The Mickie Mouse that turns somersaults. Bright baubles still hang on the Christmas tree, but the pink candles are burned to their sockets.

Gillian and Diggory do not know what to do with themselves. Everything is over. The new toys scarcely seem to belong to them. They scarcely seem to belong to one another. Visions of yesterday—the present-giving, the callers carrying packages, the Children's Service, to which they were taken by Nurse, swim, blurred pictures, in their sensitive minds. What stands out most clearly in Gillian's memory is the brightly lighted Crib. In turn they were lifted to see the Babe surrounded by the Kings, Shepherds, and beasts of the stable. She is beginning to feel religious. She is beginning to desire something different from ordinary play.

"But," observes their mother, through a cloud of cigarette smoke, when they appear in the study that evening, "you must amuse yourselves, for I am tired out, and I have a thousand notes to write, and you have a thousand new toys."

Karen is no better. Though she looks inviting, with her fair hair and red dress bright in the firelight, there is no play in her. She is putting crosses in front of names on a long piece of paper.

"Why are you making all those kisses?" asks Gillian.

"Kisses! Far from it!" exclaims Karen. "Now, like a darling, do find something you and Baby can play at quietly."

"But what?"

"You might find something to do in the hall."

“Good idea,” says Mummie. “Some quiet game.”

They wander into the hall. The light from the hanging lamp makes it only the more mysterious. The high trefoil windows give it the look of a church. Like the church it is festooned in greenery.

“Diggory,” whispers Gillian, “we’re going to church.”

He nods solemnly.

“I must get books for us. You must hold to my hand because I’m four and you’re just two.”

He slips his hand into hers.

She leads him into the study, and from the bottom shelf, from which they are allowed to take books, draws out a guide to the Riviera and a volume on the Care of the Dog.

“We must go quietly into the church,” she whispers. “This is a procession. You must follow me.”

Obediently, with head bent over his book, he follows close behind while she leads the way into the hall, circles it twice. They climb on to the high oak chest and sit there with legs sticking straight out in front. The oak is very cold under their bare legs, but they feel nothing. In a deep monotone Gillian delivers herself of unintelligible extracts from her book. Diggory gazes up at the hanging lamp with a rapt expression.

Opposite them stands a table on which are set bedroom candlesticks and a silver plate strewn with visiting cards. Near by hangs a coat and scarf on a hook. Gillian tugs at the scarf till it falls. She lays it about her shoulders like a stole. It is of orange-and-brown plaid woollen material. She bows in front of the bedroom candlesticks.

Obediently Diggory bows too, clasping the guidebook of the Riviera to his breast. The grandfather clock strikes six.

“That is the bell calling people to church,” says Gillian, but in her heart she knows that it means that Nannie will be coming for them.

She has a triple identity. She is the officiating priest, with Diggory as her acolyte. She is a church warden about to take up the offertory. She is the congregation searching hurriedly in its pocket for sixpence.

She removes the silver card-dish from the table and, followed by Diggory, walks solemnly from pew to pew, observing with a critical eye her own offering placed on the plate by her other hand. With dignified tread she

marches the length of the hall and presents the plate to herself, waiting by the altar. The plaid scarf trails on the floor.

As priest she accepts the alms-dish, holds it aloft, places it on the altar, genuflects. Her expression is so rapt that Diggory is a little afraid of her.

They return to the chest, climb on to it and, opening their books on their knees, prepare to sing.

She waits receptive for words to come to her. She opens and shuts her mouth as though gasping for air. At last the words come and she chants in a loud voice:

"The bells ring and the people come to church! Ding dong, ding dong! The clock says ding dong! The bells say—Jesus—Jesus. On Christmas day He comes down from Heaven for His Birthday. He loves His Birthday! He loves little girls! I am four years old. Diggory is just two. When I am five I shall have Saturday pennies. I will take them to the church. Oh, oh, London Town, Tuesday afternoon, thank you for the nice tea. I can't work for you to-day, Miss, I'm so sorry! Do it properly and don't forget to say please! The middle of next week. Our pussy is gone away for ever and ever, Amen!"

Diggory never takes his eyes from her face. She turns to him and remarks:

"You haven't much to say for yourself, have you?"

He hangs his head abashed.

Steps are heard in the passage. A door opens and Nurse comes into the hall. Her white figure gleams in the lamplight. She looks at Gillian and Diggory with a twinkle in her small bright eyes.

They scramble off the chest and run in a panic toward the study. Gillian climbs into her mother's lap and tightly clasps her neck. Diggory clambers on to the couch behind Karen and hides his head under a pillow.

"Oh, no, no, no, *please*, Nannie!" wails Gillian.

"Me *can't* go!" growls Diggory, from under his pillow.

But they must! They break into howls and throw themselves on the floor.

The result of Christmas, declares Nurse.

They are very much afraid of the car when it comes rolling along the curves of the driveway and through the arch of the gate past where they are pushing the doll's pram and toy wheelbarrow toward the greenhouse. The sudden appearance of the car always frightens them. They drop wheelbarrow and pram and scuttle like two little rabbits behind one of the cold frames. The car slides on to the cobbles of the stable-yard and stops. Chad gets out of it and carries a box into the garage.

The children creep out and peer into the yard.

"Where have you been, Chad?" asks Gillian.

"Important business," he replies. "You'd never understand."

"But I should! I'd understand perfeckly."

"Me unschtand perfeckly," echoes Diggory.

"Well, I'm preparing to get you off to London to-morrow."

"But we're not going to London till February!"

"To-morrow is February."

"Are you coming, too?"

"Not I. Nor Cook."

"Is Hannah coming?"

"Yes."

"Is Mrs. Dibble?"

"Lord bless you, no!"

"Is Mummie and Karen?"

"Now ask a sensible question!"

"Is Nannie?"

"You'd be in a pretty fix without her!"

He jumps into the car and the engine begins to throb. The children scuttle terrified into the stable and peer out as it glides away.

London Town! London Town! They go there to-morrow! Great is it! Greater than Broad Windsor. Greater then Yeovil. Greater even than Exeter.

They talk to Nannie about it during their walk. They tell her of the projected journey and of the size of London, as though she had never heard of either. To-morrow, to-morrow, how far off, how mysterious it is!

They pass the Hunt on its way to the meet at Wootton Cross. Nurse draws the pram close to the hedge while the shining horses pass. The children are so close to them that they hear their deep breathing, see their full dark eyes, smell the exciting smell of them. The hounds jog past with waving tails. They seem to be smiling. The tall riders look down into the pram from the height of their mounts. One of them says “Hello, Diggory!” But Diggory is filled with too much wonder for speech. All thoughts of London are driven out of his head.

The air is frosty. All the tender fern leaves are touched with white. The ground is hardening. To-morrow there will be no hunting. A flock of heavy-booted red-cheeked village boys clatter out from the school-yard and gallop like ponies down the hill. Their sturdy legs are red with chilblains.

A horn sounds in the distance.

But what is happening? Diggory's cot is being taken apart by Chad, and Nannie is up and dressed and Diggory finds himself in Nannie's bed. He is only half awake and opens his mouth wide in a yawn.

But Gillian is very much awake. Her eyes shine and her little pigtails stick out triumphantly in the lamplight:

"It's to-morrow!" she laughs. "We're going to London Town."

The grown-ups are going on an early train and are taking Diggory's cot with their luggage. The children, Nurse, and Hannah are to go at noon, with the children's fine new trunk and the boxes of eggs and poultry and jams.

Nurse stands, tense and excited, sewing up the little mattress and the bed-clothes in a square of canvas. Chad folds up the cot and puts it on his shoulder. Everyone is so busy that the children are not washed and dressed for a long time. Gillian leaps about in her crib and Diggory looks ridiculously small in Nurse's bed. Their orange juice is brought to them by Mrs. Dibble, who exclaims:

"Ah, but aren't you ever so lucky going off to London like real grown-up folks! And whatever will poor Dibble do without 'ee?"

They don't know and they don't care. They suck in the orange juice portentously. They never quite know whether they like or hate it, but they would not be without it. It is important, like tooth-brushing. They eye each other jealously.

Will it never be noon! They run, they peer, they direct, they interfere, getting in everybody's way. Servants rule the house. The grandfather clock strikes out the hours. The clock in the church tower answers. The children find a mud puddle and time passes lightly. They are washed and dressed all over again.

Miraculously they find themselves in the car speeding through the bright noonday. Hedges and houses fly past! They are in the little market town. They are at the station. A train walks along by the platform snuffling and talking in an undertone. But they lose sight of it when they enter the waiting-room.

Tickets are bought. Two men take the perambulator, the trunks, the boxes of eggs and poultry and jams away from them. Gillian's lip trembles. They will have nothing to eat in London.

Chad carries Diggory and Nurse leads Gillian up a great flight of steps and down on the opposite side to another platform. Chad cannot bear to put Diggory down. He holds him close, gazing lovingly into his face. Gillian strides along beside Hannah. She stares down the endless perspective of the track watching for the train that is to carry them to London.

It appears no larger than a toy, a little toy uttering a shrill squeak. Gillian's lips part in a pleased smile. What a dear little train! She will play with it. Never before has she been so near one.

But look, how suddenly it grows large! A cloud of smoke pours out of it. Its squeak becomes a roar. It is bearing down on them. Nothing can stop it. A flicker of fear crosses Gillian's face. Diggory clings tightly to Chad's red neck. He hides his face there and a sob shakes him.

"There, there," says Chad, patting him. "You're all right. You're a big boy. You're not afraid."

The train stops. The porters bearing the luggage search for a desirable compartment. Chad kisses Diggory's cheek again and again. Nurse picks up Gillian and sets her inside. Hannah looks dazed, her pink cheeks pinker every moment.

They are off! Nurse and the children are First Class in a compartment upholstered in rich-flowered tapestry. Hannah is Third but just next door. They seem to own the train. No one interferes with them. They move swiftly, quietly out of the town. The sunlight shines on the coloured pictures of Bath, Glastonbury, and the Isle of Wight that hang on the walls.

The children are settled, one at each window, hats and coats folded neatly in the rack. Fields, woods, rivers, and copses stream past the train. Russet and green the hills rise and fall and, every now and again, there is a flash of the sea. They go through Chard Junction. They go through Crewkerne. They wind in and out of the hills of Dorset. Nurse is unpacking sandwiches from a hamper. She takes Diggory from the window and puts him on her knee.

Hannah comes in with them and is given sandwiches. Nurse tells her how good the children are being. The humming of the train becomes louder and louder. Diggory's eyelids feel heavy. Nurse holds a mug of milk to his soft mouth. His head sinks against her breast.

When he wakes he finds himself tucked up on the seat and opposite him lies Gillian, her eyes very blue and alive. Nannie is sitting up straight knitting a cardigan. He has left his old world behind him and he knows nothing of the one he is going to. He is whirled between two worlds. He has no responsibility.

“Is this London, Nannie?” asks Gillian, looking out on the platform full of busy people, the laden tea-wagons pushed by girls in blue uniforms, the boys selling papers and chocolate.

“Dear me, no,” answers Nurse, negligently. “It’s Salisbury. When we leave you’ll see the spire of the cathedral.”

They press their noses to the pane. Chimneys pass. Towers pass. Fields and villages pass. Carts and horses, motor-lorries, steam-rollers, ponds with ducks on them, lines hung with washing, all pass. Hours pass.

They are dazed when they are carried through Waterloo Station and put into a taxi. They see nothing though they pass through streets crowded with great buildings.

“Look!” exclaims Nurse to Hannah, “there is the Abbey! There are the Houses of Parliament!”

Hannah looks eagerly out of the wrong window.

“Look, look, there is Buckingham Palace!”

Hannah frantically looks out of the other wrong window.

Now they are in the strange new house.

How amazing it is to find Mummie and Karen here!

Gillian and Diggory are tired out. They are experienced travellers, in truth rather world-weary. Their bath is made warmer than usual. They are tucked into bed.

They find themselves in a new world. The night nursery, instead of overlooking the laurel-bordered drive, the yew trees, the church tower, overlooks little paved gardens, innumerable clusters of tall chimneys. From the windows of the day nursery they see, instead of sloping fields, tall houses with little iron balconies. Opposite one window is a passage between spiked iron fences through which they look out on Buckingham Palace. Nannie tells them that a Queen's Lady-in-waiting once lived in the house.

"Was she waiting all the while?" asks Gillian.

"Yes, all the while."

"Who was she waiting for? A man?"

"Not waiting *for*. Waiting *on*. The Queen."

"Why?"

"Because she was a Lady-in-waiting."

"Why was she a Lady-in-waiting?"

"To wait on the Queen."

"Oh."

Every morning at eleven two little faces are pressed close to the pane. The music of pipes, the music of a band rises high above the sound of passing motors. The children watch them pass, the swinging kilts, the towering busbies, the swinging arms. If they are lucky, and they generally are, they reach the Palace Gates in time to see the changing of the Guard.

One day they see the Prince of Wales drive in a carriage from the Palace in the uniform of a Guard.

"Oh," cries Gillian, rather shocked, "one of the sentries is going off in a cart!"

Nannie hopes that none of the other spectators have heard her charge make so shocking a remark.

The children gaze in wonder at the Royal Standard flying against the delicate opal tints of the sky.

“When the Royal Standard flies it means that the King is at home,” Gillian instructs Diggory.

“Me awnt to see King at home.”

“You can’t. He wouldn’t let you in.”

“Why-ee?”

“Because you’re too little.”

“Me a king myse’f!” He walks proudly, holding his head high.

Nurse fastens a ribbon round his head for a crown. The gilt label from the Jersey milk bottle shines on his forehead as a jewel. He is immensely pleased when Gillian and Nurse curtsey to him. It is some time before he has enough of being a king. Even the next day he remembers it and comments:

“Tie on me wibbon! Me awnt to be a king.”

They live in an atmosphere of royalty, bands, and shouted orders. The small boys in the park play at soldiers, holding their bodies erect. “Eyes front! Right wheel! Quick march!” shouts the leader.

A Highland regiment is sweeping along the road on a frosty morning. Now, as they near the Palace, the band plays more slowly. Nurse says to Gillian:

“You will notice that the band is playing slowly and that now the soldiers march slowly.”

Gillian raises a face full of delighted intelligence.

“I know,” she says eagerly. “The band plays slowly so that the soldiers shall not walk too fast and slip on the ice!”

She knows all about soldiers. Passing the barracks the clear call of a bugle comes to them.

“Listen,” she exclaims, “it’s the soldiers’ rest time!”

One joyful day she sees the Queen. They are just at the Palace gate when Her Majesty’s car turns in. Nurse quickly takes off Diggory’s hat. The Queen bows and smiles to them.

“Now, *that* was an experience!”

“I saw the Queen! I saw the Queen!” chants Gillian.

The King is holding a Levee. Gilt State coaches with coachmen and footmen in scarlet and gold roll between the high gates of the Palace. The

burly policemen are tolerantly supercilious toward the onlookers. Gillian and Diggory are in the front rank. Whatever happens they are always in the front rank.

They have not so many friends in London as in the country, and there are consequently fewer tea-parties. But now they are going to tea in a house where there is a little girl named Rachel and a baby named Thomas and two older children. They can talk of nothing else.

“Shall I wear my pink dress!” asks Gillian. She has discovered that pink is her favourite colour. Everything must be pink, if she has her way. When she is taken to buy goloshes, she says to the man in the shop:

“Pink suits me best. Will you please try to find pink ones!”

But, when the day of the tea-party comes, Diggory wakes with a snuffly cold. Whispering grown-ups decide that he must stay at home. It is hard to break the news to him, he is so full of joy in the thought of the long drive in the taxi.

He cannot believe the bad news. He looks incredulous. He draws back as though those who direct his little life were wilfully combining to hurt him. Tears well into his eyes. Then he says slowly, the words coming painfully from his throat:

“But I must go. It is a party. We are to go in a wed taxi-cab.”

It is the first time he has said “I”. At this moment he drops the babyish “me” for ever. He turns older.

Tenderly it is explained to him that he cannot go out with a cold. That some other treat will be thought of as a substitute. A cloud of bitter disappointment darkens his face. He is filled with hate for the grown-ups who look down at him so compassionately. He hurls himself on the floor and rolls there, howling in an abandon of grief.

He howls all the while Gillian is being dressed. She stands daintily in her frilly white petticoat while her pearl-like nails are cleaned. Her hair hangs like spun silk about her shoulders. She tries to ignore the noise he is making, to shut it out from her happy consciousness of pleasure to come. But, though she sets her face firmly in an expression of happiness, she cannot quite forget Diggory.

Perhaps it is because he is not well that makes this so shocking a disappointment to him. He cries off and on all the afternoon.

“Was it a wed taxi Gilly went in?” he asks between sobs.

“I don’t think so, my pet,” answers Nannie, bathing his hot cheeks. “I think it was a black one.”

“No,” he persists, “I think it was wed.”

Again he asks—“Do you think Gilly is playing with Thomas and Wachel now?”

“Yes, I suppose she is.”

“Do you think Thomas has a little toy motor-car?”

“You must ask Gillian all about it!”

But, when Gillian returns flushed and happy, he asks her no questions. He sits quietly on Nannie’s knee, watching her swift movements with a detached, reflective look in his eyes.

“I was a fairy!” she cries. “They dressed me up like a fairy—in *pink*—in *pink*, with a wand and a star!”

In his hand he holds a small broken toy. He turns it over and looks at it reflectively.

“And the other children were *Indians*! They wore feathers and they had real knives in their belts!”

“Wachel and Thomas?” he asks.

“No. The big ones. But Rachel and Thomas have more toys than you ever ’magined. And Mummie and I came home in the night. There were hundreds of lights!”

In a small voice he asks:

“Was the taxi wed?”

Nannie is so afraid that Gillian will say yes, she snatches him up in her arms and runs with him to the window.

“Look! Look!” she cries. “There are lights upstairs in the Palace! The king is going to bed!”

Every morning they set out with a bag of crusts and bacon rind to feed the waterfowl in St. James's Park. If there is just one bag Gillian carries it, walking very importantly alongside the perambulator. But if the cook is in a happy mood she gives them two bags and Diggory has one all to himself.

The powerful policeman holds up the traffic while they cross the street. They pass the Barracks, and Nannie draws up the pram so that they may look through the iron palings and see the sentries standing in front of their boxes, with their scarlet coats and busbies. A detachment of cavalry is crossing the barrack-yard with a clatter of hooves. The sentries pay no heed to anything but their own important affairs. A young officer marches up to them and shows them some writing on a small square board. He and they gaze at it with great absorption. A small crowd has collected outside the palings. Everyone but Gillian is wondering what words are on the board, but her sensitive nostrils quiver with excitement. She smells new smells: the smell of beer and the smell of unwashed human flesh.

"*What* funny smells, Nannie!" she exclaims. "I quite like them."

Nurse takes her firmly by the hand and pushes the pram through the crowd.

Diggory raises himself on his seat, "I want to smell, too," he says. "Why can't I smell?"

Now they are on Birdcage Walk. They feel full of life, for the air is brilliant with sunshine, and there are other children hurrying with their nurses toward the Park. The water glances brilliant between the trees. A flock of gulls circle and dip above the bridge. The children clutch their bags of crusts as Nurse takes them across the road.

Once in the Park Diggory is set on his feet, and they scamper together along the side of the glittering water. Their bare legs flash beneath their new pink coats. He is growing so fast, he is almost as tall as she is.

They feed the pigeons who walk proudly over the bright-green grass, their coral-coloured feet moving beneath their iridescent breasts. A bed of golden crocuses folds the sunlight close.

Then come the pretty little waterfowl swimming neatly and ducking their burnished heads to catch the crumbs. But the gulls, the greedy gulls,

have seen what is going on. They cry out complainingly and sink toward the water, their enormous wings near the children's faces. Gillian draws back, a little frightened, and throws her crusts as far as she can, out in the water, but Diggory is not at all afraid. He holds a bit of bacon rind up to the largest gull of all. It swoops, with a beat of wings, its glittering eyes looking into his. It catches the rind in its beak and pulls, but Diggory does not instantly let go. There is a brief tug-of-war while they gaze, eye into eye, then the gull flies off gulping the rind.

They walk for what seems to them a very long time. They stand staring at other children while the nurses joggle the prams and talk. Then they come to the place where the strange foreign fowls live—storks, flamingos, and pelicans. The pelicans stand palely aloof on their island. They move heavily and cast a shadow of doubt on the water.

Gillian thinks deeply about them all the way back. At last she raises her voice above the noise of the traffic and shouts:

"Nannie! Why is a pelican delicate?"

"Yes," repeats Diggory, "why is a pelican delicate?"

48

It has taken Hannah some time to get used to the Town. The first days were a misery to her, though she bravely tried to conceal the fact. She who had never been away from the deep quiet roads of Devon, who had woken to the sound of bird-song, who had been exhilarated by the bustle about her father's inn, whose attic window had looked across a vast stretch of rolling country, now must spend her days in a basement kitchen, climb endless flights of stairs, and, when she ventures out, feel only a timid country thing in the press and roar of the street. She had a feverish cold, too, her eyes were glazed and her cheeks like fire. At last, against her will, she was forced to go to bed.

"How do you like London, Hannah?" her mistress asked her.

Hannah raised her hands with a desperate gesture.

"Oh, Madam, I don't like it at all! I feel as though I couldn't breathe. The ceilings seem to press down on me! I—I keep thinking of home."

"Tch! Well, you must go to bed and see if you can sleep it off!"

Hannah went, tall, straight, and submissive. For three days she lay there listening to the sounds of London. The children and Nannie brought her two oranges in a paper bag. She had a letter from home which made her hide her face in the pillow.

But on the fourth day she got up and she was a new Hannah, ready for anything. The cook took her to see the shops, she rode on a bus, she went to the cinema. Her recovery was complete.

Now her cheeks are pink and white again, her step full of life. She is interested in all about her, the clatter of the milkman down the area steps, the handsome policeman who has an eye on her as she crosses the street, the soldiers who forget to stare straight ahead as they pass her. She stands amazed as a hundred brewery girls clatter past, rough-voiced, in overalls and wooden clogs. She strains toward her afternoon out, for she has a thousand things to do.

"Do you like London now, Hannah?" asks her mistress.

Hannah dimples. "So well, 'm, that I don't believe I shall ever want to go back!"

“Tch!” Her mistress feels a mixture of relief and regret.

Hannah does not mind the stairs now, though the children never get quite accustomed to them. Carpeted in blue they wind up and up, twisting so sharply that at the inner side they are only a few inches wide. “Keep to the wide part,” cautions Nannie, “but don’t put your hands on the wall. Remember this is not our house. We must be very very careful of it.”

Gillian and Diggory love the long narrow passage that leads to the dining-room. Swords are hung on its walls and cases of medals and decorations. There are rows of pewter plates from the mess of a regiment in India. The dining-room is unexpected in its grandeur. The children like to sit at either end of the long table in the high-backed carved chairs, playing at entertaining.

“How do you do, Mr. Brown?”

“Very well, thank you, Mrs. Brown.”

“I’m not Mrs. Brown. I’m Mrs. Jones.”

“Then I’m Mr. Jones.”

“You *can’t* be! You’re a visitor.”

“Oh!”

“Have you brought your children to London?”

“Oh, yes.”

“How many have you, Mr. Brown?”

“Oh, I have nine eleven, Mrs. Brown.”

“I’m not Mrs. Brown! I’m Mrs. Jones.”

“Oh!”

“Are you going to call me Mrs. Brown again?”

“Yes.”

“Then I’ll smack you!”

“I’ll fow you in the fire!”

“I’ll bite your head off!”

“Mrs. Brown! Mrs. Brown!”

“Stop it!”

They scream at each other. Their mother comes with a stern face. She says—"Do you see that gentleman in the picture?"

They stare up at the oil painting of the Duke of Wellington.

"Yes. . . . Will you be a Big Bad Wolf?"

"Be a Big Bad 'Oolf, peash!"

"No. . . . Now let me tell you that that gentleman is very particular about behaviour in this room. He was called the Iron Duke."

"Me an Iron Duke!"

"You're not! You're Mr. Brown!"

Suddenly Mummie becomes a Big Bad Wolf. She rages, growling after the children. They run, screaming with delight, to hide behind the long blue curtains.

Hannah shows in an expected visitor. The Big Bad Wolf advances somewhat shamefaced to meet her, but the visitor has seen nothing but the Devon roses in Hannah's cheeks.

"Oh, my dear, what a complexion! Where on earth did you get her?"

They are home again in the country. Spring is everywhere. Not just in the parks and at the corners where flower-sellers have their barrows, but in the most remote corner of the garden where daffodils crowd together and the little cherry tree shows its white petals. Even the old stone cross and arch, ruin of a still earlier church, that are almost hidden by the fuchsia tree, have bright forget-me-nots growing all about them. The graveyard is a sea of waving daffodils. Purple and white hyacinths stand upright on the graves. The church tower sends forth its music of bells, and the weathercock turns in the breeze. The gargoyle faces are warmed by the sun and, inside the church, the children are taken to see the carvings of little winged creatures, squirrels, goats, even monkeys, on the pillars.

But nothing is so wonderful as the bluebells. They come, not in groups, not in delicate processions, not in sunny corners of the woods like a bit of fallen sky. They come like an army, unquestioned in their victory. They turn the very ditches into tracks of heavenly blue. Many a wood they take to themselves and so transform it that it scarcely knows itself in its blue beauty. How many bells to each stalk? The children cannot count. And the stalks themselves—green, sucking strongly at the moisture in the deep soil, snapping off if one touches them—weak in their very strength, after all their victory!

The school children gather them in armfuls. Some fall on the road, and they lie there reaching out, it seems, to the runnels of water that rush beside the hedges that still show branches white with may. The little schoolgirls in their white pinafores and flying pigtails play with their skipping-ropes on the road. Chad holds Gillian and Diggory in his arms to peer at them over the wall.

It is good to be held in Chad's strong arms once more. They press their own arms tightly about his neck and look lovingly into his red face. He says to them:

"And you will not forget Chad, will you?"

"No, no, we shall not forget you!"

But why does he ask that and why does he look serious?

Gillian asks—"Why do you look serious, Chad?"

“Oh, I don’t know,” he answers, brightening. He sets her down and stalks off to the stable-yard.

Gillian has a feeling for words. She acquires new ones almost every day. Long words like “extraordinary” and “imagine” have no difficulty for her. She has curious little turns of speech. When she does not understand something, she asks—“What means that?”

Now and again she breaks into free verse, without any warning, when she is in a certain mood and something has stirred her imagination. For example: they have been taken to the seashore and watch, rather awe-struck, breakers that crash to the shore.

“It is like a rush of wild horses,” observes her mother.

The words, the sound of the waves inspire Gillian. A fixed smile changes her face into an unfamiliar little mask. She throws back her head and, raising her voice to its greatest strength, she chants:

“The wild horses gallop,
They gallop fast, one behind the other,
Their manes wave,
Their tails wave,
But their hooves
Never touch the shore.”

In a moment she is digging a hole in the sand and has forgotten everything else.

Another time, sitting by the fire, she has asked her mother for a story.

“No,” answers her mother. “You tell me a story, just for a change.”

Gillian fixes her eyes on the fire, her lips part in a smile. She chants:

“I see the firelight—
I see the firelight on the wall.
I can remember the lights by the sea.
I shall sail away to Spain
Without ever telling you this story.”

Diggory regards her hallucinated face with a look of embarrassment. He is even disapproving. He has a distinct expression of relief when she is herself again.

He often has a struggle to express his thoughts and his brow is troubled. His small hands, already with long shapely fingers, will quiver in a gesture of supplication for the word he wants.

Under the deodar tree they have suddenly espied something smooth and oval and of a most beautiful blue. It lies on the velvet of the grass like a jewel. Their mother pounces on it to save it from being crushed and holds it on the palm of her hand to show them.

“It is a blackbird’s egg,” she says.

“Oh, lovely! lovely!” cried Gillian. “Oh, how amazing!” She dances about the egg on her toes.

But Diggory can get out no single word to express his joyful wonder. He stands still, gazing with deep dark eyes. He clenches his hands and raises them to heaven as though to draw down from that blueness words eloquent to describe the egg. There is a look almost of suffering on his face.

“Oh, lovely, lovely!” cries Gillian. “I will put it in a little box! I will wrap it in cotton-wool. It shall be the treasure of my life!”

Diggory stretches out his hand and takes the egg from his mother’s palm. He throws it as far as he can into the darkness of the laurels.

The bells ring out from the tower. For a space their strong notes startle the birds from their song. Then exhilarated by the clamour, the bolder birds resume their sweet piping. Their shadows flit across the grass. Gillian flits too, singing at the top of her voice. She forgets all about the egg.

They have very different ways of crying. Not in the ordinary crying caused by rasped knees, bumped heads, anger, or attempted quelling of Nannie by the sheer force of noise, at which he is an adept; this sort of crying comes as naturally and easily as breathing. But, when their feelings are really hurt, they express their misery in quite different sounds.

He makes his mouth square, showing all his teeth. He rolls his eyes accusingly at the one who, he considers, has wronged him. If you touch him, he clutches you, wriggles against you, cries out blindly for succour, for comfort. He is a male baby in distress. You gather him into your arms and laugh as you comfort him.

But she—she asks no comfort. She does not want to be touched. She is alone in her grief. As she averts her face, as you see her quivering mouth, her streaming blue eyes, hear the moaning sobs that shake her, something in you is hurt. You realize that one day she will be a woman.

How they develop! How they grow in this moist mild Devon air, with its golden sunlight and its shadows purple as the bloom of a grape! She grows in strength and grace, he in agility and height. He is almost as tall as she is. He digs manfully in the sand heap, runs after Chad through the garden paths with scarcely a tumble, but the round little stones of the gravel sweep are too much for him. His knees are never without cuts and bruises from falls there.

At this time she has a passion for numbers. Talking to herself you will hear her remark:

"So I said to him—'Eighteen, two, seven,' and he said to me—'Eleven, twenty-one, five.' "

These mathematical conversations appear to give her a sense of serene importance.

Age also fascinates her. She is constantly referring to Diggory's age and her own.

They are watching Chad trim the laurels with a pair of shears. Chad gives a loud snip quite close to Diggory.

"Don't cut my head off, Chad," says the little boy.

Gillian exclaims—"Chad would never cut off your head, a boy of almost three!"

She is flat on her bed, stretched out to her fullest length.

"See me," she cries, "how tall I am!"

Her mother obligingly admires her. "Why, you reach to the very middle of the bed!" she says.

"And so I should!" declares Gillian, "a girl of four!"

Always they are stretching out their little hands toward the days, the months, the years, to add them to their stature.

Gillian says—"Soon I shall no more be a tiny child but a schoolgirl."

The imagination of Diggory leaps even further. Standing looking out across the valley of the Axe with its sweep of hills beyond, he remarks, in a deep voice—"I am a man."

They are rivals. Try as the grown-ups will to instil loving-kindness and generosity into their minds, they are rivals and grudge each other every small triumph. The most extraordinary things become desirable if not shared. An empty cigarette-box, an envelope from the waste-paper basket, is enough to bring a despair of jealousy. They cannot understand why one should have even a dose of magnesia without the other being physicked also. Yet they sometimes have unexpected bursts of generosity. In truth they are seldom stingy toward each other.

Their balloons, one blue and one green, float ceilingward, bumping softly and drifting downward to the four eager hands that are stretched up to catch them. Again they are struck, again they soar, airy spheres, holding the colours of grass and sky.

Diggory loves his balloon, loves it all too well, for now, as he confines it in his arms and presses it to his breast, there is a faint explosion, and he holds only a tattered shred of green rubber.

He can scarcely believe in his ill-fortune. He looks incredulous, dazed, then a sob shakes his chest. Never had he loved a balloon as he loved this.

Gillian has thrown hers up again and caught it with a swift sweep of the arm. But something in Diggory's face holds her. She looks at him magnanimously and says:

"Take mine! I'll give you mine to keep."

She tips it from her palms into his. He looks at the balloon doubtfully for a moment, then a smile lights his face.

Mother, Karen, and Nannie exclaim in approval of her generosity. "Gilly, how nice of you!"—"That's very sweet of you, darling."—"Now, that is what I call being a kind big sister!" Gillian beams. She suns herself in the light of all this approval. She stands quite still like a kitten while her head is stroked.

But Diggory looks pessimistic.

"She was naughty yesterday," he says, "and Nannie smacked her."

The three elders look at him aghast.

“Oh, how can you remind us of that, just when she has been so kind to you!”

“But she was,” he persists.

“Diggory,” says his mother sternly. “I won’t have tales.”

His eyes are accusingly on Gillian’s.

“You were naughty, weren’t you, Gilly?”

She hangs her head.

“Why should you bring that up?” asks Karen.

“I must.”

Nurse’s eyes twinkle. Karen takes Gillian’s hand. “We’ll not listen to him,” she says, and they walk away.

The balloon has fallen to the floor. Diggory lies down beside it. He gazes into its buoyant blue depths. One hand curves over its roundness, his firm bare legs are relaxed. He does not know whether to be happy or unhappy.

“But she was naughty,” he repeats in a muffled tone.

But how charming Diggory can be! With a courtliness strange in so small a creature.

One day Mother has been gardening. Her hands have some of the dark loam clinging to them. Gillian and Diggory are just turned out, fresh for the afternoon. They are as fresh and dainty as the daisies on the lawn. They run to her and would take a hand on either side. But she draws back.

"I am not fit to touch you. See my hands!" She spreads them out for their inspection.

"Ugh!" cries Gillian, darting out of reach. "Don't touch me!"

But Diggory looks longingly at those hands he loves. He longs for the clasp of them. He stoops and rubs his little hand on the ground. He inspects the palm, no longer immaculate.

"Now," he says, "it is like yours. You may touch me." And he slips it where he wants it to be. . . .

On another day the two are invited to tea with a friend of their Mother's, and her mother, an old, old lady, is present. They must not make a noise but play sedately on the floor with the little china animals produced from the cabinet for them.

At tea-time they sit very straight with large snowy napkins tied under their chins. Their hostess leans toward Gillian and says:

"Now will you tell me which place you like best to be in—London, with all the excitement, the soldiers, the king's palace, the park with the waterfowl, or the country, where nothing happens but where you have flowers and birds and sheep and the sea?"

"I like being on the train best," replies Gillian.

"Good! You like movement and change. Now"—and she turns to the little boy—"will you tell me, Diggory, where you like best to be?"

He answers gravely—"I like best to be in your house."

When Gillian has hurt anyone by accident, she raps out: “Sorry!” and proceeds with the business in hand. But such a thing really distresses Diggory. If the hurt place is on a hand he will take it gently in his and raise it to his lips or, if it is perhaps on the foot, he will kneel and tenderly kiss the shoe that covers it. Gillian is rather impatient of this solicitude and, directly the injured spot is kissed, will skip out of reach. Yet, if he omits the ceremony, her mouth will droop, her blue eyes darken, and she will say —“Diggory has hurt me and doesn’t care!”

He abhors the sight of his own blood. He will endure a quite cruel bump with no more than a grimace of pain, for he tries hard to be a brave man, but a drop of blood on his finger is horrible to him.

His mother has been running with him by the hand. The day is chill and raw.

“There,” she exclaims, out of breath, “that will make your blood race!”

He looks up at her, terrified.

“My blood,” he stammers—“my blood——”

“Why, yes. Don’t you know that your body is full of blood? That’s what keeps you warm—gives you rosy cheeks.”

But plainly he does not like the thought at all.

Gillian has fallen and rasped her knee. A raw spot shows on the tender flesh and a trickle of red runs down the sturdy leg. Tears stream from her eyes.

Diggory stands looking on while bandages and Pond’s extract are produced and comforting words and pats are lavished on her. At last he speaks.

“It’s very sad,” he says, “but it’s not my blood.”

There is strangeness, there is change in the air. The children do not know what it means, but they do know that Chad is not himself, that Cook and Hannah look mournfully at them and embrace them with a new intensity, and that Mrs. Dibble overflows with tears at the mere sight of them.

But the strangest and most disturbing behaviour is Nannie's. She has become quiet, almost stern, and, as she pushes the pram up the steep village street, she sighs and scarcely speaks to them. But—"Oh, my lamb," she whispers to Diggory, as she tucks him into his crib and knows he is too nearly asleep to hear clearly, "oh, my lamb, this is breaking my heart!" He gives her a merry look out of his brown eyes before the sleepy lids cover them.

Then a day comes when she is very bright, with an odd brightness, and there is much bustle about the nurseries. Her boxes are packed and stand at the foot of her bed. She has taken all her things out of the clothes cupboard and out of the drawers of her dressing-table. She has taken her brush and comb, her work-basket, her calendar, the photographs of her parents, the little boy she used to care for before she came to them, and the serious young man in soldier's uniform.

Yet she is going to her home—"just for a little while," as she has often done before! On those occasions their mother and Karen and Hannah and Mrs. Dibble and Coo-coo and Chad had looked after them and it was rather an hilarious time, but now a new person appears who is to take her place but —"it's just for a little while, you know!"

The new person is a nurse, too. She wears a white uniform like Nannie's, and the two sit at the nursery table with a pot of tea between them talking about the children who are playing on the floor. They are somewhat embarrassed at being under discussion. They know very well that the "he" and "she" of the conversation refer to them, and they wonder if they are naughty and Nannie is telling tales of them. Then Gillian distinctly hears her say—"I could not possibly go so far away from my mother for a whole year, so soon after my father's death."

That word "death"! Gillian remembers having heard it before but she cannot recall where. Did someone say it about David, the Persian?

Before long Chad comes and easily carries Nannie's things downstairs. The car is at the door, and they all troop after to see her go. She disappears then to say good-bye to Mother and Karen. The children take the visitor to see the greenhouse and cold frames. Chad comes as well, and Gillian hears the visitor telling how the little boy she has just left was a Japanese and has gone back to Japan to school. Then she and Chad stare down at the children and he says: "Well, you couldn't help loving these."

Nannie squeezes them so hard that they feel out of breath, then she gets into the car with her face set and white. But Chad's face is red and comforting as ever. Masterfully he drives the car along the curves of the drive. They disappear.

"I think we'll get on together, don't you?" asks the visitor.

"Very much indeed, thank you!" answers Gillian, politely. "Shall we show you our paddock?"

They go to the paddock, holding her hands. They show her the flock of sheep with their lambs in the next meadow. They gather buttercups. Diggory is tired then, and the visitor sits down on Chad's wheelbarrow and holds out inviting hands.

"Come," she says, and gathers him on to her lap.

He had not known that such a lap could be. It is deeper, warmer, more relaxing than any in his experience. And an authentic bosom to rest one's head against! He looks up into her round good-humoured face. He puts his hand into hers. She lifts Gillian to her side.

"Now," she says, "while you rest, Nannie will tell you a story."

Already the children are happy again. They think only of the moment. But the next time they go out in the car Diggory refuses to sit in the front seat on the new nurse's knee where he has always delighted to sit and watch Chad manipulate the gears and do impressive things with his feet.

"I cannot sit there," he says firmly.

"But why?"

"Because I sat there with my Nannie." He turns away his head.

How they develop! How they strive toward growth! Like the lambs in the meadow, like the flowers in the hedge, the fledgelings in the nest, they push always upward and outward from their secure shelter. They show new traits.

He who has been so gentle, so reasonable, shows a tendency to rebellion. He realizes that he is a person and takes pleasure in making others recognize the fact.

"Put it there," he is told.

"No," he returns, "I will put it here."

He has spells of defiance, of shouting—"No, no, no, Nannie!"—of screaming, as though he were being murdered, when he is only being carried off to his rest. He is getting strong. He feels his power and scarcely knows what to do with it. But he is always ready to make friends, to put his arms closely about your neck, to give his whole soul to loving you.

One day Nannie is ill and, from morning to night, he never once gives any trouble. His behaviour has been so beautiful that next day Karen says to him:

"I think it would be nice if you would try to be just as good to-day as you were yesterday."

He stares in wonder. "But why should I be good to-day? Nannie is quite well again!"

Gillian, the exuberant one, now has periods of pensiveness, of gentleness. She is religious. Gazing thoughtfully at her doll, Narcissus, she says:

"I have changed her name. She is not Narcissus any more."

"Oh, what is her name now?" asks Karen.

"Jesus."

She has a baby doll, called Cuddles, for whom she has a new tenderness. It is a dimpled plump doll, with real eyelashes, and Gillian spends much of her time in putting it to bed and taking it up. She tucks its pink blanket about it with maternal solicitude.

Diggory, busy on the floor with a train made of three cardboard boxes fastened together by string, now and again spares a glance to Cuddles. At last he says:

“Put Cuddles in my twain. I want to give her a wide.”

Gillian refuses scornfully. “No. Cuddles doesn’t like going in trains with strange men.”

He feels snubbed for a moment, then he says, firmly:

“But I’m not a stwange man. I’m her father!”

Gillian has a feeling for words. She invents expressions that are fresh and vigorous. She says—"I will tell you a story," and proceeds:

"Last night I lay sharp awake. A little shining frog hop-jumped to my window-sill. I said—'What do you want?' But he didn't answer. He just picked a flower off the wistaria and held it to his ear. Then I lay quite still and listened. I waited till the great joy came." That odd, hallucinated look comes into her eyes and she repeats: "Yes, I waited till the great joy came."

Her Auntie Ina has sent her a card with three charming kittens on it. She gazes at it rapturously. "This," she says, "is the most lovely thing in my life."

When she hears that they are going across the sea in a ship, she collects her most treasured toys to take with her. They are to be packed in a trunk and not opened on the voyage. "But," she says, "I shall take Narcissus with me in my berth in case the boat should uptip."

All the world now knows that they are going away. There is a bustle of preparation everywhere. Chad is busy from morning to night. He and Diggory have secret conversations about what can be stored inside the car, which is going also. Secretly they stow away one thing after another, even the toy mowing-machine.

Then a day comes when they are taken to a little white hotel at the top of a hill, with a view of the sea. They are to stay here for a fortnight while the house is being closed. A mysterious thing called a "sale" is to take place. Mother and Karen talk a great deal about the sale—the things that are to be sold and the things that are to be stored. It is all a mystery to the children, but they have not the time to be puzzled by it. They are too busy being gloriously happy through the long sunny days.

Was there ever such a spotless, comfortable, happy little hotel! The landlord's face is round and cheery. There is a fire every day in the little lounge, though the weather is warm. The waiter is a kind man, too, and has quantities of delicious food to give away.

Every morning Nannie takes them to the seashore with their spades and buckets—down, down, and down the ever-steepening hill. When she has pushed the perambulator back up it, her poor face is as red as a peony. Every day the sea dances in the brilliant sunshine. They can look across to Charmouth and see the white cliffs and the Golden Cap.

What is their amazement one day to see "old Nannie" running across the sands to them! They are a little shy with her, even though the smell and feel of her is so familiar. Already she is partly a stranger.

She comes back to tea with them and another day comes to tell them good-bye. Hannah comes, too, looking unfamiliar without her cap and apron. On the steep terraces behind the hotel she plays at hide-and-seek and crack-the-whip with the children, swinging them clean off their feet, and they roll shrieking with laughter down the grassy steep.

She picks them up and gathers them into her lap. They raise their dancing eyes to her face and are surprised to see that she has burst into tears. What is the matter with the grown-ups? It is only for children to cry.

Mother and Karen behave strangely, too. Every morning Chad comes for them with the car and they stay away all day. In the evening he brings them back, pale and tired, with no play in them. On the last day Mother does not go but sits in a corner of the hotel verandah, smoking glumly and reading a book without turning the pages. Karen returns, says—"It is shut up. Everything is done." Her arms are full of roses from the garden at home. She bends over them and the children see that she too is crying.

Chad is always afraid that they will be in bed when he comes to the hotel in the evening. He hurries up the two flights of stairs to their bathroom, taps on the door, and then sticks in his head. Gillian is invariably sitting in the bath sailing a little boat and Diggory is on Nannie's knee, his body glistening wet. They shout with joy when they see Chad.

He has always flowers for them—tulips, forget-me-nots, and roses. He fills their hands with them, naked, as they are.

Early, early, early are they up, on this last morning. Scarcely is the sea awake from its night's slumber. It lies still, under its light covering of mist. The landlord looks sleepy when he bids them good-bye. The children are bewildered. They scarcely speak, but meekly do just as they are told.

Through the windows of the car they see the early sunlight burnishing the tree-tops. They see quiet hollows where blue smoke hovers above thatched roofs. They see the spreading flame of the gorse and the secret glory of the bluebells. They reach the little market town and get out at the railway station.

Chad holds both their hands as they wait for the train. He holds them so tightly that they cannot move their fingers and they stand close to his legs.

It is a long wait and the morning air is chill. It seems that the train will never come. But it comes at last, and there is a great scurrying to find a compartment to themselves.

Chad lifts the children into it. His mouth is twisted into a forced smile, but his eyes are swimming in tears. He kisses the little gloved hands in turn.

"Good-bye, Gilly! Don't forget Chad! Good-bye, Diggory! Remember that some time I am going to teach you to ride!"

"Good-bye! Good-bye, Chad!"

They peer through the window as the train moves away at his blue figure erect on the platform.

Southampton—and the ocean liner! It looms, a towering wall before their eyes.

"But—where is the ship?" asks Diggory.

"In front of you."

"Where?"

Everyone laughs at him.

"I know its name," says Gillian. "Ascania. Nannie, have you got Narcissus safe?"

“But—where is the ship?” repeats Diggory. “I don’t see it.”

Nobody answers him. He is on the gangway.

But suddenly he espies his perambulator being carried on. He is delighted and shouts:

“There’s me pwam!”

Through all the changes of the journey he has kept watch over it. “Where’s me pwam?” or “There’s me pwam!” has been his cry.

When a label was being pasted on it at a station, he exclaimed:

“The man is painting me pwam! Isn’t he a ki-ind man?”

Mother and Karen are choosing a place for their deck-chairs. Nannie is in her cabin unpacking. The deck steward and Gillian are already friends. She says:

“I will show you my doll, Narcissus. She is asleep in my berth. I will take you to her.”

All about them are other boats—liners, freighters, tugs, little pilot-boats. Gulls fly screaming overhead. A tremor goes through the ship. The sunlight pours down hot and brilliant on sea and deck.

Mother and Karen lift up the children so that they may see the pilot-boat turn the ship about.

“There is a deal of water,” says Diggory.

The great expanse spreads before them. They move outward on to the ocean.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Because of copyright considerations, the illustrations by Alice Helena Watson (1896-1984) have been omitted from this etext.

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[The end of *Beside a Norman Tower*, by Mazo de la Roche]