

MARTIN AND MARGOT

By AMY LE FEUVRE



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THOUGHTLESS SEVEN, A
US, AND OUR CHARGE
US, AND OUR DONKEY
US, AND OUR EMPIRE



“Mais moi IT IS VERY TIRED I AM.”

MARTIN & MARGOT

BY

AMY LE FEUVRE

AUTHOR OF
"DREAMIKINS" "ME AND NOBBLES" "A PUZZLING PAIR"
"PROBABLE SONS" ETC. ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY GORDON BROWNE, R.I.

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“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

Martin & Margot

CHAPTER I

Two Little Strangers

They stood on the deck of a cross-channel steamer. Two rather forlorn-looking little creatures, except that there was an alert eagerness in their eyes, as they watched the English shores become clearer and clearer. Martin had his arm round his sister, and her dark curly head was burrowed into the shoulder of his thick reefer coat.

There was a stiff breeze blowing, and their little faces were blue with the cold. Martin stood sturdily, legs planted well apart, and his left hand thrust deep into his pocket. Margot had both her hands in her pockets, too. She was a good head shorter than he was, and where Martin's brown eyes were twinkling with a thousand sparkles and flashes, hers were soft and appealing. There was a wistful droop at the corners of her lips, too. Every one who noticed Margot said, "What a sweet, pathetic little face. It looks as if it has had no petting."

Now the Dover pier hove in sight; there was bustle and confusion on board. Nobody seemed to be looking after the children. Every one was engrossed in securing their luggage and making an effort to be the first to get on shore, and through the Customs.

Presently the Captain came along.

"Hullo, youngsters! Any one turned up for you yet?"

"We don't know," said Martin. "If nobody does come, Captain, you will take us back again, won't you? Ah! we would like well to go home to Mère Annette. Margot is frightened of the big new world we come to!"

The Captain laughed, then was called away. Five minutes after, when the passengers were in full swing across the gangway, and the noise and confusion became quite bewildering to the children, he returned, bringing with him a young clergyman.

“Here you are,” the Captain said heartily. “They’re two of the bonniest young scamps I’ve met for a long time. Are you a relative?”

“No; I have been sent to meet them. I am going to take them to their aunt’s.”

Martin held out his hand.

“*Bonjour, Monsieur*—I mean—good-day. We are only partly French, Margot and I. We speak very good English.”

The young clergyman smiled, and it was a tender, happy smile. Martin was won at once.

“Margot, he is kind; look up and behave.”

Margot put out her hand, still hiding her face in her brother’s shoulder. Then, between the curls that hung over her forehead, she stole a glance at the stranger. She was reassured, and when he took her up in his arms, she made no protest, only clung rather nervously to him as they pressed through the crowd. Martin followed close behind, clinging hold of the clerical coat tail.

It was not very long before their small trunk had been secured, the Customs passed, and they were seated in the train which bore them swiftly through the English country towards London.

It was not a pleasant day. Heavy fog filled the air. A grey misty rain was falling.

The children sat with their faces pressed against the window-panes. They had the carriage to themselves, and each occupied a corner of it.

There had been silence for some time. Mr. Maitland realised that they were shy, and would not press for their confidence. Presently Martin broke the silence by saying reflectively:

“*Le bon Dieu* does not live in England; Annette said she had never seen His smile the whole time she stayed here.”

“Oh, how sad!” said Mr. Maitland. “But I think Annette was mistaken; God lives with us everywhere. He is here with us now.”

“Margot and I say that the sun is God’s smile and the rain His tears. Annette nods her head when we say so. She thinks it, too. And she says *le bon Dieu* loves France better than England, for He smiles better on it.” Martin’s eyes were very earnest and grave when he made this statement.

“Ah well,” said Mr. Maitland, “you’ll see the sun shine in our country soon.”

Margot looked across at him with a sudden sweet smile.

“Would you like to see my pocket?” she asked, diving her hand into her coat pocket and producing a handful of treasures. Mr. Maitland bent forward with the greatest interest. A fir cone, a tiny thimble, a marble, a bit of lead pencil, a polished shell, a walnut, a live snail in his shell, a little leather purse, a piece of string, a lump of gum, two blue beads, and a match-box with a green caterpillar inside wrapped round with two mulberry leaves. All these were proudly displayed. Margot was fast losing her shyness, and began to chatter away in a mixture of English and French. Then Mr. Maitland asked a few questions.

“Do you remember your father? When did you see him last?”

“Ah!” cried Martin, “he and Maman both did come to see us. Papa was going over sea. He was not happy; he frowned terrible, and said to Maman she must take us to live with her in Paris. It was a black day; Annette was *désolée*. Margot had been driving the pigs through the mud, and was not made ready. The big car came so quick, and papa thought we must not be barelegged. He called us *gamins*, and Annette cried, and Margot. But me, I stood still, and spoke—I said I would rather go over the sea with papa.”

Here Margot interrupted her brother, making a fine play of her tiny hands in true French fashion.

“And Maman, she laughed, and then she said Paris was no place *pour les enfants*. And she was beautiful, and her smelly scent—was it not nice, Martin? But we could not go near to kiss her; we were not neat or clean. Oh no—we were full of shame—but Maman, she blew us kisses before she got in her car, and they went fast away, so fast, so furious! And Martin *et moi*—we nevere have seen them any more. Papa is still over sea, and Maman has gone up to *ciel*—to *le bon Dieu*. Martin and *moi*, we do not cry for Maman—she was a *belle dame, mais Mère Annette, ah, je l’aime beaucoup!*”

Her lip quivered; she let her hands drop in her lap, and gazed out of the window through a mist of tears.

Martin looked first at her, then at Mr. Maitland. Then he shrugged his small shoulders.

“Girls are made for tears, Annette says. And the curious thing is that Annette was never for Margot much. She was *très* fond of me; she was for kissing me long after I had grown big. Annette says boys steal into women’s hearts, but girls leave them cold!”

“Don’t tell me any more of Annette’s speeches,” said Mr. Maitland sharply; “I don’t like them. Tell me about your life in France. Did you go to school? Did you see anything of the terrible war?”

Margot turned from the window. Her little face was alight with excitement at once.

“Ah, the big guns! They roar and shake and roar, terrific! It would make my chest jump. Martin and I loved them. And we looked for the soldiers to come every day. We longed for them! We made ourselves bows and arrows under the cherry tree and watched for them behind the hedges. But the real enemy soldiers never came. Only ours marched, and the music made us dance. And sometimes the carts would bring back *les blessés*—*ah, c’était triste!* And Pierre went away and Annette cried, but he came home one day quite whole, and Annette said she would have liked one little wound, not very big, just to show he had been in battle!”

“We went to school,” put in Martin more gravely, “with *les autres enfants*. And *Monsieur le Curé* did come and give us many talks in school. But he liked us not. Do you know that Margot and I are heretics? Papa would not have us true Catholics. *Monsieur le Curé* and Annette they shake their heads at us and sigh, but we never went to Mass. Annette says you are mostly heretics in England.”

Mr. Maitland shook his head.

“No, my boy; I shall teach you better than that.”

“*Voyez!*” cried Margot, pointing out of the window; “*le bon Dieu* begins to smile at us!”

The fog was rolling away, the rain had stopped, and before they had reached London the sun was shining brightly. It had an extraordinary effect on the children, especially upon Margot, whose spirits always rose and fell with the barometer.

Just before they reached Charing Cross, Mr. Maitland went outside into the corridor to speak to the guard. He had left his hat on his seat. When he

came back it was gone. He asked the children if they had seen it. Martin, who was deep in a picture paper which Mr. Maitland had given him, looked up frankly and said, "No." Margot was steadily looking out of the window, and said, without moving her head:

"P'r'aps it has fallen under the seat."

"Perhaps it has," said Mr. Maitland, and he stooped down to search for it. But there were no signs of it anywhere. The young clergyman got warm and flustered at his loss. The whole carriage was searched, then the corridor.

Just as they were entering the station at Charing Cross, Martin suddenly shot out an accusing finger at his sister.

"*Monsieur*, look at her eyes!"

Mr. Maitland was conscious for a moment of two small blue eyes bubbling over with twinkling mischief; then they were tightly shut, and Margot sat up very straight, with screwed-up mouth as well as eyes.

Martin made a dash for her. There was a piercing shriek from Margot as he dragged her off the seat, and there was Mr. Maitland's hat, on which she had been calmly sitting during the search.

Mr. Maitland smoothed out his crushed hat without a word of reproof. But his silence made Margot look at him curiously, then wistfully. After a few moments she edged across the carriage towards him, then held out two dimpled hands, palms uppermost.

"Whip me, *Monsieur*; I am ready."

He looked at her. His grave face relaxed into a smile. He raised the tiny hands to his lips and kissed them.

"I enjoy a joke, little one! I am not too old for fun."

Then Margot climbed upon his knees and, putting her arms round his neck, hugged him.

"I am *très fâché*. *Pardonnez-moi*. I will love you *beaucoup*. I will be an angel. I nevere will take again your hat, your boots, your gloves. I never will take *rien de tout!*"

Martin looked on with an impish smile on his face.

"Margot is full of monkey's tricks. Annette says so. And I like to do tricks, too—at times when it is *triste* and dull!"

Mr. Maitland began to feel slightly nervous over these charges of his. He took them to a quiet hotel, where they were to sleep for the night. And he was rather relieved than otherwise when, after a hearty meal, they went off to bed, and the good-natured chambermaid assured him that they were asleep directly their heads touched the pillows.

They were off again early the next morning. The children were rather silent during their breakfast, and slept a good deal in the train that took them down to Somersetshire, their future home.

Just before they reached the small station of Overcoombe at which they must alight, they awoke, and began to bombard Mr. Maitland with questions.

“Is it the real end of our travel?”

“Are you going to say good-bye to us?”

“Does our aunt keep chickens and goats?”

“Will she be kind?”

“Does she live near the station?”

When they were out upon the platform, their eyes were more busy than their tongues. Martin was the first one to spy out a brown dogcart and black horse.

“Is that what we’re going to drive in?”

“Yes, my boy; your aunt has sent it for you.”

The children climbed up into the vehicle with great satisfaction.

“We like horses better than cars,” said Margot; “a haycart is the best for us. It is so soft to lie upon.”

Then their luggage was brought out and packed in behind, and away they went, along white, straight roads with budding trees and green banks, lightened here and there with pale bunches of primroses. Then they came in sight of a village, and a grey church tower stood up in the middle of it.

“That is my church,” said Mr. Maitland.

The children were interested at once.

“Is it all your very own? Did you buy it?” asked Margot.

“Are you a *Monsieur le Curé*?” asked Martin.

“It has been given to me and all the village, too,” said Mr. Maitland, with a grave smile. “I have to take care of it all for God.”

“Did *le bon Dieu* give it to you?”

“I like to think He did.”

They passed through the village, then turned in at some big gate up a drive bordered with old chestnut trees.

“We’re coming to a *château*,” cried Martin. “Our *château* is empty; *le Compte* died in the big war, and his wife would not come back. She’s like Maman—loves not the country, but Paris.”

But when they came in sight of the house, the children saw it was no *château*, only a square grey stone building long and low. In front of it were beds of spring bulbs, daffodils, and hyacinths, and then, just as they stopped at the door, a big grey horse came trotting up the drive, and a lady mounted on it called out:

“I shall be there in a minute, Mr. Maitland. I’m going to the stables.”

The children were lifted down, and looked round them with keen interest as they followed Mr. Maitland into a square oak-panelled hall. He seemed to know his way about, for after a word with an old servant, he took them straight into a room at the farther end of the hall.

Here there was a bright wood fire. Books lined the walls and filled the table. Close to the fire in an arm-chair sat an invalid man.

“This is your Uncle Duncan,” said Mr. Maitland.

“Have we an uncle?” said Martin, with surprise.

The invalid turned towards them with a smile.

He was not an old man, but his face was thin and lined, and his shoulders seemed up to his ears. Yet his eyes were so blue and soft and kind, and his smile so sweet, that Margot ran forward and, stretching on tiptoe, kissed him of her own accord.

“*Bonjour*—are you glad we are come?” she said in her soft little voice. “You are a new uncle to us. They told us we were going to our aunt.”

“Your uncle isn’t of much account,” said the invalid, smiling; “he’s just an obstacle.”

Mr. Maitland shook his head at him. And then the door opened quickly, and a tall lady in her riding-habit walked in.

“And these are the neglected children,” she said.

Martin turned to her and made an old-fashioned bow.

“We have come,” he said. “We are not very glad to leave our home, and Tartare, and the goats, and Annette; she cried much, and so did we, too, but we will do our best to live with you, *n’est-ce pas*, Margot?”

Their aunt did not offer to kiss them; she stood still, gazing at them with rather cold, hard eyes. And then Margot’s lips quivered. She spread out her little hands with a tragic gesture.

“*Moi*, I am going to cry. I feel *désolée*.”

“Lydia!”

Their uncle said it almost under his breath, but his sister turned towards him quickly, then her face softened. She held out her arms and Margot ran right into them. Tears were streaming down her face.

“You are so straight, so tall, you love me not!” she sobbed.

“How can I love you when I don’t know you?” said her aunt, with a sudden quick laugh; but she kissed the tear-stained face and patted the curly head rather awkwardly. “There!” she said; “I dare say we shall be friends, but I have never had anything to do with children. If you were young foals, now—well, I shall turn you over to Janet upstairs. She nursed your father, and she will mother you. Come along.”

She led the children out of the room and up the broad stairs, then along a wide passage, until they reached a green baize door at the end, and then they entered a big sunny room, and a short smiling woman came forward at once.

Both Margot and Martin heaved a deep sigh of relief and content. This kind woman would welcome them, they felt sure. And she did; she took them right into her motherly arms and kissed them. Then she held them at arm’s length to see if they resembled their father.

“You have his eyes,” she assured Martin.

“*Et moi?*” demanded Margot, turning up her blue eyes till only the whites of them could be seen.

“No; you must be like your mother,” the old nurse said, and Margot danced up and down in delight.

“Maman was a grand lady, in silks and jewels, *si belle* — —”

Their aunt had slipped out of the room. She saw that old Janet would do all that was required.

The children were soon enjoying a nursery tea, and as they ate, they plied Janet with questions.

“We did not know we had an uncle—a sick one—why is he an obstacle? That is what he called himself. Will he be kind to us? Papa shrugs his shoulders; he likes us not.”

“Oh, my dears, you mustn’t speak so of your father. And your Uncle Duncan is one of God’s saints. ’Twas he who said you must come here when he heard your mother was dead. ’Tis Mr. Duncan’s house; all the property is his, and after his death ’twill come to your father, and you, Master Martin. So you must be a good boy and try to grow up in the way you should go. I’ve heard your uncle call himself an obstacle—he thinks your father should be in his shoes, but that’s just his humble opinion of himself. No one has such a business head as Mr. Duncan, and every one loves him. A word from him brings every one to his feet. I don’t know why. ’Tis just his goodness. And your aunt will listen to him better than to any one else. There! Why am I talking to you like this? But you will love your uncle, and you must be very, very good to him.”

Martin and Margot listened with big eyes; they were too small to understand Janet’s talk, but they understood that the invalid uncle was kind, and that was all they cared about.

“We like you, Martin and me,” said Margot, putting her head on one side and looking at Janet with an insinuating smile. “You are very like Annette—and your name sounds like also. You are older, but you please us. Does she not, Martin?”

Janet laughed at the child’s condescension.

“We’ll get on, honey,” she said.

“It is the aunt who looks black,” said Martin gravely; “but, Margot, you and I must keep away from her. Maman always said she liked us at a distance, with the post for news, and we will run away when she comes near.”

“No, no, Master Martin,” cried Janet; “that is all wrong. You must love your aunt, and she will love you. Miss Lydia has a warm heart, and if she does not understand you quickly, she will soon learn to. She is out of doors a great deal, but she neglects nothing. I have known her get up at daybreak

before she goes hunting to get her letters and business done. And she will do her duty by you, that I'm sure of."

"Margot and I like not that word duty. It is too hard for us."

Janet looked at them and was silent. These children puzzled her. They were so self-assured, so old in their ways, but she saw they were tired with their long journey, and very soon had them comfortably settled in bed for the night.

CHAPTER II

In Mischief

Janet wisely kept the children in the nursery the next morning, but when the sun was shining, she sent them down to the garden, and told them they could play there till dinner-time. To Martin and Margot the old garden, with its high red-brick walls and beautiful spring flowers, was enchanting. They explored every bit of it with breathless interest. They had a good deal to say to the old gardener and his young assistant, a boy called Tom. Margot was brought to book for picking some daffodils.

“But why are the flowers here if not for me?” she demanded quickly, turning her pathetic little face up to old Bardsley. “*Moi*, I cannot live without flowers! The *bon Dieu*, He drops the seed out of heaven for little girls, and when the flowers open their faces it is for to be kissed *comme ça!*”

She seized the flowers and held them to her lips.

“The Missis she do not like her flowerbeds pulled about,” said Bardsley, looking at Margot disapprovingly. “Children must look, and not touch in *my* garden.”

“Is the garden yours? Then, Martin, we will get out of this garden and find a place where we can pick flowers as we like.” Margot took to her heels, and Martin followed her. Presently they came to a door in the high wall. It was bolted, but the bolt was an easy one, and outside there was a wild bit of moorland with a white road running across it. It reminded them of the white road that led to Paris outside Annette’s cottage. In the distance was a schoolhouse, and the figures of children coming out of it. In another moment the two were scampering over the turf.

“Ah, *les enfants!* Venez quickly, Martin. Bah! These shoes and stockings. All these days they’ve been hurting and wearing me tired; off with them, *vite!*”

Nothing loth, Martin followed his sister’s example, sat down on the grass, and pulled off his shoes and stockings. They left them on the ground without a thought, and raced on over the turf barefooted and exultant.

Their Aunt Lydia, half an hour later, was walking through the village with a neighbouring friend, a Colonel Graham. She saw a crowd of children

round two little dancing figures. Martin and Margot were the dancers, and Martin was crying:

“Why don’t you dance *comme ceci*?”

“*Comme ça*,” cried Margot, and their bare legs flashed to and fro, and up and down, in a surprising way to the stolid English audience round them.

Lydia gave a little gasp.

“My promising niece and nephew!” she said to her companion. “How have they got here? It must be stopped.”

She pushed her way through the ring of children and took hold of Martin by his shoulder.

“Look here, this won’t do!” she said sharply. “Come home with me at once, both you and Margot.”

The village children fell away, and without a word Martin and Margot stopped their dancing and followed their aunt. She took a firm hold of Margot’s hand.

“These your brother’s children?” asked the Colonel.

“You wouldn’t think so, would you? We’ve rescued them from a foster nurse with whom their mother placed them. We could do nothing until her death. Martin, English boys and girls don’t go barelegged at this time of year. Where are your shoes and stockings?”

Martin looked vaguely round.

“I do not know this English earth of yours. But it does not matter; we walk best without them.”

“We hurled them into the air,” cried Margot, throwing her small hands out as she spoke. “We like not to wear them; they make the feet heavy to carry.”

“Now, just remember where you left them,” said their aunt sharply. “You must find them, and put them on before you come home.”

Martin and Margot darted away from her over the grass, like two little elves. They enjoyed the fun of the search. Their aunt and the Colonel searched, too; and at last the Colonel was the lucky man, and produced one small shoe from a gorse bush—the others were close by.

Then the children were made to sit down on the grass and put them on. Martin did so with a cheerful face. He was always philosophical, and, if a

disagreeable thing had to be done, did it uncomplainingly. Not so Margot; she scolded her shoes and stockings in broken French and English as she put them on, and then she jumped up with an angry stamp and a flash in her eyes which quite surprised her aunt.

“I will *not* stay in England. I want my France. My toes, my *pauvre* little toes, they ache with these hard shoes; nobody is kind, they are all cruel and *méchant*. I do not like you, Aunt Lydia; I have said it. You are tall and hard. I want my *Mère Annette*.”

Her lips quivered. Big tears crowded into her eyes. Martin flung his arms round her.

“There, *Bébé*, I’ll love you. Be good now. Let us race, and see which shoes get home first. Once, twice, thrice, away!”

Totally ignoring the grown-ups standing near, the children flew across the grass towards the house. Their aunt gazed after them helplessly, and the Colonel laughed heartily.

“Poor little wild birds,” he said. “You’ll have to go gently.”

“Oh, I shall leave them to Janet,” said Miss Fosberry; “I can’t be bothered with them.”

About three o’clock that afternoon the children’s uncle was busy sorting out some papers in the library. He was alone, and one or two important letters had fluttered away out of his reach, for his windows were open, and there was a strong breeze.

“Oh, for a pair of legs!” he sighed, and then his hand was on his bell, when he was startled by a very small, soft voice:

“*Moi*, I am *désolée*; none in this house love me! None are wanting me!”

It was Margot, standing just inside the door, her big, pathetic eyes and drooping lips bearing out the truth of her statement.

“In the very nick of time,” said her uncle cheerfully. “I want you badly, little Margot. Will you pick up those papers and bring them to me? Thank you—what a useful little maid you are! Now, will you help me fold these up?”

In an instant Margot was smiling all over her face. She loved being of use; and if her small fingers were not as skilful as her uncle’s they were quite as willing. Then a box was produced, which sadly wanted tidying; and it was a box which afforded her great delight. There were bits of sealing-wax

in it, nibs of pens, old seals, bits of pencils, indiarubber bands, and old stamps, with stamp-paper edgings. As her busy little fingers turned over these treasures, her tongue kept pace with them; and then, suddenly, she turned with great gravity towards her uncle:

“I love you, Uncle Duncan! I will come every day and live in your room. You listen, and you do not laugh. You are not unkind to Margot. And I will be as a good mother to you. Good mothers are scarce, Annette would say; but when they are good they love and love and *love*, and that is how I will love you! Janet says you are one of the saints. Have you a day all to yourself, like Saint Joseph and Saint John?”

“I hope I am not going to laugh,” said Uncle Duncan, “for I know you won’t like it if I do; but Janet has made a very big mistake by talking so. I assure you I’m very, very far from being a saint.”

Margot shook her curly head unbelievably.

It was not very long before Janet came to fetch her to go out for a walk; but, when she left, she extracted a rash promise from her uncle that she could come and see him whenever she liked.

“I shall be as quiet as a tiny mouse,” she assured him; “I will not take off the shoes and stockings and dance, and when you say ‘*Tais toi*, Margot,’ I will shut in my tongue tight, so that it shall not move till you give it leave.” And so she took her departure, waving an adieu to her uncle as she did so; and he lay back and smiled, well content with his small niece.

Before many days had passed, the children had settled down happily in their new home. One afternoon they were invited to the rectory to tea. Mr. Maitland lived with his sister there, and she was a bright, happy little woman who mothered every one in the parish, though she was a single woman.

She took Margot off to see some tiny pigs; but Martin stuck to Mr. Maitland, and when a message came to their rector from the sexton, Martin followed him through the shrubbery path and gate into the churchyard. Whilst Mr. Maitland was talking to the sexton, Martin pushed open the door of the church and walked in. The previous Sunday had been wet, and the children as yet had not been to church. When Mr. Maitland joined him a little later he saw him gazing up at a beautiful painted window. It depicted Christ on the cross, with the weeping disciples at the foot.

Martin pointed to it.

“The Christ,” he said in an awed whisper. “But we heretics have nothing to do with Him, have we? Pierre, who is husband of Annette—he is neither heretic nor good Catholic, he laughs at everything—he said we need not bow our heads nor kneel like Annette, when the Christ was being carried by. In France they carry a figure, you know, which is more real than a picture; but I like this picture best. Margot and I don’t understand much about the Christ. We could not be taught by the Curé. Did he really die like that many years ago? I wonder He let Himself do it, for He was God’s Son, was He not? And He used to do miracles, like the sick people get well at Lourdes.”

Mr. Maitland put his hand gently on Martin’s shoulder. “Don’t you know why the Lord Jesus Christ died upon the cross?” he asked.

Martin shook his head.

“I suppose He couldn’t help it. Annette said it was wicked men who killed Him.”

“They could not have touched Him unless He had been willing,” said Mr. Maitland. “Don’t you know that He died for you, Martin?”

“Oh no, never. I was not born. He did not know me.”

Martin raised an earnest, startled face towards the rector.

“He knew the very day He was going to send you into the world, and He sent you down here to do some work for Him. He knew beforehand that you would often be naughty, that you would disobey God, that you would not be good enough to have a place with the angels in heaven. And He loved you so much, that He gave up His life instead of yours. God said if He would suffer and die for you, and bear your punishment, that you would be able to come to heaven when you died. Every one that sins, you know, is shut out of heaven; but Jesus was punished for your sins, and that makes you free.”

Martin knitted his brows.

“But was it only me He died for?” he asked.

Mr. Maitland smiled.

“No, thank God! He died for every boy and girl in the world, and every man and woman too; but you and Margot are amongst them. If a person dies for you, how ought you to feel towards that person?”

“I don’t know.”

“Supposing you and I were going to a party one afternoon, and you disobeyed your aunt in the morning, and she said you must stay at home in

your bedroom for a punishment? Supposing you went upstairs crying, and then I came after you, and said I had promised your aunt to take your place, and I was going to be shut in your bedroom all the afternoon, and you were free to go to the party. How would you feel?"

Martin looked up at the rector with radiant eyes.

"I should simply love you!" he said.

"Now can't you love the Lord Jesus for dying for your sins, taking your punishment, and letting you go free and happy into heaven?"

"Is it true?" demanded Martin. "Does the Christ know me by my name? Did He die specially for me?"

"He certainly knows you by your name, for you were named Martin in church. But He died for Margot as well as you, and all the other boys and girls in the world."

Martin considered this, gazing up at the window with big, earnest eyes.

"Think it over, my boy," said Mr. Maitland, "and when you say your prayers to-night, thank the Lord Jesus Christ for His death on the cross."

"We don't say prayers, Margot and me. Annette said we were heretics, so it didn't matter. But Janet—she says she will teach us."

Steps and voices in the porch outside interrupted the conversation. Margot was softly calling to her brother, and he joined her without another word.

The children spent a very pleasant evening at the rectory. After tea, Mr. Maitland showed them the contents of a tall curiosity cabinet in his study. There were shells, and birds' eggs, and coins, and all kinds of queer things from abroad. When they went away they asked if they might come again soon.

"I think I'd rather live here than where we do," said Martin.

Margot shook her head.

"I like both. I like to be in one house one day, and in *l'autre* another day! I am very happy when I go to see Uncle Duncan in his big room."

"I wish I could have a church of my own," said Martin earnestly, as he said good-bye to Mr. Maitland. "Do boys ever have churches?"

"No, never, Martin. I only have it because I take services and preach. The church belongs to you in a way, as much as to me. And you can come to

it as often as you like, but you must remember it is God's House, and you must not play in it."

Martin said no more.

That evening Janet made them kneel by her side and repeat the Lord's Prayer.

When Martin had finished, he still knelt on.

"I should like to speak to Jesus. Do you think I could?"

"Why, yes," said Janet. "What do you want to say?"

Martin did not answer; he bent his head and whispered.

"I never knew it before, Jesus—I didn't know You were on the cross for me. Thank You, *beaucoup*. I'm glad to be going to heaven. I wouldn't like to be left outside. And I do love You for doing it. It is Martin who is speaking. I hope You remember me. Mr. Maitland says You knew me before I was born. Thank You very much. Amen."

Janet caught the whispered words, but she said nothing. Margot was already dancing round the room like an elf, trying to incite Janet into a chase. She loved a romp before she went to bed.

Martin's great gravity puzzled her. But he could not be proof against her wiles for long, and soon there was a scrimmage; and pillows were thrown, until Janet forbade it sternly. Martin had a little room all to himself, leading out of the room where Margot slept with Janet. And when Janet had gone away, leaving his door ajar, and both of them comfortably settled in bed, he called out to his sister:

"Margot! Attend. I know all about crucifixes now!"

"Annette said English people didn't love the Christ, and they had them nowhere!" said Margot quickly.

"They have windows and pictures. Do you know, Margot, Jesus was nailed up like that to die for me and you."

"I don't know what you mean—I want nobody to die. I never asked Him to."

"Well, He did it to let us go to heaven. It's *difficile* to explain, but I understand."

"And I don't, and I go to sleep. *Adieu!*"

Margot rolled herself up into a little ball and buried her head in the pillows. She was not interested, and her brother was; but then she had not seen the picture in the church, nor had the talk with the rector.

The next day was wet and stormy. Rain lashed against the windows, and the wind shrieked and howled in the old chimneys. The children played contentedly in the old nursery in the morning; but after their early dinner they began to get restive.

Janet was called away to speak to their aunt, and then they slipped out of the nursery and went prowling about the house. It seemed so delightful to them to be in a house with so many rooms. The pictures on the walls, and all the china ornaments and foreign curiosities entranced them.

At first they were as quiet as mice stealing in and out of doors, and tiptoeing round the rooms; but gradually they grew bolder. They knew their aunt was in the stables, for the groom had sent in to say that her favourite hunter was not well, and she had gone at once to see him.

They came to her private sitting-room in due time. It was not much like a ladies' room. All her pictures were of dogs and horses; two or three mounted foxes' brushes hung on her walls; there were riding-whips, and a collection of old leather gloves, and cigarettes, and some sporting illustrated papers.

Lying on a rug by one of the windows was old Spot. He was an Airedale, and attached himself to their Aunt Lydia and no one else. By the side of the wide fireplace was a Breton cradle for keeping logs of wood in. A bright idea struck Martin.

“Look, Margot! We will make Spot pull a cart like they do in France. He is lazy. Let us fasten him to that load of wood and drive him along the passage outside. I will be the driver; see my whip!”

He seized one of his aunt's whips as he spoke. Margot danced up and down in delight and clapped her hands. Spot was hauled up, and then they looked round for reins. There was a fishing-rod in the corner, and a pair of scissors at hand was seized to cut some of the line. It was a long business tying Spot on to the cradle. If he had not been very old and very lazy he would have resented the handling he got. But eventually he was fastened to it.

Margot ran and opened the door. Martin applied his whip to Spot's back. Spot first only stood still and shook himself; then, as the children whooped and danced round him, and the whip touched him on a tender part, he made

a sudden bolt for the door and down the stairs. The logs scattered far and wide; the cradle bumped and turned somersaults with Spot, who yelled with fright and pain, and when they arrived at the bottom of the stairs, Spot's frantic efforts to extricate himself from his burden had the effect of bringing a huge china vase on a pedestal to the ground and breaking it into a thousand pieces.

Their aunt and several servants appeared on the scene, and Miss Fosberry was very angry.

Margot was so frightened at her wrath that she ran away to her uncle and took refuge behind his chair.

“*Moi*, I am in a terrible fright! The aunt is so angry; she looks like she will kill us. Oh, we have been *très méchants*, but what would you! It is so *triste* and dull in the nursery. Ah, my uncle, just love me a little.”

She had crept round now, and was looking into her uncle's face with her insinuating smile.

He shook his head at her.

“I must hear what you have been doing first. I am afraid it's a case of—

“Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do.”

Margot gave him her version of the story. Then she held out her hands to him, palms uppermost.

“Are these idle hands, did you say? But they were very busy. They tied more knots than did Martin! I think it was Spot who did mischief, not us—oh yes! He it was broke the vase. He would not keep still and draw his cart like a good dog.”

“But dogs don't draw carts in England. You've frightened poor Spot very much, I expect. I think you had better stay with me this afternoon. There's a drawer over there wants tidying. Would you like to do it?”

“Oh, so very much!”

Margot darted over to the table indicated, and pulled out the drawer. She was immediately engrossed with its contents, singing a little French song under her breath. Her uncle had been reading. Now he lay back amongst his cushions and looked at her.

Presently Margot looked up.

“I dreamt of you last night, Uncle Duncan. You were eating tarts with me in a cherry tree. Did you dream of me?”

“I’m afraid I did not.”

“But you *must* think of me a lot. You ought to think of me if you love me. I like to be thought about.”

“Well, I did think of you, little Margot.”

Margot beamed.

“Nice thinks, did you?”

“I was wondering when and how lessons ought to be begun.”

“Oh, lessons! Let them go! Pouf! I do not like the lessons.”

“But they must be learnt, little one. I learn lessons still. I have been learning all my life, and you have a lot to learn.”

“Do you learn spelling?” Margot asked, with eager interest. “It is so *difficile* to me.”

Her uncle laughed; then he drew her to him.

“I remember I used to hate my spelling,” he said, “but it has got to be learnt, Margot. There are many things that must be done whether we like them or not.”

“Ah, I like not that word ‘must.’ It is a nasty English one. Janet says all day, ‘You must do this, and you mustn’t do that.’ Mère Annette never said ‘must’ to us, never.”

“I think I shall take you in hand and give you a short lesson every day. It won’t be out of books. And ten minutes will be long enough.”

“Oh, that will be *charmante*! I am very pleased to do lessons with you. To-morrow we will begin. Just me and you, Uncle Duncan. I will learn furious with you.”

She ran back to her drawer-tidying, and very soon her aunt came into the room.

Margot ran and hid behind her uncle’s chair directly she saw her.

“That naughty child is here. Has she told you what she and the boy have done? What plagues children can be! Why did we have them, Duncan? They could have been sent straight to school.”

Miss Fosberry was still ruffled in temper; and her brother looked grave when he heard of the damage done.

“Come out, Margot, and let me hear you tell your aunt you are sorry for having been the cause of a most valuable bit of china being broken.”

His tone was very grave. Margot crept out, but clutched hold of his hand and looked very pathetically up into her aunt’s face.

“*Moi*, I am feeling nearly crying,” she said. “I was very frightened with all the noise and scolding. I ran away here. Uncle Duncan, he loves me!”

“Your brother has been sent to bed,” said her aunt sharply, “and you had better follow him. I mean it. Go at once.”

“To bed, before tea!” gasped Margot.

“Yes, for a punishment.”

Margot looked at her uncle.

He said rather sternly:

“I am waiting to hear you tell your aunt you are sorry.”

“Oh, I am very sorry, very sorry indeed,” cried Margot, shaking her curly head. “I am sorry for stupid Spot, I am *très* sorry for poor Martin, and I am most horribly sorry I have to go to bed. I shall weep *beaucoup*. I am beginning now.”

Sure enough, tears were crowding into the blue eyes and running down Margot’s pink cheeks. If Margot thought that tears would soften her aunt’s heart she soon found she was mistaken. Miss Fosberry took her by the hand and led her straight upstairs to Janet, who was horrified at the mischief her charges had wrought.

“Is this a deep disgrace?” asked Margot, when she was undressed and placed in her bed. “Martin and me have *nevare*—no, *nevare* gone to bed in the daytime! I would like you to sit by my bed, Janet, and hold my hand and sing me little songs. I think I could bear it better if you did.”

“No, Miss Margot; I shall do nothing of the sort. You are to lie there and think how naughty you have been.”

“And has Spot been sent to bed *aussi*? He broke the big china pot. I didn’t. I promise you I didn’t, Janet.”

Janet left the room without speaking.

Then Margot sat up in bed and began an animated conversation with Martin in the next room.

“There is one thing I know,” she asserted. “I do not love Aunt Lydia. I shall never love her. I wish *le bon Dieu* had not made her. Do you think He likes her, Martin? I don’t expect He does. *Le bon Dieu* does not like people to be unkind to little girls. I love the uncle. He is going to teach me lessons, Martin. I will have him for my teacher.”

Martin lay still and would not answer. He was ashamed of what he had done, and humiliated by his punishment. When an hour later Janet came in and released them and took them into the nursery for tea, she had two very subdued little children.

CHAPTER III

Lessons

It was Sunday. Martin and Margot had been to church with their aunt. They had behaved very well, and after church Mr. Maitland came up and spoke to them, and walked with them a part of the way home. Miss Fosberry stopped to speak to some friends presently, and Martin looked up eagerly into Mr. Maitland's face when his aunt had left them.

"I want to ask you a lot of things," he said. "Can you say what you like when you get up in that box of yours?"

"Why, my boy?"

"I wish you'd talk to Margot next Sunday and tell her what you told me. About the Christ. She is *méchante*. She says she doesn't believe what I tell her."

Margot's angelic face puzzled Mr. Maitland.

"What is it you don't believe, little one?"

"Martin talked so fast I couldn't understand. But I don't believe *le bon Christ* was killed because of Martin and me. He is so big and great, and we are very little, and we weren't alive when He died. We would remember it if we were."

"I told her it wasn't only for us," said Martin.

"But I should like it to be," cried Margot quickly; "that I would like very much indeed—to be the only ones He died for. I don't like to be one of crowds—why, we shouldn't be noticed at all. I don't expect the Christ knows us."

"When I was a little boy," said Mr. Maitland, smiling, "there was an old lady who was very fond of giving children's parties. I was a happy boy when I got an invitation from her to go. And the bigger the party was, the more I enjoyed it. I didn't want to be the only one that was invited; that would have been no fun at all."

Margot thought over this.

"I'll ask Uncle Duncan about it," she said.

“You couldn’t do better,” said Mr. Maitland warmly, and then their aunt joined them again, and very soon Mr. Maitland left.

“Aunt Lydia,” said Margot earnestly, “I like the *Curé*, don’t you? And I like his painted window, but there’s a lot more pretty things in Annette’s church—pictures, and dolls, and all sorts of flowers. And nobody tells their beads. I like beads, don’t you?”

“Those are Roman Catholic ways,” said her aunt.

“Yes,” sighed Martin; “and English ways are difficult to understand. We shall learn them soon, perhaps, but Margot and I like France best.”

“Much best,” said Margot, with a determined nod of her head—“all except Uncle Duncan! He and me are very fond of ourselves. We love each other much—*beaucoup!*”

That afternoon she crept into the library, and found her uncle having a little nap. She sat by his side without moving for five minutes, then heaved one tremendous sigh. Her uncle opened his eyes. Margot smiled seraphically upon him.

“I was afraid that you might be dead; you looked so still.”

He took hold of her little hand.

“And you watched by me like a little guardian angel. I am wide awake, and not going to die yet, please God.”

“Would you like, Uncle Duncan, tell me—would you love anybody to die for you?”

“No; I don’t think I should. Why do you ask?”

Margot clapped her hands.

“And that’s what I said, and the stupid Martin got angry and called me *méchante*. And now, do you know Some One has done it. And we’ve got to love Him very much.”

“Ah, I misunderstood you. You are talking of the One Death in the world that matters. Why, Margot, I would think it heaven indeed to get near His feet and thank Him.”

“Tell me all about it from the beginning,” said Margot, impressed by her uncle’s voice. “Martin and me—we thought it was only for the Catholics—nobody ever told us the cross with the figure on it had to do with us.”

So her uncle began in low, reverent tones to tell her the story of the cross, and Margot listened breathlessly, asking innumerable questions.

“But I don’t feel I love Him very, very much, not like you,” she said; “for I really don’t know Him.”

“You must speak to Him, Margot. He is close beside you all day. It pleases Him when you are good; it grieves Him when you are naughty.”

“I called Janet a *méchante bête* this morning,” said Margot thoughtfully. “Did that hurt the Christ?”

“It made Him sad.”

“Oh, I won’t make Him sad,” cried Margot, stretching out her arms. “I don’t like sad people. I won’t make Him sad. I’ll be good *toujours*—all the time.”

Then, childlike, she began to chatter of other things, lessons amongst them.

“Well,” said her uncle, “I have given you your first lesson this afternoon. It is that the Lord Jesus loves you and has given His life for you, and He wants you in return to try to please Him by being a good little girl. Will you remember this?”

Margot nodded.

“And what will be to-morrow’s lesson?”

“Wait and see.”

When the next day came, the news that a governess was coming every day to give them two hours’ lessons in the morning put everything else out of Margot’s head. She and Martin were very excited at the prospect.

Miss Hale arrived at ten o’clock, and came up to the old nursery. Janet went away, and they sat round the round table in the middle of the room, whilst Miss Hale produced a few books out of a brown canvas bag which she had brought with her.

Miss Hale seemed very old to the children; she wore spectacles and had a very long, grave face. But she had a kind voice and a quick way of speaking that brought a certain amount of awe into the children’s hearts.

“We won’t do much in the way of lessons this morning,” she said, “for I shall have to discover how much you know. Which of the two of you knows most, I wonder?”

“*Moi!*” cried Margot; “I know *tout*. Martin he pretends to be very wise, but he can’t dance so fast as me—indeed he can’t!”

“Margot thinks she knows all,” said Martin, with red cheeks, “but she knows *rien de tout*. She is like the ducks that quack so loud and do nothing.”

“Do you both know how to read?”

Miss Hale soon discovered that they could read and spell in French very fairly well, but not in English. Their writing was good, and they were not bad in arithmetic. Then after half an hour’s examination she asked them if they would like her to tell them a story. They assented with great delight, and this is what she told them:

“Jack and Molly did not like lessons; they told every one they hated them. But one night a wonderful thing happened. They had gone to bed as usual. Suddenly Molly woke by hearing whispering voices close to her. She opened her eyes, and there, at the bottom of her bed, balancing itself on the bed rail, was a tiny little figure of a fairy. She was leaning towards another fairy, who was sitting on the rail of Jack’s bed. And this is what Molly heard them say:

“‘It is a shame for them to be so cruel! If they only saw how they’ve hurt their feelings, surely they’d be sorry.’

“‘Shall we take them downstairs now?’

“‘What are you talking about?’ asked Molly.

“Then Jack woke up and rubbed his eyes, and asked what was the matter.

“The fairies— —”

“Please, how were they dressed?” asked Margot eagerly.

“They were in white rose petals, and their caps were green, and they each held a magic wand.

“One of them spoke to the children.

“‘We want you to come down into the schoolroom now.’

“Jack and Molly thought this would be fun. They put on their dressing-gowns.

“‘Are we going to dance?’ asked Molly.

“‘You must be quite silent, and we will make you invisible. We want you to use your eyes and ears only.’

“They waved their wands over the children’s heads, and they were quite frightened when they looked down and couldn’t see their hands, or legs, or feet, or any part of their body. But they *felt* as if their bodies were there right enough, and they followed the fairies downstairs into the empty schoolroom.

“Then they stood still and gazed in astonishment. All the books in their schoolroom bookcase were out of their shelves and were moving about the room. The big table was covered with them, but they were all wringing their hands and crying bitterly. It looked funny to see the books with hands and feet, but somehow Jack and Molly did not think it unnatural.

“And then they listened to some of the talk going on, for all the books were talking, and it was quite a babel of voices. There was Jack’s geography-book—he saw its shabby red cover—and Molly’s torn spelling-book.

“‘It is dreadful to be treated so,’ sobbed the red geography-book. ‘I’ve tried my best to interest him. I should have thought he would have liked to have known about the strange countries he has never seen. And I’ve coloured maps, so pretty and bright. But he kicked me from one end of the room to the other this afternoon. I’m black and blue now, and aching all over. I wish I could serve him the same. That’s why I thought we could all join together and think of some way to pay them back. Some of our covers are pretty hard; we could slap their faces well.’

“‘I don’t think we need be cruel because they are,’ said the spelling-book, with a sigh. ‘I’ve done my best to make Molly like me, but it seems no use. I have lovely little pictures which she never looks at, and I was such a pretty book when I was new; and when you think how important I am, you would think she would treat me with respect. Why, if it wasn’t for me, they would have no story-books! Then what would they do! Molly has torn my pages, and she simply hates the sight of me, and says so. It’s dreadful to be hated when I’m trying to do her good.’

“‘Look at me!’ cried the history-book. ‘Think of all the wonderful things I tell them. They would never have known what happened in the world before they were born if it wasn’t for me! They spilt the ink over me the other day, and laughed when they saw my clean pages all soiled and black. Jack tried to throw me in the fire one day. I shudder with fright whenever he takes me into his hands. He would like to destroy me if he dared, and this is how we are all treated when we try to help children to know things.’

“‘Ah!’ sobbed an arithmetic-book, ‘I don’t suppose any of you are hated as much as I am—I feel my life isn’t worth living. They seem to hate the

sight of me. I can't help being myself; I didn't make myself. But I know one thing—that the world couldn't get on without me. Why, the children's father wouldn't be able to make money for them without me. It is so ungrateful. If they only showed us a little respect and liking, how happy it would make us!

“‘Yes,’ sighed a big copy-book; ‘I dread lesson-time. I do long for love and kindness.’

“‘Well, what can we do to alter it?’ asked a Child’s Reader. ‘Shall we stand for our rights and fight them? I feel I could.’

“‘So could I!’ said a ruler; ‘I could give them a pretty sharp rapping.’

“Then there was a great cheering from all the books, and Jack and Molly felt very frightened. Suddenly one of the fairies spoke, and when she spoke there was sudden silence.

“‘I have come to suggest that you give them another chance. You are all very wise, and they are very ignorant. You are old, they are young. I will try and make them understand you are their friends, and want to help them for the life before them. If they know they are making you miserable as well as themselves, they will try and do better.’

“‘Oh, if they only would!’ cried all the books together. ‘We would love to be happy and smiling; but their tears and frowns and angry words make us sad and angry too, and then, even when the sun shines, it seems no good.’

“‘Cheer up,’ said the other fairy. ‘To-morrow will bring you happiness.’

“Then the books began to dance gaily together.

“‘Let us have a good time now,’ they cried, ‘and hope for a good time to-morrow.’

“Jack and Molly said nothing. They suddenly found themselves in bed again, and the fairies had disappeared. Yet as they turned their heads on their pillows and fell asleep, they heard a tinkling voice in their ears:

“‘Remember to give your lesson-books a happy time to-morrow!’”

“Is that all?” asked Martin breathlessly.

“*Moi*—I am going to be very, very good to my lesson-books,” said Margot.

Miss Hale smiled, and when she had gone away the children talked over the story with great gravity. They touched the lesson-books on the table with

soft, kind fingers, and Margot lifted the new spelling-book to her lips and kissed it.

“I will love you,” she said softly—“you poor little thing. I will never make you cry, and you mustn’t make me cry either! We will be very immense friends, *n’est-ce pas*, Martin?”

“Yes. I like Miss Hale, and I mean to like my lessons,” said Martin valiantly.

It was a good beginning. Miss Hale had very few complaints to make of the children at lesson-time.

In the afternoons they went out for walks with Janet; but if ever Martin got a chance of running into the rectory, he did it. Margot took all her troubles to her Uncle Duncan; Martin took his to Mr. Maitland.

One afternoon the children were visiting the village shop, which was a great delight to them. They had two pennies each to spend, and the spending took a considerable time. Margot had found a wooden top to be spun with a piece of string, but Martin laid hands on it and declared he saw it first. Mrs. Clay, who kept the shop, tried to find another like it, but failed, and Martin and Margot were soon shouting angrily at each other, and struggling to possess the coveted article. Janet scolded them well, and into the turmoil came the rector. When he heard of the trouble, he said:

“Now, who’s going to prove themselves the best man? Who’s going to give way?”

“There’s nothing in the shop I like besides,” said Martin sulkily. “Margot can buy dolls, and beads, and lots of girl’s things. A top belongs to a boy.”

“It belongs to me,” cried Margot excitedly. “Buy a slate-pencil or a marble; there’s lots of things for boys.”

But Martin would not. Margot had already pocketed the top and paid her twopence over the counter. Martin put his twopence back into his pocket, and went out with a frown upon his face.

“Margot is a nasty pig!” he said; “she’s a selfish beast!”

And then Mr. Maitland took hold of his hand.

“Come along with me, Martin. I want to talk to you. I’ll bring him home, Janet, very soon.”

So Janet and Margot continued their walk, and Martin followed the rector into his garden, which was close by.

“I hope,” said Martin viciously, “that Margot won’t come to heaven with me. She’d quarrel *anywhere*; she’d disgrace herself before the angels! Margot—she always wants to be first—always. And I won’t come last. I hate being the last!”

“Yet our Lord said the last shall be first,” said the rector.

“Did He? When will they be first?”

“When His Kingdom comes. Now I’m going to show you a picture in my study. Come along.”

He led Martin up to the corner of his room, and pointed to a small portrait in oils of a very pretty little girl. She had golden curls, and was standing under a tree with a small spaniel at her feet.

“That was my little sister May. She was just a year younger than I was. One day, when she was seven years old and I was eight, we had a fierce quarrel over that little dog you see in the picture. His name was Dumps, and he was given to me by my father.

“But May liked to call him hers, and he was very fond of her; and I was a naughty, jealous boy, and when we were quarrelling over him I struck her, and when she ran crying into the house I took Dumps and locked him up in a shed, so that she could not get him.

“I went out for a ride on my pony with my father that afternoon. It rained a good deal, and May, I heard afterwards, had spent all her time searching the garden for Dumps. She got wet through, and no one noticed, and the next day she was very ill. In a week she was dead. How do you think I felt? How would you feel if Margot were to die before you made it up with her? I have never forgiven myself for that quarrel, and for being the cause of her death.”

Martin looked quite pale as he listened to this tragedy.

“I wouldn’t like Margot to die,” he said. “I hope she won’t. I’ll go home and kiss her. She forgets very quick.”

“I’ll take you back now. You told me you were learning to love the Lord Jesus. You have disappointed Him by fighting with Margot.”

“Yes,” said Martin, with a sigh; “but I feel all quiet inside now. I was a roaring lion before. It’s hard to be good *toujours*.”

“Ask God to help you.”

It was a very subdued Martin who climbed the nursery stairs a little later.

Margot was playing with her top, but she couldn't make it spin. She looked up, and then tried to stuff the top into her small pocket.

"You needn't do that," said Martin, marching up to her gravely. "Mr. Maitland has told me a story, and I'm not angry with you any more."

Margot smiled sweetly.

"Then make it spin, *cher* Martin. See, I will let you have it in your hand."

Peace was made. Their quarrels never lasted very long. But from now, Martin began to try to curb his temper when provoked, and Margot saw it and wondered. Yet during her Uncle Duncan's ten minutes' talk with her every day, she, like Martin, began to see that there was something better than always having one's own way, and both children were gentler with each other in consequence.

CHAPTER IV

Martin's Accident

Lessons were over. It was a lovely spring morning. The sun was shining out of a bright blue sky, and Martin and Margot were very happy. They danced out into the garden. They had one whole hour of play before them. It was only twelve o'clock, and the nursery dinner was never ready till a quarter-past one.

"Martin," said Margot importantly, "I have found a new path, here in the shrubbery; it leads to a locked door in a wall. Let us see what is on the other side. There is Tom—he will tell us."

Now Tom was a little afraid of the children. He was a good, hard-working boy, but rather stupid, and he could not say "No" to Margot. The consequence was that he had got into trouble more than once over her misdeeds.

Once he let her have the hose in the greenhouse. She had made him drag it out upon the lawn for her, and then she had suddenly turned it upon some visitors coming up the drive. And another day she had made him carry her in his wheelbarrow, with two shrieking ducks which she held firmly under each arm until they had reached the fountain where the goldfish were. She had plunged the ducks headlong in the water, and there was soon an end of the goldfish.

Tom was always blamed for helping her in her mischief. It seemed as if she could not keep out of it. Now she approached him with her head well on one side, and with one of her bewitching smiles.

"Tom dear, I love you so!"

Tom gave a grunt, looked furtively round, then began to shuffle off in the opposite direction. But he was not to escape. Margot was after him like lightning, and seized hold of his coat.

"Tom, you must help us—Martin and me, *vite!* We must get through that door in the wall—we *have* to do it—and it is locked. There is no key. Give it to us at once."

"Mr. Bardsley he have it, missy. 'Tis never opened, that there door ain't."

“What is on the other side?” demanded Martin.

“I dunno—it isn’t a proper garding—it leads to the river.”

“That is where we are going,” said Margot, a gleam of delight in her face. “You must get the key at once, Tom.”

Tom shook his head.

“Mr. Bardsley he’ll cuff my ears if I ask him!”

“Does he cuff your ears? What a cruel, wicked man! Then you shall help us to climb over the wall. You shall—*maintenant*, quickly.”

“Yes,” cried Martin; “we’ll get a ladder, and go over it. There’s one by that tree—run and get it, Tom!”

“You’d best not do it,” said Tom hesitatingly.

“Quick, quick!” cried Margot, “before Bardsley comes along. Dear Tom, you are so kind! It won’t take but one little minute.”

So Tom produced a ladder, and placed it against the red-brick wall, which was not a very high one. Margot and Martin climbed up like monkeys, and sat astride the wall at the top, looking down at the other side with great pleasure. There was a path, with overhanging bushes close to the wall, and a beautiful flowing river on the other side. How to get down was the difficulty; but Martin spied a stout young oak tree touching the wall a little farther on. He and Margot crawled along the top of their wall till they got to it, and then it was not very difficult to climb down by its aid. When they were safely on the path, Margot laughed gleefully.

“Oh, Martin, it is love-ly! We could catch the fish if we had fishing-sticks, and oh, look at the *jolie* yellow flowers!”

Yellow flags were by the side of the river. Martin began to gather them. Margot danced along excitedly. Presently they came to a locked gate and a board on which was painted: “Private Fishing—Trespassers will be prosecuted.”

“What long words!” said Margot. “Read them, Martin.”

Martin could not.

“I like not these big English words; but we can climb the gate, Margot. Come on!”

So over the gate they went. The same path edged the river, and then suddenly they came upon a clearing—a sloping lawn surrounded by trees

and a house in the distance. But neither of the children noticed the house. A dark-blue boat was moored to a small pier, and they eagerly made for it.

“Oh, *voilà*, Martin! Let us get in, and play we are sailing over the sea to France!”

In they jumped. The rocking of the boat did not frighten them. They had lived near a fishing-village in France, and had often been taken out for a row by some of the fishermen. And then, just as they were settling themselves comfortably in the stern, they heard some one shouting to them. In another moment a sturdy fair-haired boy had raced across the green lawn and down to the pier.

“Ho! Hands off my property! If you don’t make yourselves scarce, I’ll duck you in the river!”

The children scrambled out quicker than they had scrambled in, but when they saw the boy was very little bigger than themselves, they stood their ground.

“Who are you?” asked Martin, planting his legs well apart and thrusting his hands into his pockets.

“My name is Gregory Gordon, and that’s my father’s boat. You’re trespassers. What are you doing in our garden?”

“We’re looking round us,” said Margot, regarding him curiously. “We’ve come to live close to you, and if you’re a nice boy we will play with you.”

“Well, I never! And where do you come from?”

“From France. Ah! This England! We do not like it.”

Martin pointed to their uncle’s red-brick wall in the distance.

“We live there.”

“That’s where Mr. Fosberry lives.”

“He’s our uncle.”

There was a pause, the boys were eyeing each other doubtfully, but Margot advanced with one of her beguiling smiles.

“We’ll all be friends, Gregggy—that’s what I shall call you—and now we’ll get into the boat again *vite*, and you’ll row us down to the sea. We haven’t anybody to play with in our garden. *Cher* Uncle Duncan is too ill. And we just climbed over your gate and came; that’s what we did. O—oh! What a darling little puppy.”

A black-and-white puppy was dashing over the lawn, dragging a chair after him.

“Oh, it’s Nipper; he’s broken loose again!” cried Gregory. “Help me to catch him, quick!”

In the excitement of the chase, friendship was founded, and when Nipper was caught, Gregory invited the children to come and sit in the boat with him.

“Dad won’t let me go on the river alone. I’m home from school. I’ve had whooping-cough, but I’m better now a lot, and there’s no more infection—so I’ll be going back soon. Ever seen a water rat? There’s one. Her nest is under those rushes!”

Before long they were all talking away as if they were the greatest friends; and then they heard a big gong sound from the house.

“I must be going,” said Gregory; “that’s dinner.”

Martin and Margot looked at each other.

“It must be our dinner-time. Come along quick, Margot,” said Martin.

They took to their heels, climbed over the gate, and found their way back to the oak tree. But it was much more difficult to climb up than down, and they found it hard work. Margot accomplished the feat first, and reached the top of the wall in triumph; then Martin, in haste to follow her, was reckless, broke a branch, missed his footing, and fell with a hard thud upon the ground, doubling one of his feet under him as he did so. A yell of pain was the result.

“Oh, Margot, I’m nearly killed! I’ve smashed my foot to pieces!”

“But have you? Oh, Martin, my *chéri*, climb up to me and I’ll nurse it for you!”

“I can’t climb! I can’t move it! I must have the doctor quick,” cried Martin, striving not to give way to tears.

“I must tell all the peoples in the house. I will run quick and fetch them all!”

In great excitement Margot found her way back to the ladder, which still remained against the wall. And in a very few minutes she was running up to the house, uttering piercing cries as she went. Martin had not long to wait. Bardsley produced the key of the locked door and carried him into the house. When Janet saw him, she felt his foot, and gave her opinion:

“’Tis just a nasty wrench or twist, but no bones broken. Still, we’d best have the doctor.”

The doctor came, and said it was a sprain. Poor Martin was carried to his bed, and there he lay, wishing with all his heart that he had never climbed the wall. In a day or two he was carried into the nursery. At first Margot was most loving and attentive, waiting upon him with the greatest fervour; and then she got tired, and betook herself to her uncle.

“*Moi*, I am tired of Martin always lying on a sofa! With you, my uncle, it is different. Martin, he gets cross, and he talks about his foot so *beaucoup*, that I say very angry, ‘I wish your foot had never been born.’ And then he say furiously, ‘I’d rather have my foot than I’d have you for a sister,’ and I say, ‘Then I will be a sister no more, and I leave him.’ Tell me, my dear Uncle Duncan, would you speak to your Margot like that? You are always so sweet, so good, so kind to little girls. I love you always, but Martin no, not at all to-day. I dislike him much!”

“Poor Martin! I feel so sorry for him, Margot. He is longing to run about in the sunny garden amongst the birds and flowers; no wonder he is a little cross. You ought to be very, very kind to him. Think if you were lying there, would you like Martin to be cross to you and run away and leave you?”

“If he did,” Margot said earnestly, “I would demand Janet to carry me straight to you. I would have a couch close to your chair. You and me would be always together, and oh! the stories we would tell! My uncle, have you a story in your brain this morning?”

“If I tell you one, will you tell it to Martin to cheer him up?”

“Yes; I promise you true I will. I will fly to him immediately when it is over, but it must be a long one, a very long one!”

So Uncle Duncan began a thrilling story about a boy who ran away from school and was lost on the mountains in Wales, and Margot listened to his adventures and hairbreadth escapes with big eyes and bated breath.

When she left him at length to go up to her brother, she said half aloud to herself as she mounted the stairs:

“And that is what I shall do next. There will be a fuss over me—I will be lost!”

But she did not tell Martin of this sudden resolve of hers; she kept it to herself, and Martin listened to her story with the greatest interest. Margot

could always tell a story well; she acted it throughout. When she had finished, Martin said:

“I like to hear about boys. I wish that boy with the boat would come and see me.”

“Shall I go and ask him?” asked Margot.

“No—they scolded so. We are never to get over that wall again.”

“I will find another way into his house—write a letter to him, Martin—we will write at once—and ask him to tea. I will help you.”

A pencil and paper were procured, but the English words were hard to spell. However, this is what they produced between them:

“TO GREGGY,—Martin and Margot want you *beaucoup*. Martin is *malade* in the foot. Come upstairs and have tea *chez nous*. And come very quickly. We love to see you. We will talk and play.”

“And Tom shall take the letter to the house, and say it’s for the boy whose name is Greggy.”

Margot flew off with the bit of paper and coaxed Tom to take it, but as she was talking to him, her aunt came up.

“What is it, Margot? What are you wanting Tom to do?”

Margot did not speak, but Tom stupidly let the piece of paper fall to the ground, and Miss Fosberry picked it up and read it.

“Where did you meet Gregory Gordon?” she asked. “I suppose this is for him. Was he the boy you met by the riverside?”

“Why, yes,” cried Margot, hoping from her aunt’s face that she was not in a forbidding humour; “poor Martin he lie upstairs so lonely. The only thing to make his foot quite better is a boy. And Greggy would like to come and talk. Please let us have him quickly, Aunt Lydia.”

“But I can’t have you sending out invitations on your own,” said Miss Fosberry gravely. “I won’t have it. It’s not to be done, do you understand? There’s no reason why Gregory shouldn’t come to tea with you. We know his father very well, and should have asked him over before, only he was not safe from the whooping-cough. But you must ask me first always. Children who act on the sly like this are not to be trusted.”

“But I didn’t mean to be sly—I tell you, my aunt, we are frightened much at your cross face, and so we do not come near you. Now we will be

as sweet as *sucre* to you, if you ask this boy to come. Ah! you will do it, Aunt Lydia; we shall be happy and joyful if you do it!"

Margot took hold of her aunt's dress with both hands, and smiled her sweetest.

Miss Fosberry was more amused than vexed at this audacious speech.

"You shall have him to tea if he cares to come," she said; "but *I* send invitations, not you. Will you remember this?"

Margot nodded her curly head as she danced up and down.

"I will fly to Martin and tell him to be gay again, for a boy will be with him at tea-time."

"Not so fast," said her aunt. "He won't be here to-day. I will ask him to come to-morrow."

Margot's face fell.

"I like not to-morrows. I wish there were none of them. They are tiresome, weary things, and make me ache waiting for them. But I will go and tell Martin." She danced away. Miss Fosberry looked after her and shrugged her shoulders.

"A thorough volatile French child," she muttered to herself. "Why have they not more of their father's blood in their veins?"

But she went indoors then and there, and wrote a note to Gregory's father. The boy had no mother, and an old cousin kept house for his father. Gregory was at a boarding-school generally, and only came home for his holiday. He arrived the next day. Martin and Margot interested him extremely; he told his father they were the queerest kids he had ever seen!

Martin was still on the old nursery sofa. It was a wet afternoon, so Margot did the honours of the house, and was a most entertaining little hostess.

She had three games spread out on the nursery table—one called Tivoli, another a racecourse, and the third was a comic card game.

"You are our visitor, so we are going to be *très* kind and agreeable. You shall choose first what we shall play. And whichever person wins, see!—a big chocolate for him! Uncle Duncan, he gives me chocs often. And, after tea, he will like to see you. I take you to him, for he has a wonderful book for boys, about red foxes with bushy tails racing away from crowds and crowds of dogs and horses, and men in red coats tumbling over hedges. Oh!

it is a beautiful book. Now we'll begin a game *vite*, and I think if I were you I should choose the racecourse. And Martin can play. Shall we begin quickly?"

Gregory felt paralysed under Margot's tongue. Like a lamb he did everything she told him, and for half an hour before tea they played happily together. But tea unloosed Gregory's tongue. He began to talk of his school and schoolfellows, of the school games, of the pony he had; and how he went out hunting, and fishing, and shooting with his father. It was Martin's and Margot's turn to be impressed now.

"Ah!" cried Martin, "I would like to have a father like that, who would not frown and look at you through glasses, and turn away from you quite unhappy that you belonged to him, like as if you were ugly toads!"

"Yes," chimed in Margot; "our papa, he goes away the other side of the world to forget us. But you see papa is like Aunt Lydia, straight and tall and stiff. He cannot laugh. Poor Maman used to laugh at us and wave her hands to us when she drove away. 'Adieu, *mes enfants!*' she would cry. But papa would sit straight up and look before him like as if he did not see us! When I grow up I shall keep his house for him, and then he will like me. But you know, Gregory, some big people—they do not like *les enfants*."

When tea was over, Margot insisted upon taking Gregory downstairs to see her Uncle Duncan, and finally they had a thorough romp in the long passage outside the nursery. Martin had the door wide open and looked on wistfully. How he longed to race about again! How weary he was of lying still!

At last Gregory departed.

"You'll have to come to tea with me," he said; "I'll get dad to take us up the river in the boat. There's a jolly inn with swings in the garden where we have tea sometimes, and they give you a stunning lot of cake and jam."

Margot clapped her hands.

"Martin must make haste and get well," she said. "*Moi*, I am *triste* to play by myself, but — —"

Here she lowered her voice, and her eyes were full of secret mischief as she whispered the words:

"I have a little plot I have made. I will begin it the first fine day. I like not this English rain. It pours, and pours, and pours! And the mud—it gets over your shoes, and you wish to take them off, and you are slapped if you

do! No, I will not do my plot in the rain, the sun must shine, and the *bon Dieu* be smiling to see His happy world, and then, *moi*, I shall be smiling, too, for I shall be having things happen. Oh! wonderful things—adventures do you call them? Just till Martin is well enough to play with me again.”

Gregory looked at her with an amused grin.

“I’ll join you in your plot,” he said.

“No—*moi*—I must go lonely. It is so far better, for then one gets help.”

She shook her head wisely as she spoke, and Gregory began to have some respect for her.

“Don’t listen to Margot’s gabble,” said Martin. “She talks no end; but it’s chatter, and she doesn’t know what she says.”

Margot turned upon him sharply.

“*Tais toi!* You don’t know what is in my head. I have told nobody, and it has been there for many days since I told you Uncle Duncan’s story.”

Gregory said good-bye to them, and went off laughing. He thought Margot one of the gamest little creatures he had ever met.

CHAPTER V

Margot's Plan

The next day was very fine. The sun shone as the children liked to see it. Even Martin felt cheerful. Janet wheeled him out into the garden after lessons were over, and Margot was in high spirits. She had discovered a young puppy in the stables, and was allowed to bring it out upon the lawn. Martin looked on at the antics displayed by his sister and the pup with envy. And then a voice called to him from the library window, and Janet wheeled his chair up to it.

It was his Uncle Duncan who was sitting in his easy-chair close to the window.

"I want to see the little invalid," he said. "How is the ankle?"

"Oh, it's getting well so slowly," said Martin. "I feel I'm a very old man now. I quite forget the time when I used to run about."

"Will you come down and pay me a visit this afternoon? We shall be two old fogies together then; but we can talk, and I dare say the time will pass quicker if I can remember a story or two. I invite you to tea."

"Oh, thank you; and Margot, too?"

"Yes, certainly; but you can come down when she goes for her walk with Janet."

Martin's face brightened. Presently Margot came flying across the lawn to them. But she did not look pleased when she heard the proposal.

"Uncle Duncan belongs to me," she said, standing in front of Martin, with an angry frown. "I can be in his room always, whenever I like—you shan't be there when I'm not. I won't have it; no, I won't. There! I have said it!"

A stamp on the ground accompanied her words.

"You can't be there when you're out walking!" said Martin. "I shall be there, for Uncle Duncan has asked me, and he is going to tell me stories—stories that you haven't heard. You are a nasty pig of a toad, that is what you are!"

He began to get excited, and bobbed up and down in his chair. Then Margot turned tragically to her uncle. Throwing her small hands out, she exclaimed with piteous, quivering lips:

“*Moi!* I am *désolée!* I am weeping. My *cher* beautiful uncle, you love your little Margot. Her heart will be broken. Martin is *not* to be in my chair close to you. I love you much, Uncle Duncan; I think of you in the night. I shall be *très* wicked if you love me not. Martin is not your little boy. His friend is Mr. Maitland, the *Curé*. He shall not have my uncle, no, *never*. I shall cry, and weep and cry, till I’m sick. See! I’m beginning! Oh, my uncle, Martin is not to have you all to himself!”

Tears were streaming down her face. Martin looked at her with a disgusted expression.

“Cry-baby!” he said.

And then Uncle Duncan spoke, and he put his hand out of the window and caught hold of Margot’s.

“How dreadful,” he said, “to have such salt rain on this lovely day! We had quite enough water upon the earth yesterday, Margot.”

Margot stopped crying, and began to mop her face with her tiny handkerchief.

“I do not want to cry,” she said. “But I love you, Uncle Duncan!”

“My sweet, I know you do; but Martin has long dull days up in the nursery by himself, and he has been a good patient boy, Janet says. And so you must be glad for him to have a little change this afternoon; and when you come in from your walk you will find us waiting to welcome you to tea.”

Margot pulled her hand out of her uncle’s.

“Then I know what I’m going to do,” she said. “You love me no more, and you and Martin will cry, Uncle Duncan, when it comes to pass.”

She ran away from the window into the house, and did not come out into the garden again.

At dinner she was very talkative; but there was a quiet exultant look in her face that Martin noticed.

She seemed eager and anxious for her walk with Janet, and watched Martin being carried down to the library in silence. She did not accompany

him; but just before leaving the house with Janet she put her head in at the door, and waved her little white glove in the air.

“Adieu, mine uncle! Adieu, Martin. Never do you guess what is going to come!”

Then she marched down the drive with Janet.

“She’s a funny girl, isn’t she?” said Martin gravely, when the door had closed upon his sister. “She likes to talk very grand, but she’s a cry-baby, and she’s not at all a good girl, Uncle Duncan. She won’t let me talk to her about Jesus Christ. She even says sometimes she doesn’t want to be inside heaven. We shan’t be locked in tight there, and never come out again, shall we? That’s what Margot thinks we shall be.”

“Oh, you little people! How can we grown-ups understand your minds! Of course, there will be no locking up. Heaven is the most beautiful country! You could never get to the end of it.”

“That’s nice! Margot and I hate keys and locks. Do you know, Mère Annette never had one—no, not one. She had one bolt to her door, that was all, and it was always wide open in the daytime. Here Janet locks the jam and sugar in the cupboard, and there are locked doors and cupboards all over your house, and Bardsley locks up your glass flower-houses, and you have that locked door in the wall. Mr. Maitland is the only one who doesn’t like keys. He says he’ll have the church always open; it shan’t be locked up from anybody. I go in and look at the windows sometimes. It makes me sad and happy all in one. But Margot—she says she doesn’t like church. Do you think she’ll make God angry?”

“I think, my boy, I should leave Margot alone. She doesn’t talk to me like that. Do you think you’re a very good boy yourself? We often say things we don’t mean, and Margot is given to doing it.”

Martin flushed a deep red.

“No, I’m not good,” he said, with earnest conviction, “but I want to be. I’m a kind of servant, you know, and Christ is my Master. Mr. Maitland tells me so. And I’d like Margot to be a servant, too.”

“Poor little Margot! Don’t be hard on her! And don’t think yourself better than she is, for that is being proud, and our Master does not like His servants to be proud. You mustn’t turn into a prig. Be good, but don’t talk about it. Don’t tell Margot you are better than she is. I have heard some very angry words passing between you, and it isn’t all on Margot’s side.”

“No,” said Martin, with a droop to his lip; “we fight like dogs—Mère Annette used to say we did—and Margot runs away from me often, because I’m cross!”

“Well,” said Uncle Duncan cheerfully, “we all stumble a good deal as we travel along our road, but the great thing is to keep our eyes on the Master and our hands in His.”

“It is *such* a long way off for Him to stretch down,” said Martin, looking dreamily out of the window up into the sky.

“Not at all, my boy. Our Master is with us still, down amongst us, though we cannot see Him.”

Martin nodded, with a little smile.

“Yes, and when I’m in bed He comes so close I can almost touch Him; it makes my heart thump sometimes!”

Then, boylike, he suddenly changed the subject.

“Uncle Duncan, show me your book of foxes, will you?”

A hunting-book with beautiful coloured pictures was produced. Martin went into raptures over it. Then he said:

“I wish I had a father like Gregory. I should like to ride after foxes. Aunt Lydia does, doesn’t she?”

“Yes, but there’s plenty of time yet. What you and Margot shall have very soon is a pony between you.”

Martin beamed with delight.

“Oh, shall we, Uncle Duncan? Oh, how *charmante*! Oh, I wish Margot was here! How she would scream to hear it!”

He could talk of nothing else for the rest of the afternoon, and began to be impatient for Margot’s return home. But the time came, and neither she nor Janet appeared. Tea was brought in, but when half-past five arrived, and no Margot, Uncle Duncan insisted upon Martin beginning. Then suddenly Aunt Lydia appeared. She had just come in from a ride.

“Has Margot been in here? Janet is in such a state—says she has lost her. So ridiculous, as if the child could be lost! She went to the village shop for some odds and ends and left Margot outside. When she came out she was nowhere to be found, and the servants all say she has not been near the house.”

“Oh, she’ll turn up,” said Uncle Duncan reassuringly. “Send Tom and Bardsley round the village. She’s off on a game of her own, I expect.”

“I knew she meant something,” said Martin excitedly. “Oh, I wish I was with her! I don’t have any fun now!”

“Have you any idea where she has gone?” asked his aunt sharply; “it is very naughty of her to leave Janet in that way.”

“Oh, she might have gone anywhere—*anywhere!*” cried Martin, waving his hands in the air. “Margot never thinks—she just goes. She wants to get to the moon one day if she can, but I tell her that is impossible! And we both mean to try to get back to France one day. We talk many times over that!”

Aunt Lydia looked worried, but her brother smiled.

“Don’t get anxious yet,” he said; “she’s a daring little soul, but I’m sure she’ll find her way home before it is dark.”

After a time Martin was taken up to the nursery; he heard a great commotion going on in the house, and thought it was a pity Margot could not hear the fuss being made about her absence. Notoriety of any kind was bliss to Margot. She would like to have been the centre of the world. But the long light evening came to an end at last, and darkness set in. Still no Margot. Martin was put to bed, and, in spite of his concern and excitement about his sister, he fell into a sound sleep, not waking till the next morning. The first thing he did was to open his door and peep into Margot’s room. No; there was her little bed, white and still; her little nightdress and pink dressing-gown hung upon her chair, her pink slippers by the side of them.

Janet was up and about. She turned sharply round when she heard Martin’s door open.

“Go back to bed at once,” she said crossly. “You’ve no right to be standing on that foot of yours.”

Martin was thoroughly frightened now. He set up a wail.

“Margot’s dead! I know she is. Her bed looks like it. She’s drowned in the river. I think she went in a boat to get to France, and she tipped over. Oh, Margot’s dead, and I called her a pig of a toad yesterday!” He began to cry and sob bitterly.

Janet seemed to take no notice of him, but rushed out of the room herself.

“I don’t believe any of us have thought of the river!” she gasped, as she made her way down to the servants’ hall.

And poor Martin lay sobbing on his bed, quite certain now that he would never see his sister alive again. Only the week before Tom had shown them a drowned cat. They had shuddered at the sight of the stiff, cold form. Would Margot look like that, he thought, and he sobbed wildly at the very idea.

Then suddenly he grew calm.

“I believe Jesus knows where she is. He must. He’s in the world and He can see us all. I’ll speak to Him.” He knelt up in his bed and shut his eyes and folded his hands. “Please, will you bring Margot home. Don’t let her be dead; don’t let her be *tout à fait* dead. Bring her alive; oh, please, please, do it, and make her come back quick. Mr. Maitland says you listen to us always. Do, dear Christ, find her. Amen.”

He lay still after this, half exhausted with his crying, half soothed by the realisation that his prayer had been heard.

All that day the search for the missing child continued. Aunt Lydia rode off on her big horse, making inquiries everywhere. Uncle Duncan in the library was busy with his telephone talking to all the police in the neighbourhood. The river banks were searched, but no signs of Margot were found in that direction, and it was only Martin who still preserved the terror of it in his heart. And then when another long summer day began to wane, a day which seemed perfectly endless to poor little Martin, a message suddenly came through the telephone to Uncle Duncan.

Martin was in his room. He heard his uncle say in a startled way:

“Yes. Missing since yesterday. Yes. Thank you very much. Nothing the matter with her? Thank you. Shall I send a car? We would like her home to-night.”

And then Martin cried out:

“Is she found, Uncle Duncan? Is it Margot? Oh, tell me quick.” His uncle nodded to him, then went on speaking through the telephone.

“Of course, if you think it best. Very good of you. Perhaps it would be better—I am sure she is in good hands. Then we will expect her to-morrow morning. It is an immense relief to our minds.” He rang off and turned to Martin.

“Yes; it is Margot all right. But she is a long way from here. I don’t know any of the particulars, dear boy. We must wait. She is with a very kind

lady. Run and tell the servants. Ring that bell first. Oh, I keep forgetting you are like myself! We're two very helpless folk, aren't we? I shall have to use the 'phone for some time now to let every one know she is found."

"I'll tell Janet. I can hop along quite quick now with my stick," said Martin, and he left his uncle at once. Hobbling up the stairs, he sent his shrill shout through the house:

"*Attendez!* Margot is found. She's alive and well. She's coming home tomorrow morning!"

There was rejoicing everywhere. Margot might be mischievous and troublesome and very wilful, but she certainly had the faculty of winning hearts wherever she went.

She had laid no plans, but circumstances had favoured her. When Janet went into the shop she stayed outside. She meant to hide or run away; she was not sure which she would do first. But her quick eyes spied an old countryman selling vegetables in his pony cart. He was a man who liked a bit of gossip as he went along. The children had often met him during their walks, and always stopped to speak to him. Now he was in a cottage talking hard to the owner of it.

Margot peeped into the cart, then in the twinkling of a moment she was in it, and under the seat, pulling some empty potato sacks over her. Mike came out, having finished his round, got up into his cart, and drove away, and naughty Margot had the joy of hearing Janet come out of the shop and call her name out loudly as she looked everywhere for her.

But Margot soon got very stiff and uncomfortable in her cramped position. It is a wonder that Mike did not hear her fidgeting; but he was rather deaf, and his springless cart made a great noise as it rattled and bumped along the road.

About three miles out he stopped at an inn. Here he went in to have a drink, and that was Margot's opportunity for getting out and walking away into a green field. There was a path across it, and buttercups were making sunshine on each side of it.

Margot skipped along very happily. Nobody saw her. It was a quiet time in the afternoon, and few people were about. She soon came to a stile, then climbed over it and crossed another field, then came out into a narrow lane with high green banks on either side and a steep hill in front of her. Nothing dismayed, she trotted on. Her great idea was to get as far away from her home as possible, and to do it as quickly as she could.

She did not make much of the hill, but when she gained the top, she came to a white gate at the side leading into a field. She climbed up on this and sat on the top bar, looking about her with pleased interest. It was a pretty scene below her: a wooded valley dotted over with thatched farmhouses and cottages, and some blue hills in the distance, which, in the clear afternoon's sunshine, looked nearer than they were.

Margot nodded her head towards them with a smile. "That's the mountains," she said to herself, "where I must be lost. I'd better be quick and get to them."

She climbed down from the gate, and walked along the lane. It was a country by-lane, with very little traffic along it. So far she had not met a single person. By and by she flagged. She was getting tired, and the hills did not seem any nearer. She sat down on a bit of grass and began to consider. Then she heard the sound of wheels, and a boy driving a baker's cart came behind her and passed.

"Give me a ride!" she cried out to the boy.

"Where be you goin'?" he demanded.

"Over there," said Margot, nodding her head in front of her.

He stopped his cart.

"You be too little to be out all this way," he said. "You live in Gomerton, I reckon?"

Margot did not answer. She sat back in the cart, delighted to rest. When, in an hour's time, they came to a biggish village, the baker's boy put her down, taking it for granted that she lived there, and she did not undeceive him. When he had driven off out of sight, Margot felt very forlorn. She trudged through the village, and began to want her tea. When she had passed all the houses, she found herself on a broad high road, and presently she was overtaken again by a trap. This time it was an old lady driving in a low jingle. She looked sharply at Margot as she passed her, then pulled up. Her fat, white pony began to munch at the grass on the side of the road, and the old lady spoke to Margot, with a smile.

"Now I wonder what you are doing here," she said pleasantly. "You look as if you ought to have a nurse with you."

Margot glanced up with her big pathetic eyes.

"I'm getting lost," she said. "*Mais moi*—it is very tired I am!"

“You look tired, poor mite. Jump in, and I will drive you on your way.”

Margot got into the jingle without a word.

“I’m on my way to the mountains,” she said. “I shall be very pleased if you drive me there—the mountains—I do believe they’re walking away from me.”

“Yes,” said the old lady, applying her whip very gently to her pony’s back; “I don’t think we shall be able to catch them up to-night—we’d better not try.”

Margot felt too tired to object.

“*Moi*,” she said sadly, “I cannot do it like I wished. It takes so many, many steps to be lost. But I want things to happen—and you it is that have happened now—so *Madame, s’il vous plait*, go on with me anywhere. And make nice things to happen to me.”

The old lady looked at the child in a puzzled kind of way.

“Where do you come from, dear? Tell me that.”

But Margot shook her head and, tired though she was, a smile flickered across her face.

“I’m lost, *tout à fait* lost! Like the boy on the mountains.”

Nothing would induce her to give the lady her name. She relapsed into stubborn silence, and presently her head began to nod and her eyes to close. In a few minutes Margot was fast asleep. Her new friend produced a cushion, tucked it under her head, and drove on.

CHAPTER VI

In a Strange House

The old lady felt glad she had picked up the little runaway. Margot's dainty white frock and sun-hat, her little, finely cut face, and soft accents, told her that she was not a cottager's child, and had evidently wandered far from her home.

When Margot woke up from a long sleep she found herself being carried into a low white house with a thatched roof; and a young lady was hurrying down the stairs into the small hall.

"Why, Granny, what is it now? Another sick dog? No—it's a child! What a woman you are for picking up things."

She laughed as she spoke, a happy ringing laugh, and the old servant, who had Margot in her arms, put her down on her feet.

"She's half asleep, Miss Enid. Poor lamb, she looks very forlorn."

Margot looked up and round.

"*Moi*, I like this house. Does it give tea when one is hungry?"

"She's a lost child," said the old lady; "and she won't tell me her name, or where she comes from. But we'll certainly give her tea."

"It's ready and waiting. Come along, Granny."

Enid took hold of Margot with one hand and her Granny with the other.

Then they came into a pretty room with a tea-table in the big window. There was a parrot in the corner of the room who called out when they came in:

"Here's a fuss! Here's a fuss! Bless my soul! Here's a fuss!"

Margot looked at him in horror. She had never heard a parrot speak before.

"Is it the devil he has in him makes him speak?" she asked in a breathless whisper. "Mère Annette used to know a man who had a raven, and he spoke; and Annette said it was a devil in him made him do it."

“Oh no,” said the old lady, smiling; “my Polly has no devil in him, though he is a naughty bird at times. Sometimes he takes his bread and milk and throws it all out on the carpet through the bars of his cage. Now, little one, sit next to me. We will soon stop you from feeling hungry.”

Margot began to recover her spirits. She was given white scones and butter and honey, and then some cake.

“Ah!” she cried presently. “Martin will be having no honey nor cake—Janet she says sweets are not good for *les enfants*.”

“And what does your mother think?” asked the old lady craftily.

“Oh, Maman is with *le bon Dieu*.”

“You are a French little girl,” said Enid. “When did you come to England? Did your father bring you?”

Margot looked horrified.

“Papa! Oh no, he not bring us anywhere. He sweep us away with his hand—so!”

She stretched out her small hand, and looked over her shoulder as if in disgust. “We are *canaille* to papa, *les gamins*. He love us not, he get far away from us.”

“This is growing interesting, Granny,” said Enid, smiling. “You and I are fresh-comers here or we should soon guess her whereabouts.”

“I wonder why you wanted to get lost,” said the old lady.

Margot frowned.

“I forget; but *c’est moi* who is loved by my kind uncle. Not Martin. I sit, and sit, and sit with him. Martin he is always busy elsewhere. And”—here she smiled, and mischievous twinkles came to her eyes—“it is a grand thing to be lost; peoples they cry, and seek, and wish they had been kinder and gooder to poor little Margot! And the boy Peter, he was found at last by a beautiful big dog, and he was hanging by one foot over the cliff. I did want to hang over a cliff, too, in the mountain, but it would not come to me.”

“Poor little Margot!” said Enid, laughing; “and what is your uncle doing now, I wonder? Isn’t he expecting his little Margot home?”

Margot looked grave.

“I did not tell you my name. I am lost. I won’t be found yet. May I go to bed in this dear little house?”

“I think you may,” said the old lady. “We will certainly not turn you out of doors till we find your friends.”

“Here’s a fuss!” croaked Polly again. “Put your head in a bag!”

Margot did not laugh; she looked at him with awe. After tea she seemed so tired and sleepy that Enid took her straight upstairs and put her to bed in her own bedroom. Mary, the old servant, was making up a little bed there.

“You are going to sleep with me to-night,” said Enid, “and I will have to lend you one of my nightdresses. What a big thing it is, when it has to fit such a little body.”

They were very merry over the undressing. When it came to prayer-time, Margot looked grave.

“Does God know where I am?” she asked. “Does He live in this house? Can He hear me?”

“Oh yes, indeed He does.”

Margot knelt down and folded her hands. Then she looked up.

“I hope God won’t tell Martin where I am. Martin—he speaks his own words to the Christ. He knows Him better than I do. *Mais moi*, I say what Janet tells me.” She seemed to be considering. “Perhaps I’d better not say prayers to-night. *Le bon Dieu* may think I’ve been naughty.”

“I certainly think you have been,” said Enid.

“No, no—I am lost. I am a poor little lost girl. Everybody must be sorry.”

“If you tell us your uncle’s name, we will take you home at once.”

“But no, I am not ready to go home yet. I shall be very happy to sleep in a new little bed. And perhaps for a poor little lost girl you have some kisses to give her in bed to stop her tears that may come running out of her eyes.”

“Yes,” said Enid; “I think I can promise those. Now, will you say your prayers?”

Then Margot shut her eyes and said:

“God bless papa and keep him safe over the sea, and God bless Aunt Lydia and Uncle Duncan and all our kind friends and relations. And make me a good girl, and keep me safe to-night. And forgive me, for Christ’s sake. Amen.”

The Lord's Prayer followed, and she got up from her knees with one of her sweetest smiles.

"And now I'll get into this dear little bed, and will you tell your angel to come and sit by me. Martin and me—we have an angel who sits by us. He takes turns, and flaps his wings and frightens the bogies away when they come to frighten us. But he's with Martin to-night, and I 'spect he'll be wondering where I am."

Enid bent over her and kissed her.

"Yes; you shall have an angel to take care of you. God never leaves any little children without an angel to watch over them. Good-night, darling."

"Granny, her aunt is called 'Lydia' and her uncle 'Duncan.' Now, who can they be? If only we knew our neighbours better, it would be a clue. Had we better communicate with the police?"

"Yes, but it is too late to-night. To-morrow I will drive into town to do it. If only we had a telephone!"

"I wish we could keep her," said Enid; "she's a darling child, but a very naughty one. She seems quite unrepentant and indifferent to the anxiety she must have given every one. And she will not tell her name!"

The next morning Enid was wakened about six o'clock by a slight tickling on her forehead. She opened her eyes. Seated on the rail at the bottom of her bed was Margot in her big nightdress. In her hand was a sunshade which she had found in a corner of the room. A bootlace also found on the dressing-table was tied to the end of it; with both hands extended she had been able to tickle Enid's forehead with the bootlace.

She smiled wickedly when she met Enid's astonished gaze.

"Just to wake you up gently—I am fishing *pour déjeuner!*"

"Get into bed, you imp. You will catch cold. Or come into mine."

With a little bound, Margot was in the bed with Enid, and snuggled her little warm body against hers with a sigh of comfort.

"Do you love little Margot? Will you be very kind to her, and not scold, and let her play in your little house all the day?"

"Not all the day," said Enid. "What are your poor uncle and aunt doing? Don't they love you and want you back again? Aren't you sorry for their anxiety about you?"

“Aunt Lydia, she be very angry, I expect. She be walking up and down stairs with her mouth tight shut. But Uncle Duncan—he will be very much sorry, for he does love Margot, and *moi*—I love him much.”

“Won’t you tell me his name?”

Margot shut her lips tightly.

“I am not wanting home yet!” she said, and Enid could get no more out of her.

She chattered all the time she was being dressed, and then went down to breakfast with a radiant face. After it was over, she went out in the garden. Granny seemed very troubled when breakfast was over. She had found her pony lame, and the boy who attended it had never turned up that morning. Enid said she would walk into the town in the afternoon, but she had a lot of household duties to do first, as Mary was single handed. The town was six miles away, and Granny said she could not do it.

“I must. I will get a lift back. The child is well and happy enough. It is her friends who will be anxious. Well, it will only be a few hours later.”

But it was rather late in the afternoon before Enid started, and Granny and Margot had their tea together. Margot was perfectly happy chattering away.

“I have no Granny,” she said. “I like Grannies. Have you any little children anywhere?”

“I have a little grandchild just your age,” said Granny. “She is out in India, and her name is Dora Speedwell. She has two names, not one like you.”

“Oh, but I have another.”

“Have you? I don’t think you have, or you would have told me.”

Like a flash Margot cried:

“It’s Margot Fosberry.”

“Ah!” said Granny.

She was silent a minute.

“I have heard of your uncle. He is a great invalid, is he not?”

“He’s a very good saint. That’s what he is.”

“Poor Uncle Duncan, and poor little Martin! What a pity you don’t want to make them happy by going home to them.”

“Then I will,” cried Margot suddenly. “Martin he be feeling very lonely, *pauvre garçon!* He say, ‘Where is my Margot!’ And when I go home, they will run and fling their arms round me, and cry tears of joy. All the house will run to meet me. And I will cry too—of plenty—and there will be a fuss—like your Polly says, and it will be *bon*—to be lost and found again. When shall I go home? This very minute? I think I’d better go *vite!*”

“No. We must wait now till Enid comes back. I hope she will have let your uncle know about you.”

Enid came home just about Margot’s bedtime.

“It’s all right,” she said. “I found the police had been notified that a child was lost. Mr. Duncan Fosberry is her uncle. Don’t you remember a Miss Fosberry called on us about two months ago?”

Granny told her how she had discovered Margot’s surname.

“And she wants to go back now,” she said.

“Well, I got upon the ’phone and spoke to her uncle, and he’s agreed that she had better stop with us to-night, and come home to-morrow. He is sending his car to fetch her.”

Margot did not hear this conversation. Enid informed her she was going to be taken home the next morning.

“I am going to give you into your aunt’s hands to be kissed or whipped—whichever she thinks proper.”

Margot looked up with big eyes.

“*Moi*—I will like best to be given to my uncle. His hands are always kind.”

She was very docile for the rest of her stay. But her tongue never stopped; she evidently thought herself quite a heroine. When breakfast was over the next day, her uncle’s car arrived. Dale, the chauffeur, seemed very glad to see her.

“Ah, Miss Margot, you’ve given us all a scare!”

Margot looked quite proud of herself.

“Have you cried about me?” she demanded. “I have been lost for all yesterday and two long nights. Are they all crying for me?”

He did not answer.

Her parting with Granny was most affectionate.

“Thank you, Madame, for letting your pony drive me here. I am so sorry I did not get on the mountains to be lost, but you’ve been very kind to Margot. And will you ask Martin and me one other day to come to tea with you? We do like going out to tea much. And Martin he is very good boy. He says he wants to be good to please the Christ Who died for him. *Moi*, I do not feel like that. It was so very, very long ago it happened. And I’m not wanting to be good always like Martin. But I love you, dear Madame. You are so kind and pretty. And I would like to come and see you again. And you do love Margot a teeny bit, *n’est-ce pas? Au revoir*. I will come again!” She drove off, waving and kissing her hands to the old lady, who stood in the doorway to watch her departure.

Enid tried to improve the occasion as they drove along the country lanes.

“You are not very sorry for what you have done. Perhaps it would have been better if Granny had not picked you up. What would have happened if the dark night had come on, and you were alone on the road, tired out, with no bed to sleep upon, and no tea?”

Margot shook her head, and her face grew pathetic at once.

“Ah, the *pauvre* little Margot! When I grew too tired to walk any more, I should have sat down in the middle of the road and screamed, and screamed, and *screamed!* Then somebody would come running and take me into their house, and they would be very sad for little Margot, and kiss and comfort her and feed her well.”

“But,” objected Enid, “there might have been nobody near enough to hear you screaming, nor any house for miles. You might have screamed yourself hoarse, and no one would have found you. And sometimes in the night stray horses get out of the field and trot down the lanes, and one might have come along and trodden upon you or kicked you.”

“And what else?” demanded Margot, looking interested.

“And a storm of rain and thunder and lightning might have burst upon you, and you had only a thin white frock on. You would have got soaking wet, and perhaps would have got rheumatism and had awful pains over your body, and been very, very ill!”

“What a lot might have happened to me,” said Margot regretfully, “if only I had gone on longer!”

Enid gave her up in despair. Then she said suddenly:

“Does Martin think only of himself, as you do?”

“How?”

“Why, Margot’s little heart only contains one person, and that person is fat and very swelled, and fills every corner of it.”

“Who?”

“Why, Margot herself.”

“How can I fill my own heart?” asked Margot.

“You do. You never say to yourself, ‘Will this make Uncle Duncan happy? Or will this please Martin? Or will Aunt Lydia like this?’ You always say and think, ‘Will this make Margot happy? Will this please Margot? Will Margot like this?’”

“Is that filling your heart?”

“Yes. You have no room or time to think of anybody but yourself.”

“But, *moi!*—I am not fat and swelled.”

“Yes, you are puffed out with your own importance. You think you are very important; that everybody must like you and make a fuss over you.”

Margot had never before been spoken to so plainly about her selfishness. She looked at Enid with a frown upon her small face.

“Are you cross with me?” she asked.

“Not a bit,” said Enid, laughing. “I am talking to you for your good, as Granny used to talk to me when I was a small child. I have been giving you a little sermon. Now it is finished. Look over the hedge there, and see those little foals kicking up their heels and playing.”

Margot’s thoughts were turned in another direction at once; and then, a short time later, they drove up to Uncle Duncan’s house.

Margot began to get excited then. She bobbed up and down in her seat.

“Will Martin be at the window? Do they know I’m coming back? Will Janet be running downstairs to meet me?”

But when they stopped before the big hall door, there seemed nobody about, and only Nelson, the old butler, came to open it.

He looked at Margot and smiled.

“Eh, you’ve given us all a lot of anxiety, missy!” he said.

“I’ll go to Uncle Duncan!” cried Margot.

She was running off without a word of thanks to Enid, when her aunt appeared, and Margot was brought instantly to a standstill.

“Go up to the nursery at once, Margot,” Miss Fosberry said sternly; “I am very much ashamed of you.” Then she turned to Enid and begged her to come indoors.

“Indeed, I must be getting home, thank you. Don’t be too hard on your small niece!”

And Enid watched the rather solitary-looking little figure mounting the stairs so reluctantly. Miss Fosberry looked after Margot and smiled.

“Ah, she has stolen your heart, of course! But she is a naughty child to have run away like this. And she ought to be made aware of it.”

“Granny wants to see more of her. May she and her brother come over to tea one day?”

“Thank you. They will be delighted. I don’t profess to understand children—these are different to the ordinary English run of them, and Margot is like her mother, very, *very* French!”

“That makes her fascinating to me; but I have scolded her well. She knows she has done wrong.”

Enid drove away, and Miss Fosberry went straight to her brother.

CHAPTER VII

The Return Home

Meanwhile Margot reached the nursery in a very dejected state of mind. She had run away once from Annette, and the whole village came out to meet her upon her return. She had pictured the whole house turning out to meet her; she expected her aunt to say, "Ah, little Margot. How sorry I am that I was ever cross to you! How glad I am to have you home again!" And now she was being sent up to the nursery in disgrace. But when she opened the door, Martin started up from his sofa with a yell of delight, and Janet, who was sitting by the window sewing, got up and took her into her arms.

"Oh, you naughty little thing, how thankful I am that you are safe!"

Brother and sister embraced rapturously.

"I have cried quarts," Martin said. "I thought you were drowned and dead! Oh, Margot, why did you do it?"

"It was fun," said Margot.

"It wasn't fun for me," said Martin.

"Nor for me," said Janet. "I shall never let you out of my sight again, never!"

Margot sat down close to Martin, and began to tell him her adventures.

"You see, *mon ami*," she said, "I didn't do what I wanted. Do you remember Peter lost on the mountains? That's what I meant to be. *Mais moi*—I could not do it—the nasty mountains, they ran away from me. Did Uncle Duncan cry for poor lost little Margot?"

"No," said Martin; "he did nothing but talk to policemen through his telephone."

"Policemen!" cried Margot.

"Yes; he told them to look for you."

"And they never did! I never saw one policeman. *Moi*, I should have liked twenty hundred policemen coming along the roads to carry me home! Oh, I wish they had found me!"

Then she began to tell him about the old lady and her parrot, and about Enid. And when she was tired of talking, she asked Janet if she might go and see her uncle.

“No; your aunt said you were to stay up here till she sent for you.”

“Is Uncle Duncan angry?”

“He ought to be,” said Janet. “But he’s such a dear, good gentleman — —”

“Yes, he’s the bestest man in the world,” cried Margot. “He loves me *toujours*. He isn’t angry with his little Margot.”

She was not allowed to go down to the library till after tea that day. And when she went in, her aunt told her she was not to stay more than ten minutes.

“Your uncle has been ill, and his heart is weak. He mustn’t talk much.”

“Did I make him ill?”

“No,” said Miss Fosberry truthfully. “He has these attacks; but you made him very anxious.”

Margot went into the room on tiptoe, and stole up to her uncle’s couch so softly that he did not see her till she was close to him.

And then his arm went round her and held her close.

“My little Margot!”

Margot kissed him softly.

“I am sorry, Uncle Duncan—there! I have said it! I will not say it to nobody else! But I am sorry if I made you unhappy. I was only trying to be like Peter in your story. Don’t you remember? That lovely story of Peter lost in the mountains? He ran away from school. And I wanted to get to the mountains too, but they was too far for me.”

She was stroking his hair with one small hand as she spoke.

“You haven’t left off loving your little Margot, have you?” she asked coaxingly. “*Moi*—I’ve thought of you all the time. If I lived with you in this room always, Uncle Duncan, I should never want to lose myself, never, never!”

“Ah!” said Uncle Duncan, with a little sigh; “so I was to blame, was I, Margot? I must take care what kind of stories I tell you in future. Will you promise me you will never do such a thing again?”

“Is it a promise I must keep?” asked Margot.

“Promises are *always* kept by ladies and gentlemen!” said Uncle Duncan gravely.

“I promise then. I’ll never lose myself again. It wasn’t half so nice as I thought it would be.”

Then she tucked her hand into her uncle’s.

“Let me sing you a little song to make you better,” she said. “I don’t like you to feel ill. Just a little teeny whisper song.”

“That will be very nice.”

Miss Fosberry, coming in to fetch Margot away, stood in the doorway, puzzled by the many sides to her small niece’s character.

She was sitting with her head against her uncle’s shoulder, and her hands clasped in his, and she was crooning softly a pretty little French song. Her eyes were shut, and her face was perfectly angelic.

She opened her eyes when she heard her aunt’s step across the floor.

“I’m singing to make him well,” she said.

“You’re a dear little soother,” said her uncle.

“Her time is up,” Miss Fosberry said gravely. “I hope she has told you she is sorry for her behaviour.”

“Hush!” said Margot, putting her finger to her lip. “Uncle Duncan is not to be asturbed. He is *très fatigué*. Good-night, *chéri!*”

She kissed him, and trotted after her aunt out of the room.

“Uncle Duncan and *moi*—we understand each other much. And we loves each other. And I’m always sorry to *him!*”

With this parting shot she danced away upstairs.

Poor Uncle Duncan was ill for several days, but Margot generally managed to creep into his room for a moment or two. She would steal in and out on tiptoe when no one expected her. Miss Hale found her very subdued during lesson-time.

“*Moi*, I am *désolée* when my uncle is ill,” Margot said. “And I thought it would be a happy house when I was found after being lost. But nobody cares for Margot. They never smiled to see her back—only Uncle Duncan; he smiled and was pleased.”

“And so did I, Margot,” cried Martin. “I was awfully glad to see you back. I told you I was.”

Margot looked at him with a shadow in her eyes.

“Yes, but you’re a little boy. I like the grown-up people to be pleased when they see me.”

“We grown-up people,” said Miss Hale, “can’t be pleased when children give trouble and anxiety by being naughty. It was naughty to run away and be lost, Margot.”

“I won’t do it again,” said Margot resolutely. “It wasn’t fun enough.”

But the next time she saw Gregory she talked very grandly of her escapade. He was rather impressed by her enterprise.

“I wouldn’t do it myself,” he said, “but I couldn’t very well in this part of the country, for I know it all so well. When you hunt like I do, you can’t lose yourself anywhere.”

“We’re going to have a pony soon,” said Martin. “Uncle Duncan is going to give one to us.”

“He’d better give you one each,” said Gregory, “or you’ll always be quarrelling as to who is to ride him.”

And that is what Uncle Duncan thought, and when he was well again he looked about for two Shetland ponies, and at last one day a beautiful little pair came up the drive. One was brown and the other was white. The brown one was called Pixie and the white one called Queenie.

The children were enchanted. The old coachman gave them lessons in riding directly after breakfast, before Miss Hale’s arrival, and in a very short time they could keep their seats with ease.

Even their Aunt Lydia took an interest in their riding; she was so fond of horses that she could not help it, and it was a proud day for Martin when she told him he could come for a ride with her.

She did not ask Margot, and the little girl felt aggrieved.

“I can’t manage two of you,” Aunt Lydia said, “and Martin rides better than you. He is a boy, and can look after himself.”

Margot comforted herself by spending the time the others were out with her uncle.

Miss Fosberry took Martin over to a farm on the top of one of the hills which Margot had tried to reach. And as they rode together she began to talk to him about his father.

“I heard from him this week, and he asks after you both. I think you ought to write to him sometimes.”

“But,” said Martin, “papa he does not really like us, you know.”

“Say ‘father,’ not ‘papa.’ English children say ‘father’ and ‘mother.’ And that is not true about your father. He is most anxious you should grow up to be a credit to him.”

“What is a credit?”

“It is to be worthy of him—to be a boy a father would be proud of!”

Martin held up his head and squared his shoulders.

“I should like my father to be proud of me,” he said. “I wonder what I could do to make him proud.”

“You can be obedient, and try to learn to behave as a little gentleman should.”

“I don’t take off my shoes and stockings now,” said Martin thoughtfully. “Will papa—I mean father—will he ever come back here? Why does he live such a long way off?”

“Your father likes to travel—he always did—and when your mother died he asked us to have you, whilst he went to Hong-Kong with a friend of his. That is away in China. He may come home next spring, and, if he does, you must show him what good children you can be.”

“I suppose he’s something like God. He likes us to be good always. But he isn’t quite so kind, is he? He used to shrug his shoulders at us, and one day he said to Maman, ‘I am ’shamed that they belong to us!’ Annette cried hard when he spoke so. I try to be good now to please Christ. I can’t forget He died for me. I think I’d rather please Him than my father, because He loves me much. He must have, you know, or else He would not have died.”

Miss Fosberry made no answer. Martin went on:

“Margot and me, we are getting quite English, aren’t we? I say no French words now, hardly ever. If Margot spoke slowly, she would remember not to, but she’s in such hurry always that they slip out. Do we please you better now, Aunt Lydia?”

“You’re improving,” said his aunt, smiling. “If you would remember to keep your hands quite still when you are talking, you would be more English still.”

Martin had been gesticulating a little with his right hand. He gave a sigh.

“There’s so many things we must and mustn’t do! Is it wicked to be French?”

“Certainly not. Look at your reins, and don’t chatter so. You are holding them too loosely.”

In spite of much advice from his aunt, Martin enjoyed his ride. He was rather stiff after it, for it was a long time to be in the saddle, but he told Margot that Aunt Lydia was very nice to ride with.

“She showed me where the foxes went, and how they got away, and she talked to me about our father, Margot, and we are not to call him papa any more, and we are to write letters to him. And it seems he writes letters to her and asks about us.”

“Oh, let us write a letter to him at once!” cried Margot. “You write it, Martin, and I will tell you what to say. We will write most of it in French.”

“No; Aunt Lydia does not like anything French. It must be quite English.”

“Ah! Well, *commencez*, Martin, *vite!*”

So Martin got a piece of paper and pencil, and he wrote very slowly at Margot’s dictation, altering and improving it according to his own discretion.

“DEAR FATHER,—We are quite well, and we hope you are. We love Uncle Duncan—Margot very much indeed. Aunt Lydia takes me out riding. We like Janet, and Tom, and Gregory Gordon. Margot ran away. I hurt my foot. We do lessons. Are you proud of us yet? We would like you to write us a letter. We are trying to be English. We like France best because it shines better there. One day we go back we hope, but we are afraid it is not good to belong to France. So we now say adieu.

“MARTIN and MARGOT.

“We hope you will like us better when you see us next.”

Janet was consulted as to how their letter was to get to their father.

“Give it to your Aunt Lydia. She will have it stamped and posted for you.”

“But we must stamp it and post it ourselves,” cried Margot. “That is the best part of it.”

“You must ask your aunt about it.”

“No; I will *not*,” said Margot, stamping her foot. “I shall take it to Uncle Duncan.”

Seizing the letter, she ran down to the library and breathlessly put it into her uncle’s hand.

“You can read it. Nobody else,” she said.

He smiled as he unfolded the sheet of paper and saw the crooked, uneven letters.

“A very nice letter, indeed,” was his verdict. “Your father will be pleased. Now, if you bring me my stamp-box from the writing-table, you shall pick out a stamp and stick it on.”

This was done, and then Margot went out into the hall with it, and put it herself into the post-bag. She went back to the nursery with great content.

“I wonder when we shall have the answer,” she said. “Papa will be astonished when he gets it.”

“We must call him father, not papa,” Martin told her. “Aunt Lydia says papa is only what French children say now, and we are not to move our hands about, Margot. We must keep them quite still in our pockets when we talk. Aunt Lydia says father will like to see us quite English when he comes back.”

“He needn’t come back,” said Margot indifferently. “*Moi*—I am not needing him. And I like France better than England. People don’t laugh here; they’re all so *triste* and grave.”

A short time after this the children were invited to go to tea with Granny and Enid. Enid came over to fetch them in the pony trap. Martin’s foot was quite well by this time, and he and Margot packed themselves into the little jingle in the highest spirits.

“I have told Martin all about you and Polly and Granny and your little house,” said Margot importantly; “but you are my particular friends, is it not so?”

“But I shall be friends, too, when I have been to tea,” argued Martin. “Margot—she always will make herself more loved than me.”

“We shall know and like you both,” said Enid.

They chattered and laughed with her without restraint. Enid could be full of fun when she liked, and Martin thought her the nicest grown-up girl he had ever seen.

When they got to the house, Polly welcomed them warmly. Her cage was in the open window.

“Here we are again!” she screamed. “Here’s a fuss! Bless me! Here’s a fuss! Put the kettle on and let’s have tea!”

“Oh, how clever!” cried Martin. “She knows all about us.”

“It seems so,” said Enid, laughing; “but she hasn’t many sentences which she can say—only, they always seem to fit.”

Then Granny came out and kissed them both.

“What a dear little couple!” she said. “I am so glad to know your brother, Margot.”

“Martin is gooder than me,” said Margot, “but he gets very cross sometimes, and so do I.”

There was nothing to make them cross during their visit. They had a delicious tea out in the garden, under an apple tree, and afterwards Enid played cricket with them in a field at the bottom of the garden. When they were tired of the game they came back and sat upon the lawn by the flowers, and Enid told them a wonderful fairy story, which held them spellbound.

In the cool of the evening Enid drove them home again.

“*Moi*,” said Margot on her way home, “I am very pleased I went to be lost. I found you and Granny. Martin and I—we would never have known you at all if I hadn’t run away.”

“Oh, I expect we should have met before long,” said Enid. “We should have come over to see your aunt, and then I should have run up to the nursery to see you. I always go up to a nursery when I call. It is the most beautiful room in the world to me.”

“Is it?” asked Martin. “Margot and I like to get away from it often. In France we could run all over the house, and in and out, as we liked; but at Aunt Lydia’s we have to stay in the nursery all day long. We do lessons with

Miss Hale there, and then Janet comes and sits there the rest of the day. Janet—well, we do like her—but she orders us, and we have to be always washing our hands so many times in the day. In France we did not wash our hands so much!”

“Ah no!” cried Margot; “but we had not our ponies in France, nor a Uncle Duncan. Miss Enid, if you saw my uncle, you would love him at once!”

“I expect I should; and as for the ponies, I think you are very lucky little children to have them.”

They parted from her with much affection.

“We like much to have people to play with us like you,” said Martin. “And will you come one day soon up to our nursery?”

“To tea!” cried Margot, clapping her hands. “We will ask you to tea, and Greggry can come, too; and, if Aunt Lydia is out, we will play hide-and-seek all over the house.”

“But Aunt Lydia must ask you to come,” said Martin, “for we—we are not allowed to write invitations.”

Enid waved her hand to them as she drove off again.

“*Au revoir!*” she cried, and the children shouted back to her:

“*Au revoir bientôt!*”

Then they went upstairs to the nursery, well pleased with their outing.

CHAPTER VIII

Visiting a Sick Man

One afternoon when Martin and Margot were out walking with Janet, Mr. Maitland stopped to have a chat with them.

“I’m off to see a sick man,” he said, “who lives a mile away across the fields. Would you like to come with me, Martin? He’s a friend of yours. Old Mike Bennett.”

“Oh, I shall love to come. May I, Janet?”

“If Mr. Maitland will bring you home,” said Janet.

“But I’m not a baby,” objected Martin.

“I’ll bring him home all right, Janet,” said Mr. Maitland, with a smile.

“Mike is a friend of mine, too,” said Margot. “I got into his cart when I tried to be lost. He gives us pears and plums which are just beginning to be bad!”

“Old villain!” muttered Janet.

“He’s very ill with bronchitis,” said Mr. Maitland, smiling, “so you must forgive him, Janet. He got wet through last week on a rainy day, and never changed his clothes. Come along, Martin.”

Margot looked after her brother wistfully.

“Martin never minds leaving me if Mr. Maitland calls him—it is not kind of him.”

“You can’t be always together,” said Janet. “Come along with me, and I’ll take you to see a dear little baby that has just been born. It’s Mrs. Jones’ sixth, and your aunt has sent me to find out if she has all she wants.”

A baby was a great delight to Margot. She forgot all about Martin, and followed Janet willingly.

Martin was very happy as he trotted across the fields with Mr. Maitland. They talked of rabbits and pheasants and other dwellers in the woods, and of birds and of their different calls. Mr. Maitland was a born naturalist, and he could tell Martin many interesting things. When they reached old Mike’s

cottage, his wife came downstairs from the bedroom with her apron to her eyes.

“Eh, dearie me,” she said when she saw the rector, “doctor’s been here, and says my Mike be goin’ from me—says he won’t give him a week. ’Tis hard to lose him.”

“I am sorry to hear that. Shall I go up and see him? Tell him I’m here, will you?”

“And me, too,” said Martin; “Mike and me like each other very much.”

“Mike he says to-day, ‘I b’ain’t goin’ to see no parson.’ I did tell him as I’d sent word to you. But maybe he’ll change his mind when he knows that you’ve comed a purpose to see him!”

She stumbled up the narrow stairs. They heard the sick man’s voice in a low rumble, and then she appeared again.

“Please, sir, he be just contrary; says he’d like to see the young gent, but nobody else.”

Mr. Maitland smiled.

“I’m not in a hurry, Mrs. Bennett. Now, Martin, you go up. We must humour the sick.”

“But,” said Martin, with round eyes, “I’ve never seen any one ill. Is he going to die?”

Mrs. Bennett began to cry.

“He’s not long for this world. How shall I live without ’im!”

“Go up, my boy; don’t be afraid,” said the rector.

So Martin climbed the stairs slowly, and found his way into the low-roofed bedroom.

Mike lay in bed, but everything was spotlessly clean, and the old man looked very calm and peaceful as he turned his eyes upon his small visitor.

“Oh, Mike, I’m so sorry you’re ill,” said Martin, coming up to the bedside and laying his hand softly on the old brown wrinkled hand that was grasping the coloured quilt.

“Ay,” said Mike weakly, “I be cruel bad, sure enough. I don’t know how I can bear much more of it.”

Martin looked at him in silence; then suddenly light flashed into his eyes as a thought darted into his mind.

“Oh, Mike, you won’t have much more to bear. Shall I tell you a secret? You’re going to heaven next week, perhaps. Won’t that be *lovely!*”

Mike looked at his little visitor with frightened, restless eyes; then a grim smile came to his lips.

“I don’t see the loveliness,” he muttered.

“If you do,” said Martin in an eager, breathless way, “will you take a message for me—a very special message? Oh, do say you will!”

“What’s it about?”

“When you see Jesus,” said Martin softly, in an awestruck whisper, “will you give Him my love, and say that I thank Him very much for dying for me? It would be so nice to send a message to Him, and you will really see Him, and I shall know that He has really got a message from me, quite different to saying my prayers to Him. Will you remember, dear Mike?”

“No,” groaned the old man; “if I dies, I shan’t see nobody. I’m not a religious man—never was.”

“Oh, but you must see Jesus. You can’t help it. Why, Mike, Mr. Maitland says the door of heaven is wide open for us all, and He’s inside waiting for us. He died on purpose that the door should be put wide open, and no one shut out. Didn’t He die for you as well as for me?”

“Not that I knows of. I be not fit for heaven, and I b’ain’t goin’ there. I be not a religious man, and I won’t have the parson a-scolidin’ me for not havin’ been to church.”

“But, Mike, I think you must be mistook—because Jesus did die on purpose that you might go to heaven. He’ll be expecting you next week. I know He will.”

A softer expression came over the old man’s face.

“He won’t expeck an old sinner like me!”

“He will. Mr. Maitland says He came down here to die for every sinner in the world. Do give Him my message, Mike.”

“I don’t mean to die,” the old man said in a quavering voice.

“It isn’t a horrid thing to die,” said Martin consolingly; “you just get out of your body and leave it behind. I’d like to do it very much myself.”

The old man began to cough, and his wife heard him and came up. She told Martin he had better go, and Martin gravely shook hands with the old man.

“I won’t say good-bye,” he said, “nor adieu, but *au revoir*. That’s what we say in France when we mean to meet again.”

Then he went downstairs. Mr. Maitland and he went away together.

“I shall come again to-morrow,” Mr. Maitland said a little sadly. “Some people are frightened of parsons, Martin; they think it means they’re going to die.”

“But I told Mike he was going to heaven next week,” said Martin.

“Upon my word! That was straight, but not quite wise. What else did you tell him?”

Martin repeated the conversation as well as he could.

“Ah, well,” said Mr. Maitland, “you did better than I should have done, perhaps. We will pray for poor Mike that he may see that his Saviour is ready to receive him.”

“Mr. Maitland, why doesn’t every one go to heaven? They can, can’t they?”

“Yes; they can, Martin, if they go in at the right gate by the cross.”

“Margot isn’t a bit sure about it,” went on Martin, with a puzzled frown. “And Janet says wicked people don’t go to heaven, and, of course, Margot and I have been wicked over and over—but I do try to be good.”

“Yes; we are all wicked,” said Mr. Maitland, “but if we try to be good and ask God to help us, He will forgive us all our sins and mistakes for Jesus Christ’s sake. Don’t worry your little head any more, Martin. Look at the rooks going home to bed. How they chatter, and what a fuss they make!”

Martin’s grave face lightened. He was a happy irresponsible boy again. Mr. Maitland knew when to stop his busy brain from working and puzzling over some of life’s problems.

But Martin did not forget old Mike.

He heard the next day that Mr. Maitland had been sent for at Mike’s own request, and two days afterwards Janet told them that he was dead. Margot was much impressed. Martin and she had a long talk over it.

“What is he doing now?” she asked Martin, for she had a sublime belief in her brother’s powers concerning unseen things.

“He’s giving my message, I hope. And I expect Jesus is talking to him, and telling him how glad He is to see him.”

“Is he singing hymns? Mike didn’t come to sing hymns in church, you know, not never!”

“The angels will help him if he doesn’t know how.”

“You’re sure he’d got through the door all right?”

“Why shouldn’t he?”

“*Moi*—I shouldn’t like to be him. I’m rather afraid of God, Martin; He’s so big, and I’m so little. He stretches all over the world, you know. Just think how big He must be.”

“Jesus is just like a man,” said Martin thoughtfully. “You wouldn’t be afraid of Him. He took His body up to heaven, Margot. And nobody is afraid in heaven; you’re never anything that you don’t like being there. There’s no dark, and no goblins, and nothing to hurt. I should like to go to heaven to see it all very much.”

Then Margot caught hold of him with both hands.

“I shan’t let you go, Martin; you’re not to go. I won’t have you leave me. You don’t love poor little Margot like you used to do. You go about with Mr. Maitland, and talk about heaven always. *Moi*—I want to be here when papa comes back, and I shall walk up to him and say, ‘See your *enfants*, how polite and grand they are! Will you be kind to us now and love us?’ And he will say, ‘Yes, I will, with all my heart.’ And then we will run to his arms to be kissed, and he will see us ride on our ponies, and he will say, ‘*Bravo, mes enfants!*’”

She was dancing up and down as she spoke; then she returned to her former pathos.

“And how can you talk of going to heaven, Martin, when such things will happen! You would spoil it all.”

“I’m not going yet,” said Martin; “but father isn’t coming back for *years!*”

He asked Mr. Maitland anxiously about Mike when he next met that gentleman.

“Did he want to go when you saw him?”

“I hope and trust he was ready, my boy. You and I were both allowed to make things clearer to him. He sent for me of his own accord, because of what you told him. And I had one or two nice talks and some prayer with him before he died. But it is very sad, Martin, when people do not know their Lord as their Saviour and Friend. It does not do to wait till you are ill to get acquainted with Him.”

Martin did not understand this. He smiled contentedly.

“I only hope he wasn’t too happy when he got there to remember my message. But I expect he wouldn’t forget it.”

Mr. Maitland did not ask what the message was, and Martin did not enlighten him.

As the summer passed, Uncle Duncan seemed to get a little stronger, and was wheeled out into the garden in a comfortable bath-chair. This was a great joy to Margot, who always accompanied him when she could get a chance. There was a favourite spot in the garden where Mr. Fosberry would have his chair placed, and there he would sit for an hour or two with his books. This was under an acacia tree overlooking the water-lily pond. The grass was very smooth, and the shade nice and cool on a hot day. Beyond the pond was a view of the distant valleys and hills. Margot loved sitting with him here. She used to talk to him of water fairies sailing along the pond in the water-lilies, which were their boats. And one day he made her a wonderful little reed pipe out of some rushes that grew near.

One afternoon Margot came to nursery tea with a face full of excitement and mystery.

“What are you doing?” demanded Martin suspiciously.

“Eating bread and butter,” said Margot, opening her mouth saucily.

“Ah, it’s your head doing something wicked, I know,” was her brother’s retort.

“Then, now, it isn’t! But I know something you don’t, so there.”

“I don’t care.”

“It’s something very important—and very nice—and you couldn’t guess, so it’s no good your trying.”

“I don’t mean to try.”

But Martin was curious, and Margot was as anxious to tell as he was to hear. So presently she said:

“I will tell you the secret, Martin, but *c’est moi* who has to do with it. It is Uncle Duncan’s birthday very soon.”

“When?”

“In three days after to-day.”

“The day after the day after to-morrow,” said Martin reflectively. “That will be Saturday. Miss Hale never comes on Saturday; if she did, we could ask for a holiday.”

“I’m going to give him a present,” said Margot impressively.

“And so will I,” cried Martin joyfully. “I have saved up a whole shilling, and he shall have it all—for he’s very kind to give us each fourpence a week.”

“It’s for *me* to give him a present, not you,” said Margot scornfully. “I am his little Margot, and I have a shilling and a penny, and I know what I shall buy him, and I shan’t tell you.”

“Where will you buy it?”

“In the big town where Aunt Lydia goes sometimes.”

“I shall buy him something, too,” said Martin firmly.

“You are a pig!” screamed Margot, getting very red in the face. “You shan’t give my uncle a present like me. I want to be the only one. I shall be! I am his little girl; you are nothing—nothing at all. My Uncle Duncan he would not care if you go to heaven to-morrow! He only loves me. And *moi*, I will be the only one to give him a birthday present. I will not let you buy him anything—not one little penny toy. Oh, I am *désolée*—see my tears! You are a cruel boy to spoil my joy!”

Tears streamed down her cheeks. Janet, who had been reading a newspaper, interfered.

“What dreadful children you are for quarrelling! Why are you making your sister cry, Master Martin?”

“She’s a spoilt *poupée*, a cry-baby! I shall give Uncle Duncan a present if I like. I won’t give in to her, Janet. I won’t!”

Martin was getting angry and excited now. Janet had difficulty in understanding what it was all about. When she was told, she delivered

judgment without any hesitation.

“Of course, you can both give your uncle a birthday present. It’s only right you should do it. Think of what he has given you! Those beautiful little ponies, and all your clothes and food and comforts.”

“*Le bon Dieu* gives us those,” said Martin quickly.

“He is *my* Uncle Duncan, not Martin’s,” sobbed Margot.

“Now, stop crying at once, and if you’re good children, I’ll ask your aunt to let us all go into town to-morrow afternoon to shop. And we will have tea there, and you will both love that. And perhaps—who knows—your aunt may let us drive in by the car.”

Margot’s tears dried up instantly.

“Oh, dear Janet, how lovely! And shall we have tea in a shop? And buns and tarts! Oh, ask Aunt Lydia *vite*—quickly.”

She and Martin forgot their quarrel in the joyful prospects before them.

Aunt Lydia’s permission was got, and Dale was told to take them in the car and be ready to start the next afternoon at two o’clock. The town was five miles off. For the rest of that day Martin and Margot were wild with excitement. Towns were a novelty to them. Shops of all kinds were bliss. Before they went to bed that night Margot told Martin that she would let him buy a *little* present for her uncle.

“But it must not be so big as mine, and I must give mine first, and you must come last. Now, I have said it. It *must* be!”

Martin succumbed. He always did in the end. But when he said his prayers aloud that night, he added in a loud voice, so that Margot might hear:

“And help me to be good to Margot, for it’s *very* good of me to let her always be first; but please, God, will you remember that it says in the Bible that one day the last shall be first? Please don’t forget me then, and put Margot right at the very back!”

Janet shook her head at him as he got up from his knees.

“Those are not the kind of prayers God likes to listen to, and He won’t answer them neither, Master Martin.”

“Oh, Mr. Maitland told me the last would be first. And I’m always last with Margot. You’re always saying, ‘Little ladies first.’ And if I’m never to

be first here, I do hope I shall be first in heaven.”

“That’s a very naughty wish,” said Janet, “and I’m fair ashamed of you to speak it out in your prayers.”

Martin did not answer, but when he was in bed his tender conscience pricked him. He got out of his bed and knelt down reverently.

“Please, God, I take back what I said. If You don’t like it, I won’t say it again. But could You be so very kind as to make Margot want to be last just once or twice?—it wouldn’t hurt her, and I should enjoy *beaucoup* being first for a change. And I don’t want to be first when I get to heaven. I’ll just go in the place You choose for me! For Jesus’s sake. Amen.”

And then Martin felt happy again, and got into bed and went fast asleep.

CHAPTER IX

Uncle Duncan's Birthday

At two o'clock the next afternoon two very happy children climbed into the big car with Janet. Uncle Duncan waved to them from his window. Margot had taken leave of him with suppressed importance in her tone.

"It is business we are going to do," she said to him; "and something secret, too. *Moi*—I thought of it first, and Martin has copied me, and it is very kind of me to let him do the same as me; but you will remember, dear Uncle Duncan, that it is your little Margot who thought of it all herself. When you see it, you will know."

The car sped swiftly through the leafy lanes.

Martin sat back in his seat with a contented smile.

"If father were to see us now, wouldn't he be proud!" he said.

Janet rebuked him promptly.

"Your father isn't proud in that kind of way. No little gentleman ought to be proud of what he *has*; only of what he *does*."

Martin thought of this.

"But father did not like to see us running barelegged, and driving the cows home; he said we were like *gamins*. Now we're behaving like English children. He wouldn't call us *gamins* now."

Margot did not sit as still as Martin. She waved and kissed her hands excitedly to every one who passed them on the road.

They seemed to get to the town in no time; but the shops amazed and delighted the children. The car was put up at an inn called the "Black Eagle," and then Janet walked up the High Street very slowly so that they might all look into every shop window.

Margot had started out with the determination to buy her uncle some sealing-wax. She knew how fast she got through his, for it was a favourite occupation of hers to seal and stamp old envelopes. But now, when she saw the shops, her volatile mind turned from one thing to another, with lightning rapidity. Unfortunately her money did not equal her aspirations.

An inkstand in a window, consisting of a stork which obligingly opened his body in half to produce some ink, was most entrancing; but the price was fifteen shillings. A velvet smoking-cap would cost eleven shillings and sixpence, a tobacco-box five shillings and sixpence.

Martin seized upon a jig-saw puzzle. It cost one shilling, and he bought it promptly.

“Perhaps he’ll let me help him put it together one day,” he said. Margot happily did not hear this hope expressed or she would have opposed it with all her strength. She flitted from toy shop to book shop, from ironmonger to saddlers, and even the drapers came in for her attention. But silk handkerchiefs and scarves and ties all cost more than one shilling and one penny. Janet suggested a pipe; but Margot would have none of it.

“It’s so dull, and so’s the sealing-wax. I want to give him something he’s never had in his life before.”

At last she stopped outside a china shop. There were some china animals on a shelf, and amongst them a china monkey. He was sitting down and holding his long tail in one hand, and was gazing at it in admiration. Margot determined she would have him.

“He is such a dear little monkey. He will sit on Uncle Duncan’s table and make him laugh.” So in she went and found he could be bought for one shilling. Then she had one penny to spare, which she was determined to spend, and finally she went into a sweet shop and bought a cracker. This being done, she and Martin gave themselves up to the delight of the town. Everybody who passed them was interesting—especially children of their own age. Janet had a lot of shopping to do, so they had time to look about them.

“Oh,” Margot cried, “I would like to buy and buy and buy! How happy grown-up people must be to buy just what they like!”

“Next time I get money—a lot of it,” said Martin, “I shall come in, and buy myself an air-gun.”

“And I shall buy one of those little shops where you have the sweets,” said Margot. They were standing outside a draper’s shop as they talked, and a little boy with a ragged coat and bare feet came up to them.

“Buy a paper!” he screamed in their ears.

“What is your paper about?” asked Margot, with interest.

He grinned at her.

“Lunnon is blown up by the French!” he said.

“Oh, Martin, what a pity we haven’t a penny,” said Margot.

Martin was looking at the boy very earnestly.

“Haven’t you a coat without holes?” he asked.

“Would you like to giv’ me ’un?” mocked the boy.

“Yes, I will,” was Martin’s astonishing reply. He was wearing a little covert coat much against his will; but it was a dull, grey day, and Janet had thought he might feel cold driving in the car. In an instant he had slipped out of it and handed it to the boy.

“It’s too big for me, and I should think you would get into it very easy.”

The boy hesitated, then seized the coat, rolled it up in a bundle under his arm, and raced down the street. In another moment he was out of sight.

Martin drew himself up with a sigh of relief, but with a little pride at the same time.

Margot stared at him in astonishment.

“What did you do that for? Janet will scold.”

“It’s because my name is Martin,” said Martin, with a grand air. “St. Martin was always giving away his things. He cut his coat in two to give to a beggar one day; he said they would halve it together. But I couldn’t cut my coat, I had no knife. Mr. Maitland told me a lot about St. Martin. I mean to do the things he did, if I can.”

Then he added:

“And I feel so nice and cool without it. I was boiling with heat.”

Janet had finished her shopping, and now joined them.

She was horrified when she heard what had occurred, and scolded Martin furiously.

“How dare you give away that beautiful coat, you naughty boy! Your aunt gave such a lot of money for it, and you’ve only worn it twice. It didn’t belong to you. It was bought with your aunt’s money. It’s downright dishonest, and you deserve to be well whipped! Come to the police station at once. I’ll put them on the track of that young rascal.”

Martin said nothing. He did not seem at all disturbed, and he and Margot rather enjoyed their visit to the police station. But when Janet told her story,

the constable in charge shook his head and smiled.

“It isn’t a question of theft, my good woman. You say the young gentleman gave it to him.”

“But he had no right to give it, and the young scamp knew it—else he wouldn’t have made off so quick.”

“You’re a very naughty boy,” said Margot, turning to Martin.

“I’m trying to be a saint,” he said. “Saints can do what other people can’t. St. Martin dressed up a beggar in his church robes once—in church it was! And people who don’t understand always pussycute saints; and they bear it, and never say nothing at all—just like I’m doing to Janet.”

“You aren’t a saint, and you never will be!” said Margot scornfully; then she said in a wheedling tone, “Tell me the story of the beggar being dressed up in church.”

But Janet had had her say, and took them both by the hand and led them out into the street again. By the time they reached the shops Janet was tired of scolding Martin; and when they found a confectioner’s, and sat down to have their tea, she was almost her pleasant self again. The children loved it all. They had scones and butter and a plate of fancy cakes with iced sugar on them, and some raspberries and cream, and cups of sweet tea. They chattered and laughed, and Margot was so excited that she burst out into voluble French:

“C’est charmant n’est-ce pas? Oh, il me fait heureux! Martin, nous retournerons ici un autre jour!”

“Be English, you stupid!” said Martin. He did not like the attention of other people in the tea-room, who were gazing at Margot as if she were some foreign curiosity. So Margot subsided a little, and left off speaking French.

When tea was over, they went back to the “Black Eagle.” Dale brought the car round at once. Their afternoon was over; but they hugged their parcels, and arrived home in the highest spirits. Martin forgot all about his coat, though he had been indignant with Janet for folding a rug round his shoulders when he got into the car. But, when Janet got home, she very soon told his aunt, and a message came to summon him to the library.

“Me too,” said Margot. “I want to see Uncle Duncan.”

“No, not to-night,” said Janet firmly. “It is nearly bedtime. Master Martin is to go down alone.”

So Martin slowly descended the stairs with knitted brows. He was wondering if his defence was as sound as he at first considered it.

When he opened the library door he found his Aunt Lydia sitting by the side of her brother's couch.

"Come here, Martin," she said sharply. "What possessed you to give your coat away to-day? Don't you know it was a wrong thing to do?"

"I didn't know it till Janet said so. I don't think I know it now. St. Martin often used to do it, and God was very pleased with him, so I thought it couldn't be wrong."

"Who has been telling you about St. Martin?" asked his uncle, with a smile.

"Mr. Maitland."

"You are never to do such a thing again," said his aunt; "never! A grown-up person has a right to give away his clothes. A little boy has no right. He neither makes them nor pays for them. They are not his to give away."

"It doesn't seem fair," said Martin, looking at his aunt with thoughtful, interested eyes. "Supposing I am not alive when I grow up, I shall never be able to give poor beggars anything; and why shouldn't boys be able to do what the Bible tells them, as well as grown-up people?"

"Children must obey, not argue!" said his aunt.

Then Uncle Duncan laid his hand gently on her arm.

"I don't know, Lydia. I think he may see the reasonableness of it. Come here, little man. Let us talk the matter out. Your aunt is quite right. Until you buy your clothes with your own money you have no right to give them away, for it means that your aunt and I will have to give you new ones to replace them, and so it is we who give them to the beggars—not you. And we have a right to be consulted before that is done. But you are quite wrong about your not being able to give to the poor. You have money; save it up if you like, and spend it on them. You want to follow in the steps of St. Martin, I expect, don't you?"

"I'm his namesake," said Martin, a little proudly.

"Well, do you see our point of view? Shall I explain it again?"

"I think I understand," said Martin; "but I didn't stop to think. And I didn't like my overcoat. It was making me too hot. In France we were not wrapped up over and over so! I do not like it."

“It was a case of one for the boy, and two for yourself!” said his uncle. Martin hung his head; then he raised it again and squared his shoulders.

“I am sorry. And I will take the punishment if you will tell me what it is!”

His aunt looked at her brother, then gave a short laugh.

“Oh, there will be no punishment given you from this room. I don’t think your uncle believes in punishment at all.”

“Punishments are to make us remember,” said Uncle Duncan. “Do you think you need one, Martin? Will you remember not to give any of your clothes away again without first consulting your aunt or me?”

“Yes, I won’t forget,” said Martin firmly. “I promise not to; but do you think”—here he dived into his pocket and brought out a much soiled and very ragged pocket-handkerchief—“do you think if any boy wanted this I could give it to him? Janet said it was past mending or washing, and Tom cut one of his fingers the other day, and I let him have a bit of it to wind round it. Was that wrong?”

“Not if Janet said it was worthless,” said his aunt impatiently. “Now run along; you haven’t had anything of a scolding from us, but I expect Janet gave that to you.”

“Yes,” said Martin calmly. “She scolds, but we don’t mind. Mère Annette used to scold, and scold, and shake, and scream, and then she kissed after it was over. It doesn’t hurt at all—not me. I think of other things while it goes on.”

He left the room.

“They’re *most* difficult children; acknowledge they are,” Miss Fosberry said, with a frown.

“No; they are original and intelligent, and Martin is thoughtful beyond his years. Treat him like a reasonable being, Lydia. Small people have a good deal of common sense, and appreciate sensible talk.”

Martin went upstairs quicker than he went down.

“It’s all right,” he told his sister. “We can give away anything that we buy with our own money—or make—nothing else. Uncle Duncan always understands. Aunt Lydia tried to be cross; but she wasn’t *very*. And I’m never going to do it again.”

Margot looked out of the window thoughtfully.

“Can’t we give away our bread and butter if we don’t want to eat it ourselves? I gave some to the birds yesterday.”

“We’ll ask Janet.”

“When I grow big,” said Margot, “I shall buy a shop all for myself. And I shall play with everything in it. Oh, Martin, don’t you wish the day after to-morrow would come!”

“Yes,” replied Martin; “I’m longing to put my puzzle together. I hope Uncle Duncan will ask me to help him.”

Margot took her monkey to bed with her; she placed him under her pillow and talked to him as if he were alive.

“You’re going to be given to the goodest person in the world; you’ll belong to him, like I do, and you’ll be with him all day long. I wish I could be! You must be very good, and listen to all he says, for he will tell such beautiful stories; and when he and me talk together you can listen to me too. Monkeys must be seen and not heard. Poor little thing. They borned you without a tongue, but your ears are big enough for anything, and your tail. I wonder what the good of a tail is? Now we must go to sleep, and I’ll give you a kiss.”

The next morning, when Miss Hale came to lessons, she was shown the presents for Uncle Duncan. She was quite interested, and told Martin and Margot of a little rhyme that she and her brothers and sisters used to sing outside the door of the one whose birthday it was.

Martin and Margot begged her to repeat it to them, and then they insisted upon learning it by heart.

“*Moi,*” said Margot; “I will sing it to my uncle, and if Martin is a good boy he may sing with me.”

Miss Hale went to the piano and played a well-known hymn tune that suited the words, and Margot and Martin lifted up their voices and sang with all their hearts:

“Oh! happy was the day when you
Were sent from heaven above.
And happy may your days still be,
With us, and all you love.

We wish you many happy years
Of life, and health and rest.
We pray that God from heaven above
May give you of His best.

And many may your birthdays be,
And long may be your life;
And when it's finished may you be
Away from care and strife!”

“It is lovely!” cried Margot, clapping her hands. “We will sing it outside his door early in the morning.”

She and Martin thought that day would never come to an end, but it did at last, and in due time Uncle Duncan's birthday dawned.

Martin and Margot were up early. They told Janet their plan, and she had nothing to say against it. So at eight o'clock, outside Uncle Duncan's bedroom door, the two shrill, clear, childish voices sang their little song. Their Aunt Lydia came to the door of her room and listened, but said nothing. Morris, Uncle Duncan's valet, came to the door.

“The master he's sent you his best thanks, and will be ready to see you at ten o'clock in the library.”

“Couldn't we see him now?” asked Margot.

“No, it's impossible.”

So they retraced their steps to the nursery. Arrived there, Margot had a brilliant inspiration.

“Oh, Martin, we will get Bardsley to give us some flowers for Uncle Duncan's room—thousands of them. We will scatter them over his chair and carpet. He shall come into his room full of flowers. Let us come—at once. We will not wait a minute!”

“But you will,” said Janet firmly; “you are to come to breakfast at once. Afterwards you can go into the garden.”

“It is always so!” pouted Margot. “When we want to go out, we must stay in—when we want to stay in, we must go out.”

“Be good on your uncle’s birthday,” said Janet; and Margot had not another word to say.

They scampered out into the garden very soon, and when Bardsley heard that it was the “master’s” birthday he filled their arms with flowers, and carried a big basket himself to the open windows of the library. The children were now absolutely happy. Margot covered her uncle’s chair with roses, and then strewed the floor all round with loose flowers.

Martin said it was a pity not to put them in water; then, with an ecstatic gleam in her eye, Margot said:

“We’ll get some water-cans and sprinkle the carpet with water, or the hose, Martin, the hose! What fun! Don’t let Bardsley know. We’ll send Tom for the hose!”

Happily this mad scheme was frustrated by the appearance of Morris on the scene. He had come to get the room ready for his master, and sent the children out very sharply.

“’Tis great nonsense—all these here flowers—a nice mess to be swept up presently—but go off both of you. You’ll be sent for when the master is ready to see you.”

Martin and Margot retired. At ten o’clock they were waiting outside the door, each with a precious parcel.

And then came the happy moment when Margot was admitted. She made Martin promise to wait for five minutes by the clock in the hall before he presented his gift.

Her radiantly important face as she wished her uncle very many happy returns of the day made him smile, and then her gift was placed in his hand.

Uncle Duncan was a long time unwrapping the paper.

“I do love a surprise,” he said; “and it feels so interesting.”

When at last the china monkey came to light, he really looked as pleased as Margot.

“What a ripping little fellow! He will be company for me, Margot, when I am quite alone. How very kind of you to choose me such a delightful present. Bought with your own money, too! Well, I can’t express my thanks properly, but I must give you a kiss for him. What a charming birthday I am

having! And as to my room, why, I really feel as if I am being married! It's like a bridal room!"

Then Margot began to consider where her monkey had better be placed.

"I want him to see you all day," she said.

At last he was put on the writing-table by the inkstand. It was a movable table, and was generally by Uncle Duncan's side.

Meanwhile Martin was stamping impatiently outside. He was called in, and his present was much appreciated.

"I want you to like it as much as Margot's monkey," Martin said, with wistfulness in his tone; "and perhaps if you find it difficult you'll let me help you."

"We'll all do it together this afternoon, shall we?" said Uncle Duncan, after he had thanked them warmly for his second present. "I expect you to tea, remember. It is to be my tea-party to-day."

The rest of Uncle Duncan's birthday passed very happily. It was a lovely day, and tea was had out in the garden. Aunt Lydia joined them, and was pleasanter than she had ever been before. Margot's one cracker was pulled, and Uncle Duncan was made to wear a wonderful cap found inside it. After tea, Margot suddenly said:

"Would you like Martin and me to give you a dance? We used to dance a lot in France. Mère Annette loved us to do it."

"I should like to see you do it very much," said Uncle Duncan.

So upon the lawn Margot and Martin, holding hands, began their dance. They were light-footed, and their aunt watched them with great amusement. There was a lot of bowing and curtsying, and twirling on tiptoe, but it was gracefully and prettily done, and the children certainly thoroughly enjoyed it themselves.

When bedtime came, they wished their uncle good-night very reluctantly. He pleased them by asking them to sing their Birthday Ode once again before they left him.

Then Margot climbed up on his knees and twined her arms tightly round his neck.

"I'm very glad you have a birthday," she said, "because it's been so lovely giving you a present. But, Uncle Duncan, you'll love your little Margot always, won't you? *Moi*, I couldn't stay in England if you wasn't

here. I do love you so very, very much. If you hadn't a birthday at all, I would want to give you a present, because I love you so!"

And then, kissing her hands to him, she followed Martin to bed.

CHAPTER X

A Tragedy

Gregory Gordon had been away at school all this time. Now he came home for the holidays, and soon found his way over to see Martin and Margot. Miss Hale went away with an invalid mother to the seaside, and so the children were able to spend a good deal of their holiday time together. Once they went for a water picnic with Gregory and his father down the river, and another day they and Gregory all rode out on their ponies to a farm some distance off and had tea there. The old coachman accompanied them.

A good many nice things happened in these holidays. Mr. Maitland had a school treat in the rectory fields, and Martin and Margot went and thoroughly enjoyed themselves, and they were invited on another occasion to a big children's party, at a house about four miles off. Their aunt took them to this, and had no fault to find with their behaviour there.

One day Gregory came tearing up the nursery stairs.

"Martin! Martin!" he called out.

Both Martin and Margot met him at the door.

"Martin, dad is going to motor me to the sea, and he says he has room for you if you like to come."

"And me?" cried Margot.

"Not you, *Moi*. There's no room, and dad doesn't like too many children."

He always called Margot "*Moi*." It was the last French word that stuck to her, and she used it pretty often.

Martin tore off to find his aunt, and ask her permission to go.

Margot stood with big, sad eyes, and presently the tears began to roll down her cheeks.

"It is very unkind not to take me. I can squeeze myself into anywhere. Such a little Margot I am! Nobody is kind to me. I hope you will all tip over and be hurt very much, and have no Margot to kiss and comfort you!"

Gregory grinned.

“When you give up crying you’ll grow,” he said. “You’re only a baby now.”

“Never am I a baby—never! And it is you that are a pig to call me names!”

Margot’s eyes were flashing. Gregory always enjoyed teasing her.

“We’re three men going off together; we don’t want cry-babies with us.”

Margot rushed at him.

“I will pinch! I will pull your hair! I will kick you. I will never speak to you again!”

She was putting her words into action when Martin threw open the nursery door.

“Hurrah! I can come!”

Both boys clattered downstairs. Janet pursued them to make Martin put on his objectionable new overcoat.

Margot stood at the window sobbing as if her heart would break.

When Janet came back she soon cheered her up. She took her downstairs with her to the housekeeper’s room, where she and the cook were tying down plum jam and putting it into the jam cupboard.

And after Margot’s early dinner she was told she might spend the afternoon with her Uncle Duncan by the lily pond. This was real joy. She went off radiant with smiles. Uncle Duncan welcomed her as she liked to be welcomed, and then his clever fingers began showing her how to plait rushes into little baskets and dolls’ hats. There were a good many rushes by the side of the pond, and this fascinating occupation kept her still by his side for a long time. But her tongue could not be still. She poured into his ears the account of Gregory’s rudeness.

“I like not boys, Uncle Duncan, except Martin; I like him a little, but I like men much the best. I like Gregory’s father. Why does not he like me?”

“I think perhaps he considers that boys can take care of themselves and rough it. Little girls cannot. Don’t let us think of Gregory. He was only teasing you.”

“I like not to be teased. You do not tease me; you are always kind. And Gregory ought not to make me wicked and angry. When I’m quite good, he

makes me wicked. He is like the devil who loves to see me in a temper.”

“Next time try to speak gently, little one. I want you to grow up *such* a sweet Margot.”

“Do you?”

Margot thought deeply for a moment or two.

“Greggy said I cried too much to grow.”

“What do you think of this little basket now?”

“Oh, how clever you are! It’s a darling! I will pick some dear little flowers to put in it.”

She sprang up from her seat and danced away backwards from him, holding up the little basket on the end of one of her fingers.

He called her sharply, but it was too late! With a splash and a scream she had overbalanced herself, and pitched backwards into the lily pond.

Great emergencies produce unbelievable efforts.

In a second the invalid was out of his chair, sending up a hoarse shout for help; then he dropped himself into the water, which was very deep at this end, and had seized his little niece as she rose to the surface of the pond. It was all the work of a moment. And Bardsley had reached the spot in time to grasp his master’s hand.

“The child, Bardsley—take her.”

No one knew the effort it cost the half-paralysed man to hold up the helpless child, but Bardsley got hold of her, and then with his strong arms drew his master tenderly up into safety. In a few minutes there was a little group round them. Mr. Fosberry could not speak; his face was a blue-grey and drawn with pain. They carried him gently into the house, and Margot was taken by Janet up to the nursery and put to bed. She was given a hot drink, and was soon quite herself again, but Janet forbade her moving, and left Kate, the nursery-maid, in charge of her.

“Read her a story, and then perhaps she’ll go to sleep.”

Janet herself slipped downstairs. Miss Fosberry met her with white face and frightened eyes.

“Oh, Janet, come! He is very, very ill. We have sent for the doctor; it is his heart!”

Janet went straight into her master’s room, and there she stayed.

Upstairs Margot tossed restlessly in her bed. She would not listen to Kate reading.

“I want to get up. Why doesn’t Martin come home? I want to see my Uncle Duncan. Oh, that pond, Kate! That wicked old pond! It nearly drowned me and him together. I’m so frightened when I think of it!”

Kate brought tea to her in bed, and amused her as best she could. By and by Martin arrived. He came into the nursery glowing with health and spirits, and was astonished to find Margot in bed.

“Oh, I’ve had such a lovely time. We went all along the sea wall, and Gregory and I paddled in the sea, and climbed over the rocks, and we went shrimping! What are you in bed for? Have you been naughty?”

“*Moi*—I have been nearly dead in the water. I fell in, and the water it poured into my mouth and ears and nose and eyes. I screamed, and Uncle Duncan he screamed, and then he plunged in the pond after me. He really did, Martin. And Bardsley pulled us both out, and Janet brought me to bed. *Moi*—if Uncle Duncan hadn’t caught me, and held me up out of the water, I should have been drowned dead, Martin! Think of it! He would not let his little Margot drown. He saved me!”

Martin’s eyes grew big with interest and awe.

“Tell me again, Margot; tell me all about it.”

Margot was only too delighted. She waved her hands and plunged about in bed, and described most vividly the scene by the lily pond.

“It wasn’t my fault, Martin! I was just running backwards and then over I went! Oh, it was horrible—most awfully horrible. I get frightened when I remember! And it’s very unkind of Janet to go away and leave me in bed, and tell Kate to watch over me. Kate is so stupid—she is!”

Kate had taken the opportunity of slipping downstairs to hear the latest from her master’s room.

Martin sat down by his sister.

“What did it feel like—to drown?” he asked curiously. “Is your hair wet? Were you wet all over?”

“I streamed! I ran with water. I dripped, and made pools! My hair is wet still! Feel it! I kicked and screamed in the pond, and then I couldn’t do no more, and then I felt Uncle Duncan’s arm round me. ‘Keep still; you’re

safe!’ he said, and then I knewed I was. *Moi*—I was loving him much when he caught hold of me.”

“Poor Uncle Duncan!” said Martin. “How could you let him come into the pond when he is so ill! It must have hurt him much!”

This aspect had not struck Margot.

“Uncle Duncan was quite strong; he caught me and held me up. Would it hurt him, Martin? Oh, let me go to him. I will go this very instant minute. Nobody shall keep me. Give me my clothes, Martin. Quick, quick! I will go to him at once, and see how he feels!”

She was out of bed, putting on her socks, and was half dressed, when suddenly the door opened and Janet came in. Her eyes were red. She looked as if she were trying not to cry. Margot expected a scolding for being found out of bed, but she did not get it.

“Come, Miss Margot, quick! Your dear uncle wants to see you. Just as you are! Now, then!”

She hastily wrapped her in a dressing-gown and carried her downstairs. There was great silence when they entered Uncle Duncan’s bedroom. It was on the ground floor behind the library. The doctor was standing at one side of the bed, Miss Fosberry was on the other. Morris was doing something at a small table, but Margot saw nobody but her uncle. Was that drawn, weary face his? Blue lines were about his mouth. He lay still, so still, that only a very slight movement of his chest showed that he was still breathing. Janet put her down very, very gently on the bed.

Margot put out her little hand and laid it against her uncle’s cheek.

“Uncle Duncan!” she whispered; “speak to me. It is Margot. Speak to Margot!”

Her clear, penetrating voice was heard by the one who had reached the margin of the river. His eyelids fluttered, then he opened his eyes, and a soft, radiant smile illumined his whole face. Every weary line seemed to disappear. He lifted up his hand very gently and laid it on Margot’s hand.

“My little Margot—be good!”

It was all he could say; his eyes closed and he dropped his hand on the pillow. Janet seized Margot and carried her out of the room.

“Run upstairs, darling. Your uncle is very ill. I must go back to him.”

Margot climbed the stairs with fright in her eyes. Running into the nursery, she seized hold of Martin, who was sitting by the open window intent upon a live crab he had brought with him, and which was reposing in a saucer of water on the windowsill.

“I’m afraid he’s going to die,” he said, backing away from Margot.

“He shan’t die. God won’t let him die. Oh, Uncle Duncan!” She set up a piercing wail.

“You are a stupid,” said Martin. “I’m talking of my crab.”

“But I’m talking of Uncle Duncan. He is in bed; he is nearly asleep. He looks very curious. And they’re all watching him, and the doctor’s there, and Janet’s crying. And she made me come out of the room. I was frightened, but he smiled at me, he did, Martin, and he spoke, but he spoke such a long way off.”

“What did he say?”

Martin forgot his crab, and stared at Margot, with much interest.

“He said, ‘My little Margot, be good.’ I am his little Margot. *Moi!* I belong to him. Martin, let us go back. Let us sit outside his door. He is ill, I tell you. Uncle Duncan is very, very ill. Ask God to make him well quickly. He must get well. I will not be alive without him.”

They were about to creep downstairs when Kate came up. “You are both to go to bed—Janet says so.”

“How is Uncle Duncan?” Margot said.

“Oh,” said Kate, trying to speak cheerfully. “You come to bed like good children, and perhaps you’ll find him better in the morning. He strained his heart getting you out of the water, Miss Margot. There! Don’t begin to cry; come to bed, and we’ll hope he’ll be well in the morning.”

Childlike, Margot caught at this hope eagerly. She was tired and exhausted by what she had been through; and five minutes after her head was on her pillow she was fast asleep. Martin was not long behind her.

And downstairs one of God’s saints on earth took flight from his poor weak body, and joined the white-robed multitude in his Father’s home.

When Margot woke up the next morning she forgot all about her uncle’s illness at first. It was not till she was nearly dressed that she asked Janet if

she might go and see him.

Janet had been unusually grave and preoccupied. She did not say anything for a moment, then she said slowly:

“No, you can’t see him at present, Miss Margot. Come to breakfast.”

“Is he quite well again?” Margot asked cheerfully.

“Quite well!” was the grave reply.

Martin and Margot ate their breakfast as usual. Martin was rejoiced to find that his crab was still alive. Janet left them alone after breakfast, and then suddenly their aunt appeared. She, like Janet, looked very grave and pale.

“What are you doing?” she asked. “You must be very good and quiet today.”

“Must we?” asked Margot. “When can I see Uncle Duncan?”

And then Aunt Lydia sat down, and her lips quivered. “Uncle Duncan has left us. Gone away,” she said. “Janet ought to have told you.”

“Gone away!” echoed Margot, in puzzled tone. “Oh, he’d never go away without wishing me good-bye. He never goes away Aunt Lydia. Who has gone with him?”

Miss Fosberry looked at her little niece with sad eyes.

“They say angels take us on our last journey. I don’t know.”

“He has never gone to heaven like Mike!” cried Martin.

“Yes, he has left us, Martin. I always said he was too good to live.”

Margot gave one shriek, then tore out of the room, and down the stairs as fast as her legs could take her.

She reached her uncle’s room and tried the door, but it was locked. Then she beat with her small hands against the door, and screamed again.

“Uncle Duncan! Wake up! Speak to your little Margot. They’re pretending you’ve gone to heaven. Oh, you’re not. You’re not. Let me in.”

Janet came up.

“Miss Margot, come upstairs; this will never do. Be a good child, and I will tell you all about your dear uncle.”

Margot was in such a state of frenzy that when Janet stooped to lift her up in her arms she struck her full in the face.

“I hate you, Janet. You tell lies. You said he was quite well. I hate every one. *Moi!*—I want my uncle. He shan’t be dead. He isn’t dead.”

Janet was not quite herself this morning. She was strained and strung up to a high pitch. She seized Margot by the shoulder and shook her well.

“You little, worthless, wicked child. I wish he had left you to drown. You are not worth the sacrifice of such a noble life. He lost his life for you. You could have been spared much better than him. If you had been taken, and him left, it would have been better for every one. If it hadn’t been for you he would have been alive and well this morning.”

Margot freed herself from Janet’s grasp, then tore down the passage into the library, slamming the door violently behind her.

Meanwhile upstairs Martin was trying to take it all in. He was questioning his aunt like a little old man.

“How has Uncle Duncan got to heaven so quickly? Mike was ill for days and days. Did God send a chariot of fire for him like Elijah, and catch him up? Why has he died, Aunt Lydia? We thought he would be quite well today. Did the pond hurt him yesterday?”

“He wasn’t strong enough to do what he did,” his aunt replied. “It was a miracle his being able to get out of his chair at all. The doctor doesn’t know how he did it. Of course he overstrained his heart—and every part of him. It was only to be expected.”

“And it was because of Margot.”

Martin said it under his breath. But his aunt caught the words and echoed them with rather a bitter smile.

“Because of Margot, a naughty, mischievous child. And we shall never replace him. He sweetened the very air he breathed. You children will never know or understand what a loss he will be to us all.”

She sat in a chair by the window, and was gazing despairingly up into the blue, sunny sky. She had not shed a tear, and her lips were set in a thin, straight line.

Martin said nothing for a moment, but he, too, followed her gaze. Then he said in a soft little voice:

“Mr. Maitland says nobody is ill in heaven. How glad Uncle Duncan will be to walk about. And he’ll fly, too. It’s very nice for him, isn’t it?”

“Oh yes,” assented his aunt. Then she got up wearily from her chair.

“You seem more thoughtful than Margot. Will you try to keep her quiet to-day, Martin?”

“Poor Margot; she does love Uncle Duncan so very much!”

“She can’t love him more than I do.”

And then the dignified Miss Fosberry quitted the nursery hastily, for tears had come at last.

A few minutes later Janet came in, looking much perturbed.

“Here, Master Martin, you must go down to the library. Miss Margot is carrying on there something shocking. She won’t listen to reason; she won’t let me touch her. She’s almost in hysterics. Like a little mad thing. You’d best see what you can do. You can manage her sometimes. She’s beyond me entirely. Get her to come up to the nursery and be quiet. I don’t want to worry your aunt.”

Martin went downstairs at once to the library. He found Margot lying full length on the ground, face downwards; she was kicking and screaming, and crying passionately. She was close to her uncle’s chair—which looked pathetically empty.

“I won’t be good. I won’t listen to any one. I won’t eat. I won’t move from here. I’ll stay here till I die. I’ll be as wicked as I can be. Everybody hates me. Uncle Duncan was the only one who loved me, and he’s left me. He’s left me. And he’ll never speak to me again. Oh, Uncle Duncan, why did you die instead of me? Janet would have been glad to have me drowned. She’s said so. Nobody wants me. They all want me to be drowned. They want you back, and I want you back. And God has plenty of good people in heaven. He could have left you with us. Oh, do come back. Can’t you come back. Can’t you try hard and come back. I can’t, I won’t live without you. *Moi!* I am *désolée*; I’m miserable; I’m anguished.”

These were some of Margot’s words sobbed out between fits of screaming.

Martin sat down on the floor beside her. Poor little boy, he did not know what to say, or how to comfort her.

CHAPTER XI

Their Father's Return

“Margot!”

Martin spoke at last, but his sister would not listen to him. She screamed the louder. Then Martin acted with determination. He thumped her on the back. Whereupon, quite astonished, she sat up and looked at him.

“What’s the good of screaming and kicking?” he demanded.

“Oh!” cried Margot, extending her hands tragically; “I have nobody, nobody to love me.”

“But Uncle Duncan hasn’t stopped loving you. He’s alive, you stupid girl.”

“How does he love me?” Margot asked.

“I expect he talks to God about you,” said Martin softly.

Margot became quite still.

“What does he say?”

“He says, ‘Please, dear God, I love her, and You love her; make her good.’”

“Uncle Duncan said that to me,” said Margot, in an awed tone. “He said, ‘My little Margot—be good.’”

“And a nice way you are doing that,” said Martin scornfully. Then he produced a rather dirty-looking handkerchief out of his pocket, and began mopping his sister’s face.

“You’re *not* to cry any more. You have to listen to me.”

Margot heaved a sigh which ended in a sob. Then she snuggled up to her brother.

“Love me, Martin! Nobody loves me. They say I made Uncle Duncan ill. I didn’t make him die, did I?”

Martin put his arm round her.

“I’ve just thought of something,” he said. “You listen, and don’t you interrupt me. The good Uncle Duncan died for you, Margot. He saved you. If he hadn’t jumped in the water after you you would have died, and he would have lived.”

“That’s what Janet said,” cried Margot. “She said if it hadn’t been for me he’d have been alive now. I wish I had been drowned—I wish— —”

“Be quiet; *attendez!* Uncle Duncan did what the Christ did. Think of that. You seemed to think it nothing when I told you the Christ has died instead of us. Now you know what it feels like. You’ve had Uncle Duncan die for you.”

“But I wish he hadn’t.”

“And so do I,” said Martin earnestly. “I wish the Christ had not died such a cruel death. But He did it for us. And that is why I want to please Him, because I know it was done because He loved us. And now you know Uncle Duncan got into the water to save you because he loved you. Don’t you want to please him?”

“Oh, Martin, how can I?”

“By doing what he told you.”

“He told me to be good,” said Margot. “Can he see out of heaven, do you think, Martin?”

“I don’t know; but God can. I expect he is asking God, ‘What is Margot doing now?’ And God has to say, ‘She’s kicking and screaming on the floor, and telling everybody she means to be as wicked as she can.’”

“How dreadful!” exclaimed Margot, in shocked accents.

“If you want to be good,” went on Martin severely, “you must come up to the nursery and keep quiet all the day.”

“Will you tell me more about Uncle Duncan?” asked Margot meekly.

“Perhaps I will.”

“Will you tell me what he is saying now? Oh, Martin, *cher* Martin, do you think God would send him back to us? He could, you know. God could do *anything*. How can I do without him?”

“You’ll have to do without him,” said Martin impressively. “But you can please him by being good. Come on!”

Out of the library and up the stairs they went. Margot was perfectly quiet now, and Janet marvelled when she saw her. Then Margot stood in front of Janet.

“I’m sorry I slapped you, Janet. I’m going to be good. I mean for *le bon Dieu* to look down and see me good, and then He will say to Uncle Duncan, the ‘little Margot is very sweet and good to-day,’ and then Uncle Duncan, he will be very pleased. I will please my Uncle Duncan when he is in heaven. I won’t make him sad, no, never!”

“That’s right,” said Janet. “I’m glad to hear you say so, Miss Margot.”

That was a weary day to the children. Late that afternoon they were sitting listlessly at the nursery table trying to play one of their games together, when suddenly the door opened, and Enid appeared.

“You poor, dear little mites,” she said; “I’ve just asked Janet if I can take you home with me for a few days. She has gone to ask your aunt. Would you like to come?”

Margot ran into her arms at once and began to cry. Martin sharply admonished her.

“She is not to cry and scream,” he said. “She’s promised she won’t.”

“She shall cry as much as she wants to,” said Enid indignantly.

“But I won’t do it loud,” sobbed poor Margot. “I’m going to be as sweet and good as a little angel, because Uncle Duncan he wants me to be.”

Janet came into the room.

“Miss Fosberry, she’ll be only too thankful. She isn’t up to seeing you herself, but she’s very, very grateful.”

And then there was a little bustle and confusion, Janet packing up the clothes the children would want; and in a very short time they were ready.

Enid had driven over in her jingle; she packed them in and their luggage. Then away they drove, and somehow or other in the sweet smelling lanes, with the blue sky above, and the fresh pure breeze blowing in their faces, everything did not seem so black and gloomy as it had done in the nursery. When they got to Enid’s home, Granny was there to greet them, and Polly again screamed: “Here’s a fuss! Here’s a fuss! Put the kettle on and we’ll all have tea!”

Martin laughed out loud, then put his hand before his mouth, and looked quite ashamed of himself.

“It isn’t wrong to laugh,” Enid said to him. “Your Uncle Duncan wouldn’t like to see you so solemn. He is very happy himself, you know.”

“I don’t think he can be happy without me,” said Margot, shaking her head sorrowfully. “And, *moi*, I can never laugh, for I made him die — —”

“No, darling, you couldn’t do that. God arranged it all. He wanted Uncle Duncan to come to Him, and so He took him that way.”

“Do you think He did?”

A gleam of light came into Margot’s eyes. Her little face looked more pathetic than ever. Granny said to Enid, when both the children were looking at some old-fashioned picture-books which she gave them:

“She wasn’t made with that pathetic face for nothing. She has come into her heritage of suffering early.”

But Enid would not hear of this.

“She is going to be happy,” she said stoutly, “and I will do my best to make her so.”

And in two days’ time Margot began to lift up her head and run about and play. Enid was always planning some fresh amusement for them. She took them fishing with her one day, and they caught some small trout, and cooked them over a fire in the open. And the next day she asked her rector’s two children to come and play with them.

It was in the evenings that they talked together of Uncle Duncan, but Enid spoke of him quite brightly, and made them do it too.

“Nobody is miserable in heaven,” she said. “We ought to be very glad when they go there.”

Their visit lengthened into a week; and then their aunt wished them to come back. They were both sorry to go, for they were devoted to Enid; and Granny they thought the kindest old lady they had ever seen.

When they returned home, Janet gave them a warm welcome, their aunt a very grave one.

And that night when they were in bed, and the door open between their rooms, Martin and Margot began to talk together.

“Martin,” said Margot, “I know how you feel now about the Christ. I feel I could do anything in the world to please darling Uncle Duncan,

because he loved me and died for me. That's how you feel about Jesus Christ, don't you?"

"Yes, I do, when I think about it," said Martin.

"And two people have died for me," said Margot, with a little pride in her tone.

"But it isn't the same," said Martin eagerly. "Jesus Christ was God, and He had no business to die at all. He made Himself do it. He loved us so."

"Yes, He loved us so," repeated Margot thoughtfully. "I understand it all very well, Martin. I think I'll try to please Him more, Martin, and you shall help me—it all seems so difficult. Do you think Jesus Christ talks to Uncle Duncan? Will He say, 'I died for little Margot before you did?'"

"It's all different," said Martin. "Mr. Maitland told me so. Jesus Christ died to save our souls. Uncle Duncan died to save your body."

Margot thought over this.

"I'll thank Him when I say my prayers to-morrow," she said.

And the very next morning she did; and all that day she was like a little angel. Janet was almost anxious lest she should be feeling ill; but in a few days she was naughty again. Poor little Margot had many battles to fight with her selfishness and temper.

One afternoon they had been having tea at the rectory, and after it was over, Martin made Margot come into the church with him to look at his favourite painted window. Margot looked and admired, but she could never stay still long, so she wandered into the churchyard and suddenly came upon her aunt laying flowers on a newly made grave. Now the children had never seen their uncle's grave. Owing to a wet Sunday they had not been to church since their uncle's funeral.

Miss Fosberry looked up startled when Margot appeared.

"Why are you doing that?" Margot asked.

"This is your uncle's grave," Aunt Lydia replied gravely.

"But Uncle Duncan went to heaven?"

"Yes, but he left his body here."

Margot looked horrified.

"It isn't under the earth!"

Her aunt turned away from her. Margot tore into the rectory as fast as her legs could carry her.

“Mr. Maitland, Mr. Maitland, tell me quick! Uncle Duncan isn’t under the earth?”

“No, indeed, he isn’t, Margot,” said the rector, taking her up on his knee.

“But Aunt Lydia says his body is there.”

“So it is. Look here, Margot— —”

Mr. Maitland went to his cabinet of curiosities, and put a small box before her. In it was a little broken brown shell of something.

“That belonged to a beautiful butterfly,” the rector said. “I saw him come out of it, and fly away into the sunshine. That was his body before he was a butterfly. He was just a little brown grub. He left his body behind. And your Uncle Duncan has done the same. He doesn’t want his earth body now. He has done with it. And we put it into sweet Mother Earth, who takes care of it for him till he wants it again.”

Margot was silent. Then she said:

“And what does Aunt Lydia put flowers there for?”

“To remind her that just as flowers come out of a brown little seed of no importance, so Uncle Duncan has come out of his body and has gone to God’s Flower Garden.”

“Is he like a flower now? You said he was a butterfly.”

“He’s much more beautiful than either.”

“Oh,” said Margot, her eyes filling with sudden tears, “I want him very, very badly! *Moi*, I am *désolée* without him.”

Mr. Maitland gave her a kiss.

“He won’t forget you, little one. God’s saints are watching and waiting for us, just as we wait and watch for them. And perhaps—nobody can be sure—Uncle Duncan may be allowed by God to be your guardian angel. He may watch over you while you sleep, and take care of you all day.”

“Oh,” cried Margot quite joyously, “I wonder if he could be! Oh, I’ll ask God to send him instead of my other angel. That would be lovely. *Moi*—I shall be very happy if Uncle Duncan watches over me.”

And it was after this little talk that Margot recovered a good deal of her joyousness. Miss Fosberry, hearing her happy chatter and laughter, thought

to herself how soon children forget.

But Margot did not forget. She could not.

And then one day the children were told that their father was on his way home. Janet explained to them the reason of it.

“This house and all the property belongs to your father now. He must come home and live here, and look after his estate as your dear uncle did.”

“Is father going to live in this house always?” asked Martin.

“I expect so. It belongs to him.”

Martin and Margot began to look forward with eager expectation to their father’s return. As time went on, certain preparations began to be made. The house was repainted in parts, the rooms redecorated. Bardsley was in a great fuss over his fruit-houses. Gardeners under him worked as they had never worked before. And the whole village seemed excited and interested in the news that Mr. Henry was coming home at last. Aunt Lydia was the only one who seemed to take no interest in anything; but as time went on she grew a little brighter. Mr. Maitland came up one day and had a long talk with her. She seemed quite different afterwards.

The summer holidays were over now. Gregory had gone back to school, and Miss Hale began the lessons again. The days became shorter and colder, and soon the trees in the garden began to get yellow and red, and shed their leaves. Martin and Margot delighted in the bonfires that the gardeners were making everywhere. They picked up the horse-chestnuts in the drive, and strung them together, and made a harness of them when they played horses.

And then came the day at last when their father was expected to arrive.

The children were in their best clothes. Janet was feverishly anxious that they should keep tidy, and be on their best behaviour.

“Mayn’t we go down to the hall and wait for the car?” Martin asked.

“No; your aunt wishes you to stay in the nursery till she sends for you.”

So the children stood patiently at the nursery window, watching for the car that had gone to the station to meet their father. It was very dark now. The fire in the nursery shed its ruddy gleams over the walls and cast big shadows of the children’s heads upon the ceiling above.

“Oh,” said Martin, with a long-drawn sigh, “how I hope he will like us!”

“He must like us,” said Margot, with a stamp of her foot on the floor; “we will make him like us. *Moi*—I am not a French *gamin* no more. I am altogether English, and proper and good. I will hold out my hand for him to kiss like Maman used to do.”

“Listen!” cried Martin. “Here it comes.”

But though the car glided swiftly up to the door they could see nothing. They only heard a stir and bustle downstairs, and doors shutting and opening, and voices.

It was hard for them to wait. Janet, sitting working by the fire, felt sorry for them.

At last Kate appeared at the nursery door.

“The children are to go down,” she said excitedly.

Martin and Margot made a rush for the door. Janet looked at them proudly. Surely they did her credit, she thought.

Martin was in a black velvet suit; his curly head was shining and gleaming with the gold in it. Janet’s fervent brushing had given it a gloss that only the brush can give. Margot was in her best white frock. Her aunt had refused to let her wear black ribbons; but Janet had discarded her pink sash, and given her a mauve one instead. Her curls were tied back with mauve ribbon, too. She had dainty white shoes and socks, and her little face wore its most pathetic look.

She took hold of Martin’s hand when she reached the hall, and then they pushed open the drawing-room door.

Their father was standing upon the hearth-rug—his back to the fire; and he was talking to their Aunt Lydia, who sat in a big easy-chair, looking at her brother with real pleasure and affection.

“Here we are!” announced Martin in a deep, grave voice.

His father turned, and surveyed the little couple with amused, though critical eyes.

Then Margot stepped forward.

“How do you do, papa. We are very pleased to see you. Is it not so, Martin? You may kiss my hand, please.” She extended one small arm and hand with such a royal air that her father laughed aloud.

Then he caught her up in his arms, and held her up in the air for quite a second before he kissed her. Putting her down on the ground again, he looked at his sister and nodded his approval.

“They do you credit, Lydia. Now, my boy, let us shake hands like gentlemen. Have you forgotten your father?”

“No, never!” cried both children at once. Then Margot said:

“You waved us away, and called us *gamin*! But we are quite, quite English now. And we like England; but France just a little better.”

“And we ride ponies here,” said Martin, watching his father anxiously lest he should meet with a disapproving glance.

“You were little savages when I last saw you,” said his father, adding in a low aside to his sister, “Poor Lucia *would* not have them with her—I couldn’t induce her to—left them to their foster-mother entirely. I expect you were rather astonished when you first saw them.”

“They aren’t bad children now,” said their aunt.

Martin and Margot beamed upon her. That was high praise from her.

Then their father sat down, and talked as his children had never heard him talk before. He told them funny stories of his travels, and gave them a graphic account of his last lion hunt. And then he listened to their talk, and when it was time for them to go to bed they went upstairs most reluctantly.

“He’s quite as nice as Gregg’s father,” said Martin.

Margot was strangely silent.

The next day she came upon her father alone. He was smoking on a stone seat on the terrace outside the library windows. Martin had run off with Tom to see some ferrets in the stable. Margot walked up to her father and stood gazing at him for a minute in silence, then she said:

“Did you know my Uncle Duncan?”

“I rather think I did,” her father replied, with a smile, and then a sigh.

“I love him best,” she said.

“You have my leave to do that,” was her father’s dry response.

“Uncle Duncan, he died for me,” Margot went on, dropping her voice to an awed whisper. “That makes two people who have died for me; but the Christ wasn’t a common person. He was God.”

There was silence. She went on:

“Martin says the Christ died for the inside of me—for my soul. But Uncle Duncan died for my body. It makes me feel I ought to be double good; but, *moi*—it is quite impossible. Martin—he says the Christ will help us to be good. Did He die for you, father? I suppose it was for you when you were a little boy. Martin says it was to forgive wicked people He died. Grown-up people are never wicked, are they? It’s only children who have to be punished, and punished, and punished.”

“Upon my word, Margot, you have got a lot of theology from some one.”

“What is theology?”

“Don’t trouble your little head about it. Go ahead!”

“So you see I must love the Christ, with every bit of my heart, and I always have loved Uncle Duncan. I seem to have no room for anybody else. But Janet says we must love you. Will liking be enough? I do like you when you don’t laugh at us. And Martin is hoping you will let us ride out with you—on our ponies, you know?”

“I might do that,” said her father. “So I must be content with a little bit of liking from you, must I? Well, it is a good beginning.”

Margot approached nearer, then she climbed up on the seat by the side of her father, and putting her head round, she peeped up at him with her most wheedling smile.

“Will you be loving little Margot? *Moi*—I want to be loved.” Here her face grew quite pathetic. “I have nobody who loves me; Uncle Duncan did love me much, and he has gone away. And Martin—he has Mr. Maitland; and *moi*—I have nobody. Aunt Lydia does not love boys and girls.”

“What should I have to do to show you I loved you?” asked her father, taking his cigar out of his mouth and regarding her with a quizzical look in his grey eyes. “Should I have to be kissing you always?”

“Oh no—not at all. You would call me your little Margot, and say it soft like Uncle Duncan did, and you would let me come into your room, and you would always, always smile when you saw me. *Moi*—if you did love me, well, I would begin to love you, and then my love it would get bigger and bigger, and one day I would put my arms round you and hug you tight.”

There was a pause. Then Margot looked away dreamily up into the sky.

“They love me very much up there. God loves me, and the Christ—Martin says so; and Uncle Duncan—shall I tell you a secret? Put your head down close. Uncle Duncan, I think, has asked God to let him be my angel. And I do believe he is; he comes when I get into bed—and I talk to him. And he watches me all the night, and keeps the devil away; and so I wake up in the morning very good and happy.”

“Margot! Margot! Where are you? Come quick!”

It was Martin’s voice.

Margot slipped down off the seat, but she laid her tiny hand on her father’s knee:

“*Moi*—I feel I am liking you much, father. Will you love your little Margot?”

Her father put his hand on her head.

“You are a stealer of hearts, little witch. Run along. You will be your mother over again.”

Margot danced away.

From that day she determined to get as much of her father’s society as possible.

CHAPTER XII

Learning to know each Other

Lessons were going on one cold bright morning in November. The children had not seen much of their father of late. He had been out hunting with Aunt Lydia; but now the frost had set in so hard, that hunting was stopped for the time.

The nursery fire roared up the old chimney. Outside on the broad ledge of the nursery windows, two robins, some tomtits, and a thrush were enjoying a lunch of bread and milk, put there by the children for their feathered friends.

Margot was devoted to one particular robin. He was very tame, and had more than once flown into the nursery when the window was open, and had hopped about the table looking up out of his bright little eyes at Margot, as if anxious to be friends with her.

The last time he had done this, she knelt down by the table and spoke to him very earnestly.

“If you were a really good robin,” she said, “you would try every day to get to heaven. I believe you could. The larks go very near, and they’re no bigger than you. I wish you would. Just to see Uncle Duncan, and give him my love.”

The robin cocked his head on one side as if listening to her.

“Do try, dear robin,” Margot said beseechingly. “If I had wings like you, I would get up in no time. I would *make* myself go. What’s the good of wings if you don’t get higher than the trees. Martin and me can climb trees without wings at all.”

The robin looked offended. He flew away out of the window, and Margot watched him alight on the top of a tall holly bush.

To-day at her lessons she had suddenly said to Miss Hale, “I s’pose God doesn’t want His world empty after He’s made it so carefully.”

They were having a geography lesson, and Miss Hale saw that her mind had wandered off the track a little. But she did not scold Margot for this, and that was why Margot liked her governess.

“No, God wants us here, else He would not have made us,” she replied.

“Yes, and He knew He mustn’t give us wings, for then we should all be flying up to heaven as fast as we could, and there would be nobody left.”

“Perhaps some people would rather stay down,” said Martin gravely, looking at his sister with thoughtful eyes. “In France we didn’t want to go to heaven at all.”

“Oh, but then Uncle Duncan was not there.”

“And we did not know how Jesus loved us,” said Martin softly.

“The birds are very silly not to find out heaven,” went on Margot.

“No,” said Miss Hale. “The birds know they have their work to do here for God. They were sent into the world to stay here, to make us happy, to eat up a lot of destructive garden pests. We could not live happily without the birds. And we are wanted here for bigger reasons than that. We must never wish to leave this world before God’s own time.”

“When is that?” asked Margot.

“We don’t know. He doesn’t tell us. Now let us come back to our geography.”

There was a sharp knock at the door. Then it opened, and Mr. Fosberry came in.

“Good morning, Miss Hale. Lessons going well? I’m taking the car into the town at twelve o’clock, and I wondered if a small boy and girl would like to come with me?”

The children screamed with delight. Their father asked Miss Hale a few questions about them.

“Teach the girl music, and the boy figures. Then they’ll be useful members of society when they grow up.”

He turned and went downstairs. Miss Hale smiled, but said nothing, only went on steadily with lessons till twelve o’clock. Then Martin and Margot flew to Janet.

“We’re going out with father. Quick! We’ve only a minute to get ready.”

Janet wrapped her little charges up well. She shook her head doubtfully.

“’Tis not weather for motoring, and I hear the car is to be open.”

But little cared the children for the cold. They were going out for the first time alone with their father. The honour of it filled their hearts with joy.

It was a hard frost, but there was a bright sun. The rush through the cold air prevented much talking, but Margot's tongue could not be silent very long.

"We're quicker than a train, father. Are we quicker than the birds? Martin and me—we would like to be birds very much—and we would not be so stupid as to keep so close to the ground as they do. We would fly, and fly, and fly! Miss Hale says we have to do the work God sets us, and not want to be what we aren't!"

"Of course, of course!" said her father quickly, then he lit his cigarette. He was not much interested in the irrelevant chatter of small children, and Martin's quick instinct told him so.

"Shut up, Margot! We don't want to hear you."

Margot subsided with a sigh.

"My Uncle Duncan always liked me to talk much—he did. I shall talk to him in a whisper now."

Martin looked anxiously across at his father as Margot's whisperings began. He feared it would disturb him; but Mr. Fosberry was too full of his own thoughts to pay much attention to his children. When the town was reached they stopped at the principal hotel, where they were going to lunch, and their father told them they could accompany him to some shops. He went to the saddler's, then to an ironmonger; and then, as they were making their way to a stationer's, they met Enid. The children welcomed her rapturously, and insisted upon introducing her to their father.

"She's our best lady friend," Martin assured him; "she takes us to stay with her when we're unhappy, and makes us happy again."

"That's a fine character to have," said Mr. Fosberry heartily. "I believe I met a brother of yours abroad, Miss Digby. My sister was telling me you had just settled here."

"With my grandmother," said Enid, with her pretty smile. "Was it Burke you met? He mentioned you in one of his letters. Do tell me about him. I haven't seen him for seven years."

"Come to lunch with us at the 'Antlers,'" said Mr. Fosberry.

Enid hesitated; but the children were so eager and delighted at the idea that she consented.

“I’ve just put our old pony up, and must give him a couple of hours’ rest before I start back again,” she said. “I have a little shopping to do. I wonder if you could spare me the children?”

Her quick eyes had noted that their father seemed to be finding them heavy on his hands. He looked at her and laughed.

“You are a witch,” he said. “Take them with my fervent blessing. And we’ll meet for lunch at two o’clock.”

“Could you let us spend a little of your money for you, father?” asked Margot, in her sweetest tone, taking hold of him by the sleeve. “Martin and me—we loves buying in the shops.”

“You wouldn’t be a woman if you didn’t,” her father replied, putting his hand in his waistcoat-pocket and producing a half-crown for each of them. “There, I suppose that will go in chocolates.”

“Oh no, it’s for you,” cried Margot, dancing up and down on her toes. “We mean to learn to love you, and we like to give presents we do, when we like much.”

Her father turned away, and Enid took possession of them. They made her stand outside shop windows whilst they pressed their faces against the glass, and looked at every article in them. She did not hurry or worry them as Janet would have done; and Martin, quick to appreciate this in her, gave her hand a grateful little squeeze.

“You’re so understanding,” he murmured. “It takes such a long time to choose for a man. We’ve only been here once before with Janet, and then we choosed— —”

He stopped, for Margot was standing still upon the pavement, with a shadowed brow and woebegone face.

“Oh, *moi*—I am *désolée*. We were buying for dear Uncle Duncan’s birthday, and now he’ll never have another. Oh, I’m going to cry—I feel the tears!”

They were raining down her cheeks. Enid was distressed, but Martin was equal to the emergency.

“Thump her on the back! That stops her—I will— —” He suited the action to the word.

“You shan’t spoil our shopping. I’m going in here—it is a man’s shop. You haven’t time to cry, Margot. We must buy quick, or it will be time to go to dinner.”

Margot heaved a sob. Enid wiped away her tears, and together they followed Martin into a fancy stationer’s. He marched up to a shopwoman.

“Please show me the best sort of present for a man, for half a crown, for his birthday.”

This clear and lucid demand brought a smile upon the shopwoman’s face; but she obligingly brought over a tray with little knick-knacks upon it.

After a great deal of talk and thought, Martin bought a paper-knife with a parrot’s head. Margot was more difficult to please, She moved restlessly about.

“I want my present to be better than Martin’s.”

“Why?” asked Enid.

“It’s no good to pretend you like father better than I do,” argued Martin, “for you don’t; and he doesn’t like you better than me—so there— —”

“No; nobody loves me. Only dear Uncle— —”

“Look!” said Enid hastily; “do you see that pretty little calendar over there? Wouldn’t you like to buy him that?”

“No,” said Margot, retreating to the door. “I’m going to another shop. I’ll buy him a silk pocket-hanky.”

But silk handkerchiefs could not be purchased for half a crown. Then a bottle of scent seized her fancy, and she insisted upon buying it.

Their shopping done, they accompanied Enid to several other places where she had to do business, and then at two o’clock they returned to the “Antlers.”

Mr. Fosberry was standing in the porch. He took them into the big coffee-room and ordered lunch.

It was a delightful time—Margot had recovered her spirits. She presented her father with the scent bottle immediately.

“It is to be your very own,” she said; “and when you go to church you must drop some on your hanky, like Dale does, and Emma’s young man who comes to take her out walking.”

“But must I only keep it for church time?” asked her father. “I’m sure I’m very grateful for such a present.”

“Margot is always first,” said Martin, holding out his paper-knife; “but I bought my present first, and I hope you’ll enjoy yourself, father, with it.”

“No doubt about that,” said his father, taking his gift as if he loved it. “Well, I’m going home a rich man to-day. I didn’t think it when I came out. I’m awfully obliged to you both. Now shall we have some grub?”

They began their lunch. Enid seemed a little quiet and shy at first; but Mr. Fosberry soon put her at her ease, and they had a merry meal together.

When it was over they went into the lounge, and Mr. Fosberry asked Enid if she minded his smoking. The children went to the window and watched with the greatest interest the busy street outside. Enid and their father sat over the fire and talked, first about her brother, then about Mr. Duncan’s death, and then they began to talk of the children.

“Rum little kids,” said their father; “but they amuse me. I don’t think I would have spent my half-crown on my father in my young days. What’s the idea, do you think?”

“I think they considered it was your money, and therefore the purchase must be yours; and also, though you mayn’t believe it, they have a great hankering after you. Poor little mites, their loneliness along the first bit of their road through life is rather pathetic.”

“But children are never lonely.”

“Not as a rule. Yours have been. Forgive me, but they have never known a parent’s love, and realise they’re only just tolerated by their aunt.”

“I don’t believe small children have feelings of that sort.”

“They mayn’t be able to express them, but they’re there.”

Mr. Fosberry stared across the room at his children. He drew his cigarette out of his mouth and looked at Enid.

“Lydia says she never understands children. They bore her. Can’t you give her some hints? How is it you know about them so well? If I’ve heard your name mentioned once, I’ve heard it fifty times.”

“Oh, they’re darlings! I love them. I should like to have them for my own.”

She flushed and sparkled as she spoke; then she got up as if afraid of her impulsiveness.

“I must go. Granny will wonder what has become of me. Do be a real good father to them, Mr. Fosberry. They want one badly.”

She would stay no longer. The children hung upon her arms when she said she must go.

“Come and see us in the nursery soon,” they besought her. “Give our love to Granny and to Polly. Ask us over to tea again!”

And then she went, and Mr. Fosberry looked after her with a quick-drawn sigh.

A little later he sent Martin down to find Dale, and to tell him to bring the car round. When Martin had left the room Margot sidled up to her father. She placed one hand upon his knee and looked up at him earnestly.

“Father, will you be number two?”

“You must explain.”

“Uncle Duncan must be first, always and always. He and me loved each other very much. And he died for me. You couldn’t never expect me to forget that, could you? But he’s in heaven, and it’s cold without him. I think much when I’m in bed about him; but in the day I’ve made up my mind to have you. Just to love, and to talk about. And will you call me your little Margot like he did? There’s a little kinky curl over your ear just like he had. It makes me have a lump in my throat when I look hard at it. And I’ve asked you before to love me proper, and you’ve never answered. I can’t live if nobody loves me. You could do it very easy. I told you the other day how!”

She had climbed on his knees now, and had her arms twined round his neck.

“When I grow big, I shall keep your house for you. Emma and Kate say Aunt Lydia will marry a gentleman she knows very soon. And then she’ll go away, and I’ll do everything for you. I love you very much, *mon père*—and I’ll always be like the angels when I’m close to you. We aren’t frightened of you no more now. Martin and me—we look out of the nursery windows, and we see you ride away, and we hear you come back, and we hang over the banisters, and we peep and see you in the hall, and we listen for your voice. It is very *charmant* to have our father home. Do you love your little Margot now?”

Who could resist the tiny hands, the soft lips pressed against his cheek, the insinuating baby voice whispering in his ear?

Margot had found an entrance to her father's heart, and there she stayed. From that day she could do little wrong in his eyes.

With Martin it was different. Mr. Fosberry had his own ideas about boys and their training, and he took no account of his son's tender age. Boys must be hardy, self-reliant, and unemotional, he said.

He talked already of sending him away to boarding-school; but even Aunt Lydia would not agree to this.

"He wants to be taught by a woman for at least a couple of years more. There's no hurry. Let well alone. Miss Hale manages them beautifully."

"I dare say she does, but she's too gentle. I know what boys are, and I won't have him a mollycoddle."

Aunt Lydia laughed.

"I don't think there is any fear of that. There's not a tree in the garden that they have not climbed. He is over walls and fences like a cat, and he's a fearless rider. He's already jumped the brook at the bottom of the field—the one that as children we had to get over before we were allowed to hunt."

But Mr. Fosberry did not look satisfied. He took to making Martin accompany him when he went out in the dusk rabbit-shooting, and of course Martin was proud and delighted to go. Sometimes even his sturdy legs flagged when they covered a good bit of ground, but he never complained of being tired. Occasionally his father would walk round the coverts with his head keeper, Martin trudging contentedly behind them. Once he went to a distant farm three miles away, and when Janet heard of it she was so indignant that she went straight downstairs to the smoking-room and remonstrated with him.

"The boy is fagged out. You forget, sir, you take him out after his day is over, and he's on his feet every hour of it except in lesson-time in the morning. A six-mile walk at the end of the day is too much for a child of his age. You'll be breaking his constitution."

"Rubbish!" laughed her master. "The boy must be tough; he's too old for nurses and governesses!"

"You never did it at his age!" the old nurse retorted, and Mr. Fosberry laughed.

“You think you have me there, but I was of harder make. The boy is soft and girlish—wouldn’t touch a dead bird or rabbit at first; almost cried when he saw them fall! I had an air-gun and used it well when I was as old as he!”

“He’s in my charge,” said Janet stubbornly, “and I shan’t let him go out with you if you make him walk so far.”

The next time Mr. Fosberry walked a good distance he suddenly stopped and sent Martin home by himself.

It was already nearly dark, and for a moment the small boy shrank from the lonely walk. Then he pulled himself together and squared his shoulders.

“May I take Trip with me, father?”

Trip was an Irish terrier, who generally accompanied Mick, the brown spaniel, Mr. Fosberry’s constant companion.

“No; Trip will keep with me.” Then, looking at his boy in the gathering dusk as he stood under a tall pine tree, the father’s heart smote him. After all, he was a baby in years. Janet was right. “Yes, take Trip. Cut along with you. Janet says I over-walk you—and I’m going a good bit farther.”

Martin and Trip departed for home quite happily, but Janet was not better pleased when she saw them arrive.

“Walked all by yourself from Bent’s Hill? You oughtn’t to do it after dark! ’Tis a shame, I call it!”

Martin stretched himself to his full height.

“I’m getting big, Janet. Father says boys can go anywhere by themselves.”

Margot broke in breathlessly.

“You’re only one tiny inch bigger than me. One tiny inch! Poof! It’s nothing at all, and I ought to go with father. One day I shall escape from Janet—I shall run, I shall fly—you will hear Margot’s feet fast behind you, and when the rabbits are shotted, I shall catch them first, and carry them on my shoulders. Ah, father will say then, ‘You are quick, my little Margot; I will take you another day.’ You will see. It will come to pass.”

“You’re only a girl!” said Martin; “and a baby-girl. You’re afraid of the dark!”

“And so are you.”

Martin stoutly denied this. Then he wondered when he was in bed that night if he had been quite true.

“But if I say I’m not afraid, I’m not!” he assured himself; “and I shall soon like the dark; father does.”

CHAPTER XIII

Martin's Obedience

One afternoon Martin was walking through a wood with his father. Mr. Fosberry had shot a few rabbits and a brace of pheasants. Then he came upon some gins, and was so furious that he marched straight off to the keepers to report it, forgetting to pick up the brace of pheasants, which he had flung down by an oak tree when he tore up the gins.

Martin generally carried some of his father's bag; he had two rabbits now. But, after talking to the keeper, Mr. Fosberry turned towards home; then he remembered the pheasants.

"Why didn't you bring them with you?" he asked Martin sharply. "Didn't you see them?"

"Yes, but I couldn't hold more."

Mr. Fosberry had a quick temper.

"You're a lazy young scamp! Give me the rabbits; now go back and fetch those pheasants, and look sharp about it."

It was very nearly dark. The wood looked forbidding in the twilight.

"Perhaps I shan't find them," Martin said, hesitating.

"You know the tree where we found the gins; you have eyes in your head. Go back at once. You'll soon overtake me, and don't think of coming on till you've found them."

Back to the wood trotted Martin without a word. It was a cold frosty afternoon; the thought of nursery tea with a blazing fire made him wish himself at home. As he entered the wood, the trees loomed up in front of him in queer, ghostly shapes. He thumped his chest valiantly.

"I'm not afraid!" he said aloud. He reached the oak tree at last, but there were no pheasants. Hastily he hunted round. Had he mistaken the tree? No, there were the traces of the gins. One was still there, the others his father had carried away. A board on the tree above stated that "Trespassers would be prosecuted." He had read it whilst his father was unsettling the gins. Where were the pheasants? Frantically he peered amongst the bramble bushes. How could they have disappeared?

“P’r’aps they were only pretending to be dead, and ran away directly he left them. What shall I do?”

He felt in despair as he continued the search. Every moment it was getting darker, and to be in a wood after it was dark seemed a terrible thing to poor little Martin. He never thought of running after his father and telling him that they were not there. He had been told not to come away from the wood till he had got them; so up and down the paths and round and round the trees Martin hunted.

Once he started, as he thought he heard steps crackling in the bushes. Would there be wolves in England, he wondered? He had heard of wolves in France, and how when they were hungry in winter they had come down from the hills, and had attacked little children. He remembered a horrid story he had heard of a baby being carried off from its cradle whilst its mother had gone to milk the cow. She had left the door open, and a great grey wolf had crept in and seized the sleeping baby in its teeth. It was never seen again—only some of its clothes with marks of blood upon them were found in the wood near by.

Martin shuddered. His teeth began to chatter in his head, between cold and fright. But he would not cry. He clenched his small fists and turned his coat collar up over his ears, and tramped round and round again.

“Father says I must be manly. But oh, I’m so cold—so misseruble,” he murmured weakly. Then comfort came to his little heart. Was not God close to him, looking down upon him from the sky? It was God’s wood. God had made it. God saved David from bears and lions and giants. Only last Sunday Janet had been reading to them about it. God would keep the wolves away.

Martin dropped upon his knees.

“Oh, please, God, take care of me, and do let me find the pheasants. I want to be a good boy; please help me to find them. You know just where they are. I do want to get home to-night, and keep the wolves away. For Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen.”

He got up then and felt better, but it seemed as if his prayers weren’t going to be answered as far as the pheasants were concerned. For find them he could not, and then suddenly he saw in the distance a twinkling light. It went out in a moment, but he wondered if it was Wallace the keeper with his lantern. He forgot his fears and tore along the wood path as fast as he could towards it. But there was darkness and silence now, and he tried to retrace his steps. Confused, he took a wrong path, and very soon became hopelessly lost. Then the tears came. Deep sobs escaped him.

Suddenly from behind the clouds shone a bright silver moon. Martin raised his head, and as he did so he heard a murmur of men's voices.

"They may be robbers," he assured himself, "and they may be keepers." Then he softly stepped in the direction of the voices. In a few moments the moon enabled him to see some dark figures in the shadow of a hedge.

Unknowingly Martin had reached the outskirts of the wood. Two men were busy packing some rabbits into a bag. His quick eyes saw this at once. But his eyes also saw the pheasants lying on the ground. His father had tied them together with an old silk handkerchief, and Martin recognised the handkerchief.

In a moment, all fear forgotten, he had dashed through the bushes and confronted the men.

"Oh, please, you've found my pheasants, and now I can take them home. I'm lost and so tired!"

One of the men dashed away with his bag; the other raised a stick threateningly.

"Here, clear out, youngster. Who is with you?"

"Nobody. I've been hunting and hunting and hunting, and I asked God, and now He's let me find them."

Martin stooped to lay his hand on the pheasants, but the man with an oath snatched them away from him.

Martin gave a cry.

"I'm so—so very tired. I've got to stay here all night till I bring them home—father said so. Oh, do please—please be kind and give them to me."

Then as the man was making off he ran after him.

"Don't leave me all alone. Take me with you, and oh, do give me the pheasants. I can't stay all by myself in the dark. God sent me straight to you. I asked Him to show me where they were, and they're father's birds. He shot them. I'm trying to be brave, but I do want to go home and have my tea!"

His baby voice faltering in spite of all his courage touched the poacher. He had a little boy at home, the same age. Flinging the pheasants down, he said gruffly:

"There you be! But findings keepings as a usual thing! And get out o' this 'ere wood, and make tracks home."

Martin seized hold of the birds with a little sob of relief. Then felt himself lifted up by the man and deposited outside the wood in the narrow lane he knew well.

“Cut along, and don’t you dare reckernise me in daylight, or I’ll come and slit your throat one night!”

With this terrible threat the man departed.

With blue stiff fingers Martin gripped the pheasants. He was shivering with cold, but joy was in his heart. Though he could not explain it, his chief thought was that he had not failed his father. Nothing else seemed to matter. The moonlight shone on his road, and though the pheasants were heavy, and Martin’s poor legs and feet aching and footsore, he trudged happily homewards.

Just as he was getting near the village he tripped over a root, and cut his knee on a sharp stone. It bled freely. He got out his handkerchief and tied it up as best he could, then limped on, wondering if he ever would reach home that night, it seemed so very far away.

And how was it that poor little Martin was left all these hours alone?

His father walked slowly home, expecting the child to overtake him every minute. Then, as he was nearing the house, he met one of the grooms rushing frantically along.

Mr. Fosberry’s favourite hunter had been suddenly taken alarmingly ill, and he was going for the vet. Without another thought of Martin, Mr. Fosberry went straight to the stables. He was clever at doctoring horses, and there he stayed for a good three hours, fighting for his favourite’s life.

Janet upstairs in the nursery was not at all concerned. More than once her master had taken his little son to a farm to tea. Margot fretted a little. She did not like these afternoon rambles, when Martin left her at home. But when seven o’clock came, Janet went downstairs to make inquiries as to whether Mr. Fosberry had returned. No one seemed to know, and then half an hour later she was told that her master was in the stable with a sick horse.

“Then Master Martin must be there, too. Bring him in at once,” said the irate Janet to the old butler. “The master won’t give him a thought if his horse is bad.”

After some time a message was brought up to the nursery that “Master Martin” was not in the stables.

Margot was being put to bed.

“He’s got lost same as I was,” she said in glee. “P’r’aps Granny has found him and is tucking him up in that nice little bed!”

Janet flew downstairs, and encountered Miss Fosberry in the hall.

She poured out her story breathlessly, and at the same moment Mr. Fosberry came in by the back hall, rubbing his hands together.

“Phew, isn’t it cold! But we’ve pulled him through. He was nearly done for!”

He spoke to his sister.

“Where is Martin?” she asked sharply.

“What? Hasn’t he come home?”

“Where did you leave him?”

“He must have come back. He ran back to fetch a couple of birds and was to have overtaken me. We were at the edge of Worsley Wood.”

“Then you came home without him?”

Reproach was in Miss Fosberry’s voice.

“I expected him to overtake me every minute. What a nuisance children can be! Are you sure he is not in the house?”

“You came in three hours ago!” said Janet in horror. “Something must have happened to the poor child!”

Eight o’clock struck. Miss Fosberry, who was dressed for dinner, looked very anxious.

“Some of the men had better go off to the wood at once. Oh, Henry, you ought not to have left him.”

“I’ll go myself,” said her brother, slipping into his thick coat; “but who would have imagined that the child was not home hours ago!”

He strode out towards the hall door, telling the butler to send one of the grooms after him.

And then, when the door was open, staggering up the steps was poor little Martin. His face was pinched and blue, a bloodstained bandage was round his knee, and he was almost dropping with sheer weariness, but an unquenchable light was in his brown eyes as he raised them to his father’s face, and held out the pheasants triumphantly.

“I’ve only just got them,” he said; “a man tooked them by mistake.”

Then the warmth, the lights, the concerned faces round him, brought a strange dizziness to Martin's head. He dropped with his pheasants in a heap at his father's feet, and it was his father who carried him up in his arms to bed, and stood there helping Janet to restore consciousness to the still, pathetic little figure.

Martin's story could not be told that night, nor for many a day afterwards. For the long exposure to cold resulted in a sharp attack of pneumonia, and there was a day when they did not think that he would pull through. Janet nursed him night and day, and, strange to say, Miss Fosberry devoted herself to her small nephew, even giving up her day's hunting to sit with him whilst Janet took a much-needed rest. And it was when the fever ran high that Martin's ceaseless, delirious talk gave them an insight into what he had gone through.

"I must find them—who's taken them away? Father said I was to stay till I found them—hark, it is the wolves—they've come down from the hills. Oh, I will be a brave *garçon*. They've eaten the pheasants—I'll have to stay all night. Oh, it's cold, it's cold! Where are they? Oh, I can't find them, I'm so tired—I'm lost! I'm lost! I'm lost! I don't know where I'm going!"

He would struggle to get out of bed.

"You mustn't stop me! I've *got* to find them. I'm not a cry-baby, I'm a man—oh, hush—it's voices—quick! quick! It's robbers—I must go to them! I will ask them if they've eaten them—they won't kill me—I'll ask them not to—*vite!* I must go!"

Miss Fosberry listened to this and more with a softened, troubled face. Janet marvelled at her. She said to her friend, Mrs. Lucas, the cook-housekeeper:

"Miss Lydia has found she has a heart. She seems bound up in the boy. She said to me yesterday, 'Janet, we mustn't lose him—my brother's heir—we shall never have such another. You're a praying woman,' she said; 'pray hard he may be spared.' And this from her who voted the children a perfect nuisance when they first came. Why, she wouldn't go and meet them. Made use of the rector, who's at every man's bidding. I never thought the boy would have won her heart so."

Mr. Fosberry was lying back in his easy-chair in the library smoking his pipe. He was uneasy and anxious about his little son, and reproached himself bitterly for having forgotten him that cold night.

“He’s a Casabianca Number Two!” said Miss Fosberry to him. She had come down to give him the latest report. “Don’t ever taunt him with being unmanly if he lives.”

“No,” said his father; “I think I’ve been a bit hard with him, poor little chap.”

“Dr. Lanbury thinks there is a chance for him; but only a small one.”

She went out of the room as she spoke, and a few minutes afterwards, like a small whirlwind, Margot dashed in.

Running up to her father, she scrambled upon his knee.

“Oh, squeeze me tight, father. I’m so frightened I’ve come flying to you. Kate and Emma are talking in the pantry. They say Martin is going to die. He mustn’t die, father. Do tell God he mustn’t. My Uncle Duncan has gone away from me, and now Martin is going. They’ve got so many people in heaven they might leave Martin out. *Moi!*—I can’t do without Martin; he helps me to be good. I shall be very wicked if he goes. Tell me, what do you think, father dear? Won’t God let him get better? Could you and I—just here—kneel down and pray for Martin? God is kind. He will listen. You can speak proper to Him. Do pray, father.”

“Upon my word,” said Mr. Fosberry uncomfortably, “I don’t see my way to do that. Suppose that you do it instead.”

“But grown-up people can make big prayers. I can’t. My Uncle Duncan often used to pray with me. Oh, do pray quick, father, quick! The angel will be coming to take him away if you don’t make haste.”

She audaciously removed her father’s pipe from his mouth, then laid her little soft cheek against his caressingly.

“Do, do, do! My dear father, be kind to your little Margot. She’s too small to pray proper. Let us kneel down *vite!*”

Down on the floor Mr. Fosberry was dragged. Margot had a way with her that would take no denial. He covered his face with his hands. Could he pray, he wondered.

“Speak to God quick!” whispered Margot. “I’ve got my eyes shut ready.”

“Gracious God,” began Mr. Fosberry haltingly, “we beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord— —”

A long pause, then:

“Let the boy live, we ask Thee. We don’t want to lose him. Cure him; make him well. For Christ’s sake. Amen.”

And Margot echoed a very fervent Amen.

Then she jumped up from her knees and handed him back his pipe.

“I knewed you would pray. And now I’ll go upstairs to see the answer.”

She disappeared. That night was the turning point. From restless tossing to and fro, Martin fell into a sound sleep, and the next day the joyful news spread through the house that he was going to get better.

Margot sought out her father with shining eyes.

“I knewed if you prayed to God, He would answer. Martin says he has heaps and heaps answered, but, *moi*—I make very little prayer. I do not know God so well as you and Martin and my dear Uncle Duncan. I think it is kind of God. I expect He wanted Martin up with Him; but He’s let us have him instead. I will love God much for this. Do you know how to love God, father? It is to be very good, Martin says. I was always good when I stayed in the room with Uncle Duncan. I loved him so. And I’m going to be good all to-day. I’ve set myself out to be.”

But, alas, for Margot’s resolves. Only two hours afterwards, her aunt found her lighting a fire of leaves and paper in the potting-shed, and burning up some of Bardsley’s pet bulbs and begonias.

She was sent upstairs to the nursery in disgrace.

“It is my wicked little hands,” sighed Margot, when later on in the day her father heard of it, and gave her a scolding. “They do things too quick sometimes, before I have time to think, and oh, dearest father, it is such a *charmante* thing to see a blazing fire burn. And I was wanting a bonfire to rejoice because Martin is going to get well.”

CHAPTER XIV

Margot's Birthday

It was some time before Martin was up and running about again, and during his convalescence it was his aunt who spoilt him. She brought him toys and books from the neighbouring town, she sat talking with him for hours, and when she commenced her hunting again, she always came in at the end of the day and told him about the run they had had.

Martin loved all this. His eyes would grow big with excitement, and the colour would come and go in his white little cheeks.

“Shall I ride with the hounds one day?” he would ask, and his aunt told him that he would when the following winter came round. Sometimes his father would come up into the nursery and sit with him.

Martin gave him a full account of his adventures in the wood that unfortunate evening, and was much relieved when his father told him that there were no wolves in England.

“I wasn't very afraid,” he admitted. “I didn't run away, and I asked God to take care of me. But I don't like wolves. I'm glad they don't live in England.”

He had several visitors during his convalescence. Mr. Maitland came very often, and Enid several times. Margot played the hostess to all the visitors. She would advance with the air of a little queen.

“We are very pleased to see you, Martin and I. Will you take this nice chair? Martin—he has still to lie on the sofa—he is tired, Janet says; his legs are weak, they shake about so when he tries to run. I take care of him when Janet is away.”

And then she would fuss over Martin's pillows, and pull the rug straight which was over his knees, and stand over him like a sentinel, whilst he was being talked to.

Once when Enid was leaving, she said to her:

“I do so wish one day God would make *me* ill. It is always Martin—he hurt his foot, you know—he is always on the sofa—I should *so* love to be ill, and have people tiptoe up to my bed ‘And how is the dear little Margot

to-day?’ And then there would be grapes, and beef-tea, and flowers, and new toys; and every one speaks so gentle to Martin now, but nobody thinks nothing of me. It makes me *désolée* sometimes.”

Enid hugged her.

“I know, Margot. I used to feel just like it when I was small. We do love to be important, don’t we? But don’t wish to be ill, darling; you’ve no idea how it hurts. And we want our bright little Margot to cheer us up. Martin is very dull when you go out for your walks. When you are with him he is a different boy.”

Margot smiled. Enid always knew how to comfort her. And then the day came when Margot became important. The first of December was her birthday. She had talked about it a great deal, and two or three days before had had a long consultation with her father on the matter.

“Janet is going to ask cook to make me a big birthday cake—with ice on it, she says. Won’t it be cold! But do you think, father dear, I could have a birthday party? Martin and me—we have a book about ‘Little Frank’s birthday party.’ I should like to have a party of my own very much.”

“I don’t see why you shouldn’t. I’m quite willing.”

Margot clapped her hands.

“And may I ask anybody I like? Greggy is at school, or I’d ask him. But I know lots of people I would like to have.”

Her father rashly gave her permission to ask any one. So she and Martin spent a blissful afternoon inviting their friends. Enid headed the list, then Mr. Maitland and his sister, Miss Hale, then Tom, the gardener’s boy, Mrs. Clay, who kept the village shop, a little cripple girl called Lucy, the lodge-keeper’s two small children, a very old man who always sat outside the village inn in the sun and who talked to the children whenever he saw them, and the clergyman’s two children who lived close to Enid. A few other village children completed the list. Miss Fosberry shrugged her shoulders when she heard that Margot’s friends numbered about fifteen. She said the tea had better be in the servants’ hall; but both Margot and Martin begged that it might be in the nursery. Janet was talked over. Cook began to prepare for it, and the little notes of invitation were all sent out, written in Martin’s best handwriting.

“DEAR FRIEND,—We invite you to tea next Thursday at five o’clock. It is Margot’s birthday.

“MARTIN and MARGOT.”

But the tea-party was not Margot's only treat. When she woke in the morning she found her bed covered with presents. And Martin hurried in from his room to rejoice with her over them.

There was a beautiful picture-book from her aunt, a little fitted up work-basket from Miss Hale, a paint-box from Janet, a shell pin-cushion from cook, a purse from Martin, and a little sealed box from her father. This last present was opened with trembling fingers, and then with a scream of delight Margot held up a delicate little watch and chain.

“Oh! See! Look! Was there ever anything so charming! Oh, an angel watch!”

She flung the chain round her neck and danced about the room. Janet caught her up and whipped her back into bed.

“You'll catch your death of cold,” she said. “'Twould be better to have had your presents after breakfast; but Master Martin he begged to have it so.”

Margot was almost too excited to eat her breakfast.

“Never—never have I had such a birthday. In France Annette she make me a nice pudding, but no presents. Sometimes one from Maman—only twice all my life long. But now I have a tableful.”

She rushed all over the house thanking every one she met—and on the way got one or two more gifts presented to her from some of the servants. Then she went to find her father. He was in the library. Margot always trod softly when she came into this room. She never forgot the absent uncle who used to make it so sunny with his presence. She remembered now his birthday, and the happy summer day it had been.

Her father was writing letters. Margot advanced towards him, then stood still and smiled.

“Come along,” said her father, putting his pen down. “I suppose I must have a kiss. And what is it I have to wish you—very many happy returns of the day, isn't it?”

“Yes,” nodded Margot. Then she climbed up on his knee and twined her arms tightly round his neck.

“I must hug you tight for my watch. It is ravishing! *Charmante!* Oh, I cannot find the English words for how I feel. I love it, father. I thank you a

thousand times. I feel so happy. I could fly.”

“Well,” said her father suddenly, thinking he ought to give her good advice, “you’re getting a big girl, and every birthday ought to find you better—that is what I used to be told, I believe.”

Margot released her hold, then she took her father’s chin between her thumb and first finger, and looked at him very seriously.

“And how many birthdays have you had?”

“Me? About forty; we won’t be too particular about exact numbers.”

“And you got altogether good long ago, I s’pose?”

“No,” said her father, with a twinkle in his eye. “I haven’t grown better every year as I ought, Margot. Some years I haven’t put the brake on, and have gone down to the bottom of the hill.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You can understand that I want you to grow up a good woman.”

“Yes, you’re like God. He likes me good. And Uncle Duncan liked me good, and Martin says the Christ weeps tears when we’re wicked. He died for me, you know, and so did Uncle Duncan; but the Christ made Himself die on purpose. He thought about how He’d do it years, and years, and *years* before. Martin says I ought to be double good, because I’ve had Uncle Duncan die for me, too.”

Then her seriousness vanished. She sprang off her father’s knee and danced gaily round the room.

“It’s my birthday. And every one is kind to Margot to-day, and we have a whole holiday, father dear, and we think, Martin and me, that you might like to take us out for a ride on our ponies—just you and Martin and me.”

“All right. Be ready by ten o’clock.”

“Ten o’clock by my sweet darling watch.”

Margot put it to her mouth and kissed it, then ran away upstairs to tell Martin the good news.

They had never yet ridden out together with their father, and it was a great treat for them now.

At ten o’clock they started for their ride, and Mr. Fosberry took them up to a breezy common where they all had a canter on the green turf. Martin

and Margot were fast losing their awe of their father. They could now chatter and laugh to him almost as freely as they did to Enid.

“You have not invited me to your tea-party,” said Mr. Fosberry, as they were returning home after a very enjoyable time.

“No, we haven’t,” said Martin gravely; “nor Aunt Lydia. Janet thought perhaps the rest of the party would be frightened of you.”

“Mr. Maitland wouldn’t,” said Margot. “He always likes to talk to Aunt Lydia. But Tom would; he’s very frightened of you.”

“Miss Enid wouldn’t be frightened,” said Martin. “She’s frightened of nobody; she always says she isn’t.”

“But I might be frightened of her,” said Mr. Fosberry.

“But you couldn’t be, father. Men are *never* frightened.”

“That’s the only fear I have—women!”

This sounded very funny to the children. They began to laugh.

Martin resolved to tell Enid this at the first opportunity given to him.

She arrived quite early in the afternoon and brought Margot two more lovely presents—a beautiful little cooking stove from herself, that would bake toffee and real cakes, and a little, pale blue jersey and cap that Granny had knitted for her.

Margot was delighted.

“I’m really too happy to last,” she said gravely. “I feel I shall soon burst, or something!”

It was a strange tea-party in the nursery. Mr. Fosberry and his sister might have felt awkward if they had been there. Neither of them were given to making jokes, and the tea-party was uproarious with fun.

Miss Hale laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks at some of Mr. Maitland’s funny stories. Enid stamped and clapped her hands like the rest of the children—and every one talked, even the silent Tom; they all talked together at the same time. Cook had provided a lovely tea, with crackers, and iced buns, and jam puffs, and jellies, and the most lovely iced cake in the middle of the table, with Margot’s name and age in pink sugar upon it.

And then, as every one’s plate was at last empty, and they wanted no more, Martin from the bottom of the table got up. Margot was, of course, at

the head of the table. She poured out tea, and when she saw Martin stand right upon his chair she wondered what he was going to do.

“I am going to say a poem speech,” Martin said. “Part of it I made up, and part a friend helped me. It isn’t the same we said to our uncle who is in heaven to-night. It’s a man friend who’s helped me.”

Here Martin stole a sidelong glance at Mr. Maitland, then he cleared his voice:

“Dear Margot was born some years ago,
’Twas in the winter time, I know,
For the earth was covered with pure white snow.

Dear Margot, she flew down to live on this earth,
We all were so glad on the day of her birth,
We made the house ring with our joy and mirth!

Dear Margot, she came from God on high,
And He watches her now from the deep blue sky.
When He wants her back He’ll make her die.

Dear Margot, we hope you’ll make a long stay,
So we wish you long life on this special day,
And God will bless you on your way.”

There was uproarious cheering at this, and Margot was so excited that she got up on her chair and danced up and down and screamed with all her might.

“I think you must make a speech now, Margot,” said Enid.

There was nothing that Margot loved better than that. She extended her arms.

“My very dear friends, I love you all, and I love Martin for making that poem, and I’m so happy I don’t know what to do. I think a birthday is the best thing you can have in the world, for every one is so kind, and so pleased with you. *Moi*—I am going to be the very goodest person in the whole world, for I feel I love you all here, and everybody in the house, and everybody in the world, and everybody in heaven. I don’t remember being there when I was a baby, but I’m going there one day, and then I shall remember it all again. And I’m going to love God as much as He loves me.”

After which tremendous statement she sat down, and they all cheered her again.

Then they all left the table, which was cleared quickly away, and for an hour longer they played games in the nursery. The little cripple girl and old man looked on, but the rest, old and young, romped about with a will. And then the time came when the guests departed, and Martin and Margot were tidied up by Janet to go down and say good-night to their father.

They found him in the drawing-room dressed for dinner.

“Well, youngsters, had a good time?” he asked.

Margot as usual had perched herself upon his knees.

“We’ve had an ax-orsting time,” she said, with much emphasis. “Miss Enid said she would hardly be able to get home. We’ve laughed and laughed till we couldn’t laugh any more.”

“Then the birthday has been a success?”

“Does that mean nice? It’s the happiest birthday I’ve ever had.”

“Father,” said Martin gravely, “you weren’t very glad when God first sent us down to you, were you? We were too French, weren’t we? Aunt Lydia doesn’t like the French.”

Mr. Fosberry frowned.

“Don’t forget, my boy, that your mother was French.”

The children looked puzzled.

“But we try to forget French. Janet doesn’t like our French words. Nobody does.”

“I do,” said Mr. Fosberry.

This was quite a new light to the children.

“But,” said Margot, shaking her head at her father, “you loved us not when we were in France. You would come and look at us and turn your back?”

“That was because of your bad manners,” said their father. “Now you have learnt how to behave properly.”

“And are we a credit to you?” asked Martin eagerly. “That is what Aunt Lydia said I must be.”

“I won’t overpraise either of you, for you’re neither of you overstocked with goodness,” said Mr. Fosberry, with a smile.

“Father dear, Martin has made a beautiful poem about me. May he say it to you?”

Margot could not get away from herself and her birthday yet awhile.

Mr. Fosberry expressed his wish to hear it, and Martin stood up very straight, and repeated it slowly and importantly.

“Very nice indeed!” was his father’s comment.

“Which verse do you like best?” asked Martin anxiously.

Mr. Fosberry could not say, but Margot could.

“I like about my flying down to earth,” she said. “I almost think I can remember it.”

Here she shut her eyes tight.

“It was snow, and snow, and snow, and the angel who showed me the way said, Quick, quick! And I made haste with all my might. I wanted to get to the fire in the house, and I tapped at the window—and who let me in, father—did you, or was it Maman?”

“It was Maman,” said her father slowly and softly.

“And what did you say when you first saw me?” asked Margot breathlessly.

“I said, ‘What a little fright!’” said Mr. Fosberry, laughing.

Margot stiffened. She looked hurt and offended. Her father added:

“But you grew a very pretty baby afterwards, Margot.”

“She was cold and red with the snow,” said Martin, in an excusing voice.

“Ah, I didn’t think of that,” said Mr. Fosberry hastily.

“And when did I come to you?” asked Martin, a little shyly.

“You came when the larks were beginning to sing. Your birthday won’t be here just yet, Martin.”

“I hope God won’t want me back just yet,” said Margot. “I don’t want to go just yet. Perhaps I shall be too bad for Him to want me. I did think I’d like to go after dear Uncle Duncan and catch him up; but now I love *you*,

father, and you won't be able to get on without your little Margot. Oh, do say you want me."

"Of course I want my little daughter," said Mr. Fosberry. "She will have to keep house for her old father one day."

"Janet said to Kate one day," said Martin, "that she hoped you would get another wife one day."

"Yes," said Margot; "and we'd like you to marry Miss Enid very much. She is so nice."

"Great Scot! Stop your tongues, children. I never heard such rubbish!"

The children were frightened at their father's tone, then Margot snuggled up closer to him.

"Never mind, father dear—we won't have any mothers at all. We'll just be three—you, and Martin, and me."

"And when we grow up," said Martin earnestly, "I shall go shooting and fishing with you every day."

"And I shall pour out tea, and sit like I did to-night," said Margot, who could not forget her late glory.

"But where will Aunt Lydia be?" asked Martin.

Margot stuck one small finger in her mouth and considered. "Is she too old to get married, father?"

"Hardly," said Mr. Fosberry, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Well," said Margot cheerfully, "we'll ask her to marry, and go into some other house, and then there will be just three of us left, and, *moi*—I shall be the lady mistress here. I will be very tall, and everybody shall do quick what I tell them."

"And then," said Martin dreamily, "the three of us will be waiting till the good God wants us."

"And," broke in Margot, "we'll all walk into heaven together holding hands, and meet Uncle Duncan who died for me."

"No," said Martin, with a stern rebuke in his eye, as he fixed it on his sister. "No, Uncle Duncan will be quite at the back. We shall meet at the door the dear Christ Who has died for all of us three!"

"Amen!" said their father suddenly and earnestly. Then he kissed Margot and set her down on the floor. "Good-night. Off to bed with you."

And so ended Margot's happiest day in the year.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled 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.

Some pages of advertising from the publisher were excluded from the ebook edition.

[The end of *Martin & Margot* by Amy Le Feuvre]