THE ORIEL WINDOW

MRS MOLESWORTH'S STORIES for CHILDREN

ILLUSTRATED

THE ORIEL WINDOW


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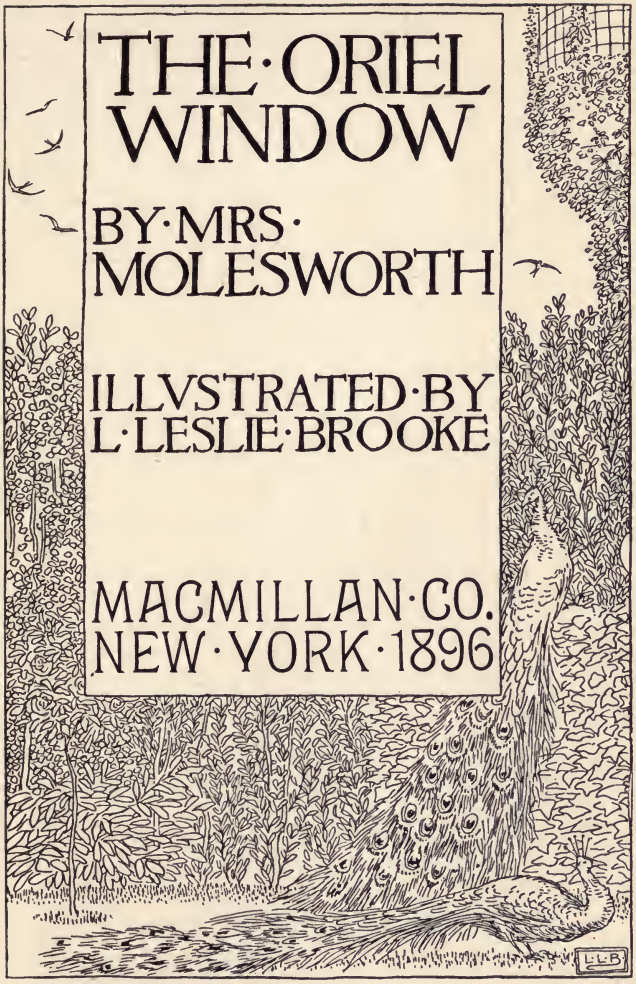

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To

AMY AND ARTHUR

MY MUCH-ESTEEMED OPPOSITE NEIGHBOURS

19 Sumner Place, S.W.,
June, 1896.

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THE ORIEL WINDOW

CHAPTER I

A HAPPY WAKING

I DO not think you could anywhere have found a happier little boy than Ferdy Ross when he woke on the morning of his ninth birthday.

He was always — at least almost always — happy, and he had good reason for being so. He had everything that children need to make life bright and joyous: kind parents, a dear sister, a pretty home, and, best of all, a loving, trusting, sunshiny nature, which made it easy for him to be very happy and loving, and made it easy too for others to love him in return and to feel pleasure in being with him. But to-day, his birthday, the fourteenth of May, he was very particularly, delightfully happy.

What a very long time it seemed that he and Chrissie had been looking forward to it! Ever

since Christmas, or New Year at least. That was how he and Chrissie had settled to do about their lookings-forwards. Chrissie's birthday was in September. She was a year and four months older than Ferdy, so it fitted in very well. As soon as her birthday was over they began the Christmas counting, and this in one way was the biggest of all the year, for their father's and mother's birthdays both came in Christmas week, and it had been found very convenient to "keep" them and Christmas Day together. So Christmas Day at Evercombe Watch House, which was Ferdy's home, was a very important day for more reasons than the great Christmas reasons which we all join in.

And then when Christmas time was over and Ferdy and Christine began to feel a little dull and unsettled, as children are pretty sure to do after a great deal of pleasure and fun, there was Ferdy's birthday to think of and prepare for; for it was not only just looking forward and counting the days, or rather the months first, and then the weeks and then the days to their "treat" times, that they divided the seasons into; there were

separate and different things to do, according to which of the three parts of the year it was. For Christmas, of course, there was the most to do — all the little things to get ready for the Christmas tree as well as the presents for papa and mamma and lots of other people. And for Ferdy's birthday Chrissie had always to make something which had to be done in secret, so that he should not know what it was; and for Chrissie's birthday it was Ferdy's turn to prepare some delightful surprise for her. He was very clever at making things, even though he was a boy! He was what is called "neat-handed," and as this little story goes on, you will see what a good thing it was that he had got into the way of amusing himself and using part of his playtime in carrying out some of his inventions and ideas.

"I don't know how I should bear it, Ferdy," Christine used to say sometimes, "if you were one of those tiresome boys that do nothing but fidget and tease their sisters when they want to sit still and work quietly for their dolls. Just think of Marcia Payne now. These two *horrible* boys, Ted and Eustace, think there is nothing so nice as to

snatch away her work and throw it into the fire or out of the window, or to nearly *kill* her poor dolls with their cruel tricks. I really don't know how poor Marcia ever gets their clothes made, for it takes *all* my time to keep my children tidy, even though you never worry me," and Chrissie sighed, for she was a very anxious-minded doll-mother.

Ferdy's presents to his sister were very often for her dolls, rather than for herself, though, like most mothers, it pleased her much more, she used to say, for her dear pets to be kindly treated than any attention to their little mamma could do.

She was very amusing about her dolls. She used to talk about them in such an "old-fashioned" way that if any grown-up person had overheard her, I think they would have laughed heartily. But Chrissie took care to keep all private conversation about her four girls and two sons for herself and Ferdy only.

Besides these *big* dolls, she had a large party of tiny ones who lived in the doll house, and I think Ferdy's prettiest presents were for this miniature family. These small people really were almost as

much his as Chrissie's, for he took the greatest interest in them, especially in their house and their carriages and horses and in all kinds of wonderful things he had made for them. Several of the doll-house rooms were entirely furnished by him, and he was builder and paper-hanger and cabinet-maker and upholsterer for Doll Hall, all in one. But now I think I must return to the history of his ninth birthday.

The fourteenth of May — just about the middle of the month which is the best loved, I almost think, of all the twelve. And oh it was such a lovely day! Ferdy woke early — though not quite as early as he had meant to do, for when he bade his sister good-night he told her he would be *sure* to knock at her door not later than five. But the sun was a good way up in the sky when he did wake — so far up indeed that Ferdy got quite a fright that he had overslept himself altogether, and it was a relief to see by the old clock which stood on the landing just outside his door that it was only half-past six.

"And after all," he said to himself, "now I come to think of it, I don't believe mamma would

have liked me to wake Chris so very early. I remember last year, on *her* birthday, she had a headache and was quite tired by the afternoon with having got up so soon."

He rubbed his eyes, — to tell the truth he was still rather sleepy himself, though it *was* his birthday, — and downstairs he heard the servants moving about and brushing the carpets. The schoolroom would certainly not be in order just yet; it never took him very long to have his bath and dress, and he knew by experience that housemaids are not the most amiable of human beings when little boys get in their way in the middle of their cleanings and dustings.

So on the whole Ferdy decided that the best thing to do was to go back to bed again and not get up till Flowers — Flowers was Chrissie's maid, and she looked after Ferdy too, since nurse had left to be married — came to wake him at his usual time, for he could hear no sound of any kind in his sister's room, though he listened well, outside the door.

It was very comfortable in bed, for May mornings, however lovely, are often chilly. And as

Ferdy lay there he could see out of the window, and enjoy the sight of the clear bright sunshine and the trees moving softly in the wind, their leaves glittering green and gold, and even silver, as the gentle breeze fluttered them about. The birds too, they were up and about of course; now and then there came quite a flight of them, and then one solitary soarer would cross the blue sky up at the very top of the window — he would see it for half a moment, and then it disappeared again. On the whole, he had more view of sky than of anything else from his bed, though when standing by the window he could see a good long way down the road, and, by craning his neck a little, some way across the fields past the church.

For the Watch House stood at the very end of the village, near the church, so that strangers often thought it must be the Vicarage, and envied the vicar for having such a charming home, whereas the real Vicarage was a pretty but small cottage-like house, quite at the other side of the church, and not nearly as old as it was, or as the Watch House was.

It, Ferdy's home, was very, very old. And the

story went that long ago some part of it had really been a kind of watch tower, though there was nothing remaining to show this except the name and the fact that you could, from the upper windows especially, see a very long way. The nicest window of all was one in Mrs. Ross's own sitting-room, or "boudoir," as it was sometimes called. This was a corner room on the floor just below the children's, and the beauty of it was this window, — an oriel window, — projecting beyond the wall, as such windows do, and so exactly at the corner that you could see, so to say, three ways at once when you were standing in it: right down the village street to begin with, and down the short cross-road which led to the church, and then over the fields between the two, to where Farmer Meare's duckpond jutted out into the lane — "the primrose lane" — as not only Ferdy and Christine but all the children of the neighbourhood had long ago named it. For here the first primroses were *always* to be found, year after year; they never forgot to smile up punctually with their little bright pale faces before you could see them anywhere else. Chrissie sometimes sus-

pected that the fairies had a hand in it. Everybody knows that the good people "favour" certain spots more than others, and perhaps Chrissie's idea was right.

Any way this oriel window was a charming watch tower. Ferdy always said that when he grew to be a man he would build a house with an oriel window at each corner.

But again I am wandering from the morning of Ferdy's birthday, when he lay in bed wide awake and gazed at as much as he could see of the outside world, that lovely May morning.

It *was* lovely, and everything alive seemed to be thinking so, as well as the little hero of the day — birds, trees, blossoms — even the insects that were beginning to find out that the warm days were coming, for a great fat blue-bottle was humming away with the loud summery hum which is the only nice thing about blue-bottles, I think. And not always nice either perhaps, to tell the truth. If one is busy learning some difficult lesson, or adding up long columns of figures, a blue-bottle's buzz is rather distracting. But this morning it was all right, seeming to give just the

touch of summer *sound* which was wanting to the perfection of Ferdy's happiness as he lay there, rather lazily, I am afraid we must confess — a little sleepy still perhaps.

What a nice beautiful place the world is, he thought to himself! How can people grumble at anything when the sun shines and everything seems so happy! In winter perhaps — well, yes, in winter, when it is very cold and grey, there *might* be something to be said on the other side, even though winter to such as Ferdy brings its own delights too. But in summer even the poor people should be happy; their cottages do look so pretty, almost prettier than big houses, with the nice little gardens in front, and roses and honeysuckle and traveller's joy climbing all over the walls and peeping in at the windows. Ferdy did not think he would at all mind living in a cottage, for Evercombe was a remarkably pretty village, and to all outside appearance the cottages were very neat and often picturesque, and the children had never been *inside* any except a few of the clean and nicely kept ones, where their mother knew that the people were good and re-

spectable. So they had little idea as yet of the discomfort and misery that may be found in some cottage homes even in the prettiest villages, though their father and mother knew this well, and meant that Ferdy and Christine should take their part before long in trying to help those in need of comfort or advice.

"I suppose," Ferdy went on thinking to himself —for once he got an idea in his head he had rather a trick of working it out—"I *suppose* there are some people who are really unhappy—poor people, who live in ugly dirty towns perhaps," and then his memory strayed to a day last year when he had driven with his father through the grim-looking streets of a mining village some distance from Evercombe. "That must be horrid. I wonder any one lives there! Or very old people who can't run about or scarcely walk, and who are quite deaf and nearly blind. Yes, they can't feel very happy. And yet they do sometimes. There's papa's old, old aunt; she seems as happy as anything, and yet I should *think* she's nearly a hundred, for she's grandpapa's aunt. She's not blind though; her eyes are quite bright and smily, and

she's not so very deaf. And then she's not poor. Perhaps if she was very poor — " but no, another aged friend came into his mind — old Barley, who lived with his already old daughter in the smallest and poorest cottage Ferdy had ever been in.

"And he's quite happy too," thought the little boy, "and so's poor Betsey, though she can't scarcely walk, 'cos of her rheumatism. It is rather funny that they are happy. The worst of all would be to be lame, *I* think — 'cept p'r'aps being blind. Oh dear! I *am* glad I'm not old, or lame, or blind, or things like that. But I say, I do believe the clock's striking seven, and — oh, there's Flowers! I might have run in to see Chrissie just for a minute or two first if I hadn't got thinking. I — " but then came an interruption.

An eager tap at the door, — not Flowers's tap he knew at once, — and in reply to his as eager "Come in" a rush of little bare feet across the floor, and Chrissie's arms round his neck in a real birthday hug.

"Flowers is just coming. I meant to wake *so* early. I've brought your present — mine's always the first, isn't it, darling?"

And Chrissie settled herself at the foot of the bed, curling up her cold toes, and drawing her pink flannel dressing-gown more closely round her that she might sit there in comfort and regale her eyes on her brother's delight as he carefully undid the many papers in which her present to him was enfolded.

It was a very pretty present, and Ferdy's natural good taste knew how to admire it, as his affectionate heart knew how to feel grateful to Chrissie for the real labour she had bestowed upon it. "It" was a writing-case, embroidered in silks of many lovely shades, and with a twisted monogram of Ferdy's initials — "F. W. R." — "Ferdinand Walter Ross" — worked in gold threads in the centre of the cover. It was a very good piece of work indeed for a little girl of Chrissie's age, and promised well for her skill and perseverance in days to come. Ferdy's eyes sparkled with pleasure. "Oh, Chrissie," he said, "you've never made me anything quite as pretty as this! How clever you are getting, and how did you manage to work it all without my seeing?"

"It *was* rather difficult," said Chrissie, with satisfaction in her tone. "Ever so many times I had to bundle it away just as I heard you coming. And do you know, Ferdy, it's a very ancient pattern — no, pattern isn't the word I mean."

"Design?" said Ferdy. He knew some words of this kind better than Chrissie, as he was so often planning and copying carved wood and brasswork and such things.

"Yes, that's what I mean — it's a very ancient design. Miss Lilly drew it for me from an old book-cover somebody lent her, and she helped me to arrange the colours. I *am* so pleased you like it, Ferdy, darling. I liked doing it because it was such pretty work, but if it hadn't been a present for you, I think I would have got tired of it — it *was* rather fiddly sometimes. And after working ever, ever so long, I didn't seem to have done hardly any."

"I know," said Ferdy thoughtfully. "I think that's always the way with any really nice work. You can't scurry it up. And it wouldn't be worth anything if you could."

But just then there came a tap at the door, and Flowers's voice sounding rather reproachful.

"Miss Chrissie," she said, "I couldn't think where you'd gone to. I do hope you've got your dressing-gown and slippers on, or you will be sure to catch cold."

"All right, Flowers," said Chrissie, "I'm *quite* warm;" and as the maid caught sight of the little pink-flannelled figure her face cleared, for, fortunately for her peace of mind, the pink *toes* were discreetly curled up out of sight.

Who could expect a little girl to remember to put on her slippers on her brother's birthday morning, when she had been dreaming all night of the lovely present she had got for him?

"Many happy returns of the day, Master Ferdy, my dear," Flowers went on, growing rather red, "and will you please accept a very trifling present from me?"

She held out a little parcel as she spoke. It contained a *boy's* "housewife," if you ever saw such a thing. It was neatly made of leather, and held needles of different sizes, strong sewing cotton and thread, various kinds of useful buttons, a sturdy

little pair of scissors, pins, black and white, small and large, and several other things such as a schoolboy might be glad to find handy now and then.

"Mother always gives one to my brothers when they leave home," said the maid, "and I thought as no doubt Master Ferdy will be going to school some day—"

"It's capital, Flowers," Ferdy interrupted; "thank you ever so much; it's first-rate. I needn't wait till I go to school to use it. It's just the very thing I'm sure to want when I go yachting with papa next summer—this summer—in uncle's yacht. It's *capital!*"

And Flowers, who had not been very long at the Watch House, and had felt rather uncertain as to how her gift would suit the young gentleman's taste, smiled all over with pleasure.

Master Ferdy had certainly a very nice way with him, she thought to herself.

"Miss Christine," she said aloud, "you really must come and get dressed, or instead of being ready earlier than usual, you'll be ever so much later."

And Chrissie jumped down from the bed and went off to her own quarters.

CHAPTER II

THE PEACOCK'S CRY

HALF an hour or so later the children met again, and together made their way downstairs to the dining-room, Ferdy carefully carrying his presents, which had been increased by that of a nice big home-made cake from cook, and a smart little riding-whip from two or three of the other servants.

Papa and mamma had not yet made their appearance; it was barely half-past eight.

Ferdy's eyes and Chrissie's too wandered inquiringly round the room. Neither knew or had any sort of idea what *the* present of the day — their parents' — was to be. Many wonderings had there been about it, for Mrs. Ross had smiled in a very mysterious way once or twice lately, when something had been said about Ferdy's birthday, and the children had half expected to see some veiled package on the sideboard or in a corner of the room, ready for the right moment.

But everything looked much as usual, except that there was a lovely bouquet of flowers — hot-house flowers, the gardener's best — beside Ferdy's plate.

"Oh, I say!" he exclaimed, as he took it up and sniffed it approvingly, "what a good humour Ferguson must be in to have given me these very best flowers. Why, he doesn't even like mamma herself to cut these big begonias. They *are* splendiferous, aren't they, Chris? I shall take one out for a button-hole, and wear it all day. But oh, Chrissie, I *do* wonder what papa's and mamma's present is going to be — don't you?"

"I should just think I did," his sister replied. "I haven't the very least inch of an idea this time, and generally, before, I have had *some*. It isn't in this room, any way."

"No, I expect it's some little thing, something mamma has kept safe in a drawer, a pair of gold sleeve-links, or, or — no, not a writing-case, for she'd know about yours. P'r'aps a pocket microscope or some book."

"Would you like any of those?" asked Chrissie.

"I'd like anything, I think. At least I mean

papa and mamma'd be sure to give me something nice. Of course, *the* present of presents would be—"

"We fixed not to speak about it, don't you remember?" said his sister quickly. "It's a bad habit to get into, that of fancying too much about impossible things you'd like to have."

"But this wouldn't be quite an impossible thing," said Ferdy. "I may get it some day, and one reason I want it so is that it would be just as nice for you as for me, you see, Chris."

"I know," said Christine. "Well no, it's not a couldn't-possibly-ever-be thing, like the magic carpet we planned so about once, or the table with lovely things to eat on it, that there's the fairy story about, though I always think that's rather a greedy sort of story—don't you?"

"Not if you were awfully hungry, and the boy in that story was, you know," said Ferdy. "But I didn't mean quite impossible in a fairy magic way. I mean that papa and mamma *might* do it some day, and it's rather been put into my head this morning by this," and he touched the riding-whip. "It's far too good for Jerry, or for any

donkey, isn't it? I shall put it away till I have a—"

Chrissie placed her hand on his mouth.

"Don't say it," she said. "It's much better not, after we fixed we wouldn't."

"Very well," said Ferdy resignedly. "I won't if you'd rather I didn't. Now let us think over what it really *will* be, most likely. A—"

But no other guess was to be put in words, for just then came the well-known voices.

"Ferdy, my boy"—"Dear little man," as his father and mother came in. "Many, many happy returns of your birthday," they both said together, stooping to kiss him.

"And see what Chrissie has given me, and Flowers, and cook, and the others!" exclaimed the boy, holding out his gifts for admiration.

Mr. and Mrs. Ross looked at each other and smiled. Neither of them had anything in the shape of a parcel big or little. Ferdy and Christine felt more and more puzzled.

"They are charming presents, dear," said Mrs. Ross, "and ours—papa's and mine—is quite ready. How are you going to do about it, Walter?"

"We had better have prayers first," Ferdy's father replied. "And — yes, breakfast too, I think, and then — "

In their own minds both Ferdy and Christine thought they would not be able to eat much breakfast while on the tenter-hooks of curiosity. But kind as their father was, he had a way of meaning what he said, and they had learned not to make objections. And, after all, they did manage to get through a very respectable meal, partly perhaps because the breakfast was particularly tempting that morning, and mamma was particularly anxious that the children should do justice to it.

Nice as it was, however, it came to an end in due time, and then, though they said nothing, the children's faces showed what was in their minds, Chrissie looking nearly as eager as her brother.

"Now," said Mr. Ross, taking out his watch, "I have just half an hour before I must start. Leila," — "Leila" was mamma's "girl name" as Chrissie called it, — "Leila, you keep these two young people quietly in here for five minutes by the clock. Then all three of you come round to the porch, but Ferdy must shut his eyes — tight, do you

hear, young man? Mother and Chrissie will lead you, and I will meet you at the front door."

Did ever five minutes pass so slowly? More than once the children thought that the clock must really have stopped, or that something extraordinary had happened to its hands, in spite of the ticking going on all right. But at last—

"We may go now," said mamma. "Shut your eyes, my boy. Now, Chris, you take one hand and I'll take the other. You won't open your eyes till papa tells you, will you, Ferdy?"

"No, no, I promise," said Ferdy.

But his mother looked at him a little anxiously. His little face was pale with excitement and his breath came fast. Yet he was not at all a delicate child, and he had never been ill in his life.

'Dear Ferdy," she said gently, "don't work yourself up so."

Ferdy smiled.

"No, mamma," he replied, though his voice trembled a little. "It is only — something we've tried not to think about, haven't we, Chrissie? Oh," he went on, turning to his sister, and speaking

almost in a whisper, "*do* you think it can be — you know what?"

Christine squeezed the hand she held; that was all she could reply. Though her face had got pink instead of pale like Ferdy's, she was almost as "worked up" as he was.

There was not long to wait, however. Another moment and they were all three standing in the porch, and though Ferdy's eyes were still most tightly and honourably shut, there scarcely needed papa's "Now," or the "*Oh!*" which in spite of herself escaped his sister, to reveal the delightful secret. For his ears had caught certain tell-tale sounds: a sort of "champing," and a rustle or scraping of the gravel on the drive which fitted in wonderfully with the idea which his brain was full of, though he had honestly tried to follow his sister's advice and not "think about it."

What was the "it"?

A pony — the most beautiful pony, or so he seemed to Ferdy and Christine at any rate — that ever was seen. There he stood, his bright brown coat gleaming in the May sunshine, his eager but kindly eyes looking as if they took it all in as he

rubbed his nose on Mr. Ross's coat-sleeve and twisted about a little, as if impatient to be introduced to his new master.

"Papa, mamma!" gasped Ferdy, with a sort of choke in his throat, and for a moment — what with the delight, and the sudden opening of his eyes in the strong clear sunshine — he felt half dazed. "Papa, mamma, a pony of my very own! And Chrissie can ride him too. He is a pony a girl can ride too, isn't he?" with a touch of anxiety.

"He is very gentle, and he has no vices at all," said his father. "I am quite sure Chrissie will be able to ride him too. But you must get to know him well in the first place."

Ferdy was out on the drive by this time, his face rosy with delight, as he stood by his father patting and petting the pretty creature. The pony was all saddled and bridled, ready for Ferdy to mount and ride "over the hills and far away." The boy glanced up at Mr. Ross, an unspoken request trembling on his lips.

"Yes," said his father, seeing it there and smiling. "Yes, you may mount him and ride up and down a little. He'll be all right," he added, turn-

ing to the coachman, who had been standing by and enjoying the whole as much as any of them.

"Oh yes, sir. He's a bit eager, but as gentle as a lamb," the man replied.

"And this afternoon," Ferdy's father continued, "if I can get home between four and five, I'll take you a good long ride — round by Durnham and past by Mellway Sight, where you have so often wanted to go."

"Oh, papa," was all Ferdy could get out.

Merton meanwhile had been examining the stirrup straps.

"They're about the right length for you, I think, sir," he said, and then in a moment Ferdy was mounted.

Pony pranced about a little, just a very little, — he would not have seemed a real live pony if he had not, — but nothing to mind. Indeed, Ferdy, to tell the truth, would have enjoyed a little more. The coachman led him a short way along the drive, but then let go, and Ferdy trotted to the gates in grand style and back again.

"Isn't he *perfect*, Chris?" he exclaimed as he came up to the group in front of the porch.

"Mayn't I gallop him, papa, this afternoon when we go out? Round by Mellway there's beautiful grass, you know."

"All right," Mr. Ross replied. "We shall see how you get on outside on the road. I don't know that he has any tricks, but every pony has *some* fad, so for a few days we must just be a little cautious. Now trot back to the gates once more, and then I think you had better dismount for the present. You may go round to the stable with him. It's always a good thing for your horse to know you in the stable as well as outside."

Off Ferdy went again, a little bit faster this time, his spirits rising higher and higher. Then he turned to come back to the house, and his mother was just stepping indoors, her face still lighted up with pleasure, when there came a sudden cry, — a curious hoarse cry, — but for a moment she was not startled.

"It is the peacocks," she thought, for there were a couple of beautiful peacocks at the Watch House. "I hope they won't frighten the pony."

For the peacocks were allowed to stalk all about the grounds, and they were well-behaved on the

OFF FERDY WENT AGAIN, A LITTLE BIT FASTER THIS TIME. — P. 26

whole; though, as is always the case with these birds, their harsh cry was not pleasant, and even startling to those not accustomed to it.

Was it the cry, or was it the sudden sight of them as they came all at once into view on a side-path which met the drive just where Ferdy was passing?

Nobody ever knew, — probably pony himself could not have told which it was, — but as Mrs. Ross instinctively stopped a moment on her way into the house, another sound seemed to mingle with the peacock's scream, or rather to grow out from it — a sort of stifled shriek of terror and rushing alarm. Then came voices, trampling feet, a kind of wail from Chrissie, and in an instant — an instant that seemed a lifetime — Ferdy's mother saw what it was. He had been thrown, and one foot had caught in the stirrup, and the startled pony was dragging him along. A moment or two of sickening horror, then a sort of silence. One of the men was holding the pony, Mr. Ross and the coachman were stooping over something that lay on the ground a little way up the drive — something — what was it? It did not move. Was it only a heap of clothes that had dropped there

somehow? It couldn't, oh no, it *couldn't* be Ferdy! *Ferdy* was alive and well. He had just been laughing and shouting in his exceeding happiness. Where had he run to?

"Ferdy, Ferdy!" his mother exclaimed, scarcely knowing that she spoke; "Ferdy dear, come quick, come, Ferdy."

But Chrissie caught her, and buried her own terror-stricken face in her mother's skirts.

"Mamma, mamma," she moaned, "don't look like that. Mamma, don't you see? Ferdy's *killed*. That's Ferdy where papa is. Don't go, oh don't go, mamma! Mamma, I can't bear it. Hide me, hide my eyes."

And at this frantic appeal from the poor little half-maddened sister, Mrs. Ross's strength and sense came back to her as if by magic. She unclasped Chrissie's clutching hands gently but firmly.

"Run upstairs and call Flowers. Tell her to lay a mattress on the floor of the oriel room at once; it is such a little way upstairs; and tell Burt to bring some brandy at once — brandy and water. Tell Burt first."

Chrissie was gone in an instant. Ferdy couldn't

be dead, she thought, if mamma wanted brandy for him. But when the mother, nerved by love, flew along the drive to the spot where her husband and the coachman were still bending over what still was, or had been, her Ferdy, she could scarcely keep back a scream of anguish. For a moment she was sure that Chrissie's first words were true — he was killed.

"Walter, Walter, tell me quick," she gasped. "Is he — is he alive?"

Mr. Ross looked up, his own face so deadly pale, his lips so drawn and quivering, that a rush of pity for *him* came over her.

"I — I don't know. I can't tell. What do you think, Merton?" he said, in a strange dazed voice. "He has not moved, but we thought he was breathing at first."

The coachman lifted his usually ruddy face; it seemed all streaked, red and white in patches.

"I can feel his heart, sir; I feel fairly sure I can feel his heart. If we could get a drop or two of brandy down his throat, and — yes, I think I can slip my arm under his head. There's Burt coming with some water."

"And brandy," said Mrs. Ross. "Here, give it me — a spoon — yes, that's right. And, Walter, have you sent for the doctor?"

Mr. Ross passed his hand over his forehead, as if trying to collect himself.

"I will send Larkins now," he said, "on the pony — that will be the quickest," though a sort of shudder passed over him as he spoke of the innocent cause of this misery. "Larkins, go at once for Mr. Stern; you know the shortest way," for there was no doctor within a mile or two of Evercombe village, and Mr. Ross raised himself to give exact directions to the young groom.

When he turned again they had succeeded in getting a spoonful of brandy and water between Ferdy's closed lips — then another; then poor old Merton looked up with a gleam of hope in his eyes.

"He's coming to, sir — ma'am — I do believe," he said.

He was right. A quiver ran through the little frame, then came the sound of a deep sigh, and Ferdy's eyes opened slowly. They opened and — it was like Ferdy — the first sign he gave of re-

turning consciousness was a smile — a very sweet smile.

"Papa, mamma," he whispered, "is it time to get up? Is it — my birthday?"

That was too much for his mother. The tears she had been keeping back rushed to her eyes, but they were partly tears of joy. Her boy was alive; at worst he was not killed, and perhaps, oh *perhaps*, he was not badly hurt.

Ferdy caught sight of her tears, though she had turned her face away in hopes of hiding them. A pained, puzzled look came over him. He tried to raise his head, which was resting on Merton's arm, but it sank down again weakly; then he glanced at his left arm and hand, which were covered with blood from a cut on his forehead.

"What is the — mamma, why are you crying?" he said. "Have I hurt myself? Oh dear, did I fall off my beautiful pony? I am so, *so* sorry."

"My darling," said his mother, "it was an accident. I hope you will soon be better. Have you any pain anywhere?"

"I don't think so," said he, "only I wish I was in bed, mamma. What is it that is bleeding?"

"Nothing very bad, sir," said Merton cheerfully; "only a cut on your forehead. But that'll soon heal. Your handkerchief, please, ma'am, dipped in cold water."

"Yes," said Mr. Ross, "that is the best thing for the moment," and he folded the handkerchief up into a little pad, which he soaked in the fresh cold water, and laid it on the place. "I think we must move him," he went on. "Ferdy, my boy, will you let us try?"

Ferdy stretched out his right arm and put it round his father's neck. But the movement hurt somehow and somewhere, for he grew terribly white again.

"My back," he whispered.

A thrill of new anguish went through his parents at the words.

"Don't do anything yourself," said Mr. Ross; "lie quite still and trust to me."

Ferdy closed his eyes without speaking, and skilfully, though with infinite pains, his father raised him in his arms, Ferdy making no sound—perhaps he half fainted again; there he lay quite helpless, like a little baby, as with slow, careful

tread Mr. Ross made his way to the house, from which, not a quarter of an hour ago, the boy had flown out in perfect health and joy.

At the door they met Chrissie. She started violently, then covered her face with her hands.

"Oh, papa," she began, but her mother was close behind and caught her in her arms.

"Hush, dear," she said. "No, no," in answer to the little girl's unuttered question. "Ferdy has opened his eyes and spoken to us; he knew us—papa and me."

Chrissie's terrors at once made place for hope. Her white face flushed all over.

"He's spoken to you, mamma? What did he say? Oh, then he can't be so *very* badly hurt. Oh, *mamma*, how glad I am!"

"Be very, very quiet, dear. We can do nothing, and be sure of nothing, till the doctor comes, but—oh yes, thank God, we may hope."

But by the time they had laid him on the mattress in the oriel room Ferdy looked again so ghastly pale that the poor mother's heart went down. There was little they could do; they scarcely dared to undress him till the surgeon

came. It was a terrible hour or two's waiting, for Mr. Stern was out, and Larkins had to ride some considerable way before he caught him up on his morning rounds.

CHAPTER III

A STRANGE BIRTHDAY

LATE on the afternoon of that sad day the doctor, coming out of the oriel room, was met by little Christine. She had been watching for him on the stairs. It was his second visit since the morning, and his face was very grave; but its expression altered at once when he caught sight of Chrissie. Though Stern by name, he was very far from stern by nature, and he was very fond of the Ross children, whom he had known nearly all their lives. Besides, it is a doctor's business to cheer up people as much as possible, and he was touched by poor Chrissie's white face. Never had the little girl spent such a miserable day, and thankful though she had been that her darling Ferdy's life had been spared, she was beginning to doubt if after all he *was* going to get better. Her mother had scarcely left him for an instant; she had been busy arranging the room for him, or

rather she had been sitting beside him holding his hand while she gave directions to the servants.

By the doctor's advice Ferdy's own little bed had been brought into the room, and he himself moved on to it, lifted upon the mattress as he lay; and it had, of course, been necessary to carry out some of the other furniture and rearrange things a little. This would not disturb Ferdy, Mr. Stern said, but Ferdy's head was now aching from the cut on his forehead, though it was not a very bad one, and he was tired and yet restless, and could not bear his mother to move away.

So there she sat, and Mr. Ross had gone off to Whittingham by a mid-day train, and no one had given much thought to poor Christine.

"My dear child," said the doctor, "how ill you look! Have you been wandering about by yourself all day?"

"Yes," said Chrissie simply, her lip quivering as she spoke. "There was nothing I could do to help, and they were all busy."

"Where is Miss Lilly?" asked Mr. Stern.

"She wasn't coming to-day. We were to have a holiday. It—it is Ferdy's birthday, you know,

and we were going to be so happy. *Oh*," she cried, as if she could keep back the misery no longer, "to think it is Ferdy's birthday!" and she burst again into deep though not loud sobbing.

Mr. Stern was very, very sorry for her.

"Dear Chrissie," he said, "you must not make yourself ill. In a day or two you will be wanted very much indeed, and you must be ready for it. Your brother will want you nearly all day long."

Chrissie's sobs stopped as if by magic, though they still caught her breath a little, and her face grew all pink and rosy.

"Will he, *will* he?" she exclaimed. "Do you mean that he is really going to get better? I thought—I thought—mamma kept shut up in the room, and nobody would tell me—do you really think he is going to get better soon?"

Mr. Stern took her hand and led her downstairs, and then into the library. There was no one there, but he closed the door.

"My dear child," he said, "I will tell you all I can," for he knew that Christine was a sensible little girl, and he knew that anything was better

than to have her working herself up more and more with miserable fears. "I think Ferdy will be *better* in a day or two, but we cannot say anything yet about his getting *well*. Your father has gone to Whittingham to see one of the best doctors, and ask him to come down here to-night or to-morrow to examine your brother, and after that we shall know more. But I am afraid it is very likely that he will have to stay in bed a long time, and if so, you know how much you can do to make the days pass pleasantly for him."

Chrissie's eyes sparkled through the tears still there. "I don't mind that," she began. "Of course I know it will be very dull and tiresome for him, but *nothing* seems very bad compared with if he was going to —" she stopped short, and again she grew very white. "Oh, you are *sure* he isn't going to get worse?" she exclaimed. "I do get so frightened every now and then when I think of how his face looked, and it was bleeding too."

Mr. Stern patted her hand.

"You have not seen him since this morning?" he said.

Chrissie shook her head.

"Not since papa carried him in," she replied.

"Would you like to see him very much?"

"Oh, *may* I? I'll be very, very quiet and good. I'll bathe my eyes, so that he won't find out I've been crying, and I'll only stay a minute."

"Run upstairs then and make yourself look as much as usual as you can. I will go back for a moment and tell Mrs. Ross I have given you leave to come in."

Two minutes or so later Chrissie was tapping very softly at the door of the oriel room.

"Come in," said Mr. Stern.

He was not looking at all grave now, but very "smily" and cheerful, which Chrissie was glad of, as it reminded her that she herself must not cry or seem unhappy. But how strange it all was! She would scarcely have known the pretty little sitting-room: Ferdy's bed with a screen round it standing out at one side of the curiously shaped window, her mother's writing-table and other little things gone. Chrissie could not help staring round in surprise, and perhaps because she had a nervous dread of looking at Ferdy.

He saw her, however, at once.

"Chrissie," said a weak, rather hoarse little voice, "Chrissie, come here."

Chrissie choked down the lump in her throat that was beginning to make itself felt again.

"Kiss me," he said when she was close beside him. He did not look so unlike himself now, though there was a bandage round his forehead and he was very pale. "Kiss me," he said again, and as she stooped down to do so, without speaking, "Chrissie," he whispered, "I don't want mamma to hear — Chrissie, just to think it's my birthday and that it's all through our great wish coming true. Oh, Chrissie!"

The little girl felt, though she could not see him, that Mr. Stern was watching her, so she made a great effort.

"I know," she whispered back again, and even into her whisper she managed to put a cheerful sound. "I know, Ferdy darling. But you're going to get better. And you haven't any very bad pains, have you?"

"Not very bad," he replied. "My head's sore, but I daresay it'll be better to-morrow. But that

won't make it right, you see, Chrissie. It's it being my birthday I mind."

Christine did not know what to say. Her eyes were filling with tears, and she was afraid of Ferdy seeing them. She turned away a little, and as she did so her glance fell on the window, one side of which looked to the west. She and Ferdy had often watched the sunset from there. It was too early yet for that, but signs of its coming near were beginning; already the lovely mingling of colours was gleaming faintly as if behind a gauzy curtain.

"Ferdy," said Chrissie suddenly, "I think there's going to be a beautiful sunset, and you can see it lovelily the way you're lying. Aren't you awfully glad you're in here? It wouldn't be half so nice in your own room for seeing out, would it?"

"No, it wouldn't," said Ferdy, more brightly than he had yet spoken. "I can't move my head, only the least bit, but I can see out. Yes, Chrissie, I can see the people on the road — I mean I could if the curtain was a little more pulled back."

"Of course you could," said Mr. Stern, coming forward. "But you must wait till to-morrow to try how much you can see."

"Shall I have to stay in bed all to-morrow?" said Ferdy.

"We must hear what the big doctor says," Mr. Stern replied, for he had already told Ferdy that another surgeon was coming to see him, so that the sudden sight of a stranger should not startle the little fellow. "Now, Chrissie, my dear, I think you must say good-night; you shall see much more of Ferdy to-morrow, I hope."

They kissed each other again, and Chrissie whispered, "Don't mind about its being your birthday, darling. Think how much worse you might have been hurt."

"I know. I *might* have been killed," said Ferdy in a very solemn tone.

"And do watch the sunset. I think it's going to be extra pretty," Chrissie went on cheerfully. "If you *have* to stay in bed, Ferdy, it will be nice to have this lovely window."

And Ferdy's face grew decidedly brighter.

"Good little woman," said the doctor in a low voice as she passed him, and by the way mamma kissed her Chrissie knew that she too was pleased with her.

So the little sister was not altogether miserable as she fell asleep that night, and she was so tired out that she slept soundly — more heavily indeed than usual. She did not hear the sound of wheels driving up to the house soon after she had gone to bed, and this was a good thing, for she would have guessed they were those of the carriage bringing her father and the doctor he had gone to fetch, from the station, and her anxiety would very likely have sent away her sleepiness.

Nor did she hear the carriage drive away again an hour or two later. By that time she was very deeply engaged, for she was having a curious and very interesting dream. She had forgotten it when she woke in the morning, but it came back to her memory afterwards, as you will hear.

Ferdy did not much like the strange doctor, though he meant to be very kind, no doubt. He spoke to him too much as if he were a baby, and the boy was beginning at last to feel less restless and more comfortably sleepy when this new visitor came. And then the library lamp was brought up, and it blinked into his eyes, and he hated

being turned round and having his backbone poked at, as he told Chrissie, though he couldn't exactly say that it hurt him. And, worst of all, when he asked if he might get up "to-morrow" the strange doctor "put him off" in what Ferdy thought a silly sort of way. He would much rather have been told right out, "No, certainly not to-morrow," and then he could have begun settling up things in his mind and planning what he would do, as Chrissie and he always did if they knew a day in bed was before them; for they had never been very ill — never ill enough to make no plans and feel as if they cared for nothing in bed or out of it.

No, Ferdy was quite sure he liked Mr. Stern much better than Dr. Bigge, for, curiously enough, that was the great doctor's name, though by rights, as he was a very clever surgeon and not a physician, I suppose he should not be called "doctor" at all.

When at last he had gone, Mr. Stern came back for a moment to tell Ferdy's mother and Flowers how it would be best to settle him for the night. They put the pillows in rather a funny

way, he thought, but still he was pretty comfortable, and he began to feel a little sleepy again; and just as he was going to ask his mother what they were doing with the sofa, everything went out of his head, and he was off into the peaceful country of sleep, where his troubles were all forgotten, hushed into quiet by the soft waving wings of the white angel, whose presence is never so welcome as to the weary and suffering.

When he woke next there was a faint light in the room. For a moment or two he thought that it was the daylight beginning to come, and he looked towards where the window was in his own little room; but even the tiny motion of his head on the pillow sent a sort of ache through him, and that made him remember.

No, he was not in his own room, and the glimmer was not that of the dawn. It was from a shaded night-light in one corner, and as his eyes grew used to it he saw that there was some one lying on the sofa — some one with bright brown hair, bright even in the faint light, and dressed in a pale pink dressing-gown. It was mamma. Poor mamma, how uncomfortable for her not to

be properly in bed! Why was she lying there? He hoped she was asleep, and yet—he almost hoped she wasn't, or at least that she would awake just for a minute, for he was thirsty and hot, and the fidgety feeling that he *couldn't* keep still was beginning again. He did not know that he sighed or made any sound, but he must have done so, for in another moment the pink dressing-gown started up from the sofa, and then mamma's pretty face, her blue eyes still looking rather "dusty," as the children called it, with sleep, was anxiously bending over him.

"What is it, dear? Did you call me?"

"No, mamma. But why aren't you in bed, and why is there a light in the room? Aren't you going to bed?"

"Yes, in an hour or two Flowers will come and take my place. You see we thought you might be thirsty in the night, and the doctor said you mustn't move."

"I *am* thirsty," said Ferdy. "I'd like a drink of water."

"Better than lemonade? There is some nice fresh lemonade here."

"What is it, dear? Did you call me?"—P. 46.

Ferdy's eyes brightened.

"Oh, I *would* like that best, but I didn't know there was any."

Mamma poured some out into such a funny cup — it had a pipe, so Ferdy called it, at one side. He didn't need to sit up, or even to lift his head, to drink quite comfortably.

"And I think," Mrs. Ross went on, "I think I will give you another spoonful of the medicine. It is not disagreeable to take, and it will help you to go to sleep again."

Yes, it did; very, very soon he was asleep again. This time he dreamt something, though when he awoke he could not clearly remember what. He only knew that it was something about birds. He lay with his eyes shut thinking about it for a few minutes, till a sound close to him made him open them and look round. It was morning, quite morning and daylight, and from the window came the gentle twittering of some swallows, who had evidently taken up their summer quarters in some corner hard by.

"That must have been what made me dream about birds," said Ferdy to himself, though he

spoke aloud without knowing it. "I must have heard them in my sleep."

"You have had a nice sleep," said a voice from the other side of his bed, and, looking towards her, Ferdy saw Flowers, already dressed and with a pleasant smile on her face. "Are you feeling better, Master Ferdy, dear?"

The little boy waited a moment or two before he replied.

"My head isn't so sore, and I'm not so tired, but I don't think I want to get up even if I might. I want Chrissie to come and sit beside me. What o'clock is it, Flowers?"

"Just six o'clock, sir. You will have to wait a little before Miss Christine can come. I daresay she's tired, poor dear, and she may sleep late this morning; perhaps you will be able to sleep a little more yourself, Master Ferdy. Would you like a drink of milk?"

"Yes," said Ferdy, "I would like some milk, but I can't go to sleep again; I've too much on my mind," with a deep sigh.

He spoke in such an "old-fashioned" way that, sorry as the maid was for him, she could scarcely

help smiling a little. She gave him the milk and lifted him very, very gently a little farther on to the pillows.

"Does it hurt you, Master Ferdy?" she asked anxiously.

"N—no, I don't think so," he replied; "but I feel all queer. I believe all my bones have got put wrong, and p'r'aps they'll never grow right again."

"Never's a long word, my dear," said Flowers cheerfully. The truth was she scarcely knew what to say, and she was glad to turn away and busy herself with some little tidying up at the other side of the room.

Ferdy lay still, almost forgetting he was not alone in the room, for Flowers was very quiet. His eyes strayed to the window, where another lovely sunshiny morning was gilding again the world of trees, and grass, and blossom with renewed beauty. It was all so very like yesterday morning, all "except me," thought Ferdy, so terribly like his birthday morning, when he had been so happy, oh! so happy, that it had been difficult to believe in unhappiness anywhere. And yet even then

he had thought of unhappiness. It was queer that he had. What had put it into his head? He remembered it all — wondering how very poor, or very old, or very suffering people, cripples, for instance, could be happy. And yet he had seen some that really seemed so.

"Cripples" — that word had never come into his mind in the same way before. He had never thought what it really meant. Supposing *he* were to be a cripple? Was it for fear of that that the doctor would not let him get up? Ferdy moved his legs about a very little; they did not hurt him, only they felt weak and heavy, and he had a kind of shrinking from the idea of standing, or even of sitting up in bed.

Was that how cripples felt? He wished somebody would tell him, but it was no use asking Flowers — most likely she did not know. And he didn't think he would like to ask his mother; she looked so pale and tired, and it might make her cry if he spoke about being a cripple. He thought he might ask Chrissie, perhaps. She was only a little girl, but she was very sensible, and he could speak to her without being so afraid

of making her cry as if it was mamma — or rather, if she did cry, he wouldn't mind quite so much.

He wished Chrissie would come. Only six o'clock Flowers had said, not so very long ago. It couldn't be more than half-past six yet. What a pity it was that people, boys and girls any way, can't get up like the birds, just when it gets nice and light! What a chatter and twitter those birds outside were making — he had never noticed them so much before. But then, to be sure, he had never slept in the oriel room before. He wondered if they were the same swallows that were there last year, and every year.

"If they are," thought Ferdy, "I should think they must have got to know us. I wish they could talk to us and tell us stories of all the places they see when they are travelling. What fun it would be! I'll ask Chrissie if she's ever thought about it. I wonder if we couldn't ever get to — under — stand — "

But here the thread of his wonderings was suddenly snapped. Ferdy had fallen asleep again.

A minute or two after, Flowers stepped softly

across the room and stood beside the bed looking down at him.

"Poor dear," she said to herself, "he does look sweet lying there asleep. And to see him as he is now, no one would think there was anything the matter with him. Oh dear, I do hope it won't turn out so bad as the doctors fear."

CHAPTER IV

WHAT THE SWALLOWS THOUGHT OF IT

THANKS to the extra sleep which had come to Ferdy after all, he had not long to wait for Chrissie once he had wakened up "for good." She was not allowed to see him till he had had his breakfast, for it was very important to keep up his strength with nourishing food, and "if you begin talking together, you know," said mamma, "Ferdy would get interested and excited, and very likely not feel inclined to eat anything. That is even the way sometimes when you are both quite well."

She was speaking to Chrissie about how careful she must be, if she were to be trusted to be with her brother, not to seem sad or dull, and yet to be very quiet — "quietly cheerful, dear," she went on, "and if Ferdy is at all cross or peevish, you must just not mind."

Chrissie looked up in surprise. Ferdy cross or peevish seemed impossible.

"He never is, mamma dear," she said. "If ever we have little quarrels, it is almost always more my fault than his," which was quite true.

"Yes," her mother replied, "but you don't know, Chrissie, how illness changes people. Ferdy never has been seriously ill in his life, and — and this sad accident is sure to tell on his nerves." She had been doing her best to speak cheerfully, but now her voice broke, and the tears came into her eyes, already worn and tired-looking with the long hours of anxiety.

Chrissie stroked her hand gently. Then she said, though hesitating a little, "Mamma darling, won't you tell me more about Ferdy — about what the doctors think, I mean. I promise you I will not let him find out anything you don't want him to know. I will be very brave and — and cheerful, but I would so like to know. It isn't that he's not going to get better — that he's going to get *worse?*"

"No, dear, not that," said Mrs. Ross, drying her eyes as she spoke. "He is a strong child,

and his general health is good, but his back is injured badly. That is the reason we are so anxious. He may get *better*. The doctors think that in a few weeks he will be able to be up and dressed and to lie on a couch, but they cannot say if he will ever be *quite* right again. I am afraid they do not think he ever will."

"Oh, mamma," said Chrissie.

Mrs. Ross looked at her anxiously; she wondered if she had done wrong in telling her so much. And the little girl guessed what she was thinking.

"I would much rather know, mamma," she said, —"much rather. It will make me more careful when I am with dear Ferdy, and if he ever is the least cross, I won't mind. I will try to amuse him nicely. Are you going to tell Miss Lilly, mamma?"

"Oh yes, I am hoping that she will be a great help. I will see her this morning as soon as she comes."

"Are we to do any lessons to-day?" asked Chrissie. "Is Ferdy to do lessons in bed?"

"In a few days perhaps he may," said Mrs. Ross. "He will seem better in a few days, for he

has had a great shock besides the hurt to his back, and he must have time to get over it; but I think you had better do *some* lessons, Chrissie — those that you have separately from Ferdy. Flowers or I will sit beside him a good part of the day, and I hope he will sleep a good deal. If he does not seem much better in a day or two we shall have to get a nurse."

"Oh, I hope not," said Chrissie. "Ferdy wouldn't like a stranger."

"Well, we shall see," said Mrs. Ross. "Now you may go to Ferdy, dear."

And Chrissie ran off. She was startled, but still not *very* sad. She was so delighted to be with her brother again after a whole day's separation, and proud too of being trusted to take care of him. But it was going to be more difficult for her than she knew, for, as you will remember, Ferdy had made up his mind to ask Christine if she could tell him what the doctors really thought of him.

He looked so much better than the day before that she could scarcely believe there was much the matter, and he looked still better when he

caught sight of her — his whole face lighted up with smiles.

"Oh, Chrissie," he called out, "how glad I am you've come! It seems such a long time since I saw you. You do look so nice this morning."

So she did — she was a very pretty little girl, especially when her cheeks were rosy and her eyes bright, as they were just now.

"*You* look much better too, Ferdy," she said, — "quite different from yesterday. Have you had a good night?"

"*Pretty* good," said Ferdy in rather a melancholy tone. "I am getting tired of staying in bed."

Chrissie's heart sank — "tired of staying in bed," and this scarcely the second day of it! What would he do if it went on for weeks — perhaps months? She felt glad, however, that she knew the truth; it would make her be very careful in what she said.

"I wouldn't mind so much," he went on, "if I knew how long it'd be. And I don't like to ask mamma for fear of making her sad, *in case* it was to be for a long while. Chrissie," and here he fixed his blue eyes — so like his mother's — on his sis-

ter's face, "*do* you think it'll be a very long while? Do you think," and his voice grew still more solemn, "that p'r'aps I'll never be able to stand or walk again?"

Chrissie's heart was beating fast. She was so glad to be able with truth to answer cheerfully.

"Oh no, Ferdy dear. I really do think you'll be able to get up and be dressed before very long. But I should think the quieter you keep just now the quicker you'll get better. And it's so nice in this room, and you can see so nicely out of the window. You don't want to get up just yet, do you — not till you feel stronger? Mamma says you'll feel much stronger in a few days."

"Does she?" said Ferdy, brightening; "then the doctors must have told her. I'm so glad. No, I don't really want to get up — at least I don't feel as if I *could* — that's what bothers me. I am not sorry in my body to stay in bed, but in my mind I'm all in a fidget. I keep fancying things," and he hesitated.

"What sort of things?" asked Chrissie. She had a feeling that it was better for him to tell her all that was on his mind.

He tried to do so. He told her how the day before, when he was quite well and so very happy, his thoughts had somehow wandered to people whose lives were very different from his, and how this morning these thoughts had come back again, the same yet different.

"Chrissie," he said, "I don't think I could bear it if I was never to get well again."

It was very hard for the little sister to keep her self-control. If Mrs. Ross had known how Ferdy was going to talk to Chrissie, very probably she would not have told her all she had done. But Chrissie seemed to have grown years older in a few hours.

"And yet there must be lots of people who do bear it — just what you were saying yourself," said Chrissie thoughtfully. "I suppose they get accustomed to it."

"I think it must be more than getting accustomed to make them really seem happy," said Ferdy. "P'r'aps it's something to do with not being selfish."

"Yes," said Chrissie, "I'm sure it has. You see they'd know that if they always seemed unhappy

it would make their friends unhappy too. And then —"

"What?" said Ferdy.

"I was only thinking that mamma says people can always do *something* for other people. And that makes you happier yourself than anything, you know, Ferdy."

Ferdy lay still, thinking.

"That was partly what was in my mind," he said at last. "Such lots of thinkings have come since yesterday, Chrissie — you'd hardly believe. I was thinking that *supposing* I could never run about, or do things like other boys, what a trouble I'd be to everybody, and no good."

"I don't think you need think of things that way," said his sister. "Papa and mamma love you too much ever to think you a trouble, and I'm sure you *could* be of good somehow. But I don't think you should begin puzzling about things when you're really not better yet; you'll make your head ache, and then they might think it was my fault. Oh, Ferdy," suddenly, "I had such a funny dream last night."

"I dreamt something too," said Ferdy, "but I

couldn't remember what it was. It was something about —"

"Mine was about birds," interrupted Christine, "about the swallows who have a nest just over the oriel window. I thought — "

"How *very* funny!" exclaimed Ferdy, interrupting in his turn, his eyes sparkling with excitement. "I do believe mine was too. I knew it was about birds, but I couldn't get hold of the rest of it. And now I seem to remember more, and I know I was thinking about those swallows when I fell asleep. I was wishing I could understand what they mean when they twitter and chirp. Tell me your dream, Chris; perhaps it'll make me remember mine."

Christine was delighted to see that Ferdy's thoughts were turned from melancholy things — only — there was something about him in her dream. She hoped it wouldn't make him sad again.

"I dreamt I was walking in the garden," she said, "down there on the path just below this window. I was alone, and somehow even in my dream I knew there was something the matter. It

seemed to be either late in the evening or very early in the morning, I'm not sure which, but it wasn't quite light, and there was a funny, dreamy sort of look in the sky — "

"What colour?" asked Ferdy.

"All shaded," said Chrissie, "something like mother-of-pearl. I've seen it in a picture, but never *quite* like that in the real sky, though the real sky is so very beautiful."

"That's just because it was a dream," said Ferdy sagely. "You never see things *really* the same as you do in dreams. That's what makes dreams so nice, I suppose, — nice dreams I mean, — but I've sometimes felt more unhappy in dreams than ever I did awake."

"So have I," said Chrissie.

"Well, go on," said Ferdy, "it sounds rather nice. You were walking along and the sky was so wonderful?"

"Yes," continued Chrissie, "I was looking up at it, and not thinking a bit about you being ill, and then all of a sudden I heard something rustling up over my head, and then a twittering and chirping, and I knew it was the swallows come

back, and then I got the feeling still more that there was something the matter, and I began wondering if the swallows knew and were talking about it — their chirping got to sound so like talking. And at last, standing quite still and almost holding my breath to listen, I began to make out what they were saying. The first thing I heard was, 'It's rather sad to have come back to this,' and then another voice said, 'I don't like peacocks; vain, silly birds; they have no hearts; not like us; everybody knows how much we mind what happens to our friends.' And when I heard that, Ferdy, it made me think of the poetry we were learning last week, about the swallows coming back, you know, and the changes they found."

"I daresay it was that made you dream it," said Ferdy.

Christine looked rather disappointed.

"No, we won't think that, then," said he, correcting himself as he noticed his sister's face, "it's really very interesting — 'specially as I know I dreamt something like it that I've forgotten. What more did the swallows say?"

"The other voice said something I couldn't hear. It sounded as if one was inside the nest, and the other outside. And then the first one said, 'Well, we'll do our best to cheer him up. He needn't be dull if he uses his eyes; it's a cheerful corner.' And by this time, Ferdy, I had remembered all about you being hurt, and it came into my mind how nice it would be if the swallows would tell us stories of all the things they see at the other side of the world when they go away for the winter."

"I don't think it's quite the other side of the world," said Ferdy doubtfully, "not as far as that."

"Well, never mind," said Chrissie, with a little impatience, "you know what I mean. If you keep interrupting me so, I can't tell it rightly."

"I won't, then," said Ferdy.

"There isn't much more to tell," continued Chrissie. "I looked up, thinking I might see the swallows or martins, whichever they are, and I called out, 'Oh, won't you come down and speak to me? It would be so nice for you to tell Ferdy stories about your adventures, now that I can understand what you say.' And I felt *so* pleased. But I

couldn't see them, and all I heard was twittering again, — twittering and chirping, — and then somehow I awoke, and there really *was* twittering and chirping to be heard, for my window was a little open. It was a funny dream, Ferdy, wasn't it?"

"Yes, very," said Ferdy. "I wish you'd go on with it to-night and make them tell you stories."

Chrissie shook her head.

"I don't think any one could dream regular stories like that," she said. "But it is rather nice to fancy that the swallows know about us, and that it's the same ones who come back every year. It makes them seem like friends."

"Yes," said Ferdy, "it is nice. I wonder," he went on, "what sort of things they meant me to look at out of the window. It did rather sound, Chrissie, as if they thought I'd have to stay a long time here in bed, didn't it?"

Chrissie laughed, though a little nervously.

"How funny you are, Ferdy," she said. "How could the *swallows* know, even if it had been real and not a dream? Still, we may a little fancy it is true. We could almost make a story of the window — of all the things to be seen, and all the people passing.

When you are able to be on the sofa, Ferdy, it might stand so that you would see all ways — it would really be like a watch-tower."

Ferdy raised himself a *very* little on one elbow.

"Yes," he said eagerly, "I see how you mean. I do hope I may soon be on the sofa. I think I would make a plan of looking out of one side part of the day, and then out of the other side. I don't think it would be so bad to be ill if you could make plans. It's the lying all day just the same that must get so dreadfully dull."

"Well, you need never do that," said his sister, "not even now. When Miss Lilly comes I'm to do a little lessons first, and then I daresay she'll come in here and read aloud to us, and when I go a walk mamma will sit with you. Things will soon get into plans."

"If I could do some of my work," said Ferdy, "cutting out or painting things for my scrap-book."

"I daresay you soon can," said Chrissie hopefully. She was pleased that he had not questioned her more closely as to what the doctors had said, for fortunately her cheerful talking had made him partly for-

get that he had made up his mind the night before to find out exactly everything she could tell him.

Suddenly Chrissie, who was standing in the window, gave a little cry.

"There is Miss Lilly," she exclaimed. "I am so glad. Now she has stopped to talk to somebody. Who can it be? Oh, I see, it's that naughty Jesse Piggot! I wonder why he isn't at school? She seems talking to him quite nicely. Now she's coming on again and Jesse is touching his cap. He *can* be very polite when he likes. Shall I run and meet Miss Lilly, and bring her straight up here? No, I can't, for there's mamma going down the drive towards her. She must have seen her coming from the drawing-room window."

"Go on," said Ferdy. "Tell me what they are doing. Are they shaking hands and talking to each other? I daresay they're talking about *me*. Does Miss Lilly look sorry? P'r'aps mamma is explaining that I can't have any lessons to-day."

"N—no," said Chrissie, "she's talking quite — like always, but — she's holding mamma's hand."

"Oh," said Ferdy with satisfaction, "that does mean she's sorry, I'm sure. It would be nice, Chris-

sie, if I was lying more in the window. I could see all those int'resting things myself. I could see a good deal now if I was sitting up more," and for a moment he startled his sister by moving as if he were going to try to raise himself in bed.

"Oh, Ferdy, you mustn't," she cried, darting towards him.

But poor Ferdy was already quite flat on his pillow again.

"I *can't*," he said with a sigh, "I can't sit up the least little bit," and tears came into his eyes.

"Well, don't look so unhappy," said Chrissie, returning to her post at the window, "for they are coming in now, and mamma won't be pleased if she thinks I've let you get dull. There now, I hear them coming upstairs."

"All right," said Ferdy manfully, "I'm not going to look unhappy."

And it was quite a cheerful little face which met his mother's anxious glance as she opened the door to usher in Miss Lilly.

CHAPTER V

JESSE PIGGOT

Miss Lilly's face was cheerful too. At least so it seemed to Ferdy, for she was smiling, and immediately began speaking in a bright, quick way.

But Chrissie looked at her once or twice and "understood." She saw faint traces of tears having been very lately in her governess's kind eyes, and she heard a little tremble in the voice below the cheeriness. "My dear Ferdy," Miss Lilly was saying, "see what comes of holidays! Much better have lessons than accidents, but it's an ill wind that blows no good. We shall have famous time now for your *favourite* lessons — sums and — "

"Now, Miss Lilly, you're joking — you know you are," said Ferdy, looking up in her face with his sweet blue eyes — eyes that to the young girl's fancy looked very wistful that morning. He had stretched out his arms, and was clasping them round her neck. Ferdy was very fond of Miss

Lilly. "*Aren't* you joking?" He wasn't quite, quite sure if she was, for sums were one of the few crooks in Ferdy's lot, and rather a sore subject.

Something in the tone of his voice made Miss Lilly kiss him again as she replied, "Of course I'm joking, my dear little matter-of-fact. No, your mamma says you are only to do your *really* favourite lessons for a week or two, and not those if they tire you. We are all going to spoil you, I'm afraid, my boy."

"I don't want to be spoilt," said Ferdy. "Chrissie and I have been talking. I want to make plans and be — be useful or some good to somebody, even if I have to stay in bed a good bit. What I most want to get out of bed for is to lie on the sofa and have the end of it pulled into the window, so that I can see along the roads all ways. Oh, Chrissie, you must tell Miss Lilly about the swallows, and — and — what was it I wanted to ask you?" He looked round, as if he were rather puzzled.

"Are you not talking too much?" said Miss Lilly, for the little fellow's eyes were very bright — too bright, she feared. "Chrissie dear, perhaps

you can remember what Ferdy wanted to ask me about."

"Oh, I know," said Ferdy; "it was about Jesse Piggot. Chrissie, you ask."

"We saw you talking to him — at least I did — out of the window, and we wondered what it was about. They all say he's a very naughty boy, Miss Lilly."

"I know," Miss Lilly replied. "He's a Draymoor boy" — Draymoor was the name of the mining village that Ferdy had been thinking about on his birthday morning — "or rather he used to be, till his uncle there died."

"And now he lives at Farmer Meare's, where he works, but he's still naughty," said Chrissie, as if it was rather surprising that the having left off living at the black village had not made Jesse good at once.

Miss Lilly smiled.

"I don't think everybody at Draymoor is naughty," she said. "I think Jesse would have been a difficult boy to manage anywhere, though Draymoor isn't a place with much in the way of good example certainly. But I hope it's getting a

little better. If one could get hold of the children." She sat silent for a moment or two, her eyes looking as if they saw scenes not there. "I know several of the miners' families who live nearer us than Draymoor—at Bollins, and there are some such nice children among them."

Bollins was a small hamlet on the Draymoor road, and the little house where Miss Lilly lived with her grandfather, an elderly man who had once been a doctor, was just at the Evercombe side of Bollins.

"But you haven't told us what you were saying to Jesse," said Chrissie.

"Oh no," said Miss Lilly. "Poor boy, it was nice of him. He was asking how Master Ferdy was."

Ferdy looked pleased.

"Did you tell him I was better?" he asked.

"I said I hoped so, but that I had not seen you yet. And then he asked if he might send you his 'respexs' and 'Was there any birds' eggs you'd a fancy for?'"

"Poor Jesse," said Ferdy. "But birds' eggs are one of the things he's been so naughty about—

taking them all and selling them to somebody at Freston. Papa's almost sure — at least Ferguson is — that he took some thrushes' eggs out of our garden. Fancy, Miss Lilly!"

"And then for him to offer to get Ferdy any," said Chrissie.

"He knows I c'lect them," said Ferdy; "but papa told me long ago, when I was quite little, never to take all the eggs, and *I've* never taken more than one. If you see Jesse again will you tell him he must never take more than one, Miss Lilly?"

"I think in this case," she replied, "it is better to tell him not to take any at all — the temptation would be too great if he knows he can always sell them. I told him I would give you his message, but that I did not think you wanted any eggs that he could get you, and I advised him to leave bird's-nesting alone, as it had already got him into trouble."

"What did he say?" asked Christine.

"He looked rather foolish and said he 'had nought to do of an evening, that was what got him into mischief; it wasn't as if he had a home

of his own,' though as far as that goes, I see plenty of boys who *have* homes of their own idling about in the evenings. It doesn't matter in the summer, but in the winter grandfather and I often feel sorry for them, and wish we could do something to amuse them. But now, Chrissie dear, we had better go to the schoolroom; your mamma is coming to sit with Ferdy for an hour or so."

"Good-bye, darling," said Chrissie, as she stooped to kiss Ferdy's pale little face — it had grown very pale again since the excitement of seeing Miss Lilly had faded away. "We shall be back soon — won't we, Miss Lilly?" she went on, turning to her governess as they left the room together.

"It depends on how he is," was the reply. "Mrs. Ross hopes that he will have a little sleep now, but if he is awake and not too tired when you have finished your lessons, I will read aloud to you both in his room."

"Miss Lilly," began Chrissie again, looking up very sadly when they were seated at the schoolroom table, "I don't want to be silly, but I really don't feel as if I could do any lessons. It is so — so dreadful to be without Ferdy, when you

think that only the day before yesterday we were both here together and so happy, looking forward to his birthday," and the child put her head down on her arms and broke into deep though quiet sobs.

In an instant Miss Lilly had left her place and was kneeling on the floor beside her.

"My poor little Chrissie, my dear little Chrissie," she said, "I am so sorry for you," and the tone of her voice showed that it was difficult for her to keep back her own tears, — "so very sorry; but remember, dear, that we can do much better for Ferdy by controlling our grief than by giving way to it. A great deal depends on keeping him cheerful and happily employed and interested. When I got your mother's note yesterday afternoon — oh dear, what a shock it was to me! — I spoke to my grandfather about Ferdy a great deal, and he said in such cases much depends on not letting the nervous system give way. Do you understand at all what I mean?"

"Yes, I think so," said Chrissie, drying her eyes and listening eagerly. "You mean if poor Ferdy was to lie there all day alone, like some poor

children have to do, I daresay, he'd get to feel as if he would never get well again."

"Just so," said Miss Lilly, pleased to see how sensible Chrissie was. "Of course, he must not be tired or allowed to excite himself, and for a few days he is sure to be restless and fidgety from weakness; but as he gradually gets stronger again in himself, we must do all we can not only to amuse him, but to keep up his interest in things and people outside himself."

"I know," said Chrissie, "if he can feel he's of any good to anybody, that would make him happier than anything. Ferdy has never been selfish, has he, Miss Lilly?"

"No, he certainly has never seemed so, and I do not think suffering and trial such as he may have to bear will make him so."

Chrissie's face fell again at the two sad words.

Miss Lilly saw it, and went on speaking quietly. "I don't mean anything very dreadful, dear, but he may have to stay in bed or on a couch for a long time, and of course that cannot but be a great trial to an active boy. Let us get on with

your lessons now, Chrissie, in case Ferdy is awake when they are over."

He was not awake. He slept a good part of the morning, which Mrs. Ross, sitting beside him, was very glad of; and when at last he opened his eyes and looked about him, it was not long before a smile came to his face, and he cheered his mother by saying he felt "so nicely rested."

"May Chris and Miss Lilly come back now?" he asked. "Miss Lilly said she would read aloud."

Yes, Chris and Miss Lilly would be only too happy to come, but first Ferdy must be "good" and drink some beef-tea, which was standing all ready.

It was rather an effort to do so. Ferdy did not like beef-tea, and he was not at all hungry, and he just wanted to lie still and not be bothered. But "To please me" from his mother was enough, and when she kissed him and said he *was* "a good boy," he told her, laughing, that he felt as if he were a little baby again.

Chrissie's face brightened when she heard the sound of her brother's laugh.

"Are you feeling better, Ferdy dear?" she said. "I *am* so glad, and Miss Lilly has brought a story-book of her own that we have never read."

"Oh, how nice!" said Ferdy. "Do tell me the name of the book, Miss Lilly."

"It is short stories," she replied. "I will read you the names of some of them, and you shall choose which you would like best."

The titles were all very tempting, but Ferdy made a good hit, and fixed upon one of the most interesting in the book, so said Miss Lilly. It was about a family of children in Iceland, and though it was rather long, they wished there was more of it when it came to an end. Then Miss Lilly looked at her watch.

"There is still a quarter of an hour," she said, as she turned over the leaves. "Yes, here is a short story, which will just about fill up the time."

Ferdy and Chrissie looked very pleased, but they did not say anything. They were so afraid of losing any of the precious fifteen minutes.

CHAPTER VI

A FAIRY TALE — AND THOUGHTS

"THE name of the story," said Miss Lilly, "is 'A Fairy House,'" and then she went on to read it.

"Once upon a time there was a fairy who had done something wrong, and for this reason had to be punished. I do not know exactly what it was that she had done, perhaps only something that we should scarcely think wrong at all, such as jumping on a mushroom before it was full grown, or drinking too much dew out of a lily-cup, and thereby leaving the poor flower thirsty through the hot noontide. Most likely it was nothing worse than something of this kind, but still it was a fault that had to be corrected; so the little culprit was banished to a desert part of fairyland, a bleak and barren spot, which you would scarcely have thought could be found in the magic country which we always think of as so bright and beautiful.

"There she stayed with nothing to do for some

time, which is about the worst punishment a fairy can have to endure. So she felt very pleased when one morning there came a messenger direct from the queen, charged to tell the little exile that she should be forgiven and released from her banishment as soon as she should have fulfilled a task which was to be set her. This task was to build a house, which to us may sound almost impossible without masons and carpenters and all manner of workmen. But fairy houses are not like ours, as you will hear.

"The messenger led the fairy to a spot on the moor where there was a heap of stones.

"'These are what you are to build with,' he said. 'As soon as the house is completed you may send a butterfly to tell the queen, and she will then come to test it. If it is quite perfect, you shall return at once with her to the court,' and so saying he fled away.

"The fairy set to work in good spirits. She had no need of mortar, or scaffolding, or tools, or anything, indeed, but her own little hands and the stones. Nor were the stones cut evenly and regularly, as you might have expected. They were of

all sizes and shapes, but each only required a touch from the fairy's fingers at once to fit itself into the place which she saw it was intended for. So for some time the work went on merrily. It was not till the house was very nearly completed that the fairy began to fear something was wrong. It lopped a little — a *very* little — to one side. But there was nothing to be done that she could see. So she finished it in hopes that the queen would not notice the tiny imperfection, and despatched the butterfly to announce her readiness for her royal lady's visit.

"The queen arrived promptly, — fairy queens are never unpunctual, — and at first sight she smiled amiably.

"'You have worked hard,' she said to the poor fairy, who stood there half hopeful and half trembling. Then her Majesty stepped out of her chariot, patting her winged steeds as she passed them, and entered the new building, followed by the little architect.

"All seemed right till they got to the second floor, when the queen stopped and looked round her sharply.

"'Something is wrong here,' she said. 'The left-hand wall is out of level. I suspected it downstairs, but waited to see.'

"The fairy builder looked very distressed.

"'Did you know there was anything wrong?' said the queen, more coldly than she had yet spoken.

"'I—I was afraid it was a little crooked,' the little fairy replied, 'but I hoped perhaps your Majesty would not mind it.'

"'My messenger told you that the building must be *perfect*,' replied the queen. 'You had all the stones, every one ready for its place. If you have left one out, even the smallest, the building cannot be perfect. Ah, well, you must try again,' and so saying she left the house, followed by the builder. As soon as she stepped outside she waved her wand, and in an instant the walls had fallen apart, and there was nothing to be seen but the heap of stones as before.

"The poor little fairy sat down and cried as she saw the queen's chariot disappear in the air.

"'I don't know what to do,' she thought. 'It would be just the same thing if I set to work to

build it up again. I am sure I used every stone, down to some quite tiny ones; but still it is no good crying about it,' and she started up, determined to try afresh.

"As she did so, a very slight sound caught her ears. Out of her pocket had rolled a very small stone, a tiny, insignificant pebble, probably smaller than any she had used in the building.

"'That's the very pebble I found in my shoe the other day,' she exclaimed. 'I must have picked it up with my handkerchief,' and she was just about to fling it away when a new idea struck her. Was it possible that this little atom of a stone — or rather its absence — was what had spoilt the whole piece of work? It might be so, for had not the queen said that the slightest little scrap of material wanting would spoil the perfection of the building.

"And, full of fresh hope, she carefully placed the little stone on the top of the heap and began again. All went well. Deep down in the foundations, unseen but far from unneeded, the tiny pebble found its own place, and before the sun set, the magic edifice stood perfect, gleaming

white and fair in the radiance of the evening sky.

"It was without fear or misgiving this time that the fairy sent off her butterfly messenger the next morning; and her joy was complete when the queen not only took her back to court in her own chariot, but as a proof of her perfect restoration to favour, transported the pretty white house by a wave of her wand to the centre of a lovely garden near her own palace, and gave it to the fairy as her home."

Miss Lilly stopped reading. The children looked up, pleased but a little puzzled.

"What a funny story," said Ferdy; "it's nice, but isn't it more what you call a — I forget the word."

"Allegory, do you mean?" said Miss Lilly. "Well yes, perhaps. Many fairy stories have a kind of meaning behind them, but I don't think this one is difficult to guess."

"It means, I suppose," said Chrissie, "that everything is of use, if you can find the right place for it."

"A little more than that," said Miss Lilly. "We

TOOK HER BACK TO COURT IN HER OWN CHARIOT.—P. 84.

might put it this way — that *everybody*, even the smallest and weakest, has his or her own place in the house of — " and she hesitated.

"In the house of the world?" said Ferdy.

"In the house of life," said Miss Lilly after thinking a little. "That says it better."

Then, seeing that Ferdy was looking rather tired, she told Chrissie to run off and get dressed for going a walk.

"I will send Flowers to sit with you," she said, as she stooped to kiss the little invalid, "and in the afternoon Chrissie and I will come back again for an hour or so if you are not asleep."

"I won't be asleep," said Ferdy; "I have slept quite enough to last me all day. Miss Lilly — "

"What, dear?" for the boy's eyes looked as if he wanted to ask her something. "Would you like us to bring you in some flowers? — not garden ones, but wild ones. There are still primroses — and violets, of course — in the woods."

"Yes," Ferdy replied, "I should like them *very* much. And could you get some moss, Miss Lilly? I would like to arrange them with moss, in that sort of birds'-nesty-looking way."

"I know how you mean," the young lady said. "Yes, we will bring you some moss. And, by the bye, Ferdy, if I had some wire I could show you how to make moss baskets that last for ever so long to put flowers in. You put a little tin or cup to hold water in the middle of the basket —the moss quite hides it,—and then you can always freshen up the moss by sousing it in water."

"What a nice word 'sousing' is," said Ferdy, in his quaint old-fashioned way. "It makes you think of bathing in the sea. Miss Lilly, do you think I'll ever be able to bathe in the sea again? I do so love it. And then there's skating and cricket, and when I go to school there'll be football. Papa was so good at football when he was at school. I wonder—" he stopped short. "I wonder," he went on again, "if I'll ever be able for any of those things. Boys who are all right, *well* boys, don't think of the difference being like me makes."

"No, they don't," his governess agreed. "But there is still a good long while before you would be going to school, Ferdy dear."

"I know," he said, though he could not keep back a little sigh. "I've only been two days in bed, but I have thought such a lot. Miss Lilly, there was something I wanted to ask you. It's about that boy, Jesse Piggot. I was thinking about him when I was awake in the night. If you meet him, please thank him for asking if I was better, and do you think mamma would let him come in one day to see me? It's partly that story, too."

Miss Lilly did not at first understand.

"The 'nallegory," said Ferdy, "about all the stones being some good."

Miss Lilly's face cleared; she looked pleased and interested.

"Oh yes," she said.

"I haven't got it straight in my head yet," said Ferdy. "I want to think a lot more. It's partly about me myself, and partly about Jesse and boys like him. Oh, I do wish I could be on the sofa in the window," he added suddenly. "I'd like to see the children going to school and coming back."

"I hope you will be on the sofa in a very few

days, dear," said Miss Lilly. "But I must go—Chrissie will be waiting for me. I hope we shall get some nice flowers and moss, and to-morrow I will bring some wire and green thread that I have at home on purpose for such things."

When she had gone Flowers made her appearance. She sat down with her work, and Ferdy lay so still, that she thought he must have fallen asleep again. But no, Ferdy was not asleep, only thinking; and to judge by the look on his face, his thoughts were interesting.

The moss baskets proved a great success as well as a great amusement. Ferdy's nimble fingers seemed to have grown even more nimble and delicate in touch now that he was forced to lie still. They twisted the wire into all sorts of new shapes, some quaint, some graceful, that Miss Lilly had never even thought of, and when some little old cups without handles or tiny jelly pots or tins were found to fit in, so that the flowers could have plenty of water to keep them fresh, you cannot think how pretty the moss baskets looked. The children's mother was quite delighted with one that was presented to her, and

she smiled more cheerfully than she had yet done since Ferdy's accident, to see him so busy and happy.

And time went on. It is very curious how quickly we get accustomed to things — even to great overwhelming changes, which seem at first as if they must utterly upset and make an end of everything. It is a great blessing that we *do* get used to what *is*. When I was a little girl I remember reading a story about the old proverb which in those days was to be found as one of the model lines in a copy-book. This one stood for the letter "C," and it was, "Custom commonly makes things easy."

Somehow the words fixed themselves in my memory. You don't know how often and in what very far differing circumstances I have said them over to myself; sometimes in hopefulness, sometimes when I had to face sorrows that made me feel as if I *could* not face them, "Custom commonly" seemed to be whispered into my ear, as if by a gentle little fairy voice. And I found it came true, thank God! It is one of the ways in which He helps us to bear our sorrows and

master our difficulties, above all, *real* sorrows and *real* difficulties. Fanciful ones, or foolish ones that we make for ourselves, are often in the end the hardest to bear and to overcome.

It was so with little Ferdy and his friends. One month after that sad birthday that had begun so brightly, no stranger suddenly visiting the Watch House would have guessed from the faces and voices of its inmates how lately and how terribly the blow had fallen upon them. All seemed bright and cheerful, and even the boy's own countenance, though pale and thin, had a happy and peaceful expression. More than that indeed. He was often so merry that you could hear his laugh ringing through the house if you were only passing up or down stairs, or standing in the hall below.

By this time things had settled themselves down into a regular plan. The oriel room was now Ferdy's "drawing-room" — or drawing-room and dining-room in one, as he said himself. It was his day room, and every night and morning his father or Thomas, the footman, carried him most carefully and gently from and to the invalid

couch in his favourite window to bed, or *from* bed in his own little room.

This was a delightful change. Ferdy declared he felt "almost quite well again" when the day came on which he was allowed "to go to bed properly," and be attired nicely the next morning in a little dressing-gown made to look as like a sailor suit as possible.

His general health was good, thanks to the excellent care that was taken of him, and thanks too to his own cheerful character. There were times, of course, when he *did* find it difficult to be bright — lovely summer afternoons when a sharp pang pierced his little heart at the sight of the school children racing home in their careless healthfulness, or fresh sweet mornings when he longed with a sort of thirstiness to be able to go for a walk in the woods with Christine and Miss Lilly. But these sad feelings did not last long, though the days went on, and still the doctor shook his head at the idea even of his being carried down to the lawn and laid there, as Ferdy had begun to hope might be allowed.

The oriel window was his greatest comfort. It

really was a delightful window. On one side or other there was sure to be *something* to look at, and Ferdy was quick to find interest in everything. He loved to see the school children, some of whom were already known to him, some whom he learnt to know by sight from watching them pass.

But one boyish figure he missed. All this time Jesse Piggot had never been seen. Miss Lilly had looked out for him, as Ferdy had asked her to do, but in vain. And it was not till within a day or two of a month since the accident that she heard from some of the Draymoor people that the boy had been taken off "on a job" by one of his rough cousins at the colliery village.

"And no good will it do him neither," added the woman. "That's a lad as needs putting up to no manner o' mischief, as my master says."

"Wasn't it a pity to take him away from Farmer Meare's?" Miss Lilly added.

"They hadn't really room for him there," said the woman. "But Farmer Meare is a good man. He says he'll take the poor lad back again after a bit when there'll be more work that he can do."

Miss Lilly told this over to the children the next day. Ferdy looked up with interest in his eyes.

"I hope he will come back again soon," he said. "You know, Miss Lilly, I never finished talking about him to you. I was thinking of him again a lot yesterday; it was the birds, they *were* chattering so when I was alone in the afternoon. I was half asleep, I think, and hearing them reminded me in a dreamy way of birds' nests and eggs, and then, through that, of Jesse Piggot and what the fairy story put in my head about him."

"What was it?" asked Miss Lilly.

"It's rather difficult to explain," Ferdy replied. "I was thinking, you see, that if I never get well and strong again I wouldn't seem any use to anybody. It *does* seem as if some people were no use. And Jesse Piggot seems always in everybody's way, as if there was no place for him, though quite different from me, of course, for everybody's so kind to me. And then I thought of the stones, and how they all fitted in, and I wondered what I could get to do, and I thought perhaps I might help Jesse some way."

Miss Lilly looked at Ferdy. There was a very kind light in her eyes.

"Yes, Ferdy dear," she said. "I think I understand. When Jesse comes back we must talk more about it, and perhaps we shall find out some way of fitting him into his place. Stop dear, I think I had better look at your knitting; you are getting it a little too tight on the needles."

Ferdy handed it to her with a little sigh. He did not care very much for knitting, and he had also a feeling that it was girls' work. But it had been very difficult to find any occupation for him, as he could not go on making moss baskets always, and knitting seemed the best thing for the moment. He was now making a sofa blanket for his mother, in stripes of different colours, and Miss Lilly and Christine were helping him with it, as it would otherwise have been too long a piece of work.

"I'm rather tired of knitting," he said, "now that I know how to do it. I liked it better at first, but there's no planning about it now."

"We must think of a change of work for you before long," said Miss Lilly, as she quickly fin-

ished a row so as to get the stitches rather looser again. "Don't do any more this morning, Ferdy. Lie still and talk. Tell me about the birds chattering."

"They are so sweet and funny," said Ferdy. "Sometimes I fancy I'm getting to know their different voices. And there's one that stands just at the corner of the window-sill outside, that I really think I could draw. I know the look of him so well. Or I'll tell you what," he went on. "I could *figure* him, I'm sure I could, better than draw him."

"*Figure* him! what do you mean?" said Chrissie. "What funny words you say, Ferdy."

"Do you mean modelling it?" asked Miss Lilly. "Have you ever seen any modelling?"

"No," said Ferdy, "I don't understand."

"I mean using some soft stuff, like clay or wax, and shaping it, partly with your fingers and partly with tools," replied Miss Lilly. "I don't know much about it, but I remember one of my brothers doing something of the kind."

Ferdy reflected.

"It does sound rather fun," he said, "but I

didn't mean that. I meant cutting — with a nice sharp knife and soft wood. I am sure I could figure things that way. I know what made me think of it. It was a story about the village boys in Switzerland, who cut out things in the winter evenings."

"You mean carving," said Christine; "you shouldn't call it cutting. Yes, I've always thought it must be lovely work, but you would need to be awfully clever to do it."

"I'd like to try," said the boy. "When my sofa's put up a little higher at the back, the way Mr. Stern lets it be now, I can use my hands quite well. You needn't be afraid I'd cut myself. Oh, it *would* be jolly to cut out birds, and stags' heads, and things like that!"

"Stags' heads would be awfully difficult," said Christine, "because of the sticking-out horns — they're just like branches with lots of twigs on them. What is it you call them, Miss Lilly?"

"Antlers, isn't that what you mean?" Miss Lilly replied. "Yes, they would be very difficult. You would have to begin with something much simpler, Ferdy."

"I suppose I thought of stags because the Swiss boys in the story cut out stags' heads," said Ferdy. "I think I'd try a swallow's head. When I shut my eyes I can see one quite plain. Miss Lilly, don't you think I might try to *draw* one? If I had a piece of paper and a nice pencil — "

Just then the door opened and his mother came in. Her face brightened up as soon as she caught sight of Ferdy's cheerful expression and heard his eager tone — it was always so now. Since the accident Mrs. Ross seemed a kind of mirror of her boy; if he was happy and comfortable her anxious face grew smooth and peaceful; if he had had a bad night, or was tired, or in pain, she looked ten years older.

And Miss Lilly, who, though still quite young herself, was very thoughtful and sensible, saw this with anxiety.

"It will never do for things to go on like this," she said to herself, "the strain will break down poor Mrs. Ross. And if Ferdy is never to be quite well again, or even if it takes a long time for him to recover, it will get worse and worse. We must try to find something for him to do that will take

him out of himself, as people say, — something that will make him feel himself of use, poor dear, as he would like to be. I wonder if my grandfather could speak to Mrs. Ross and make her see that she should try not to be always so terribly anxious."

For old Dr. Lilly was a very wise man. In his long life he had acquired a great deal of knowledge besides "book-learning"; he had learnt to read human beings too.

But just now Miss Lilly's thoughtful face brightened up also as Ferdy's mother came in.

"We are talking about wood-carving," she said. "I am going to ask my grandfather about it. And Ferdy would like to prepare for it by drawing a little again — he was getting on nicely just before he was ill."

"I'd like a slate," said Ferdy, "because I could rub out so easily; only drawings on a slate never look pretty — white on black isn't right."

"*I* know what," exclaimed Christine. "Mamma, do let us get Ferdy one of those beautiful white china slates — a big one, the same as your little one that lies on the hall table for messages."

Ferdy's eyes sparkled with pleasure.

"That would do lovelily," he said.

So it was arranged that Christine should drive with her mother that afternoon to the nearest town — not Whittingham, but a smaller town in another direction, called Freston, in quest of a good-sized white china slate.

CHAPTER VII

AN UNEXPECTED PIG'S HEAD

Miss Lilly and Ferdy spent a quiet hour or two together after Christine and her mother had set off. Then, as it was really a half-holiday, and Miss Lilly usually went home immediately after luncheon on half-holidays, she said good-bye to Ferdy, after seeing him comfortably settled and Flowers within hail, and started on her own way home.

She was anxious to have a talk with her grandfather and ask his advice as to the best way of helping the little boy and his mother, and keeping off the dangers to both which she saw in the future.

It was a lovely day — quite a summer day now — for it was some way on in June, and this year the weather had been remarkably beautiful — never before quite so beautiful since she had come to live in the neighbourhood, thought the young girl

to herself, and she sighed a little as she pictured in her own mind what happy days she and her two little pupils might have had in the woods and fields round about Evercombe.

"Poor Ferdy," she thought, "I wonder if he really ever will get well again. That is, in a way, the hardest part of it all — the not knowing. It makes it so difficult to judge how to treat him in so many little ways."

She was not very far from her own home by this time, and looking up along the sunny road, she saw coming towards her a familiar figure.

"I do believe it is Jesse Piggot," she said to herself. "How curious, just when I'd been thinking about him the last day or two!"

Jesse stopped as he came up to her, and it seemed to Miss Lilly that his face grew a little red, though bashfulness was certainly not one of Jesse's weak points.

"Why, Jesse!" she exclaimed, "so you've got back again. How did you get on while you were away?"

Jesse's answer to this question was rather indistinct. He murmured something that sounded like

"All right, thank you, miss," but added almost immediately in a brighter tone, "How is Master Ferdy, please?"

"Pretty well," Miss Lilly replied; "that is to say, he doesn't suffer now, and we do all we can to cheer him up."

Jesse's face grew concerned and half puzzled.

"Ain't he all right again by this time?" he asked. "I thought he'd have been running about same as before, and a-riding on his new pony."

Miss Lilly shook her head rather sadly.

"Oh no," she said, "there's no chance of anything like that for a long time" — "if ever," she added to herself. "The kind of accident that happened to Master Ferdy," she went on, "is almost the worst of any to cure — worse than a broken leg, or a broken head even."

Jesse said nothing for a moment or two, but something in his manner showed the young lady that his silence did not come from indifference. He had something in his hand, a stick of some kind, and as Miss Lilly's eyes fell on it, she saw that he had been whittling it with a rough pocket-knife.

"I'VE DONE 'EM BEFORE FROM ONE OF THE OLD SQUEAKERS UP AT THE FARM."—P. 103.

"What is that, Jesse?" she said. "Are you making something?"

The boy's face grew distinctly redder now.

"'Tis nothing, miss," he said, looking very ashamed, "only a bit o' nonsense as I thought'd make Master Ferdy laugh. I've done 'em before from one of the old squeakers up at the farm."

And he half-reluctantly allowed Miss Lilly to take out of his hand a small stick, the top of which he had chipped into a rough, but unmistakable likeness to a pig's head.

Miss Lilly almost started. It seemed such a curious coincidence that just as she was going to consult her grandfather about some new interest and occupation for Ferdy, and just, too, as the idea of her little pupil's being of use to this poor waif and stray of a boy had been put into her mind by Ferdy himself, Jesse should turn up again, and in the new character of a possible art! For though not an artist of any kind herself, she had quick perceptions and a good eye, and in the queer, grotesque carving that the boy held in his hand she felt almost sure that she de-

tected signs of something — well, of *talent*, however uncultivated, to say the least.

Jesse did not understand her start of surprise and the moment's silence that followed it. He thought she was shocked, and he grew still redder as he hastily tried to hide the poor piggy in his hand.

"I didn't think as any one 'ud see it till I met Master Ferdy hisself some time; he's partial to pigs, is Master Ferdy, though no one can say as they're pretty. But I thought it'd make him laugh."

"My dear boy," exclaimed the young girl eagerly, "don't hide away the stick. You don't understand. I am very pleased with your pig — very pleased indeed. Have you done other things like it? I should like to — " but then she stopped for a moment. She must not say anything to put it into Jesse's scatter-brained head that he was a genius, and might make his fortune by wood-carving. Of all things, as she knew by what she had heard of him, it was important that he should learn to stick to his work and work hard. So she went on quietly, "I am sure Master Ferdy will like the

pig very much, and he will think it very kind of you to have thought of pleasing him. Let me look at it again," and she took it out of Jesse's rather unwilling hands.

"It is not quite finished yet, I see," she said, "but I think it is going to be a very nice, comical pig."

And, indeed, the grotesque expression of the ears and snout — of the whole, indeed — was excellent. You could scarcely help smiling when you looked at it.

Jesse's red face grew brighter.

"Oh no, miss," he said, "it bain't finished. I'm going to black the eyes a bit — just a touch, you know, with a pencil. And there's a lot more to do to the jowl. I'm going to have a good look at old Jerry — that's the oldest porker at the farm — when he's havin' his supper to-night; you can see his side face beautiful then," and Jesse's eyes twinkled with fun.

"Oh, then you are back at the farm — at Mr. Meare's?" said Miss Lilly. "I am glad of that."

"I'm not to say reg'lar there," said Jesse, "only half on — for odd jobs so to say. I've been a mes-

sage to the smithy at Bollins just now," and certainly, to judge by the leisurely way in which he had been sauntering along when Ferdy's governess first caught sight of him, his "odd jobs" did not seem to be of a very pressing description.

"That's a pity," said the lady.

"Farmer says as he'll take me on reg'lar after a bit," added Jesse.

"And where are you living, then?" inquired Miss Lilly.

"They let me sleep in the barn," said Jesse. "And Sundays I goes to my folk at Draymoor, though I'd just as lief stop away. Cousin Tom and I don't hit it off, and it's worser when he's sober. Lord, miss, he did hide me when he was away on that navvy job!" and Jesse gave a queer sort of grin.

Miss Lilly shuddered.

"And what do you do in the evenings?" she asked.

Jesse looked uncomfortable.

"Loaf about a bit," he said vaguely.

"That isn't a very good way of spending time," she said.

Jesse screwed up his lips as if he were going to whistle, but a sudden remembrance of the respect due to the young lady stopped him.

"What's I to do else, miss?" he said.

"Well, you've something to do to-night, any way," she replied. "If you can finish the pig's head, I am sure Master Ferdy will be delighted to have it. I won't tell him about it," as she detected a slight look of disappointment on Jesse's face, "oh no, it must be a surprise. But if you call at the Watch House the first time you are passing after it is ready, I will see if I can get leave for you to see him yourself for a few minutes. The afternoon would be the best time, I think."

The boy's face beamed.

"Thank you, miss; thank you kindly," he said. "I'll see if I can't get it done to-night."

And then the two parted with a friendly farewell on each side.

Miss Lilly had a good deal to think of as she finished her walk home. She felt quite excited at the discovery she had made, and eager to tell her grandfather about it. And she was all the more pleased to see him standing at the gate

watching for her as she came within sight, for Dr. Lilly had something to tell her on his part, too.

"You are late, my dear," he said, "late, that is to say, for a Wednesday."

"Yes, gran," she replied, "I had to stay an hour or so with poor Ferdy, as Mrs. Ross and Christine were going out early."

"Then there is nothing wrong with him," said the old doctor. "I get quite nervous about the poor little chap myself. But that was not why I was coming to meet you, Eva; it was to tell you of an invitation I have from my old friend, Mr. Linham, to spend two or three weeks with him travelling in Cornwall. I should much like to go, I don't deny, except for leaving you alone, and I must decide at once, as he wants to know."

"*Of course* you must go, dear gran," replied the girl. "I don't mind being alone in the least. I daresay Mrs. Ross would be glad to have me more with them, especially if — oh grandfather, I have a lot to talk to you about!"

And then she told him all she had been thinking about Ferdy, and the curious coincidence of

meeting Jesse Piggot, and the discovery of his unsuspected talent for wood-carving.

Dr. Lilly listened with great interest. He was pleased with Eva's good sense in not praising the old porker's head too much, and he quite agreed with her that it would be well worth while to encourage little Ferdy's wish to try his own skill in the same direction.

"I believe I know the very man to give him a little help to start with," he said. "He is a young fellow who carves for Ball and Guild at Whittingham. I attended him once in a bad illness. Now he is getting on well, though he is not a genius. But he would be able to help with the technical part of the work — the right wood to use, the proper tools, and so on. If Mr. Ross approves, I will write to this man — Brock is his name — and ask him to come over to talk about it. The only difficulty is that I fear he is never free except in the evenings."

"I don't think that would matter," said Miss Lilly, — "not in summer time. Ferdy does not go to bed till half-past eight or nine. And if he gets on well with his carving, grandfather, — and

I do believe he will; you know I have always thought there was something uncommon about Ferdy, — *he* will be able to help Jesse. Who knows what may come of it? It may be the saving of Jesse."

Her pleasant face grew quite rosy with excitement. It might be such a good thing in so many ways — something to take the little invalid's thoughts off himself and to convince his too anxious mother that feeling himself able to be of use to others would be by far the surest way of securing Ferdy's own happiness in the uncertain and perhaps very trying life before him. And her grandfather quite sympathised in all she felt.

So that evening two letters were sent off from the pretty cottage at Bollins, one to Mr. Linham, accepting his invitation to Cornwall, and one to Mr. Ross, asking him to stop a moment on his drive past the old doctor's house the next morning to have a little talk about Ferdy.

"He is sure to do so, and sure too to be pleased with anything *you* think would be good for Ferdy," said Eva to her grandfather.

And this was quite true, for though Dr. Lilly no longer looked after ill people, his opinion was most highly thought of, and by no one more than by Mr. Ross, who had known him as long as he could remember knowing any one.

After Miss Lilly left him that afternoon, Ferdy, contrary to his custom, fell asleep and had a good long nap, only awaking when the carriage bringing his mother and Chrissie back from their expedition drove up to the door.

Mrs. Ross's anxious face grew brighter when she saw how fresh and well the boy was looking. She had been afraid lest the increasing heat of the weather would try Ferdy's strength too much, especially as the doctors would not yet allow him to be carried out of doors. But here again the oriel window proved of the greatest use: it could always be open at one side or the other, according to the time of day, so that it was easy to catch whatever breeze was going for Ferdy's benefit, and yet to shade him from the sun. He certainly did not look at all fagged or exhausted this afternoon, though it had been rather a hot day for June.

Christine followed her mother into the room, her

arms filled with parcels, her eyes bright with pleasure.

"We've got such a beautiful slate for you, Ferdy," she said, "and a book of animal pictures — outlines — that will be quite easy to copy on a slate, and the man at the shop said it was a very good thing to study them for any one who wanted to try wood-carving."

"Oh, how nice!" said Ferdy eagerly. "Do let me see, Chrissie! And what are those other parcels you've got?"

"Two are from the German confectioner's at Freston — cakes for tea — that nice kind, you know — the fancy curly shape, like the ones in the 'Struwelpeter' pictures."

Ferdy's face expressed great satisfaction.

"We must have a regular good tea," he said; "those cakes are meant to be eaten while they're quite fresh. And what's the other parcel, Chrissie?"

"Oh, it's two little ducky cushions," his sister replied, "quite little tiny ones of eider-down. They are to put under your elbows when you're sitting up, or at the back of your neck, or into any little odd

corner where the big ones don't fit in. You know you've often wished for a little cushion, and when you go out into the garden or for a drive you'll need them still more, mamma says."

All the time she had been talking, Christine had been undoing her parcels, Mrs. Ross helping her to lay out their contents.

"Thank you so very much, mamma," said Ferdy, "everything's beautiful. Which way did you drive to Freston?"

"We went one way and came back the other," said Mrs. Ross, — "by the road that passes near Draymoor, you know. Dear me, even on a fine summer's day that place looks grim and wretched! And there seems always to be idle boys about, even early in the afternoon."

"Miss Lilly says there's often a lot that can't get work to do," said Ferdy. "It's this way — sometimes they're very, *very* busy, and sometimes there's not enough to do, and that's how they get into mischief, I suppose," he added, with the air of a small Solomon.

"It seems a pity that no one can take a real interest in the place," said his mother; "but here

comes tea, Ferdy. I am sure we shall all be glad of it. Chrissie, you can arrange the cakes while I pour out tea."

They seemed a happy little party that afternoon — happier than Ferdy's mother, at least, would have believed it possible they could be, had she, three months or so before, foreseen the sad trouble that was to befall her darling.

"I wonder how soon I shall be able to go for a drive," said Ferdy. "Will you ask the big doctor the next time he comes, mamma? I should like to see Draymoor again. I've never forgotten that day I went there with papa. And now I understand about it so much better. Miss Lilly says it isn't that the people are very poor — they earn a lot of money when they are at work, but then they spend it all instead of spreading it over the times they haven't work. Isn't it a pity they can't be taught something else to do for the idle times, to keep them from quarrelling with each other and being unkind to their wives and children?"

Mrs. Ross looked at Ferdy with surprise and some misgiving. It was doubtless Miss Lilly who had talked to him about the Draymoor people.

Was it quite wise of her to do so? Ferdy was so sensitive already, and his illness seemed to have made him even more "old-fashioned." To hear him talk as he was doing just now, one could easily have believed him twice his real age. But a second glance at his face made her feel easy again. He was speaking in a tone of quiet interest, but not in any nervous or excited way.

"Yes," she replied, "there is plenty to be done to improve Draymoor, and at present no one seems to take any special charge of it. If your father was less busy and richer, I know he would like to try to do something for the people there."

"Miss Lilly says if there was any one to look after the boys it would be such a good thing," said Ferdy. "I hope Jesse Piggot won't go back there to live."

Then they went on to talk of other things. Ferdy greatly approved of the German cakes, and his mother's spirits rose higher as she saw him eating them with a good appetite and making little jokes with his sister.

The rest of the evening passed happily. Ferdy amused himself for some time by "trying" his new

slate. He drew two or three animals without any model, and was delighted to find that Chrissie recognised them all, and that they did not compare very badly with the outlines she had brought him.

"I am tired now," he said as he put down his pencil with a little sigh, but a sigh of contentment as much as of weariness, "but I know what I'll do to-morrow, Chrissie. I'll *study* one animal's head, or perhaps a bird. If those old swallows would but settle for a bit on the window-sill, or even on one of the branches close by, I'm sure I could do them. What a pity it is they can't understand what we want, for I always feel as if they knew all about us."

"That's because of my dream," said Christine importantly. "But I must go now, Ferdy dear; Flowers has called me two or three times to change my frock."

So Ferdy lay on his couch, one end of which was drawn into the window, watching the sweet summer sunset and the gentle "good-night" stealing over the world. There were not many passers-by at that hour. The school children had long

WATCHING THE SWEET SUMMER SUNSET. — P. 116.

ago gone home; the little toddlers among them must already be in bed and asleep. Now and then a late labourer came slowly along with lagging steps, or one of the village dogs, in search of a stray cat perhaps, pricked up his ears when Ferdy tapped on the window-pane. But gradually all grew very still, even the birds ceasing to twitter and cheep as they settled themselves for the night. And Ferdy himself felt ready to follow the general example, when suddenly his attention was caught by a figure that came down the lane from the farm and stood for a moment or two at the end of the drive where the gate had been left open.

Ferdy almost jumped as he saw it.

"Flowers," he exclaimed, as at that moment the maid came into the room followed by Thomas to carry him up to bed. "Flowers — Thomas, do look! Isn't that Jesse Piggot standing at the gate? He must have come back again."

"I don't know, I'm sure, Master Ferdy," said Flowers, who did not feel any particular interest in Jesse Piggot.

But Thomas was more good-natured. He peered out into the dusk.

"It looks like him, Master Ferdy," he said, "but I don't know that he'll get much of a welcome even if he *has* come back. Such a lad for mischief never was," for Thomas had had some experience of Jesse once or twice when the boy had been called into the Watch House for an odd job.

"Never mind about that," said Ferdy, "*I* shall be glad to see him again. Be sure you find out in the morning, Thomas, if it is him."

CHAPTER VIII

WELCOME VISITORS

But Ferdy did not need to wait till Thomas had made his inquiries, which most likely would have taken some time, as he was not a young man who cared to be hurried.

Miss Lilly in her quiet way was quite excited when she came the next morning.

"Whom do you think I met yesterday afternoon on my way home, Ferdy?" she said as soon as she and Chrissie came into the oriel room for the part of the morning they now regularly passed there with the little invalid.

"I can guess," said Ferdy eagerly. "I believe it was Jesse Piggot," and then he told Miss Lilly about having seen a boy's figure standing at the end of the drive looking in.

"Poor fellow," said Miss Lilly, "I daresay he was watching in the hopes of seeing some one who could—" but then she stopped short.

Ferdy looked up with curiosity.

"'Who could' what, Miss Lilly?" he asked.

His governess smiled.

"I think I mustn't tell you," she said. "It might disappoint the boy, if he is wanting to give you a little surprise. And I scarcely think he would have sent in a message by any one but me," she went on, speaking more to herself than to Ferdy, "after what I promised him last night."

"What did you promise him, Miss Lilly?" the little boy asked. His curiosity was greatly excited.

"Only that if possible I would get leave for him to come in and see you for a few minutes," the young lady replied. "I must ask Mrs. Ross."

"Oh, I'm sure mamma wouldn't mind," said Ferdy. "I do so wonder what the surprise is."

"You'd better not think about it," said Chrissie sagely. "That's what *I* do. I put things quite out of my mind if I know I can't find out about them. Don't you, Miss Lilly?"

Miss Lilly smiled.

"I try to," she said, "but I own I find it very far from easy sometimes. I think the best way to put something out of your mind is to put

something else in. So supposing we go on with our lessons, Ferdy."

"Oh, but first," said Ferdy eagerly, "first I must show you the beautiful things mamma and Chris brought me yesterday. See here, Miss Lilly."

And Eva examined his new possessions with great interest, even greater interest than Ferdy knew, for her head was full of her new ideas about Jesse, and the talent she believed he had shown in his carving. She turned over the leaves of the little book of animal outlines till she came to one of a pig, and she sat looking at it in silence for so long that Christine peeped over her shoulder to see what it could be that had so taken her fancy.

"It's a pig, Ferdy," she called out, laughing. "Miss Lilly, I didn't know you were so fond of pigs. I'm sure there are much prettier animals in the book than pigs."

"I daresay there are," said her governess good-naturedly. "But I *am* very interested in pigs, especially their heads. I wish you would draw me one, Ferdy, after lessons. I would like to see how you can do it."

Ferdy was quite pleased at the idea. But in the meantime Miss Lilly reminded both children that they must give their attention to the English history which was that morning's principal lesson.

Jesse Piggot did not make his appearance. It was a busy day at the farm, and for once there was plenty for him to do. He had finished carving the stick, and if he had dared he would have run off with it to the Watch House. But what he had gone through lately had been of use to the boy. He was becoming really anxious to get a good regular place at Farmer Meare's, for he had no wish to go off again on "odd jobs" under the tender mercies of his rough Draymoor cousins.

And, on the whole, Miss Lilly settled in her own mind that she was not sorry he had not come that day, for she hoped that Mr. Ross had seen her grandfather that morning and heard from him about the lessons in wood-carving which the old doctor thought might be so good for Ferdy; and more than that, she hoped that perhaps Mr. Ross's interest in poor Jesse might be increased by what Dr. Lilly would tell about him.

It all turned out very nicely, as you will hear.

Late that afternoon, just as lessons were over and Chrissie had got her mother's leave to walk a little bit of her way home with Miss Lilly, Thomas appeared in the oriel room with a message from Mrs. Ross.

"Would Miss Lilly stay to have tea with Miss Christine and Master Ferdy? Mrs. Ross would come up presently, but there was a gentleman in the drawing-room with her just now."

"What a bother!" exclaimed Chrissie. "Now it will be too late for me to go with you, Miss Lilly. I wish horrid, stupid gentlemen wouldn't come to call and interrupt mamma when it's her time for coming up to see Ferdy. And it's not really tea-time yet."

But tea appeared all the same. There was plainly some reason for Miss Lilly's staying later than usual. And when the reason was explained in the shape of Dr. Lilly, who put his kind old face in at the door half an hour or so later, no one welcomed him more heartily than Chrissie, though she got very red when Ferdy mischievously whispered to her to ask if she counted *him* "a horrid, stupid gentleman."

Dr. Lilly was a great favourite with the children. And never had Ferdy been more pleased to see him than to-day.

"I am so glad you've come," he said, stretching out his little hand, thinner and whiter than his old friend would have liked to see it. "Miss Lilly says you know a lot about wood-carving, and I do so want to learn to do it."

Dr. Lilly smiled.

"I am afraid my granddaughter has made you think me much cleverer than I am, my dear boy," he replied. "I can't say I know much about it myself, but I have a young friend who does, and if you really want to learn, I daresay he might be of use to you."

Ferdy's eyes sparkled, and so did Miss Lilly's, for she knew her grandfather too well to think that he would have spoken in this way to Ferdy unless he had good reason for it.

"Grandfather must have seen Mr. Ross and got his consent for the lessons," she thought.

And she looked as pleased as Ferdy himself, who was chattering away like a little magpie to Dr. Lilly about all the lovely things he would

make if he really learnt to carve — or "cut out," as he kept calling it — very nicely.

"What I'd like best of all to do is swallows," he said. "You see I've got to know the swallows over this window so well. I do believe I know each one of them sep'rately. And sometimes in the morning early — I can hear them out of my bedroom window too — I really can almost tell what they're talking about."

"Swallows are charming," said Dr. Lilly, "but to see them at their best they should be on the wing. They are rather awkward-looking birds when not flying."

"They've got *very* nice faces," said Ferdy, who did not like to allow that his friends were short of beauty in any way. "Their foreheads and necks are such a pretty browny colour, and then their top feathers are a soft sort of blue, greyey blue, which looks so nice over the white underneath. I think they're awfully pretty altogether."

"You have watched them pretty closely, I see," said Dr. Lilly, pleased at Ferdy's careful noticing of his feathered neighbours. "I love swallows as much as you do, but it takes a master hand to

carve *movement*. You may begin with something easier, and who knows what you may come to do in time."

Ferdy did not answer. He lay still, his blue eyes gazing up into the sky, from which at that moment they almost seemed to have borrowed their colour. Visions passed before his fancy of lovely things which he would have found it difficult to describe, carvings such as none but a fairy hand could fashion, of birds and flowers of beauty only to be seen in dreams — it was a delight just to think of them. And one stood out from the rest, a window like his own oriel window, but entwined with wonderful foliage, and in one corner a nest, with a bird still almost on the wing, poised on a branch hard by.

"Oh," and he all but spoke his fancy aloud, "I feel as if I could make it *so* lovely."

But just then, glancing downwards, though still out of doors, he gave a little start.

"It *is* him," he exclaimed. "Miss Lilly, dear, do look. Isn't that Jesse, standing at the gate?"

Yes, Jesse it was. Not peeping in shyly, as

some boys would have done. That was not Mr. Jesse's way. No, there he stood, in the middle of the open gateway, quite at his ease, one hand in his pocket, in the fellow of which the other would have been, no doubt, if it had not been holding an inconvenient shape of parcel — a long narrow parcel done up in a bit of newspaper, which had seen better days; not the sort of parcel you could possibly hide in a pocket. It was tea-time at the farm, and Jesse had slipped down to the Watch House in hopes of catching sight of Miss Lilly, for she had spoken of the afternoon as the best time for seeing Ferdy.

"Of course it is Jesse," said the young lady. "Look, grandfather, don't you think I may run down and ask Mrs. Ross to let me bring him in for a few minutes?"

And off she went.

A minute or two later Ferdy and Chrissie, still looking out of the window in great anxiety lest Jesse should get tired of waiting and go away before Miss Lilly could stop him, saw their governess hurry up the drive. And Jesse, as he caught sight of her, came forward, a little shy and

bashful now, as he tugged at his cap by way of a polite greeting.

Ferdy's face grew rosy with pleasure.

"They're coming in," he said to Dr. Lilly.

"Yes," said the old gentleman. "I will go over to the other side of the room with the newspaper, so that the poor lad won't feel confused by seeing so many people."

But all the same from behind the shelter of his newspaper the old gentleman kept a look-out on the little scene passing before him.

Miss Lilly came in quickly, but Jesse hung back for a moment or two at the door. He was almost dazzled at first by the bright prettiness before him. For he had never seen such a charming room before, and though he would not have understood it if it had been said to him, underneath his rough outside Jesse had one of those natures that are much and quickly alive to beauty of all kinds. And everything that love and good taste could do to make the oriel room a pleasant prison for the little invalid boy, had been done.

It was a very prettily shaped room to begin with, and the creeping plants trained round the

window outside were now almost in their full summer richness. Roses peeped in with their soft blushing faces; honeysuckle seemed climbing up by the help of its pink and scarlet fingers; clematis, the dear old "traveller's joy," was there too, though kept in proper restraint. The oriel window looked a perfect bower, for inside, on the little table by Ferdy's couch, were flowers too — one of his own moss-baskets, filled with wild hyacinth, and a beautiful large petalled begonia, one of old Ferguson's special pets, which he had been proud to send in to adorn Master Ferdy's room, and two lovely fairy-like maidenhair ferns.

And the little group in the window seemed in keeping with the flowers and plants. There was the delicate face of the little invalid, and pretty Christine with her fluffy golden hair, and Miss Lilly, slight and dark-eyed, stooping over them, as she explained to Ferdy that Jesse was longing to see him.

Altogether the poor boy, rude and rough as he was, felt as if he were gazing at some beautiful picture; he would have liked to stand there longer

— the feelings that came over him were so new and so fascinating. He did not see old Dr. Lilly behind his newspaper in the farther corner of the room — he felt as if in a dream, and he quite started when Miss Lilly, glancing round, spoke to him by name.

"Come in, Jesse," she said, "I do want Master Ferdy to see — you know what."

Jesse was clutching the little walking-stick tightly. He had almost forgotten about it. But he moved it from his right arm to his left, as he caught sight of the small white hand stretched out to clasp his own big brown one — though, after all, as hands go, the boy's were neither thick nor clumsy.

"I'm so glad you've come back, Jesse," said Ferdy in his clear, rather weak tones. "You didn't care for being away, did you? At least, not much?"

"No, Master Ferdy, 'twas terrible rough," said the boy. "I'm glad to be back again, though I'd be still gladder if Mr. Meare'd take me on reg'lar like."

"I hope he will soon," said Ferdy. "I daresay

papa wouldn't mind saying something to him about it, if it would be any good. I'll ask him. But what's that you've got wrapped up so tight, Jesse?"

Jesse reddened.

"Then the young lady didn't tell you?" he said, half turning to Miss Lilly.

"Of course not," she replied. "Don't you remember, Jesse, I said you should give it to Master Ferdy yourself?"

Jesse fumbled away at the strips of newspaper he had wound round his stick, till Ferdy's eyes, watching with keen interest, caught sight of the ears and the eyes and then the snout of the grotesque but unmistakable pig's head — "old Jerry — the biggest porker at the farm."

"Oh, Jesse," cried Ferdy, his face radiant with delight, "*how* lovely!" and though the word was not quite exactly what one would have chosen, it sounded quite perfect to Jesse — it showed him that Master Ferdy "were right down pleased."

"'Tis only a bit o' nonsense," he murmured as he stuffed the stick into the little invalid's hands. "I thought it'd make you laugh, Master Ferdy. I

took it off old Jerry — you know old Jerry — the fat old fellow as grunts so loud for his dinner."

"Of course I remember him," said Ferdy. "Don't you, Christine? We've often laughed at him when we've run in to look at the pigs. Isn't it *capital?* Do you really mean that you cut it out yourself, Jesse? Why, I'd *never* be able to cut out like that! He really looks as if he was just going to open his mouth to gobble up his dinner, doesn't he, Miss Lilly?"

"He's very good — very good indeed," she replied. And then raising her voice a little, "Grandfather," she said, "would you mind coming over here to look at Jesse's carving?"

Dr. Lilly crossed the room willingly. Truth to tell, the newspaper had not been getting very much of his attention during the last few minutes.

In his own mind he had been prepared for some little kindly exaggeration on Eva's part of Jesse's skill, so that he was really surprised when he took the stick in his own hands and examined it critically, to see the undoubted talent — to say the least — the work showed.

Rough and unfinished and entirely "untaught"

work of course it was. But that is exactly the sort of thing to judge by. It was the *spirit* of it that was so good, though I daresay you will think that a curious word to apply to the rude carving of so very "unspiritual" a subject as an old pig's head, by a peasant boy! All the same I think I am right in using the expression.

"Life-like and certainly original," murmured Dr. Lilly. "Grotesque, of course — that is all right, that is always how they begin. But we must be careful — very careful," he went on to himself in a still lower tone of voice.

And aloud he only said, as he looked up with a smile, "Very good, my boy, very good. You could not have a better amusement for your idle hours than trying to copy what you see in the world about you. It is the *seeing* that matters. You must have watched this old fellow pretty closely to understand his look, have you not?"

Jesse, half pleased, half shy, answered rather gruffly. "He do be a queer chap, to be sure. Master Ferdy, and Missie too, has often laughed at him when they've been up at the farm. And that's how I come to think of doing him on a

stick. And many a time," he went on, as if half ashamed of the childishness of the occupation, "there's naught else I can do to make the time pass, so to say."

"You could not have done better," said the old doctor kindly. "Don't think it is waste of time to try your hand at this sort of thing after your other work is done. I hope you may learn to carve much better. A little teaching would help you on a good deal, and proper tools and knowledge of the different kinds of wood."

Jesse's face expressed great interest, but then it clouded over a little.

"Yes, sir," he agreed, "but I dunnot see how I could get the teaching. There's nothing like that about here — not like in big towns, where they say there's teaching for nothing, or next to nothing — evenings at the Institutes."

"Ah well, help comes to those who help themselves. Master Ferdy may be able to give you some hints if he learns carving himself. And he can tell you some stories of the poor country boys in Switzerland and some parts of Germany — how they work away all by themselves till they learn

to make all sorts of beautiful things. Have you any other bits of carving by you that you could show me?"

Again Jesse's brown face lighted up, and Ferdy listened eagerly.

"Oh lor, yes, sir, all manner of nonsense — whistles, sir, though there's some sense in whistles, to be sure," with a twinkle of fun.

"Then bring me a pocketful of nonsense this evening — no, to-morrow evening will be better — to my house at Bollins. You know it, of course? And we'll have a look over them together. Perhaps I may have a friend with me, who knows more about carving than I do."

"And after Dr. Lilly has seen them, please bring some of them for me to see too, Jesse," said Ferdy. "When can he come again, do you think, Miss Lilly?"

Miss Lilly considered.

"On Friday afternoon. Can you get off for half an hour on Friday about this time, Jessie?"

"Oh yes, miss, no fear but I can," the boy replied.

"And thank you ever so many times — a great,

great many times, for old Jerry," said Ferdy as he stretched out his little hand in farewell.

Jessie beamed with pleasure.

"I'll see if I can't do something better for you, Master Ferdy," he said.

And to himself he added, "It's a deal sensibler, after all, than knocking up after mischief all the evening — a-shamming to smoke and a-settin' trees on fire." For this had been one of his worst misdeeds in the village not many months before, when he and some other boys had hidden their so-called "cigars" of rolled-up leaves, still smouldering, in the hollow of an old oak, and frightened everybody out of their wits in the night by the conflagration which ended the days of the poor tree and threatened to spread farther.

Still more pleased would he have been could he have overheard Ferdy's words after he had gone.

"Isn't it really capital, Dr. Lilly? I don't believe I could *ever* do anything so like *real* as this old Jerry."

CHAPTER IX

"MY PUPILS"

THAT summer was a very, very lovely one. It scarcely rained, and when it did, it was generally in the night. If it is "an ill wind that brings nobody any good," on the other hand I suppose that few winds are so good that they bring nobody any harm, so possibly in some parts of the country people *may* have suffered that year for want of water; but this was not the case at Evercombe, where there were plenty of most well-behaved springs, which — or some of which at least — had never been known to run dry.

So the little brooks danced along their way as happily as ever, enjoying the sunshine, and with no murmurs from the little fishes to sadden their pretty songs, no fears for themselves of their full bright life running short. Every living thing seemed bubbling over with content; the flowers and blossoms were as fresh in July as in May;

never had the birds been quite so busy and merry; and as for the butterflies, there was no counting their number or variety. Some new kinds *must* have come this year from butterflyland, Ferdy said to Christine one afternoon when he was lying out on his new couch on the lawn. Christine laughed, and so did Miss Lilly, and asked him to tell them where that country was, and Ferdy looked very wise and said it lay on the edge of fairyland, the fairies looked after it, that much he *did* know, and some day perhaps he would find out more.

And then he went on to tell them, in his half-joking, half-serious way, that he really thought the swallows were considering whether it was worth while to go away over the sea again next autumn. He had heard them having *such* a talk early that morning, and as far as he could make out, that was what they were saying.

"The spring came so early this year, and the summer looks as if it were going to last for always," he said. "I don't wonder at the swallows. Do you, Miss Lilly?"

Eva smiled, but shook her head.

"It is very nice of them to be considering about

it," she replied, "for, no doubt, they will be sorry to leave you and the oriel window, Ferdy — sorrier than ever before." For she understood the little boy so well, that she knew it did him no harm to join him in his harmless fancies sometimes. "But they are wiser than we are in certain ways. They can feel the first faint whiff of Jack Frost's breath long before we have begun to think of cold at all."

"Like the Fairy Fine-Ear," said Ferdy, "who could hear the grass growing. I always like to think of that — there's something so — so *neat* about it."

"What a funny word to use about a fairy thing," said Christine, laughing. "Ah, well, any way we needn't think about Jack Frost or cold or winter just yet, and a day like this makes one feel, as Ferdy says, as if the summer must last for always."

It had been a great, an unspeakable comfort to the family at the Watch House, all thinking so constantly about their dear little man, to have this lovely weather for him. It had made it possible for him to enjoy much that would otherwise

have been out of the question — above all, the being several hours of the day out of doors.

The big doctor had come again, not long after the day I told you of — the day of Miss Lilly's grandfather's visit, and of the presentation of the "old Jerry stick," as it came to be called. And he gave leave at last for Ferdy to be carried out of doors and to spend some hours on the lawn, provided they waited till a special kind of couch, or "garden-bed" in Ferdy's words, was ordered and sent from London. It was a very clever sort of couch, as it could be lifted off its stand, so to say, and used for carrying the little fellow up and down stairs without the slightest jar or jerk.

And Ferdy did not feel as if he were deserting his dear oriel window, for the nicest spot in the whole garden for the daily camping-out was on the lawn just below the swallows' home. And watching their quaint doings, their flyings out and in, their "conversations," and now and then even a tiny-bird quarrel among the youngsters, came to be a favourite amusement at the times, which must come in every such life as Ferdy had to lead, when he felt too tired to read or to

be read to, too tired for his dearly loved "cutting-out" even, clever as he was getting to be at it.

Miss Lilly's hopes were fulfilled. Ferdy was having real lessons in carving two or three times a week. Dr. Lilly had arranged all about it, with the young man he had thought of, before he went away. His going away had turned into a much longer absence than was at first expected, but out of this came one very pleasant thing — Miss Lilly was living altogether at the Watch House.

This was a most happy plan for Ferdy, and for everybody, especially so far as the carving lessons were concerned, for Mr. Brock could only come in the evening, and but for Miss Lilly's presence there might have been difficulties in the way, Mrs. Ross was so terribly afraid of overtiring Ferdy, and nervous about his straining himself or doing too much in any way.

But she knew she could trust Eva, who really seemed to have, as her grandfather said, "an old head on young shoulders." She was the first to see if Ferdy was getting too eager over his work, or tiring himself, and then too, though she had not actual artist talent herself, she had a very

quick and correct eye. She understood Mr. Brock's directions sometimes even better than Ferdy himself, and was often able to help him out of a difficulty or give him a hint to set him in a right way when he was working by himself in the day-time.

And another person was much the gainer by Miss Lilly's stay at the Watch House. I feel sure, dear children, you will quickly guess who that was.

Jesse Piggot?

Yes, poor Jesse.

But for Eva I doubt if he would have been allowed to share Ferdy's lessons. Mrs. Ross had grown nervous since that sad birthday morning, though at the time she seemed so calm and strong.

But she was now too anxious, and I am afraid Flowers was a little to blame for her mistress's fears that Jesse would in some way or other harm little Ferdy. Flowers did not like Jesse. Indeed, a good many people besides the Watch House servants had no love for the boy. It was partly Jesse's own fault, partly a case of giving a dog a bad name.

"He came of such a rough lot," they would say. "Those Draymoor folk were all a bad lot, and Piggot's set about the worst. Jesse was idle, and 'mischeevious,' and impudent," and besides all these opinions of him, which Flowers repeated to Ferdy's mother, there was always "some illness about at Draymoor — at least there was bound to be — scarlet fever or measles or something, in a place where there were such swarms of rough, ill-kept children."

This was really not the case, for Draymoor was an extraordinarily healthy place, and when Mrs. Ross spoke to Dr. Lilly before he left of her fears of infection being brought to her boy, he was able to set her mind more at rest on this point, and Eva took care to remind her from time to time of what "grandfather had said." And Jesse's luck seemed to have turned. To begin with, he was now regularly employed at the farm, and a week or two after Mrs. Ross had consented to his sharing Ferdy's lessons, the Draymoor difficulty came to an end, for Farmer Meare gave him a little room over the cow-houses, and told him he might spend his Sundays there too if he

liked, so that there was really no need for him to go backwards and forwards to the neighbourhood Ferdy's mother dreaded so, at all.

He was not overworked, for he was a very strong boy, but he had plenty to do, and there might have been some excuse for him if he had said he felt too tired "of an evening" to do anything but loiter about or go to bed before the sun did.

No fear of anything of the kind, however. Jesse was a good example of the saying that it is the busiest people who have the most time. The busier he was in the day, the more eager he seemed that nothing should keep him from making his appearance at the door of the oriel room a few minutes before the time at which the wood-carver from Whittingham was due.

And he was sure to be heartily welcomed by Ferdy and his governess, and Christine too, if she happened to be there.

The first time or two Miss Lilly had found it necessary to give him a little hint.

"Have you washed your hands, Jesse?" she said, and as Jesse looked at his long brown fingers

rather doubtfully, she opened the door again and called to good-natured Thomas, who had just brought the boy upstairs. "Jesse must wash his hands, please," she said.

And from that evening the brown hands were always quite clean. Then another hint or two got his curly black hair cropped and his boots brushed, so that it was quite a tidy-looking Jesse who sat at the table on Mr. Brock's other side, listening with all his ears and watching with all his eyes.

And he learnt with wonderful quickness. The teacher had been interested in him from the first. Old Jerry's head had shown him almost at once that the boy had unusual talent, and the next few weeks made him more and more sure of this.

"We must not let it drop," he said to Eva one day when he was able to speak to her out of hearing of the boys. "When Dr. Lilly returns I must tell him about Jesse. He must not go on working as a farm-labourer much longer. His touch is improving every day, and he will soon be able to group things better than I can do myself — much better than I could do at his

age," with a little sigh, for poor Mr. Brock was not at all conceited. He was clever enough to know pretty exactly what he could do and what he could not, and he felt that he could never rise very much higher in his art.

Miss Lilly listened with great pleasure to his opinion of Jesse, but, of course, she said any change in the boy's life was a serious matter, and must wait to be talked over by her grandfather and Mr. Ross when Dr. Lilly came home.

And in her own heart she did not feel sure that they would wish him to give up his regular work, not at any rate for a good while to come, and till it was more certain that he could make his livelihood in a different way; for what Dr. Lilly cared most about was to give pleasant and interesting employment for leisure hours — to bring some idea of beauty and gracefulness into dull home lives.

She said something of this kind one evening after Jesse had gone, and she saw by the bright look in Ferdy's face that he understood what she meant, better even than Mr. Brock himself did perhaps.

"It sounds all very nice, miss," said the wood-carver, "but I doubt if there's any good to be done in that sort of way unless when there's real talent such as I feel sure this Piggot lad has. The run of those rough folk have no idea beyond loafing about in their idle hours; and, after all, if they're pretty sober — and some few are that — what can one expect? The taste isn't in them, and if it's not there, you can't put it."

Eva hesitated.

"Are you so sure of that?" she said doubtfully.

"Well, miss, it looks like it. With Jesse now, there was no encouragement — it came out because it was there."

"Yes, but I think Jesse is an exception. He *has* unusual talent, and in a case like his I daresay it will come to his choosing a line of his own altogether. But even for those who have no talent, and to begin with, even no taste, I do think *something* might be done," she said.

"Thomas has taken to making whistles," said Ferdy, "ever since he saw Jesse's. He can't carve a bit — not prettily, I mean — but he cuts out letters rather nicely, and he's been giving every-

body presents of whistles with their — 'relitions' on."

"*Initials* you mean, dear," said Miss Lilly.

"*Initials*," repeated Ferdy, getting rather pink.

"Ah," said the wood-carver with a smile, "you can't quite take Thomas as an example, my boy. Why, compared to many of the even well-to-do people about, his whole life is 'a thing of beauty.' Look at the rooms he lives in, the gardens, the ladies he sees. And as for those Draymoor folk, they'd rather have the bar of an inn than the finest picture gallery in the world. No, miss, with all respect, you 'can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.' "

Ferdy laughed. He had never heard the quaint old saying before, and as it was time for Mr. Brock to go, no more was said.

But both Miss Lilly and Ferdy had their own thoughts and kept their own opinion.

Ferdy's own work made him very happy, and of its kind it was very nice. His little mind was full of sweet and pretty fancies, but these, of course, for such a mere child as he was, and especially as he could not sit up to do his

carving, it was very difficult to put into actual shape.

But his happy cheeriness kept him from being discouraged.

"I shall never be as clever as Jesse," he told Miss Lilly and Christine, "but I don't mind. P'r'aps when we're big I'll *think* of things for Jesse to *do*."

"You can't tell yet what you may be able to do when you're big," said his governess. "I think it is wonderful to see all you can do already. Those animals for the poor little children at the hospital are beautiful, Ferdy."

"They're *toys*," said Ferdy with some contempt, "only," more cheerfully, "I'm very glad if they'll please the poor little children. But oh, Miss Lilly dear, if I could make you see the beautiful things I *think!* The prettiest of all always comes something like the oriel window — like an oriel window in fairyland."

"Was there a window like that in the house the little fairy had to build, do you think, Miss Lilly?" asked Christine.

"No, of course not," said Ferdy, before his gov-

erness had time to answer. "My thinked window isn't built, it's cut out; it's all beautiful flowers and leaves, like the real window in summer, only far, far prettier. And there are birds' nests, with them *almost* flying, they are so light and feathery looking, and — " he stopped, and lay back with his eyes closed and a dreamy smile on his face.

"When you are older," said Miss Lilly, "I hope you will travel a good deal and go to see some of the wonderful carvings there are in Italy and Germany, and indeed in England too. Not only wood-carving, but sculpture. Fancy, *stone* worked so as to look as if a breath of air would make it quiver!"

She spoke perhaps a little thoughtlessly, and in an instant she felt that she had done so, for Ferdy opened his big blue eyes and gazed up at her with a strange wistful expression.

"Miss Lilly dear," he said, "you mustn't count on my doing anything like that — travelling, I mean, or things well people can do. P'r'aps, you know, I'll be all my life like this."

Eva turned her head aside. She did not want

either Ferdy or his sister to see that his quaint words made her feel very sad — that, indeed, they brought the tears very near her eyes.

And in a minute or two Ferdy seemed to have forgotten his own sad warning. He was laughing with Christine at the comical expression of a pig-ling which he had mounted on the back of a rather eccentric-looking donkey — it was his first donkey, and he had found it more difficult than old Jerrys.

That evening a pleasant and very unexpected thing happened.

It was a lesson evening, but a few minutes before the time a message was brought to the oriel room by good-natured Thomas. It was from Jesse to ask if he might come up, though he knew it was too early, as he wanted "pertickler" to see Master Ferdy before "the gentleman came."

"He may, mayn't he, Miss Lilly?" asked the little invalid.

"Oh yes," Eva replied. She was careful to please Mrs. Ross by not letting Jesse ever forget to be quite polite and respectful, and never, as he would have called it himself, "to take free-

doms," and there was a sort of natural quickness about the boy which made it easy to do this.

And somehow, even the few hours he spent at the Watch House — perhaps too the refining effect of his pretty work — had already made a great change in him. The old half-defiant, half-good-natured, reckless look had left him; he was quite as bright and merry as before, but no one now, not even Flowers, could accuse him of being "impudent."

He came in now with an eager light in his eyes, his brown face ruddier than usual; but he did not forget to stop an instant at the door while he made his usual bow or scrape — or a mixture of both.

"Good evening, Jesse," said Ferdy, holding out his hand. "Why, what have you got there?" as he caught sight of some odd-shaped packages of various sizes, done up in newspaper, which Jesse was carrying.

"Please, Master Ferdy, I've brought 'em to show you. It's my pupils as has done them. They're nothing much, I know, but still I'm a bit proud of 'em, and I wanted to show them to you and Miss here, first of all."

He hastened, with fingers almost trembling with eagerness, to unpack the queer-looking parcels, Miss Lilly, at a glance from Ferdy, coming forward to help him. Ferdy's own cheeks flushed as the first contents came to light.

"Oh," he exclaimed, "I *wish* I could sit up!"

But in another moment he had forgotten his little cry of complaint, so interested was he in the curious sight before him.

All sorts and shapes of wooden objects came to view. There were pigs' heads, evidently modelled on old Jerry, dogs, and horses, and cows, some not to be mistaken, some which would, it must be confessed, have been the better for a label with "This is a—," whatever animal it was meant to be, written upon it; there were round plates with scalloped edges, some with a very simple wreath of leaves; boxes with neat little stiff designs on the lids—in fact, the funniest mixture of things you ever saw, but all with *attempt* in them—attempt, and good-will, and patience, and here and there a touch of something more—of real talent, however untrained—in them all, or almost all, signs of love of the work.

There came a moment or two of absolute silence — silence more pleasing to Jesse than any words, for as his quick eyes glanced from one to another of his three friends, he saw that it was the silence of delight and surprise.

At last said Ferdy, his words tumbling over each other in his eagerness, "Miss Lilly, Chrissie, isn't it wonderful? Do you hear what Jesse says? It's his *pupils*. He's been teaching what he's been learning. Tell us all about it, Jesse."

"Do, do," added Eva. "Yes, Ferdy, you're quite right — it's wonderful. Who are they all, Jesse?"

"There's about a dozen, altogether," began Jesse, with, for the first time, a sort of shyness. "It began with one or two at the farm; seein' me so busy of an evening, they thought it'd be better fun nor throwin' sticks into the water for the dogs to catch, or smokin' them rubbishin' sham cigars. We sat in the barn, and then one day I met Barney — Barney Coles, cousin's son to Uncle Bill at Draymoor. Barney's not a bad chap, and he's been ill and can't go in the mines. And we talked a bit, and he axed how it was

"WE WORKS IN A SHED THERE, IN A FIELD BY THE SMITHY . . . AND WE'RE AS JOLLY AS SAND-BOYS."—P. 155.

I never come their way, and I said how busy I was, and he might see for hisself. So he comed, and he's got on one of the fastest — with plain work like," and Jesse picked out one or two neat little boxes and plates, with stiff unfanciful patterns, carefully done. "He's lots of time just now, you see, and he's got a good eye for measuring. And then he brought one or two more, but I was afraid master wouldn't be best pleased at such a lot of us, so now I go two evenings a week to Bollins, close by your place, miss," with a nod, not in the least intended to be disrespectful, in Miss Lilly's direction, "and we works in a shed there, in a field by the smithy. We got leave first, that's all right, and we fixed up a plank table and some benches, and we're as jolly as sand-boys. I've often had it in my mind to tell you, but I thought I'd better wait a bit till I had somethin' to show."

"You will tell Mr. Brock about it?" said Miss Lilly. "He will be *nearly* as pleased as we are — he can't be *quite*. I don't think I have ever been more pleased in my life, Jesse."

It was "wonderful," as Ferdy had said. Jesse

Piggot, the ringleader in every sort of mischief, the "cheeky young rascal" out of one scrape into another, to have started a class for "art work" among the rough colliery boys of Draymoor!

"Oh, I do wish grandfather were back again," Eva went on. "*He* will help you, Jesse, in every way he possibly can, I know."

"We should be proud if the old doctor'd look at what we're doing," said Jesse. "And there's several things I'd like to ask about. Some of the boys don't take to the carving, but they're that quick at drawin' things to do, or fancy-like patterns that couldn't be done in wood, but'd make beautiful soft things — couldn't they be taught better? And Barney says he's heard tell of brass work. I've never seen it, but he says it's done at some of the Institutes, Whittingham way, and he'd like that better than wood work."

He stopped, half out of breath with the rush of ideas that were taking shape in his mind.

"I know what you mean," said Miss Lilly. "I have seen it. I think it is an ancient art revived again. Yes, I don't see why it would not be possible to get teaching in it. And then there's

basket work, that is another thing that can be quite done at home, and very pretty things can be made in it. It might suit some of the lads who are not much good at carving."

"Them moss baskets of Master Ferdy's are right-down pretty," said Jesse. "And you can twist withies about, beautiful."

His eyes sparkled — his ideas came much quicker than his power of putting them into words.

"There's no want of pretty things to copy," he said after a little silence.

"No indeed," said Miss Lilly.

But at that moment the door opened to admit Mr. Brock. A start of surprise came over the wood-carver as he caught sight of the table covered with Jesse's exhibition. And then it had all to be explained to him, in his turn. He was interested and pleased, but scarcely in the same way as Eva and Ferdy.

"We must look them all over," he said, "and carefully separate any work that gives signs of taste or talent. It is no use encouraging lads who have neither."

Jesse's face fell. He had somehow known that

Mr. Brock would not feel quite as his other friends did about his "pupils."

"Yes," said Miss Lilly, "it will no doubt be a good thing to classify the work to some extent. But I would not discourage *any*, Mr. Brock. Taste may grow, if not talent; and if there are only one or two boys with skill enough to do real work, surely the pleasure and interest of making *something* in their idle hours must be good for all?"

The wood-carver smiled indulgently. He thought the young lady rather fanciful, but still he could go along with her to a certain extent.

"Well, yes," he agreed. "At worst it is harmless. When the doctor returns, Miss Lilly, we must talk it all over with him; I am anxious to consult him about—" he glanced in Jesse's direction meaningly, without the boy's noticing it. For Jesse and Ferdy were eagerly picking out for their teacher's approval some of the bits of carving which their own instinct had already told them showed promise of better things.

CHAPTER X

TAKING REFUGE

It was a Saturday afternoon.

Ferdy, as he lay on his couch in the oriel window, looked out half sadly. The lawn and garden-paths below were thickly strewn with fallen leaves, for the summer was gone — the long beautiful summer which had seemed as if it were going to stay "for always." And the autumn was already old enough to make one feel that winter had started on its journey southwards from the icy lands which are its real home.

There were no swallow voices to be heard.

Oh no; the last of the little tenants of the nests overhead had said good-bye several weeks ago now. Ferdy's fancy had often followed them in their strange mysterious journey across the sea.

"I wonder," he thought, "if they really *were* rather sorry to go this year — sorrier than usual, because of me."

He took up a bit of carving that he had been working at; it was meant to be a small frame for a photograph of Chrissie, and he hoped to get it finished in time for his mother's birthday. It was very pretty, for he had made great progress in the last few months. In and out round the frame twined the foliage he had copied from the real leaves surrounding his dear window, and up in one corner was his pet idea — a swallow's head, "face," Ferdy called it, peeping out from an imaginary nest behind. This head was as yet far from completed, and he almost dreaded to work at it, so afraid was he of spoiling it. To-day he had given it a few touches which pleased him, and he took it up, half meaning to do a little more to it, but he was feeling tired, and laid it down again and went back to his own thoughts, as his blue eyes gazed up dreamily into the grey, somewhat stormy-looking autumn sky.

Some changes had come in the last few months. Dr. Lilly was at home again, so Ferdy and Christine no longer had entire possession of their dear governess, though they still saw her every day except Sunday, and sometimes even then too.

Ferdy was, on the whole, a little stronger, though less well than when able to be out for several hours together in the open air. What the doctors now thought as to the chances of his ever getting quite well, he did not know; he had left off asking. Children live much in the present, or if not quite that, in a future which is made by their own thoughts and feelings in the present. And he had grown accustomed to his life, and to putting far before him, mistily, the picture of the day when he *would* be "all right again." He had not really given up the hope of it, though his mother sometimes thought he had.

The truth was that as yet the doctors did not know and could not say.

But the present had many interests and much happiness in it for Ferdy, little as he would have been able to believe this, had he foreseen all he was to be deprived of in a moment that sad May morning.

His friendship for Jesse was one of the things he got a great deal from. Nothing as yet was settled about the boy's future, eager though Mr. Brock was to see him launched in another kind

of life. For both Mr. Ross and Dr. Lilly felt that any great step of the sort must first be well thought over, especially as Jesse was now working steadily at Farmer Meare's and earning regular wages, and seemingly quite contented. Though he had had his troubles too. Some of his old wild companions were very jealous of him and very spiteful; and bit by bit a sort of league had been started against him among the worst and roughest of the Draymoor lads, several of whom were angry at not being allowed to join the class in the shed at Bollins, some still more angry at having been sent away from the class, for Jesse and his friend Barney who acted as a sort of second in command were very particular as to whom they took as pupils. Or rather as to whom they *kept;* they did not mind letting a boy come two or three times to see "what it was like," but if he turned out idle or disturbing to the others, and with no real interest in the work, he was told in very plain terms that he need not come back.

They were patient with some rather dull and stupid lads, however. Barney especially so. For he was very "quick" himself. And some of these

dull ones really were the most satisfactory. They were so *very* proud of finding that they could, with patience and perseverance, "make" something, useful at any rate, if not highly ornamental. No one who has not been tried in this way knows the immense pleasure of the first feeling of the power to "make."

These things Ferdy was thinking of, among others, as he lay there quietly this afternoon. He was alone, except for an occasional "look in" from Thomas or Flowers, as Mr. Ross had taken his wife and Christine for a drive.

Ferdy had grown much older in the last few months in some ways. He had had so much time for thinking. And though he did not, as I have said, trouble himself much about his own future, he thought a good deal about Jesse's.

There was no doubt that Jesse was *very* clever at carving. Ferdy knew it, and saw it for himself, and Miss Lilly thought so, and the old doctor thought so; and most of them all, Mr. Brock thought so. But for some weeks past Mr. Brock's lessons had stopped. He had been sent away by the firm at Whittingham who employed him, to

see to the restoration of an old house in the country, where the wood carving, though much out of repair, was very fine, and required a careful and skilful workman to superintend its repair.

So there seemed to be no one at hand quite as eager about Jesse as Ferdy himself.

"The winter is coming fast," thought the little invalid, "and they can't go on working in the shed. And Jesse may get into idle ways again — he's not learning anything new now. It fidgets me so. I'd like him to be sent to some place where he'd get on fast. I don't believe he cares about it himself half as much as I care about it for him. And he's so taken up with his 'pupils.' I wonder what could be done about getting some one to teach them. Barney isn't clever enough. Oh, if only mamma wouldn't be so afraid of my tiring myself, and would let me have a class for them up here in the winter evenings! Or I might have two classes, — there are only ten or twelve of them altogether, — and once a week or so Mr. Brock might come to help me, or not even as often as that. If he came once a fortnight or even once a month he could see how they were getting on,

— *extra* coming, I mean, besides his teaching me, for of course the more I learn the better I can teach them. And another evening we might have a class for something else — baskets or something not so hard as carving. Miss Lilly's learning baskets, I know. And then Jesse wouldn't mind leaving his pupils. Oh, I do wish it could be settled. I wish I could talk about it again to Dr. Lilly. I don't think Jesse's quite am— I can't remember the word — caring enough about getting on to be something great."

Poor Jesse, it was not exactly want of ambition with him. It was simply that the idea of becoming anything more than a farm-labourer had never yet entered his brain. He thought himself very lucky indeed to be where he now was, and to have the chance of improving in his dearly loved "carving" without being mocked at or interfered with, neither of which so far had actually been the case, though there had been some unpleasant threatenings in the air of late. His efforts to interest and improve the boys of the neighbourhood had been looked upon with suspicion — with more suspicion than he had known till quite lately, when he and Barney

had been trying to get some one to lend them a barn or an empty room of any kind for the winter.

"What was he after now? Some mischief, you might be sure, or he wouldn't be Jesse Piggot."

So much easier is it to gain "a bad name," than to live one down.

"Oh," thought little Ferdy, "I do *wish* something could be settled about Jesse."

He was growing restless — restless and nervous, which did not often happen. Was it the gloomy afternoon, or the being so long alone, or what? The clouds overhead were growing steely-blue, rather than grey. Could it be going to thunder? Surely it was too cold for that. Perhaps there was a storm of some other kind coming on — heavy rain or wind, perhaps.

And mamma and Chrissie would get *so* wet!

If only they would come in! Ferdy began to feel what he very rarely did — rather sorry for himself. It was nervousness, one of the troubles which are the hardest to bear in a life such as Ferdy's had become and might continue. But this he was too young to understand; he thought he was cross and discontented, and this self-reproach only

made him the more uncomfortable. These feelings, however, were not allowed to go very far that afternoon. A sound reached Ferdy's quick ears which made him look up sharply and glance out of the window. Some one was running rapidly along the drive towards the house.

It was Jesse.

But fast as he came, his way of moving told of fatigue. He had run far, and seemed nearly spent.

Ferdy's heart began to beat quickly, something must be the matter. Could it be an accident? Oh! if anything had happened to his father and mother and Chrissie, and Jesse had been sent for help! But in that case he would have gone straight to the stable-yard, and as this thought struck him, Ferdy breathed more freely again. Perhaps, after all, it was only some message and nothing wrong, and Jesse had been running fast just for his own amusement.

The little boy lay still and listened. In a minute or two he heard footsteps coming upstairs. Then a slight tap at the door — Thomas's tap — and almost without waiting for an answer, the footman came in.

"It's Jesse, Master Ferdy," he began. "Jesse

Piggot. He's run all the way from Bollins, and he's pretty well done. He's begging to see you. He's in some trouble, but he won't tell me what. I'm afraid your mamma won't be best pleased if I let him up, but I don't know what to do, he seems in such a state."

Ferdy raised himself a little on his couch. There must be something very much the matter for Jesse, merry, light-hearted Jesse, to be in a "state" at all.

"Let him come up at once, Thomas, I'll put it all right with mamma," he began, but before Thomas had time for any more hesitation the matter was taken out of his hands by Jesse's short-cropped, dark head appearing in the doorway.

"Oh, Master Ferdy!" he exclaimed, in a choking voice, "mayn't I come in?"

"Of course," said Ferdy quickly. "It's all right, Thomas," with a touch of impatience, "I'll call you if I want you," and Thomas discreetly withdrew, closing the door behind him.

"They're after me, Master Ferdy," were Jesse's first words, "at least I'm afraid they are, though I tried my best to dodge them."

"Who?" exclaimed Ferdy.

"The p'lice and Bill Turner's father, and a lot of them, and oh, Master Ferdy, some one called out he was killed!"

"Who?" said Ferdy again, though his own cheeks grew white at Jesse's words. "And what is it that's happened, and what do you want me to do. You must tell me properly, Jesse."

It said a good deal for Ferdy's self-control that he was able to speak so quietly and sensibly, for he was feeling terribly startled. Jesse choked down his gasping breath, which was very nearly turning into sobs.

"I didn't want to frighten you, Master Ferdy. I didn't ought to, I know, but I couldn't think what else to do. It's that Bill Turner, Master Ferdy," and at the name he gave a little shudder. "He was in the class once, but it was only out of mischief. He did no good and tried to upset the others. So Barney and I wouldn't keep him at no price, and he's gone on getting nastier and nastier, and the other day he 'called' me — he did — so that I couldn't stand it, and I went for him. It didn't hurt him, but it made him

madder than ever, and he said he'd pay me out. And this afternoon when Barney and me were sorting the carvings at the shed — we've a box we keep them all in, there — Bill comes down upon us, him and some others. They got hold of 'em all and smashed 'em up and kicked them to pieces — all to pieces, Master Ferdy" — with a sort of wail, almost of despair, in his voice. "All the things we've been at for so long! We were going to make a show of them at Christmas; and I couldn't stand it, I went at him like a wild beast — it was for the other lads I minded so — though he's much bigger nor me, and I got him down, and he lay there without moving, and some one called out he was dead, and then the p'lice came, and one of 'em caught hold of me, but I got loose and I started running — I scarce knew what I was doing. I just thought I'd get here, and you'd tell me what to do. He can't be dead, Master Ferdy," he went on, dropping his voice — "you don't think he can be? I didn't seem to know what it meant till I got here and began to think."

"I don't know," said Ferdy, again growing very

pale, while poor Jesse's face was all blotched in great patches of red and white, and smeared with the tears he had tried to rub off. "Oh, I do wish papa and mamma would come in! I don't know what to do. Do you think they saw you running this way, Jesse?"

"I — I don't know, Master Ferdy. I hope not, but there was a lot of the boys about — Draymoor boys, I mean — Bill's lot, and they may have tracked me. Of course none of *my* boys," he added, lifting his head proudly, "would peach on me, whatever the p'lice did."

But even as he spoke, there came, faintly and confusedly, the sound of approaching steps along the road just beyond the hedge, and a murmur of several voices all talking together. It might not have caught Ferdy's attention at any other time, but just now both his ears and Jesse's were sharpened by anxiety.

"They're a coming, Master Ferdy," exclaimed the poor boy, growing still whiter.

"Never mind," said Ferdy, trying hard to be brave, "Thomas is all right, he won't let them come up here."

"Oh, but maybe he can't stop them," said Jesse. "The p'lice can force their way anywheres. I wouldn't mind so much if it *had* to be — like if your papa was here and said I must go to prison. But if they take me off now with no one to speak up for me, seems to me as if I'd never get out again."

Poor Ferdy was even more ignorant than Jesse of everything to do with law and prisons and the like; he looked about him almost wildly.

"Jesse," he said in a whisper. "I know what to do. Creep under my couch and lie there quite still. Thomas is all right, and nobody else saw you come up, did they?"

"No one else saw me at all," Jesse replied, dropping his voice, and going down on his hands and knees, "better luck. I'll keep still, no fear, Master Ferdy," his boyish spirits already rising again at the idea of "doing the p'lice," "and they'd never dare look under your sofa."

He scrambled in, but put his head out again for a moment to whisper in an awestruck tone, "But oh, Master Ferdy, if they do come up here, please try to find out if Bill Turner's so badly

hurt as they said. I know it *can't* be true that I did as bad as *that*."

All the same he was terribly frightened and remorseful. Ferdy scarcely dared to reply, for by this time a group of men and boys was coming up the drive, and a constable in front marched along as if he meant business, for as Ferdy watched them, he turned round and waved back the eight or ten stragglers who were following him, though he still held by the arm a thin, pale-faced little fellow whom he had brought with him all the way. This was Barney, poor Jesse's first lieutenant.

Another minute or two passed. Then hurrying steps on the stairs again, and Thomas reappeared, looking very excited.

"Master Ferdy," he exclaimed, but stopped short on seeing that his little master was alone. "Bless me!" he ejaculated under his breath, "he's gone! and I never saw him leave the house."

"What is it, Thomas?" said Ferdy, trying to speak and look as usual. "I saw the constable come in — you must tell him papa's out."

"I have told him so, sir, and I'm very sorry, but

he will have it he must see you. Some one's been and told that Jesse ran this way."

"Let him come up then," said Ferdy, with dignity, "though I'm sure papa will be very angry, and I don't believe he's any right to force his way in! But I'm not afraid of him!" proudly.

"Master *will* be angry for certain," said Thomas, "very angry, and I've told the constable so. But he's in a temper, and a very nasty one, and won't listen to reason. He says them Draymoor boys are getting past bearing. I only hope," he went on, speaking more to himself, as he turned to leave the room again, "I only hope he won't get me into a scrape too for letting him up to frighten Master Ferdy — not that he *is* frightened all the same!"

CHAPTER XI

UNDER THE SOFA

Two minutes later the burly form of Constable Brownrigg appeared at the door. He was already, to tell the truth, cooling down a little and beginning to feel rather ashamed of himself; and when his eyes lighted on the tiny figure in the window —looking even smaller and more fragile than Ferdy really was — the clumsy but far from bad-hearted man could at first find nothing to say for himself. Then —

"I beg pardon, sir, I hope I haven't upset you, but dooty's dooty!"

Ferdy raised his head a little, and looked the constable straight in the face, without condescending to notice the half apology.

"What is it you want of me?" he said coldly.

"It's all along of that there Jesse Piggot," replied Brownrigg, "as bad a lot as ever were!"

"What's he been doing?" said Ferdy again in the same tone, rather turning the tables upon the constable, as if he — Brownrigg — and not Ferdy himself, was the one to be cross-questioned.

The man glanced round him half suspiciously.

"He was seen coming here, sir."

"Well, suppose he *had* come here, you can't take him up for that?" said the boy. "I'm asking you what harm he'd done."

"He got up a row at Bollins this afternoon, and half killed a poor lad — Bill Turner by name — threw him down and half stunned him."

"Half stunned him," repeated Ferdy, "that's not quite the same as half killing him. Have you sent him to the hospital?"

"Well no, sir," said the constable, "he come to again — them boys has nine lives more than cats. I don't suppose he's really much the worse. But these Draymoor fights must be put a stop to, they're getting worse and worse; I've had orders to that effect," drawing himself up.

"And has Jesse Piggot been mixed up with them lately?" said Ferdy severely.

Again the constable looked rather small.

"Well no, sir," he repeated, "but what does that matter, if he's been the offender to-day."

This was true enough.

"But what do you want *me* to do?" asked Ferdy.

"To detain the lad if he comes here and give him up to the lawful authorities," said Brownrigg more fluently. "Everybody knows you've been very kind to him, but it's no true kindness to screen him from the punishment he deserves."

A new idea struck Ferdy.

"Did he begin the fight then?" he said. "There's such a thing as — as defending oneself, quite rightly. Supposing the other boy started it?"

"That will be all gone into in the proper time and place," said Brownrigg pompously. "An example must be made, and — "

Before he had time to finish his sentence Ferdy interrupted him joyfully. He had just caught sight of the pony-carriage driving in rapidly. For some garbled account of what had happened had been given to Mr. Ross by the group of men and boys still hanging about the gates, and he hurried in, afraid of finding his boy startled and upset.

Nor did the sight of the stout constable reassure him. On the contrary it made Mr. Ross very indignant. He scarcely noticed Brownrigg's half-apologetic greeting.

"What's all this?" he said sharply. "Who gave you leave to come up here and disturb an invalid?"

Brownrigg grew very red, and murmured something about his "dooty."

"You've exceeded it in this case, I think you'll find," the master of the house replied severely. "Step downstairs if you please, and then I'll hear what you've got to say," and to Ferdy's inexpressible relief, for the consciousness of Jesse's near presence was beginning to make him terribly nervous.

Mr. Ross held the door wide open and the constable shamefacedly left the room. Scarcely had he done so when there came a subterranean whisper, "Master Ferdy," it said, "shall I come out?"

"No, no," Ferdy replied quickly. "Stay where you are, Jesse, unless you're choking. Mamma will be coming in most likely. Wait till papa comes back again, and I can tell him all about it."

"Step downstairs, if you please, and then I'll hear what you've got to say."—P. 178.

Rather to Ferdy's surprise, the answer was a sort of giggle.

"I'm all right, thank you, Master Ferdy — as jolly as a sand-boy. And you did speak up to the old bobby, Master Ferdy; you did set him down. But I'm right down glad Bill Turner's none the worse, I am. It give me a turn when they called out I'd done for him."

And Ferdy understood then that the giggle came in part from relief of mind.

"Hush now, Jesse," he said. "I want to watch for Brownrigg's going. And till he's clear away, you'd best not come out, nor speak."

There was not very long to wait. For though Mr. Ross spoke out his mind very plainly to the constable, he made short work of it, and within ten minutes of the man leaving the oriel room, Ferdy had the pleasure, as he announced to Jesse in a sort of stage whisper, of seeing the worthy Mr. Brownrigg walking down the drive, some degrees less pompously than on his arrival. Nor was he now accompanied by poor little Barney, whom Mr. Ross had kept back, struck by pity for the lad's white, frightened face, as the con-

stable could not say that there was any "charge" against *him*, except that he had been an eye-witness of the "row."

"It's all right now, Jesse," Ferdy added in a minute or two. "He's quite gone — old Brownrigg, I mean — so you'd better come out."

Jesse emerged from his hiding-place, a good deal redder in the face than when he went in, though he was still trembling inwardly at the idea of meeting Ferdy's father.

"You don't think, Master Ferdy — " he was beginning, when the door opened and both Mr. and Mrs. Ross came in.

"Ferdy, darling," exclaimed his mother, "you've not been really frightened, I hope — " but she stopped short, startled by an exclamation from her husband.

"Jesse!" he said. "You here after all! Upon my word!" And for a moment he looked as if he were really angry. Then the absurd side of the matter struck him, and it was with some difficulty that he suppressed a smile.

"My dear boy," he went on, glancing at the tiny, but determined-looking figure on the couch, "you'll

be having your poor old father pulled up for conniving at felony."

"I don't know what that is, papa," said Ferdy. "But if it means hiding Jesse under the sofa—yes, I *did* do it, and I'd do it again. It wasn't Jesse thought of it, only he was afraid that if Brownrigg took him away he'd be put in prison and have nobody to speak up for him, and perhaps have been kept there for ever and ever so long."

"Your opinion of the law of the land is not a very high one apparently, Jesse," said Mr. Ross, eying the boy gravely.

Jesse shuffled and grew very red.

"I'll do whatever you think right, sir," he said stoutly. "If I must give myself up to Brownrigg, I'll run after him now. I don't want to get Master Ferdy nor you into any bother about me, after —after all you've done for me," and for the first time the boy broke down, turning his face away to hide the tears which he tried to rub off with the cuff of his sleeve.

"Oh, papa," said Ferdy pleadingly, his own eyes growing suspiciously dewy, "mamma, mamma, look at him."

Up to that moment, to tell the truth, Mrs. Ross's feelings towards Jesse had not been very cordial. The sight of him had startled her and made her almost as indignant with him as with the constable. But now her kind heart was touched. She glanced at her husband, but what she saw already in his face set her mind at rest.

"Come, come," said Mr. Ross, "don't put yourself out about it, Ferdy. Tell me the whole story quietly, or let Jesse do so," and after swallowing one or two sobs, Jesse found voice to do as he was desired. He told his tale simply and without exaggeration, though his voice shook and quivered when he came to the sad part of the destruction of the many weeks' labour of himself and his "pupils," and Mrs. Ross could not keep back a little cry of indignation.

"It is certainly not *Jesse* who deserves punishment," she said eagerly, turning to her husband.

"If he could have controlled himself," said Mr. Ross, "to the point of *not* knocking down that bully, Turner, his case would have been a still stronger one. Do you see that, my boy?" he

went on, turning to Jesse, who murmured something indistinctly in reply.

"I'm glad he did knock him down all the same, papa," said Ferdy. "You don't now think Jesse need give himself up to the p'lice?" he added anxiously.

"Certainly not," said Mr. Ross, "but it will be best for me to see Brownrigg and tell him all I now know — except — no I don't think I will tell him of the hiding-place under your sofa, Ferdy." Then turning again to Jesse, "To-morrow is Sunday," he said; "do you generally go to see your friends at Draymoor on a Sunday?"

"Sometimes," said Jesse; "not always, sir."

"Then they won't think anything of it if they don't see you to-morrow?"

"Oh lor, no," Jesse replied. "They'd think nothing of it if they never saw me again. It's only Barney that cares for me or me for him of all that lot."

"Oh yes, by the bye — Barney!" said Mr. Ross, starting up. "I left him downstairs, poor little fellow. He is in my study — you know where that is, Jesse, run and fetch him," and Jesse,

delighted at this proof of confidence, started off quite cheerfully on his errand.

When he was out of hearing, Mr. Ross said thoughtfully, "It won't do for that lad to remain in this neighbourhood, I see. I must have a talk about him again with Dr. Lilly, and probably with Brock. Something must be decided as to his future, and if he really has talent above the average he must be put in the right way towards making it of use."

Ferdy's eyes sparkled; sorry as he would be to be parted from Jesse, this was what he, as well as Miss Lilly, had long been hoping for. Before he had time to say anything, a tap at the door told that the two boys were outside.

"Come in," said Mr. Ross, and then Jesse reappeared, half leading, half pushing his small cousin before him.

Mrs. Ross was touched by Barney's white face and general air of delicacy.

"Don't look so scared," she heard Jesse whisper to him.

"You must be tired, Barney," she said kindly. "Jesse and you must have some tea before you go back to Draymoor."

"Jesse's not to go back to Draymoor, mamma," said Ferdy, looking up quickly.

"No," said Mr. Ross, "that is what I wish to speak to Barney about. Will you tell your father, Barney — is it to your father's house that Jesse goes on Sundays generally?"

"No, sir, please, sir, I haven't a father — mother and me's alone. It's my uncle's."

"Well, then, tell your uncle from me," continued Mr. Ross, "that I think it best to keep Jesse here at present, and that he was not to blame for the affair this afternoon. I shall see the constable again about it myself."

Barney's face expressed mingled relief and disappointment.

"Yes, sir," he said obediently. "There'll be no more classes then, I suppose?" he added sadly. "Is Jesse not even to come as far as Bollins?"

"Not at present," replied Mr. Ross, and then, feeling sorry for the little fellow, he added: "If your mother can spare you, you may come over here to-morrow and have your Sunday dinner with your cousin in the servants' hall."

Both boys' faces shone with pleasure.

"And will you tell the lads, Barney," said Jesse, "how it's all been. And what I minded most was their things being spoilt."

Barney's face grew melancholy again.

"Don't look so downhearted," said Mr. Ross. "We won't forget you and the other boys. Your work has already done you great credit."

Ferdy's lips opened as if he were about to speak, but the little fellow had learnt great thoughtfulness of late, and he wisely decided that what he had to say had better be kept till he was alone with his parents.

Just then Christine made her appearance, very eager to know more about the constable's visit and the exciting events of the afternoon. So Mrs. Ross left her with her brother while she herself took the two boys downstairs to put them into the housekeeper's charge for tea, of which both struck her as decidedly in need.

"Papa," said Ferdy, when he had finished going over the whole story again for his sister's benefit, "don't you think if Jesse has to go away that *I* might take on the class, one or two evenings a week any way? Mr. Brock might come sometimes —

extra, you know — just to see how they were getting on. And they would be quite safe here, and nobody would dare to spoil their things."

"And Miss Lilly and I would help," said Christine eagerly. "There are some of them, Jesse has told us, that want to learn other things — not only wood-carving — that *we* could help them with. Miss Lilly's been having lessons herself in basket-making."

"Dr. Lilly has reason to be proud of his granddaughter," said Mr. Ross warmly. "We must talk it all over. It would certainly seem a terrible pity for the poor fellows to lose what they have gained, not merely in skill, but the good habit of putting to use some of their leisure hours — miners have so much idle time."

"There's the big empty room downstairs near the servants' hall," said Ferdy. "Could not I be carried down there, papa?"

Mr. Ross hesitated. He felt doubtful, but anxious not to disappoint the boy, for as his eyes rested on the fragile little figure and he realised what Ferdy's future life might be, he could not but think to himself how happy and healthy a

thing it was that his child should be so ready to interest himself in others, instead of becoming self-engrossed and discontented.

"We must see what Mr. Stern says," he replied, "and — yes, it will soon be time for the other doctor's visit. It would be a long walk from Draymoor for the lads."

"*They* wouldn't mind," said Ferdy decisively.

"And now and then," said Christine, "we might give them tea for a treat--once a month or so. Oh! it would be lovely!"

CHAPTER XII

ANOTHER BIRTHDAY

AGAIN a spring morning, only two or three years ago. Evercombe and the Watch House look much as they did when we first saw them; one could fancy that but a few months instead of ten years had passed since then. The swallows are there, established in their summer quarters above the oriel window, the same and yet not the same, though their chirping voices may, for all we know, be telling of the little boy who for so long lay on his couch below, and loved them so well.

He is not there now, nor is his couch in its old place. Instead of the small white face and eager blue eyes, there stands at the post of observation a tall young girl, a very pretty girl, with a bright flush of happy expectancy on her fair face.

"Mamma, mamma," she exclaims to some one farther in the shade of the room. "I think I hear wheels. Surely it will be they this time!

If it isn't I really shan't have patience to stand here any longer."

But "this time" her hopes were fulfilled. Another moment and a carriage, which Christine, for Christine of course it was, quickly recognised as their own, turned in at the lodge gates. And before those inside had time to look up at the window, Chrissie had flown downstairs followed by her mother.

"Ferdy, Ferdy," she exclaimed, as the carriage-door opened, and her brother, his face flushed with pleasure equal to her own, got out, slowly, and with a little help from his father, for the young man was slightly lame, though his face told of health and fair strength. He was sunburnt and manly looking, full of life and happy eagerness.

"Isn't he looking well, mamma?" said Chrissie, when the first loving greetings had sobered down a little.

"And haven't I grown?" added Ferdy, drawing himself up for approval. "And isn't it delightful that I managed to get back on my birthday after all?"

"Yes, indeed, my darling," said Mrs. Ross; while

his father gently placed his hand on the young fellow's shoulder, repeated her words — "yes, indeed! When we think of this day — how many years ago! Ten? — yes, it must be ten — you were nine then, Ferdy, how very, unutterably thankful we should be to have you as you are."

"And to judge by my looks you don't know the best of me," said Ferdy. "I can walk ever so far without knocking up. But oh! what heaps of things we have to talk about!"

"Come in to breakfast first," said his mother. "It is ten o'clock, and after travelling all night you must be a little tired."

"I am really not, only very hungry," said Ferdy, as he followed her into the dining-room, where the happy party seated themselves round the table.

Ferdy had been away, abroad, for nearly two years, both for study and for health's sake, and the result was more than satisfactory. School-life had been impossible for him, for the effect of his accident had been but very slowly outgrown. Slowly but surely, however, for now at nineteen, except for his slight lameness, he was perfectly well, and able to look forward to a busy and useful life, though the

exact profession he was now to prepare himself for, was not yet quite decided upon. A busy and useful and happy life it promised to be, with abundance of interests for his leisure hours. He was no genius, but the tastes which he had had special opportunity for cultivating through his boyhood, were not likely to fail him as he grew up. And in many a dull and sunless home would they help him to bring something to cheer the dreary sameness of hard-working lives. They had done so already, more than he as yet knew.

Breakfast over and his old haunts revisited, Mrs. Ross at last persuaded him and his sister to join her on the lawn, where she had established herself with her work for the rest of the morning.

"This is to be a real holiday, Ferdy," she said. "Chrissie and I have been looking forward to it for so long. We have nothing to do but to talk and listen."

"I have heaps to tell," said Ferdy, "but even more to ask. My life in Switzerland was really awfully jolly in every way, but I'll tell you all about it by degrees; besides, I did write long letters, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did," said his mother and Chrissie together; "you have been very good about letters all the time."

"Of course," began Ferdy, after a moment or two's silence, "the thing I want to hear most about is how the classes have all been getting on. You kept me pretty well posted up about them, but in your last letters there was some allusion I didn't quite understand — something that the Mayhews have been trying to arrange."

Christine glanced at her mother.

"I may tell him, mayn't I, mamma? Now that it is all settled? It is not only the Mayhews' doing, but Jesse Piggot's too." And as Ferdy's face lightened up at the mention of his friend's name — "He hasn't told you about it himself, surely?" in a tone of some disappointment. "I know that he wrote you long letters regularly, but I thought he understood that we wanted to keep this new thing as a surprise for you when you came back."

Ferdy looked puzzled.

"He hasn't told me anything special except about himself. The last big piece of news, since of course it was all settled about his getting that capital berth

at Whittingham, that Brock was so delighted about — the last big piece of news was his getting the order for the carved reredos at Cowlingsbury Abbey. But that was some time ago!"

"Oh yes," said Christine, "we have got over the excitement about that. Though when you think of it," she went on thoughtfully, "it is wonderful to realise how Jesse has got on."

"And is going to get on," added Mrs. Ross. "And without flattery, Ferdy dear, we may say that it is greatly, very greatly owing to you."

Ferdy's face grew red with pleasure.

"I can't quite see that," he said. "Genius must make its own way. But do tell me the *new* news, Chrissie."

"It is that Mr. Mayhew has got ground and money and everything for a sort of, — we don't know what to call it yet — 'Institute' is such an ugly word, we must think of something prettier, — a sort of art college at Draymoor for the afternoon and evening classes. It won't be on a large scale. It would spoil it if it were, and a great part of their work can still be done at home, which is of course the real idea of it

all. But this little college will really be for teaching what, up to now, has had to be done in odd rooms here and there."

"Oh!" Ferdy exclaimed, "that is splendid!"

"For you see," Chrissie continued, counting up on her pretty fingers as she spoke, "what a lot of different kinds of work we've got to now. Wood-carving to begin with — we must always count it first!"

"No," said Ferdy, laughing, "strictly speaking, moss baskets came first."

"Wood-carving," repeated Chrissie, not condescending to notice the interruption. "Then the modelling, and pottery classes, basket work, brass hammering, and the iron work, not to speak of the girls' embroidery and lace work. Yes," with a deep sigh of satisfaction, "it *is* time for a little college of our own."

"A great, great deal of it," said Ferdy, "is owing to Miss Lilly — I always forget to call her Mrs. Mayhew. If only she hadn't gone and got married we might have called it the 'Lily College,' after her."

"If she hadn't gone and got married, as you

elegantly express it, Mr. Mayhew would never, probably, have been the vicar of Draymoor," said Chrissie. "For it was through his being such a great friend of Dr. Lilly's that he got to know the old squire, who gave him the living. And just think of all he has done — Mr. Mayhew I mean — for Draymoor."

Ferdy did not at once reply. He gazed up into the blue sky and listened to the sweet bird-chatter overhead, with a look of great content on his face.

"Yes," he said, "things do turn out so — quite rightly sometimes. Just when you'd have thought they'd go wrong! There was that row of Jesse's to begin with, when he thought all he had tried to do was spoilt, and then there were all the difficulties about the evening classes, while I was still ill, and it almost seemed as if we would have to give them up. And then — and then — why! when it was fixed for me to go away two years ago, I could scarcely believe they'd go on, even though Mr. Mayhew had come by that time. Yes, it's rather wonderful! I say, Chrissie," with a sudden change of tone, "doesn't it really sound

as if the swallows were rather excited about my coming home!"

Christine looked up at the oriel window with a smile.

"I wonder," she said, "if *possibly* any of them can be the same ones, or if they are telling over the story that has been handed down from their great-grandparents — the story of the little white boy that used to lie on the couch in the window?"

. . . . .

This is not a completed story, dear children, as you will have seen. It is only the story of the beginning of a life, and of the beginning of a work, which in many and many a place, besides gloomy Draymoor, started in the humblest and smallest way. If ever, or wherever any of you come across this endeavour to brighten and refine dull, ungraceful, and ungracious homes, you will do your best to help it on, I feel sure, will you not?

THE END

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