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# LITTLE PETER'S TASK



JEANNE MAIRET

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HEATH SUPPLEMENTARY READERS



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HEATH SUPPLEMENTARY READERS

# LITTLE PETER'S TASK

*Bigot, Marie (Healy) & Mme. Charles Bigot*  
By JEANNE MAIRET *pres.*

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH  
By HORTENSE G. MAGUIRE



ILLUSTRATED BY MARGO SYLVESTER

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## PREFACE

THE story of little Peter and his task has been read and loved by French children for many years, but it has never before been published in English translation as a supplementary reader for the fourth and fifth grades.

The difficulties encountered by ten-year-old Peter in discharging his man-sized task, and his bravery in meeting and overcoming them will furnish engrossing reading for other boys and girls.

The material has been somewhat abridged from its original lengthy form in order that the story might move more rapidly and directly to its thrilling conclusion, and certain details have been adapted to the understanding of American children. No undue liberties have been taken with the text, however, and an earnest effort has been made to retain the inimitable freshness and charm of the French story teller.

Vocabulary and sentence structure have been carefully checked against recognized standards, to the end that the story may be read with ease and enjoyment by children of the grades for which it is intended.

In interest of content and originality of style *Little Peter's Task* would seem to deserve a place beside such recognized children's classics, in translation, as *Pinocchio*, *The Story of a Donkey*, and *Heidi*.

H. G. M.





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LITTLE PETER'S TASK



HE BEGAN TO CLIMB DOWN.

## CHAPTER I

### AN ATTIC HOME

IN the old French village of St. Nazaire, at the mouth of the Loire River, lived a ten-year-old boy named Peter Delsart. Peter's father was dead, and his mother worked very hard to support herself and her little son. She sewed from morning till night, and Peter had often seen her cry. He helped her every day after school, and was so brave and good that the neighbors called him a "little man."

Peter and his mother were very poor, and they lived in the attic of a large old house in a narrow, dirty street. Sometimes they were cold, and often they had little to eat, but mother and son loved each other so much that they did not mind all their hardships.

But one day Peter's mother was very sick, and in less than a week the poor woman died. Peter could not understand what had happened — it did not seem possible that he should never hear his mother's voice again. All the neighbors

felt sorry for the little orphan, but they were poor working people and could do nothing to help him. They could not even go to the cemetery with him on the day of the funeral — it was a week-day, and they must work!

It was raining hard as Peter set out alone on this sad trip, and even if one is a “little man,” one is still a child at ten. Walking along in the rain, Peter said to himself that he was now quite alone in the world. What was going to become of him? Shaking with sobs, he thought again and again, “Who will love me now? Who will take care of me? Who will get me something to eat?” You would have pitied him and thought it a shame that the poor mother had not been able to take this heartbroken child with her.

After the last pathetic services were over, Peter turned his steps toward home. It had stopped raining, and suddenly the bright June sun peeped from behind the clouds. Perhaps it was the effect of the warm sunshine, but Peter felt a little better. He no longer wanted to be dead beside his mother. He thought that after all it was good to be alive.



A little light-haired girl who often played with him had been waiting for him on the steps of the shabby old house. She ran to meet him, and threw her chubby arms around his neck.

“Oh, Peter,” she said, “the doctor said that he wanted to speak to you. He wanted you to wait for him in the bedroom. Shall I wait with you?”

“Yes.”

Peter said no more. He was content to feel that Mary was beside him.

The children went hand in hand into the bedroom and sat together on an old trunk. They did not say a word for a long time — somehow it seemed to them that they ought to be quiet.

The little room was neat, but almost bare. There was only one old chair in it, besides the bed; but through the open window the children could see a bit of the sky, quite blue now, and some swallows flying about, singing their happy little songs.

“Will you have something to eat?” asked Mary, taking from her pocket a piece of bread and a chocolate bar.

Peter had eaten nothing since morning, and the chocolate smelled good, but he did not know

whether one ought to be hungry when one is very sad. He shook his head slowly.

Mary smiled at him gently and broke off a piece of the bread and half of the chocolate bar. She put them into his hand, and he could not resist. The two children sat quietly side by side and ate their lunch.

“What do you suppose the doctor wants of you?” asked Mary.

“I’m sure I don’t know,” answered Peter. “Perhaps he has found some work for me. I am very strong for my age, you know, and I must earn my living now.”

His voice trembled as he thought of his mother and of all that she had done for him, and his tears fell on the bread. The poor child was crying and eating at the same time.

“Look out for your tears, Peter!” exclaimed Mary. “Don’t let them drop on the chocolate.”

Mary spoke so seriously that Peter had to smile, and Mary laughed aloud. Then they stopped, ashamed, and finished their lunch in silence.

The doctor found them sitting on the trunk,

picking up the crumbs that had fallen on Mary's apron. They were still hungry.

"Ah, there you are, my boy. I have something to say to you, and I must hurry, for I have sick people to visit. Mary, run away! Quickly!"

Mary was disappointed, and she made such a wry face that the doctor had to smile.

Peter whispered, "I will tell you everything."

"Everything?"

"Yes, I promise."

Mary went out of the room, a corner of her apron in her mouth.

"Come here, my little man," said the doctor, sitting on the chair and drawing Peter to him.

"How old are you?"

"Ten years and five months, doctor."

"Good! That's the way to speak up. Are you a brave boy? Do you get afraid easily?"

Peter thought. His mother had taught him always to tell the truth and the whole truth.

"I am not afraid of bigger boys, but sometimes I am afraid in the dark. Mama used to laugh at me, but she was braver than I."

"I don't blame her for laughing at you. Of

course you can bump against furniture in the dark and perhaps hit your nose — that's all. But I am not going to send you into the dark. I think you are going to travel alone to Paris. I wonder if you could keep your head in a crowd, ask your way, and act wisely if something unexpected should happen to you on the trip. Think hard."

"I think I could do that. Mama sent me on all her errands. She always said that I was a real little man."

"Well, my child, since you are a little man, I am going to tell you all that your mother told me before she died. Imagine, if you can, that she is speaking to you. You must try to understand and to do what you think she would want you to do. Do you remember your father?"

"Yes, indeed, sir! He had a soft voice and white hands."

"Well, Peter, this is the story of your father, and it is not a very happy one. He had an elder brother, an ambitious boy, who did not want to be a farmer like his father. This elder brother went to Paris and began to make his way there. He sent for his younger brother — your



“I THINK YOU ARE GOING TO TRAVEL ALONE TO PARIS.”

father — and gave him a fine education, but this younger lad liked good times too well. He wanted pleasure, amusement, gaiety, and went about with a crowd of rich young people, though he himself was poor — always an unwise thing to do. One night he played cards for money and lost. He kept on playing to win back his money, but he lost still more. Then, since he had to pay somehow, he stole a large sum of money from his employer.”

“That is not true!” cried little Peter in distress. “My father was not a thief!”

“Your mother told me this, so that I might tell you,” said the doctor gently. “She couldn’t. Cry, my child, and you will feel better. But listen to the rest of the story, and you will pity your father instead of blaming him.

“The employer went to the elder brother, who by this time had become well known as a lawyer, and told him about the affair. It was a choice between disgrace or ruin for the elder brother, and he chose ruin. To pay the sum, he gave everything he had and even went into debt, but on the condition that his younger brother leave France at once.

“The boy went away and never saw his elder brother again, but during the years that followed he dreamed of only one thing — of making up for his mistake, of being forgiven.

“He went to America, where he hoped to make his fortune, but where he nearly starved to death. Then he wanted so much to see France again that he worked his passage back across the ocean on a freight ship. The vessel landed him at St. Nazaire, and he lived here for the rest of his life.

“He had a beautiful handwriting; so he easily found work as a clerk. One of his neighbors was a young dressmaker, who tried to comfort the unhappy young man, and later became his wife. She encouraged him to try to make up for his mistake — for he had told her the whole sorry story before they were married. He dreamed of heroic deeds, but was never able to do them, and four years ago he died, a broken-hearted man. From now on, my child, you must remember that he was sorry for what he had done, and forget his mistake. Do you understand?”

“Yes, sir,” murmured Peter, choking back his sobs.

“Now then, this is what your mother wanted you to do. The task your father was unable to do you are charged to do for him. She wanted you to go to find your uncle.”

“But if he didn't want to see Papa again, why should he care to see me? He doesn't even know me, and I should have to go to him as a beggar. No, doctor, please find some work for me and let me stay here.”

“You may do as you wish. These were your mother's wishes, not her orders. I offered to write to your uncle, but she did not want me to do so. She thought, poor soul, that a letter would bring back the sad past, but that if he saw you he would love you. It seemed to her so easy to love you! She believed that later you would find a way of paying your father's debt and your own.”

“I will do everything that she wanted me to,” said Peter, drying his tears.

“Very well, Peter, I will take you home with me to-night. I have spoken of you to some of my rich patients, and they have given me money enough for your trip to Paris. When you get there, you must ask some one



where Mr. Peter Delsart lives. His name is the same as yours; so you can remember it easily. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, come along."

"I should like to say good-by to Mary and the others."

"So you must, and since you are already a little man, I am going to talk to you as a man. Your mother's bills are all paid; the landlord took the furniture for what was owed to him. Make a bundle of your clothes, say good-by to every one who was kind to your mother, and then come to my house."

And the doctor went away very quickly.

Mary had been watching to see him leave. She returned to the bedroom and found her little playmate making a bundle of his clothes. It was a very small bundle, indeed.

Peter told her that he was going to Paris, where his uncle lived, but he did not dream of telling her what his father had done. Of that he would never speak, though he would think of it always. He would do so well, be so brave and so wise, that the past would be forgotten!

All the neighbors bade him good-by and gave him their best wishes. Mary's mother gave him a shiny new piece of silver. Mary cried because she had nothing to give the little traveler; then quickly she ran to her play corner and brought a tiny china doll. She loved this doll very much, and she tucked it into Peter's bundle without saying a word.

The doctor's children — there were four of them — took charge of Peter as soon as he appeared. At first no one knew just what to say, and they all sat and looked at one another.

Then the eldest, who was a year older than Peter, said to him, "Do you know how to play marbles?"

Peter knew very well how to play marbles; so the ice was broken. He played better than the doctor's children, and stopped thinking about the trip that he was going to make.

At dinner he had a fine appetite. Everything tasted so good! It was the first time he had seen a table well set and a fresh white napkin. He watched the others and did just as they did.

After dinner the doctor took down a map from the wall and showed Peter the route that

he was going to take. In the morning the doctor would put him on the boat which went to Nantes. There Peter must go to the railroad station and buy a third-class ticket to Paris.

The doctor and his wife counted out the money for his trip and told him to be very careful of it. Then the doctor's wife put a few pieces of silver into a little purse and, ripping open the lining of his vest, slipped the purse inside and took a few stitches to hold it in place.

"One never knows what may happen. Perhaps you will be glad to have these, my child," she said.

Peter thanked her very much. It seemed to him that the world was full of kind persons. He was to learn later that there were others, not so kind.

It had been a hard day for little Peter, and he was a tired boy. His good friends put him to bed on the sofa in the living room, and he fell asleep at once.

## CHAPTER II

### ON THE WAY TO PARIS

THE next morning was warm and sunny. The doctor put Peter aboard the boat and started away at once to make his calls. Peter ran after him.

“Oh, doctor!” he cried. “You must think I have no manners. I haven’t even thanked you for everything. I just don’t know how” — and his eyes finished what he was trying to say.

“Nonsense,” said the doctor. “We understand each other, don’t we? When you are settled at your uncle’s home, you must write me a letter. Good-by.”

The little steamer bobbed about merrily on the waves. In the yellowish water there were little frothy bubbles like soapsuds, amusing to watch. Peter had never been on a boat before, and at first he felt a bit dizzy. But he soon got used to the motion, and with wide eyes watched the pretty green shore and the waves.

He was beginning a long journey, and he was



PETER BEGAN TO LOOK ABOUT AT THE OTHER PASSENGERS. not at all afraid! Of course, sitting quietly by himself in a corner of the boat, with money in his pocket and a good lunch in his bundle, he had nothing to fear.

After a while he grew tired of watching the shore and the water, and began to look about him at the other passengers. There were many farmers on board, carrying poultry and vegetables to sell at Nantes. Baskets full of fish, which Peter could smell, were all about the deck. There was much talking and laughter, but no one noticed the little traveler sitting in the corner. This annoyed Peter — he did not like to feel all alone in the crowd.

“Ah!” he thought. “If these people only knew that I am going alone to Paris to find my uncle, who is a lawyer, they would pay attention to me.”

Peter did not know just what a lawyer was. He had heard the doctor say that lawyers wore robes. His uncle must be very handsome — it certainly was something to be proud of to be the nephew of such a man.

He rose and with his bundle in his hand walked back and forth as the others did, his head held high. But no one seemed to notice him.

At eleven o'clock he felt hungry; so he went back to his corner, sat down again and ate his lunch. Then, to amuse himself, he took his money from his pocket and began to count it. Never before had he had so large a sum — he was very proud.

By this time the little traveler was being watched. Two men who were playing cards on a big box near by followed his movements. When Peter counted his money, the two players exchanged glances.

Soon they finished their game, rose, and moved slowly to Peter's side. They leaned against the

deck railing and puffed at their bad-smelling pipes. The smoke made Peter cough.

“Ah! You do not like tobacco smoke, my boy?” asked one of the men. “You will like it when you are a little older.”

“Oh! The smoke does not bother me, sir,” said Peter politely.

He was pleased to have some one notice him.

“You must be going to Nantes to stay. I see you have a bundle with you,” remarked the second man.

“I am going farther than that,” replied Peter. “I am going to Paris.”

“And your parents let you go all alone?”

“Mama is dead.” The child’s voice trembled. “I am going to find my uncle in Paris. He is a lawyer, and he wears a robe.”

“Listen!” interrupted the man who had spoken first. “We are going to Paris, too. Only we are common people. We are going third class.”

“Oh, so am I,” said Peter. “I haven’t enough money to go first class or even second. Is the railroad station far from the wharf?”

“It is hard to tell you just how to go. You

must take one street, then another, turn to the right, then to the left — but you may go along with us if you wish. We will get your ticket when we get ours.”

“Oh, how good you are! Every one has been so kind to me since Mama died!”

The men began to play cards again, and Peter watched them.

As they approached Nantes, there was a great bustle on the boat. Peter was afraid of all the noise. He held tightly to his bundle, and did not take his eyes off his new acquaintances. He was glad that he had found friends. Without them he should have been confused in such a crowd.

At last the town came into sight. It was more beautiful than St. Nazaire. Peter already felt much nearer Paris. Paris must be like Nantes, but larger and still more noisy.

The boat pulled up at the wharf, the gang-plank was thrown out, and the passengers filed off two by two. Peter's two “protectors” were used to crowds. They pushed their way along skillfully. One of them glanced behind him.

“Are you coming, little one?” he asked.





“YOU WAIT HERE,” SAID ONE OF THE MEN. “I’LL GET  
OUR TICKETS.”

“Oh, yes, sir,” answered Peter.

Little legs made a great effort to keep up with long legs. The two men exchanged smiles and spoke in a language that Peter did not understand.

Soon they left the main street. Peter thought the station must be far away, indeed, for his “friends” led him through many small streets. Finally they came to a park and found benches.

“You two wait here,” said one of the men. “The station is near by. I’ll get our tickets for the next train.”

Peter wondered why they did not all go to the station, but he did not dare to say anything; so he sat quietly beside the other man.

Many persons were walking about under the trees: mothers held their little ones by the hand, and other children made sand piles under the eyes of their nurses. Peter enjoyed watching them, and the time passed quickly.

Soon the man who had gone to get the tickets came back. He seemed to be very much annoyed, and he cried out:

“No luck! There is a train to-night, but it is for rich people — it has no third-class cars. We shall have to wait until to-morrow morning.”

Peter could have cried. What was he going to do? Where should he spend the night? His lower lip began to tremble.

“Don’t cry, little one!” said one of his companions. “You shall stay with us, and we’ll all leave to-morrow on the first train.”

“Thank you — but I want to go to-night.”

“Take a first-class ticket then, my prince.”

This mockery was too much for Peter. He began to cry.

“Come, come, don’t do that! We’ll find a market and buy something to eat. Then we’ll all have dinner together like good friends.”

Peter was ashamed of being so weak, and quickly dried his tears.

It was great fun when his two companions bought bread, cold pork, and two bottles of wine, and found a place where they could all sit down and eat. They had walked quite a distance, and were in the country. One of the men noticed a barn near by and remarked that they should sleep better on the hay than on a bed and that it would certainly be good not to have to pay for lodgings for the night.

Peter was glad that he should not have to

spend his money. His walk had made him very hungry and thirsty. There was no water, but the men said that water was for ducks and wine for men; and Peter, to show that he was a man, drank a great deal of wine.

Soon he talked and talked, and did not know what he was saying. His head swam. He knew that the men carried him to the barn and that the hay made a good bed. It tickled his cheeks a little, but Peter did not care. He fell at once into a deep sleep.

When he awoke, the sun was shining brightly. It was a new day. Peter raised himself on his elbow and tried to remember where he was and why he had slept on the hay. The sunlight came through the cracks in the walls of the old barn. Spiders' webs hung from the beams.

Peter began to recall what had happened the day before, and looked about for his two protectors, but he did not see them. There were no marks in the hay to show that they had slept there. Gently he called, but there was no answer. He was quite alone.

He ran out of the barn and called more loudly. He saw the spot where they had all eaten the



HE PLUNGED HIS HAND INTO HIS POCKET — IT WAS  
EMPTY!

night before. Two empty bottles lay on the ground, and there was the greasy paper that the pork had been wrapped in. That was all. Peter was alone in an abandoned field.

He could see the roof of a large farmhouse through the trees. Probably the farmer would be angry if he knew that Peter had slept in his barn. Peter shook himself, brushed the hay from his hair and clothes, and hurried to the road that ran along beside the field. He again looked about for his friends, but saw no one. They had certainly deserted him.

He saw a watering trough ahead and ran to it

to wash his face and hands. As he took off his coat, it seemed light. He plunged his hand into his pocket — it was empty!

Peter at last understood that his two “protectors” were thieves. How was he going to Paris, now, to find his uncle?

## CHAPTER III

### ALONE

YOU may be sure that by this time Peter did not feel very brave! As he realized that he was quite alone in a strange place, his courage left him, and he trembled so much that he had to sit down. He tried to collect his thoughts. What was the best thing to do?

If he knew his uncle's address, he could write to him and tell him of his plight. But a letter addressed to Mr. Delsart, Paris, would not be likely to reach him. Then, how could he wait for an answer, and where? Should he write to the doctor? No, he could not do that! He was ashamed of having been so easily tricked.

It was clear to Peter that he must find a way of getting to Paris without money. It would not be easy, but there was no use in crying over spilled milk.

He straightened his clothes, smoothed his hair, and felt better. He was thirsty; so he drank some fresh, cold water from the watering

trough. He picked up a piece of bread left from their dinner the night before, and his bundle, which the thieves had not bothered to take. As he did so, a tiny china doll fell to the ground. Peter picked it up, and he seemed to hear his little friend Mary say, "Good luck, Peter!" He put the doll in his pocket, where his money had been.

There was only one thing to do — walk to Paris. It would take a long time, no doubt, but he was a good walker. But what should he eat, and where should he sleep?

Then suddenly he remembered the pieces of silver that the doctor's wife had sewed into his vest. He scarcely dared to breathe as he felt the lining. Ah, they were there! The thieves had not found them.

Peter turned toward the river which he saw a short distance away. He did not know much geography, but one thing was clear — that if he walked *up* the river, he should surely be going away from Nantes. For a time at least, his best guide would be the little stream that sparkled so joyously in the warm sun.

In spite of all the hardships that lay before



him, Peter now felt curiously happy. He looked up at the birds flying about and thought, "I am as free as you! Like you I am adventuring! Like you I find the air pure and the river gay!"

He walked along with head held high. For three hours he marched without stopping. Then his courage fell a bit. He was tired and hungry, and the sun was very hot. The little traveler lay down in the shade of a great tree and was soon fast asleep.

When he awoke, it was late, and he was still hungrier. Very, very cautiously he drew one of the silver pieces from the lining of his vest, taking great care that no one saw him — a tardy precaution and an unnecessary one, here in this deserted spot! Then with a needle and thread which he had taken from his poor mother's work-basket, he made a few awkward stitches to sew up the lining again.

"Oh, Mama," he thought, "you shall see! I will do so well that you will be proud of me. I promise to be very brave; I promise not to be afraid!"

He felt comforted, and took up the march again. Soon he came to a village where he

bought some bread. One can live on bread, and fortunately Peter had not been brought up to be fussy. He sat down on a large rock and ate his meager meal. As he ate, he watched some children playing near by.

It was a pretty little village, on the river bank. A little farther on were some beautiful farmhouses, shaded with great trees.

“Ah,” thought Peter, “if I didn’t have an uncle in Paris, I should like to stay always in a village like this, working in the fields, taking care of the animals.”

He continued to watch the other children, and finally he could keep still no longer. He stuffed what was left of the bread into his bundle and dashed into the midst of their game crying, “That’s not the way to play marbles. Look here!”

The others watched him, and as Peter could play marbles very well indeed, all the children wanted to be on his side. The game became more lively. Peter played so hard that he forgot all about his uncle, his journey, his great ambition — he thought only of the marbles. Other children joined the group, and all crowded



· “THAT’S NOT THE WAY TO PLAY MARBLES.  
LOOK HERE!”

about this newcomer who played so well. Peter was very happy. He was proud of his skill.

But soon it was supper time. Mothers appeared at the doorways of the houses and called, “Hallo! Aren’t you hungry? Come to your supper while it is hot.”

Peter remembered that there was no one to call him, and sadly he picked up his bundle. He would walk a little farther before dark and look for a friendly barn to sleep in. If he couldn’t find a barn, the grass would have to do. Fortunately the nights are not very cold in June.

The children had gone home, and the village

was quiet. Men were returning from work, tired, and no one paid any attention to the little traveler in the middle of the road. Only one boy had not gone away — the oldest one of the crowd — and he watched Peter curiously.

“Where are you going to eat your supper?” he asked.

“There is no supper for me,” replied Peter. “I have some bread that I shall eat a little later.”

“Where are you going to sleep?”

“Oh, I don't know. I am traveling. I am going to Paris. I was going on the train, but my money was stolen; so now I am walking.”

This seemed very strange to the older boy. He stared at Peter a moment and then turned and vanished as if by magic.

Peter had hoped his new friend would wish him luck, but he grasped his bundle firmly and again set out on his way. He had not gone twenty steps when the other boy reappeared.

“You may eat supper at my house. Mama says you may. She doesn't like tramps, but you aren't a tramp, are you? Come with me.”

Peter soon found himself in the kitchen of a farmhouse. There was a large family at the ta-

ble. The cabbage soup smelled good, and his new friend saw to it that Peter had a large serving.

These good people had him tell his story, and he seemed so honest about it all that they believed him at once — even the farmer's wife, who did not like tramps! The farmer gave him some simple directions about what roads to take. Peter stayed at this farmhouse all night, and the next morning the farmer's wife put some bread and butter in his bundle, so that he would not have to spend his money that day, at least.

Later he remembered the beginning of his trip almost as a pleasant holiday. He became acquainted with the river and was glad when his route took him along its banks. Sometimes he stopped to bathe his feet, which were swollen from the march.

He walked on and on, days and nights, in sunshine and in rain. At the end of a week the weather was very bad, and it was not always easy to find shelter at night. Sometimes he couldn't even find an abandoned shed, and then he had to go to the village inn and pay for lodging.

But he never lost hope. Each morning he set out bravely. He passed through villages, towns, even cities, but he stopped only in the little villages. He was afraid in the cities. People looked at him as though he were a tramp because he was shabby and was traveling on foot. They might arrest him! The poor little fellow, who did not know much about such things, hurried through the city streets and felt safer when he was in the country, especially when he was near the river.

He was always hungry. He did not dare to spend much money; so he bought only a little bread each day. Occasionally a kind woman, the mother of a family, would notice the pale child with the famished eyes and would give him a good meal, but he was not often lucky enough to be seen by kind mothers.

Hunger and fatigue finally blurred his memory. It seemed to him that his life with his poor mother in St. Nazaire was years and years before. He could hardly remember the doctor and his four children, and it was only with great difficulty that he could bring back to his mind the little village where he had played marbles. But

one thing he thought of always: he must get to Paris and make up to his uncle for his father's mistake.

Oh, if he had only been more careful when he was on the boat! If he had just stayed quietly in his corner and had not counted his money! If he had not been so vain and had said nothing about his uncle who was a lawyer and wore a robe! The thieves would not have tricked him. He should now be in Paris, his troubles at an end. He looked at his ragged clothes, at his shoes, which were so worn that his poor bruised feet could be plainly seen. Surely his uncle would be ashamed of such a nephew, if, indeed, he ever reached Paris, and would take him for a beggar.

Finally the day came when Peter had to spend his last penny for some bread. He ate the bread and wondered what would become of him now, but he was so very, very tired that it did not seem to matter much. He had tried hard to follow his mother's last wishes, and if he should die now — well, it would not be his fault. But he trudged along, trembling with weakness.



“HO THERE, MY BOY! YOU CAN’T SLEEP IN MY HAY!  
GET UP!”



The poor child could think of nothing but his desire for rest. He wished that he could lie down and sleep forever. He left the river bank and climbed over a fence into a meadow where there were some haycocks. Suddenly he felt very faint, and the next moment he fell unconscious by one of the stacks of hay, where he lay as if he were dead.

Some men were working in the meadow, which belonged to a well-to-do farmer, but they were not near this spot. The farmer, Mr. Pichon, happened to be walking about looking over his property, however, and he passed this haycock.

“Ho there, my boy! You can’t sleep in my hay! Get up!” he said.

He shook the child, but Peter did not stir. Then the farmer picked him up in his arms. Six months before, he had lost a little son about Peter’s age — his only child — and it seemed to him that he was holding his own Jean again.

Mr. Pichon was known as a stern man who ruled his household with a rod of iron. But no woman could have carried a child more tenderly than he carried this boy whom he did not know

and whom he had intended to drive away, but who reminded him of his own little son.

Mrs. Pichon was standing by some trees near the house. As her husband approached, he cried:

“Oh, Mama! Come here! You have always told me that if I ever disturbed a bird's nest on the farm, I must bring the little birds to you. Well, here is a big bird that has fallen from its nest!”

Mrs. Pichon, astonished, looked at the white-faced little figure and said, “But he is dead — dead, like —”

“Like our Jean, you mean? He looks like Jean, doesn't he? But he is not dead. His heart is beating, but he looks starved.”

They carried him into the house, and the farmer's wife put him into Jean's little bed. She forced some brandy between his teeth.

Soon Peter opened his eyes and breathed a sigh. He was in a bed, and a woman who made him think of his mother was taking care of him. He hoped she would not send him away without giving him a little bread.

“I am so hungry,” he murmured.

His new friend gave him some hot milk to drink. Then he dropped into a deep, calm sleep.

When he awoke, it was morning. At first he did not know where he was or what had happened to him.

But soon the farmer's wife came into the room, and Peter smiled and said, "I almost thought yesterday that you were my mother."

"Well, my child, I am going to be like your mother. Take some of this soup, and then we shall have a talk."

Peter again told his story, and again he was believed.

"And now," he ended, "I don't know how to go to find my uncle."

Mrs. Pichon thought a moment as she looked at the child whose life she and her husband had saved.

"Listen, my dear. My husband likes you, but he is a stern man, and he does not like any one who does not make himself useful. At this season we need helpers about the farm. You are small, but you could help the men. Tell my husband that you want to work, and I am sure he will let you. He will pay you, and when you

have saved a little money, you can buy a railroad ticket to Paris and go to your uncle if you still want to. If you don't, you can stay here, and we'll make a good farmer out of you!"

So Peter, after a day or two of rest, went to work in the fields. He was tired at night, but he ate and slept well and was very happy. He was tempted to stay always with these good people who had rescued him, but he must not forget his task. He must go on to Paris.

## CHAPTER IV

### LITTLE PRINCE CHARMING

THE sound of gay dance music filled the Delsart home. Outside was the cold, dreary November afternoon, but inside, among the masses of flowers, the gray skies and sharp wind were forgotten. Little Maurice Delsart's tenth birthday was being celebrated by a costume party.

The mothers were seated along the wall of the large living room, chatting with one another and watching their children. Each mother thought, of course, that her child was prettier and more beautifully dressed than any other, and each mother wanted to tell all the other mothers about the amusing things her child had said and done. No one listened to what any one else was saying. Each was waiting for the moment when she could speak.

The children were not yet feeling at ease. The boys huddled together on one side of the room; the girls on the other. Mrs. Delsart went here and there, urging the boys to dance.

“You don't seem to be having a good time, boys. What is the matter? Maurice, you must ask one of the little girls to dance.”

“Yes, Mama.”

Maurice shyly walked to the other side of the room and invited a pretty little dark-haired girl to dance. He hoped that she would refuse, but she did not, and the two children waltzed about with gloomy faces.

Maurice was a delicate boy with large blue eyes and golden hair. He was dressed as Prince Charming, in white satin knee-breeches embroidered with silver, a coat of the same material, and a cap trimmed with a long, graceful feather. Over one shoulder he wore a little cloak — white, too, and lined with light blue. But what delighted Maurice most of all was a shining sword which hung at his side — only it kept getting between his legs and bothering him when he danced, and even when he walked.

As Mrs. Delsart continued to urge the other children to dance, her husband appeared in the doorway and looked about a moment.

“Perhaps they are shy because their mothers are watching them,” he said. “They would

probably rather play games than dance. Come, ladies, and have a cup of tea in the dining room, and if in ten minutes you are not deafened by the noise of these young ones — well, I'll give the cat my tongue!"

The mothers were glad to leave their chairs, and the living room was left to the children. Soon the little ones were playing blindman's buff and drop the handkerchief as merrily as though they were dressed in their everyday clothes.

Mr. Delsart, having made every one feel happier, was walking through the long reception hall on his way to the library to enjoy a cigar. He heard the sound of the front door closing, and turned to see what it meant. He distinguished a child's voice and the laughter of some of the servants. He stopped and listened.

"I wish to see Mr. Delsart. I must see him. I have come all the way from St. Nazaire. I tell you he is my uncle."

"Enter the prince," laughed one of the maids.

"He doesn't look much like one," said another.

"What is all this noise?" demanded Mr. Delsart.

The servants were confused. Then one of them approached his master.

“The janitor has let this little ragamuffin in, sir. He pretends —”

The “little ragamuffin” had started to go out, but he turned back. He was very pale, and could scarcely keep back the tears.

“Oh, sir, you will listen to me, won't you? I must see Mr. Delsart. I must! I must! I have been traveling for months. I have come a long way to see him, and now they want to turn me away because I am poor and shabby.”

“Calm yourself, my little man. I am Mr. Delsart. What do you want?”

Peter — for, of course, it was he — was so overcome for a moment that he could not speak. This was his uncle, the lawyer, who lived in this beautiful house and entertained children dressed in gold and silver!

“Well?” said Mr. Delsart with some impatience.

“Sir — I should like to speak to you alone.”

Mr. Delsart hesitated, but Peter's eyes were so imploring that he yielded. Without a word he led the way to the library and sat down at a



huge table covered with papers. Peter stood before him. His heart beat as though it would burst, but he knew that after all he had suffered, this was not a time to weaken.

“My name is Peter Delsart, sir, and I am the son of your brother, Maurice Delsart.”

At this unexpected statement Mr. Delsart half rose from his chair; then, sinking back, he looked sharply at the child.

“How can you prove that you are my brother’s son?”

Peter had not thought of proof. He said steadily, “I tell you so, sir, and I have never told a lie.”

His manner was so proud that the lawyer could not keep back a smile, and he said more kindly:

“I don’t want to frighten you, my child, but I am a member of a profession which demands proof. I had a brother, it is true, but I haven’t heard from him for fifteen years.”

“Ah, sir, I have just learned why my father was always so sad. Mama didn’t want to tell me, but she asked the doctor, just before she died, to tell me all about it. I know you had rea-

son to blame him, but I think that if you could have seen him, so sad, always trying to find some way of earning your forgiveness and never finding any, working hard and getting nowhere — I really think, uncle, that you would have forgiven him. My poor father's only wish was to make up for his mistake. I am not very big yet, but I am sure that the day will come when I can pay you back my father's debt. Mama charged me with that task. I came from St. Nazaire to tell you. My money was stolen at Nantes; then I traveled on foot. I walked for many weeks with nothing but bread to eat. When I had no more bread, I nearly died. Some kind people rescued me and took care of me. I earned enough from them to make the rest of the trip on the train. This morning I found out where you lived, and here I am. Do you believe me now, uncle?"

"Yes, my brave Peter, I believe you. I believe you without proof! So my poor brother is dead, and he gave you my name. Ah, my little nephew, I forgave your father a long time ago. For years I have tried in vain to find some trace of him."

And Mr. Delsart took Peter in his arms. Just

at that moment Mrs. Delsart opened the door and stood looking at the scene, hardly believing her eyes.

“What are you doing here? We have been looking everywhere for you, and here you are with a little street urchin!”

Mr. Delsart held Peter’s hand tightly in his and said firmly:

“This ‘street urchin,’ my dear, is my brother’s son. He is named for me, and I have promised him that he shall be our second son.”

“You are crazy!”

“Let us leave the question of whether I am crazy or not until later, if you please. If you do not want my nephew to remain here, I shall provide for him elsewhere. But one thing I want you to promise — that you will not say anything to our son against his cousin. I think I can find some clothes of Maurice’s that will fit Peter. Anyway I can try. Miss Nancy must be in Maurice’s room.”

Mrs. Delsart bit her lips and said nothing more. Peter was sorry to have caused any trouble, and he quietly followed his uncle upstairs.

Miss Nancy, Maurice’s governess, was sitting

at the window reading a book. She rose as Mr. Delsart entered the room. Mr. Delsart explained the situation in a few words, and Miss Nancy quickly found what he wanted.

Maurice's clothes were just right for Peter. Miss Nancy had him bathe; then she helped him to dress. Peter did not know himself when he looked into the mirror. Gone was the ragged little vagabond, and in his place stood a beautiful boy with big black eyes and curly hair, dressed in a soft, blue woolen sailor suit.

Mr. Delsart, smiling at the change that had taken place, cried gaily, "Now let's see if the servants will send you away."

Solemnly they walked through the hall, where the servants bowed respectfully as they passed. Mr. Delsart took Peter into the midst of the group of children, who had begun to dance.

"I have brought you a new playmate, my little friends," he called. "Come here, Maurice. You have often wanted a brother or a sister. Well, here is a big brother, whom you will love, I am sure. He is your cousin, Peter Delsart."

All the children stopped dancing at once and looked curiously at the newcomer. Peter was



MAURICE CAME AT HIS FATHER'S BIDDING.

dazzled by the lights, the bright-colored costumes embroidered with gold and silver, the pink-and-white, golden-haired children. It seemed to him that he was entering Fairyland, and he was frightened. He clung to his uncle's hand.

Maurice came at his father's bidding. He was very much astonished. He had often wished for a brother, a playmate, and here he was! It was too bad that he was not a little smaller, but he would do very well. Maurice was an affectionate child, and after looking at Peter seriously for a moment, he threw his arms about his cousin's neck.

“I am glad that you are going to be my brother!” he said.

Peter would have liked to say something pleasant in return, but he was so touched that he could not speak. He hugged Maurice hard.

“There! Now you know each other,” said Mr. Delsart. “Shall we have a big game of sheep and wolf?”

“Yes, yes!” shouted the children, who liked noisy games better than dances.

In a twinkling the circle was formed. Peter was the wolf, and Maurice the sheep.

Soon Peter was playing happily. He was no longer afraid. Here, as in the village where he had played marbles, the other children gathered about him. He had some quality that commanded attention from children and grown-ups as well.

Then came the birthday feast. The smaller children sat at little tables, the older ones stood, and all did justice to the good things that were served.

Peter was by this time friendly with all the children. He was proud and held his head very high.

But as he passed a group of ladies who were chatting with Mrs. Delsart, he heard the words, "Oh, he is a little orphan that my husband rescued."

At once his pride fell. He hung his head, and tears glistened in his eyes. He was a sensible child, however, and he realized that his uncle's wife had no reason for caring for him. But he made a firm vow that he would some day earn the love of his aunt, too. It would be hard, but if he failed it would not be his fault.

## CHAPTER V

### A NEW LIFE

ABOUT two weeks after Maurice's birthday party Peter wrote to the doctor at St. Nazaire. His uncle had already written him about Peter's safe arrival, and now Peter must reply to the note that had been received in return.

Peter did not find this task an easy one. He did not write so well as Maurice, who was ten months younger than he.

Maurice was given lessons by a young tutor who came to the house every day. The tutor was very glad to have Peter for a pupil, too. Peter knew that he was behind Maurice in his studies, and he tried hard to learn, while Maurice was glad to go slowly for a few months until Peter caught up with him.

But just now Peter was not thinking about his lessons; he was worrying about writing his letter. He was all alone in the big room which he shared with his cousin as a study and a bedroom.



Children easily get used to new surroundings, especially if they are pleasant, but sometimes Peter wondered if he was dreaming a wonderful dream from which he should suddenly awake to find himself in rags, lost in the great world. His eyes traveled to the long windows that opened upon a terrace where they could play in summer, but which was now covered with snow.

Then he looked steadily at the white paper before him. It was two o'clock, and Maurice had gone out with his mother. He would return at three for a lesson. The letter must be finished in an hour so that they could work on their lessons together.

Peter did not know how to write a fine letter, but he did his best, and this is what he wrote:

Dear Doctor,

I do not know how to write letters. This is the first one I have ever written, and I know you will laugh at it. But at least I should like to say that I thank you for all that you did for me. I often think of the evening when I ate dinner at your house and Mrs. Dubois sewed the silver pieces into my vest. Those pieces certainly saved my life!

Every one here is very good to me. My uncle is not at home very often. I was surprised to find that he does not wear a robe. It seems that he wears one only in court. I should like to see him there! One day I saw his name in a newspaper, and I was very proud.

I live with Maurice all the time. We like each other very much. I tell him all about St. Nazaire and what I did there, and how I looked after the stock at the Pichon farm and helped the men in the fields. He thinks that is all very funny, but if he had been there he would not have thought it so funny. He was never hungry, and never wore a jacket without a penny in it!

His mother doesn't like to have me tell him about those things, but when we are together we have to talk about something, and I don't know how to make up stories. Maurice makes them up often, and they are so funny! Maurice's mother does not like me, but I suppose that is natural. I am afraid of her. She always wears beautiful clothes.

Last night we were allowed to see her before she went out to a dinner party. Ah! It must be fun to be a lady and have such pretty things.

Maurice and I held each other's hand and walked about her to see her dress better. My uncle was waiting with his hat in his hand. He acted tired. Perhaps he doesn't like dinners and balls.

"Ah! You are so beautiful, aunt!" I said.

And she said, "My, he is not so stupid after all."

Then my uncle said, "Come; we shall be late."

My aunt answered, "I will come when I get ready!" And she didn't hurry at all.

Finally they went out, and I heard one of the maids say, "Any one can see that she has a great fortune."

What do you suppose she meant?

Well, I have covered two pages, and still I have not written a letter. I have said nothing but nonsense. When our tutor has taught me about letters, I will write you a good one. Until then at least you will know that I remember you and Mrs. Dubois and the children.

Peter Delsart

If you ever go to the old house, please tell Mary that I have her little doll. Maurice and I made a pretty little bed for it from a nut shell. Miss Nancy, Maurice's governess, showed us how to make it.

Peter may not have known how to write letters, but he had told the doctor just how he lived in his uncle's home. He and Maurice were always together. Maurice would not know now how to get along without his cousin. They had games of all sorts between their lessons, and when the sun shone they played outdoors on the terrace.

But the happiest times were when Mr. Delsart found a chance to spend an hour with them. Then books were thrown aside, games were forgotten, Maurice climbed up on his father's knees, and Peter stood near.

How they talked! Mr. Delsart knew how to talk with children — something that many grown-ups do not know how to do. Sometimes he scolded, but gently, for he knew that little boys cannot be perfect.

One day the young tutor complained that Maurice was not attending to his lessons properly, and Mr. Delsart said to his little son very seriously:

“You are only a little boy now, Maurice, but what you do now you will probably do later. I am very much ashamed to find that my son is not doing me credit.”

“I don’t like this kind of conversation,” said the little lad, making such a funny face that his father had to smile.

“I don’t doubt that you would prefer a different kind, but I must tell you when you hurt me.”

“I won’t do it any more, Father dear. I will do my lessons as well as Peter does his. There! Are you happy again? Come; let’s play soldiers, and you can tell me about Napoleon’s battles.”

“Play! Play! That’s all you think of. When I was your age —”

“All grown-ups say that — ‘when I was your age!’ Perhaps they can’t remember what they did when they were little. But I promise, Father, that I will do better! Peter has to catch up with me though, and I must wait for him.”

“He will catch up with you. He will pass you. You may be sure of that!”

Mr. Delsart was silent for some time — he could not tell the children what he was thinking of. His son Maurice reminded him of another Maurice, Peter’s father, who, like his little namesake, had been a charming, lovable child, but

who had been too fond of pleasure. Thoughtfully Mr. Delsart stroked Peter's head. Peter looked at him, surprised, trying to understand what made his uncle so sad. But Mr. Delsart said only:

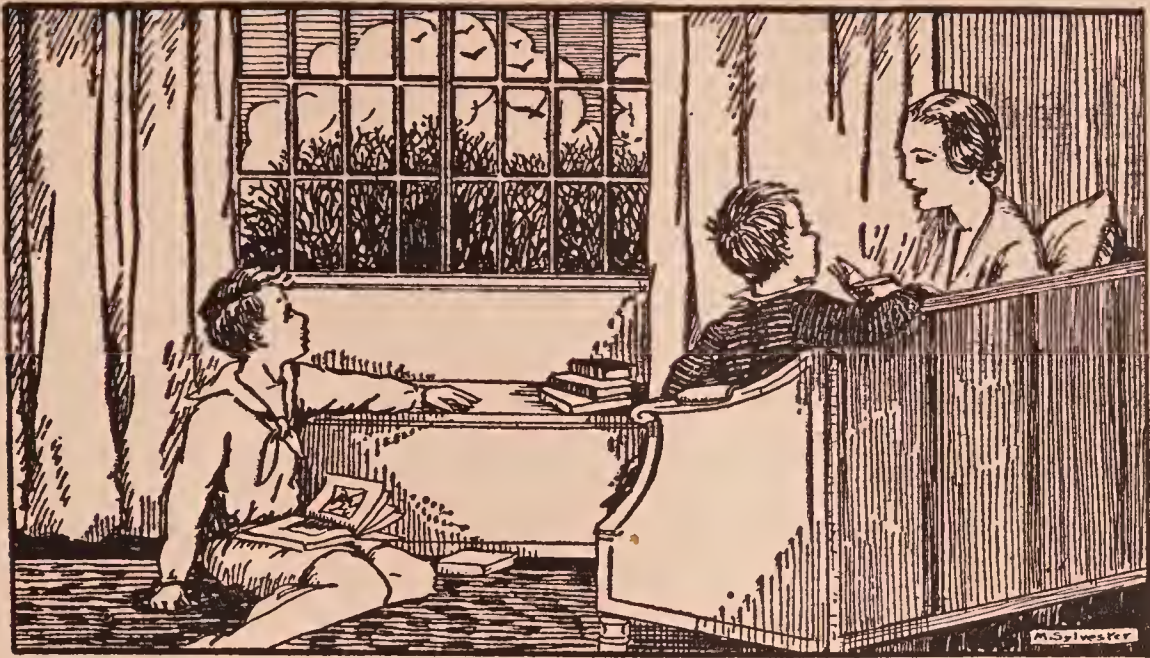
“Love Maurice, my child. Love him more than yourself.”

Much later Peter was to recall these words, which he did not now understand.

His uncle did not give him time to ask for an explanation. He arranged the lead soldiers and put them through drills which delighted the two boys. They both thought it a pity that Mr. Delsart had to spend so much time at court.

The days that Mr. Delsart did not play with them were all alike: lessons with the tutor in the morning, a walk after lunch with Miss Nancy, more lessons, then dinner, for which they had to dress again.

Usually Mr. Delsart worked in the library after dinner; and Mrs. Delsart, if she was not going out, read, or played games with Maurice, while Peter tried to amuse himself by looking at pictures. Peter disliked these evenings very much. His aunt never played with him.



PETER DISLIKED THESE EVENINGS VERY MUCH. HIS AUNT  
NEVER PLAYED WITH HIM

He told himself that it was natural that she should not care for him, but he suffered just the same. Of course, he never thought of complaining. What could he complain of? But he often promised himself that when he grew up he would earn a great deal of money and pay back to his aunt all that he had cost her. This thought made him very serious — too serious for a child.

One evening these thoughts tormented Peter while Maurice was chattering to his mother and telling her the little things he had done during the day. Peter's name came very often to Maurice's lips, and finally his mother pushed him from her lap.

“How irritating you are with your ‘Peter this,’ ‘Peter that!’ Are you such a baby that you have to be led about by some one else all the time?”

Mrs. Delsart was sorry the moment after she had spoken, but it was too late. Peter looked at his aunt pathetically, and two large tears fell upon the picture he was looking at. He was ashamed, and with his handkerchief he carefully wiped the page. He thought that his aunt would scold, but she did not. Then Peter said very gently:

“Do you want me to go away? Mrs. Pichon said that perhaps you would not like me, that I might be in the way here, and she told me that I might always go back to the farm. Even in the winter there is plenty of work to be done there. Shall I go away? Later, when I am grown up, I will try to earn enough money to pay you back all that you have spent on me.”

Peter said this quietly, as though he was not surprised that they did not like him. But Maurice looked at him in astonishment; then he rushed upon him and threw his arms about Peter's neck.



“I don’t want you to go away. What should I do without you? I shall go with you if you go to the Pichon farm.”

Maurice shook with sobs, and it was only when his mother promised that Peter should not go away that he could be quieted. Then Mrs. Delsart turned to Peter and said:

“I like children who act like children and do not talk about earning money and paying debts. It is true that it annoys me to hear ‘Peter,’ ‘Peter,’ all the time, but that does not mean that I do not want you here. I am glad to have you stay with Maurice because he would be lonely without some one to play with. If you want me to love you, try to earn my love.”

“I will try, aunt.”

Peter spoke with such feeling, such a desire to be loved as Maurice was loved, that Mrs. Delsart was touched. She hesitated a moment; then she laughed.

“Well, well!” she cried. “Come to my arms. Who knows but that some day I shall think of you as Maurice’s brother? There, there, it’s all right! Run along to bed, both of you!”

## CHAPTER VI

### VACATION PLANS

TOWARD spring little Maurice was sick. There was nothing seriously wrong with his health, but he had a slight fever and felt very weak and tired. He was not able to study, and he lay in bed or sat in a large armchair all day. He wanted Peter near him always.

“Have your lessons here where I can watch you, Peter,” he said. “You will have a good chance to catch up with me now. But don’t learn too fast, or I shall have to catch up with you when I am better.”

Mrs. Delsart never went out now. She stayed with Maurice all day. The two children chatted constantly, and Mrs. Delsart listened to them. She could not tell stories very well, but Peter could talk endlessly about things he had seen.

Maurice liked best of all to listen to stories of the Pichon farm. He never tired of hearing about the great kitchen, the large pine dining table, and about Mrs. Pichon, who made cab-

bage soup which smelled so good. Then there were stories about the animals: the herds of cows and oxen; the little calves which followed their mothers about on long, gawky legs; the gentle, white lambs. And Peter would tell about the work in the fields in the warm sun or under the bright stars. All this amused Maurice more than his story books.

Mrs. Delsart liked Peter a little better now. She knew that without him Maurice would be very lonely.

"I think it is fun to be just a little ill," said Maurice one day, looking at his companions.

"I suppose you do, little loafer," said his father fondly. "No lessons, no duties!"

"Yes," said Maurice, "it is pleasant not to have lessons for a while, but when I am better I will do them well, I promise you. But it is good to have you all sitting here, and not downstairs. I like to have Peter tell me about the farm. What a pity that you are a lawyer, Father! If we only had a big farm, with pigs and cows and chickens!"

"No, thank you," laughed his mother. "I should not like to be a farmer's wife!"

“Oh, well, of course we can't have one,” sighed Maurice. “No such luck.”

Mr. Delsart thought for a moment, stroking his son's thin white hands. Then he said:

“If you will eat everything that is brought to you and take all your medicine, perhaps we can show you a real farm. What do you say to my writing to Farmer Pichon and asking him to let you two boys visit him for the Easter holidays?”

“Oh, will you do that, Father?”

“No, no!” cried Mrs. Delsart. “You can't put a delicate child who is just getting over an illness on a farm. Think what you are saying!”

“I am thinking, my dear. I have talked it all over with the doctor. Of course, the weather is too severe now for Maurice to go to the farm, but in a month, at Easter time, if he will try to eat and get a little more strength —”

“Mama,” cried Maurice with shining eyes, “I think I am hungry. May I have a boiled egg?”

Mrs. Delsart was happy to think that he would eat. She smiled gently.

“You see,” said her husband. “Sick children sometimes know what will make them better.”

From that moment the boys spoke of nothing but the Easter holidays. Maurice improved little by little. Soon he was up and about, and one day he asked to have a lesson with Peter, saying that he did not want to get behind in his studies.

Mr. Delsart was very much pleased, and he said to Peter, "You see, my little man, how you have helped me."

You may believe that Peter was very happy at these words.

## CHAPTER VII

### AT THE FARM

ONE beautiful April day a gentleman and two little boys got off the train at the railroad station at Amboise. Mr. Delsart had kept his promise. He was taking Maurice and Peter to the Pichon farm to spend their vacation.

Farmer Pichon had had to be coaxed a little before he consented to receive the boys. He had never taken boarders, and his farm was a serious business, where every one worked hard and no one had time to bother with little city lads.

But Peter had written a letter to Mrs. Pichon, who had always had a tender feeling for the starving child whose life she and her husband had saved. Peter promised that neither he nor his cousin would cause them any trouble. He reminded her that he knew all about farm life. He would work and so would Maurice, only Maurice not too hard, for he had been ill and was not yet very strong.

Then Mrs. Pichon had realized that their



THE PICHONS WERE WAITING IN THE YARD TO WELCOME  
THEIR GUESTS

board money would help her to build a larger henhouse. Her husband had considered this, too, for his chickens were well-thought-of in the country. Then perhaps he might make arrangements to send these "city people" poultry, butter, and eggs regularly.

The Pichons were waiting in the yard to welcome their guests as Mr. Delsart and the boys stepped out of their cab.

Mr. Delsart was very well pleased with the appearance of the farm. The house, low and rambling, was separated from the other farm buildings, which could be seen at a distance.

Beautiful great trees shaded it. Chickens walked about the yard; a big dog barked a welcome.

“How you have changed, Peter,” said Mrs. Pichon. “Ah, sir, you should have seen him when my husband and I carried him into the house. He was as white as a sheet. We were afraid that we could not bring him to. How attached we get to a person we have saved!”

“How a person loves those who have saved him!” replied Peter, putting his arm about her neck.

Maurice did not move a step away from Peter. He had never seen a farm before, and he was astonished at the great kitchen, the straw chairs, the herbs hanging from the ceiling, the enormous fireplace with a big kettle hanging over the fire. But he soon got used to his surroundings, and when Mrs. Pichon brought them bowls of creamy milk and huge slices of dark bread he thought it the best meal he had eaten for a long time.

Mr. Delsart looked thoughtfully at his little son, who was still silent.

“You know, Maurice, if you do not like the country so well as you expected to, you may



come home right away. I want you to be well and happy more than anything else in the world. Are you afraid to stay?"

"No, Father. Peter is here. We shall have a good time. Only — only I shall have to get used to it."

Mr. Delsart turned to Peter. "You seem much older, Peter, than Maurice — I suppose because you have had to think for yourself. Try to be a 'little man' again. I entrust Maurice to your care. Remember that he is not so strong as you are. Do not let him get tired, and if he is not happy here, write to me at once. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Uncle Peter. But we shall have a good time, I am sure."

An hour later Mr. Delsart, having looked over the rest of the farm, left them to their country life.

The weather was fine during the whole vacation. There were only a few showers, and showers are nothing in the life of country people.

By the second day Maurice had lost his timidity, and walked along fearlessly in the midst of a herd of cows. It seemed that the days did not

begin early enough for him to do all that he wanted to do.

The boys caused the Pichons no trouble. They played by themselves, and Peter, who had taken his uncle's words to heart, watched carefully over Maurice.

They could not help very much in the kind of work that the men were doing at this season of the year; so they romped about the farm. They were much interested in all the animals. There were flocks of downy yellow chickens. One hen had hatched some duck eggs, and the little ducklings persisted in going into the water, much to the terror of their foster mother.

Every morning they gathered the newly laid eggs, which Mrs. Pichon sent to the Paris markets. Then they had a little kitchen garden to care for, and no one else must touch it. They dug, planted, and weeded in great hope. They spent long hours in the warm spring sunshine and fresh, pure air, and every day they gained in weight. No one would have believed that Maurice had been sick. He had never been so happy, and he declared, to the great satisfaction of the farmer and his wife, that he did not under-

stand how any one would choose to live in the city if he could live on such a beautiful farm.

But vacations do not last forever, and the time to go home came all too soon. Mr. Delsart was too busy to come for them; so Mrs. Delsart arrived at the farm early one fine morning. She looked at her son and was much pleased to see his bright eyes and firm, rosy cheeks. With tears of happiness in her eyes she turned to Mrs. Pichon.

“Oh, I am so glad to meet you!” she said. “Maurice is the picture of health. If you had seen him two months ago! We were afraid we were going to lose him.”

“I know how you must have felt, Madam,” replied Mrs. Pichon, thinking of her own little son, who had died. “And Peter,” she added. “Doesn’t he look well?”

“Oh, yes. But Peter has not been ill.”

Mrs. Delsart remembered that she had not yet spoken to Peter, and she kissed his forehead.

Then they visited the farm, and Mrs. Delsart arranged to have some butter and eggs sent to her each week.

Finally they must say good-by. Mrs. Pichon

felt very bad, for she had grown to love the two children. Just before they stepped into the cab which was to take them to the railroad station, she took Peter aside and said:

“You know, Peter, if you are not happy with this great lady, come back to me. You seem to belong to me, almost. She puts on airs, this fine lady from Paris! She is not like your uncle. He is not so proud. Well, remember, my child.”

“Thank you, Mama Pichon. I shall remember. But perhaps my aunt will love me some day. We shall see!”

And the little man climbed into the cab and sat beside his aunt. He and Maurice waved their handkerchiefs as long as they could see Mrs. Pichon standing in the yard. It had been the happiest vacation that either of the boys had ever spent.

## CHAPTER VIII

### AT THE SEASHORE

PETER and Maurice found it hard to get back to their usual way of living — their regular lessons, their walks with Miss Nancy. Peter was as restless as Maurice. He felt, more than Maurice, perhaps, the need of freedom, of fresh air, of being his own master. The young tutor found his pupils very inattentive.

Mr. Delsart called Peter to account for this conduct, for he had always before found his nephew well-behaved. But Peter, after all, was only eleven years old, and little boys sometimes have naughty spells. So, instead of taking his uncle's scolding in good part, he said to himself:

“My uncle thinks he has bought my good behavior. He thinks I have no right to be idle or inattentive. He pays me to be a model to Maurice.”

But when he saw that Maurice was following his example — was not working, and wanted to play all the time — he realized that he must

change. One day he caught a curious, half-mocking, half-triumphant glance on Mrs. Delsart's face, and heard her say to her husband, "Well, he doesn't seem to be doing very well — your little hero!"

Mr. Delsart did not reply, but looked at Peter so sadly that Peter wanted to hurl himself into his uncle's arms and promise to do better. His pride held him back; but he resolved to change, and he did his best to stop thinking about the Pichon farm.

Maurice had a closet full of playthings that his parents and their friends had given him. There was everything from lead soldiers to mechanical trains and steamboats — those expensive, complicated toys that often amuse the grown-ups who give them as much as the little ones who receive them.

But what Maurice liked best — much to his mother's astonishment — was the rounded lid of an old trunk. He made a sail by attaching a piece of cloth to a broomstick. Into the trunk lid he put two little stools and the sail, and he had a fine ship.

The children would set sail solemnly, taking



MAURICE WOULD INVENT GREAT ADVENTURES —  
ONCE THEY MET A WHALE!

for provisions what was left of their lunch. The rocking of the curved lid seemed like the rocking of a boat on the waves of a strange ocean. Maurice would invent great adventures — once they met a whale who upset them with a flick of his enormous tail! Sometimes they landed on desert islands covered with tropical flowers, and birds with gorgeous plumage. Sometimes they explored savage countries and acted with great bravery. Their enemies would fall about them like lead soldiers. They freed enchanted princesses imprisoned in ivory towers a hundred feet high, and in triumph entered capital cities built of gold, silver, and precious stones. The inhabitants, clothed in purple, proclaimed them kings, and they proudly took possession of their new throne — just at the moment that the familiar voice of Miss Nancy would call them from their heights to recite a lesson or to change their jackets for dinner.

Peter could never make up stories himself, but he listened wide-eyed to his cousin, whose imagination had no limit.

“How can you do it?” Peter would ask.

“Oh, I don't know. It just comes to me.”



“But,” insisted Peter, “our trunk lid doesn’t go an inch, and still we cross oceans — oceans that are not on the map, too!”

“What does that matter? We see them, don’t we? We see our islands, our cities of gold. We smell the flowers more than we smell Mother’s roses.”

“Do you believe — ?”

Peter was not convinced that *he* saw all these things and smelled the fragrance of make-believe flowers.

The weather became very warm. Mrs. Delsart had no dinners or parties. July was near, and the city seemed stifling. The doctor wanted Maurice to go to the seashore; so the Paris house was closed and the Delsarts moved to a hotel at the beach.

Miss Nancy had left the Delsart home to be married and live in London, but fortunately the children needed little care at the shore. They amused themselves all day running barefooted in the sand and came back to the hotel only for meals. Peter and Maurice were very proud of being trusted, and readily promised all that was asked of them.

Life at the seashore was quite different from life in the farm, but it was very pleasant. At the bathing hour all was noise and confusion. There were shouts and cries. Groups ran into the water hand in hand, splashing and laughing.

It was very amusing to see the men in bathing suits rowing little boats which danced on the waves. These little boats sometimes tipped over, throwing their occupants into the water. But no one minded. They would right the boats and climb in again, and the sun soon dried their bathing suits.

After the bathing and lunch, the children were free to do as they pleased. Sometimes they sat in the shade and read a thrilling book; sometimes they played on the beach with other children who were staying at the same hotel. Peter was the oldest, and he was usually the leader. He would direct the building of great sand cities which were, alas, only too soon destroyed by the waves.

One day it was very hot, and Peter and Maurice each took a book and went to look for a shady place.

On each side of the beach, cliffs jutted out

into the sea. On the tops of the cliffs there were great rocks which furnished beautiful, thick shade; down below there were little coves covered with golden sand.

Peter found a satisfactory spot, but Maurice wanted to go farther.

“Come, Peter,” he cried. “I see a little cove. It is like a room in a fairy palace with a carpet of powdered gold. It must be cool down there.”

“No, no. You know we must not go into those places — we couldn’t get out after the tide came in a little. No, stay here. This is all right.”

Peter had chosen a shady spot. He lay flat on his stomach, his hands thrust into his curly hair, his book open before him; and he became immediately absorbed in the wonderful story of *Sinbad the Sailor*, which he was reading for the first time.

Maurice’s book was not so interesting. At first he threw himself down beside Peter to read, too, but he was not comfortable. He wanted to talk, but Peter was so interested in his story that he paid little attention to his cousin. Maurice thought of going back to the hotel for a different book; then he decided to go

to look at the little cove which was like a fairy room. He would not climb down to it, but he could at least look at it.

He rose, glanced at his cousin, who was more absorbed than ever; then he started to walk along the cliff.

Peter was reading of the time when Sinbad and his companions, after the shipwreck, landed on a little black island, or what they thought was an island. They made a fire and quickly found that they were on a huge whale, which plunged and hurled the unfortunate sailors into the sea. At this unexpected turn of affairs Peter laughed aloud.

It seemed that something answered his laugh, something like a cry of terror. Peter leaped to his feet; it had sounded like Maurice's voice. He looked about him. Maurice had disappeared.

Then his senses cleared like lightning. He knew what that cry meant and where it came from. He raced along the top of the cliff.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE ACCIDENT

PETER looked anxiously over the edge of the cliff. There on the sand below lay the little figure, white and motionless. Peter called him, but there was no reply. Was he dead?

No one answered Peter's cries. To get help he would have to go back to the hotel. It was not likely that there would be any one on the cliffs on such a hot day.

The tide was coming in. Peter had often watched it creep up the beach, wave after wave. Now he noticed with terror that the last wave had reached almost to Maurice's feet. In ten minutes the little cove would be filled with water, and the child would be picked up by the great waves and carried out into the sea. Peter knew that it would take longer than ten minutes to go to the hotel and back. No, it was not to be thought of.

Having decided what to do, Peter did not hesitate a moment. There was only one chance of

saving his cousin — he must go down after him and carry him beyond reach of the water.

He began to climb down. He must be careful. It wouldn't do to tremble or to lose his footing. He tried to think of nothing but the best place to find a foothold. Along the upper part of the cliff there were jagged places for one's feet, but soon the descent became much more difficult. The pieces of rock that stuck out were farther and farther apart. It was almost like trying to climb down the wall of a house. Peter clung so hard with his hands that they began to bleed.

But he thought only of reaching Maurice. Once he happened to look down below him, and he got very dizzy. He fixed his eyes firmly on the rock before him and rested a moment to master his feelings.

Then he crept down slowly but surely. It seemed to be a little easier now. He found a little platform of rock where he could put both his feet at once, and he stopped and looked down to see how much farther he had to go. His heart almost stood still. He was a considerable distance above the ground, and from this point

down there was not a single place where he could put his foot. How could he reach Maurice?

He looked at his cousin and cried out in horror. Already the water was licking Maurice's feet. Peter judged the distance which separated him from the little beach. There was only one thing to do. He jumped into space and landed on the sand with a thud, stunned, but safe and sound. Quickly he picked himself up and ran to Maurice.

To take the little lad in his arms, carry him away from the water, and place him tenderly on dry sand was the work of a few seconds. Peter saw that in falling Maurice had broken his left arm, but that he was alive — his heart was beating, and he was breathing faintly.

But what were they to do now? Peter ran along the little space still left by the tide, trying to think of some way of getting help. He remembered their make-believe adventures in the old trunk lid, when they had played that they were shipwrecked sailors and had waved their handkerchiefs for help.

He saw that at the end of the cliff there was a fringe of rocks that jutted half out of the water.

If he could crawl out on those rocks he could be seen from the open sea, where there might be a boat or two. It was not easy to creep out on the slippery rocks, and more than once Peter fell and scraped his knees and hands. But at last he reached the end of the little rocky wall and standing up tall, he waved his handkerchief and shouted with all his might.

No one came, and no one came. Peter kept on waving and shouting. What if Maurice should die before some one rescued them!

Finally Peter saw a boat. The two persons in it had seen him and soon were rowing up beside the rock where he stood.

“What is the matter, my child?” asked a man’s voice.

“Oh, sir, come quickly! Maurice! He is dead! He fell from the top of the cliff!”

Peter grew faint.

“Let me take him,” said a woman’s voice gently.

The lady took Peter in her arms and wrapped him in an old coat that was in the boat. Then her husband rowed to the spot where Maurice was lying. He leaped to the sand and gently



picked up the injured child, who began to moan a little.

“How did this happen?” asked the young man.

“Oh, sir,” replied Peter, “I was reading in the shade up there, and suddenly I heard a cry. Maurice had left me. He had wanted to come down into the cove, but I had refused. I knew at once what had happened. I looked down and saw him here. There wasn’t time to go back to the hotel; so I climbed down.”

“Climbed down? How?”

“Oh, over there,” said Peter. “It is not so hard as it looks.”

The young man placed Maurice gently on some cushions in the bottom of the boat and rowed back to the hotel landing.

A crowd of people had gathered on the veranda. Mrs. Delsart, worried because the children had not returned, was about to set out to look for them when she saw them coming. Maurice seemed lifeless in the arms of the young man. “He is dead!” He is dead!” screamed Mrs. Delsart.

“Not at all, madam. See! He is coming to.

But he is in pain, for he has broken his arm."

The young man did his best to calm the terrified mother. He put the child on a bed and asked where Mr. Delsart was. He arranged everything. A telegram was sent to Mr. Delsart so that he could take a train from Paris at once. A doctor was called. Then the young couple went away, after hugging Peter, whom no one else had noticed at all.

Peter looked at his cousin, who was trembling and moaning. Suddenly Mrs. Delsart remembered Peter. She turned on him furiously.

"Go away from me! You are to blame for this. You led him into danger. It is your fault that he is injured. If he dies I shall blame you. Ever since you came there has been trouble. Ever since you entered the house, Maurice has not cared so much for me. He has thought only of playing with you. You have taken my place. I hate you! Go away from me!"

Peter stared at her in terror. He could not find voice to say, "I saved him." He could only follow, with frightened eyes, the movements of this woman who seemed to hate him so much.

He went away, crushed with a sense of unfairness against which he did not know how to defend himself.

Maurice's bed had been carried into his mother's room. Peter took refuge in the next room, which he had shared with his cousin. He sat forlornly in a corner, too unhappy to care what became of him. He had not deserved his aunt's anger. He had done his best.

Through the thin wall he could hear steps in the next room. The doctor must be there, and he must be hurting Maurice, for the poor child was moaning. The sound made Peter cry.

He had a headache, and he was terribly unhappy. The more he thought of his aunt's unfairness the more he suffered. It was not that he praised himself for saving Maurice — that was only natural — but he loved Maurice as a brother, and to be sent away from the room where he lay suffering was almost more than he could bear. He was angry with himself for not saying something to Mrs. Delsart, for being so afraid of her. Then he tried to understand why Maurice's mother was so cruel to him: she saw

her son injured, perhaps dying, and she imagined that it was Peter's fault, he supposed.

Thinking of these things, the poor child nodded; still sitting in his chair, he leaned his head against the wall and dozed. No one thought of him. He remained alone through the long, gloomy hours.

When he awoke, it was very dark. Again he heard a noise in the next room — he thought that he recognized his uncle's voice. He stood up, very painfully, for he felt ill all over. His head throbbed; his arms and legs ached. Each movement was torture.

Gently he opened the door. A ray of light shone into the corridor, and he knew that the door into Maurice's room was open. He crept quietly along the wall and drew back into the shadows when his aunt came out crying. Then he ventured a little nearer and looked in.

His uncle was standing at Maurice's bed. In a corner a nurse and the doctor were preparing bandages and other things. Peter started with joy when he heard Maurice cry, "I want Peter. I want Peter."

"Here I am."

Peter walked softly to the side of the bed and took Maurice's hand.

"Put this child out," said the great surgeon from Paris. "I have sent the mother away, and now they have let him in."

"Go away, Peter," said Mr. Delsart. "You mustn't stay here."

Tears came to Peter's eyes.

"I don't want him to go away. I want him to stay," cried the little patient.

"Sir, I promise to be very quiet. I will not say a word. I'll only hold his hand and give him courage."

The surgeon looked at Peter and in a different tone said, "You may stay, my boy."

All the time that they were setting the poor broken arm, Peter did not flinch. He held Maurice's hand. Once Maurice screamed at the pain, and Peter felt himself getting very weak.

"He is going to faint," said the surgeon, who had finished his task.

"No, sir, no. Maurice needs me."

"It's all over, my little man. Your brother will not suffer any more."

The surgeon took them for brothers. Peter was pleased.

“Mrs. Delsart may come in, now.”

When Peter heard these words, he kissed his cousin, who no longer needed him, and quietly left the room, just in time to avoid meeting his aunt.

It must be that his uncle, too, thought him to blame for the accident. But Peter did not have the strength to worry about what they thought of him. He could hardly drag himself along. He was hot and cold by turns. Chills ran over his body. Never before had he felt so strange.

He was alone, quite alone in the world. The image of his mother came clearly to his troubled mind — his mother whom he sometimes forgot, he thought with shame, in the midst of his new surroundings. But now all the other pictures faded while she became clearer and clearer. He forgot his uncle and his aunt and her cruel words. He even forgot Maurice.

He threw himself on his bed, but he could not rest. The pillow and the covers seemed to burn him. He tossed and turned, and repeated over and over again,

“Mama, Mama — my dear, dear Mama!”

## CHAPTER X

### BROTHERS

EARLY the next morning the young woman who had helped to save the two boys knocked at the Delsarts' door and inquired for Maurice.

"Come in," said Mr. Delsart happily, "and see for yourself that he is resting comfortably. I don't know how we can ever thank you enough for what you did — you and your husband."

"Oh, we did very little. It is not to my husband and me that you owe thanks."

"To whom, then?" asked Mr. Delsart.

"Why, to his cousin, to little Peter!"

"How is that?" demanded Mr. Delsart. "I understood that Peter was the cause — without meaning to be, of course — of this terrible accident."

"He has not told you then?"

"No," said Mr. Delsart uneasily, recalling his gruffness of the night before.

Then the young woman told the whole story, and in conclusion she said, "Where is he now? I should like to talk with him."

“The fact is that in all the confusion we have not noticed him,” replied Mr. Delsart. “He held Maurice’s hand while his cousin’s arm was being set. Then he disappeared.”

“Well, Peter is old enough to put himself to bed,” said Mrs. Delsart.

Mr. Delsart had hurried into the next room, and at his startled exclamation the two women ran after him.

Poor Peter, still dressed in his wet clothes, was lying across his bed. His head turned feverishly from side to side. He did not recognize his uncle or his aunt. He moaned again and again, “Mama, my little Mama.”

When the doctor came, he said that Peter was a very sick boy.

In the days that followed, Mrs. Delsart did not leave Peter’s bedside. She was quite changed. Peter’s own mother could not have been more devoted.

Sometimes Peter’s mind would clear for a moment. He felt his aunt’s presence; he followed her movements with his eyes, usually not recognizing her, but happy to feel a cool, gentle hand on his hot brow. Once he called her “Mama!”



“Yes, I promise, I will be your mother always. You shall see!”

Mr. Delsart had forgotten all about his Paris business. He thought only of the two boys.

There came a day when Peter was so ill that the doctor feared that he might not get better. Maurice, who had slipped into the room, heard what was said. He threw himself at the side of the bed and sobbed:

“Don’t die, Peter. Stay with me. What should I do without you? Peter, answer me.”

Peter seemed to listen, as though he heard a familiar voice from a great distance, and he stopped tossing. With a burning hand, he touched Maurice’s neck.

Peter did not die, but his illness lasted a long time. His moments of reason became more frequent, but his head was not yet quite clear — the affairs of his real life and the horrible things which had been haunting his poor brain were strangely mixed.

Once Mr. Delsart heard him say something about a debt that he ought to pay. He seemed to be talking with his mother, saying that he was doing his best but that it was very hard.

“My poor Peter, don't worry,” said his uncle, soothingly, “We are quits.”

The word “quits” reached the child's understanding. A radiant smile lighted up his face, so thin now that it seemed hardly larger than that of a baby. He was quite content; he kept repeating, “Quits, quits. We are quits. Mama, we are quits. Do you hear, Mama? We are quits, quits.”

When it was known at the hotel that the little boy who had saved his cousin at the risk of his own life, was going to get better, there was great joy. He belonged to them all, and the children, in whose games he had been leader, brought him their playthings, and flowers that they had gathered in the fields. He was surprised by so much attention. The young couple whose boat had come into the little cove in the nick of time, called often to see him. But Peter would never speak of his adventure. It was nothing, he said.

He was too weak to talk much, but he enjoyed having the family about him. Mrs. Delsart rarely left him. She did not go about now with the fine ladies who were at the hotel. Peter was



THE CHILDREN BROUGHT HIM THEIR PLAYTHINGS.

afraid that he was taking too much of her time, but his aunt did not seem to think so. On the contrary, she had never been so gay. She told funny stories and made everybody laugh. Her husband seemed happy, too. Peter was almost afraid to get well, for fear this new happiness would not last.

One day he learned that there was going to be a big picnic in the country, but that the Delsarts had refused to go and leave him. He said to Mrs. Delsart:

“Aunt, I am almost well now. You mustn’t spend all your time here with me. When I was very sick, perhaps it was all right, but now that

I am better, I am afraid that I am stealing your good times."

"My dear little Peter, you have some foolish ideas! When you had fever you called me 'Mama, my little Mama.' Keep on calling me that if you want to please me. I am no longer your aunt — I am your mother. You saved my son, and you have given me another, too. And I love my two sons equally. Do you understand?"

"Oh, yes, yes, I understand."

Peter had succeeded in doing what had seemed impossible — he had won his aunt's love.

Maurice danced with joy, crying:

"I haven't a cousin any more, but I have a brother! We are Peter and Maurice Delsart — two brothers, aren't we?"

Mr. Delsart took his nephew's hand, and adopted Peter as his son. He said only a few words, but they were words that filled little Peter's heart with pride and happiness:

"Quits, my son, we are quits."







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