

THE SAILOR MAN

From *The Golden Windows*, by Laura E. Richards



Once upon a time, two children came to the house of a sailor man, who lived beside the salt sea; and they found the sailor man sitting in his doorway knotting ropes.

"How do you do?" asked the sailor man.

"We are very well, thank you," said the children, who had learned manners, "and we hope you are the same. We heard that you had a boat, and we thought that perhaps you would take us out in her, and teach us how to sail, for that is what we most wish to know."

"All in good time," said the sailor man. "I am busy now, but by-and-by, when my work is done, I may perhaps take one of you if you are ready to learn. Meantime here are some ropes that need knotting; you might be doing that, since it has to be done." And he showed them how the knots should be tied, and went away and left them.

When he was gone the first child ran to the window and looked out.

"There is the sea," he said. "The waves come up on the beach, almost to the door of the house. They run up all white, like prancing horses, and then they go dragging back. Come and look!"

"I cannot," said the second child. "I am tying a knot."

"Oh!" cried the first child, "I see the boat. She is dancing like a lady at a ball;

I never saw such a beauty. Come and look!"

"I cannot," said the second child. "I am tying a knot."

"I shall have a delightful sail in that boat," said the first child. "I expect that the sailor man will take me, because I am the eldest and I know more about it. There was no need of my watching when he showed you the knots, because I knew how already."

Just then the sailor man came in.

"Well," he said, "my work is over. What have you been doing in the meantime?"

"I have been looking at the boat," said the first child. "What a beauty she is! I shall have the best time in her that ever I had in my life."

"I have been tying knots," said the second child.

"Come, then," said the sailor man, and he held out his hand to the second child. "I will take you out in the boat, and teach you to sail her."

"But I am the eldest," cried the first child, "and I know a great deal more than she does."

"That may be," said the sailor man; "but a person must learn to tie a knot before he can learn to sail a boat."

"But I have learned to tie a knot," cried the child. "I know all about it!"

"How can I tell that?" asked the sailor man.