



The Joyous Story
of ASTRID *by*
L. ADAMS BECK

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The Moon Lady and the Rabbit

The Joyous Story of
ASTRID

by

L. ADAMS BECK
(*E. Barrington*)



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*To my son Harry
and all children the world over
even if they happen to be grown up
I offer this joyous story of Astrid
from the joys and delights hidden
in Asia.*

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*The Rabbit
in the Moon*



Chapter I



THE RABBIT IN THE MOON

*T*HERE had been a great snowstorm and even the pines in the forest were loaded with snow on every bough. The air was so still that if you breathed loudly it would have frightened the birds hopping about and looking for food. The full Moon was shining like a million lamps in the sky and all the shadows had run away into the great woods to hide. But the Rabbits with their children, the Bats, the Owls, the Wolves, and many other happy people who lived in the woods had come out to watch and listen.

Very far off in the village the church clock struck twelve and Astrid was born. And because a church clock takes a long time to strike she was born half in the old year and half in the new year. Perhaps this was the reason why the first thing Astrid did was to laugh, and all the animals laughed too.

The Moon heard all this laughter and said:

“This child is mine. Everyone shall think of night when they see her and of Stars when they hear her name. She shall shine like me and her eyes shall be green like the sea when I look at it. But they shall only shine at night and the day shall be her darkness. She shall have for friends all the creatures that love the night.”

Now you understand why the Rabbits and their children, and the Bears and Wolves and their families and all the other people who lived in the huge pine woods were so glad and laughed when Astrid was born. They are always proud to have a child for a friend.

Two nights afterward three people who lived in the little thatched house on the edge of the pine woods heard a baby laughing outside. These people were—the Man Who Wrote Stories and the Man and his Wife who waited upon him. The Moon was as bright as day so the Man and his Wife held the door open while the Man Who Wrote Stories went out to see what was laughing. Under the oldest pine tree he saw Astrid lying and round her a ring of young Wolves and Rabbits and young Bears. On a low bough over her head sat a great white Owl and when the Man came out all the animals scampered into the frost and the Owl spread out wide soft wings and floated

away. But the marks of a sleigh which had brought Astrid to the wood could be seen in the snow.

The Man carried her in and they looked and looked at her and could not think where she had come from. And her laughter amazed them because babies usually cry. They put her to bed and gave her milk and wished she had been left anywhere else. They did not like babies and they expected every baby to do exactly the same things as every other baby has done from the beginning of the world, and that was foolish because if babies all did the same old thing we should never get any farther. So everything she did they thought was wrong.

For instance, Astrid being a Moon-child could not possibly eat in the day. She could not even drink her milk while the Sun was up. They tried hard to wake her and make her drink, and then she fought with her arms and legs, and then they got angry and frightened and sent for the Doctor. Fortunately he was the seventh son of a seventh son and so he was wise. The moment he saw Astrid fighting and screaming he knew she was not like other babies, and he said:

“I see I must put on my spectacles and have a good look at her before I can say a word. Now don’t speak and don’t stand between me and the light. I might as well be in a beehive.”

He stooped and looked at her and then, sitting in the great armchair, he said seriously:

“This is a very rare sort of child. Never attempt to feed her in the daylight. She can only eat in the dark—except for a lamp or the Moon. It will not be so difficult as you think, because she will sleep, as you have seen, all day. Have her milk ready when she wakes in the evening.”

Then he went off in a hurry because his old pony Duffle was impatient and stamping in the snow and blowing loudly from his nostrils.

The people in the house were pleased at first because Astrid never gave any trouble and they could be busy sweeping, lighting fires, writing stories, and all the other tiring things grown-up people do. They only had to wash her in the very early morning when they got up, and afterward she went to sleep until it was dark. Then she had her food and lay still till morning. She never got up at all, and at last they began to think she could not walk. They never guessed she had daytime dreams from the Moon and Stars, because they never remembered that the Moon and Stars are there all day, only hiding in the light. And at last they were sure she was a very stupid child who slept like a kitten and would never know anything. They were quite sorry for her.

But when she was eight years old they sent for the Doctor again, and the way it happened was this.

As the clock struck twelve at midnight when she was eight years old Astrid got out of bed. No clothes had ever been made for her except nightdresses so she got out in a little pink nightdress and bare feet. Fruit and bread and butter stood on the table by her bed, and she ate it hungrily and drank her milk. And suddenly she knew she did not want to go back to bed, so she went to the window and looked out into the shining world she had seen only in her dreams.

The Moon was bright, and all the Stars of the Dipper were shining, and they looked down at her with smiling eyes like old friends; and on the grass outside the garden sat the Rabbits and their children, and behind them the two white Goats who gave her milk, the House-Dog, the Cat and woolly Bear-Cubs, and young Wolves as lovely and bright-eyed as Foxes and quite as friendly; and all said in a language you would not understand at first (but Astrid knew it because she was a Moon-child): "Come out, Astrid. Come out!"

So she went to her door. The Man and his Wife were asleep and snoring terribly, but she was quite used to hearing that. The Man Who Wrote Stories was at his typewriter, and it made a friendly noise so that he should not hear in case she wanted to get out. But not being used to stairs she tripped over her nightdress and fell and made such a noise herself that he came out to see what had happened and all the animals rushed away. He carried her back to bed, and she said nothing, and next day the Doctor was sent for.

He came with Duffle, but Duffle was much older now and did not mind waiting, so the Doctor had more time. He put on his spectacles and looked at Astrid thoughtfully while the Man Who Wrote Stories and the Man and his Wife explained things to him. Astrid explained nothing, since she was fast asleep; but that did not matter for the Doctor was now eight years wiser.

He looked at her legs and pinched them gently and said:

"Well, she has nice straight legs. I think she could walk. Let us wake her and try."

He shook her gently, but she never woke. Then they lifted her up and tried to set her on her feet, but she slept and swayed sidewise like a doll that has lost part of its sawdust stuffing. Then they laid her on the bed, and the Doctor sat in the chair and looked and looked at her, and at last he took off his spectacles and said the wisest thing he had said since he was a doctor:

"Now attend very strictly to what I say about this child. You are all very old. The gentleman of the house is at least forty, and you two people must be fifty, I should think. Astrid is a Moon-child and I strongly suspect that the Lady of the Moon has something to do with all this. She lives in these woods.

If you are not too old to have noticed, tell me, are Astrid's eyes green? For if so that settles it."

Not one of the three could remember. But then they had never seen them in daylight. The Man Who Wrote Stories was dreadfully ashamed, and felt very old indeed. But the Man and his Wife stood and stared and said nothing. They thought the Doctor must be quite mad. Then they went away to eat their dinner and they shut the door.

"Well, you will see I am right," said the Doctor. "When I find a child with dark green eyes like the water of Pine Sound where the pines hang over it to look at themselves I know what to think. Now a Moon-child must always be allowed to please herself, and what I advise is this: Make a little green dress for her and a pair of sandals, and *always* have the house door open at night. But explain nothing of all this to the Man and his Wife. They could not make head or tail of it. When I see people with eyes like oysters I know what to think about telling them anything sensible."

"But what about the Wolves?" asked the Man Who Wrote Stories.

"As to the Wolves," said the Doctor, "surely you know that the Wolves in this wood are the most respectable people that were ever born. There is not a single grain of badness in any one of them, and I have known them to refuse even fish though it was cooked with marmalade. They live on sprouts and roots. No, no! Do you suppose the Rabbits, who are so careful of their children, would let them play with the Wolves if they were bad? Do what I advise, and you will never be sorry for it. Now I must go. My fee is half a dollar and two cookies."

The Doctor ate the cookies and put the money in his hat, and Duffle and he went away. And a little green dress was quickly made for Astrid on the Wife's sewing-machine, and the sandals were ordered from the cobbler.

All this time she was dreaming. Now you will hear what happened.

She woke laughing in the deep dark, having slept late because the buzzing of the Doctor's voice had made her sleep longer. On the table were bread and jam, a large plate of cookies, and a jug of milk with thick cream on top. She dipped her finger in that and licked it. On a chair was a little green dress, and she put it right on. Then she ate her supper and put what was left of the cookies in the pocket of her dress and walked downstairs. The typewriter made no noise. She thought the Man was asleep, but he was really sitting in the dark and being sorry that he was not young enough to go out too.

So Astrid went out into the world through the open door.

"My stars!" she said to herself. "How beautiful!" And stood still to stare.

For all the sky was trembling and glittering with Stars like twinkling lights on the sea.

Outside sat the Wolves in families, the two white Goats, the House-Dog, the Cat, the Rabbits with their children, and several Bears—as loose and furry and shuffly as if they had been put into fur dresses made by a very careless dressmaker and ever so much too big. There were many other creatures, including a pair of Squirrels, and all formed up after Astrid when she began to run and ran with her. She had to run, for her feet would have danced against her will if she had tried to walk.

By one edge of the woods Pine Sound runs up narrow and bright like a sword between great woods. It is so deep that if the Stars floating on it could sink they would never reach the bottom. It is an arm of the great ocean, and it stretches far up into the heart of the woods so that when the sea princesses want to visit the princesses who live in the forest they can swim up quite comfortably without wounding their delicate silver tails by trying to walk or get into a carriage. There is a rock with a flat top by Pine Sound on which they sit and talk, and Astrid ran straight to it, for she had often seen it in her dreams.

On the top stood a lady in a long green dress, stooping over the deep water as if she watched something in it, and when she saw Astrid and all the creatures she turned and clasped Astrid's hand in her own and swung her up to the rock as light as a bit of thistledown. Two young Bears and a Rabbit climbed up also. The rest sat down in rows.

"But what were you looking at?" Astrid asked. She knew the Lady of her dreams and was not a bit shy. The Lady was very tall and when she stooped it was like a young curved Moon, and she had dark hair that fell far below her knees and the ends floated on the air as if on water. She wore a wreath of small stars, and her eyes were dark green, and she had a green dress like Astrid's.

"Look here!" she said. "Kneel!"—and Astrid knelt and looked into the water. Underneath, far, far down was the youngest Moon you ever saw. She could give out no light. She had to keep it all for herself or she would have gone out altogether because she was so slim and silver. And beside her down in the deep water sat a Rabbit, waiting.

"That is where the Moon sleeps when she is too slim and too young to climb up the ladder of clouds," said the Lady. "And that Rabbit is the one who sits in her lantern when she shines. Children in America and Europe don't know about the Rabbit. They think it is a man in the Moon, but if they looked closer and knew the story they would see it really is a Rabbit waving his paws. Would you like to hear the story about it? Then listen! The children

in China and Japan all know this. They would laugh if you talked of a man in the Moon. They all love the Rabbit.”

So Astrid sat down at her feet, and the youngest Rabbit climbed into her lap, and all the creatures came nearer, especially the Rabbits, for this is the greatest story of their family and it comes all the way from India. China and Japan learned it from there.

Once upon a time in India [began the Lady] a young man was walking very slowly along through a great wood. He was very beautiful to look at and he was a King’s son, but he was so poor now that he had to beg for his food and he had nothing to wear but a yellow robe, very faded and patched. No one could be poorer. He had no house at all. And now he was very hungry and had lost his way in the wood.

There were Lions and Tigers and huge Elephants, but of those he had no fear and there was not one who would hurt him. Indeed he was so kind to men and to animals that the Moon always sent a little Moon such as you see reflected in water to shine about his head, so that he might have light wherever he went. Men did not see this until later, but animals always saw it and knew what it meant.

Well, a Partridge, a Rabbit, and a little Monkey lived in that wood. They were such friends that they had decided to live together, and they had a most comfortable home under a banyan tree. You have never seen a tree like that, Astrid, so I must say that it is an enormous tree which lets down branches to root in the ground, and they become pillars supporting the mother-tree and make all sorts of delightful rooms in the shade. So the Partridge, the Rabbit, and the Monkey had two rooms, one for cooking and housework, the other for sleeping and seeing friends. Each had his own bed to sleep on. The Monkey liked to sleep on heaped dry leaves. The Partridge perched on a bough, the Rabbit had a pile of dry moss as soft as feathers.

In the outer room was their cooking-fire with bricks round it which the Monkey had found near a village. This made it very safe, and the other animals would never have allowed them to have a fire but for that for they are terribly afraid of it. As it was, they were all very glad to be invited to warm themselves when the nights were cold, as they often are in India in winter. You could sometimes see many Monkeys like fruit in the tree above it or a Tiger purring as he stretched out to get warm, his great green eyes blinking like a Cat’s.

[“Did the Birds come too?” asked Astrid.]

All but the Peacock [answered the Lady]. He always wanted to come, but he liked to spread his tail, and there was no room. He had no every-day dress. Well, that night it was not cold, and the cooking-fire was low, and the three friends had gone to bed after a delicious supper, when suddenly they heard someone moaning in the forest. Instantly the Monkey sat up.

“Man!” he said. The Rabbit put his head out of the moss, and his ears shot up to listen. The Partridge stiffened and listened, and he also said, “Man!” and the Rabbit’s nose twitched, “I smell him.”

After a while the moaning was nearer and so sad that the kind little Monkey said:

“Come. We really must go and see what it is.” And he and the Rabbit went first, and the Partridge followed, ready to spring into the air at a moment’s notice.

Presently they came to the little stream where they drank every day, and there lay the young man in a yellow robe and moonlight all about his head. His eyes were closed, and his feet were bleeding from walking so far, but, however ragged he was and however poor, you could feel that he was a Prince. And the Monkey said timidly:

“Sir, I know you are a Prince. I have played on the roof of one of your palaces and I saw you come away into the wide world. I see you are very sick. Can we help you?”

And the Prince answered:

“Thank you so much, but I am ill from want of food. If I could eat I should be better.” Then the Rabbit spoke in his little shy voice:

“Dear Prince, we have very nice food in our house. Come and rest there and I will cook it.”

For he was the cook. The Monkey was too fond of jumping about, and the Partridge had once singed his wing in the fire. The Partridge said:

“Sir, my wings could not carry you or I would try, but I will fan the fire and our brother shall cook you most delicious fruits and leaves and corn.”

But the Prince said sadly:

“Dear creatures, your kindness makes me very glad, but my feet are hurt, and I cannot walk, and if you brought me food I am too weak to eat it. So I beg you to stay with me until I die and then carry the news to my father, the King of Kapila.”

Again he closed his eyes, which he had opened to look at their kind little faces, and the Rabbit cried for pity and brushed away the tears with his paws. He said to the Monkey:

“Pick out the cruel thorns from the Prince’s feet with your fingers and you, Brother Partridge, fly to the rocks where the scilla leaves grow and bring them in your beak. They will cure the cuts.”

So they did all this, and the Partridge laid the cool leaves on the torn feet, and the Prince opened his eyes. He said:

“Dear creatures, I thank and bless you, and now I think I can walk to your house and rest and perhaps I can eat some food.”

So he got up and walked very feebly to their house, and the Rabbit and the Monkey put their beds together for him; and he lay down and fainted straightway, for walking made him much worse, but the three friends were too busy to notice this.

The Monkey rushed to collect leaves and roots, the Partridge fanned the flame with his wings, the Rabbit put leaves and roots and nuts into the pot with honey from a wild bees’ nest. It was a costly feast such as they could not often have, and when it was cooked they poured it into the half of a coconut with a spoon made from the other half, and the Rabbit carried it to the Prince. But when he saw the Prince he screamed and let the coconut drop, for he thought he was dead, and the others came running in great terror, and the Monkey said, crying:

“It is too late. He is dead. And this is the Prince who can cure all the sick and sorry people in the world! He came away to do it, because they were afraid to come to the palace on account of the soldiers. I heard it when I sat on the palace roof in Kapila. Oh, what can we do? There is a precious drink that can cure every pain. They said it could even cure death. But we cannot get it.”

“Oh, what is it? Let us try!” said the little Rabbit, sobbing and clasping his paws. “Is it wine?”

“No, it is water. But there must be something in it that no money can buy. Someone must die before they can make it. Once a King died in Greece, and his wife made it for him though she had to die herself to get it. And then he got well again. But it is useless to talk. We do not know.”

So then the Rabbit could really bear it no more, and he went out of the house and looked up at the Moon, and thoughts came into his little heart so much too big that it seemed as if it must break and that the Moon and all the Stars were waiting to see what that one little Rabbit would do.

He said to himself:

“If the Prince dies, all the sick and sorry people in the world will never be cured. But I am only a Rabbit, and nobody will mind if I die. Rabbits die every day, and no one knows or cares.”

Then a thought came into his mind, and he ran to the cooking-pot and took it to the stream and washed it and filled it with water. But when he tried to lift it it was too heavy for his little paws, and if a friendly Wolf had not come along and helped him he could not have done what he did. But the Wolf put it on the fire for him and said:

“It’s very full. Now, just you take care you don’t scald yourself”—and he went away. But the Partridge ran in and fanned the fire, and the Rabbit said:

“This is pure Moon-water, and it will bring the Prince back from death. But I can cook it. Go and fan him.”

So the Partridge ran back, and the Rabbit was alone.

Now the pot boiled and boiled and threw beautiful bright sparkles like Stars all over the ground, and little Moons broke in the water like bubbles, and all the place was filled with moonlight, and the Rabbit crept up to the pot and looked into it and covered his eyes with his paws for fear, and then he sprang straight into the boiling pot.

After a while the Monkey said to the Partridge:

“Where is our brother, and what is this wonderful sweet scent like all the fruits that grow in Kings’ gardens? And why is the pot boiling and no one to watch? Come and see.”

But the Prince lay with closed eyes; and they went to the other room and stood by the pot, and the Monkey said in a low voice:

“I know. This is the drink that saves even Kings from death. How could it come here in our little house?”

The Partridge said: “I know how it came.”

They looked at each other.

Then, running like the wind, the Monkey got the coconut cup and filled it from the pot and brought it with the spoon to the Prince and trickled a drop between his lips. The moment it touched his tongue they saw the color run back into his white face, and the light of his eyes grew bright, and he sat up and looked at them and said:

“Give me no more, for one drop is enough to make a man well and happy, but fill a large bottle with all that is in the pot, for I will take it with me to cure every sick and sorry person I meet, and teach them to cure others. For there is no medicine so good in earth or sky or sea.”

Then, seeing the Monkey and the Partridge weeping for their brother, he said:

“Stop crying, for I have something to tell you. Look up at the Moon.”

He led them outside the house, and there was the great Moon floating almost near the top of the trees, lovelier than they had ever seen her, and in

the middle of her lantern sat the little Rabbit. He leaned over and looked down at them and waved his paws for joy, and the Prince stroked their heads and said:

“Now you may each ask him one question. Only one, and be quick, for the Moon has to get to England and America. She must not waste a minute.”

So the Monkey rushed up a tree to be nearer, and he called out with all his strength:

“Are you happy, dear brother? Are you glad you did it?”

And the Rabbit called out in a far-away little voice:

“Dear brother, I am happier than the Sun and Moon and Stars all rolled into one ball of light. If you knew what it is to float round the world with the Moon and see all the wonderful places and hear all the stories you would want to come too. Oh, how I wish you could!”

Then the Partridge flew high up above the trees, for he hoped he could fly into the lantern, and he screamed out:

“Can we come too? That’s what *I* want to know!”

But the Moon floated higher and higher, and the Rabbit called in a far-away voice:

“Of course you can come. But not yet. Ask the Prince.”

The Moon floated so high that she was just as she always is in the sky, but still they could see the Rabbit waving his paws. Then the Prince called them and said:

“Now I must go. The whole world is waiting for the wonderful medicine the Rabbit gave me. And when you have learned the magic of the Rabbit’s medicine you will come to the Moon; there is room there for everybody. So be glad and say good-by with cheerful faces, and be sure to wave to the Rabbit every night when the Moon shines.”

He went away and cured all the sick people, and the Monkey and Partridge were happy and began to learn the Moon-magic, and they are learning it still.

The Lady stopped and said: “Astrid, do you like that story?”

Astrid answered: “I like it so much that I shall learn the Moon-magic too. Do you know I am a Moon-child?”

The Lady laughed.

“I know. That is why I tell you stories. But sometimes the Moon is too busy to tell any stories, so if you come tomorrow you can hear another. After that she will be just strong enough to climb up the ladder of the clouds, and

we must wait for a few days. Some day I will tell you why that must be. Now, come.”

So Astrid knelt once more and looked down at the Rabbit, waiting eagerly to spring into the Moon’s arms when she was strong enough to hold him. Then they all went home and separated at Astrid’s door after she had divided the cookies among them, and the Lady kissed her forehead and all the Rabbits’ noses were twitching with pride because of the story.



*Early Snow
and Inu*



Chapter II



EARLY SNOW AND INU

NEXT night when Astrid woke up and ate her supper there were little oranges, very sweet, which had come up the sound in a ship from Japan. She took one in each hand when she went out into the snow where the Lady in the green dress was waiting for her, and Astrid gave one to her and one to Starlight, the youngest Wolf. It was a great treat to him, for Wolves hardly ever see oranges. You should think of that when you eat them. They went to the rock by the sound, and you never saw anything so lovely as that night, because it had rained in the morning and then had frozen hard, so everything was covered with little crystals like the ornaments on a Christmas tree, and the rocks glittered with silver fur and so did every bough.

When they got to the rock the Lady said:

“Now, about those oranges. Mine was delicious; and do you know I have been where it grew? A little village with very small thatched houses like fairies’ houses and where the children are so pretty. Every child has black hair and eyes and a round little face, and they help to pick the oranges. The trees grow all round, covered with oranges like golden balls. I saw a boy pick those Astrid gave to Starlight and me, and I kissed his eyes though he did not know it; and because I kissed them he will paint beautiful pictures when he grows up that every child will love to see. Then I watched the ship bringing the oranges all the way from Japan to the great city at the beginning of Pine Sound, and the sailors hurried to unload them because they wanted to get back to their children in Japan. They too had black eyes and hair, like the children. And while they unloaded the oranges they sang strange songs about Japan, and the Pine Sound children danced and sang this song:

‘Go back to Japan as fast as you can
And bring us more fruit to eat—eat—eat.
Let sunlight shine golden and fine,
For we like our oranges sweet—sweet—sweet!’

So I think, because of the oranges, that we should have a story about Japan tonight. Do you think so, all of you?”

Astrid and all the animals said yes, and Starlight asked:

“But will it be about oranges?”

The Lady said: “Partly, and about a cherry tree, a plum tree, and a pine tree. But first look down into the water and see how the young Moon has grown since yesterday. She is nearly ready for the Rabbit.”

Astrid and all the animals knelt down and looked into the deep, deep water, and the Moon was much larger. She gave out little ripples of light that swam away on the water like silver fishes, and the Rabbit was standing, ready to jump into her arms and sail up with her as in a boat, into the blue lake of the sky. He was so happy that he could hardly wait to be happier. Children are the same when they are longing for Santa Claus to come and hear the tinkling of his reindeer bells in the distance.

They all sat down in rows, except the youngest Rabbit, which lay in the Lady’s lap, with Astrid and Starlight at her feet. And so the story began.

Now we are in Japan. Japan long ago. It was a cold, cold night, and the Moon was watching between the clouds steadily like a round bright eye in the night to see that none of her children came to harm. Just then she could only see dimly, for it was snowing and the large snowflakes fell like a veil between her face and the earth. They drifted down like feathers, and when people could struggle through them no farther and lay down on the ground the Moon saw to it that they were covered up warm in the soft snow-feathers and sent them sound asleep and gave them the loveliest dreams until they woke up again.

Now there was a tiny house standing in a little garden by the snow-covered track which led to the next village four miles away—a very poor little house, and you could not easily believe a Prince and Princess lived there. Yet it was true. Once they had been the Prince and Princess of Sunriver and very rich and great. Her best dress was sewn all over with diamonds in the most beautiful patterns, so that when she moved people could hardly look, because she shook light out of her dress like the sun. The Prince had great palaces and armies of servants. But the cruel King who lived at Kamakura took everything from them except the Princess’s white bird Early Snow, the Prince’s dog Inu, and three tiny trees in blue and white china pots. People in Japan are still very fond of these tiny trees. They are very old and crooked and wise, and yet they are only about a foot or two high. The Prince had had many and loved them dearly; but the cruel King burned all the rest when he drove the Prince and Princess out into the wide world. So, carrying the three trees, with Early Snow perched on the Princess’s shoulder and Inu walking with them, they wandered on and on and found this little house and there they lived. But they were so unhappy that the Prince said:



Now we are in Japan. Japan long ago.

“Now my name shall be Prince Darkness because I have lost all I had; and because men have been so cruel no man shall ever come into my house any more.”

The Princess thought he was quite right, and they lived in their miserable little house and never would give a cup of water or spoonful of rice—though rice is the bread of Japan—to any poor person. But no poor person had asked for it, for the Prince never looked up from digging in the garden when they

passed and the gate was always tight shut. He grew vegetables and tramped to the village to sell them and so earned a few cents, and they lived on that.

Now you must hear about the bird. He was called Early Snow because he was the purest white, like snow, and of the loveliest shape. His eyes were blue like forget-me-nots. He was born in a wonderful place called Gokuraku, and for that reason he could speak if necessary, but he had very seldom done so. The cruel King wanted Early Snow and begged him to come and live with him and have the most delicate food and a little gold filigree collar set with diamonds like dewdrops, but Early Snow refused and went with the Princess. As for Inu, the big dog, he was so faithful and true that you could never stop to think how he looked, though when you did you saw that he had a beautiful face and ears like velvet and brown eyes that looked at you as if he were trying to speak, and that his whole body and not only his tail wagged with joy when he saw you loved him.

Now the morning after the snow had fallen Prince Darkness had gone off to the village with a heavy load of store-carrots and potatoes on his back. He would scarcely speak to the people who bought them, and they knew that. They just pointed at a bunch of carrots and said:

“Ikura desuka?” which means “How much?” and he would hold up three fingers or four as the case might be, and they would pay it and take the carrots. Then he would buy rice in the village by pointing to it and saying, “Ikura desuka?” himself.

The Princess had done sweeping and dusting and washing, and she slid back the window a little (windows slide in Japan) and looked out. A terrible day it was!—snowing, snowing, as if all the sky had melted into snowflakes and were falling. And she was dreadfully anxious about Prince Darkness, for how could he find his way back? It was nearly half past four and darkening quickly when she heard the sound of feet shuffling through deep snow, and she ran out joyfully to meet the Prince.

“Oh, how glad I am you have come back before it was quite dark!” she said.

But it was not the Prince. It was a young man with a beautiful face like ivory, and black eyebrows and eyes, and he was so tired that he could hardly drag himself along. His hair was covered with melting snow, and he stretched out his hands and held fast to the gate for he was afraid of falling down. And he said almost in a whisper:

“Let me in, please let me in. I am almost dead of cold and hunger. Please, please!”

But when he said this the Princess replied:

“You cannot come in here. My husband allows no one to come in. He is Prince Darkness, and men have been so cruel to him that he will never allow a man to come into his house any more.” And she went straight in and pulled the door tight shut.

Now Early Snow was sitting on the spinning-wheel inside, and he said:

“Let him in, Princess. *Please* let him in! Only bad men are cruel. Perhaps this one is kind.”

But she answered: “My husband says all men are cruel.” And Early Snow fluttered onto her shoulder and said:

“Princess, even if he is cruel you must not let him die in the snow. Open the door!” And at that she grew very angry and said:

“Early Snow, this is the first time you have said anything foolish. Say no more. It is not your business.”

By that time the young man had crawled up the garden and had fallen down before the door, and he said in a most pitiful voice:

“Princess, Princess, please let me in. I am so cold. Or if I may not come in give me some rice. I am dying of hunger and I have lost my way.”

But her whole heart was full of anger, and she called out:

“Go away. You shall not come in, and we have only enough rice for one meal for ourselves. Is it likely we should give it to you? Go away!”

She was so angry that tears of anger rolled down her face, and they tasted quite bitter. And now the man outside was silent. Suddenly Early Snow began to tremble all over until his wings shook.

“Oh, I’m so cold, so cold!” he said in a weak little voice. “This house is as cold as ice. It will turn my feathers quite black. One feather is gray already.” He stretched out his little wing, and there was one gray feather. But the Princess was vexed with Early Snow now and she cried out:

“Go away, I’m tired of you! A faithful bird must hate what its mistress hates. Here! I’ll drive you out!” And, never meaning what she said, she pushed the window a little open to frighten Early Snow, and in one second he flew through it and was gone into the whirling snow.

So, quite forgetting the man, she sat down and cried and cried because she had lost her white bird. She knew then how dearly she had loved him and how she could never be happy without him. But what could she do? It was quite dark now, and the wind had begun to blow furiously, and suddenly she knew that the house had grown most terribly cold and she herself felt almost frozen. Her feet—she could hardly move them; and her heart was like a lump of ice. It seemed as if all the cold of winter had come in by the window when Early Snow flew away; and Inu, the dog, lay shuddering with cold at her feet.

She dragged herself to the door and slid it back for a minute and called to Early Snow, but nothing answered, and the wind blew her voice away, and when she shut the door she saw that Inu must have run out after Early Snow for the room was quite empty.

Again she sat down and cried, and the house was so cold that the tears froze like glass on her cheeks. She went to the door once more and looked up to the Moon and stretched out her hands and said:

“You who see everything, send back my Early Snow. Send back my Inu. How can it be that both my pretty ones should vanish away and leave no trace? Oh, what shall I do?”

And the Moon, who was now only a pale light beginning in the sky, said in a voice like sharp frost:

“The house was like an iceberg. They would have died in it. They fled away into the snow to get warm.”

The Princess understood and was furious again, and she called out:

“That is not true! They loved us and they have been here for two winters as cold as this. That is not true!” And she went in and shut the door, and the house was as empty and cold as her own heart—and the Moon darkened behind a cloud.

After a while she heard feet shuffling in the snow, and she called out through the door:

“Go away and die! You shall never come in here. But for you I should never have lost my lovely white bird and Inu. What will my husband say when he comes home? He will kill you.”

But it was not the man. It was Prince Darkness struggling back through the snow, and he was very sad and very tired, for he had sold only one bunch of carrots for four cents and the only thing he could buy with that was matches. All the village people were in their houses and would not come out because of the snow, and he would not go to them.

So he came in, and she told him what had happened and how Inu and Early Snow had gone away together into the night, and when he heard it he said:

“Oh, my Inu and Early Snow! Now we have lost everything we cared for except the little trees. It is too sad. I would rather die.” As he said these words they heard a faint sound outside and he thought it was the man and he called out angrily:

“Go away, I tell you! You have done harm enough already. There is nothing for you here. I will set the dog at you!”

Of course he said this to frighten the man for, as you know, Inu was gone. But he himself could hardly speak. His very tongue felt like ice, the house was awfully cold, and he grew so cold that his heart was a lump of ice from the North Pole, and his hands were too stiff to hold the carrots he could not sell and they fell to the ground. Then outside, even through the wind, he heard a sound he knew—a little faint whining noise like a dog in pain, and he jumped up and shouted:

“It is Inu. He is lost in the snow. Bring the lantern, wife, quick—quick, and I will save him.”

So he put a candle in the lantern and opened the door and tramped out into the garden. Desperately he hunted, trying to find where the little cry came from, and at last under a great bush loaded down with snow he saw two things—Inu’s black nose just showing above the snow, and Early Snow’s little head lying on it as if he were dead. Prince Darkness set down the lantern and knelt, and with his hands he dug at the snow and pitched it away with all his strength; and the Princess heard him digging, and she came running out through the snow and knelt beside him and dug at the snow and cut her hand, but did not care, and felt the warmth stealing back into her heart and then into her hands and her body as she worked, and the Prince felt it also.

Presently they uncovered Inu and then Early Snow, and what do you think they found next? Early Snow and Inu were lying on the body of the poor man to keep him warm with the warmth of their own little bodies. Like a flash of light, Prince Darkness understood why the house had been so cold, and he and the Princess like lumps of ice, and she understood too, and the frozen tears on her cheeks melted and ran down like rain. He took Inu and she took Early Snow, and they struggled to the house with them and back to the man, and together they dragged him into the house and shut the door and looked at each other quite out of breath, as bright and glowing as two children that have been snow-balling. Now the house was as warm as spring, and already Inu and Early Snow were opening their eyes and looking at them. The Princess said:

“I am so glad, so glad, they have come back. How could we live without them? And now I must cook some rice for our guest. There is not enough for us all. We four must eat the carrots. Look, the man is waking too!”

He had heard what she was saying, and he sat up and looked at her thankfully and said:

“Inu and Early Snow saved my life, and I shall love them always. I was dying of cold and hunger, and they lay on me and kept me warm and would have given their lives to help me.”

So he kissed Inu and Early Snow on their heads, and the Princess said eagerly:

“But you must eat. We have plenty of rice, and I will cook it now, this minute. Sit as close as you can to the fire.”

The poor little fire! It was only as large as the jewel in a Queen’s ring, and though she fanned it with paper it had not strength to burn, and the rice was still as hard as pearls, and though pearls are very beautiful they cannot be eaten. And the stranger said:

“Never mind, Princess. The very thought of your kindness is like food, and we need no fire to warm us for the house is summer-warm. You cannot make the fire burn.”

But the Princess said sorrowfully to her husband:

“He must eat. See how pale he is. Is there no wood in the house?”

The Prince shook his head very sadly. Then, all in a minute, his face brightened like the sun on a frosty morning and he cried out:

“Yes! I have my little trees—my three little trees. They will burn splendidly and cook the rice for our guest.” He was running to get them, and tears were in the Princess’s eyes, when the young man caught his hand and said in a voice weak from hunger:

“Please do not burn them! They are so old and wise and lovely that everyone must love them. So do not burn them, Prince!”

But Prince Darkness would not listen. He brought the little trees from outside all covered with snow, the tiny plum tree, the cherry tree and the brave little pine. For a moment he looked at them and murmured to himself so that no one else should hear:

“O beautiful trees, must I lose you? You plum tree, blossoming in the cold, the first to know that spring is near, you first shall burn. You cherry, I thought a lonely tree, for each spring your flowers come behind the rest. Now—it is I that shall miss you. And you pine, whose boughs I thought would live when I am old—you whom the winds loved and the rising mists, you now shall burn.”

He broke them up and put them underneath the pot and lighted them with the matches he had brought from the village; and then he threw all the matches on them, and tongues of flame shot up about the rice pot and there was a glorious fire.

Early Snow began to sing in a voice as sweet as honey. He sang of spring coming and the snow melting and the brooks dancing down through the meadows all covered with buttercups and daisies. He sang of how the primroses shine like stars in the mossy banks and the children run out to

gather them, singing for joy; and as he sang the pot boiled and boiled with a magic sound like spinning wheels whirling and whirling, and they all grew drowsy, and the house grew warmer until on the frozen windows the frost-flowers melted into warm drops, and the Moon shone in a clear sky, and for a while all slept but Early Snow and Inu; they sat and looked at one another and laughed.

The Princess woke up first with a start, and that waked the others. The fire had gone out, but the rice was steaming in the pot. And she put one little bowl on the table and said to the young man:

“Now, please, come and eat your supper.” He sat down on the ground before the little table while she heaped his bowl with rice. But when the plate was full there was more in the pot, enough for her husband, and she heaped that bowl, and still there was more, so she fetched Early Snow’s saucer and Inu’s bowl and then her own, and all were heaped and still there was rice in the pot. It was the most delicious rice, all tasting of strawberry jam and thick cream, and everyone had an enormous second helping until they could eat no more. None except Early Snow and Inu knew how this had happened though perhaps the others guessed why. But the Moon looked in at the window, for it stood open, and *she* understood, and Early Snow sang again, and the happiness in the house was like a roaring joyful fire which made the snow melt for miles all round. At last the young man said:

“Dear friends, there is now no more snow falling, and the Moon shines brightly, and I can walk quite easily to the village, for this splendid meal has strengthened me and I am not tired now. Good-by and thank you a thousand times for your kindness. My only sorrow is for the little trees.”

Prince Darkness could not speak of the trees or look at the empty pots, it made him so sad, but he said:

“You are going through the country. Remember that if any enemies come and the country needs to be defended I shall take my old sword and my old armor and come to protect it. It does not matter even if the King is cruel. Still I should come.”

And the young man bowed and said:

“I shall remember.”

They went to the door to say good-by to him, and he tramped away into the night.

“I am glad he came,” said the Princess. “The house has been warm ever since like summer, and Early Snow is singing of roses in the garden. Let us not shut the gate any more. The children can come in and pick them.”

Spring came very early that year, and a white Crane brought a child to the Prince and Princess—a little girl. They called her April, which is a very pretty name in Japanese, and she was the happiest child you ever saw. But because they had so little money they could give her no new dress, and all she could have was a little blue one made out of an old one of her mother's.

However, Early Snow at once taught her the language of the birds and flowers, and she lived in the garden all day. Early Snow and the white Crane took care of her and gave her lessons, so that she never wanted any toys. The mother birds always showed her their nests and asked her advice about keeping the young ones warm and teaching them to fly. The garden was full of flowers and fruit, and Prince Darkness could make much more money by selling the flowers and fruit; now they could always have honey for breakfast and jam made from the garden fruit for dinner and oranges or marmalade for supper, because, you see, bees had swarmed into the garden since all the flowers came.

Still Prince Darkness missed his old friends and longed for a little more money to buy food for the people in the village who were dreadfully poor. He gave them what he could, but it was too little to be of much use.

So four years went by, and the Princess had quite forgotten the man who had come so long ago.

One day the Prince was digging in the garden when a soldier came riding up on a fine brown horse. He was dressed in red and gold and he carried a large letter tied with red and gold silk in his hand. He got off his horse and bowed and held out the letter. The Prince opened it and read:

Prince Darkness:

You are commanded by the King to come to Kamakura on the twentieth day of May. Because the King orders it you must not let anything hinder your coming. Be obedient.

When the Prince read this he turned a little pale, and he went past little April, who was sitting on the grass with the white Crane standing above her and Early Snow on her lap. A Nightingale and a Reed-Warbler were asking advice about their nests. They wanted to know if they should alter them, because the Cuckoo had said they were not nearly large enough for respectable birds and that they looked like nothing at all. But the Prince went too quickly to hear the advice, though he loved little April with his whole heart.

The Princess was making a cake—a beautiful cake covered with pink and white sugar and “A Merry Summer” written on it in little gold drops of sugar. She had said it was very nice to have a “Merry Christmas” cake, but she thought there should be a “Merry Summer” cake too because it divided the

year so nicely in half, and Prince Darkness and April had agreed. But now, when she saw the Prince's face and the letter, she grew as pale as the sugar and let her spoon drop and forgot to pick it up. She took the letter in her sugary fingers and read it.

"Perhaps the King wants to kill me. He cannot take anything more from us, for there is nothing to take," said Prince Darkness.

Now the Princess was very brave and she would not cry, so she said:

"Perhaps, and perhaps not. The sun is so bright, and April is so happy in the garden, that I think it may be something good. Now you must start at once. I have nothing to give you to eat on the way but rice and honey and apples, but they are very good and will make you strong. I wish you had a beautiful horse like our Dapple long ago; but as you have not you must walk the whole twenty miles. Eat three meals a day, and do not forget to comb your hair before you see the King. Now, be brave! I have a sort of creeping feeling in the ends of my fingers which always means nice things. It happened before the bees swarmed here into the garden, and first of all when Early Snow came back. I seem to know by that."

The Prince answered:

"I will be very brave, but certainly he is a terribly bad King."

He was gone in half an hour, for he had nothing to pack up. He wore his only clothes, and they were as old and ragged as could be. On his feet were grass sandals, which he always made for the Princess and himself. They are called *waraji* in Japan, and it is very useful to learn how to make them because then you need never go to the shoemaker. In a basket on his head he carried the rice and apples and honey. Very soon he began to notice how many grand noblemen were going to Kamakura. It was a splendid sight. Some wore shining breastplates of silver with red silk tassels. Their swords and daggers were decorated with gold. They rode on noble horses, fat with good food, and even their grooms and followers shone with gay colors and beautiful silken clothes. Some of these great lords were in shining lacquer carriages carried on men's shoulders, and these were even more splendid than the others. But all laughed and shouted when they saw Prince Darkness tramping along to Kamakura, and none of them remembered him or thought a Prince could be hidden in a ragged dress and poor grass sandals on his feet. The grandly dressed servants mocked at him and said:

"Just look at that beggar going to Kamakura with his shabby dog trotting behind him! He has not even a collar—that dog! I suppose he thinks he will be invited to the royal feast and that the King will give his master a fat purse of gold. No, no! He will soon be taught better. People like that should not come near rich people like us!"

But Prince Darkness did not even hear them, for he was thinking of the Princess and April and of how glad they would be if the King did not kill him and he could come home safely. That was all he hoped for, and even that he could not be sure of, but he thought he could be brave even if he had to die, because death is good, too, when you understand. So he went gaily along.

At last they came to Kamakura—a beautiful city near the sea—and the sun was shining gloriously, and masses of cherry trees were covered with blossom as if pink, scented snow had fallen upon them and loaded all the boughs. And so he came to the gate of the King's palace.

Soldiers in fine dresses stood about it—a great guard of them—and they bowed low as the rich noblemen came up and dismounted and went splendidly in, flaming with gold and silver. But when Prince Darkness came no one bowed. They looked at him scornfully and shouted:

“Stand back! You can't go in!”

The Prince bowed politely and said smiling: “But I think I must! Look here!” And he took out the royal letter, and showed it to them. Very rudely they said:

“Well, then, get along in. If there's any mistake it's not our fault. But you certainly can't take that shabby dog in with you. Here, Saburo! Get your bow and arrows and shoot the beast. The idea of bringing that kind of scarecrow to court!”

But Prince Darkness held Inu and said:

“The man who hurts my dog will pay for it. No one shall touch him. And I will not go in without him. He is only safe with me. Now, what will you do?”

Then they were frightened because he was so brave and strong, but still they said:

“No—no dog can go in. Only the beautiful dogs of the King and the rich noblemen go into the palace, and this dog is only worth shooting.”

At that Prince Darkness seemed to grow taller and stronger before their very eyes. He said:

“I too am a Prince. I am Prince Darkness, and I will not leave my dog to be shot. Go, one of you, and say to the King—‘Prince Darkness is here with his dog and he will not come in without him.’ Say just those words.”

Greatly fearing both the King and Prince Darkness, one of them went into the King's magnificent hall, and while Prince Darkness waited he sat down on a stone by the gate and stroked Inu's head, and Inu looked up at him and was happy.

Presently the messenger came back.

“His Majesty says the man and the dog may come in. They are to appear before him at once. His Majesty will see them first.”

That was the message, and instantly the guards made way, and the Prince and Inu walked through the great gate and into the courtyard crowded with rich nobles who had to wait and let the Prince go first. They stared at the man and the dog, but no one bowed or welcomed them.

Into the long hall, the walls most splendidly painted with mountains and rivers and great trees, went the two, and the Prince knelt and bowed his head to the ground, for that is the custom in Japan. So he did not see the King at all. But suddenly Inu sprang from him and rushed up to the high seat where the King sat and leaped upon him wildly and licked his hands and barked with joy, until the hall rang and all the nobles rushed in to see what could be happening. Prince Darkness sprang to his feet. He thought Inu would be killed now, even if he meant no harm, but as he leaped up he saw the King's face, and, lo! Inu had been the wisest of all. For it was not the bad King; it was the man who had visited his poor little house—the man for whom he had burned his little cherry and plum and pine trees and whose life Inu and Early Snow had saved. Then the King spoke, and his voice rang through the hall.

“Prince Darkness, when I grew up I was told how cruelly you had been treated, and so I went to see you myself and find out the truth. I should have died in the snow but for Inu and Early Snow and later your own kindness. I could do nothing to help you then, for though I told the cruel King, my uncle, he would not listen. But he has just died, and I am King. Now, hear what I say. You were good to a poor stranger and to keep him warm you burned your three trees and you and the Princess gave him all your food. You have come bravely to see me and you would not leave your faithful dog but were true to him as he is true to you. So now for each tree I give you a great estate. The first is called Plumfield, and it has an orchard of plum trees all covered with white blossoms with hearts of gold. The next is called Cherrywell, and it has an orchard of cherry trees all covered with blossoms like pink and scented snow. The third is called Pinebranch, and it has a forest of pine trees more beautiful than any other and a river runs through it where golden fishes swim. Now, be happy!”

Prince Darkness bowed his head three times before the King and could scarcely believe it was true; and joy shone upon his face like the rising sun, and all the nobles bowed before Prince Darkness and cried—

“May you live for a thousand thousand years!” until the hall rang.

The King put his arms about him as if he were his brother. And from his own arm the King took a broad golden bracelet set with diamonds and clasped it about Inu's neck, and it was settled that he and his children, and his

children's children should wear it one after another so that all should know the story. And from his thumb he took a great gold ring set with pearls, and Early Snow was to have that for a collar. To the Prince he gave back the gold crown that he used to wear long ago, and the Princess's dress all sewn over with diamonds like sunshine. And he commanded that the Prince and Princess should be called Prince and Princess Sunriver once more and for always.

So the Prince rode home on a splendid horse to make the Princess and April happy and to be good to all the people who lived at Plumfield and Cherrywell, and Pinebranch.

There was a moment's silence while everyone thought about the story and then the Lady said:



Prince Sunriver rode home on a splendid horse

“There is one thing more before the story finishes. He found something at home that made him very happy. Can any of you guess what it was? Can you guess, Astrid?”

But Astrid could not guess. She was not wise enough yet, for this was only the second story she had heard from the Lady. But the white Owl spread out his great wings, wide and soft as snow, and he laughed for joy and it sounded exactly like—

“Too-whit—Too-whoo-oo-oo!”

Everyone laughed with him, and he said:

“I know, because I am so wise, and all the trees are my friends. He found the three little trees standing each in a blue and white china pot, and they were covered with blossom and buds and green pine needles exactly as they had been when they were burned. And the reason was this. I have heard it from Early Snow who saw it. When the trees were burned their souls escaped in the smoke—for all wise people know that trees have souls exactly like children—and each little tree soul hid in the garden under the snow; and the snow was kind and warm, and the sunshine helped them, and the rain watered them, and when they heard the good news they opened into blossom to meet the Prince.”

Astrid caught the Lady’s hand and said:

“May I come tomorrow night? I dream of stories all day and long for the night. Oh, may I? And can I see Early Snow?”

And the Lady said:

“Yes, you can see Early Snow and hear more stories but not tomorrow, because the Moon will be quite large enough to sail up into the sky with the Rabbit in her lantern, and she will be too busy for a while after getting back to the sky. Besides it would not do if you had a story every night. Enough is as good as a feast, and children must think things over in their own minds. But you must be very busy making beautiful things in *your* mind, because then we will plant them out in the forest, and they will grow, and you shall have your own garden. Now we must run home. Remember always to look up to the Moon and wave your hand to the Rabbit.”



Teakettle Princess



Chapter III



TEAKETTLE PRINCESS

ASTRID spent the next few nights in making mind-flowers. She was sure it would be only a few, because the Moon would soon have time to listen, and she wanted with all her heart to have a flower ready for planting in the garden she was promised in the forest.

First, she caught all her silly dancing little thoughts and stood them on shelves in her mind and told them to go to sleep and be good. Then she took six blue pieces of thoughts and shaped them in her mind into a starry flower, looking steadily at them all the time. After that, she took four more pieces and made a curled-up bud. And then she had to stop for a minute, for in the night she had never noticed any leaves. At last she remembered some pink seaweed like little ferns which she had seen in Pine Sound on the rocks, and at once she put it on the table in her mind and sat looking at it until she could make it quite prettily. And so she made the leaves from that. It was not quite right, for they should have been the leaves of land flowers, but still it was very pretty for they were like little pink ferns with crinkled edges, and of course it was quite a new idea. The moment her flower was done she took it out of her mind and put it on the window-sill, and then she laid two fingers on her lips and gave the Owl-call. The white Owl came flying like a dream across the Moon, blotting her out with his wide wings, and lighted on the window-sill by Astrid. She was so eager that she began to talk before he was really settled, and that made him a little cross.

"I never knew anyone in such a hurry!" he said. "You'll never have time to grow if you're always running after your own tail like that!"

"I haven't got a tail. I wish I had!" Astrid answered. "They're so nice and warm for curling round your feet in the snow."

"Well, you certainly run after other people's tales if you don't run after your own," he hooted. "I never knew anyone so fond of stories. But what did you give the call for?"

She laughed for joy like a whole crowd of bluebells shaking their bells together, and that is the jolliest laughter in all the spring.

"Look here!"

She had covered the mind-flower with the lid of a box, and now she lifted that off and showed it to the white Owl. He put on a pair of spectacles (though he did not in the least need them) which the Man Who Wrote Stories had left in her room when he was cleaning the windows, and looked at it carefully.

“Well, it’s alive and it will grow, but I never saw one like it before. You’ve mixed up land-things and sea-things. That flower could grow quite comfortably under the sea or in the forest, and your Lady mayn’t like that. She doesn’t mix her things up like that except at the very beginning when she’s making a new world. They start all mixed up and sort themselves tidily afterward.”

“But it’s *my* very beginning,” Astrid answered, nearly crying with disappointment. “If you knew how difficult it was to make! Don’t you like it?”

The Owl shook his head and looked wiser than the wisest old man alive.

“I’m sure it was difficult. It ought to have been impossible. Who ever heard of a flower with seaweed for leaves? However, we must make the best of it. Now I suppose you want me to keep it in the stables for you. Could you lend me a box?”

She found a pretty box with a picture on the lid of a ship sailing to India on a blue sea with little white waves like skipping kids, and the Owl took it in his beak.

“You’ll be going out again in a few nights,” he said. “The Squirrels had a message from the Lady, and she told them to pass it on to the Mice who live in the house so that they might tell you. However, I tell you now. Good-by!”

He flew straight away with the mind-flower, and she was horrified to find she had forgotten to remind him to bring it on the story night.

When that night came she had no other ready. She was so troubled about the seaweed leaves like little pink ferns all crinkled at the edges that all her thoughts kept scurrying about like frightened Mice, and she could not catch one to make another flower with. They were simply as disobedient as could be.

The night came and she put on her little green dress and slipped quietly downstairs and out at the open door. She was so anxious about the Owl and the mind-flower that she had not been able to eat her cookies, and so she brought them in a paper bag.

There they all were in the moonlight—the lovely Lady sitting in her shining green dress among the animals under the pines. She wore a little Moon in her dark hair tonight, and it shone like pearls, not brightly but with

the soft light the Moon makes, which never dazzles your eyes. Astrid knelt beside her and quite forgot even the mind-flower because the Lady put her arm round her, and she looked and looked at the Moon in her hair until it seemed to her that they were up in the sky sailing along together like the Moon and the Rabbit past shores and islands of clouds and Stars. She was so happy that this might have gone on all night long but that the Lady said:

“Wake up, Astrid! Where is your mind-flower? We are going to the garden now.”

And when she said that every animal began to dance for joy, some of them alone, some of them in pairs, and if ever you have seen a Bear and a Rabbit doing the Fox-trot together you will know what Astrid saw and you don’t need to be told. Just as they finished the Owl came flying up with the box and put it on the Lady’s knee.

“I’m quite out of breath with hurrying!” he said. “The truth is Duffle wanted to come too, and the stable door jammed. But here he comes. He said he thought you’d want him tonight, madam!”

“Dear Duffle!” said the Lady. “Yes, I do. Astrid must ride him, for that’s delightful. Look! He has brought the saddle that once belonged to the Doctor’s little boy. Good Duffle!”

She stooped and kissed the white Moon on his forehead. I ought to have told you before that Duffle was really a Moon-pony though no one dreamed of that except the Doctor and he only guessed. Duffle had never told him about it. Nice people do not boast of being gentlemen, and Duffle was very nice.

“But just look at that for a mind-flower, madam!” said the Owl, taking it out of the box. “I ask you! Who ever saw a blue land flower with pink seaweed leaves?”

The Lady took it, and all crowded up to see and to hear what she would say. Nothing is more interesting to animals than mind-flowers because they are always trying to make them themselves. When you see a cat or a dog or any animal staring at the fire or into the dark you may know a mind-flower is being made. I knew one dog who made them so beautifully that his mistress could see them too and love them, and they are growing still and more beautiful than when first they were made.

So the Lady looked very carefully indeed at Astrid’s and then she smiled, saying:

“I think it is one of the prettiest, queerest little flowers I ever saw. It never could have thought of itself, and no one but Astrid could have thought of it. What will happen is this: nine months of every year it will live in Astrid’s garden, but for the three winter months it will have to live under the sea in

Pine Sound. Just think what wonderful stories it will have to tell the sea fairies about the forest and the forest fairies about the sea. This flower shall be called Astrida.”

Astrid was a pale child but now she colored quite pink with pleasure.

“I shall make plenty more!” she said. And the Lady smiled again.

“Yes, but when you know more you will make other things besides flowers. You can make perfectly lovely animals and even people.”

“But will they be alive?” Astrid asked eagerly, and all the animals listened eagerly too, for to be alive is most important.

“They will be just as much alive as you yourself are,” said the Lady, “and that is forever and ever. Every animal you see was made that way. Someone thought of him, and so he is here.”

“Who thought of him?” asked Astrid, and she caught the Lady’s hand in her own.

The Lady did not smile now. Her eyes were like Stars, and she looked at Astrid for a minute and said nothing. Then at last:

“You must get to the Back of Beyond before you can be told all about that, Astrid, and when you get there you won’t need to be told. But now let us all come and see the garden.”

She turned and led them on, carrying the mind-flower in her own hand and walking so quickly that her feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground, and Duffle and all the animals had to trot to keep up with her. How Astrid enjoyed that ride! The saddle was so comfortable, and Duffle was so careful that he looked round and told her every time he was going to make a little jump.

They went deep, deep, into the pine woods, and the huge trees stood up and apart as if they were holding up the sky. They made a whispering noise far, far overhead, telling each other secrets that Astrid longed to hear. It was very dark under the trees, so she said to herself:

“When the garden comes I shall never be able to see it. I wish the Moon could see through the trees better or that the animals’ eyes were brighter.” For in the dark they shone like little green lamps, almost as beautiful and as bright as the Lady’s. Now she stood still, and the Moon in her dark hair grew brighter and brighter and gave out light like the Moon in the sky, and Astrid saw that they were in a very wonderful place.

They stood in the middle of gardens stretching away among the trees to the beginning of darkness. They were lighted not only by the Moon in the Lady’s hair but by the light which each flower gave out like a little moony lamp. Yes—there were hundreds of flowers planted in every corner, not stiffly in garden-beds but in the shelves and crevices of great rocks, under the trees,

climbing up banks, dipping down into little valleys; and Astrid saw that though they were of different colors all the flowers of the same shape were planted together in families as if they belonged to each other, so that you could say each was a garden of its own.

“The animals love this place, for they have their very own gardens,” said the Lady. “They each made the flowers for them. Now look about carefully and see if you can guess which is the Rabbits’ garden. You ought to be able to tell.”

So Astrid stooped and went bending about, looking most carefully at all the flowers, and wondering what sort of mind-flower would come out of the Rabbit’s inmost heart. At last she came to a very small corner where everything was beautifully fresh and green because a little stream ran there sparkling in the light of the flowers. How can I describe the scent that rose from them? It was warm and furry, it smelled of hay and clover-blossoms. It was like a meadow in sunshine, and when she knelt to see more closely, the flowers were soft gray and downy like blowaways and the stems very short; you had quite to lift up the silvery leaves to see underneath, but when you did there were hundreds and hundreds of flowers close to the ground, and in the middle of each flower was something like a little black eye, which gave out light. Astrid looked up quickly and said:

“This is the Rabbits’ garden!”

They all frisked and turned head over heels for joy and danced the Bunny-Hug. You could not tell one from another—they were so tangled up—a warm furry mass of happy Rabbits. They had been terribly afraid Astrid might not know their garden, and that would have made them sad because most animals try to make mind-flowers exactly like themselves. They cannot imagine anything better than that. So they wanted Astrid to be obliged to think of Rabbits directly she looked at them. And the Lady said:

“They are beautifully made. Did you ever see such little innocent flowers? They mostly make them in twilight when they sit in the dewy grass twinkling their little moist noses. I love the Rabbits’ flowers. But one day they will make more lovely ones. Dogs do, and Horses, and I have even known Elephants to make wonderful mind-flowers, but we have almost none of those here because they grow in Asia. If we can get your House-Dog to come with us one night you shall see the Dogs’ garden. One can never see a garden unless its own animals are there, and Dogs are difficult to get at night because they must take care of their masters and their houses.”

“Are they *very* different from the Rabbits’ flowers?” asked Astrid.

“Very. Some of them you might not even understand until you get to the Back of Beyond, because Dogs are so very wise. But go and look into

Duffle's eyes and you'll see something."

Duffle was standing quite near, listening carefully, and Astrid went up to him and put her hands on each side of his nose—smoother and softer than the softest velvet—so that he should not move; and he never stirred but looked into her eyes. In his great brown eyes she saw two little pictures of herself. Nothing else. Not trees nor the Lady—just herself; and she knew that he loved her and she loved him. She thought:

"If Duffle made a mind-flower I think it would be me. I mean I think it would be like me. He would not want anything else."

"Yes," said the Lady as if she had spoken. "A Rabbit is a dear, but it couldn't do that. So you must be beautiful that Duffle may make a beautiful flower, for it will be like you even if you are ugly, and you would hate to see that. Come now and see your garden and then we'll have the story."

They went on and into a little dark corner. It was dark because there were no flowers, but when the light of the Lady's Moon touched it you could see how lovely it was. The stream hopped down a rock, making a tiny waterfall quite white and foamy at the bottom over bright pebbles, and great ferns grew over it, and there were little flat ferns clinging to the rocks, and beds of thick green moss all cool and damp from the spray of the stream—a heavenly place to sit in on a very hot sunshiny day.

"Now you must plant your Astrida yourself!" said the Lady.

Then Astrid knelt and made a tiny hole in the moss and set the flower in it, and the moss closed at once about it, and there it stood making a lovely little blue star against the moss. Certainly the pink leaves were rather funny, but the Lady liked them, and the Rabbits liked them, and if Duffle and the Wolves looked a little puzzled that could not be helped. And the moment it was planted it gave out light like a blue glowworm.

"Now we will sit here and look at it," said the Lady, "and I shall tell you the story of this stream—Astrid's stream—for it is a part of a much larger one who has sent it to water the gardens here."

Its name is Bird-Music. [The Lady began the story.] The story does not begin in this forest but in enormously high mountains to the north covered half-way up to the top with glorious pine forests. Even the pines cannot climb to the top of those mountains—they are so high. From the snows great and little streams rush down the mountains. One of these streams was very proud and great; she was a Princess because she was born, so she said, on the topmost peak of the mountains, and the hard ice clear as crystal was her father and the pure white snowdrift of the cave was her mother. This made

her so terribly proud that she told all the other streams she was the Ice Princess, and she forbade them to speak to her for they were only common people. They could play among themselves, but she would not play with them, for a Princess must never run quickly, she said. So they let her alone and almost forgot her. No bird would drink from her stream, for if one tried to drink she would hiss and spatter and wet its wings and say:

“Go away or I shall drown you. Why should a miserable bird think a real live Ice Princess is to give him water to drink?”

All the birds flew off to the other streams and told them wonderful stories of the things they saw when they went away for the winter. Some of them had been even as far as India and Japan. They had seen the wild Elephants and the Tigers in the jungles and they knew where the King and Queen of the Oysters keep their glorious pearls and the very place in Ceylon where Oysters sing on moonlight nights. But the Ice Princess never heard a thing. She was too proud. And she was content to be alone for it gave her more time to be proud, and she would think:

“I am the Ice Princess. It is a splendid thing to be a Princess and flow slowly and gracefully along and wear a flashing white crown of ice in winter, sparkling in moonlight and sunlight. The other streams can never freeze because they go hurrying along and jump and skip like common children. They are very common, but *I* am the Royal daughter of the Heaven-High Mountain, and my heart is as cold as ice on the highest peak.”

Indeed her heart was cold and cruel! I must tell you a really dreadful thing she once did.

A beautiful bird with golden feathers was sitting on a little rock near her one day, and though she would not talk to him she began to talk to herself about her pride, and he heard her and laughed. So she felt she must know what he was laughing at and she said sharply:

“How dare you laugh so near the Royal Daughter of the Heaven-High Mountain? Sh-sh!”

He answered:

“I laugh because the stream called Bird-Music, which has no pride at all and is loved by us all, springs from much higher on the Heaven-High Mountain than you do, and her father was a Star, which is much brighter and grander than a lump of ice, and her mother was a pure white Cloud sailing like a Swan about the Sun and Moon. She is very much grander than you are, but she never boasts about herself, and the littlest Mouse may drink of her stream.”

The Princess was so furious at this that she hissed like a Snake and sent a great wave rushing over the golden bird and swept him away and drowned

him. She was not sorry, and after that none of the animals or birds would even look at her. She did another thing too which showed her pride. All the other streams flowed down into the world and were very useful. They worked mill-wheels, they watered gardens, I cannot tell you half the useful things they did. But she was too proud to leave the mountain and mix with common people. She dug a hole in a valley in the lower part of the mountain and made a lake so deep that it looked quite black, and there she lived a great deal, thinking how proud and grand it was to make a lake and live in it when she chose. And sometimes when she thought of the other streams it made her so angry that she tossed up great waves on her lake, and the first time that happened a boat was upset and two men were killed, and afterward no boat would go near it. As no fish could live in it, and no bird or animal ever came there, the Princess was quite, quite alone. She was miserably unhappy for it is a terrible thing to be alone always, but she did not know how miserable she was. She just went on being alone.

["Why would no fish live in her lake?" asked Duffle, "and why would nobody drink from it?"]

"Because it was so cold that everything that touched it froze to death."

"Couldn't the sunshine warm it?" asked Starlight, the youngest Wolf.]

It could not get through [said the Lady]. The part of the sunlight which makes you grow cannot get through even a pane of glass and so it was with the Princess's lake. There was a covering like ice over it, and the sunlight could only see the lake. It could not warm it. Well, time went on, and now the Princess's hair was frozen too. It was quite white, and her eyes were the color of ice and as cold, and her cheeks and lips were white as snow so that she was quite dreadful to see. The truth was she was freezing herself to death, but everyone was afraid to tell her this, and they could not be very sorry about it, for they thought that when the Princess was frozen to death a happy singing stream would come instead and perhaps overflow the horrid black lake and drive it out of the mountain.

One night the Princess sat alone near the Heaven-High Mountain and it was bitter cold. It seemed the very Stars were freezing, for they all shook and trembled and threw splinters of light about them as if they could not hold them any longer, and a black cold wind was blowing. The Princess's white hair blew out on it like a sail, and she pressed her hands to her heart to try to warm them, but her heart was as cold as an iceberg and it made her hands colder, and all the water of her stream was frozen like iron. She had shut her eyes and was trying to sleep and forget her misery when a little silvery voice near her said:

“Princess, don’t sleep. Wake up! When people sleep in the cold they die. Wake up!”

She did not even open her eyes, the cold made her so sleepy. The little voice spoke again, “Wake up!” and when she still took no notice there came a great handful of warm water flung in her face. She sat up awake and furiously angry.

“Who dares to throw water in my face?”

“I dare,” said the sweet little voice, “for if I don’t you’ll die.”

“And why shouldn’t I die if I want to?” asked the angry Princess. “Who are you? Let me alone, I tell you!”

“My name is Bird-Music!” said the sweet voice. “And I am a stream belonging to this mountain. Once you did a kind thing for me, and I want to do one for you.”

“I never did a kind thing for anybody,” said the Princess. “I hate everybody. Let me alone. How dare you speak to a great Princess like me? I am the daughter of the highest ice and snow on the mountain peak. I ought not to speak to you. You are only a common person.”

Bird-Music laughed.

“My father was a Star, and that is why my heart is so warm and full of light. And my mother was a Cloud. Even the water in my stream is warm. You felt it just now. And I too am a Princess. They call me the Teakettle Princess.”

“Horrible! Shocking! You can’t be a real Princess. I don’t believe your father was a Star. No real Princess would be called a Teakettle!”

The Teakettle Princess dashed another wave of warm water over the Ice Princess’s heart. It warmed it a very little, and she opened her eyes wider.

“What did I ever do that was kind?” she asked.

“It was a day in summer, and it had not rained for weeks. I was dying of thirst,” said Bird-Music. “I tried to scoop up some water in my hands, but only a little muddy puddle was left, and all my grass and flowers were withered and brown. Just as I was dying you came down beside me and sent a great wave of ice-cold water right over my face, and it filled the puddle and washed it clean and I drank. The rain came that night, and my life was saved. Now, listen to me, Ice Princess. I have loved you ever since though I did not dare to speak to you. You will die if you stay alone like this. It is too cold. Come down into the world with me and be happy.”

“I certainly never knew I gave you a drink and I am very sorry I did,” said the Ice Princess. “And I’ll never go down into the world with a Teakettle

girl. I shall stay where I am. No common people for me! But if you like to tell me what you do it may amuse me.”

“As to that, I am a very busy person,” said the Princess Bird-Music. “But before I begin, put your poor frozen feet into my warm stream. How pretty they are—a real Princess’s feet, but too cold! See—lay them on my heart. It is as warm as a Christmas fire.”

The Ice Princess was a little pleased to be told this, and she put her feet on the Bird-Music Princess’s heart, and the most delicious warmth crept through them. She had never been so comfortable in her cold life and a little happiness like a very young Mouse began to creep about in her heart.

“Well,” said Bird-Music, “directly I leave the mountain I run through a lovely village—small brown houses with high roofs—and there are pipes so that I can run into every house, and that is most interesting for I can see everything that goes on and hear all the stories the grandmothers and mothers tell the children. I know the most wonderful stories. Did you ever hear the story of the King and the Goose-girl?”

“Never. And I don’t want to!” said the Ice Princess. But still she listened.

“And then the old grandmother gets up and takes the teakettle and fills it from the little pipe where I am always flowing away and boils it and they have tea and they say—‘No one makes such good tea as our Teakettle Princess.’”

“Horrible. Do go away!” said the Ice Princess, but she did not really mean it now, for she was growing warmer every minute.

“And then, when there is a wedding in the little house, the bride comes to me and she holds the water in her hands and says the old charm—

‘Water make me fair and sweet
As the flowers in the wheat.’

and she dips her face into her hands, and I make her cheeks like roses and her eyes like blue stars and her lips like poppies. And the children sail little boats made of leaves and sticks on my tiny waves; once I carried one right down to the mighty ocean and I saw the sea fairies take it to make a boat of pearls for their Queen. And at night the Stars, my grand relations, all come and dance on my waves until I am like a Queen covered with jewels.”

Now that made the Ice Princess listen very eagerly, because she liked grand people and nothing can be grander than the Stars.

“I rather like to hear about it,” she said, “so you may go on. What happens when you get to the great ocean?”

“That is one way to the Back of Beyond,” said Bird-Music, “and I can’t tell you any more until you know the way to the sea. But that is the happiest

of all.”

The Ice Princess began to wish she knew a little more about that and everything else. She really knew nothing at all, you see, for she had never been out of the forest, and even in the forest she would not talk to anyone or let them talk to her.

“But now I think you are warm enough,” said Bird-Music, “and I must go away for I am so very busy. There is a new baby at the first house in the village, and there will be a christening party tomorrow and a beautiful sugar cake, and they will want the Teakettle Princess all day long, and in the evening the grandmother will tell the story of the First Christmas Tree and I could listen to that forever and ever.”

“Oh, do stay and tell it to me!” cried the Ice Princess, and it seemed as if a cold band of ice about her heart burst and it got warm and glowing. “I can’t let you go. If I saved your life you should stay with me always and make me warm and happy. Don’t be ungrateful.”

“I’m not ungrateful,” said Bird-Music. “Don’t I tell you I love you? But I haven’t time to waste up here, and if I didn’t go down into the world I should have no new stories to tell you, and we should just sit and freeze together. No—you can do better than that! Come down and make your own stories. You don’t know how lovely it is. Come, give me your hand and we’ll rush down together and jump over that horrible black lake, and make a hole to let the water run away. They want a new river terribly at Sarras. Come along! Hold hands! Don’t be frightened, and we’ll have a royal time.”

“I want to be royal,” said the Princess doubtfully, “but—”

“Then come—come!” shouted Bird-Music. “See, the rain—the lovely rain is coming to help us. Catch hands! Now! One, two, three!”

Before she knew what she was doing—for the rain poured like a waterfall and Bird-Music gave her a push—the Ice Princess found she was tearing down the mountain hand in hand with the Teakettle Princess. Mercy! Never were two such noisy Princesses! They roared like the sea in a storm. They dashed the stupid old rocks aside. Everything ran to get out of their way except the other mountain streams, and when they heard the Ice Princess was rushing down they joined in and came sweeping down too, all holding hands, and the rain poured and the wind blew, and at last, one and all, they plunged into the black lake, the Princess and Bird-Music leading. Heavens, what a splash they made! The Princess screamed with joy.

“At last I’m alive. Down! Down!” And she sprang and leaped and bounded until even Bird-Music could hardly keep up with her and all the streams shouted, and together they broke down the rocky banks and the black lake leaped out and became a glorious river, and the frost thawed in the

Princess's heart, and her white hair became golden, and her eyes like bluebells, and she was the loveliest of them all except Bird-Music. In the lower world the people loved her and gave her a new name and she would use no other. Guess what it was. You, first, Astrid. [The Lady ended her story.]

“The Saucepan Princess!” Astrid asked, clapping her hands for joy.

“Nearly right. Not quite. Now, Duffle!”

“The Kitchen-Maid Princess,” Duffle said. “But it isn’t quite fair to Astrid, for I know. I often drank in her lovely clear stream, and she told me herself, for I was born in her country. Everybody loves her, and in the coldest winter she never freezes for her heart is warm. Her real name is Princess Fire-Shine.”

“And a beautiful name!” said the Lady. “But it was Bird-Music who gave Astrid her stream. Now, Duffle, take Astrid on your back and we must all rush home. I smell the dawn.”



*The Honorable
Mouse-People*



Chapter IV



THE HONORABLE MOUSE-PEOPLE

*F*OR two nights Astrid was so busy in trying to make friends with the House-Dog that she did not go out with the Moon Lady and the animals except just for a moment. In fact she went no farther than the garden and went there only that she might explain what she was doing. They all agreed that she was right, for it was quite impossible to get him to come away from the house at night, and the animals were much too busy with housekeeping and sleeping to meet him by day which was his only free time. Of course some people, like nurses and doctors and watchmen, must work by night, and he was a watchman.

So Astrid was the only person who could get to know him. But it was difficult, for they had never met, and she had never heard any of the house people speak of him, so she could not know his name. It took one whole night to think out how she could begin but then she thought up a plan.

She saved a bit of one of her cookies and put it down by the Mouse hole behind the chest of drawers in her room and sat down to wait patiently. Quite an hour had gone by when out came a very small but very long gray nose with whiskers and two black beady eyes. Two exquisite tiny pink feet followed—then a wee gray body, two more lovely pink feet, and a long tail; and creeping to the cookie the Mouse began nibbling swiftly with bright black eyes on Astrid. She was really puzzled, for it seemed as if her voice must be so loud as to break those little transparent frilly ears. In fact the little creature seemed so delicately and exquisitely made that Astrid felt like a clumsy giant. At last she thought it might be all right if she whispered, and she began very politely:

“Good night. Do you happen to know—”

But the Mouse interrupted in a tiny clear voice something like the squeak of a Bat, which you may hear if you sit in the garden on moonlight nights—that is, if you have particularly long ears.

“You should not say, ‘Good night,’ to begin with. ‘Good night’ always ends a conversation, and you cannot end before you begin. If you say ‘Good evening,’ I shall know you want to go on talking.”

Astrid felt quite shy at having made such a mistake, so she whispered still more gently:

“Good evening, Miss Mouse, I want very much—”

The Mouse sat up with a crumb of cookie in its paws and nibbled while it talked, which with its very little voice made it rather difficult to hear.

“You are wrong, my good child. I am Mr. Mouse, and the Mouse King always chooses a bride from my family. The present Mouse Queen is my aunt.”

“Does she wear a crown?” Astrid asked eagerly, quite forgetting what she really wanted to know. But as she spoke the Dog gave a loud bark downstairs, and Mr. Mouse rushed into the hole and her chance was lost. She was dreadfully disappointed and very much afraid he would not come back next night. But he did, and she began at once.

“Good evening, Mr. Mouse. How are you and how is your aunt?”

“You should say ‘Her Majesty,’ and you will know how careful you have to be when you see her in her crown and spectacles. You must courtesy so low that your nose touches the ground. We always do that. Her Majesty is pure white, which is very remarkable as all the rest of the family are gray. Her beautiful eyes are pink to match her feet. She is very well, thank you, but had a terrible toothache yesterday from eating the chocolates the Man Who Writes Stories left on your window-sill. But she would not have the tooth out because she was afraid she might scream, and so one of our cousins had a tooth out instead. You would have heard her screaming if you had not been asleep. Of course it would never do for the Queen to scream. She has such beautiful manners.”

Astrid did think for a moment that if her manners were so beautiful it was very strange that her Majesty should steal someone else’s chocolates, but she dared not say that because Queens are different. So she only asked:

“But how could it cure the Queen if another lady’s tooth was pulled out?”

The Mouse was nibbling so hard at the cookie that she could scarcely hear what he said. But it was this:

“You can ask me that question at exactly ten minutes past twelve midday tomorrow. I never answer questions at any other time, and then only for six minutes. Look at your watch and make sure.”

“I have no watch and I am always asleep then,” Astrid said angrily. “How can you be so stupid? Why shouldn’t I ask questions?”

“That’s two questions,” said Mr. Mouse. “Of course you can *ask* as many as you please. The only drawback is that I don’t answer them until ten minutes past twelve P.M. But I can ask questions too. Why do you want to

know the Dog's name? You won't like him. He's as large as an Elephant and as noisy as a rattle. His one idea of play is to jump up and down, and he once rolled over on a nest belonging to a sister of mine and nearly killed her two babies. Now I have finished my cookie. Good night. That ends the conversation."

It had made Astrid still more eager to know the Dog, and though all that Mr. Mouse said was very strange, she felt she would like to know the Mouse-People too, because she thought Mr. Mouse really beautiful to look at and very nice to talk to if you could get to know him. At that moment the white Owl came up and lighted softly on the window-sill.

"As you didn't come out tonight I thought I would see what you were doing," he said. "Who was that you were talking to?"

"A very grand Mouse—one of the royal family," said Astrid, and told him all that had happened. He hissed quite angrily.

"Ask him to come tomorrow night when *I'm* here! However, you needn't wait for that. The Dog's name is Rory, and at this minute he is sitting in the garden on duty. Come down!"

She slipped on her sandals—very pretty with a little thong between the big toe and the next, and went downstairs. She stood at the door and said, "Mr. Rory!" almost as softly as she had whispered to Mr. Mouse. He went on staring down the track to the far-away village but wagged his tail. She said a little louder:

"Good evening, Mr. Rory. Are you too busy to talk to me?"

He came trotting up at once.

"Not a bit. It's only that I can't leave the house. I often want to go with you all. But Starlight, the youngest Wolf, once frightened the Man's Wife, and twice the Squirrels have got into the larder and stolen her cakes, and three times the Rabbits have eaten the lettuces in the garden. The old ones never would do these tricky things, but sometimes they forget to tell the young ones and there it is. It keeps me busy!"

"Yes! I see!" said Astrid. "Now please sit and eat some of my cookies while we talk. Do you like them, Mr. Rory?"

"Immensely!" said Rory, wagging his tail and munching one. "But don't call me Mr. Rory. Let us be friends. Duffle's a great friend of mine, and sometimes he comes when all of you go out and talks to me. He knows I have a dull job. Do you think you could possibly ask the Doctor to trust Duffle with the key of his stable? Then he could come every night he isn't wanted. Duffle could well be trusted with the key. He's as good as gold."

"*I wish* I could!" Astrid said sadly. "But you see I'm always asleep when the Doctor comes. That's the difficulty. If you could manage in any way to make him come just once at night I'd do it instantly. And another thing. I'll beg all the animals to teach their young ones to behave better, and then you can come out with us."

"No—no. I should never be easy in my mind. My Man wouldn't like it," said Rory, wagging his tail. "Thanks all the same. I must be about the house unless on some special nights. But as to the Doctor—if you could fall downstairs—now, this minute!—and make a great slam-bang—I'm sure they'd send for the Doctor at once. Then you could ask about the key. But . . . hello! If that isn't his pony cart coming along with Duffle! He's been at the fisherman's cottage at Pine Point. Now if I stop him will you speak to him?"

"I will, I will," said Astrid. "Run for it, and I'll keep up."

Rory tore like the wind, and Astrid ran behind him as hard as she could go.

Rory caught the Doctor just at the corner where the Pine Point track meets the village track. He began leaping and barking for joy, and Duffle stopped instantly, and Astrid came panting up. Even then she could not help thinking what a nice woozly face the Doctor had. It was very nearly as nice as an animal's face and quite as kind, and you cannot say that of everyone. Also she thought how lovely Rory looked as he jumped and leaped in the moonlight. He was a white setter, very tall and silver-white from nose-tip to tail-tip, with a waved coat with silver fringes too; and his eyes were hazel-brown, and he was so like a prince and so beautiful that he might have been proud if he had had time to think about himself, but he never had.

When the Doctor saw Astrid he leaned over the side of his pony cart and looked at her with the moonlight on his face. He said:

"Come here, you wild thing! I asked the people of the house to tell me what color your eyes are, and they couldn't. Now open them wide."

So she opened them as if all the stars were swimming in them as they do in the sea. And that is not so silly as it sounds, for you can look in the glass and see how little your eyes are and yet when you open them wide they can hold mountains and lakes and oceans and everything in the whole world. So they must be much larger than they look. The Doctor stared into her eyes for quite a long time, and then he said:

"Dark sea-green as I thought. Aha—a Moon-child! Well, and how do you like being a Moon-child? Better than cookies?"

"Very much better, though I like them too. Will you have one, sir?"

The Doctor munched it, looking at her thoughtfully all the time, and Duffle had one too. That reminded Astrid, and she said:

“I want to ask you, please, sir, if Duffle may not have the key of the stable. He likes to get out, and often the door is locked. Besides, Rory wants him because he’s so much alone. He cannot leave the house, and Duffle could come and sit with him.”

Duffle’s ears were twitching round and round to hear what the Doctor would say, and Rory stood up on his hind legs, which made him very tall, and put his nose up the Doctor’s sleeve so that he could understand exactly what he wanted. The Doctor thought for a moment, and said:

“But what am I to do if some sick person wants me in the night and Duffle is away? Now this very night I had to go to the fisherman’s cottage at Pine Point!”

It really was a difficulty, and Duffle’s ears fell sadly down flat to his head, and Rory dropped on all fours again though he still wagged his tail, and Astrid thought backward and forward and all round about her for at least a minute. And then she spoke:

“Sir, don’t you know how I make my mind-flowers? Can’t you make them too?”

And the Doctor leaned still lower over the little cart and looked closely at her, and he smiled:

“Yes, I can make mind-flowers. That’s how I knew your eyes must be sea-green. But what about Duffle?”

“Well, Duffle can do that too. I saw myself in his eyes. And I think when you want him you can send a thought flying like a swallow to say, ‘Come quick!’ and he will gallop back. Will you try?”

This pleased the Doctor very much because he knew how wise Duffle was, and he said at once:

“I shall certainly try, and if Duffle understands I shall always leave the key under the wood-shavings in the left corner. And now I see Duffle and I can talk to each other without any words for that is the language all animals and plants and many other wise people use. It comes of being able to make mind-flowers, for then you need never trouble about any grammar any more. And grammar is really too horrible for words.”

When Duffle heard this he laughed for joy (you have heard a horse whinny?), and Rory barked in circles and nearly whirled himself off the ground. No one could talk, so Astrid thought things over, and when they were quiet she asked:

“How do *I* know that language?”

“Because you’re a Moon-child and also you’ve been taught to make your thoughts do what you tell them and be quiet. And now I must be getting on. Rory, I see two Squirrels in the tree by the larder window.”

Rory rushed home like a streak of white lightning with Astrid running after him as hard as she could go. She did not want him to frighten the Squirrels, but indeed they were not a bit frightened. They only ran up the tree and laughed until they nearly fell off the branches while they told Rory that it was now the fashionable Squirrel game to pop up everywhere and keep him rushing round and round the house. He laughed himself when he heard that, and the Squirrels faithfully promised they would eat nothing in the larder.

While they were talking this over, Astrid saw Mr. Mouse peeping out of the Mouse hole under the hall door, evidently very anxious to join the party. He said in a little squeak:

“I want to come if Mr. Rory will promise not to bark. And you *can* ask me questions. That was only a joke and I didn’t mean it. Of course I know the gentleman means no harm, but I am very delicate and it makes me jump, which Dr. Dumbell says is very bad for my health.”

“Why, Dr. Dumbell is my doctor!” said Rory. “Do you mean to say he’s your doctor too, Mr. Mouse?”

“Why, of course!” said Mr. Mouse. “He attends all the animals of good family in the country round, and though his fees are very heavy we would have no one else on any account. Shall I come out and tell you about it? I will, if you will promise to give me warning before you bark.”

Rory promised at once, and the Squirrels came down, and Mr. Mouse sat in Astrid’s lap. He said:

“For her Majesty and the royal family every year on Christmas Eve we pay Dr. Dumbell twenty-four cookies, a large box of chocolates, six candles, and two rashers of bacon. Of course this comes very dear, and none but rich people like ourselves could afford it, but we always have it ready and as all the animals are equally honest, though few pay so much, his storeroom is a sight to see with candles and bacon and chocolates and cookies—almost right up to the ceiling.”

“But how do you know that?” asked Rory much interested. “It’s quite a long way for your little pink feet to go.”

Mr. Mouse was much pleased at this praise. He cleaned his whiskers delicately with his little pink feet, and said:

“We are often there. We give all our parties in Dr. Dumbell’s storeroom and have a splendid time. We go in thin and come out fat, as the saying is.”

Astrid was perfectly horrified.

“You bad little thing!” she cried. “Do you mean to say you pay Dr. Dumbell for curing you and then eat up all you pay him?”

Mr. Mouse was indignant.

“We’ve paid him honestly and we have his receipt, and no one can say we’re one cookie short!” he squeaked in a high shrill squeak. “And when it’s paid then it’s his, and it’s very important to him to keep us in good temper or we might send for another doctor, and then what would he do? You’re as silly as you’re big, Astrid. Put me down. I won’t sit in anyone’s lap that says I’m a bad little thing. Her Majesty is my aunt, and she goes to all the parties in Dr. Dumbell’s storeroom.”

Astrid was so angry that she would have put him down that instant but for a strong suspicion which came into her mind. She said very quietly:

“Yes, of course he’s a very expensive doctor. And how do you manage to get the six candles and twenty-four cookies and the box of chocolates? Rashers of bacon too!”

“Well, as to that,” said Mr. Mouse proudly, “we collect them gradually from the Man’s Wife’s larder. It takes a dozen of us to carry one candle, but we know how to do it. The chocolates we get from the boxes the Man Who Writes Stories leaves on your window-sill. The cookies the same; but we count it a very dear fee for we have so much trouble in carrying them, and we never could afford it if we didn’t belong to such a rich house.”

I leave you to think how angry Astrid was when she heard that. Mr. Mouse was still sitting in her lap and cleaning his whiskers, so she said very quietly to Rory:

“You have been blaming the Squirrels and Rabbits and all the time it was the Mouse-People who stole the things. *Now* what will you do about it?”

Rory was so angry that he was trembling from head to foot and all his silver fringes were fluttering. You must have seen a dog do that. It means that he is very excited indeed. He made a deep soft growl under his breath, and Mr. Mouse instantly stopped cleaning his whiskers and stared at him with round black eyes of terror.

“You’re a horrid little sneak,” said Rory very sternly, “talking about your Queens and Majesties and stealing Astrid’s chocolates! Now look here—unless you promise never to do such a thing again, one and all of you, and to pay Dr. Dumbell honestly I shall scare every one of you out of the house by barking night and day at every Mouse hole. So now!”

So now it was Mr. Mouse who trembled from head to foot, and he said:

“Please, *please*, Mr. Rory, what are we to do when we are sick? We really are very poor little people though we pretend to be grand; and we are so often

sick. My aunt has dreadful toothaches, and I have a cold in my head every month. Oh, how are we to pay the doctor? We *can't* do it!"

"Be well, and then you won't want the doctor," said Rory. "And I tell you what—it's because you all eat far too much that you're sick. Cake and chocolate and candies and cookies all day long and all night long! And I saw you with all-day suckers as large as yourselves the other day, and that's how the Queen got her toothaches. I know eight Mice have had teeth out because of it. Now, if I let you off, will you faithfully promise—all of you—to eat only three meals a day and never to touch bacon or cake or candies any more? If not, I shall do what I said."

Astrid was really sorry for Mr. Mouse as he sat trembling in her lap with large tears rolling from his black eyes. But still she knew Rory was right. Presently Mr. Mouse said in a very tiny voice:

"I promise."

"Do you promise for everybody?" asked Rory.

"I promise for my aunt and all the royal family and for everybody that we will eat three times a day and never any other time, and that we'll only sometimes dip our tails in cream and suck them, and we'll never look at an all-day sucker, and we will be honorable Mice henceforward and pay Dr. Dumbell in wheat and nuts and not steal from the house."

"Very well then—I forgive you," said Rory, and Mr. Mouse was so pleased that he rushed up Astrid's sleeve and tickled her quite dreadfully.

"And now for a story!" he said, when he came down again and began to dance. "If there's anything I love better than bacon rind it's telling a story. So does her Majesty."

Astrid noticed how he said "her Majesty," now that he was happy again, and she hoped it did not mean that he was getting proud once more. But he was really sorry and meant it only for good manners. He stopped dancing and said seriously:

"Perhaps you'd like to hear our own family story. It isn't long and it's terribly interesting. We always tell it on Christmas Day, so that all the young Mice may hear it and know what a very strong and great people we are."

"Yes, that would be quite nice," Rory said, and curled up to hear, and the Squirrels came down from the tree again while Mr. Mouse stood proudly on the very top of Astrid's knee and waved his foot for all to listen.

Once upon a time [Mr. Mouse began] there was a very rich Prince in a country where wheat and corn grew so thickly that all the land was green in

spring and yellow like gold when it ripened. So everyone could have plenty of bread and pudding, and it was a very happy country to live in, and all the children were rosy and strong, and all the Mouse-People were as fat as butter, and they too had little barns in the houses under the floors and up in the roof where they stored corn for the winter, and there was nothing but singing and dancing the Mouse Muddle, which is the loveliest dance you ever saw. (I will ask her Majesty if you may see it.) Well, one summer the Sun forgot to shine, and when the rain saw that it thought, "Now I can do as I like," and it rained and rained upon the earth. The fields were like lakes, and the roads were like rivers, and all the umbrellas blew inside out, and the people had to stay indoors. Only the Water-Rats were happy, and they are hard-hearted people who never care about anyone else. But still our people didn't mind so very much, for their storerooms were full of corn and the people in the houses had plenty of corn too, and they all said:

"The Sun will shine next year and then it will be all right." So they were happy enough and feasted in their houses.

But next summer the Sun forgot to shine again, and the rain rained most terribly. It never stopped, and all the rivers ran roaring to the sea, and no corn could be sown in the fields for they were like lakes. But the great Prince did not mind, for he had huge barns still all full of corn packed right up to the top and he had even filled the churches with corn up to the tower. But at last all the poor people came crying and weeping to him for corn and telling him how thin their children were getting and that all their cows and sheep were hungry. And they begged of him:

"Please, please, your Highness, sell us corn. We know you have enough to feed the whole country. Oh, please, please!" And then they could not speak because the tears were running down their cheeks.

So the Prince looked at them and answered:

"Certainly I will sell you corn if you have the money to pay me. How much money have you got?"

They answered, crying still more:

"None, because we have spent it all in trying to buy food for our children. But we will faithfully promise to pay next year, for the Sun will certainly shine then and we can work. Trust us now, and next year we will pay twice as much as the corn is worth."

So he laughed and laughed at them and mocked:

"Perhaps the Sun will not shine next year, and then how shall I get my money?"

But after a while he smiled, and they thought he was sorry for them, and he said:

“Now I’ll tell you what I’ll do. The great church at Dune has a million corn bags in it. Go there with your carts and wheelbarrows and everything you can carry corn in and divide the bags among yourselves. The large families must have many bags and the small families few, but all can have enough. Go tomorrow, and I promise you shall find as many corn bags as you wish. And you need not pay for them at all.”

Oh, how gratefully they thanked him! There were tears of joy in their eyes. My far-away great-great-grandfather was there listening, and the Mouse King and Queen who ruled us then, and they all heard it and were glad the Prince was so kind. That is how we know the story.

So next day all the people went to the church at Dune. They could not take their children, for they were too weak—but they went like a great army, so happy that though it rained and rained they did not mind it a bit. The Mouse King and Queen went down to the church too, and my far-away great-great-grandfather, because they had a friend who lived in the church and was always called the Church Mouse. And they got down there before the people came, and the Church Mouse came running to meet them, crying:

“Oh, go away, go away, your Majesties! A terrible thing is going to happen. The cruel Prince is only laughing at the people.”

But their Majesties went on, and they came into the church and went up into the pulpit. The Prince was sitting on his throne and laughing, and presently the people poured into the church in a great crowd and looked about for the wheat and corn and there was none. Only thousands and thousands of empty bags lay there, and in the bottom of each a few dry grains. The Prince had eaten all the corn in his great rich house, and only the bags were left. Plenty of bags for the people, but nothing in them! And when he saw their disappointment he thought it a splendid joke and shouted with laughter, and he said:

“Why should I feed miserable Rats and Mice like you, who are of no good at all and only eat up the corn? Rats and Mice, go home and feed your children on grass!—Or on the empty bags!”

After he said that dreadful thing he went out of the church with his soldiers and went home to a good dinner, and you could smell the rich cooking for miles. The people went home too, but they had nothing to eat.

When the church was empty the Mouse King stood up on the pulpit cushion and he made the Mouse call, and all my people who heard it, and they were millions and millions, came rushing and crowding and scurrying, and they filled the whole church. They climbed into the galleries. They sat in

the pews. They scrambled up the pillars. My far-away great-great-grandfather said there were a thousand million Mice, but as I can't count farther than twenty-four I am not sure. When they were quiet the Mouse King got up upon the Prince's throne and spoke to them. He said:

"Honorable Mouse-People—

"You have seen a wicked thing done by a wicked Prince. Now my commands are these. You shall go to every barn and church where the wicked Prince has his corn and you shall take it all away, every grain, and you shall divide it among the poor people, giving to each as much as they want. And it is my command that all this shall be done before daybreak tomorrow morning. Now go in your millions and obey my commands."

In a moment they had all rushed out, and the church was empty. They set to work, and long before dawn the next day the wicked Prince's barns were all empty, and the people's were all cram-full. The Prince stamped and shouted, but nobody cared, and even his soldiers were glad. And, while he was stamping, the million Mice came with eyes like sparks of fire, and they said:

"We have eaten up every single scrap of food in all your larders. We have eaten your boots and your gloves. We have bitten holes in all your clothes. And now we give you one hour to get out of this country. Get on your Horse and gallop or you shall be sorry for it."

He was dreadfully frightened, for it looked as if all the world were gray with Mice, and he called for his Horse, but his Horse would not let him mount because he hated such a wicked man. And in the end the Mice told the Prince to get into a barrel, and thousands of them came, and his Horse and everybody else, and they rolled the barrel into the next country, bumping it most terribly all the way. Then the Mouse King ruled the whole country, even the men and women, and everyone was happy. Isn't that a beautiful story?

"Beautiful!" said Astrid. "No wonder you are proud!"

And Rory said, "Beautiful!" too, but he added: "When the Rats tell that story they never even mention the Mice. They say *they* did it all—every bit of it."

There was a moment's silence. Then Mr. Mouse said:

"Good night."

He got down off Astrid's lap, walked down her leg, and disappeared into the Mouse hole. When even his tail was gone she said:

"Still it was a very good story. I can't help liking Mr. Mouse."

“I like him too,” said Rory, “if only he could get over boasting he would be a very good little soul. Hello—I smell the dawn! Hurry up!”

And Astrid ran upstairs.



*Little Chu
of Old China*



Chapter V



LITTLE CHU OF OLD CHINA

NOW that Astrid knew Rory well she was never tired of watching to see how beautiful he was with his silver coat as soft as silk, his lovely fringed ears, long delicate muzzle, and great brown eyes. And if he was a Prince to look at he was a Prince in manners too. He never pushed or was rude or took things from Astrid, which he easily could have done, or from anyone else. He would share all he had with people who wanted it. Astrid saw him one night call a poor thin Dog (who had no master) into the garden to share his supper, and there was no living thing to whom he was not kind.

But from all this watching Rory and loving him the thought came into Astrid's mind that perhaps she could make a little Dog in her mind who would be a great companion for her and for Rory too. She knew it would be difficult, for the Lady had said so, but what does it matter if a thing is difficult so long as you know it can be done?

She tried and tried. She made a picture in her mind of Rory, so exactly like him that you could almost have counted the hairs in his silver plume of a tail. There were his kind eyes, his cold black nose, his feathery silver paws. Astrid's picture of him in her mind could not be told from the real Rory. She almost heard that picture breathe and make the quick little squeaks Rory made when he wanted to say, "Astrid!—look!" And then one night she shut up all the idle thoughts on the shelf in her mind. They knew now when they had to go there, and came running like a flock of children when she called them. Indeed they were now quite good, and the moment they were put on the shelf they would go quietly to sleep until they might get down again and play.

But anyone can see how difficult it is to make a Dog in your mind. He had to be exactly like Rory, because she knew no other Dog and was so fond of him, but the moment he was nearly finished she would see he was not perfectly right, and all the thought-picture would scatter. However, making the flowers had taught her patience, and she worked on and on, and grew so clever that once when the white Owl came while she was finishing she still kept her mind steadily fixed on her little Dog; and if the Owl had not given a loud angry hoot when she would not look at him she could have finished then

and there. But the hoot made her jump up with a start, and the pieces scattered. She could have cried, but it was of no use crying to the Owl; he only thought it silly, and besides he really had great news for Astrid, which was that the two eggs in his nest had hatched and Lady Owl had told him they were two little white sons. Poor Astrid said sadly:

“You have two little white sons, and I have not even one little white Dog! Well, I am very glad to hear it, but please don’t come tomorrow. I must try again.”

Everyone knew how hard she was trying, and even Mr. Mouse had come, his paws pinker and more beautiful than ever, to say:

“My aunt, her Majesty, sends her kindest regards and best good wishes and consents to be godmother when the little white Dog is finished.”

Astrid did wish her Majesty hadn’t consented before she was asked, especially as she had not thought about the name yet. The Owl had advised her not to. He said: “Never count your chickens until they are hatched. Lady Owl and I make that a rule, for the world is full of disappointments.”

Well, one night it was very quiet when Astrid woke, and the Evening Star was shining right in at her window. She is the Moon’s favorite Star and more like her than any other, and she smiled such a golden smile at Astrid—so warm and kind—that Astrid knew exactly what it meant.

“Hold on. Go on. Great joy is coming.” Even as the Star smiled, Astrid put the last touch to the little cold black nose, and the little white Dog was finished and his life begun in her mind. She trembled for joy as she lifted him out of her mind and stood him on the floor. He was perfectly lovely, silvery like Rory from head to tail with only three dark things about him, his large brown eyes and his little nose, very like a blackberry. But he was much smaller than Rory, about the size of a Fox Terrier, and Astrid thought that made him even more beautiful. The moment you looked at his eyes you knew he was true and faithful and full of fun and that he would never let Astrid be alone any more, night or day. The first thing he did was to stand on his hind legs, wagging his tail furiously, and then leap up into her lap. You see, she had not made him a puppy. He was quite grown up.

Rory heard him squeaking and barking and rushed upstairs in four jumps, and when they saw each other their joy was so great that it is a wonder the three people of the house did not wake up and come to see what was the matter.

They all rushed downstairs together—Astrid forgot her supper—and there the Lady was waiting and all the animals, and they crowded to see and to wonder at the beautiful creature Astrid had made out of her thoughts. The Lady said:

“He is lovely. I see no fault in him at all. He is quite perfect, and he will never leave you and will go to the Back of Beyond with you one happy day. Now, what shall we call him?”

Then all sat down to think with all their might. A young Bear—very beautiful because it was the Lady who had made him—said:

“Silver Prince.”

But Astrid said: “I once thought of that, but it’s too long. A Dog’s name should be easy for calling. Try calling ‘Silver Prince’ in a hurry.”

They tried it, and it really was not easy. Rory said at once:

“No. A Dog’s name must never be more than two syllables, and one is better. Try again.”

They tried several names, for it is quite as hard to name a dog rightly as to name a baby, and none was quite right. Even babies are often wrongly named. At last the Lady said:

“I told you I once knew a Dog who could do wonderful things. I think we should give him a name if we can. But Astrid’s Dog is so wise that he will not have it unless it’s right. Now watch carefully!”

She called in a very clear voice, “Dick!” but he did not stir. Then “Gyp,” then “Rags.” He did not stir. Then very softly she called “Jock!” and instantly he sprang into Astrid’s lap and looked up into her face and wagged his tail until he nearly wagged himself off her knees.

“Jock is his name!” said the Lady, and all agreed. Rory said he had known he was Jock the minute he saw him. Astrid was overjoyed, but she felt it was right to tell everybody the message Mr. Mouse’s aunt had sent her, and they thought it would be rude to take no notice as it was kindly meant. So Rory went to the Mouse hole and told Mr. Mouse exactly what had happened, and asked would he tell her Majesty that Jock would be glad to pay his respects if she would favor them with her company, as he was too large to go in at the Mouseway?

They waited awhile, until Mr. Mouse appeared alone but with something held in his little pink foot. It made it difficult for him to walk, but he hobbled bravely on. At last he spoke:

“Her Majesty the Mouse Queen thanks you all for your polite invitation, but she is suffering from a terrible toothache, and Dr. Dumbell will not allow her to go out in the night air. So she sends a present to her godson Jock and wishes him health to wear it, strength to tear it, and money to buy him a new one.”

What do you think it was? The loveliest little collar you ever saw but so small that it would hardly fit a wasp’s waist, and you know how small *that* is.

Astrid could really have cried with disappointment and have slapped Mr. Mouse for smiling. Yet the moment Jock touched it with his nose it grew and grew until it fitted his neck perfectly, and it was made of pure silver very like his coat and as soft as a ribbon. Also it was made with the best Mouse magic, which made it shine in the dark so that he could always see his way and even show the way to other people.

And then the Lady sat down, and the story began. But Astrid sat on her knee with Jock in her lap instead of the youngest Rabbit, because Jock was now the youngest person there.

This is a story [the Lady began] which you must hear on Jock's birthnight. It is about a Chinese boy called Chu, which means a Pearl. He lived with his old uncle in a little house with flat fields of rice about it. Nothing else for miles. Chu's uncle was a great scholar, always stooping over his books and writing, and his servant was a very cross old woman, so you may think how lonely it was for little Chu to wander forever about the raised edges of the rice fields, which kept you from falling into the slushy stuff rice must grow in. The only thing he liked was that when evening came hundreds of frogs would sing in the rice. They sang with thick soft voices like gently bubbling water, and very often Chu wished that he were a frog too. It would have been much less lonely.

One day his uncle allowed him to look at two pictures which were very carefully kept rolled up in boxes. The first was a picture of high mountains with pine trees climbing up steep rocks and peaks. A river came tumbling down, white with foam. And when you looked very closely you saw that half hidden among rocks was a little cottage by a bridge and in front of it were three black dots so small that you could tell nothing of what they were. The other picture was one of the same mountains but with the Moon shining over them. The three dots were larger in this.



Little Chu and his uncle

Chu sat a long while looking at the pictures, thinking how happy he could be if he lived in that mountain cottage. As he looked at the dots he began to think they must mean something, and he brought the pictures to the window. It seemed to him at last that they *might* be a boy, a girl, and a dog, and as he

thought of this almost without knowing he began to make a story about them. It was not a very interesting story, because as he never went anywhere or saw anyone he could not put much into it. But he gave them names. The girl was Miss Yeh, which in Chinese means "Miss Night." The boy had a very long name which means "The Gentleman Who Makes Happiness Grow"—but as that is so long we will call him Tseng. The Dog was Yok. And at last, though they seemed to be only three little black dots, they were so real to him that he felt he must paint their pictures. So one day he got a stick of black Chinese ink and rubbed it on the ink-dish with water and made a pool of ink. Then he got a little brush and began a picture. The first was the Moon with the Rabbit sitting in her lantern. He did this because in China it is thought to be very lucky to begin with that picture. And across the Moon he painted a pine branch, so that the Rabbit seemed to be looking through it. This made him very happy.

Two days after he drew another picture.

He drew Miss Yeh as a charming little girl in a long coat and trousers such as Chinese girls wear, with her hair in a long black braid down her back. She was laughing, and you could see she would be full of fun and able to run and jump anywhere. She had a doll in her arms and was looking at a picture book. Tseng was laughing too. He looked as strong and merry as could be. In Chu's picture he was making a kite, and Chu thought that when it flew from that height in the mountains it would surely reach the Stars and perhaps tangle its tail in a crowd of them. Yok sat and watched them both, and was making stories in his mind of what they would do tomorrow. Yok was like Rory—white with silver fringes. Every day Chu made more pictures of them, and the story grew, and he began to feel much less lonely. You see he had really made them out of his mind as Astrid made Jock, and he was beginning to see that this might be very useful.

One night he was sound asleep. He had no furniture but a wooden bed and a table, but the room was very pretty all the same, for the window was quite round like a huge Moon resting its edge on the floor. Instead of glass there was creamy white paper, and when the real Moon shone outside this looked like a pearly Moon itself but covered with shadows of the tree branches.

Suddenly Chu's sleep stopped, and sitting straight up in bed he saw beside the branches the shadow of a Rabbit which made the window look exactly like the Moon herself with the Rabbit in her lantern. And as Chu watched the shadow, the Rabbit twitched one ear. Well, Chu jumped out of bed and pushed the window half open like a sliding door. It looked like a half-Moon then. He stepped out, and there was a Rabbit waiting for him in

the shadow of the house. The Moon in the sky looked nearly as large as his window, but he could see no Rabbit in her lantern.

It was a glorious night. The trees, the rice fields, the little fleecy clouds, the grass, all were shining silver, and when the Rabbit came out of the shadows he shone like Jock—silver from nose-tip to tail-tip. He began hopping through the garden, and Chu had to follow. Something pulled him like a rope.

So they went through the rice fields, and then Chu saw before him a great hill. He could hardly believe it was real, but there it was, and the Rabbit went on hopping and jumping until at last they came to a track which led through trees to the mouth of a great cave. A beautiful clear light shone from it, and straight into the mouth of that cave hopped the Rabbit and Chu after him. But what a cave!

It was like a great room inside lighted by a large round silver lamp hanging from the roof, and on one side of the wall was painted a very large picture. Chu stood staring, for it was almost exactly like the picture of the mountains which he had made himself, only it was all in lovely colors instead of ink. There were dark green pine trees, the white rushing river, and the little brown cottage among the rocks. And there were Miss Yeh and Tseng and Yok, and Yok shone like silver and Miss Yeh and Tseng were dressed in blue.

Now as Chu stood staring in surprise and delight the picture grew larger and larger until it seemed to be no longer a picture but a place, and, as he watched, Yok came running toward him—a real Dog—and the trees waved and birds were singing. The lamp was the Moon shining in the sky, and the picture had come alive!

With one hop the Rabbit was inside the picture—sitting on the grass. With a jump Chu went after him, and Yok leaped up and put his paws on his shoulder.

“I know,” said little Jock, sitting up on Astrid’s lap. “I remember.”

Everyone was so astonished that they could only stare at him. He had not spoken a word until then, and Astrid could feel his little quick heart beating. The Lady said: “Yes, Jock begins to remember. Soon he can tell us the whole story but not yet. What happened next, Jock?” He wagged his silver tail with delight. “Yes, I remember. Miss Yeh and Tseng came rushing to little Chu. But not what comes after that, because I’m so young.”

Very well. Now we can go on [said the Lady]. Miss Yeh came and bowed to Chu saying: “Come to our cottage. We have been waiting so long. We knew quite well when you saved us from being black dots. We were dreadfully tired of that. And now we want to help *you*. Here comes Tseng. His name means ‘The Gentleman Who Makes Happiness Grow.’”

Tseng took Chu's hand, and they all ran to the cottage, with Yok leaping after them.

It was a dear little cottage with four rooms, and Miss Yeh took him first into a tiny room which hung over the river. When you leaned out of the window, which was a Moon like Chu's, you were right over it and could hear nothing but its loud song as it leaped like a white horse over the rocks. Yet there were lovely deep pools like basins where you could bathe on a hot day under the willow branches.

"Now look," said Miss Yeh. "On that little table are brushes and paints and paper, and silk for painting pictures on, and you must come every night when the Moon's shadows fall on your window. That's the signal. Directly you set us free from being dots we knew you could paint. This is your own room. Look at the wall."

Written on the wall were large Chinese letters. "This is Chu's room," they said.

He clapped his hands for joy. It was so wonderful and yet it was true. Then Miss Yeh and Tseng showed him her tiny room. It looked straight up to the tallest mountain peak, and there on a table lay some lovely Chinese dolls which she was dressing for poor children in the valley who could never expect to have such treasures. White Storks carried them for her and threw them in at the doors when no one was watching. Tseng's room looked down into this valley where were the tiny houses of the farmers and their workers. What Tseng liked was to make kites for the boys who lived there. He could float them down with little stones tied to their tails. They were really beautiful kites, quite strong enough to carry you a little way up into the air, so that you blew gently along but could put your foot on the ground when you wished.

"And now," said Tseng, "we must have tea."

They went into the fourth room, very small also but most comfortable, and a delicious tea was spread upon the table—cakes and a dish of rosy peaches. Tseng gave one to Chu saying:

"I climbed the peach tree on the topmost peak to get these for you. We have them once a week, and because they ripen in Moonlight and do not need the Sun we have them all the winter. They will keep you always young and happy, and every time you go to sleep you will wake up younger and happier and wiser. And I will teach you to climb the tree so that you can get them when I am busy. Now let us clear away and you shall see the picture book." So then they spread the huge book on the table, and it was full of all the wonderful pictures in the world and of all the happy things that ever happened in it. But the delightful thing was that whenever you finished

looking at a picture it faded away and the next came in its place, and the next was always more interesting than the last, and they were always new pictures unless you called for one you wanted again. Chu looked and looked, until the Moonlight grew thin and sleepy, and Tseng said:

“Yes, you must go now. But you can always come when the shadows are on your window. Walk straight into the picture. Tomorrow we shall all be painting pictures, and Miss Yeh will tell a wonderful story. We have stories always. I shall make a kite for you, and you can use it for getting into the mountains. Now hurry up. The Rabbit has had to get back to the Moon, but you know the way.”

Each took him by the hand, and all four ran to the edge of the picture, and he jumped and in a moment was in the cave.

Chu went always through the cave to the cottage. He learned to paint the most glorious pictures, and when he grew up all China marveled, and indeed you can see copies of some of them still. Only copies; for a reason you shall hear. But in China they do not say, “Chu made the pictures.” They say, “They were made by the greatest and happiest man in China,” and you must know Chinese before I can tell you that rightly.

At last the Emperor of China sent for him and commanded him to paint a huge picture on a wall of the palace.

When it was ready the Emperor came to see it with all the grand people, and Chu stood by with a rod to explain it. He said:

“Here are the great mountains, your Majesty, and the rushing river and the bridge and the cottage where I lived when I was young. Very happy people live there. This hole is a cave. You must always go through it to reach the cottage.”

So the Emperor clasped his hands and said it was the most wonderful picture that had ever been seen in the world or could be.

“Never shall you leave the palace. Here you shall stay, and I will heap you with gold and jewels, and you shall paint only what I want.”

All bowed low before Chu and said how greatly he was honored. But he replied: “Now, please watch, your Majesty, and if you like you can follow.”

And he stepped straight into the cave in the picture and was never seen again.

The Emperor was too surprised to follow, and as he stared the picture faded and faded from the wall until it was gone. It was fortunate copies had been taken of some of Chu’s pictures, for the same thing happened to them all. The happiest man in China had gone back to the happy cottage, and his pictures could not stay when he was gone. They went after him.

“I think that cottage was in the Back of Beyond,” Astrid said slowly. “But Jock, you little, little creature, do you know the way?”

He got off her lap and said:

“I forget but I shall remember. Everyone belongs there and so we can find the way back. Now can’t we go home? My legs are very young, and I’m as sleepy as can be.”

And the eldest Bear said:

“Just one question! If Jock was as large as Rory then why is he small now?”

To which the Lady replied:

“You see, he had to come through Astrid’s mind this time and there wouldn’t have been room. He’s smaller now but exactly like what he was then, and it’s quite as grand to be small. People’s lives are like different chapters in a story. They go on getting more and more wonderful. Besides, think what it will be when you can remember the whole story as Jock will one day!”

“But,” said Astrid, “I don’t want him to get big. If he were as big as Rory I couldn’t carry him, and I love that.”

The Lady laughed:

“Did you never hear the story of the Princess and the Calf? Once a very idle Princess was shut up in a tower by her father, and he said she should never come out again until she had learned to behave herself, and the sign that she had learned would be when she could carry a Cow up the tower stairs to the very top. So she gave up hope. One day she discovered that the woman who lived at the bottom of the tower and cooked her food had a little young tiny Calf, and the poor Princess was so lonely that she begged that she might carry her upstairs and keep her for an hour or two to play. She did this twice each day, for the Calf hated the stairs, and the Princess never noticed that the Calf got a little heavier every day; so when the King came to see her he found her carrying a large Cow quite easily up the stair. Then of course the tower door was thrown open, and she and the Cow went out into the wide world and were very busy people. Perhaps if you carried Jock every day you would never know the moment when you couldn’t carry him any more! What do you think?”

Astrid laughed, and she carried Jock all the way back and laid him in her bed with his head on the pillow, and they went to sleep in more joy than can be told.



*Rayar and the
Elephant*



Chapter VI



RAYAR AND THE ELEPHANT

A *STRID* and Jock became greater friends every night. Because she slept in the daytime he slept then too, and always when the night came he was awake first. Indeed he waked her, for he would touch his little cold nose gently, very gently, to her cheek as he lay with his head on the pillow beside her, and first she would think it was a snowflake touching her cheek in a dream and then she would know it was Jock.

When they waked up one night Jock sat up on the pillow before Astrid was wide awake, and he said:

“I think two things. First, I think we waste a great deal of play time when we are asleep, and we should ask the Lady about that. Next I think that as I am the Mouse Queen’s godson I should go and say thank you for the collar.”

Astrid thought so too, as soon as she was awake enough to think, but as she told Jock it was very difficult, for the Mouse Queen always had a toothache at night and the Mouse hole was so very small. She thought the best way would be to ask Mr. Mouse’s advice, so when she had her green dress on she made the Mouse call while she and Jock sat by the Mouse hole.

Up came Mr. Mouse, his nose longer and grayer than ever and his feet the most lovely pink. They told him at once what they had been thinking, and he sat down and thought it over carefully with his tail curled round his feet.

“It isn’t so easy as it sounds,” he said, “for the Mouseway is small and Jock is large, though of course when once you get to the palace it’s splendidly large beyond words. But when there’s a will there’s a way. You know your collar was made with Mouse magic, Jock, and when you touched your nose to it it got big. Now when I touch my nose to it it gets small. Take it off and see what I can do.”

Astrid took it off and laid it before Mr. Mouse. He touched it with his nose, and instantly it was so small that it would only fit a wasp’s waist. Mr. Mouse immediately touched his nose to Jock’s, and in another second Jock was the same size as Mr. Mouse. Astrid was horrified.

“Oh, you bad little thing!” she screamed, and stamped her foot. “I don’t want Jock to be so small. Go away, or I’ll throw you out of the window. Oh,

Jock, Jock!"

Mr. Mouse simply laughed.

"Do be calm!" he said. "What a great stupid girl you are! It's only Mouse magic. He isn't a bit different really. He only *looks* smaller."

Really Jock was perfectly lovely and as happy as could be—the tiniest, little silvery Dog you ever saw—and rushing all over the room for the fun of it. But when he saw Astrid didn't like it he came at once and licked her hand and said it was all right and he only wanted to go down the Mouse hole for ten minutes if she would let him. Even Astrid had to see that it was a most amusing Mouse magic. He begged Mr. Mouse's pardon for being so cross, and he and Jock went off together. She did not quite like that, for Jock and she had never been away from each other before, and his tiny collar lying on the ground made her feel lonely.

Soon she heard a great rushing and scuffling behind the walls and under the floor, and then all was quiet, and she sat and counted the ten minutes by the clock on the chimneypiece. Exactly as the last second ticked away out of the Mouse hole came Mr. Mouse's long gray nose, then one pink foot, then the other, and after that came a little silvery head and lovely silver-fringed ears and there was Jock. He jumped on her lap, and she kissed him, though he was so tiny that there was hardly room for one kiss on the top of his head.

"Oh, how did he behave?" she asked Mr. Mouse. "I was terribly anxious because he knows nothing about Queens. Was he polite?"

"He was most polite. People who go out with the Lady are always polite; they're just the same to Queens and Cooks," said Mr. Mouse. "But it was a most splendid sight as Jock will tell you."

So Jock began his story.

"I liked it all. The Mouse hole has a door that shuts inside it and the Mouseway is all lighted with little lights like beads. All the Mouse-People were hurrying to the palace, but Mr. Mouse and I went first because I am the Mouse Queen's godson. When we got to the palace it was the whole size of the kitchen, because it's under the kitchen floor. The Mouse Queen sat on top of a jam tin which had been polished like silver. On it was written, 'Carter's Best Strawberry Jam: Ask for Carter's,' and so all the Mice asked for Best Strawberry Jam, and it was to be provided later. On her head the Mouse Queen wore for a crown the ring which the Man Who Writes Stories lost a week ago, and because of the toothache her face was tied with the Man's Wife's garter, which looked very pretty. I sat up and begged because I thought it was polite, and she was very much pleased and invited me to sit on top of the jam tin."

“That was a great honor,” said Mr. Mouse, “and could only happen to the Mouse Queen’s godson; and her Majesty then graciously gave Jock a very beautiful and useful present.”

“Oh, how kind of her Majesty!” said Astrid. “What was it?”

“It was the right of free entry into the Mouse hole at any time that he wishes to pay his respects. That means he can go and see her Majesty when he pleases. And that whenever he touches the collar with his nose it will make him as large or as small as he wishes.”

At first Astrid was disappointed, but when she thought it over she saw how useful it might be. She said:

“Do you mean he could be as large as when he was the mountain Prince’s Dog?”

“Much larger,” said Mr. Mouse. “Try, Jock.”

Jock touched his nose to the collar, and in a minute he was larger than the largest Dog you ever saw. He lay down that Astrid might get on his back, and her feet were quite a long way from the ground. It was really delightful to think he could race with Duffle. Then he touched his nose to the collar and wished himself smallest-small, and in a second he was so tiny that for a minute she thought he was quite gone—about the size of a fly—and there she herself was sitting on the ground. Mr. Mouse looked quite a gray elephant beside Jock.

Then they put the collar on, and he was his own Jock-size again, skipping with delight and making little rushes and toy growls to show how pleased he was.

“You see it’s the best of Mouse magic,” said Mr. Mouse, getting up. “He’s really the same size all the time, only he *looks* different. And now I must be going or I shall be late when the jam is divided, and I shouldn’t like that. Have you any message? Jock has thanked her Majesty already.”

“My respectful love and thanks,” said Astrid, “and will her Majesty accept this?”

She held out the tiniest glass bottle you ever saw, not quite two inches long and filled with rose perfume. The Man Who Wrote Stories always brought back something which he thought Astrid would like when he had to go to the city at the beginning of Pine Sound, and this had come only yesterday, so the Mouse Queen couldn’t have seen it. It had a little glass stopper and was very pretty. Mr. Mouse quite trembled with delight. He said:

“We have only smelled perfume once, and that was when the Man fell down stairs and broke a bottle of castor oil. We all thought it delicious, and

even her Majesty came to lick up a drop or two. But it dried up. This will be a real luxury and must have been most expensive!”

“Oh please don’t drink it!” cried Astrid really frightened. “It might be very bad for you. I think it’s only meant to smell.”

“So is castor oil,” said Mr. Mouse, “but very lovely it tastes as well! Even sardine oil is not *half* so nice. And now I must be hurrying!” Off he went, and they heard him tripping down the Mouseway. Ten minutes after, while Astrid was brushing her hair, a strong smell of rose perfume came up the Mouse hole mixed with that of strawberry jam.

She dropped her brush.

“Oh, I do hope they won’t be sick!” she said.

But Jock was already scampering downstairs, and she had to run after him.

They found the Lady and all the animals waiting under the trees, and Duffle had come to sit with Rory; but this time it was settled that they would all stay near the garden so that Rory and Duffle could be with them, because it was going to be a very interesting story. So they found a splendid pine tree, with great roots like claws running out over the ground, and the Lady sat on the highest root of all, and all the others sat round her and as close as they could get. The Moon was looking down through the branches like a smiling golden face, and made the most beautiful pools of light on the pine needles.

Astrid first told what had happened about Jock and the Mouse Queen, and everyone was so anxious to see what the collar could do that he was obliged to make himself large and small several times.

The Lady said:

“You know that in dreams we can be any size we like, and some dreams are quite true. Indeed all dreams could be true if we learned how to dream. Long ago I was taught to dream true, and so I know all the stories that ever happened to me long before I was a Moon Lady. And I know all your stories too. When I told little Chu’s story, it made Jock remember he had been there. Now, I will tell you another one.”

They all were delighted, because they knew they dreamed stories when they were asleep. If you watch any animal sleep—even a Mouse—you can soon see that. And they saw how delightful it would be to dream true and keep all the bits together, so that they could hear the stories when they wanted.

So the Lady began:

Once upon a time and a very long time ago a great many Rabbits lived by a beautiful lake in the midst of the woods, and they were as happy as happy could be, for the nearest village was such a long way off that the people never troubled them, and there were no animals near to hurt them.

One day a friendly Monkey said:

“All the people in the nearest village have gone away because there is no water, but they have left a great deal of food and many useful things. Will you make a party so we can go and take what we want?”

The Rabbits agreed, and next day a large party went with the Monkey and found sugar and flour in the empty houses and fruit growing on the trees; and they took as much of everything as they could carry and tied a large bunch of bananas on the Monkey’s back. But they decided to sleep that night in the village because it was getting late.

They lay down and were just getting drowsy when suddenly a sad little voice began to cry:

“I’m so hungry—so hungry. Oh, give me food! They went away and forgot me. I want some milk!”

So the Rabbits got up and found the voice came from a house some way off, an empty hut with a shut door. That puzzled them and they burrowed under it, digging up the earth with their strong little feet. When they got in there was a little white Dog who was nearly dying. The kind Rabbits offered him everything they had, but he was too young for anything but milk, and they could not think what to do. At last the eldest said:

“I saw a Goat tied up in a field. Do you think she would help us?”

And the youngest said:

“Why not? Goats are very nice clean people, and we can but ask.” So two stayed with the poor little Dog whose name was Rayar, and the others went to the Goat—

[“Yes, I remember her now,” said Jock. “She was a chocolate Goat with white stripes down her face and white stockings.”]

So she was [said the Lady], and they found her tied to a tree, and she had eaten all the grass she could reach and was terribly hungry too, and they said:

“Dear Goat, if we nibble your rope and let you free, will you come and give milk to the poor little Rayar? Please do.” And the Goat at once replied:

“Of course. And may I come and live in the forest with you for I never wish to see those cruel people again?”

The Rabbits at once nibbled the string, and the Goat came and gave delicious milk to Rayar, and they all went to sleep in peace.

In the morning Rayar had more milk, and the Monkey said:

“Now that the Goat is coming with us we can put many more things on her back, and I can tie Rayar on with the rest of her rope, for he is much too small to walk.”

Nothing could be kinder than the Goat, who told them where to find most useful things and how to put them all on her back. Rayar was tied on last and went to sleep most comfortably, and so they journeyed back to the forest loaded with riches. There they led a happy life, and Rayar soon grew up and was the cleverest of them all. They had nothing left to wish for until one day a really horrid thing happened.

A herd of Elephants came to the lake to drink—and with their great feet they trampled some of the poor Rabbits to death and broke their houses and all their nice furniture. Of course they did not know they had done it, but it was just as sad. Rayar, who was hiding under a bush, heard the Elephants say:

[“I know what they said,” Jock interrupted, sitting up on Astrid’s lap. “They said—‘We have come fifty miles today, and this is the nicest place we have seen. We will live in the forest near here and have an Elephant dance round the lake every night.’—I remember that quite well but not what comes next.”]

You see how Jock remembers bits [said the Lady]. It will be much nicer, when he can remember it all himself—and the stories that haven’t happened yet as well. Now—let us go on.

So Rayar told the Rabbits and the Monkey and the Goat, and they all sat down and cried tears of despair, for they could not think what to do and they loved each other and loved their houses, and it was quite terrible. At last Rayar said:

“Shall I go and ask the Elephants to have pity on us because we have lived here so long?”

But the Rabbits and the others were quite sure that would be no good.

“No, they will not care for such little people as we are. They will only laugh and kill you. Don’t go, Rayar,” they said.

But Rayar went away alone to think. He remembered how good the Rabbits and the Goat and the Monkey had been to him, and he felt he must do something; and he looked at the Moon shining brightly above him and he thought she smiled, and perhaps she did, for when he went to sleep that night he had a wonderful dream which told him what to do. For the Moon sends true dreams when you are a friend of hers. So he came out from beneath a bush and walked up to the Elephant King and said loudly:

“Good evening, my lord King!”

The Elephant heard a little voice, and looking down he saw a white Dog, very small but as brave as a lion, looking up at him.

“And who may you be?” said the King of the Elephants.

“I am a very important Dog,” said Rayar, “for I am the Moon’s own Dog, and she has sent me to tell you you can’t dance here and you can’t live near here. This lake is the Moon’s own looking-glass, and every night she looks down into it to do her hair and to see if she is beautiful enough. If you go on dancing here you will be Moonstruck, which is worse than Sunstruck, because you go mad. And that is why mad people are called Moonatics.”

The Elephant King laughed loudly.

“Now I *know* you are telling an untruth. Mad people are called lunatics—not Moonatics. Go away, or I shall kill you.”

But Rayar laughed too.

“Ignorant Elephant!” he said. “Lunatics is the same word as Moonatics and if you had gone to school you would know it. But now come to the edge of the lake, and you will see what happens to the Moon’s looking-glass when you put your great feet into it.”

He led the way to the lake, where the Moon was shining like a great golden ball in the water. But the moment the Elephant King stepped into the lake waves and ripples ran from his feet and broke up the Moon’s reflection into little golden bits and waves and ripples of gold, and a black cloud passed over her face and it was dark. She did that to help poor little Rayar. Rayar snarled furiously and said to the Elephant King:

“Now look what you have done! Didn’t I tell you? You’ve broken the Moon’s own looking-glass.” And he began to howl quite dreadfully, and the King, who had never heard a Dog howl before, was frightened out of his wits. The Elephants were all in such terror of the howling and the Moon that they threw up their trunks and screamed, and dashed into the forest with Rayar at their heels, and ran fifty miles without stopping. For nothing is so unlucky as to break anybody’s looking-glass—and as for the Moon’s—my goodness, no wonder they ran! And they *never* came back.



*The Famous
White Sparrow*



Chapter VII



THE FAMOUS WHITE SPARROW

WHEN *JOCK* woke up next evening he waked Astrid by touching her with his little cold nose and said:

“I dreamed such a funny thing last night. I’m sure I dreamed true.”

She was still asleep, for it was not quite dark, and she said drowsily:

“No, you couldn’t, Jock. You have to be taught.”

But Jock wagged his tail and was very much pleased with himself.

“Just you listen, Astrid! I dreamed it was morning, and the Man Who Writes Stories came in and said: ‘Oh, I want to go out with Jock and Astrid! If I were only as young as the Doctor!’ I was sorry for him in my dream; he’s so old and dull. And then he came and looked at us.”

Astrid was awake now and sitting up in bed.

“Nobody except us could be as young as the Doctor,” she said. “I always know when he’s been in the room when I wake up, for it smells young like flowers. You must have been awake, Jock, without knowing it.”

“Well, I shall ask Mr. Mouse for I dreamed he was there, sitting in the corner squeaking.”

So he trotted to the Mouse hole and gave the Mouse call, and they heard a scurrying, and out came Mr. Mouse’s long gray nose and then his beautiful pink feet and then the rest of him.

“What *do* you want?” he asked all breathless. “We were just laying the supper—Carter’s jam and the stuff in Astrid’s bottle and dried peas and some cold boiled bacon rind to follow and that dry end of cheese the Man’s Wife threw away yesterday—perfectly delicious! Her Majesty has asked two friends in because of the cheese and Astrid’s bottle.”

“Who are the friends?” asked Astrid, who always wanted to know everything.

“Well, as to that,” said Mr. Mouse, “I don’t know if you ever met them, but they are celebrated world-travelers. Perhaps the most famous people in the world just now.”

“Oh, please do tell us. It must be wonderful to see the world,” said Astrid. “I’ve always envied the Rabbit who rides in the Moon’s lantern.”

“Pooh!” said Mr. Mouse scornfully, wrinkling his long nose up. “That’s nothing to this. These are two Mice—father and son—descended from the royal family. They lived on the other side of Pine Sound—just think: the *Other Side*!—and one day they decided to see the world. A pine log was floating down to the sea, and one end touched the shore. They walked onto it as if it were nothing at all to do and before it stirred they sat there for two days, living only on nuts. I declare I tremble from my nose to my tail-tip when I think of such courage. Then the log floated off gently and right across Pine Sound. It took four days to do it, but at last they stepped ashore in these woods. Did you ever hear of such a thing?”

“It doesn’t seem very far,” Jock was beginning to say. “I think I could swim—” But Astrid picked him up and kissed him on the nose to stop him because it might hurt Mr. Mouse’s feelings as he was so proud.

“Not far!” he said angrily. “And on a log! If you weren’t her Majesty’s godson I’d throw you into the water and you’d see!” He was so annoyed that he quite squeaked, and went on squeaking until Astrid said in a hurry:

“They must be the most wonderful Mice that ever lived. What will her Majesty do for them?”

Mr. Mouse calmed down.

“Ah, that’s just it! She always does things so nobly. She decided at once that the son should marry one of the two Mouse Princesses, and the banquet tonight is in honor of the engagement. The wedding will take place in a few weeks, with the greatest splendor. I’m sure you and Jock will each send a handsome present.”

There was silence, because neither Astrid nor Jock had ever thought of such a thing and couldn’t even imagine what they could send. Jock had nothing, and Astrid only her green dress, for her sandals had been lost long ago in the woods. It was really very difficult. Jock looked at Astrid, and Astrid looked at Jock, and they both meant: “What *can* we do?” Suddenly Mr. Mouse said angrily:

“Of course if you don’t *want* to—” But at that minute an idea came into Astrid’s mind. She said in a hurry:

“We do want to! Might I give the wedding dress! It would be white silk and very pretty and a little pearl necklace.”

Mr. Mouse turned head over heels with delight.

“Jewels are always useful to a Princess,” he said grandly, “and I am sure a wedding dress in the last fashion would please both her Majesty and the

bride, but please don't let it be too short in the skirt for her Majesty is very particular. And what would Jock like to give? He has a court position as the Queen's godson, and he must be Best Man. So he should give something expensive."

Jock was just beginning, "Would a bone do?" when Astrid picked him up and kissed his nose again. So he stopped. She said:

"Jock will give a little gold fan."

And Jock said: "Yes—I always give a gold fan at weddings."

Mr. Mouse was enchanted. He danced about and ran after his own tail but stopped because he thought it seemed foolish. He became grand again. He bowed and said:

"I must hurry to mention your kind gifts to her Majesty." He was scurrying off when Jock caught him by the tail.

"I want to ask about my dream. Wasn't I sound asleep when the Man Who Writes Stories was here last?"

"Don't touch my tail or I shall bite you," said Mr. Mouse. "I'm very tender there. Yes, you were asleep and snoring like a little fat pig, all wrapped up in Astrid's hair, which I don't think healthy. Good-by."

He scurried off, and they heard him tumbling down the Mouseway.

Then Jock said:

"I knew I dreamed true. But, Astrid, how are you going to get a wedding dress and me a fan? We shall be so ashamed if we haven't anything. I don't think you should have promised if you haven't got it."

"But I have!" said Astrid, clapping her hands. "A month ago the Man Who Writes Stories brought me a tiny doll. I should think if you stood a Mouse up on end she would be just the height. Well, she has a white silk dress and a little gold fan, but I like real things so much better that I put her in the drawer. Now, let's see."

She went to the cupboard, with Jock trotting after her, and took out a little box and out of it the doll. It really was a lovely dress. Pure white silk with little flounces, a tiny wreath of orange blossoms on her head, a necklace of pearls round her neck, and a gold-paper fan in her hand.

"What we can do is this," said Astrid: "we can put everything in the box and hide the doll, and I think you could go in with the box by the kitchen Mouse hole, for it's really much larger. I shall write a nice message on it: 'With Jock's and Astrid's respectful love and best wedding wishes to her Majesty and the bride and bridegroom.' How do you like that?"

They were both sitting on the floor, and Jock picked up the pearl necklace in his mouth and looked at it.

“This won’t do,” he said. “A Mouse’s neck is much fatter than a doll’s. It would only go round her leg. Oh, Astrid, what a pity you said anything about it! And it will never do to hide the doll in the cupboard, for the Mice go round and spy into everything. And then they’ll say it was an old dress. What shall we do?”

They sat and looked at the necklace awhile, and Astrid presently brightened up.

“I know!” she said. “I’ve got a few white beads in the box on the table, and I’ll thread them with the pearls and make the necklace longer. And can’t you play Catch as Catch Can with the doll?”

You should have seen Jock doing that while Astrid threaded the beads. He took the doll by the neck and woofed her and growled and threw her up in the air and caught her again and chewed her curls and legs, and all the sawdust came out, and soon there was only a little heap of rags and sawdust. He carried the rags into the wood and came back and said that perhaps the Mice might eat the sawdust. They couldn’t know what it was.

Astrid folded the little white petticoat into the box and then the white silk dress and the veil and the pearl and bead necklace; on top of all, the wreath and the gold fan. She wrote the message on the box and tied it with a bit of white wool, and very beautiful it looked; and the whole box was small enough to go down the largest Mouse hole. Then she gave it to Jock and said:

“Now go very carefully. Don’t bark or jump, and be sure you tell them the petticoat goes *inside* the dress. It will never do if they don’t know that. Promise not to forget.”

He promised, and took the box daintily in his mouth and went away, but came running back to say he had forgotten that he must do some Mouse magic to get through the Mouse hole himself. So Astrid took off his collar, and he touched his nose to it and became exactly the size of Mr. Mouse. But then he couldn’t carry the box, and Astrid had to carry it to the kitchen Mouse hole for him and push it down the deep slanting Mouseway while Jock tobogganed after it. That Mouseway was much steeper than the one in her room.

Then came a chorus of little shrieks and squeaks, which sounded like joy, and when she put her ear to the Mouse hole she heard a voice she was sure must be the Mouse Queen’s, because it sounded toothachey, say:

“A noble present and worth being married for! Astrid must come to the wedding!”

She ran out-of-doors as hard as she could go, for she knew she had nothing to wear if she were asked. Her green dress was as lovely as a beech leaf and it smelled of the woods and the wide air. But no one could call it a

party dress. Presently she ran back for Jock. She could hear him struggling and scratching and being pushed up the Mouseway by two enormous Mice, for it was so steep that his paws could not grip on it as their little strong claws could, and though he didn't like it they had to push him.

Out he came like a cork from a popgun—with the last shove they gave him. When he got his breath again Astrid and he trotted off to the woods, and there were the Lady and all their friends, and Jock told them of all the great doings downstairs. He said the Mouse Queen was in dreadful pain from toothache brought on by anxiety about the grandeur of the wedding, because the bridegroom was so proud of being a traveler that he had said he would refuse to be married unless he could have the grandest wedding in the whole world, and really the Mouse Queen did not see how she could manage that though Astrid's beautiful wedding dress and pearl necklace would help very much.

"It's a great pity, for the Mouse Queen is so kind," said Jock, "and the bride is the prettiest little white Mouse you ever saw and she cried terribly. I asked if they would like Astrid's room and the feast to be upon our bed, but the Mouse Queen said that would be dreadfully common and the bridegroom would never consent. I hate that bridegroom. He's fat and proud and stupid, and he quite frightens them."

When he had finished the Lady looked at him thoughtfully and said:

"I wish we could help, for the Mouse-People are very nice, and the Queen is very old-fashioned but as good as gold. What would you all think if we offered to have the wedding in the gardens where the mind-flowers grow? There's one Mouse mind-flower there—a lovely little flower, very like the pink flower we call Mouseear, though they haven't done any more for ages. I could invite the glowworms to come and light us up, and I know the Moon would lend a few Stars to scatter about the trees. The Bees would give honey, and Astrid could leave a message in Jock's dish asking for a lot of cookies and perhaps she could ask for a little fruit too. Mice always think fruit looks so grand. Well, what do you say?"

Everybody was delighted, and each promised to bring what he could. The Foxes offered to lay the table, and the Wolves said they would push and pull the large wheelbarrow with the bride and bridegroom and groomsmen and bridesmaids in it. Astrid said she would use the red tablecloth in her room to line it like a royal carriage. So it was then settled that Jock should run down and propose all this to the Mouse Queen. Astrid and he went to the Mouse hole, and he slithered down while she waited for him on top. He stayed quite ten minutes, and the moment he came back and got to be his own size they ran out to the others that he might tell what had happened. He said:

“The Mouse Queen was so delighted that she almost fainted, and they had to give her some scent out of Astrid’s bottle. Then she said she joyfully accepted and so did the bride—the White Princess—but the bridegroom said no—that it was very common to be married out-of-doors, and he must have the room where the Man Who Writes Stories sits. I don’t think he should have it. I don’t like him at all. I wish we could have the wedding without him. Do you think we could?”

“I never heard of a wedding without a bridegroom,” said the Lady. “But, listen—I know a *really* traveled Mouse who came from Japan in a ship which brought oranges. He went out from the great city where Pine Sound joins the sea and was in Japan for a whole fortnight. I have brought him with me because I knew this might happen, and if the Mouse Queen and the bride like him why couldn’t he be the bridegroom instead? Besides, he is very rich. He can tell you about it.”

So saying, she opened her sleeve, and out ran a fine brown Mouse and stood on her knee as she sat. Everyone, and Jock particularly, liked the look of him—he seemed so manly and brave. He spoke in a very strong squeak and began by calling out “Banzai!” which he said means “Three Cheers!” in Japanese, and then went on:

“I should very much like to marry the White Mouse Princess and settle down, for I feel I have seen the world and had enough traveling. Japan is really very like this place when you once know it, and there is no reason to go there again. Besides I have taken a most beautiful new house from the gray Squirrels who live in the tallest pine. The rent is very dear, but I did not mind that, for I brought back enough riches from Japan to live in a palace if I wish. It is the largest hole at the bottom of the tree and is richly furnished. I did seriously think of marrying the Rat King’s Princess, but if you all wish me to marry the White Mouse instead I am content.”

He said it so nicely that you *had* to like him, and the Lady said she thought he ought to go with Jock and ask the Mouse Queen what she wished. But she would tell them something in case they had any trouble. She said gravely:

“I am sorry to have to say it, but it is not true that those two Mice are travelers. They never crossed Pine Sound on a log and they are not descended from the royal family. They made that up so the son might marry the White Mouse Princess and become King, for they had a plot to put the Mouse Queen in a Mouse-trap and to make the son King of the Mouse-People. Tell them I know this is true. And then hurry back, because we must have our first lesson on how to dream true and it always takes a long time to arrange a wedding.”

So the brown Mouse started off with Astrid and Jock, and many of the animals were so interested that they asked if they might come as far as the Mouse hole and hear what they could. They begged Rory to let them go into the kitchen, and he agreed if they would promise to wipe their feet on the mat and sit still and not make a noise. So they all sat in rows and listened with all their might.

First they heard Jock speaking, though they couldn't hear what he said, and after that came a most awful noise of squeaks and little screams and rushing to and fro as if something dreadful had happened. And then the Mouse Queen screamed out:

"Oh, it can't be true! It can't be true!" They could hear that! And they heard the brown Mouse speaking with a strong sailor squeak. He began by calling out, "Banzai!" (which Jock had to explain for the Mouse Queen thought it was rude) and then he told them exactly what the Lady and he had said. There was silence, and everybody trembled to think what could be happening. Astrid's feet turned quite cold she was so excited.

A most fearful scuffling and awful squeaks came from the bottom of the Mouseway, and up rushed the two wicked Mice, pale with terror, and dashed wildly past them all and out at the front door; they heard Rory give a fearful bark and dash after them. Of course he could have caught them if he had wished, and they really deserved it, but Rory meant only to frighten them and soon he came back. So the wicked Mice disappeared and were never seen again. The Owl was asked later if he could tell what had happened to them, for he sees most things with those broad bright eyes of his, and he answered:

"Yes, *I* know, but I prefer not to tell. It is better to keep some secrets to oneself."

So they never knew. But presently Jock and the brown Mouse and Mr. Mouse came up again and said all was agreed, and they rushed out to tell the Lady. It appeared that the Mouse Queen had fainted on hearing the dreadful story, but she was better now and had gone to bed, and the White Princess was enchanted, for she had never liked the bridegroom. The wedding was arranged for four nights hence, if the Squirrels could get the house ready, and they said they could if the Rabbits would help a little.

When all that was settled, and everyone had calmed down after the excitement, the Lady began to give them the promised lesson on how to begin to dream true. Of course, like any other going to school, you must begin at the very easiest things, but later on you go up and up and learn to be very clever. She said:

"Now all come near and listen very carefully. Then you can ask questions. First, you make ready for bed. You brush your teeth and wash your

face and hands and make yourself very clean, because dreams like a clean house. When you get into bed you take time to do what Astrid does when she makes her mind-flowers. That is, you collect all your little thoughts, which have been scampering about all day, and you say: 'Now it is bed-time. You have had plenty of time to run about and amuse yourselves, but now you must come home as pigeons do to their pigeoncotes at night, and you must be very quiet. You must climb up on the shelves where I keep you all when I am asleep, and you now must lie there and sleep until it's time to get up. Nobody wants you until then.' At first they will be troublesome and run about and hide in corners and rush out just when you are beginning to think they have gone to sleep, but if they do that you must say: 'No. *No!* Get up on the shelves. I want my head to be empty that there may be room for the true dreams.' They will go and perhaps pretend to be good but then jump down again. They may go on like this for a few nights, for they are like naughty children and love to be noticed. But in the end they will be good. Lie on your right side with your knees curled up, and you may put one hand or paw under your cheek, or you may, if you have a tail, curl up in a ball and wind it round you, which is very warm and comfortable, and go to sleep as quick as you can and you will dream true. Astrid knows how to make her little scurrying thoughts obey her, so perhaps she will dream true first. But you must all try. Now I will tell you a story about it when you have asked your questions."

There were not many questions, because she had explained it so clearly, but the Rabbits were not quite sure whether they might put their tails over their mouths as they wished to do because the night air was cold, and the eldest Bear asked, since as some of them slept the whole winter, mightn't it be dangerous to dream so much? And Jock said he was sure he had dreamed true last night. But there was not time to explain, for the story had to begin, so he jumped upon the Lady's knee; and Astrid leaned her head against it.

Once upon a time long and long ago [the Lady began] there was a Queen who had a lovely white Sparrow. It had been taught to do the cleverest things possible. No other bird could do them, and it was known all over the country as the Famous White Sparrow. Now you must hear what he could do. Little silver rings were put up, hanging in a row on a rod, and when the Queen commanded he could fly through them all, even if they were swinging in the wind. That was very pretty to see. He went through them like a flash of lightning. He could also turn somersaults. You know how you can lie on the ground and turn head over heels?

The Queen had a jar made which was filled with perfume and had a little silver bucket on top as large as a thimble. When you turned a wheel the

bucket was lowered into the jar by a thin gold chain, and when you turned the wheel the other way it came up filled with perfume. Well, the Famous White Sparrow could turn the wheel beautifully, and then with the bucket in his beak he would fly or hop to the Queen or any lady she chose and offer the perfume. Nothing could have been prettier and the Queen loved him better than her diamond crown.

There was another thing he could do which was really wonderful. She had a box of small ivory letters such as you play the alphabet game with. She had had them since she was a little princess. The Famous White Sparrow could push them together so that they made words. Of course children can do that, but the Famous White Sparrow could answer questions. If you asked whether you would have a letter tomorrow or if it would rain he would spell out “Yes” or “No,” and it always came true. The reason was that he had dreamed the night before what you would ask and what answer he should give. He never was known to make a mistake, and people used to come from all parts of the country to ask what they wanted to know. They brought him lovely presents. One was a little collar of pearls and another a musical box that played any tune you wanted backward or forward. But nobody brought him the present he really wanted, and the Queen never thought about it at all, and yet he was never happy, for he wanted that present so much that he was sad day and night.

What he wanted was to be free and not to have to live in a cage. He was always in a cage except when he was doing his tricks, and even then he had a silk string tied to his poor little leg. So he could never do what he liked and never have a home and a wife and children of his own. It is true his cage was made of gold and precious stones, but he did not care for these at all. What he wanted was the free air and the trees and blue skies and his own people.

He had one lady who did nothing but wait upon him. She kept his cage clean and gave him the most delicious bird-seed and groundsel and the purest water, and every day she took him out twice with a silk thread tied to his little leg, so that he could fly up like a kite. In that way they hoped he would be satisfied, but he never was, for he knew he was a prisoner. No one can be happy in a prison even if it is made of gold, and the Famous White Sparrow was more and more miserable. Yet he remained good and kind and loved the Queen so much that he would show his tricks and do whatever she told him. But always he hated his cage.

One day he could bear it no longer, and he pushed the letters together and spelled these words:

“Please let me go free. I will come back whenever you want me because I love you, but I must be free.”

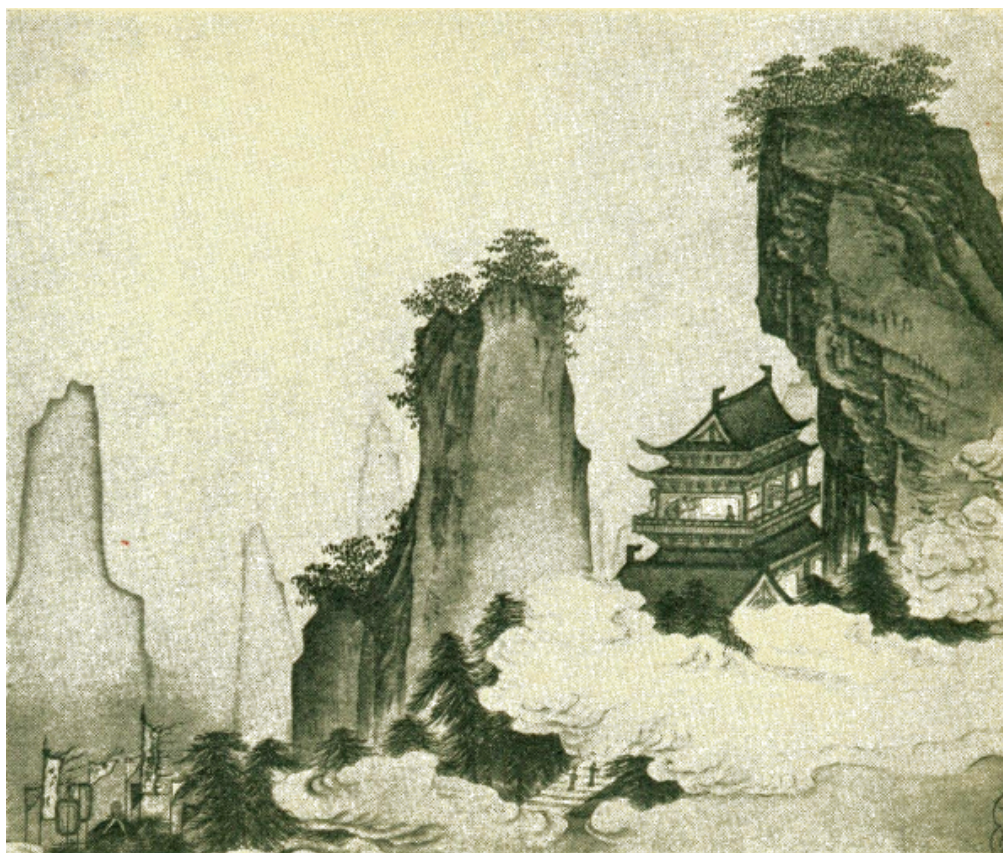
The Queen read it, but she only laughed, for she thought a gold cage must make anyone happy, and besides she did not know that love is stronger than any cage and would bring the Famous White Sparrow back to her. So she only gave him some sugar for spelling so cleverly and would not let him go.

Well, one day when the Famous White Sparrow was taken out into the garden with a silk thread tied to his leg, his heart was so sad he did not even care to fly up, but sat on the edge of the stream where the little silver bridge crossed it and thought how happy the water was to be able to run away into the wide world with no one to stop it.

Just then an officer came marching out, very grand in scarlet and gold and a long sword, and the Sparrow's lady began to talk to him and never thought any more of the Famous White Sparrow. When he saw this he pulled and pulled gently at the silken string until it slipped out of her hand, and she never knew; and he flew up into a tree and twisted the thread round and round the branches until it broke and he was free.

Oh, how happy was the Famous White Sparrow! He flew far off to a lovely wood where many birds lived, and he was as happy as a free bird could be. He found a beautiful young lady sparrow, and they were married and had a little nest with two little eggs and then two beautiful sparrow children. He really almost forgot he had ever lived in a cage and been a prisoner. But one night after he had been free for six months he went to sleep and dreamed a true dream. He dreamed that he saw the palace and the Queen's room, and there hung his golden cage and it was empty, and he saw the Queen sitting by it with the tears running down her cheeks, and she cried:

“Oh, my Sparrow, my Sparrow! How can I live without you? I never, never thought you would leave me!”



The palace where the famous White Sparrow lived. The princess is looking out over the balcony.

Then the Famous White Sparrow saw a dark prison with no window and only one little candle burning, and there sat the lady who had let him go. She was dressed all in rags, and a jug of water and a bit of bread by her side was all she had to eat and drink. And she cried and said:

“Oh, why did I let the Famous White Sparrow fly away? For now I shall be in prison till I die. If I could only tell him I am in prison! He was such a good little Sparrow I am sure he would come back and save me.”

When he heard this the Famous White Sparrow woke up, and it was a dream, but he knew it was a true dream because he did not forget it when he waked, and he could hear their voices still. He told his wife the dream, and though she cried she too said he must go. So he flew straight off to the palace, and there was the Queen weeping bitterly. The Famous White Sparrow

slipped into the room and he found the box of letters and made words on the floor, and they were these:

“I have come back. Please trust me. Do not put me in a cage, but let the poor lady go, and I will stay and do a new trick every day.”

Then he perched on a tree by the window and began to sing. He sang so beautifully that it was like delicate silver bells ringing, and the Queen looked up and said—“My Sparrow!” She saw the sentence on the ground and read it and clasped her hands and said:

“Oh, yes, yes! Come back, and the cage shall be broken, and the lady shall be set free, and I will never, never put a bird in a cage again and I will make a law that no one else shall do it, either.”

So she kissed the Famous White Sparrow, and he flew off and brought his wife and children and a nest was made for them in a rosebush near the Queen’s window. The cage was broken, and every bird in the country was set free, and they all came joyfully to the palace and sang until the air rang with music and then they went away to their houses. And the lady was set free also, for the Famous White Sparrow said, “No one should live in a cage.” And she thanked and blessed him, and he did a new and beautiful trick every day, and they lived happy ever after.

“Now do you see,” said the Lady, “what that true dream did? It made the Sparrow and his wife and children happy, and the Queen and the Lady and all the birds who were set free and all the people in the country. Therefore you must certainly learn to dream true. But now day is coming and we must go to bed, for tomorrow night we shall be terribly busy getting ready for the wedding.”

So they all said good morning, and Astrid wrote a paper and put it in Jock’s dish when he had eaten his supper. It said this:

“Please may I have a lot of cookies for they are wanted for a royal wedding? And particularly some fruit. The wedding will be in four nights from tonight.”

And when the Man Who Wrote Stories read this he went at once to the city at the beginning of Pine Sound and ordered a beautiful real wedding cake all covered with white sugar and silver comfits and ribbons—a cake like three towers on top of each other, for he knew you want a very large cake for a royal wedding. He also brought a box of magnificent candies and two large boxes of crackers and one of oranges, which all keep. He bought grapes too, and when he brought them home he put them in Astrid’s room at once, and he said:

“Oh, if Astrid and Jock would only make friends with me and ask me to the wedding too!”



*The Cats
That Told Time*



Chapter VIII



THE CATS THAT TOLD TIME

THE next evening when Astrid and Jock woke they found these glorious presents in the room. At first they were so amazed that they could say nothing, but just sat and looked at them and at each other and thought they might be dreaming still. Then they noticed that a leaf of white sugar had got broken off and lay on the floor, so they silently picked it up and divided it, and it was so delicious that they could see they were not dreaming and the cake was real. At last Jock said:

“I do like that Man Who Writes Stories, Astrid. He doesn’t ask us to take him to the wedding. He just sends us these lovely things and doesn’t even ask for a bit of cake. We *should* take him.”

Astrid sighed.

“Perhaps. But it isn’t our wedding, and we don’t know what he’s really like. It will be so *much* nicer without him. The Mouse Queen would be terrified, and Mr. Mouse might faint. You know how nervous he is. What we really have to think of is how to get these things to the mind-flower garden where the wedding is to be, and then how to keep them safe. None of us can carry them well enough, for if they get broken—”

That was too terrible to imagine, and they could not plan what to do until at last Astrid saw that you could lift the cake apart like three cakes, which made it easier. But still it might be difficult. At last she said:

“Run and call Rory. He’s so clever.”

Jock rushed down for him. Up Rory came, and looked at all the splendid things in amazement. Then:

“I say! My Stars! What are we going to do? Oh, I know—*Duffle!* Here’s the Owl!”

The white Owl was sailing by the window, staring in at the cake, when Rory put his paws up on the window-sill.

“Look here! Fly as quick as you can to the Doctor’s stable and tell Duffle to bring the cart. The *pony cart*. Don’t forget.”

The white Owl hooted softly in answer, and was gone like a shooting Star, who is quite the quickest person you can see.

“But how shall we get them downstairs?” Jock asked, trembling all over with excitement. “I could take a box of candy on my back and the crackers if Astrid tied them.”

“And I could take the cakes one by one,” said Rory. “But we must go awfully carefully.” He was so eager to do it that Astrid couldn’t try to do it herself.

You never saw such a funny thing as when Astrid tied a cake on Rory with towels and went down with him to the garden. There she untied it, and they left Jock to guard it while they went up for the next. In that way they got everything down—one after another—except the candies and crackers, which Astrid carried. Jock had one fright, for a very nice Bear was passing and stopped to see, and in his eagerness trod on a bit of broken glass and fell on the cake. Jock was at his nose in a second. But no harm was done, and the Bear was terribly sorry and offered to stay and lift everything into the cart, which none of them could so easily have done. Bears really have hands as you will see if you look.

Up came Duffle at a trot, with the pony cart behind him and the Owl flying over him. In ten minutes everything was in the cart, and Astrid jumped in too, the others running behind in wild excitement.

When they reached the garden the Lady was there with all the other friends and all were busy putting it in beautiful order for the wedding. Some were picking up dead leaves. Some were polishing the stones in the stream until they shone like diamonds and reflected the moonlight. Others were picking bits of stick off the moss and watering it. But all stopped and rushed to see what had come in the pony cart, and as the cakes were lifted down and box after box followed they could not contain their joy but jumped and cheered, each in his own way, to think what a splendid wedding it would be.

It was settled that the long, narrow bed of moss should be the table. It would need no chairs, and you will see that that was very convenient. In front of each place should be a pile of fresh green leaves to use as plates. This was close to the rippling stream, and that would be useful when anyone was thirsty.

Just as they were busiest Mr. Mouse arrived, running for all he was worth. He wanted to be sure that everything would be done *just so* for the Mouse Queen. But when they showed him the presents he turned so pale with excitement that for a minute you could have thought he was a white Mouse. Astrid was afraid he would faint and dipped her hand in the stream and

splashed the water over him till he looked like a drowned Mouse, and then he was furious.

“How dare you, you wicked badly behaved child!” he squeaked. “And I’ve just had my whiskers trimmed for the wedding! If you put your head down I’ll bite your nose.” He lay down flat on his back and would not move he was so offended.

Astrid was really sorry. In her heart she was truly fond of Mr. Mouse. So she said humbly:

“Let me dry you with my handkerchief, and then please tell us where we should keep the cake and boxes till the wedding. You are so clever. Of course no one would touch them here, but it *might* rain!”

“So it might,” cried Mr. Mouse, jumping up. He was all right in a second because he liked to be asked to advise. He could barely wait to be dried, standing on Astrid’s knee, and she had to be very careful, his little body was so tiny and so beautifully made. Indeed the best way was to hold him against her cheek to get warm, and there he struggled until she put him down. He darted off, calling after him:

“Come along quick! I know the very place!”

Sure enough there it was—a hollow pine tree, perfectly snug and dry, the bottom carpeted with lovely pine needles, which had blown in. Mr. Mouse stood waving and squeaking directions while the Bear brought the cakes, with the Lady walking beside him to see all was carefully done. Then came the smaller boxes, then the gifts given by other friends, such as a beautiful heap of nuts from the Squirrels, who had each given from his store, a jar of the richest cream from the Doctor’s two cows (Duffle had brought that in the cart). Dried mushrooms from Japan from twelve sailor Rats who lived on board the ship that had brought the bridegroom from Japan. Really Mr. Mouse could hardly contain his pride when he saw these because they certainly are not things you can see every day even in very rich houses.

“My goodness! what will her Majesty say?” he screamed. “We never thought to have such gifts. But of course the bridegroom is a great traveler and has many friends.”

Still the presents came in, including some delicious honeycomb from the bees with the Queen Bee’s best wishes, and could she come to the wedding? Mr. Mouse hurriedly asked the Lady to advise him about that.

“For you know she is *very* short-tempered, and once she stung the bride on the leg when she was a very little Mouse. That Queen Bee *can* be dangerous, so since then we have only bowed but not spoken when we met.”

“Yes, but I think she wants to be friends now, and she would never sting at a wedding. And look at the honey she has sent!” said the Lady. “Why, it would last a year even if they gave parties every day. And just think how grand it will be to say in the newspaper that there were two Queens present. That very seldom happens, and I know the Doctor means to put the wedding in the paper. And do you see that box on top? That’s the Doctor’s present. What do you think it is?”

“Oh, *what*, WHAT!” screamed Mr. Mouse, who was now quite wild with joy. “Yes, certainly the Queen Bee shall come if you’ll make her behave herself and sit near you. I’ll send her a special invitation from her Majesty. But what’s in the box? For goodness’ sake show me or I shall burst!”

“Don’t burst!” Jock said, dancing round him. “They can’t be married without *you*. Hold up!”

So they gave him an acorn-cup full of rose-dew to revive him, and then Astrid opened the box.

It was the loveliest set of tiny furniture you ever saw—indeed you never have seen anything like it unless you have been to Japan. The tiniest chairs and tables—just the size for royal Mice—and all the cups, bowls, and plates for dinner—many, many of them, all made of the purest white wood, so that they could not break. But, as if that were not enough, each table, chair, and cup and all the dishes were painted by an artist. You could never want to use a tablecloth, for the tables were covered with a sheet of clear glass and, under that, charming pictures of mountains, lakes, and forests, while the cups and plates had flower and bird designs. You could sit and look at them forever.

Two large tears of joy formed in Mr. Mouse’s black eyes and rolled down his very long nose.

The Lady said:

“Don’t you think, Mr. Mouse, that these things should be used for the royal table at the wedding? Then it can be put in the paper that the royalties and the bridal pair were served on magnificent tables from Japan. Don’t you think so?”

“Think so? Yes, yes!” squeaked Mr. Mouse. “Now don’t show me any more or I shall be sick for the wedding. My nerves can’t stand it.”

“No more work now,” said the Lady. “We have plenty of time still, and you mustn’t be tired. But first I shall write a message of thanks to the Man Who Writes Stories. Astrid, remember to put it in Jock’s dish.”

This was the message:

The Mouse Queen, the bride and bridegroom, and Astrid and Jock, all send their best thanks for your beautiful present and hope

the day is not far distant when they may know you better. Please wait a little. Again, thank you!

Then the story began, with the youngest Rabbit in the company in Astrid's lap and Jock in the Lady's. Astrid had been thinking of China, because of a picture which the Man Who Wrote Stories had put in her room—a wonderful tower with points to which were hung little bells that tinkled in the wind. She longed to know more, and leaning her arm on the Lady's knee she asked:

“Couldn't we have a story about China?”

“Indeed you can. Often and often I go there,” said the Lady.

And so the story began.

There was once a little girl called Ursula who lived in China. She was American, but as she had been born in China and lived there it was almost the same as if she had been Chinese. Her parents lived in a place where there were only Chinese people, and sometimes she was allowed to play with Chinese children like the prettiest dolls you ever saw with round, rosy apple-cheeks and bright black eyes.

But her chief friend was an old man she had never spoken to, who had a little store near her house where he sold all sorts of things that she thought very beautiful. Whenever she passed with her Chinese nurse he nodded and smiled as if there were some secret between them, and Ursula nodded and smiled back and thought there was certainly some secret and that she would know it one of these days. Every day she wished she could know him better, for his face was so wise and merry, and one day it happened that he spoke to her and gave her what looked like a few dry chips of wood. But her nurse made her put them in a basin of water, and then they came alive and were lovely flowers. Ursula was sure there must be magic and that the old man was very clever, so she thought about him a great deal and wished still more to know Master Ting, for that was his name. She thought about him more and more. Every night before she went to sleep she said in her mind very softly:

“Please, Master Ting, come and take me out. I never see anything new.”

Then she would lie and think exactly how he would look if he walked in at the door in the moonlight.

And one night he came in his long blue coat. Now you shall hear exactly what happened.

The house was very still, and the Moon was shining, and Ursula's parents were asleep, and certainly they had thought she was asleep too. Anyone

would have thought it, for she lay in her bed in her nightdress and her eyes and mouth were shut and one hand was under her cheek. But the truth was that directly she had shut her eyes that night she forgot the house and all the people in it and thought only of Master Ting and of how nice it would be to talk about his store and look at all the wonderful things put away there, and again she said in her mind:

“Please, Master Ting, come and take me to see things I never saw before, for I am quite tired of what I see every day.”

As she said this her door opened very softly, and in walked Master Ting in his long blue coat, with his kind, wrinkled face and very bright eyes, and he smiled and said:

“Here’s Master Ting, Ursula. Will you come out and see China?”

She sprang out of bed and put on a little flowery dressing gown and red bedroom slippers, and that is quite a nice dress in which to see China. And so they went out to see the world together, hand in hand. Master Ting chose what they should do, for he knew China, and Ursula knew nothing but their large garden and two of the roads outside.

“Now tonight we shall see four very useful things of which you know nothing in America,” he said. “Be sure to remember them, because you never can tell but that they might be useful one of these days. Knowledge is money. Be careful with it, and then you can spend it when you want it most.”

Walking very quickly so that it seemed they almost flew, for his long blue coat streamed out behind him and so did Ursula’s golden hair, they came across the fields to a little village and stood in the middle of it. But, heavens — what a noise!

Ten Donkeys belonged to that village, and in the daytime they were most useful and did great work in the fields. But instead of going to sleep like sensible people they spent the night in braying so fearfully loud that they never slept a wink nor could anyone else sleep either. They brayed and brayed as if they were talking at the tops of their voices and would not stop for all the world. It was so bad that the people would come out and beg them to stop, but they did not. And then the people would throw stones at them and beat them and *still* they did not stop. The people told them that they could talk all day long in the fields if they wanted to, and *still* the donkeys went on. It was dreadful.

Ursula said, crinkling up her nose:

“Please, do let us go away, Master Ting. This can’t be a useful thing, and I can’t even hear myself think.”

Master Ting smiled all over his face—he had a very nice smile—and said:

“Dear me, no. We can’t let them throw stones at the poor Donkeys, and yet the poor people must sleep. This is what we call a little misunderstanding. Now watch what I do.”

He took a long piece of strong string out of his long sleeves and found a heavyish stone and knotted it into the string. Then he went to the Donkey who was leading all the rest and tied the stone to his tail. The minute that was done the Donkey stopped braying and was as silent as a fish. The others were so amazed at the silence that they stopped and stared at him. Ursula was quite as surprised as the Donkeys. She asked:

“Master Ting, was that magic? Should I stop talking if you tied a stone to me? Why did it make them stop?”

So he replied:

“Ignorance comes of not noticing. Now I have always noticed that when a Donkey brays he sticks his tail straight out in the air in a line with his back, and when he has finished he puts it down again. So I was sure that if he could not lift it up he would not bray. Now watch.”

He took the stone off again, and the Donkey began to bray louder than ever, and the others joined in. It was as if they were complaining of Master Ting to the whole world. He put the stone on again, and all was silent. Ursula saw that what he had said was quite true.

“And now we can go on, for you have seen one useful thing,” said Master Ting. “But you shall see another. And then we must go to the city. In this village they are very, very poor folk, and they have no clocks and watches, but still they want to know when it is time for dinner. So how are they to know?”

“I think they could tell by the shadows like the one on my father’s Sundial,” said Ursula very wisely.

“Good girl! So they could,” said Master Ting. “That is, if they had a dial, which they haven’t, and if the Sun would always shine, which it doesn’t. So as that won’t do they have a plan of their own. They ask the Cats. Twenty Cats live in this village.”

“But how do the Cats know? Cats are very clever, but to tell time is quite wonderful,” said Ursula, “for I should think they’d have to know numbers and be able to speak. Are you joking, Master Ting?”

“No, not joking,” he said. “It’s this way. They’re very kind to the Cats, and when anyone wants to know if it’s near twelve o’clock he takes a Cat in his arms. He pushes up its eyelids very gently and looks into the deep green of its eyes. Now you know that in every eye there is a large dark pupil in the middle. Well, in a Cat’s eyes the pupil grows narrower and narrower every

morning as it goes on toward twelve o'clock, and at twelve the pupil is only a dark line, thin as a hair, drawn across the green part of the eye. Directly after twelve o'clock it begins to widen again. So that's the way the Cats tell the time when dinner should be ready."

Ursula was so delighted that she begged him to show her two more useful things. And he nodded like the little figures which come from China, and said:

"Very well. Then now we will see the House of Hens' Feathers. We must come to the city."

Holding her hand he walked again through the fields but so fast that his coat blew out behind him and Ursula's hair lay quite flat on the wind. It was quite unlike any walking they did in the day. They came very soon to a large city full of very low-roofed houses, and in that city lived many people who had no houses at all and certainly no beds nor even bed-clothes to snuggle into at night, and that was a dreadful thing to think of, for the winters there are very cold.

"But never mind," said Master Ting, "for there is always the House of Hens' Feathers. Come along and see!"



This is one of the cats that told the village people what o'clock it was.

He took Ursula to a great hall with a very high roof—quite empty; not a person nor a bit of furniture in it. But all the floor was covered with hens' feathers, inches and inches deep. A sea of feathers. You would think every

hen in China had given two feathers—there were such millions. She saw a man at the gate who opened the door and sat down at a counter, and presently a very poor woman came along and paid a tiny coin. If you could divide a cent into six bits each of the six would be as much as she paid. Then the woman went in and snuggled deep down in the feathers until you could see only her head. More and more people came, and they all snuggled down in the feathers and were as warm as toast.

When it was nine o'clock the man at the gate came into the hall and turned a handle, and down from the ceiling came a great wadded coverlet as big as the ceiling and covered all the feathers. Each person could unbutton a hole in it and put his head through so that he could breathe, and everyone did this, and they were soon all sound asleep, as comfortable as could be, and very funny indeed they looked, like a sea of heads and nothing else, all snoring together. It was freezing outside, but they knew no more of that than the rich people in their grand houses. In the morning the coverlet went up again into the ceiling, and they all got up and washed their faces with towels wrung out in hot water and went away to their work.

“Don’t you call that useful?” asked Master Ting.

“I like my own bed best, for I think the feathers might stick in my hair, but still it is very, *very* useful. Please show me some more, Master Ting.” That was what Ursula said, wrinkling her nose for the feathers smelled stuffy.

Then Master Ting said:

“Now in summer it is very hot, and those poor people are as thirsty as can be, and very often the water is not nice to drink alone. They cannot afford fruit juice, and tea is much too dear and would be very bad for them, too, if they drank so much. So what do you think they do? There is a creature which lives in the sea, and it is called a Polyp. There are many kinds of Polyps, and this is the only one which will do what I tell you, so you must not use any other. It is very ugly to look at, for it is all arms and legs, but handsome is as handsome does, and this Polyp does his work nobly. Now come and see.”

Again he took Ursula by the hand, and they came to a store where many poor people stood perspiring in the sun and waiting their turn. And in the shade stood a large glass tank filled with clean ice-cold water and a huge black Polyp, and the Polyp was quite comfortable, floating gently in the water.

“Thirty days ago,” said Master Ting, “they put one glass of wine into this large tank and filled it with water and put the Polyp in, and the kind Polyp immediately set to work and turned the whole thing into a kind of lemonade that is very delicious and wholesome. You take a very little from the tank and

put it in a glass and then fill up with cold water and there you are! Now will you taste it?"

But Ursula was really afraid, because the Polyp was so ugly. She held back and said nothing, but Master Ting understood.

"A good servant may be ugly and yet do his work very well. Let me tell you that when the water gets low in the tank you have only to fill it up again with water, and the lemonade is just as strong as ever. As every arm and leg he has can grow into a little Polyp on its own when the large Polyp casts it off, which it always does, you can have as many glass tanks as the Polyp has arms and legs—all full of delicious lemonade of which you only want a very little to make a glassful. If that isn't useful I should like to know what is! Now, will you taste, or won't you, for we must be going home?"

When Ursula looked at the Polyp—which was something like a huge black spider only very much fatter—she shuddered and thought she could not. But presently she remembered that this was not very polite either to the Polyp or to Master Ting so she said in a very weak voice:

"Thank you so much. A *very* little, if you please. I am not very fond of lemonade."

He smiled and put a drop or two in a glass with a pinch of sugar and a little water. She shut her eyes and shut her nose *inside*, as you do when you take very horrible medicine, and swallowed it. Then she opened them and breathed and, lo and behold! the after taste was as nice as the very best lemonade. She was astonished and bowed most respectfully to the Polyp, as Master Ting told her would be the proper thing to do. Then Master Ting took her hand and walked home with her so fast that his coat and her hair flew out in the wind like flags. Ursula begged to see one more useful thing that night, because she liked them so much, but Master Ting replied:

"If you eat too many buns you get indigestion, and if you see too many useful things at once your mind chokes. Enough is as good as a feast. Indeed it is much better. Good night."

And he walked straight out of her bedroom door where they had arrived by this time. Next morning when she told her father and mother about all these useful things they only said:

"The dreams that child has are perfectly amazing. It must be because she had some cheese with her supper."

But when she saw Master Ting standing beside his little store the next time she went out with her nurse, he smiled and nodded more than ever to remind her of the secret between them, and Ursula smiled and nodded too with all her might.

Jock said eagerly that he would like to hear more of Master Ting, and so did Astrid and Duffle. The Lady promised they should although it must be a different kind of story, for Master Ting knew all sorts of surprising stories. Before they parted Astrid remembered something.

“In one of the picture books in my room is a picture of a Polyp so hideous that I couldn’t bear to look at it. Now I think that was silly; people may be very pretty underneath if one could get to some deep downness in them.”

“Well, yes, but still one must be careful,” the Lady said. “Polyps are like everyone else—there are some very bad and some very nice. But when we all get to the Back of Beyond we shall know they are very good friends. Until that happens there are some people and some Polyps that you can’t play with. You just have to wait until it comes right.”

“And when will that be?” asked Rory.

“When our eyes open wide enough for us to see straight. And now, sleep well, you dears.”



*The
Royal Mouse Wedding*



Chapter IX



THE ROYAL MOUSE WEDDING

WOULD *ASTRID* ever forget the royal wedding? Never, as long as she lived. And that would be forever and ever.

When she and Jock woke that night the Moon was at her fullest—clear and round as a great bubble of light sailing slowly, very slowly, over the trees. Jock woke first as he always did and pushed Astrid’s cheek with his nose.

“The wedding!” he said, and in a second she was sitting up and the next they were both at the window.

“Oh, look! look! There’s the Rabbit in the Moon waving. Wave! They’ll stop over the mind-flower garden for the wedding. What a night! Hurry, Jock. Where’s your comb? Thank goodness I washed you last night. But you’re as tangled as if you’d been pulled backward through a brier bush. Come here!”

It was really difficult to catch him, for he was jumping all over the room. But at last he came with the comb in his mouth, and she made him stand with his paws on a chair while she combed his back down, so that it went into the most charming silver waves, and smoothed his ear fringes and made him as beautiful as could be. Then she combed and brushed her own long hair into waves of darkness and then—what do you think? Jock suddenly stopped in one corner where his dish always stood and said:

“Astrid, look here!”

She ran, dropping her brush. On the floor behind the screen lay a large sheet of white paper and on it a New Dress. It was grayish white and looked exactly like a trail of mist blown over the hills—with light shining through it like that. And it was sprinkled with dewdrops, but they were not wet. Indeed it was like one of the loveliest things you can see—a cobweb in the early morning with the first sunbeams shining on the dewdrops. She touched it with one finger, thinking the delicate stuff must cling to her fingers as cobwebs do, but no—it was smooth as silk and fell into folds just like the Lady’s dress. They knew it was from the Man Who Wrote Stories.

So Astrid slipped it on, and it was just the same as her green dress, made so that her neck and legs and arms could be bare, which was what she liked,

and she said to Jock:

“Promise not to jump on it till the wedding is over!”

What a night! The Moon showered the forest with light and Fireflies had come in thousands to the trees. The moss-table was lighted by countless Glowworms in the moss, who gave the softest warmest light, and behind where the wedding people would sit the Spiders had woven a curtain of the most delicate webs you could imagine, glittering beautifully with little dewdrops in a pattern that made it seem like a net of diamonds. Nothing could have been more magnificent.

“That was partly because the Mouse Queen is so afraid of drafts,” said the Lady. “But of course it looks very royal too. We have arranged a little rock for her chair to be put on, so that she shall be higher than anyone else. Doesn’t the cake look beautiful?”

Indeed it did. It was all white in the Moonlight and Starlight, and the silver leaves and flowers glittered. As to the other provisions—what can be said? You know of some, but the Mouse-People had sent cakes of every sort and all the good things they like best—especially bacon rinds and wax candle ends. In the ordinary way they would have had tallow, but this time it had to be wax, and a large party of Mice had gone to the city to get them from the Town Hall. All was perfectly arranged, and the Doctor’s present of furniture was set out for the royal party. Astrid saw that the Queen Bee’s place was at the bottom of the table for safety’s sake.

Now the guests were assembled, guests of every sort and size. The largest people were Duffle and some of the Bears. The smallest were the Bees. Between these two sizes was every size imaginable, and all were standing in expectation, for guests must always be ready and waiting on royal occasions. Royal people must not wait.

“Now please sit down and be very still,” said the Lady, “and when the procession comes in sight you must stand up and bow very low indeed. And then you can cheer. The Bees must be put in front because they are the smallest, and all the Bears and Duffle stand behind. Now, once more be very quiet and be thinking of nice things to say.”

It was terribly exciting for a very far-off sound of music could be heard. It was a March—slow and majestic, just what you would expect the Mouse Queen to have, and it was made by Grasshoppers and Crickets and a chorus of Frogs, who kept up with the procession by hopping from pool to pool.

The procession came nearer and nearer, but very slowly, and now the guests could hear the words which had been written specially for the

occasion.

“Hail to the Queen who in triumph advances.
Honored and blest be her whiskers so white.
See how she loops up her tail as she dances,
Filling her subjects with pride and delight.
Never, oh, never on earth shall be seen
Beauty and courage like that of our Queen!”

There was much more which Astrid was too excited to remember. Yet it seemed quite a long time before they could see the procession among the trees headed by an army of Mice who waved the national flag. It was pure white with a nibbling Mouse in each corner and two wheat ears crossed in the middle to remind the Mouse-People of the story you know about—the wicked Prince who tried in vain to starve them.

As this came into sight the Lady and everyone else stood up respectfully, dividing into two bands that the procession might pass between them into the garden.

It was almost too splendid for description. Every mouse wore a red or blue collar, and they marched in bands according to their collars. In the middle went a band of the largest Rats ever known, and that was a most surprising thing, for Rats and Mice never truly like each other. But on this great occasion they had sent to say let all be forgotten and they would come with pleasure.

“And I know why,” Jock said, “for I heard two of them whispering while I sat by the hole in the stable where they live, and they said the supper was going to beat all records and they would be there if they had to walk all the way on their tails. I don’t like that.”

“But still they look wonderfully nice,” said Astrid. “See how every Rat has a gold and blue ribbon about his waist. Now where can they have got them? It’s very respectful to the Mouse Queen.”

“I know where they got them,” growled Rory. “They stole them from the old woman that sells dolls and candies. And do you suppose they paid a cent for them? Not they! That’s why I always hunt Rats. They’re as clever as Elephants, and being so small they can slip in and out anywhere and have it all their own way.”



This is the Mouse Princess and her husband, and at the other end of the goose-wing is Mr. Mouse, his tail in a beautiful curve.

“Yes, but don’t say anything about it now. They look so nice!” Astrid said soothingly.

The Rats passed by doing the goose-step which had a very proud effect. Next came the Rabbits, and really the tears stood in Astrid’s eyes for joy—they looked so beautiful. In each band of animals who went in procession were one hundred, and the Rabbits were all picked. They were pure white, like swansdown, with pink-lined ears and nostrils, and each had a light blue ribbon knotted around the waist. Then came the Dogs, specially chosen by Rory, each black and white, and the effect after the snowball Rabbits could never be forgotten by those who saw. But it is impossible to describe all the bands, all chosen and looking their very best.

Finally came a lovely brown and white Deer drawing the cart lent by the Doctor. A platform had been put in the cart covered with scarlet, and in the middle, raised on a rock, sat the Mouse Queen in a golden chair. Astrid knew it at once and flushed crimson. It was one of a set of dolls’ chairs which the Man Who Wrote Stories had given her for the doll she never liked. She had amused herself by covering it with gold paper, the sort you get in tea-chests and round chocolates, and very well it looked when it was done—like hammered gold. Then one morning, it suddenly had disappeared, and she never had seen it again. Now here it was as large as life and certainly the very thing for the Mouse Queen. But—Astrid resolved not to breathe a word about

it, and she knew it was safe, for all this had happened before Jock came and he would not know it. Still it gave her an uncomfortable kind of feeling and she wished the Mouse Queen *wouldn't* . . .

Cries of joy rose when the Mouse Queen was seen sitting in state, and Astrid bowed low and clapped her hands. In her heart she freely gave the chair at that moment.

Never had the Mouse Queen looked so noble. She wore a train with a rich golden pattern, and Astrid thought, but couldn't be sure, that it was very like a cushion the Man's Wife had once left in her room. She had the famous Mouse-magic crown, which is a very wonderful thing. It is made of the little white teeth of Mice famous in history, exquisitely polished and set in a little golden rim.

The bride and bridegroom sat on each side of her, and the bride was indeed a lovely little White Princess in the dress Astrid had given with the wreath and veil and Jock's golden fan. After looking at her until their eyes almost popped out of their heads, they all turned to look at Jock and Astrid, for it had been announced that that was their gift, and indeed several people bowed to them, and the Mouse Queen specially waved her hand. The bride was too shy and hid her face with the fan.

Now the cart stopped, and a board covered with scarlet was sloped up to it, and down this they all gracefully descended, the Mouse Queen coming last led by Mr. Mouse. Astrid and Jock could scarcely believe their senses when they saw Mr. Mouse. He had a little pink cloak tied round his neck with gold thread and a little pink bonnet to match. Astrid knew it instantly. It had belonged to a doll of hers named Charlotte who had disappeared and never returned. Astrid and Jock had both suspected the Owl. And now they knew. Jock looked up at Astrid and showed his white teeth until she pulled him by the collar.

"For goodness' sake, say nothing!" she whispered. "I would have given it at once if he had asked for it. I know this isn't the way to do, but we *can't* say anything! I shall speak very seriously to him after the wedding."

"Very well, then, I'll be quiet," Jock said. "But someone must say something, or Mr. Mouse will come to a bad end."

But even Jock had to own that Mr. Mouse looked more beautiful with his gray nose coming out of the pink bonnet than he had ever thought possible. And now the Lady bowed to the Mouse Queen and made a speech, saying how glad everyone had been to help on such a glad occasion and that even the fish in Pine Sound had made an effort to send their good wishes.

Sure enough, on looking at the table, Astrid saw two lovely clear glass bowls in which swam many of the most golden and silver fish your eyes ever

beheld. And as the royal party approached they all swam to that side of the glass and waved their tails as a mark of respect.

When the Mouse Queen saw the bridal cake towering in the midst of the table, glittering like snow and silver, she almost gave way and had to put her handkerchief to her eyes. Mr. Mouse had to rush to an attendant Mouse for Astrid's bottle of perfume. She then did a thing never known before in Mouse history. She turned to Astrid and before all assembled touched her on the shoulder with the tip of her tail and thus made her an Honorary Mouse. That does not mean that she *looked* like a Mouse, but only that she was given all the rights and honors of being a Mouse and sharing in all Mouse feasts forevermore. She felt that this would make it very difficult for her to speak about the chair and the pink cloak, and rather wished it had not happened, though everyone cheered and jumped for joy, for of course it is the highest honor the Mouse Queen can give. Astrid and Jock were instantly asked to sit nearest to the royal party though not at the same table.

Never will that feast be forgotten in the forest. The provisions were so generous that it was agreed that what they could not eat should be stored away in a pine tree for a Christmas feast. There was only one blot on the feast and that was when the Queen Bee and all her subjects flew to the wedding cake and settled on it, buzzing fiercely, so that no one dared go near it to cut any more. There they stayed until the Lady reminded her that she herself had promised for their good behavior and that they could have no more cake unless they would let it be cut. Then the Queen Bee said she was sorry and it should not happen again.

After the feast the Mice sang the wedding song and all joined in, for as the tune was "Annie Laurie" everyone knew it perfectly, and it was sung as slowly as a hymn which made it easier.

"Oh, glad is now the marriage,
And gay the wedding song,
As in her golden carriage
The bride is borne along.
Our hearts are full of joy
No gladder can they be!
For to see our roy-oy-oy-al lady
We'd lay us down and dee!"

"But why don't they say 'die'?" whispered Jock, greatly astonished.

"Sh-sh! Because it's poetry, and poetry must rhyme or it isn't poetry, it's only bits cut off and joined up. Be quiet, Jock," whispered Astrid.

So the song rose higher.

“Oh, beautiful the morning
And bright the fields in May,
But all other beauty scorning
Is the Mouse Queen’s face today.
Her loyal subjects bow
In heartfelt joy and glee
And to see her roy-oy-oy-al brow-ow,
They’d lay them down and dee!”

There were two more verses even more beautiful and her Majesty’s health was drunk, followed with three cheers all standing, and then the married pair’s. The dance followed. First the bridegroom led out the Mouse Queen, and they danced alone—to the music of the Grasshoppers and Crickets and the chorus of Frogs. Astrid had never seen such wonderful dancing as the Mouse Queen’s with her tail looped over her little arm, and she wished it could last forever. Everyone joined in except the Lady; she directed the music. And all danced until they were tired.

Mr. Mouse rushed up to Astrid with the pink bonnet hanging over one shoulder and cried:

“Wasn’t that splendor? Wasn’t that royal Majesty and grace?”

“O, was never such a wedding,
Never, never such a Queen!”

That was the song sung as the procession re-formed and took the young pair to their beautiful house prepared by the Squirrels in a pine tree. When they entered, her Majesty kissed them both and wished them joy and then walked up the board into the cart and was driven home, weeping a little because she would miss them.

The Rats went away loaded with bits of cake which they simply could not eat because they were *bulging*. Astrid heard one say to another:

“Don’t *bend* me. I can’t stand it.”

When they were gone the Lady and Astrid and all the friends tidied up the forest, for of all places a forest must be kept as neat as a new pin and it is perfectly dreadful manners to leave anything about which does not belong there. You may think that a forest is all anyhow, but if you understand and have been well brought up you will see that everything has its place and could have no other. So it is wicked to leave it untidy.

At last all was finished, and the fish had been carefully returned to Pine Sound with cake for their friends, the birds had cleared away the last crumbs, and you could not have told there had ever been a feast at all. Astrid thought

that beautiful as the wedding had been it was really much more lovely like that.



*The Golden
Tigers*



Chapter X



THE GOLDEN TIGERS

THE nights grew more and more pleasant for Astrid and Jock after the royal wedding, for the Prince and Princess, as they were now called by the Mouse Queen's command, came out almost every night with the others and were the daintiest little friends and as kind as could be. It made the Bears and Duffle and the larger ones very careful and gentle, because if they had not been they might easily have hurt them—their bodies were so small and delicate. Perhaps it was because Astrid had given her that pretty wedding dress that the Princess was very fond of her and liked to sit on her knee and talk quite freely, and this gave Astrid the chance of speaking about Mr. Mouse, for she really was not happy about his taking other people's things as he did. She had meant to speak to him herself, but was not sure it was right for her to do it. It might make him too sad. So one night when she was a little away from the others (except Jock) she told the Princess about the chair and the pink bonnet and cloak, saying:

"Princess, I would have given them and anything else he wanted—and her Majesty could have anything I have, but I *wish* he would ask. Please tell me what you think."

For a moment the Princess said nothing. Sitting on Astrid's knee and shining like pure silver in the moonlight, with her black eyes and pink-lined ears, she really was more like a little Mouse-fairy than an every-day Mouse. Jock sat beside her. They were very fond of each other, and a great game was to make himself so small with the Mouse-magic collar that he was the right size to be her dog. You can think how small that would be when I tell you they could both sit in Astrid's hand—which was not a very large one. He listened attentively to what they said now, for he was very fond of Mr. Mouse in some ways. Presently the Princess spoke very thoughtfully. She was rather a serious little Mouse.

"I'm glad, Astrid, you told me this, for now I can say what I wish about dear Mr. Mouse. He is the kindest person and would give anything away and when he was young would never have taken *anything*. But some time ago he narrowly escaped with his life and since that he has sometimes—only *sometimes*—done it, usually to make her Majesty presents or to seem very

grand. You know how proud he is. The way it happened was this. The Squirrels invited him to supper in the gnarled old tree where the eldest Squirrels live. You know what a beautiful house it is. Well, they had a wonderful feast with the very nicest things to eat, and when the time came for him to go they packed up a few good things in a nutshell and tied it on his back. He was just starting to climb down the tree—very carefully, for he isn't good at trees—when suddenly the Owl, with eyes as big as church windows, floated out in the moonlight just before him. He just gave one piercing scream and fell straight down to the ground and on his poor head. We all heard the scream from the house, and when we came out there he lay speechless. We thought he never would live, but he did, and we noticed afterward that if he liked anything he took it, no matter whose it was. But we think it *may* be because we just spoiled him when he was getting better and so he can't help it."

You may think how glad Astrid and Jock were that they had said nothing. It might have broken Mr. Mouse's heart. But Jock asked:

"Does the Mouse Queen know the chair was Astrid's?"

"Oh, no, no!" answered the Princess. "Mr. Mouse just brings things in, and he laughs and says it's a secret, and she never asks. I couldn't *bear* her to know. Must you tell?"

"Never in this world," said Astrid earnestly. "It's quite safe, for only Jock and I know. Rory *may* guess because he sees things in the house. But he would never say anything. He knows a lot of things he never tells. It's quite safe. And I love Mr. Mouse—poor dear!"

Indeed she was sorry when she thought of the poor little thing lying on the ground. Now she understood why he must have the doctor quite often as he had once said. He thought it was colds, but it was really stuffiness in the head from falling, and Astrid who had never had it felt one might do anything if one had that often. So no more was said about it, but Jock and she remembered, and that very evening they made Mr. Mouse a charming present which Jock ran back to the house to fetch. It was a Noah's Ark which the Man Who Wrote Stories had brought for Astrid, and it would make the loveliest summer home for her Majesty and Mr. Mouse when they came to visit the Prince and Princess. There were a number of wooden animals with it, and Mr. and Mrs. Noah and their children, but everybody thought these much too stupid to play with. You see they could have the real people, which indeed all children should have and could have if they only knew how.

"That's quite true," said the Lady, when all were admiring the house, which Jock carried in his mouth. "You see the house is a real thing. Her Majesty and Mr. Mouse will find it useful when it rains. But the animals are

not real, and the people who made them didn't love animals and only knew a very little of what they look like outside. That's why all children, all happy people, should learn to make things in their own minds. Now attend carefully! We have no Elephants in these woods, and no one is more delightful than an Elephant. Why doesn't one of you make one? When I was very young—long, long, long ago—I wanted a baby Elephant more than anything. I knew how we should love each other and I thought how useful he would be for hanging up pictures and doing tall things I couldn't reach—like picking the ripest apples and cherries, which always grow highest. Well, where I lived there were no Elephants, but I made him in my mind just as Astrid made Jock. His name was Moti—that means 'Pearl' in his language."

"Oh, where is he now? Can't he come here? I do want an Elephant," said Astrid, catching at the Lady's dress.

"He lives in the Back of Beyond."

Astrid sighed. They were all so silent that you could hear her sigh like a little breeze stirring a leaf.

"Oh, where is the Back of Beyond?" she said at last. "I hear of it so often. All the lovely things go there, and all the happy things happen there. And this dear wood we live in is lovely and happy too, but whenever I look into your eyes or listen to the wind whispering both say—'Yes, but there are things still lovelier, still happier.' I want to know. I want to know. I want the Back of Beyond."

It was such a beautiful night that you would have believed nothing could have been lovelier, but everyone there knew that what the Lady said must be true and each waited to hear, for all knew she was thinking how she could explain. Presently she spoke:

"You all know what a secret is: something you must not tell. But there are other secrets you *cannot* tell even if you try, for people wouldn't understand them. They would just think it was a joke or what they call a fairy-tale. Now tonight I'll tell you a secret, and it will be true, but you won't be able to believe it unless something is awake inside you that knows it as clearly as you know you're alive and happy."

"Oh, tell it—tell it!" cried the Rabbits and Squirrels and the Sparrows and a number of others, especially the younger ones. "We know it's true and we shall understand it *perfectly*. We're quite ready to hear!"

But Jock and Astrid and Rory and Duffle and some others were silent. They knew—and did not know why they knew—that it would not be so easy as all that.

"Children," the Lady said, "you all belong to the Back of Beyond. You are alive and you will live forever because someone there thought of you and

made you as we make mind-flowers. Thought can never die. It goes on forever. That is no secret. Your mothers told it to you when they loved you, even if they did not tell it in words. But the secret I tell you tonight is that the Back of Beyond is *here*—here all round us in the woods and everywhere. The trees and streams and hills and flowers are all a great Picture-Writing, and if you could read it you would never be sorry or tired or sick any more, because what you read would be so wonderful. But most people we know cannot read it at all, and think it means nothing but to be pretty.”

“Here?” asked Astrid. “Do you mean that though we see all these lovely things there are other things behind them that we can’t see and much lovelier?”

“Why, yes!” said the Lady. “Tell me this: you like to look at pictures, but are they as good as real things?”

“No—never!” said Jock. “When I put my paw on them they’re hard and cold. You can’t run into the picture-woods nor drink the picture-streams. They’re like the wooden animals in Astrid’s Noah’s Ark.”

The Lady stroked his head as he looked up eagerly.

“Yes, Jock. Then believe me when I tell you that all these lovely things you see are only the pictures of the real things you’ll see in the Back of Beyond. If you could open your eyes now you would see what I see but cannot tell you.”

“If you can see it, please tell us what it is like,” said Rory, and laid a silver paw on her knee. You know how Dogs ask and how hard it is to say no. She laid her strong hand on the paw.

“Dear Rory, I would tell you if I could. It is you that can’t hear yet. I would indeed, but I can’t. It’s a rule in the Back of Beyond that no one can see with anyone else’s eyes. Suppose you were blind, my eyes would be no use to you, would they? And people are blind about the Back of Beyond until their own eyes open. You know when you were born your eyes were shut for nine days. Well, it takes longer than nine days to see the Back of Beyond. So don’t ask me to tell you that secret because if I did you would only say: ‘How *can* that be true? It sounds like nonsense!’”

“No, I would *never* say that!” Rory said, looking up at her.

“But you might think it,” said the Lady. “Listen! If I told you that that beautiful body of yours you run and jump with is really nothing solid and weighs nothing at all and could walk on the water of Pine Sound or jump straight through the trunk of this tree—if you knew how—would you believe it?”

Rory thought a moment. He was trying, trying to understand, looking up into her eyes as if he could read there better than in her words. But he was too honest and true to pretend he understood what he didn't, and at last he said sadly:

“How could I believe that? How could I walk on water? Astrid can't even lift me up. How can I think I weigh nothing or how could I jump through a great solid tree trunk?”

The Lady stroked his ears as if she loved him.

“And yet it's true, Rory. Great men today know that it's true and it can be proved. So how can I tell you the other things? No. We must wait. But I can tell you what you can do to begin to understand them. Would you like that?”

Yes, they would all like that, they said—and they crowded round to hear. But Astrid lay with her head against the Lady's heart and felt it beat, and she did not want to hurry. She knew, and Jock knew, the Back of Beyond would come when they were ready and not till then, and they looked at each other and understood that.

So the Lady said:

“Now the first thing to do is to keep your heart as clean as your body. The next thing is to make things in your own mind as lovely as the loveliest things you know. The next is to be afraid of nothing. And the last thing is the most important: to love everyone and everything—even ugly things—for they are beautiful too, if you could know what they really are deep down in themselves. Now, shall I tell you a story about that—a very interesting story?”

They all said yes most eagerly, for they knew stories make things much easier to understand and that is what stories are really for. So the Lady began:

You know that happy people grow younger instead of older all the time and are a whole year younger on every birthday. No one should ever have birthday presents who cannot do that, for it is quite as easy as growing older and ever so much nicer for everybody. Now you have all grown so much younger that you are quite able to hear this most wonderful story, which I have saved up until you were all ready for it. Listen very carefully, because it can happen to every one of you, and it is so true that not one word could be changed.

There was a great forest in India. It is there still. It is very unlike our own dear forest, but it is just as lovely. It has strange trees with wild splendid flowers and glorious vines knotting them all together, so that you can scarcely creep between, and there in the deep dark live Tigers and other wild creatures

who are happy. And some of our own friends live there too, and in the trees are wild peacocks most gorgeous to see.

In a little hut covered with vines lived a mother and her little son. They were terribly poor, and sometimes they had no food except the wild fruits in the wood. And that was not much, for they dared not look for fruit in the deep forest where the Tigers lived and other dangerous people as well.

Now in their poor little hut was only one beautiful thing, a small wooden image of a very young man who was said to live in the heart of the forest. His face was so wonderful and so joyous that you could sit and look at it for hours, and as he was playing upon a flute you might really believe you heard the music. Very often at night, when the Moon was floating over the black treetops, the poor mother would sit listening until her heart was full of happiness. And every day in gratitude she laid before this image fruits and flowers and a cup of water from a shining spring near the door.

Very strange stories were told about this beautiful young man. It was said his name was Gopal—which means the Cowherd—and that in a secret place in the woods he had a herd of Cows white as snow which gave such delicious milk that it cured every disease and made people as happy as Kings. Also, that if anyone was in trouble or danger he had but to call Gopal with a true heart and he would come at once to help. And because all these stories were told of his kindness everyone loved him though very few people had seen him. The mother had called her boy Gopal and hoped he might grow up to be like the Cowherd. At night you could sometimes hear the music of his flute from very far away, when the Moon was full.

Now the time came when little Gopal must go to school. He must have a little cotton cloth to wrap round his waist as they do in India, and he must have palm leaves to write upon and a sharp-pointed pen and a small inkstand. But, though these things were very hard to come by because they were so poor, the real trouble was that he was terribly frightened of going through the wood every day because of the Tigers and a lake where great Crocodiles swam, lifting their great snapping jaws from the water or lying pretending to be asleep on the bank—looking like logs covered with caked mud. Of course even *they* are not ugly when you know the whole truth about them and are not afraid any more, but you must be many years younger than Gopal and his mother before that can be and very near to the Back of Beyond before you can join in the game the Crocodiles and Tigers are playing.

[Jock looked up. He said: “I wish they lived here. I should try to know it. I hate to be frightened of anything. What would happen if they came here and I went up to play with them?” The Lady put her arm about him. “Without your saying one word they would know whether you were afraid of them or

no,” she said. “They could see if there was the least little bit of fear in you and whether you really loved them. And if not, the fear in you would spring at your own throat and you must die. Not that dying really matters a bit to you, but it would be bad for the poor Crocodiles and Tigers if you made them do it.” Jock asked: “But if I loved them—and I would love them, what?” And the Lady answered: “Then you could play in their game and know all about them, and you would carry them straight to the Back of Beyond and see how strong and beautiful they are. This is true. You can see pictures where a little child walks with a shining snake curled about him and his hand upon a Tiger’s golden head. That is because he is in their game. But you cannot play in anyone’s game unless you love them. Now listen about Gopal.”]

His mother knew nothing about these things, so she was terrified about him, and instead of telling him to fear nothing she told him he must watch and watch and be ready to rush away if he thought a Tiger or a Crocodile was near. She said that though Tigers mostly slept in the daytime you could never be sure. You could only know their hearts were most cruel and wicked, and as to Crocodiles it was just the same. Of course this was foolish, and one day she would know better. But she did say one wise thing:

“Little son, if ever you are frightened or in danger call loudly for help to your Elder Brother Gopal who lives in the wood. Promise me this. Lay a flower every morning before his image. He will help you for he loves every living thing.”

You see? She never saw that it was because Gopal in the wood loved every living thing that he could help little Gopal and the Tigers and Crocodiles too, and that if little Gopal could do the same no Tiger or Crocodile could hurt him. But still it was good advice in one way.

Now the very first day little Gopal was coming home he heard a rustling noise in the bushes, and his heart stopped beating for terror. He screamed out:

“Elder Brother, come quick! I hear a Tiger moving on his great velvet paws. Come quick!”

And close beside him a clear voice answered:

“No fear, Little Brother! The Tigers are my great golden hunting Dogs. They guard you. Go on happily! They are good Dogs.”

And once a Crocodile gave a great ringing snap with his jaws and terrible teeth as he passed the lake, and little Gopal screamed:

“Elder Brother, the Crocodile!” And the clear voice answered:

“No fear, Little Brother. The Crocodiles are my fighting men in the water. See their strong armor. It guards you. Go on happily.”

He told all this to his mother, and she clasped her hands and knelt before the image of the kind Elder Brother. And Gopal quite gave up being afraid and once when a splendid Tiger sprang through the wood before him he stood to see and thought:

“He is my Elder Brother’s hunting Dog. He sees him every day. I love that brave hunting Dog.”

But this put another thought into his head, and one day he stood in the wood and called out:

“Elder Brother, I am never afraid now. I forget what it feels like. But I want to see you. I want to play with you and your Dogs and fighting men. May I? Please.”

And the clear voice answered:

“Little Brother, today I am busy. But if you come out tonight you shall see me. When the shadow of the great pippala tree touches your door, come!”

And that night when his mother slept little Gopal opened the door and went out into the Moonlight and black shadows like deep water. You know, all of you, how lovely that was. And just within the trees stood Elder Brother, more beautiful than the Moon and Stars, with a crown of Peacock’s feathers upon his black hair and in his hand a flute, and he swung little Gopal up on his strong shoulder and carried him off into the heart of the woods.

Oh, that night! Afterward little Gopal tried to tell his mother—but how could he? It was too wonderful. A great Elephant came trampling through the trees, and swung Gopal up to his back so that he could see comfortably. There were the golden Tigers with their eyes burning like clear green flames, and they rolled over at Elder Brother’s feet like kittens and brought their little ones for him to see. He tossed one up to little Gopal, who held it in his arms and loved its warm fur and bright eyes. And the fighting Crocodiles came, and when Elder Brother played upon his flute they rocked in a row and swayed their heads in time to the music and told strange stories of the lake; and little Gopal listened and understood every word that was said and begged to come again. Elder Brother brought him home riding on the Elephant and gave him a little flute of his own. After that Gopal could play too—though not the same music—and when he played all the young things in the wood used to come out to hear and tumble and roll about his feet, and the birds would fly about him in clouds.

“If only he were here!” Astrid said sighing. “If only he could teach us! I want him in this heavenly wood, and Elder Brother—all—all! Can they come? And the golden hunting Dogs?”

“They are always here,” said the Lady. “But you don’t see them yet. You and Jock would still be a little frightened if you tried hard enough. See!”

She made a low call like a bird. Instantly looking out upon them from under a tree with lamping eyes like green flame they saw a huge and glorious Tiger. Not a breath. Not a movement. He just stood there. But the Rabbits, the Mouse-People, the Bears, shrieked and fled away like fish when you throw a stone into a pool. No one was left but Jock and Astrid, and it was only near the end of the story that the others came back.

They trembled. He stood so still—so terrible. But Astrid got down from the Lady’s lap, and Jock sprang down beside her, and together, but breathing hard, they went toward the two green flames. But they thought: “What if there should be a rush and a leap and a roar! Oh, what should we do!” And yet they went on.

The Tiger was still as stone. Then in the wood far off they heard the clear music of a flute, and instantly the Tiger turned like a Dog called by his master and sprang silently away and was gone, and Astrid and Jock rushed back to the Lady.

She put her arms round them.

“That was brave—brave. You were afraid, yet you went on. You are nearly ready. Nearly ready to see everything that lives in the Back of Beyond. There is only one thing greater than courage and that is love. Tomorrow I must tell our own friends not to be frightened. Now let us finish the story.”

But Astrid and Jock were so glad to think Elder Brother lived in their wood that at first they could scarcely listen. And they knew they could never fear his Dog any more. Jock especially knew that. But the Lady went on.

So every day Elder Brother took little Gopal to school and brought him back, not because he was afraid now but to teach him all the wood magic as I have taught it to you—and more. When you see little Gopal you must ask him. Even the Monkeys would trust him with their babies when they were playing or busy, and that shows you are a real wood-person.

But now came the birthday of the school teacher, when it was the custom for all the children to bring him presents. Their parents were too poor to pay him more than a very little money, so he needed the gifts very much indeed.

“What can I do, mother—what can I do?” asked little Gopal.

It seemed hard to be the only one who had nothing to give, and when his mother answered sadly, “We have nothing to give,” the tears stood in his eyes.

So he stood for a moment and then with a sudden thought rushed out into the wood calling:

“Elder Brother, Elder Brother!”

At once the clear voice answered and the bright eyes looked at him through the leaves.

“Yes, Little Brother, what is it?”

“Elder Brother, I want a present for my teacher. Please give me one. I have nothing.”

“Little Brother, I am a poor Cowherd. What can I give you? My hands have never touched money. Stay!—Wait!—I have thought of something. Your teacher is a kind man. He will know we would give more if we could.”

Then he set little Gopal on the back of the largest of the golden Tigers, and they went together to a new place in the wood and there were the white Cows feeding—the most beautiful Cows with great dark eyes and horns white as ivory; and they came about little Gopal with breath sweet as flowers.

Then from a little hut—much like the one where Gopal lived—Elder Brother brought a great bowl of milk with cream on top as thick as the first joint of your little finger, and Gopal drank; and as he tasted that delicious milk he grew stronger and more beautiful, and when he had finished he looked like Elder Brother himself only not nearly so tall. But now he could understand what every flower said and the Wind and the Sun, and though it was full daylight he could see the Stars, which of course are there all the time only most people’s eyes are not clear enough to see them. And he was so happy that it seemed his heart brimmed over like a cup filled too full.

Then Elder Brother put in his hand a very small earthenware pot of cream and said:

“Take this to your teacher.”

And Little Brother went back alone through the forest.

When he brought it to school the other children’s gifts were much finer, good cotton cloths and many other things. But Gopal held out his little gift with such a joyful face that the teacher took it first of all, saying:

“This is a delightful present! I like cream better than anything, and there are no cows here so I never get it. Well, now, suppose we put it in my little bowl, for your mother must have the pot again. Tell her I thank her. Oh, what rich cream! As good as if it had come from the White Cows of the Great Cowherd in the woods. But no one ever sees him now, and I think that is a dream.”

Gopal smiled, but he said nothing; and the teacher poured out the cream into the tiny bowl, and it filled it, and still the pot was full. The astonished

teacher got a great basin, and it filled that also; then empty coconuts, and they were filled, and the pot was still full at the end. And all the poor people came running with their vessels, and they were filled to the brim and still the pot was full.

Then the teacher understood, and he folded his hands and looked at the cream and the happy people, and he said:

“I know. Take me out into the wood that I may kneel at Elder Brother’s feet. I would rather see him than all the Kings of the Earth.”

So they went out together, and Gopal called, and from very far off the clear voice answered:

“Little Brother, he is not young enough to see me yet. But when he sees you he sees me, and his time is coming near.”

The teacher went slowly back, and Gopal ran and sprang into his Elder Brother’s arms.

So the story ended, and Jock said:

“If only we hadn’t been afraid!”

And the Lady answered:

“Very soon you will be in the Back of Beyond where no fear can come. Now, Astrid, is there anything left that you are afraid of? Because if there is you must wait until there isn’t. Now think?”

The Lady stopped, but Astrid looking up into her eyes saw them full of Moonlight and Starlight and things that cannot be told and for a moment she could not answer. But at last she said:

“I know of something.”

Jock said, “I know too.” They got down from the Lady’s lap and stood awhile, the others watching them, and then they walked away in the Moonlight and back to the house. It was still early in the night—an hour earlier than they generally went to bed—but when they came to the house the door stood open, and everything was dark inside except where Moonlight lay on the floor like water. They went into the dark, and Astrid opened the door of the room where the Man Who Wrote Stories always sat alone, and Jock followed close beside her. There he was, with his arms on the table and his head laid on them as if he were very sad. When the door opened he heard the little sound and looked up as if frightened, and Jock rushed on and sprang upon his knee and put his silver paws on his shoulders, and Astrid came and put her arms about his neck and said:

“I love you. Please come out with us—into the woods.”

He looked at them and it seemed that all his hair became young and golden and his face shone like the morning; and he said nothing but came out

with them into the woods.

He kissed the Lady's hand. The animals crowded round him and welcomed him to all they had, and Rory stood proudly by and said:

"He's *my* Man. I told you so. Now you know! Why, the very forest is shining for joy!"

And it was.

Can you see how wonderful that was for him and for them all? It just made the difference. He could do things that were very difficult for Astrid and the animals to do, just as they could do things he could not. They gave him a garden at once and he made mind-flowers from the very first. That is not surprising, for every story grows in people's minds and is a kind of flower, and he was well used to stories. Besides that he had been in India, and he made the loveliest little mind-Elephant you ever saw, a little smaller than Duffle, but perfect for reaching things down with his trunk or for standing on if you wanted to get into the branches above the bare part of a tree. Trees always grow in that way because they don't always want children bothering in their branches, but if you have an Elephant you can easily get the better of them. And even the youngest Sparrows were not afraid of the Man Who Wrote Stories, and the Rabbits sat on his knees and climbed up him when they wanted a jump-off for something high they could never have got to without him.

There was a very large, old flat-bottomed boat on Pine Sound which belonged to him, and he would crowd them into it and row them out, with the water dropping from his oars like Moonlight, while the Lady sat on the rock and sang; and you never heard such fairy-tale songs in all your life. Astrid and Jock and all who loved swimming would dive from the boat or the rock into the Moonlight below them and swim and float in it with such joy as cannot be told. Sometimes they lifted their heads and saw shining people in the woods, gliding about behind the trees, people who had handfuls of Stars and scattered them like seeds as they went, and strange flowers grew up from them which Jock and Astrid would find when they landed. These flowers had each a story and a song, and it could easily be seen that they belonged to the Back of Beyond. Sometimes these shining people would dance, and you could see that dance through the trees and long to be with the dancers who saw things no one but the Lady herself could know. For Astrid and Jock could see those dancers only when they themselves were far out on the water, and when they landed the forest was again asleep and dreaming. They began to wish with all their hearts to be with those happy people. Not to give up the people they knew, but to have both. When they said this to the Lady she smiled and said:

“Wait a very little. You are beginning to see straight.”

Every night now the Man Who Wrote Stories took them back home with Astrid holding his hand, and every night she and Jock and all the others loved him more and more, for he never thought of himself but only how to make the whole forest happy. He made a particular friend of Mr. Mouse, who used to sit on his shoulder and tell him stories. The Man gave Mr. Mouse such delightful presents—and so did everyone else—that he never again took anything that was not his own. Why should he? He was far too happy. Really happy people never do that. It is only unhappy or half-happy people who want more than they have.

It would need a book as large as the largest dictionary to tell all the wonderful things which went on in the wood now. Astrid and Jock began to believe that every tree, every flower, every blade of grass had its story, and they wished very much to know what these stories were and to learn the language in which they were told. They saw things now that they could not explain to each other in any words. They could only look into each other's eyes and say, “Wait!”

Once a strange thing happened. They dreamed that they were walking in the wood with Gopal the Cowherd, and the Famous White Sparrow sat on his shoulder, and behind him went a golden hunting Dog, a huge Tiger. The Cowherd saw how Jock and Astrid stopped at once when they saw this, and how frightened they were though they tried to be brave, and he stooped and whispered in the Tiger's golden ear. Immediately the Tiger sprang away with long noiseless jumps and the Cowherd told them to sit down on the ground and sat down beside them, saying:

“Now wait, and you shall see something worth seeing.”

While they waited the Famous White Sparrow perched on Jock's head and sang a song about the joy of living out in the woods and never having to go indoors unless one wanted to, and when it was finished Astrid said:

“That's what Jock and I want too. We want to live out in the woods like the Cowherd and the Lady. We are getting very tired of the house.”

The Sparrow chirped: “So you will. It's coming.”

In that very moment, they dreamed, the branches opened, and out sprang the Tiger. In his mouth he carried something golden that hung like a little furry bag having four little legs and a tail. He trotted slowly up and laid it in Astrid's lap, and then stood purring over them like a great Cat. It was the most exquisite Tiger-baby you ever saw, and it crawled up the front of her dress purring sleepily like a spinning top and pushed its head into her neck and licked it with a tiny rough tongue. Jock scrambled into her lap too, and

they all piled up together and the Cowherd stood beside them laughing, in his crown of Peacock's feathers and watched. He said:

"Now, Astrid, I wish you and Jock would take that little one into your dream, for I have so many Tiger cubs just now that their mothers hardly know how to take care of them. You can train him to be your own hunting Dog and as good as gold. A lovely poem was written about one Tiger of his family—it begins:

‘Tiger, tiger, burning bright
In the forests of the night.’

So they are all very proud and noble. He really belongs to the Back of Beyond as do all my hunting Dogs. Would you like him?"

Like him? She felt as if she could never let him go, and Jock licked his head. And when that was settled the Cowherd gave her a little brown flute and taught her how to make the Tiger call. So she called once—rather like a Cuckoo—and one came bounding out of the wood and lay down at her feet, and twice and another came, and so on until there were four, all lying close to her and Jock. How could they be frightened after dreaming that?

Then the Cowherd tied the flute about her neck and played on his own and out of the wood came a splendid white Cow with ivory horns and eyes like the Moon. The Cowherd took a little blue bowl and gave Astrid and Jock each a drink of her milk, so delicious that they thought it was cream. And when they had drunk it they both understood what every flower and leaf said and all their stories, and what the Moonbeams and Sunbeams said when they brought messages from the sky, so that it was really like walking into a new world joined on to the old and having millions of friends more. And the Cowherd said:

"This is another of the ways to the Back of Beyond. You will soon get there now. When people dream true it soon comes. Now remember to take Jaya into your dream every night. His name means 'Victory' because you have stopped being afraid of anybody, and he will teach you several useful things. He comes of a good family."

They woke then, and Jock saw that Astrid's face had grown as lovely as a little Star and her hair reached to her knees. She was really nearly as beautiful as the Cowherd. And she saw that Jock had grown as strong as the hunting Dogs, and his eyes were quite golden. After that they took Jaya into every dream and trained him, and he trained them until they could do such wonderful things together that half the forest people asked to be taught too, and the hunting Dogs often came into the forest. It began to be difficult to tell

the true dream from the real things, and Astrid and Jock soon knew that there is no real difference at all.



*The Back of
Beyond*



Chapter XI



THE BACK OF BEYOND

NOW it was the most beautiful December Astrid and Jock had ever known—like the still snowy winter when first she came to the wood. She had grown much younger and wiser in her mind and heart than if she had counted time by birthdays as people do outside the wood. In the wood, you see, there are no clocks and watches. There are only day and night and how you feel. Sad hours seem long and happy ones short—but in the forest all the hours were happy, so it seemed to take no time at all to make Astrid and Jock as strong and gay as two birds that soar up and up into the sky and are blown along like feathers on great winds.

The Rabbits had tried to describe the Sunrise to them when the Larks fly up into the Sun, raining down music, but Astrid and Jock could not understand that for they had never seen the dawn. They often sat in the Moonlight or watched the glitter of the Stars and wondered what the Sun could be like, but that is a thing you can never know until you have seen it, and not always then. But they understood more of other things every day. This partly came of all the stories the Lady told them. There were hundreds more than in this book, for there had been one for every night when the Moon was not too busy or was not resting at the bottom of Pine Sound, and one the Moon herself had told them when the tallest pine tree in the woods had caught her golden dress for a moment and begged for a story. But if I told you of all these stories it would leave you no time for lessons.

So you can easily see there were many reasons why Astrid and Jock should know a great deal now of how things really are, and certainly the Man Who Wrote Stories did also and the Doctor as well. The Doctor had taken animals and birds as patients, now that Dr. Dumbell had grown too old and sleepy, and there was nothing he could not cure—not even a cold in the head, which the Mouse Queen said no one in this world has ever before known how to do.

All of them—especially Jock and Astrid—had begun to make such wonderful things in their minds that the forest had many gardens in it now, and not only gardens but all sorts of delightful people and things who came to live in the woods. But I must tell the truth, which is that Astrid and Jock were

getting terribly tired of living in the house at all. They thought how beautiful it must be out under the great trees all night and all day, and you will remember that they had never yet seen the Sun, and the night was only half of life, and they began to want the whole. But the Lady always said:

“You will know when you are ready to see the Sun rise. It would blind you now.”

So they waited and wondered how they should know.

One snowy night, when the Stars were like cold sparkling diamonds and Pine Sound glittered with them, the Lady told a true story about a little girl called Felicity who was unhappy. She did not tell them why, for that did not matter, but she knew and everyone knew that the forest was the place for Felicity, and when the story was finished—but it had no real end—Astrid said:

“Her name is Felicity. That means happiness. Then the woods want her, for they could hold all the happiness in the world, and she’ll know how happy she can be when she comes here. I think unhappiness must be like the Monster in ‘Beauty and the Beast’—that you told us about once. You kiss it, and then it’s beautiful. How can we get Felicity and make her understand?”

And all listened eagerly, for how could they go on being happy if Felicity were sad? The Lady said:

“You could lend Jock to her—if Jock would lend himself—and he could guide her into the wood. You know Dogs can guide people even through the crowded terrible streets of a city. And Felicity is blind though she thinks she can see.”

For a minute Astrid had a pain in her heart. Lend Jock? But how could she do without him? And would he want to go? But already he had jumped down from her lap and was standing wagging his silver-plumed tail, as eager as if she had been coming too.

She began to say, “Jock, don’t you *mind* leaving me—” but stopped. How could she say that or be sorry when she thought of poor Felicity and saw all the happy forest and the Moon looking down through the boughs and the Lady with all the sea and sky in her eyes and all the stories of the world in her heart? She would not ask Jock that question. She asked instead:

“Will he be long away?”

He put his paws on her lap and looked up and answered:

“Only as long as Felicity wants me, and look what I’ve made for you to take care of while I go!”

It was a little wooden looking-glass with a handle, and because Jock had made it in his mind it could show Astrid exactly what he was doing wherever

he might be. As she looked into it she saw him standing with his paws on her knee just as he was doing in reality. This made her feel happier because it was so wonderful that little Jock himself should be able to make things and know what was wanted. But still fear was in her heart when she said:

“But, Jock, Felicity is in the city—in the noisy dark streets. And people may be cruel, and they may catch and keep you and you may never come back.”

Tears spilled from her eyes and rolled down her face, and the Lady said nothing at all. It seemed that she wished them to settle it alone. She sat and listened. Jock said:

“If I didn’t come back you’d come to me. Nothing could keep us away from each other. If anyone tied me up I’d bite through the rope. If they put me in a trunk, I’d come out through the keyhole. I’d come even if I had to swim across the sea. Now let me go. I can’t go unless you tell me.”

But she said with dropping tears:

“If only I could go with you, or alone, and you stay here safe and well.”

For the moment she had forgotten the story of Gopal, and the Moon was hidden in black. Still standing with his paws on her knees, Jock said:

“But, Astrid, you can’t smell your way like me. Far off I can know the smell of Felicity’s hair and hands. You see I’m a hunting Dog now, and I know some things you don’t.”

Still the Lady said nothing, and Astrid’s tears ran, but at last she lifted him and clasped him in her arms—he was so small and brave—and said only one word: “Go.”

And instantly he ran through the moss and down by the stream and he was gone, and still the Lady sat and said no word to make Astrid feel less miserable. But after a long time when she had stopped crying and sat with her hands in her lap, feeling most dreadfully lonely, the Lady picked up the glass and said:

“Now, Astrid, we all want to know what Jock is doing. Please look in the glass. Nobody but you can see.”

They sat round to hear, and the Man Who Wrote Stories watched, and Moti, the little Elephant, stood with a foot at each side of her back that she might lean against him. Just as she dipped her hand in the stream to cool her eyes which were hot and red, Mr. Mouse dashed up squeaking:

“Let me get to Astrid. Don’t stop me. I’ve something to say. Something *most* important.”

So all made way and he rushed up her leg, panting so that his body shook all over.

“Astrid, I met Jock running as hard as he could go so I didn’t stop him. But a thought jumped into my mind and I ran after him and screamed out: ‘Jock, go quick but never forget our Mouse magic! Remember your collar. If they shut you into a trunk make yourself tiny and come through the keyhole. If they hurt you make yourself as big as Duffle, bigger, and frighten them into fits! Only remember.’ And he called out, ‘Thanks; I forgot; I’ll remember,’ and rushed on. Oh, Astrid, what shall we do without him?”

With these words great courage came into Astrid’s heart. She lifted Mr. Mouse and held him against her cheek until he calmed down and could sit in her lap, and then she asked if he would come and sleep with her until Jock came back, and he was simply delighted and so was everyone else. But that night she could not see in the glass because she had cried too much. So it was next night when she began:

“I see him running, running along a road crowded with horses and cars and crowds of people, and they look and wonder at him because he’s so white and they try to catch him but he slips through and they can’t. Now a boy throws a stone at him—Oh! Oh!—but no, he rushed under a bush.”

All sat listening breathless. Rory showed his white teeth when he heard of the stone, and Moti stamped his heavy foot. She went on with the story. At last:

“And now—the city. A terrible place with houses crowding together, and Jock goes slowly and carefully. And now—oh, now—a man suddenly stoops and catches him by the collar and lifts him up. Oh, look for me—I can’t look any longer!”

She dropped the glass, and Rory picked it up in his mouth.

“Look, Astrid, *please!* None of us can see but you. Look!”

So she looked, but her heart jumped so that she could hardly see clearly.

“The man is carrying him along to a dreadful place—dark dirty houses all lumped together. Narrow ways, and Jock shines like snow. Oh, why doesn’t he make himself small and run away? Jock! Jock!”

She screamed to him madly as if he could hear, and her face was quite white. The Lady put her arm about her.

“Astrid, Jock is very wise. Perhaps the man is taking him the way he wants to go. Watch and see!”

So Astrid looked, and all listened breathlessly.

“Now the man, holding Jock under his arm, is coming to a terrible little house looking as if it would fall down into the mud. And now—yes!—Jock springs from his arms and rushes into it. The man looks furiously angry and

hunts about, but he can't see. Now there's a cloud over the glass. I can't see either. Oh, make it clean for me!"

She held it out to the Lady. She shook her head.

"I can't make it clean. Be brave, Astrid, and wipe it with your own hair. That's the only way."

So Astrid did this for a long time before it would clear, and then, with her hands all shaky, she began again.

"Now a dark narrow street with scarcely any lamps, but Jock is shining—and I can see. He's leading Felicity—oh, such a poor thin child—and her eyes are shut! She's holding a string tied to Jock's collar, and her feet are bare upon the snow. He knows what way to go. It's the very way he came. I think he smells it. Now they sit down to rest, and he licks her feet to make them warm and lies curled about them. Isn't he *wonderful*?"

She looked up at them all with shining eyes, and the Rabbits and Squirrels jumped for joy.

"Wonderful!" said the Lady. "And you made him in your own heart, Astrid; your heart must be wonderful too!"

"I'll tell you what!" said the Owl. "I make nothing of a few miles, and I'll just fly over and see how they're getting on. And I'll come back and tell you. My two little white sons have had their supper and gone to bed, so I'm free."

Astrid kissed him eagerly on the soft snow-white feathers of his breast, and said, "Tell Jock I love him." He rose noiselessly into the air and was gone, passing across the Moon like a dream. Then she looked again in the glass.

"Now Felicity is so tired she can walk no more, so Jock pulls her into a barn by the roadside, and he makes a nest in the hay, scratching with his paws, and they scramble in. I wish—"

"What?" asked the Lady.

"That I could give her the warm comforter from my bed."

The Lady kissed her.

"You have given Jock. He will keep her warm. Now look no more. They will sleep all day, and as we go back the Owl will meet us."

He did. He came swooping down and was sitting on the garden gate.

"I think a telephone could hardly have done it quicker," he said proudly. "There are no windows to the barn. No glass, I mean; so I just flew in and looked. They were sound asleep. Jock was lying right up against her, and I touched her foot, and it was warm. They're all right. But Felicity is dreadfully thin, so I just flew in at the window of the farmer's kitchen and picked up a fine currant loaf in my claws and put it where they'll see it when

they wake. That farmer's a kind soul; I shouldn't wonder if he gives them a jug of milk in the evening. Jock will beg for it—and no one can refuse Jock."

The Man Who Wrote Stories went in and brought out a small currant loaf.

"For the two little white sons," he said, and gave it to the Owl, who took it, hooting with pleasure, and sailed away.

When Astrid went upstairs and into her room her heart felt as lonely and empty as a dark night with no Moon, and yet if she could have called Jock back that minute she would not have done it. She was so sorry for Felicity. Now that she had seen her in the glass she knew how sad and poor and thin she was, and she loved to think of her coming to the wood with all the beautiful things and friendly animals and the wonderful stories and the Lady. When she looked out the Moon was floating low over the snowy trees, and the Rabbit was leaning down and waving his paws wildly as if with joy, and she felt sure the Moon would look in at the empty barn windows even in the daytime when no one could see her and be sure that nothing harmed Jock and Felicity while they slept. And for the first time Astrid began to wonder where the Lady lived when she was not with them. Could it possibly be that she was the Lady of the Moon herself, and that the Rabbit was hers, and that was why the youngest Rabbit in the company always sat upon her lap? Indeed the more things she remembered the more likely it seemed to be. But if so—how wonderful, how wonderful!

She stood so long looking at the moon and thinking of this that Mr. Mouse squeaked quite impatiently from the bed.

"Do come along, Astrid, and don't stand mooning there. We *must* get to sleep. I can smell the day!"

Astrid hurried into her nightdress, and they were asleep in ten minutes though she had meant to stay awake all that day and think of Jock. Mr. Mouse nested in her hair, and whether it was that or not I cannot tell, but she had a delightful dream of a field with tiny golden wheat-shocks and the Mouse-People running everywhere, gathering up the spilled golden grain and piling it into tiny golden carts drawn by other Mice. And they sang:

"Cakes for Felicity, bread for Felicity!

This is her grain, you see.

We are the sowers, we are the reapers,

We are the gatherers—we!

Happy Felicity! Glad Felicity!

Cakes and cream for her tea!"

She dreamed this two days running, and the second night she woke with that ringing in her ears and, lo and behold!—as if the Man Who Wrote Stories had

had the same dream—there was a large jug of thick yellow cream on the table, and crisp currant cookies in one plate, and in another slices of brown bread and butter and black currant jam, and *two* large glasses of milk, and a delicious supper for Jock in his dish.

Then it was true! Then Felicity was coming! The Moon was rising over the trees to see what would happen, and the trees all held out their branches heaped with the softest snow as if to welcome Felicity into a world made white and shining for her. She had always lived in little black, narrow streets, Astrid thought. How wonderful it would be to come out into this shining whiteness with so many longing to see her and make her life happy ever after like a Princess in a fairy-tale. While Astrid was thinking this, Mr. Mouse, who had rushed down the Mouseway, came hurrying back with the tiniest note you ever could see with the Mouse Queen's welcome to Felicity.

"But don't open it till she comes," he squeaked. "Royal letters must be opened by the people they are for. Don't be offended. I know you'll understand."

She did understand and picked him up and kissed him—his little heart was beating so fast with the hurry.

Now as she sat by the window, sure that something good was coming and longing to be out in the glorious whiteness, she saw the Owl fly between her and the Moon, looking like a picture as he crossed it. And he said: "To-whit, to-whoo-o-o! They're coming—they're coming!"

She didn't even stay to look from the window. She heard Rory tear out of the garden, and she was down the stairs and after him with Mr. Mouse galloping and tumbling behind her for all he was worth. As they ran the Rabbits came, and Starlight, and Moti, and any others that happened to be within hearing. And what do you think they saw?

The pony cart with Duffle trotting steadily on. The Doctor himself drove it, with Felicity sitting beside him, Jock between them. When Jock saw Astrid he never waited for the cart to stop but leaped straight down (it was a mercy he didn't break his legs!) and rushed to her and sprang into her arms so wildly that they both tumbled into a snowdrift, and there they struggled, all arms and legs, until the Doctor got down and fished them out—laughing so much that he could hardly do it. Even Duffle wanted to laugh.

"Well, you Moon-child!" said the Doctor. "My goodness me, how your hair has grown! It will soon be as long as the Lady's. And your eyes are as dark and green as pine trees. You'll be flying over the Moon next if you're as strong and well as this. And I've brought Jock back to you. We met him with Felicity by the turn in the lane, and they were tired, and so we packed them into the cart."

Astrid ran to the cart with Jock dancing all around, and there was Felicity.

She wore a little dress all rags, so that you could see the white skin through in places, and she was a pale child with a gentle little face and great dark eyes with the longest lashes you could ever see. They were like black silk fringes all round them. At first she did not look at Astrid—she was too shy—but as Astrid put her arms round her and kissed her she looked up, and from that minute Astrid knew they would love each other. But the first thing she said was:

“Please, may Jock sit on my lap?”—And up he jumped.

Astrid knew that it must be so, and it made her very proud and happy. The Doctor saw everyone standing round wanting to do something for Felicity, and he said:

“I’ll tell you what—I think we’ve had enough of this cart. How would it be if Moti carried Felicity back to the house? When I see an Elephant waiting for a child from the city I know what she wants!”

Felicity flushed quite red with pleasure, and Moti came up proudly and put his trunk about her waist and swung her to his back.

“Please, may Jock come too?” she said, smiling with joy, and Moti curled his trunk around Jock and up he went.

“Room for the Moon-child too!” said the Doctor, and Astrid sat behind with her arms around Felicity, and they set off in a procession to the house, Duffle following with the empty cart. At the garden gate stood the Man Who Wrote Stories, and when he saw Felicity laughing on Moti’s back he said at once quite loud:

“I like that child. When her hair grows like Astrid’s—”

“Aha—that’s what *I* said,” answered the Doctor. “I measured it before I put her into the cart, and it only just touched the back of her neck. *Now* look!”

They looked, and it had already gained half an inch.

“The best sign I know!” said the Doctor. “Now carry her upstairs and give her a good supper and particularly cookies. Be sure of that. If they have currants so much the better! I always advise currants for people who come from the city, and nothing is so good as cookies—fresh-made. Be particular about that. Look what they have done for you,” he said to the Man Who Wrote Stories. “I can see your hair is all golden now instead of the gray that used to be there. Now I must be going, but I will call round tomorrow. My fee is half a dollar and two cookies!”

Astrid rushed up to get them and then he went off. The Man Who Wrote Stories carried Felicity upstairs. Astrid took her ragged dress off and she was

bathed and put into one of Astrid's nightdresses, and then sat up to have her supper. Mercy, what a supper Astrid and Jock and Felicity ate! If I tried until tomorrow I could never tell you how they enjoyed it and how happy they were. And when it was finished the Man Who Wrote Stories said:

"Felicity must now go to bed and sleep round the clock, which means twenty-four hours, so she can't go out tonight. And I shall stay by her for she might feel strange if she woke. So you and Jock can go out now, Astrid, and she shall sleep in your bed, and soon we will have a little bed put in the next room for her."

So Astrid brushed Felicity's hair and put her into her own bed. Her head was scarcely on the pillow, after she had kissed Jock and Astrid and the Man Who Wrote Stories, before she was sound asleep, and they could see by the way she smiled that already a dream had come out of the wood and crept under her eyelids.

Then Astrid went downstairs with Jock and out into the snow; the Moon was glittering in the window panes as she had done the first night Astrid came.

None of the animals were there to meet them, and the night was so still that you might think everything was waiting—waiting for something wonderful to begin. They went a little way into the wood, and Astrid brushed the snow off a rock sheltered by the trees, and they sat down to wait for the Lady and the others. While they waited Jock told the story of how he had found and brought Felicity home, and a very wonderful story it was. Astrid understood at once that in that short time Jock had grown much younger and happier and more certain of himself, and she thought:

"He can make wonderful things in his mind—now—and I can too. Things are changed since he went, and I don't know why. Something has happened because he went for Felicity. We must see the Lady. We must go farther on into the wood."

She stood up, and Jock followed so close beside her that his hair brushed her feet, and they did not talk at all. They too were waiting for something, for they knew the very air was changed.

Now, as they walked, suddenly they saw they were in a part of the wood they had never seen. That was strange, because though they had never got to the end of the wood they thought they had been all over it. But this was more wonderful than anything they had seen yet. The great pines towered so high it seemed they held up the sky with all its Stars, and a deep shining river flowed silently along before them. As you know, the streams before had been like Bird-Music's stream—the sort that you can cross on stepping stones with

ripples splashing your feet. But this was a deep, quiet river, dark and still. And Jock said:

“We must cross it, Astrid. We can’t turn back. I *think* I can swim it. Can you?”

And she said:

“Even if I thought I couldn’t still we must go! We can’t turn back. We’ve lost the way back! Turn and look. Are you frightened?”

“Not a bit. I want to go on and on—and never stop. Oh, Astrid, look!” he said.

She looked across the river and was startled, for a strange thing had happened. Perhaps it was what everything was waiting for.

You know how trees cast a black shadow on the snow in moonlight. Often they had seen that and had been glad, because it looked like a beautiful drawing of trees and branches scribbled on the snow by the Moon. Only it was all black because the Moon has no colors like the Sun. But now—across the river the trees themselves were shining light, every twig, every branch, shining like the Moon herself, and all the shadows were gone from the sparkling snow. They stood and looked at it, and Jock said eagerly:

“Oh, let us go—let us go. We can’t stay here. Come! Come!”—and he rushed down to the river and plunged deep in, though it was as cold as the very heart of an iceberg. He went down for a second and came up swimming splendidly, and all the broken water was pure light. It dazzled Astrid as she looked. She rushed down and plunged in deep, and light was all round her; as she rose Jock was swimming beside her with light running away from his paws and every hair. Her hands made curves of light as she swam; her feet thrust it back. At first it was bitter, bitter cold and quite took your breath away, and then it was warm as new milk, and their bodies were as light as spring leaves dancing in the wind, and Jock said:

“Oh, if we could swim forever here! It makes me so strong and light, I could swim across the world. Look how it sparkles. Are we swimming in water or in light?”

Even as he said this the swiftly flowing water swept them strongly toward the other shore, and down through the trees came the Lady and she shone like the Moon herself with the Moon about her hair; and she called them, and they swam straight to the shore, and she stooped and lifted them out, and the water fell off them like Stars. When Astrid looked up she said in astonishment:

“But it’s Christmas!”

For every snowy tree was wreathed with Stars. Stars clung to every bough like bees, and the trees went on and on and away into the wood,

glittering with snow and Stars as if they went over the edge of the world into the sky. And Jock said very low:

“Now I know. This is the Back of Beyond, and we need never go back any more to live in the house. All the world and sky and sea is our house now. Is it too happy to be true?”

The Lady took him on her lap and said:

“Nothing is too happy to be true. Yes, this is the Back of Beyond—you have gone through the Cold River—but it’s also the woods, the dear woods you know, and you can come and go as you please and where you please, and you can walk into all the stories and be part of them, and into every picture and it will come alive. And all the dreams are true. It is because I live in the Back of Beyond that I am in the wood and tell you the stories, and you can go there whenever you like. But I think you won’t want to live indoors any more. I couldn’t live shut up indoors myself.”

“No—we shall never live indoors any more,” said Astrid, and she and Jock were silent for pure joy. They were slowly beginning to see that a wonderful new story, which yet was the old story too, was starting for them, exactly as when the daffodil bulb hidden underground sends up a golden flower into the sunshine.

“Astrid—Jock—there’s something you’ve never seen—never until just now wanted to see. Can you think what it is?”

Astrid answered as if she were dreaming:

“We’ve never seen the Sun rise.”

And the Lady said: “Now sit still and look up.”

They could not tell if it were soon or late, but even while they were watching the starry trees the Stars began to loosen from the boughs and to float upward—little clouds of Stars or Doves flying home—you could not be sure which. Then the trees stood dark and tall in the sky and on the snow, and light crept like rising water about the world and a faint color stole into the air. Astrid caught Jock and held him close; her heart beat with joy; it seemed the whole world was opening like a rose, for the sky blushed and clouds of rose and gold floated over the trees like rose-petals, and the light grew and grew—a mighty rising tide rolling in upon the world in waves of breaking light. Astrid and Jock said, “I cannot bear it!” and still they looked. And then—rising, rising, rising, up into the sky rolled the great Sun; and all the world was royal gold, and blinding light flooded Jock and Astrid, and for a moment they hid their eyes.

When they could look up, the river of light had flowed into the sky and was gone, and everywhere was Sunshine, and the birds singing. They could

walk into the woods they knew and loved, where all their friends and the people of all the stories were waiting for them, dancing with joy to see them come, and scattering the snow like sea-spray as they danced. Among them were Gopal the Cowherd with his crown of Peacocks' feathers and his golden hunting Tigers, and little Gopal with his flute and laughing eyes, and Master Ting, and all the other people. With them were the Shining People whom Astrid and Jock had seen from Pine Sound, and these laughed with the rest and sang songs as clear and high as the wind on the mountains, and Astrid and Jock wondered why they had never met them before.

"Ah," said the Lady, "you hadn't opened your eyes! You were like Jock's little brothers, who keep their eyes shut for nine days after they are born. But now you can see everything and go everywhere. There is no near or far in the Back of Beyond. When you wish you are there, and the sky and sea are your houses too, and they will make room for you whenever you want it."

And they wished, and were everywhere in a flash.

But this story only tells how they got there. It would take another to tell all they did and the wonderful delightful things you can find in the Back of Beyond.

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 illustrations were moved to facilitate page layout. “Astrid’s mind-flowers” by Benji Asada (1899-1984) is not included as it is not in the public domain.

[The end of *The Joyous Story of Astrid* by Elizabeth Louisa Moresby (as L. Adams Beck)]