



Chapter 21 Through the Ivory Door

"I don't know," said Sylvie. "Hush! I must think. I could go to him, by myself, well enough. But I want you to come too."

"Let me go with you," I pleaded. "I can walk as fast as you can, I'm sure."

Sylvie laughed merrily. "What nonsense!" she cried. "Why, you ca'n't walk a bit! You're lying quite flat on your back! You don't understand these things."

"I can walk as well as you can," I repeated. And I tried my best to walk a few steps: but the ground slipped away backwards, quite as fast as I could walk, so that I made no progress at all. Sylvie laughed again.

"There, I told you so! You've no idea how funny you look, moving your feet about in the air, as if you were walking! Wait a bit. I'll ask the Professor what we'd better do." And she knocked at his study-door.

The door opened, and the Professor looked out. "What's that crying I heard just now?" he asked. "Is it a human animal?"

"It's a boy," Sylvie said.

"I'm afraid you've been teasing him?"

"No, indeed I haven't!" Sylvie said, very earnestly. "I never tease him!" "Well, I must ask the Other Professor about it." He went back into the study, and we heard him whispering "small human animal—says she hasn't been teasing him—the kind that's called Boy—"

"Ask her which Boy," said a new voice. The Professor came out again.

"Which Boy is it that you haven't been teasing?"

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Sylvie looked at me with twinkling eyes. "You dear old thing!" she exclaimed, standing on tiptoe to kiss him, while he gravely stooped to receive the salute. "How you do puzzle me! Why, there are several boys I haven't been teasing!"

The Professor returned to his friend: and this time the voice said "Tell her to bring them here—all of them!"

"I can't, and I won't!" Sylvie exclaimed, the moment he reappeared. "It's Bruno that's crying: and he's my brother: and, please, we both want to go: he can't walk, you know: he's—he's dreaming, you know" (this in a whisper, for fear of hurting my feelings). "Do let's go through the Ivory Door!"

"I'll ask him," said the Professor, disappearing again. He returned directly. "He says you may. Follow me, and walk on tip-toe."

The difficulty with me would have been, just then, not to walk on tip-toe. It seemed very hard to reach down far enough to just touch the floor, as Sylvie led me through the study.

The Professor went before us to unlock the Ivory Door. I had just time to glance at the Other Professor, who was sitting reading, with his back to us, before the Professor showed us out through the door, and locked it behind us. Bruno was standing with his hands over his face, crying bitterly.

"What's the matter, darling?" said Sylvie, with her arms round his neck.

"Hurted mine self welly much!" sobbed the poor little fellow.

"I'm so sorry, darling! How ever did you manage to hurt yourself so?"



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"Course I managed it!" said Bruno, laughing through his tears. "Doos oo think nobody else but oo ca'n't manage things?"

Matters were looking distinctly brighter, now Bruno had begun to argue. "Come, let's hear all about it!" I said.

"My foot took it into its head to slip—" Bruno began.

"A foot hasn't got a head!" Sylvie put in, but all in vain.

"I slipted down the bank. And I tripted over a stone. And the stone hurted my foot! And I trod on a Bee. And the Bee stinged my finger!" Poor Bruno sobbed again. The complete list of woes was too much for his feelings. "And it knewed I didn't mean to trod on it!" he added, as the climax.

"That Bee should be ashamed of itself!" I said severely, and Sylvie hugged and kissed the wounded hero till all tears were dried.

"My finger's quite unstung now!" said Bruno. "Why doos there be stones? Mister Sir, doos oo know?"

"They're good for something," I said: "even if we don't know what. What's the good of dandelions, now?"

"Dindledums?" said Bruno. "Oh, they're ever so pretty! And stones aren't pretty, one bit. Would oo like some dindledums, Mister Sir?"

"Bruno!" Sylvie murmured reproachfully. "You mustn't say 'Mister' and 'Sir,' both at once! Remember what I told you!"

"You telled me I were to say Mister' when I spoked about him, and I were to say 'Sir' when I spoked to him!"

"Well, you're not doing both, you know."

"Ah, but I is doing bofe, Miss Praticular!" Bruno exclaimed triumphantly. "I wishted to speak about the Gemplun—and I wishted to speak to the Gemplun. So a course I said 'Mister Sir'!"

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"That's all right, Bruno," I said.

"Course it's all right!" said Bruno. "Sylvie just knows nuffin at all!"

"There never was an impertinenter boy!" said Sylvie, frowning till her bright eyes were nearly invisible.

"And there never was an ignoranter girl!" retorted Bruno. "Come along and pick some dindledums. That's all she's fit for!" he added in a very loud whisper to me.

"But why do you say 'Dindledums,' Bruno? Dandelions is the right word."

"It's because he jumps about so," Sylvie said, laughing.

"Yes, that's it," Bruno assented. "Sylvie tells me the words, and then, when I jump about, they get shaken up in my head— till they're all froth!"

I expressed myself as perfectly satisfied with this explanation. "But aren't you going to pick me any dindledums, after all?"

"Course we will!" cried Bruno. "Come along, Sylvie!" And the happy children raced away, bounding over the turf with the fleetness and grace of young antelopes.

"Then you didn't find your way back to Outland?" I said to the Professor.

"Oh yes, I did!" he replied, "We never got to Queer Street; but I found another way. I've been backwards and forwards several times since then. I had to be present at the Election, you know, as the author of the new Money-act. The Emperor was so kind as to wish that I should have the credit of it. 'Let come what come may,' (I remember the very words of the Imperial Speech) 'if it should turn out that the Warden is alive, you will bear witness that the change in the coinage is the Professor's doing, not mine!' I never was so glorified in my life, before!" Tears trickled down his cheeks at the recollection, which apparently was not wholly a pleasant one.

"Is the Warden supposed to be dead?"

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"Well, it's supposed so: but, mind you, I don't believe it! The evidence is very weak—mere hear-say. A wandering Jester, with a Dancing-Bear (they found their way into the Palace, one day) has been telling people he comes from Fairyland, and that the Warden died there. I wanted the Vice-Warden to question him, but, most unluckily, he and my Lady were always out walking when the Jester came round. Yes, the Warden's supposed to be dead!" And more tears trickled down the old man's cheeks.

"But what is the new Money-Act?"

The Professor brightened up again. "The Emperor started the thing," he said. "He wanted to make everybody in Outland twice as rich as he was before just to make the new Government popular. Only there wasn't nearly enough money in the Treasury to do it. So I suggested that he might do it by doubling the value of every coin and bank-note in Outland. It's the simplest thing possible. I wonder nobody ever thought of it before! And you never saw such universal joy. The shops are full from morning to night. Everybody's buying everything!"

"And how was the glorifying done?"

A sudden gloom overcast the Professor's jolly face. "They did it as I went home after the Election," he mournfully replied. "It was kindly meant but I didn't like it! They waved flags all round me till I was nearly blind: and they rang bells till I was nearly deaf: and they strewed the road so thick with flowers that I lost my way!" And the poor old man sighed deeply.

"How far is it to Outland?" I asked, to change the subject.

"About five days' march. But one must go back—occasionally. You see, as Court-Professor, I have to be always in attendance on Prince Uggug. The Empress would be very angry if I left him, even for an hour."

"But surely, every time you come here, you are absent ten days, at least?"

"Oh, more than that!" the Professor exclaimed. "A fortnight, sometimes. But of course I keep a memorandum of the exact time when I started, so that I can put the Court-time back to the very moment!" "Excuse me," I said. "I don't understand."

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Silently the Professor drew from his pocket a square gold watch, with six or eight hands, and held it out for my inspection. "This," he began, "is an Outlandish Watch—"

"So I should have thought."

"—which has the peculiar property that, instead of its going with the time, the time goes with it. I trust you understand me now?"

"Hardly," I said.

"Permit me to explain. So long as it is let alone, it takes its own course. Time has no effect upon it."

"I have known such watches," I remarked.

"It goes, of course, at the usual rate. Only the time has to go with it. Hence, if I move the hands, I change the time. To move them forwards, in advance of the true time, is impossible: but I can move them as much as a month backwards—that is the limit. And then you have the events all over again—with any alterations experience may suggest."

"What a blessing such a watch would be," I thought, "in real life! To be able to unsay some heedless word—to undo some reckless deed! Might I see the thing done?"

"With pleasure!" said the good natured Professor. "When I move this hand back to here," pointing out the place, "History goes back fifteen minutes!"

Trembling with excitement, I watched him push the hand round as he described.

"Hurled mine self welly much!"

Shrilly and suddenly the words rang in my ears, and, more startled than I cared to show, I turned to look for the speaker.

Yes! There was Bruno, standing with the tears running down his cheeks, just as I had seen him a quarter of an hour ago; and there was Sylvie with her arms round his neck!

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I had not the heart to make the dear little fellow go through his troubles a second time, so hastily begged the Professor to push the hands round into their former position. In a moment Sylvie and Bruno were gone again, and I could just see them in the far distance, picking 'dindledums.'

"Wonderful, indeed!" I exclaimed.

"It has another property, yet more wonderful," said the Professor. "You see this little peg? That is called the 'Reversal Peg.' If you push it in, the events of the next hour happen in the reverse order. Do not try it now. I will lend you the Watch for a few days, and you can amuse yourself with experiments."

"Thank you very much!" I said as he gave me the Watch. "I'll take the greatest care of it—why, here are the children again!"

"We could only but find six dindledums," said Bruno, putting them into my hands, "'cause Sylvie said it were time to go back. And here's a big blackberry for ooself! We couldn't only find but two!"

"Thank you: it's very nice," I said. And I suppose you ate the other, Bruno?"

"No, I didn't," Bruno said, carelessly. "Aren't they pretty dindledums, Mister Sir?"

"Yes, very: but what makes you limp so, my child?"

"Mine foot's come hurted again!" Bruno mournfully replied. And he sat down on the ground, and began nursing it.

The Professor held his head between his hands—an attitude that I knew indicated distraction of mind. "Better rest a minute," he said. "It may be better then—or it may be worse. If only I had some of my medicines here! I'm Court-Physician, you know," he added, aside to me.

"Shall I go and get you some blackberries, darling?" Sylvie whispered, with her arms round his neck; and she kissed away a tear that was trickling down his cheek.

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Bruno brightened up in a moment. "That are a good plan!" he exclaimed. "I thinks my foot would come quite unhurted, if I eated a blackberry— two or three blackberries—six or seven blackberries—"

Sylvie got up hastily. "I'd better go she said, aside to me, before he gets into the double figures!

Let me come and help you, I said. I can reach higher up than you can.

Yes, please, said Sylvie, putting her hand into mine: and we walked off together.

Bruno loves blackberries, she said, as we paced slowly along by a tall hedge, that looked a promising place for them, and it was so sweet of him to make me eat the only one!

Oh, it was you that ate it, then? Bruno didn't seem to like to tell me about it.

No; I saw that, said Sylvie. He's always afraid of being praised. But he made me eat it, really! I would much rather he—oh, what's that? And she clung to my hand, half-frightened, as we came in sight of a hare, lying on its side with legs stretched out just in the entrance to the wood.

It's a hare, my child. Perhaps it's asleep.

No, it isn't asleep, Sylvie said, timidly going nearer to look at it: it's eyes are open. Is it—is it—her voice dropped to an awestruck whisper, is it dead, do you think?"

"Yes, it's quite dead," I said, after stooping to examine it. "Poor thing! I think it's been hunted to death. I know the harriers were out yesterday. But they haven't touched it. Perhaps they caught sight of another, and left it to die of fright and exhaustion."

"Hunted to death?" Sylvie repeated to herself, very slowly and sadly. "I thought hunting was a thing they played at like a game. Bruno and I hunt snails: but we never hurt them when we catch them!"

"Sweet angel!" I thought. "How am I to get the idea of Sport into your innocent mind?" And as we stood, hand-in-hand, looking down at the dead hare, I tried to put the thing into such words as she could understand. "You know what fierce wild-beasts lions and

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tigers are?" Sylvie nodded. "Well, in some countries men have to kill them, to save their own lives, you know."

"Yes," said Sylvie: "if one tried to kill me, Bruno would kill it if he could."

"Well, and so the men—the hunters—get to enjoy it, you know: the running, and the fighting, and the shouting, and the danger."

"Yes," said Sylvie. "Bruno likes danger."

"Well, but, in this country, there aren't any lions and tigers, loose: so they hunt other creatures, you see." I hoped, but in vain, that this would satisfy her, and that she would ask no more questions.

"They hunt foxes," Sylvie said, thoughtfully. "And I think they kill them, too. Foxes are very fierce. I daresay men don't love them. Are hares fierce?"

"No," I said. "A hare is a sweet, gentle, timid animal—almost as gentle as a lamb."

"But, if men love hares, why—why—" her voice quivered, and her sweet eyes were brimming over with tears.

"I'm afraid they don't love them, dear child."

"All children love them," Sylvie said. "All ladies love them."

"I'm afraid even ladies go to hunt them, sometimes."

Sylvie shuddered. "Oh, no, not ladies!" she earnestly pleaded. "Not Lady Muriel!"

"No, she never does, I'm sure—but this is too sad a sight for you, dear. Let's try and find some—"

But Sylvie was not satisfied yet. In a hushed, solemn tone, with bowed head and clasped hands, she put her final question. "Does GOD love hares?"

"Yes!" I said. "I'm sure He does! He loves every living thing. Even sinful men. How much more the animals, that cannot sin!"

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"I don't know what 'sin' means," said Sylvie. And I didn't try to explain it.

"Come, my child," I said, trying to lead her away. "Wish good-bye to the poor hare, and come and look for blackberries."

"Good-bye, poor hare!" Sylvie obediently repeated, looking over her shoulder at it as we turned away. And then, all in a moment, her self-command gave way. Pulling her hand out of mine, she ran back to where the dead hare was lying, and flung herself down at its side in such an agony of grief as I could hardly have believed possible in so young a child.

"Oh, my darling, my darling!" she moaned, over and over again. "And God meant your life to be so beautiful!"

Sometimes, but always keeping her face hidden on the ground, she would reach out one little hand, to stroke the poor dead thing, and then once more bury her face in her hands, and sob as if her heart would break.



I was afraid she would really make herself ill: still I thought it best to let her weep away the first sharp agony of grief: and, after a few minutes, the sobbing gradually ceased, and Sylvie rose to her feet, and looked calmly at me, though tears were still streaming down her cheeks.

I did not dare to speak again, just yet; but simply held out

my hand to her, that we might quit the melancholy spot.

Yes, I'll come now, she said. Very reverently she knelt down, and kissed the dead hare; then rose and gave me her hand, and we moved on in silence.

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A child's sorrow is violent but short; and it was almost in her usual voice that she said after a minute "Oh stop stop! Here are some lovely blackberries!"

We filled our hands with fruit and returned in all haste to where the Professor and Bruno were seated on a bank awaiting our return.

Just before we came within hearing-distance Sylvie checked me. "Please don't tell Bruno about the hare!" she said.

Very well, my child. But why not?

Tears again glittered in those sweet eyes and she turned her head away so that I could scarcely hear her reply. "He's—he's very fond of gentle creatures you know. And he'd—he'd be so sorry! I don't want him to be made sorry."

And your agony of sorrow is to count for nothing, then, sweet unselfish child! I thought to myself. But no more was said till we had reached our friends; and Bruno was far too much engrossed, in the feast we had brought him, to take any notice of Sylvie's unusually grave manner.

"I'm afraid it's getting rather late, Professor?" I said.

"Yes, indeed," said the Professor. "I must take you all through the Ivory Door again. You've stayed your full time."

"Mightn't we stay a little longer!" pleaded Sylvie.

"Just one minute!" added Bruno.

But the Professor was unyielding. "It's a great privilege, coming through at all," he said. "We must go now." And we followed him obediently to the Ivory Door, which he threw open, and signed to me to go through first.

"You're coming too, aren't you?" I said to Sylvie.

"Yes," she said: "but you won't see us after you've gone through."

"But suppose I wait for you outside?" I asked, as I stepped through the doorway.

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"In that case," said Sylvie, "I think the potato would be quite justified in asking your weight. I can quite imagine a really superior kidney-potato declining to argue with any one under fifteen stone!"

With a great effort I recovered the thread of my thoughts. "We lapse very quickly into nonsense!" I said.