



Chapter 15


Bruno's Revenge

After that we had a few minutes of silence, while I sorted out the pebbles, and amused myself with watching Bruno's plan of gardening. It was quite a new plan to me: he always measured each bed before he weeded it, as if he was afraid the weeding would make it shrink; and once, when it came out longer than he wished, he set to work to thump the mouse with his little fist, crying out "There now! It's all gone wrong again! Why don't oo keep oor tail straight when I tell oo!"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," Bruno said in a half-whisper, as we worked. "Oo like Fairies, don't oo?"

"Yes," I said: "of course I do, or I shouldn't have come here. I should have gone to some place where there are no Fairies."

Bruno laughed contemptuously. "Why, oo might as well say oo'd go to some place where there wasn't any air—supposing oo didn't like air!"

This was a rather difficult idea to grasp. I tried a change of subject. "You're nearly the first Fairy I ever saw. Have you ever seen any people besides me?"

"Plenty!" said Bruno. "We see'em when we walk in the road."

"But they ca'n't see you. How is it they never tread on you?"

"Ca'n't tread on us," said Bruno, looking amused at my ignorance. "Why, suppose oo're walking, here—so—" (making little marks on the ground) "and suppose there's a Fairy—that's me—walking here. Very well then, oo put one foot here, and one foot here, so oo doosn't tread on the Fairy."

This was all very well as an explanation, but it didn't convince me. "Why shouldn't I put one foot on the Fairy?" I asked.

"I don't know why," the little fellow said in a thoughtful tone. "But I know oo wouldn't. Nobody never walked on the top of a Fairy. Now I'll tell oo what I'll do, as oo're so fond

CHAPTER 15 -- BRUNO'S REVENGE

of Fairies. I'll get oo an invitation to the Fairy-King's dinner-party. I know one of the head-waiters."

I couldn't help laughing at this idea. "Do the waiters invite the guests?" I asked.

"Oh, not to sit down!" Bruno said. "But to wait at table. Oo'd like that, wouldn't oo? To hand about plates, and so on."

"Well, but that's not so nice as sitting at the table, is it?"

"Of course it isn't," Bruno said, in a tone as if he rather pitied my ignorance; "but if oo're not even Sir Anything, oo ca'n't expect to be allowed to sit at the table, oo know."

I said, as meekly as I could, that I didn't expect it, but it was the only way of going to a dinner-party that I really enjoyed. And Bruno tossed his head, and said, in a rather offended tone that I might do as I pleased—there were many he knew that would give their ears to go.

"Have you ever been yourself, Bruno?"

"They invited me once, last week," Bruno said, very gravely. "It was to wash up the soup-plates—no, the cheese-plates I mean that was grand enough. And I waited at table. And I didn't hardly make only one mistake."

"What was it?" I said. "You needn't mind telling me."

"Only bringing scissors to cut the beef with," Bruno said carelessly. "But the grandest thing of all was, I fetched the King a glass of cider!"

"That was grand!" I said, biting my lip to keep myself from laughing.

"Wasn't it?" said Bruno, very earnestly. "Oo know it isn't every one that's had such an honour as that!"

This set me thinking of the various queer things we call "an honour" in this world, but which, after all, haven't a bit more honour in them than what Bruno enjoyed, when he took the King a glass of cider.

CHAPTER 15 -- BRUNO'S REVENGE

I don't know how long I might not have dreamed on in this way, if Bruno hadn't suddenly roused me. "Oh, come here quick!" he cried, in a state of the wildest excitement. "Catch hold of his other horn! I ca'n't hold him more than a minute!"

He was struggling desperately with a great snail, clinging to one of its horns, and nearly breaking his poor little back in his efforts to drag it over a blade of grass.

I saw we should have no more gardening if I let this sort of thing go on, so I quietly took the snail away, and put it on a bank where he couldn't reach it. "We'll hunt it afterwards, Bruno," I said, "if you really want to catch it.

But what's the use of it when you've got it?" "What's the use of a fox when oo've got it?" said Bruno. "I know oo big things hunt foxes."

I tried to think of some good reason why "big things" should hunt foxes, and he should not hunt snails, but none came into my head: so I said at last, "Well, I suppose one's as good as the other. I'll go snail-hunting myself some day."

"I should think oo wouldn't be so silly," said Bruno, "as to go snail-hunting by oor-self. Why, oo'd never get the snail along, if oo hadn't somebody to hold on to his other horn!"

"Of course I sha'n't go alone," I said, quite gravely. "By the way, is that the best kind to hunt, or do you recommend the ones without shells?"

"Oh, no, we never hunt the ones without shells," Bruno said, with a little shudder at the thought of it. "They're always so cross about it; and then, if oo tumbles over them, they're ever so sticky!"

By this time we had nearly finished the garden. I had fetched some violets, and Bruno was just helping me to put in the last, when he suddenly stopped and said "I'm tired."

"Rest then," I said: "I can go on without you, quite well."

Bruno needed no second invitation: he at once began arranging the dead mouse as a kind of sofa. "And I'll sing oo a little song," he said, as he rolled it about.

"Do," said I: "I like songs very much."

CHAPTER 15 -- BRUNO'S REVENGE



“Which song will oo choose?” Bruno said, as he dragged the mouse into a place where he could get a good view of me. “Ting, ting, ting’ is the nicest.”

There was no resisting such a strong hint as this: however, I pretended to think about it for a moment, and then said “Well, I like ‘Ting, ting, ting,’ best of all.”

“That shows oo’re a good judge of music,” Bruno said, with a pleased look. “How many hare-bells would oo like?” And he put his thumb into his mouth to help me to consider.

As there was only one cluster of hare-bells within easy reach, I said very gravely that I thought one would do this time, and I picked it and gave it to him. Bruno ran his hand once or twice up and down the flowers, like a musician trying an instrument, producing a most delicious delicate tinkling as he did so. I had never heard flower-music before—I don’t think one can, unless one’s in the ‘eerie’ state and I don’t know quite how to give you an idea of what it was like, except by saying that it sounded like a peal of bells a thousand miles off. When he had satisfied himself that the flowers were in tune, he seated himself on the dead mouse (he never seemed really comfortable anywhere else), and, looking up at me with a merry twinkle in his eyes, he began. By the way, the tune was rather a curious one, and you might like to try it for yourself, so here are the notes.



CHAPTER 15 -- BRUNO'S REVENGE

"Rise, oh, rise! The daylight dies:
The owls are hooting, ting, ting, ting!
Wake, oh, wake! Beside the lake
The elves are fluting, ting, ting, ting!
Welcoming our Fairy King,
We sing, sing, sing."

He sang the first four lines briskly and merrily, making the hare-bells chime in time with the music; but the last two he sang quite slowly and gently, and merely waved the flowers backwards and forwards. Then he left off to explain. "The Fairy-King is Oberon, and he lives across the lake—and sometimes he comes in a little boat—and we go and meet him and then we sing this song, you know."

"And then you go and dine with him?" I said, mischievously.

"Oo shouldn't talk," Bruno hastily said: "it interrupts the song so."

I said I wouldn't do it again.

"I never talk myself when I'm singing," he went on very gravely: "so oo shouldn't either." Then he tuned the hare-bells once more, and sang:—

"Hear, oh, hear! From far and near
The music stealing, ting, ting, ting!
Fairy belts adown the dells
Are merrily pealing, ting, ting, ting!
Welcoming our Fairy King,
We ring, ring, ring.

"See, oh, see! On every tree
What lamps are shining, ting, ting, ting!
They are eyes of fiery flies
To light our dining, ting, ting, ting!
Welcoming our Fairy King
They swing, swing, swing.

"Haste, oh haste, to take and taste
The dainties waiting, ting, ting, ting!

CHAPTER 15 -- BRUNO'S REVENGE

Honey-dew is stored—”

“Hush, Bruno!” I interrupted in a warning whisper. “She’s coming!”

Bruno checked his song, and, as she slowly made her way through the long grass, he suddenly rushed out headlong at her like a little bull, shouting “Look the other way! Look the other way!”

“Which way?” Sylvie asked, in rather a frightened tone, as she looked round in all directions to see where the danger could be.

“That way!” said Bruno, carefully turning her round with her face to the wood. “Now, walk backwards walk gently—don’t be frightened: oo sha’n’t trip!”

But Sylvie did trip notwithstanding: in fact he led her, in his hurry, across so many little sticks and stones, that it was really a wonder the poor child could keep on her feet at all. But he was far too much excited to think of what he was doing.

I silently pointed out to Bruno the best place to lead her to, so as to get a view of the whole garden at once: it was a little rising ground, about the height of a potato; and, when they had mounted it, I drew back into the shade, that Sylvie mightn’t see me.

I heard Bruno cry out triumphantly “Now oo may look!” and then followed a clapping of hands, but it was all done by Bruno himself. Sylvie: was silent—she only stood and gazed with her hands clasped together, and I was half afraid she didn’t like it after all.

Bruno too was watching her anxiously, and when she jumped down off the mound, and began wandering up and down the little walks, he cautiously followed her about, evidently anxious that she should form her own opinion of it all, without any hint from him. And when at last she drew a long breath, and gave her verdict—in a hurried whisper, and without the slightest regard to grammar—“It’s the loveliest thing as I never saw in all my life before!” the little fellow looked as well pleased as if it had been given by all the judges and juries in England put together.

“And did you really do it all by yourself, Bruno?” said Sylvie. “And all for me?”

CHAPTER 15 -- BRUNO'S REVENGE

"I was helped a bit," Bruno began, with a merry little laugh at her surprise. "We've been at it all the afternoon—I thought oo'd like—" and here the poor little fellow's lip began to quiver, and all in a moment he burst out crying, and running up to Sylvie he flung his arms passionately round her neck, and hid his face on her shoulder.

There was a little quiver in Sylvie's voice too, as she whispered "Why, what's the matter, darling?" and tried to lift up his head and kiss him.

But Bruno only clung to her, sobbing, and wouldn't be comforted till he had confessed. "I tried—to spoil oor garden—first—but I'll never— never—" and then came another burst of tears, which drowned the rest of the sentence. At last he got out the words "I liked— putting in the flowers—for oo, Sylvie—and I never was so happy before." And the rosy little face came up at last to be kissed, all wet with tears as it was.

Sylvie was crying too by this time, and she said nothing but "Bruno, dear!" and "I never was so happy before," though why these two children who had never been so happy before should both be crying was a mystery to me.

I felt very happy too, but of course I didn't cry: "big things" never do, you know we leave all that to the Fairies. Only I think it must have been raining a little just then, for I found a drop or two on my cheeks.

After that they went through the whole garden again, flower by flower, as if it were a long sentence they were spelling out, with kisses for commas, and a great hug by way of a full-stop when they got to the end.

"Doos oo know, that was my river-edge, Sylvie?" Bruno solemnly began.

Sylvie laughed merrily. "What do you mean?" she said. And she pushed back her heavy brown hair with both hands, and looked at him with dancing eyes in which the big tears were still glittering.

Bruno drew in a long breath, and made up his mouth for a great effort. "I mean revenge," he said: "now oo under'tand." And he looked so happy and proud at having said the word right at last, that I quite envied him. I rather think Sylvie didn't "under'tand" at all; but she gave him a little kiss on each cheek, which seemed to do just as well.

CHAPTER 15 -- BRUNO'S REVENGE

So they wandered off lovingly together, in among the buttercups, each with an arm twined round the other, whispering and laughing as they went, and never so much as once looked back at poor me. Yes, once, just before I quite lost sight of them, Bruno half turned his head, and nodded me a saucy little good-bye over one shoulder. And that was all the thanks I got for my trouble. The very last thing I saw of them was this— Sylvie was stooping down with her arms round Bruno's neck, and saying coaxingly in his ear, "Do you know, Bruno, I've quite forgotten that hard word. Do say it once more. Come! Only this once, dear!"

But Bruno wouldn't try it again.