

Molesworth Mrs.

A Christmas Child: A Sketch of a Boy-Life



Mrs. Molesworth

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Molesworth M.

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Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	11
CHAPTER III	17
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	23

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CHAPTER I BABY TED

"Where did you get those eyes so blue?"
"Out of the sky as I came through."

Christmas week a good many years ago. Not an "old-fashioned" Christmas this year, for there was no snow or ice; the sky was clear and the air pure, but yet without the sharp, bracing clearness and purity that Master Jack Frost brings when he comes to see us in one of his nice, bright, sunny humours. For he has humours as well as other people – not only is he fickle in the extreme, but even *black* sometimes, and he is then, I can assure you, a most disagreeable visitor. But this Christmas time he had taken it into his head not to come at all, and the world looked rather reproachful and disconcerted. The poor, bare December world – it misses its snow garment, so graciously hiding all imperfections revealed by the absence of green grass and fluttering leaves; it misses, too, its winter jewels of icicles and hoar frost. Poor old world! What a great many Decembers you have jogged through; no wonder you begin to feel that you need a little dressing up and adorning, like a beauty no longer as young as she has been. Yet ever-young world, too! Who, that gazes at March's daffodils and sweet April's primroses, can believe that the world is growing old? Sometimes one could almost wish that it would leave off being so exquisitely, so heartlessly young. For the daffodils nod their golden heads, the primroses smile up through their leafy nests – year after year, they never fail us. But the children that loved them so; the little feet that trotted so eagerly down the lanes, the tiny hands that gathered the flower-treasures with such delight – where are they all? Men and women, some in far-off lands, perhaps; or too wearied by cares and sorrows to look for the spring flowers of long ago. And some – the sweetest of all, *these* seem – farther away still, and yet surely nearer? in the happier land, whose flowers our fancy tries in vain to picture.

But I am forgetting a little, I think, that I am going to tell about a child to children, and that my "tellings" begin, not in March or April, but at Christmas-time. Christmas-time, fortunately, does not depend on Jack Frost for *all* its pleasures. Christmas-boxes are just as welcome without as with his presence. And never was a Christmas-box more welcome than one that came to a certain house by the sea one twenty-sixth of December, now a good many years ago.

Yet it was not a very big present, nor a very uncommon present. But it was very precious, and, to *my* thinking, very, very pretty; for it was a wee baby boy. Such a dear wee baby, I think you would have called it; so neat and tiny, and with such nice baby-blue eyes. Its hands and feet, especially, were very delightful. "*Almost* as pretty as newly-hatched ducklings, aren't they?" a little girl I know once said of some baby feet that she was admiring, and I really think she was right. No wonder was it, that the happy people in the house by the sea were very proud of their Christmas-box, that the baby's mother, especially, thought there never was, never could be, anything so sweet as her baby Ted.

But poor baby Ted had not long to wait for his share of the troubles which we are told come to all, though it does seem as if some people, and children too, had more than others. He was a very delicate little baby. His mother did not notice it at first because, you see, he was the first baby she had ever had of her very own, and she was too pleased to think him anything but perfect. And

indeed he *was* perfect of his kind, only there was so little of him! He was like one of those very, very tiny little white flowers that one has to hunt under the hedges for, and which surprise you by their daintiness when you look at them closely. Only such fragile daintiness needs tender handling, and these little half-opened buds sometimes shrink from the touch of even the kindest of mothers and nurses, and gently fade out of their sight to bloom in a sunnier and softer clime than ours. And knowing this, a cold chill crept round the heart of little Ted's mother when his nurse, who was older and wiser than she, shook her head sadly as she owned that he was about the tiniest baby she had ever seen. But the cold chill did not stay there. Ted, who was scarcely a month old, gave a sudden smile of baby pleasure as she was anxiously looking at him. He had caught sight of some bright flowers on the wall, and his blue eyes had told him that the proper thing to do was to smile at them. And his smile was to his mother like the sun breaking through a cloud.

"I will not be afraid for my darling," said she. "God knows what is best for him, but I think, I *do think*, he will live to grow a healthy, happy boy. How could a Christmas child be anything else?"

And she was right. Day after day, week by week, month after month, the wee man grew bigger and stronger. It was not all smooth sailing, however. He had to fight pretty hard for his little share of the world and of life sometimes. And many a sad fit of baby-crying made his mother's heart ache as she asked herself if after all it might not be better for her poor little boy to give up the battle which seemed so trying to him. But no – that was not Master Ted's opinion at all. He cried, and he would not go to sleep, and he cried again. But all through the crying and the restlessness he was growing stronger and bigger.

"The world strikes me as not half a bad place. I mean to look about me in it and see all that there is to be seen," I could fancy his baby mind thinking to itself, when he was held at his nursery window, and his bright eyes gazed out unweariedly at the beautiful sights to be seen from it – the mountains in the distance lifting their grand old heads to the glorious sky, which Ted looked as if he knew a good deal about if he chose to tell; the sea near at hand with its ever-changing charm and the white sails scudding along in the sunlight. Ah yes, little Ted was in the right – the world *is* a very pretty place, and a baby boy whose special corner of it is where his was, is a very lucky little person, notwithstanding the pains and grievances of babyhood.

And before long Ted's fits of crying became so completely a thing of the past that it was really difficult to believe in them. All his grumbling and complaining and tears were got over in these first few months. For "once he had got a start," as his nurse called it, never was there a happier little fellow. Everything came right to him, and the few clouds that now and then floated over his skies but made the sunshine seem the brighter.

And day by day the world grew prettier and pleasanter to him. It had been very pleasant to be carried out in his nurse's arms or wheeled along in his little carriage, but when it came to toddling on the nice firm sands on his own sturdy legs, and sometimes – when nurse would let him – going "kite kite close" to the playful waves, and then jumping back again when they "pertended," as he said, to wet his little feet – ah, that was too delightful! And almost more delightful still was it to pick up nice smooth stones on the beach and try how far he could throw them into the sea. The sea was *so* pretty and kind, he thought. It was for a long time very difficult for him to believe that it could ever be angry and raging and wild, as he used to hear said, for of course on wet or stormy days little Ted never went down to the shore, but stayed at home in his own warm nursery.

There were pretty shells and stones and seaweed to be found on this delightful sea-shore. Ted was too little to care much for such quiet business as gathering stones and shells, but one day when he was walking with his mother she stopped so often to pick up and examine any that took her fancy, that at last Ted's curiosity was awakened.

"What is thoo doing?" he said gravely, as if not quite sure that his mother was behaving correctly, for *nurse* always told him to "walk on straight, there's a good boy, Master Ted," and it was a little puzzling to understand that mammas might do what little boys must not. It was one of

the puzzles which Ted found there were a good many of in the world, and which he had to think over a good deal in his own mind before it grew clear to him. "What is thoo doing?" he asked.

"I am looking for pretty stones to take home and keep," replied his mother.

"Pitty 'tones," repeated Ted, and then he said no more, but some new ideas had wakened in his baby mind.

Nurse noticed that he was quieter than usual that afternoon, for already Ted was a good deal of a chatterbox. But his eyes looked bright, and plainly he had some pleasant thought in his head. The next day was fine, and he went off with nurse for his walk. He looked a little anxious as they got to the turn of the road, or rather to the joining of two roads, one of which led to the sea, the other into country lanes.

"Thoo is doing to the sea?" he inquired.

"Yes, dear," nurse replied, and Ted's face cleared. When they got to the shore he trotted on quietly, but his eyes were very busy, busier even than usual. They looked about them in all directions, till at last they spied what they wanted, and for half a minute or so nurse did not notice that her little charge had left her side and was lagging behind.

"What are you about, Master Ted?" she said hastily, as glancing round she saw him stooping down – not that he had very far to stoop, poor little man – and struggling to lift some object at his feet.

"A 'tone," he cried, "a beauty big 'tone for Ted's muzzer," lifting in his arms a big round stone – one of the kind that as children we used to say had dropped from the moon – which by its nice round shape and speckledness had caught his eye. "Ted will cally it hisself."

And with a very red face, he lugged it manfully along.

"Let me help you with it, dear," said nurse.

But "No, zank thoo," he replied firmly each time that the offer was repeated. "Ted must cally it his own self."

And "cally" it he did, all the way. Nurse could only succeed in getting him to put it down now and then to rest a bit, as she said, for the stone was really so big a one that she was afraid of it seriously tiring his arms. More than once she pointed out prettier and smaller stones, and tried to suggest that his mother might like them quite as well, or better; but no. The bigness, the heaviness even, was its charm; to do something that cost him an effort for mother he felt vaguely was his wish; the "lamp of sacrifice," of *self*-sacrifice, had been lighted in his baby heart, never again to be extinguished.

And, oh, the happiness in that little heart when at last he reached his mother's room, still lugging the heavy stone, and laid it at her feet!

"Ted broughtened it for thoo," he exclaimed triumphantly. And mother was *so* pleased! The stone took up its place at once on the mantelpiece as an ornament, and the wearied little man climbed up on to his mother's knee, with a look of such delight and satisfaction as is sweet to be seen on a childish face.

So Ted's education began. He was growing beyond the birds and the flowers already, though only a tiny man of three; and every day he found new things to wonder at, and admire, and ask questions about, and, unlike some small people of his age, he always listened to the answers.

After a while he found prettier presents to bring home to his mother than big stones. With the spring days the flowers came back, and Ted, who last year had been too little to notice them much, grew to like the other turning of the road almost better than that which led to the sea. For down the lanes, hiding in among the hedges, or more boldly smiling up at him in the fields, he learnt to know the old friends that all happy children love so dearly.

One day he found some flowers that seemed to him prettier than any he had ever seen, and full of delight he trudged home with a baby bouquet of them in his little hot hands. It was getting

past spring into summer now, and Ted felt a little tired by the time he and his nurse had reached the house, and he ran in as usual to find his mother and relate his adventures.

"Ted has brought some most beauty flowers," he eagerly cried, and his mother stooped down to kiss and thank him, even though she was busy talking to some ladies who had come to see her, and whom Ted in his hurry had hardly noticed. He glanced round at them now with curiosity and interest. He rather liked ladies to come to see his mother, only he would have liked it still better if they would have just let him stay quietly beside her, looking at them and listening to what they said, without noticing him. But that way of behaving would not have seemed kind, and as Ted grew older he understood this, and learnt that it was right to feel pleased at being spoken to and even kissed.

"How well Ted is looking," said one of the ladies to his mother. "He is growing quite a big, strong boy. And what pretty flowers he has brought you. Are you very fond of flowers, my little man?"

"Ses," said Ted, looking up in the lady's face.

"The wild flowers about here are very pretty," said another of the ladies.

"Very pretty," said his mother; "but it is curious, is it not, that there are no cowslips in this country? They are such favourites of mine. I have such pleasant remembrances of them as a child."

She turned, for Ted was tugging gently at her sleeve. "What is towslips?" he asked.

"Pretty little yellow flowers, something like primroses," said his mother.

"Oh!" said Ted. Then nurse knocked at the door, and told him his tea was ready, and so he trotted off.

"Mother loves towslips," he said to himself two or three times over, till his nurse asked him what he was talking about.

"But there's no cowslips here," said nurse, when he had repeated it.

"No," said Ted; "but p'raps Ted could find some. Ted will go and look to-morrow with nursey."

"To-morrow's Sunday, Master Ted," said nurse; "I'll be going to church."

"What's church?" he asked.

"Church is everybody praying to God, all together in a big house. Don't you remember, Master Ted?"

"Oh ses, Ted 'members," he replied. "What's praying to 'Dod, nurse?"

"Why, I am sure you know that, Master Ted. You must have forgotten. Ask your mamma again."

Ted took her advice. Later in the evening he went downstairs to say good-night. His mother was outside, walking about the garden, for it was a beautiful summer evening. Ted ran to her; but on his way something caught his eye, which sent a pang to his little heart. It was the bunch of flowers he had gathered for her, lying withered already, poor little things, on a bench just by the door, where she had laid them when saying good-bye to her visitors. Ted stopped short; his face grew very red, and big tears rose slowly to his eyes. He was carefully collecting them together in his little hand when his mother called to him.

"Come, Ted, dear," she said; "what are you about?"

More slowly than his wont Ted trotted towards her. "Muzzer doesn't care for zem," he said, holding out his neglected offering. "Poor f'owers dies when they's leaved out of water."

"My darling," said his mother with real sorrow in her voice, "I am so sorry, so very sorry, dear little Ted," and she stooped to kiss him. "Give them to me now, and I will *always* keep them."

Ted was quickly consoled.

"Zem's not towslips," he said regretfully. "Ted would like towslips for muzzer." And then with a quick change of thought he went on, "What is praying to 'Dod?" he said, looking up eagerly with his bright blue eyes.

"Praying to God means asking Him anything we want, and then He answers us. Just as you ask me something, and I answer you. And if what we ask is good for us, He gives it us. That is one way of answering our prayers, but there are many ways. You will understand better when you are bigger, dear little Ted."

Ted asked no more, but a bright pleased look came into his face. He was fond of asking questions, but he did not ask silly ones, nor tease and tease as some children do, and, as I said, when he got an answer he thought it well over in his little head till he got to understand, or thought he understood. Till now his mother had thought him too little to teach him to say his prayers, but now in her own mind she began to feel he was getting old enough to say some simple prayer night and morning, and she resolved to teach him some day soon.

So now she kissed him and bade him good-night.

"God bless my little boy," she said, as she patted his head with its soft fair hair which hung in pretty careless curls, and was cut across the forehead in front like one of Sir Joshua Reynolds' cherubs. "God bless my little boy," she said, and Ted trotted off again, still with the bright look on his face.

He let nurse put him to bed very "goodly," though bed-time never came very welcomely to the active little man.

"Now go to sleep, Master Ted, dear," said nurse as she covered him up and then left the room, as she was busy about some work that evening.

Ted's room was next to his mother's. Indeed, if the doors were left open, it was quite easy to talk one to the other. This evening his mother happened to go upstairs not long after he had been tucked into bed. She was arranging some things in her own room, moving about quietly not to waken him, if, as she hoped, he had fallen asleep, for falling asleep did not come so easily to Ted as to some children. He was too busy in his mind, he had too many things to think about and wonder about for his brain to settle itself quietly all in a minute. And if he had a strong wish, I think it was that going-to-bed time should never come at all!

For a minute or two no sound reached Ted's mother.

"I do hope he is asleep," she said to herself, but just then she stopped short to listen. Ted was speaking to himself softly, but clearly and distinctly. What could he be saying? His mother listened with a smile on her face, but the smile grew into a sort of sweet gravity as she distinguished the words. Little Ted was *praying*. He had not waited for her to teach him – his baby-spirit had found out the simple way for itself – he was just asking God for what he wanted.

"Please, dear 'Dod," he said, "tell me why thoo won't make towslips grow in this countly. Muzzer loves zem so."

Then came a perfect silence. Ted seemed to be holding his breath in expectation, and somehow his mother too stood as still as could be. And after a minute or two the little voice began again.

"Please, dear 'Dod, *please* do tell me," and then the silence returned as before. It did not last so long, however, this time – not more than a minute at most had passed when a sound of faint crying broke upon Ted's mother's hearing – the little fellow had burst into tears.

Then his mother could stay away no longer.

"What is the matter, my boy?" she said; anxious, baby though he was, not to make him feel ashamed of his innocent prayers by finding that she had overheard what he had said when he thought himself alone.

"What is my Ted crying about?"

The tears, which had stopped for an instant, came back again.

"Muzzer," he said, "'Dod *won't* 'peak to Ted. Ted p'ayed and p'ayed, and Ted was kite kite kiet, but 'Dod didn't 'amswer.' Is 'Dod a'leep, muzzer?"

"No, my boy, but what was it that Ted wanted so much?"

"Ted wanted towslips for muzzer, but 'Dod *won't* amswer," he repeated piteously.

A shower of kisses was mother's answer, and gently and patiently she tried to make him understand the *seeming* silence which had caused his innocent tears. And, as was Ted's "way," he listened and believed. But "some day," he said to his mother, "some day," would she not take him to "a countly where towslips *did* grow?"

CHAPTER II IN THE GARDEN

"Heigh ho! daisies and buttercups,
Sweet wagging cowslips, they bend and they bow."

Songs of Seven.

Down below the garden of Ted's pretty home flowed, or danced rather, with a constant merry babble, a tiny stream. A busy, fussy stream it was, on its way to the beautiful little river that, in its turn, came rushing down through a mountain-gorge to the sea. I must tell you about this mountain-gorge some time, or, if you like, we shall visit it with Ted and his faithful companion, whom you have not yet heard about – his father's great big Scotch collie dog, Cheviott.

You don't know what a dear dog he was, so brave, but so gentle and considerate. He came of a brave and patient race, for you know "collies" are the famous Scotch sheep-dogs, who to their shepherd masters are more useful than any *two*-legged servant could be. And though I am not sure that "Chevie" himself had ever had to do with "the keeping of sheep," like gentle Abel of old, yet, no doubt, as a baby doggie in his northern home, he must have heard a good deal about it – no doubt, if his tongue had had the power of speaking, he could have told his little master some strange stories of adventures and narrow escapes which had happened to members of his family. For up in the Border mountains where he was born, the storms sometimes come on so suddenly that shepherd and flock are all but lost, and but for their faithful collies, might never find their way home again. Often, too, in the early spring-time, the poor little lambs go astray, or meet with some accident, such as being caught in the bushes and being unable to escape. What, then, would become of them but for their four-footed guardian, who summons aid before it is too late, and guides the gentle, silly lambkins and their mothers along the right paths? I think Ted's father and mother did well when they chose for their boy a collie like Cheviott for his companion.

Across the stream, just at the foot of the garden path which sloped down from the house, a couple of planks were placed as a bridge. A narrow bridge, and not a very firm one, it must be confessed, and perhaps for that very reason – because there was something a little risky and dangerous about it – Ted, true boy that he was, was particularly fond of crossing it. He liked to stand on it for a minute or two on the way, "jiggling" up and down to feel the shaking and trembling of the planks, but that, of course, was only a kind of playing with danger. I don't think he *would* have much liked a sudden tumble into the mischievous little brook's cold waters, very cold it would have felt, though it looked so brownly bright and tempting. And many a bath in the brook Ted would have had, had Chevie been as much carried away by his spirits as his little master. For no sooner did the two set off running from the top of the sloping garden path, than Ted would call out, "A race, Chevie, a race! Who'll be at the bridge first?" And on he would run as fast as his sturdy wee legs could carry him, Cheviott bounding beside him with a great show of also doing *his* best. But – and wasn't this clever of Chevie? – just a little way on this side of the bridge he would – not stop short, for that might have disappointed Ted and made him feel as if they weren't having a *real* race, but go gradually more slowly, as if he felt he had no chance of gaining, so that little Ted always reached the bridge first, and stood shouting with glee and triumph. The first time or two that Ted's mother saw this little performance she had been frightened, for if the dog had gone on at full speed, or even only at luggage-train speed, beside the boy, he could not have avoided tumbling him into the brook. But for anything of this kind Cheviott was far too much of a gentleman, and

after watching them once or twice, Ted's mother felt perfectly satisfied that the little man could not be better taken care of than by his four-footed friend.

There was another friend, too, who could very well be trusted to take care of Ted, for though he had, of course, a very kind, good nurse in the house, nurses are not able to be the whole day long in the garden, nor are they always very fond of being much there. So, even though Ted was still quite a little boy, it was very nice for him to have two such good out-door friends as Cheviott and David the gardener, the other one I am going to tell you of.

It was a beautiful spring day. Ted woke up early, and thought to himself how nice and bright and sunny it was going to be in the garden. He was rather in a hurry to be dressed, for there were several things he was in a hurry to do, and the days, in summer time especially, never seemed long enough for all he had before him. Just now these summer days seemed really brimming over with nice things, for his big cousin Percy – at least he was what *Ted* counted a "big" cousin, and he was a good many years older than Ted – was with him for the holidays, and though Percy had some lessons to do, still they had a good deal of time together.

"Ted wonders if Percy is 'decked' yet," said Ted to his nurse. "Decked" was the word he always used for "dressed," and he was often made fun of for using it. His mind was very full of Percy this morning, for he had only arrived the evening before, and besides the pleasure of having him with him, which was *always* a pleasure, there was the nice newness of it, – the things he had to show Percy, the tricks Chevie had learnt, big dog though he was, the letters and little words Ted had himself mastered since Percy was last there.

"I don't know that Master Percy will be ready quite so early this morning," said nurse. "He may be a little tired with travelling yesterday."

"Ted doesn't *zink* Percy will be tired," said Ted. "Percy wants to see the garden. Percy is so big, isn't he, nurse? Percy can throw sticks up in the sky *so* high. Percy throwed one up in the sky up to heaven, so high that it *never* comed down again."

"Indeed," said nurse; "are you quite sure of that, Master Ted? Perhaps it did come down again, but you didn't see it."

Nurse was a sensible person, you see. She did not all at once begin saying to Ted that he was talking nonsense, or worse still that he was telling stories. For very little children often "romance" in a sweet innocent way which has nothing whatever to do with story-telling – I mean *untruth*-telling, for it is better not to call untruths "stories," is it not? The world and the people in it, and the things they see and hear, are all new and strange to the little creatures so lately started on their puzzling journey. What wonder that real and fancy are mixed up together sometimes – that it is difficult to understand that the pretty blue-bells do not sometimes tinkle in the moonlight, or that there are no longer bears in the woods or fairies hidden among the grass? Perhaps it would be better for us if we were *more* ready to believe even such passed-by fancies, than to be so quick as we sometimes are to accuse others of wishing to deceive.

Ted looked at nurse thoughtfully.

"P'raps it did," he said. "P'raps it might have comed down again after Ted was a'leep."

"I daresay it caught in a tree or something of that kind," said nurse, as she finished brushing Ted's soft curls and lifted him off the chair on which he had been standing, just as Percy put his head in at the door to ask if Ted might have a run in the garden with him before breakfast.

"They're not down yet," said Percy, nodding his bright curly head in the direction of Ted's father's and mother's room; "they're not ready. Nurse, do let Ted come out with me for a bit before breakfast," and Ted trotted off, his hand in Percy's, in utmost content.

Was there ever so clever and kind and wonderful a big boy as Percy before? Was there ever one who knew so much about *everything*– cricket and croquet and football; skating and fishing and climbing trees – things on earth and things in water – what was there he didn't know? These were the thoughts that were busy in Ted's little brain as he followed kind Percy about the garden, that

bright summer morning, chattering incessantly, and yet ready enough to be silent when Percy took it into his head to relate to his tiny adorer some of his school experiences.

"Ted will go to school some day, Percy," he said half questioningly.

"Of course you will. I hope you'll come to my school if I've not left by then. I could look after you, you know, and see that they didn't bully you."

"What's 'bully'?" asked Ted.

"Oh, teasing, you know. Setting you down because you're a little chap, and all that. Knocking you about if you don't look sharp. All those kinds of things that big fellows do to small ones."

Ted opened his eyes. It was not very clear to him what Percy meant – it was a new idea, and would have distressed him greatly had he quite taken it in that big boys could be anything but good to little ones.

"Thoo doesn't knock Ted about, and thoo is big, Percy," he said, remonstratingly.

"No, of course I don't, but that's different. You're like my brother, you know."

"And bruvvers *couldn't* knock themselves about," said Ted with an air of satisfaction.

"N-no, I suppose not," said Percy. Boy as he was, he felt somehow that he could not bear to destroy little Ted's beautiful faith. "But never mind about that just now," he added; "let's run down the bank and see how the cabbages and cauliflowers are getting on. They were just put in when I was here last;" and for some time both boys were intensely interested in examining the state of the vegetable beds.

"Ted likes f'owers best," said the child, after a few moments' silence. "When Ted –"

"Why don't you say 'I' and 'I like,' Teddy?" said Percy. "You're getting such a big boy – four years old."

"Ted *means* I," persisted the small man. "I sall have all f'owers in Ted's garden, when me is big."

Percy was obliged to leave off what he was about – hunting for the slugs and caterpillars among the cabbages – in order that he might stand still and laugh.

"I'm afraid you wouldn't get the prize for grammar at our school, Ted," he said. But Ted only laughed too.

"I haven't learnt grammar," he said slowly and distinctly. "But please, Percy, Ted doesn't like cabbages. Come and see the f'owers. There was lots of c'ocodiles at that side. Ted likes zem best of all, but zem's done now."

"*Crocodiles*," said Percy. "What can crocodiles be?"

"Little f'owers with pointy leaves," said Ted. "P'raps it isn't c'ocodiles but somesing like coc – coco –"

"Crocuses perhaps," said Percy, as they made their way up to the house. "Yes, they're very pretty, but they're soon done."

"When I'm big I'll have a garden where they'll *never* be done," said Ted. "I'll have c'ocodiles and towslips for muzzer and – and –"

"Come in to breakfast, my man," called out his father from the dining-room. "What have you been about this morning?"

"We've been in the garden," said Ted, "and Percy's been 'samining the cabbages. He's caught slugs upon slugs, worms upon worms, earwigs upon earwigs."

"My dear little boy," said Ted's father, though he couldn't help laughing, "you mustn't learn to exaggerate."

"What's 'saggerate?" began Ted, but looking round another idea caught him. "Where's muzzer?" he said suddenly.

"Mother is rather tired this morning," said his father. "Eat your breakfast, dear," and then he turned to talk to Percy and ask him questions as to how he was getting on at school.

For a minute or two neither of them noticed Ted. He sat quietly at his place, his bowl of bread and milk before him, but he made no attempt to eat it. Then Percy happened to see him.

"Aren't you hungry, Ted?" he said.

Ted looked up with his two blue eyes full of tears.

"Ses," he said, "Ted's hungry. But if muzzer doesn't come down Ted can't eat. Ted won't eat nothing all day, and he'll die."

"Not quite so bad as that," said his father quietly, for he did not want Ted to see that it was difficult not to smile at his funny way of speaking, "for see here is mother coming."

Ted danced off his seat with pleasure.

"It's dedful when thoo's not here," he said feelingly, and now the bread and milk was quickly despatched. "When I'm big," he continued, in the intervals of the spoonfuls, "I'll have a house as big – as big as a mountain," his eyes glancing out of the window, "and all the little boys in the world shall live there with all their favers and muzzers, and Percies, and everybodies, and nobody shall never go away, not to school or bidness, or nothing, so that they'll all be togever always."

Ted looked round for approval, and then took another spoonful.

"What a nice place you'll make of the world, my boy, when you're big," said his father.

"Ses," said Ted with satisfaction.

"But as that time hasn't come yet, I'm afraid I *must* go to my 'bidness,'" his father went on. For he had to go several times a week a good way into the country, to see that his men were all doing their work properly. "And Percy must go with me to-day," he went on, "for he needs some new clothes, and I shall be driving through A – , " which was the nearest town to which they lived.

Percy's face looked very pleased, but Ted's grew rather sad.

"Never mind, Teddy," whispered Percy. "We'll have lots of days. You must have a good game with Chevie to keep up your spirits."

"And David is going to cut the grass to-day," said his father, "so you will have plenty of fun."

"But Ted must be careful," said his mother; "don't touch David's sharp tools, Ted. I was quite frightened the other day," she added; "Ted was trying to open and shut those great big shears for clipping the borders."

"Zem was sticked fast," said Ted. "Zem opens kite easy sometimes."

"Well, don't you touch them any way," said his mother, laughing. But though Ted said "No," I don't feel sure that he really heard what his mother was saying. His wits were already off, I don't know where to – running after Cheviott perhaps, or farther away still, up among the little clouds that were scudding across the blue sky that he caught sight of out of the window.

And then his father and Percy set off, and his mother went away about her housekeeping, sending Ted up to the nursery, and telling him that he might ask nurse to put his big blouse on, so that he might play about the garden without risk of soiling his clothes.

Ted felt, for him, a very little sad as he trotted out into the garden. He had hoped for such a nice merry day with Percy. But low spirits never troubled him long. Off he set with Cheviott for the race down to the little bridge, always the first bit of Ted's programme, and careful Chevie as usual pulled up in plenty of time to avoid any risk of toppling his master into the brook. Arrived on the bridge, Ted stood still and "jigged" a little as usual. Then he peered down at the shiny water with the bright brown pebbles sparkling up through it, and wondered what it would feel like to be a little fish.

"Little fisses," he said to himself, "always has each other to play with. They don't go to school, and they hasn't no bidness, nor no cooks that they must be such a long time ordering the dinners with, nor – nor beds to make and stockings to mend. I wish nurse would 'tum out this morning. Ted doesn't like being all alone. Ted would like somebody littler to play with, 'cos then they wouldn't go to school or out d'ives with papa."

But just as he was thinking this, he caught sight of some one coming across the garden, and his ideas took another turn at once.

"David, old David," he cried, "is thoo going to cut the grass? Do let me come and help thoo, David."

And he ran back across the bridge again and made his way to David as fast as he could.

"Good morning, Master Ted," said the gardener. "Is it beautiful day, Master Ted, to be sure. Yes indeed."

"Ses," agreed Ted. "Good morning, old David. I'm going to stay out in the garden a long time, a tevible long time, 'cos it's such a sprendid lovely day. What is thoo going to do, David? Can't Ted help thoo?"

"I am going to cut the grass, Master Ted, but I not be very long – no; for it is only the middle that's be cut. All the rest stand for hay, to be sure. Ay, indeed."

"And when will the hay be cuttened?" inquired Ted.

"That's be as Master order, and not as Master can choose neither – no," said David. "He not able to make for the sun to shine; no, indeed; nor the rain neither, – no."

"*Dod* sends rain and sun," said Ted, reverently, but yet looking at David with a sort of curiosity.

"Well, indeed you are right, Master Ted. Yes, yes. But I must get on with my work. God gives us work to do, too; ay, indeed; and them as not work never expect to eat, no, never; they not care for their victual anyhow if they not work for it. No."

Ted looked rather puzzled. "Ted eats," he said, – "not victuals – Ted doesn't know that meat – but bread and butter, and tea, and potatoes, and rice pudding, and meat, and *sometimes* 'tawberry jam and apple pie and – and – lots of things. And Ted likes zem very much, but him doesn't work."

"I not know for that, Master Ted," said David, "is it all kinds of work; ay, indeed; and I see you very near always busy – dear me, yes; working very good, Master Ted – ay."

"I *like* to be busy. I wish thoo'd let me help thoo to cut the grass," said Ted, eyeing David wistfully, as he started his big scythe, for the old gardener knew nothing of mowing machines, and would most likely have looked upon them with great contempt. But he stopped short a moment to look down at wee Ted, staring up at him and wishing to be in his place.

"No, indeed, Master Ted *bach!*" he said; "you soon have your cliver little legs and arms cut to pieces, if you use with my scythe, Master Ted – ay, indeed, d'rectly. It look easy, to be sure, but it not so easy even for a cliver man like you, Master Ted – no, indeed. But I tell you what you shall do. You shall help to make the grass to a heaps, and then I put it in a barrow and wheel it off. Ay, indeed; that be the best."

This proposal was very much to Ted's taste. Chevie and he, at a safe distance from David's scythe, thought it great fun to toss about the soft fine grass and imagine they were helping David tremendously. And after a while, when Chevie began to think he had had enough of it, and with a sort of condescending growl by way of explanation, stretched himself out in the sunshine for a little forenoon sleep, David left off cutting, and, with Ted's help of course, filled the barrow and wheeled it off to the corner where the grass was to lie to be out of the way. It was beginning to be rather hot, though still quite early, and Ted's face grew somewhat red with his exertions as he ran beside David.

"You better ride now; jump in, Master Ted," said the gardener, when his barrow was empty. So he lifted him in and wheeled him back to the lawn, which was *quite* after Ted's own heart.

"Isn't thoo going to cut with thoo's big scissors?" said Ted after a while.

"It is want oiling," said David, "and I forget to do them. I shall leave the borders till after dinner, – ay, sure," and he was going on with his scything when suddenly a voice was heard from the house calling him.

"David, David, you're wanted," said the voice, and then the cook made her appearance at the side of the house. "There's a note to take to – ."

They could not hear to where, but David had to go. He glanced round him, and, afraid of Ted's experiments, shouldered his scythe and walked off with it for fear of accidents.

"Are you going in, Master Ted?" he asked.

"Nurse is going to call me when she's ready," said Ted composedly, and knowing that the little fellow often played about by himself for a while, good David left him without any more anxiety. He had got his scythe safe, he never thought of the big pair of shears he had left lying in the grass!

Now these gigantic "scissors" as he called them had always had a wonderful attraction for Ted. He used to think how funny they would look beside the very tiny fine pair his mother worked with – the pretty scissors that lay in her little case lined with velvet and satin. Ted had not, in those days, heard of Gulliver and his strange adventures, but if he had, one might have imagined that to his fancy the two pairs of scissors were like a Brobdignag and a Lilliputian. And no sooner had David disappeared than unfortunately the great scissors caught his eyes.

"Zem's still sticked fast," he said to himself. "David says zem needs oil. Wiss I had some oil. P'raps the fissy oil to make Ted grow big would do. But the scissors is big enough. Ted wonders if the fissy oil would make zem bigger. Zem *couldn't* be much bigger."

Ted laughed a little to himself at the funny fancy. Then he sat and stared at the scissors. What did they remind him of? Ah yes, they were like the shears of "the great, long, red-legged scissor man," in the wonderful story of "Conrad Suck-a-thumb," in his German picture-book. Almost, as he gazed at them, it seemed to Ted that the figure of the scissors man would suddenly dart out from among the bushes and seize his property.

"But him wouldn't cut *Ted's* fumbs," thought the little man to himself, "'cos Ted *never* sucks zem. What a pity the scissors is sticked fast! Poor David can't cut with zem. P'raps Ted could oilen zem for poor David! Ted will go and get some fissy oil."

No sooner thought than done. Up jumped Ted, and was starting off to the house when a growl from Cheviott made him stop. The dog had just awakened, and seeing his little master setting off somewhere thought it his business to inquire where to and why. He lifted his head and gave it a sort of sleepy shake, then growled again, but gently of course.

"What did thoo say, Chevie?" said Ted. "Did thoo want to know where I was going? Stay here, Chevie. Ted will be back in a minute – him's on'y going to get some fissy oil to oilen poor David's scissors."

And off he set, though a third growl from Cheviott followed him as he ran.

"What does Chevie mean?" thought Ted. "P'raps him's thinking muzzer said Ted mustn't touch zem big scissors. But muzzer on'y meant Ted wasn't to cutten with zem. Muzzer would *like* Ted to help poor David," and, his conscience quite at rest, he trotted on contentedly.

CHAPTER III

WISHES AND FEARS

Children. "Here are the nails, and may we help?
Jessie. You shall if I should want help.
Children. Will you want it then?
Please want it – we like helping."

There was no one in the nursery, fortunately for Ted's plans. *Unfortunately* rather, we should perhaps say, for if nurse had been there, she would have asked for what he wanted the little bottle which had held the cod-liver oil, that he had lately left off taking, but of which a few drops still remained.

Ted climbed on to a chair and reached the shelf where it stood, and in two minutes he was off again, bottle in hand, in triumph. He found Cheviott lying still, where he had left him; he looked up and yawned as Ted appeared, and then growled with an air of satisfaction. It was sometimes a little difficult for Chevie to decide exactly how *much* care he was to take of Ted. After all, a little two-legged boy that could talk was not *quite* the same as a lamb, or even a sheep. He could not run round him barking, to prevent his trotting where he wished – there were plainly some things Ted had to do with and understood which Chevie's dog-experience did not reach to.

So Cheviott lay there and blinked his honest eyes in the sunshine, and stared at Ted and wondered what he was after now! For Ted was in a very tip-top state of delight! He sat down cross-legged on the grass, drew the delicious big shears to him – they were heavy for him even to pull – and uncorking the bottle of "fissy" oil, began operations.

"Zem *is* sticked fast, to be soore," he said to himself, adopting David's favourite expression, as he tugged and tugged in vain. "If thoo could hold one side and Ted the other, they would soon come loosened," he observed to Cheviott. But Cheviott only growled faintly and blinked at his master sleepily, and after a good deal more tugging Ted did manage to open the shears, which indeed at last flew apart so sharply that the boy toppled over with the shock, and rolled for a moment or two on the grass, though happily not on the shears, before he recovered his balance.

Laughing merrily, he pulled himself up again. Luckily the bottle had not been overturned. Ted poured a drop or two carefully on to his fingers, quite regardless of the fishy smell, and proceeded to anoint the scissors. This he repeated several times, polishing them all over till they shone, but not understanding that *the* place where the oil was needed was the hinge, he directed the best of his attention to the general shininess.

Then he sat and looked at them admiringly.

"*Won't* David be p' eased?" he said. "Zem's oilened all over now. Ted must see if they don't sticken fast now."

With nearly as much difficulty as he had had to open them, Ted now managed to shut them.

"Zem's better," thought the busy little man, "but Ted must see how they cut."

He laid them flat on the grass, at a place where the blades had not been completely sheared by the scythe. Tug number one – the oil had really done some good, they opened more easily – tug number two, behold them gaping – tug number three, they bite the grass, and Ted is just going to shout in triumph when a quick shock of pain stabs through him. He had been kneeling almost *on* the shears, and their cruel jaws had snapped, with the grass, the tender fleshy part of his poor little leg!

It was not the pain that frightened him so much as the feeling held fast by the now dreadful scissors.

"David, David," he cried, "oh, please come. Nurse, please come. Ted has cuttened hisself."

His little voice sounded clear and shrill in the summer quiet of the peaceful garden, and nurse, who had been hastening to come out to him, heard it from the open window. David too was on his way back, and poor Ted was soon released. But it was a bad cut – he had to be carried into the house to have it bathed and sponged and tenderly bound up by mother's fingers. He left off crying when he saw how sorry mother looked.

"Ted is *so* sorry to t'ouble thoo," he said.

"And mother is sorry for Ted," she replied. "But, my dear little boy," she went on, when the poor leg was comfortable and its owner forgetting its pain on mother's knee, "don't you remember that mother told you not to touch David's tools?"

"Oh ses," he replied. "Ted wouldn't touch zem for hisself, but it was to *help David*," and the innocent confidence with which he looked up in her face went to his mother's heart.

"But *still*, dear Ted, you must try to understand that what mother says, you must do exactly. Mother likes you to be kind and helping to people, but still mother knows better than you, and that is why, when she tells you things, you must remember to do what she says."

Ted looked grave and a little puzzled, and seeing this his mother thought it best to say no more just then. The lesson of obedience was one that Ted found rather puzzling, you see, but what his mother had said had made a mark in his mind. He thought about it often, and as he grew bigger other things happened, as you will hear, to make him think of it still more.

It was rather a trial to Ted not to be able to run about as usual that afternoon, for had he done so, the cut might have begun to bleed again, so he had to sit still in the nursery, looking out at the window and hoping and hoping that Percy would soon come back. Once David and his barrow passed underneath, and the gardener called up to know if Master Ted's leg was better. Ted shook his head rather dolefully.

"Him's better," he said, "but Ted can't run about. Ted's so sad, David. Muzzer's got letters to write and Percy's out."

A kind thought struck David. He went round to the drawing-room window and tapped at it gently. Ted's mother was writing there. Might he wheel Master Ted in his barrow to the part of the garden where he was working? – he would take good care of him – "the little gentleman never cut himself if I with him – no, indeed; I make him safe enough."

And Ted's mother consented gladly. So in a few minutes he was comfortably installed on a nice heap of dry grass, with Cheviott close beside him and David near at hand.

"You never touch my tools again, Master Ted, for a bit; no, to be sure; do you now?" said David.

"No," said Ted. "Muzzer says I mustn't. But wasn't the big scissors nicely oilened, David?"

"Oh, fust rate – ay," said David. "Though I not say it is a cliver smell – no. I not like the smell, Master Ted."

"Never mind," replied Ted reassuringly. "Ted will ask muzzer for some cock-alone for thoo. Thoo can put some on the scissors."

"What's that, Master Ted?" inquired David, who was not at all above getting information out of his little master.

"Cock-alone," repeated Ted. "Oh, it's somesing that smells very nice. I don't know what it is. I thing it must be skeesed out of f'owers. I'll run and get thoo some now, David, this minute," and he was on the point of clambering to his feet when the stiff feeling of his bandaged leg stopped him. "Oh, I forgot," he exclaimed regretfully.

"Yes indeed, Master Ted. You not walk a great deal to-day, to be sure – no, indeed – for a bit; ay."

Ted lay still for a minute or two. He was gazing up at the sky, which that afternoon was very pure and beautiful.

"Who paints the sky, David?" he said suddenly.

"Well indeed, Master Ted, I not think you ask me such a foolis' question, Master Ted *bach!*" said David. "Who's make a sky and a sea and everything so?"

"Dod," said Ted. "Oh, I know that. But I thoughtened p'raps 'Dod put somebody up there to paint it. It was *so* pitty last night, David —*all* tolours – Ted tan't say zem all. Why isn't there many tolours now, David?"

"I not know for sure," said David, stopping a moment in his work and looking up at the sky.

"Ted *thought*," continued the little fellow slowly, "Ted *thought* p'raps 'Dod's paints was getting done. Could that be why?"

David was rather matter-of-fact, and I don't know that that made him any the worse a companion for Ted, whose brain was already quite full enough of fancies. So he did not smile at Ted's idea, but answered quite gravely,

"No indeed, Master Ted, I not think that untall."

"If on'y Ted could fly," the child continued in a minute or two, as just then a flock of birds made their graceful way between his gazing eyes and the clear blue vault above. "How pittily birds flies, don't they, David? If Ted could fly he'd soon find out all about the sky and everysing. And it wouldn't matter then that him had hurt his leg. *Couldn't* Ted learn to fly, David?"

Ted was soaring too far above poor David's head already for him to know what to answer. What could he say but "No indeed, Master Ted," again? He had never heard tell of any one that could fly except the angels. For David was fond of going to church, or chapel rather, and though he could not read Ted's Bible, he could read his own very well.

"Angels," said Ted. The word started his busy fancy off in a fresh direction. He lay looking up still, watching now the lovely little feathery clouds that began to rise as the sun declined, and fancying they were angels with wings softly floating hither and thither in the balmy air. He watched one little group, which seemed to him like three angels with their arms twined together, so long, that at last his eyes grew rather tired of watching and their little white blinds closed over them softly. Little Ted had fallen asleep.

"So, so; dear me, he tired," said old David, as, surprised at the unusual silence, he turned to see what Ted was about. "Bless him, he tired very bad with his cliver talk and the pain; ay – but, indeed, he not one to make fuss – no. He a brave little gentleman, Master Ted – ay, indeed," and the kind old man lifted the boy's head so that he should lie more comfortably, and turned his wheelbarrow up on one side to shade him from the sun.

Ted smiled in his sleep as David looked at him. Shall I tell you what made him smile? In his sleep he had got his wish. He dreamt that he was flying. This was the dream that came to him.

He fancied he was running down the garden path with Chevie, when all at once Chevie seemed to disappear, and where he had been there stood a pretty snow-white lamb. With an eager cry Ted darted forward to catch it, and laid his hand on its soft woolly coat, when – it was no lamb but a little cloud he was trying to grasp. And wonderful to say, the little cloud seemed to float towards him and settle itself on his shoulders, and then all of himself Ted seemed to find out that it had turned into wings!

"Ted can fly, Ted can fly!" he cried with delight, or *thought* he cried. In reality it was just then that David lifted his head, and feeling himself moving, Ted fancied it was the wings lifting him upward, and gave the pleased smile which David noticed. Fly! I should think so. He mounted and mounted, higher and higher, the white wings waving him upwards in the most wonderful way, till at last he found himself right up in the blue sky where he had so wished to be. And ever so many – lots and lots of other little white things were floating or flying about, and, looking closely at them, Ted saw that they were not little clouds as they seemed at first, but wings – all pairs of beautiful white wings, and dear little faces were peeping out from between them. They were all little children like himself.

"Come and play, Ted, come and play. Ted, *Ted*, Ted!" they cried so loud, that Ted opened his eyes – his real waking eyes, not his dream ones – sharply, and there he was, lying on the soft grass heap, not up in the sky among the cloud-children at all!

At first he was rather disappointed. But as he was thinking to himself whether it was worth while to try to go to sleep again and go on with his dream, he heard himself called as before, "Ted, *Ted*, Ted."

And looking up he forgot all about everything else when he saw, running down the sloping banks as fast as his legs would carry him, Percy, his dear Percy!

Ted jumped up – even his wounded leg couldn't keep him still now.

"Was it thoo calling me, Percy?" he said. "I was d'eaming, do thoo know —*such* a funny d'eam? But I'm so glad thoo's come back, Percy. Oh, Ted *is* so glad."

Then all the day's adventures had to be related – the accident with the scissors and the drive in the wheelbarrow, and the funny dream. And in his turn Percy had to tell of all he had seen and done and heard – the shops he had been at in the little town, and what he had had for luncheon and – and – the numberless trifles that make up the interest of a child's day.

"Does thoo think there's any shop where we could get *wings*, Percy?" asked Ted. He had the vaguest ideas as to what "shops" were, but Percy had been telling him of the beautiful little boats he had seen at a toy-shop in the market-place, "boats with white sails and all rigged just like real ones;" and if boats with white sails were to be got, why not white wings?

"Wings!" exclaimed Percy. "What sort of wings do you mean, Teddy?"

"Wings for little boys," Ted explained. "Like what I was d'eaming about. It would be so nice to fly, Percy."

"Beautiful, wouldn't it?" agreed Percy. "But nobody can fly, Ted. Nobody *could* make wings that would be any use for people. People can't fly."

"But little boys, Percy," persisted Ted. "Little boys isn't so very much bigger than birds. Oh, you don't know how *lovely* it feels to fly. Percy, *do* let us try to make some wings."

But Percy's greater experience was less hopeful.

"I'm afraid it would be no use," he said. "People have often tried. I've heard stories of it. They only tumbled down."

"Did they hurt themselves?" asked Ted.

"I expect so," Percy replied.

Just then David, who was passing by, stopped to tell the boys that some one was calling them in from the house.

"Is it your papa, Master Ted; yes, I think," he said.

Ted's leg was feeling less stiff and painful now. He could walk almost as well as usual. When they got to the house-door his father was waiting for him. He had heard of Ted's misfortune, and there was rather a comical smile on his face as he stooped to kiss his little boy.

"I want you to come in to see Mr. Brand," he said. "He says he hasn't seen you for a long time, little Ted."

Ted raised his blue eyes to his father's face with a rather puzzled expression.

"Whom's Mr. Brand?" he asked.

"Why, don't you remember him, Teddy?" said Percy. "That great big gentleman – so awfully tall."

Ted did not reply, but he seemed much impressed.

"Is him a diant?" he asked, gravely.

"Very nearly, I should say," said Percy, laughing, and then, as he had already seen Mr. Brand, who had met Ted's father on his way back from A – , Percy ran off in another direction, and Ted followed his father into the drawing-room.

Mr. Brand was sitting talking to Ted's mother, but just as the door opened, he rose from his seat and came forward.

"I was just going to ask you if – ah! here's your little boy," he said to Ted's father. Then, sitting down again, he drew Ted between his knees and looked kindly at the small innocent face. He was very fond of children, but he did not know much about them, and Ted, looking and feeling rather overawed, stood more silently than usual, staring seriously at the visitor.

He was very tall and very big. Whether he quite came up to Ted's idea of a "diant" I cannot tell. But queer fancies began to chase each other round the boy's brain. There had been a good deal to excite and upset the little fellow – at no time a strong child – that day, and his dream when lying asleep on the grass had added to it all. And now, as he stood looking up at big Mr. Brand, a strange confusion of ideas filled his mind – of giants tall enough to reach the sky, to catch and bring down some of the cloud-wings Ted wished so for, interspersed with wondering if it was "fissy oil" that had made this big man so very big. If he, Ted, were to take a great, great lot of fissy oil, would *he* grow as big and strong? Would he be able to cut the grass like David perhaps, to run faster than Percy – to – to I don't know what – for at this moment Mr. Brand's voice brought him back from his fancies.

"What an absent-minded little fellow he is," Mr. Brand was saying, for he had been speaking to Ted two or three times without the child's paying any attention.

"Not generally," said Ted's mother. "He is usually very wide-awake to all that is going on. What are you thinking of, Ted, dear?"

"Yes," said Mr. Brand. "Tell us what you've got in your head. Are you thinking that I'm a very tiny little man – the tiniest little man you ever saw?"

"No," said Ted solemnly, without the least smile, at which his mother was rather surprised. For, young though he was, Ted was usually very quick at seeing a joke. But he just said "No," and stared again at Mr. Brand, without another word.

"Then what were you thinking – that I'm the very *biggest* man you ever did see?"

"Ses," said Ted, gravely still, but with a certain light in his eyes which encouraged Mr. Brand to continue his questions.

"And what more? Were you wishing you were as big as I am?"

Ted hesitated.

"I'd *rather* fly," he said. "But Percy says nobody can fly. I'd like to be big if I could get up very high."

"How high?" said Mr. Brand. "Up to the top of the mountain out there?"

"Is the mountain as high as the clouds?" asked Ted.

"Yes," said Mr. Brand; "when you're up at the very top, you can look down on the clouds."

Ted looked rather puzzled.

"I'll tell you what," the gentleman went on, amused by the expression of the child's face, "I'll tell you what – as I'm so big, supposing I take you to the top of the mountain – we'll go this very afternoon. I'll take a jug of cold water and a loaf of bread, and leave it with you there so that you'll have something to eat, and then you can stay there quite comfortable by yourself and find out all you want to know. You'd like that, wouldn't you? to be all by yourself on the top of the mountain?"

He looked at Ted in a rather queer way as he said it. The truth was that Mr. Brand, who though so big was not very old, was carried away by the fun (to *him*) of watching the puzzled look on the child's face, and forgot that what to him was a mere passing joke might be very different to the tender little four-years-old boy.

Ted's face grew rather white, he edged away a little from this strange gentleman, whom he could not make out, but who was so big that Ted felt it impossible to doubt his being able to do anything he wished.

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?" he repeated, quite gravely, and glancing at Ted with slightly knitted brows which made the boy suddenly think of some of the "ogre" stories he had heard.

"No," said Ted bluntly. But he was afraid to say more. Ogres didn't like to be contradicted, and perhaps —*perhaps* this strange man really thought he *would* like it, and really meant to please him. Any way, it would never do to answer rudely, though Ted's face grew still paler, when his glance fell on the mountain peak clearly to be seen out of the window from where he stood, and a little shiver ran through him when he thought that perhaps he would have to go, whether he liked it or not. He edged away still farther, but it was no use. Mr. Brand had put his arm round him, and there was no getting away, when suddenly a noise outside the window caught the gentleman's attention and he started up. It was his dog barking loudly, and Mr. Brand, fearing he might have got into some mischief, stepped out through the glass door to see. Ted was on the alert, and before any one in the room had noticed him he was off.

Where should he go to? He dared not hide in the garden, for there he might be seen, especially as Mr. Brand was running about after his dog; he would not go up to the nursery, for nurse would ask him why he had not stayed downstairs; he did not even wish to find Percy, for though he could not have explained why, he felt that it would be impossible for him to tell *any one* of the strange terror that Mr. Brand's joke had awakened. He felt ashamed of it, afraid too that if, as he vaguely thought might be the case, the offer had been made in real earnest and with a wish to please him, his dislike to it would be ungrateful and unkind. Indeed poor Ted was more troubled than he ever remembered to have been in his whole little life – he could think of nothing for it but to hide till all danger was past.

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