Richards Laura Elizabeth Howe

Five Mice in a Mouse-trap, by the Man in the Moon.

Laura Richards

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I.
THE MAN IN THE MOON

Children, down on the planet which you call Earth, allow me to introduce myself to you! I am the Man in the Moon. I have no doubt that you know a good deal about me, in an indirect way, and that your nurses have told you all sorts of nonsense about my inquiring the way to Norwich – as if I didn't know the way to Norwich! and various things equally sensible. But now I am going to tell you a little about myself, and a great deal about *yourselves*, and about everything in general. In short, I am going to write you a book, and this is the beginning of it.

You see, I live very quietly up here, very quietly indeed, with only my dog to bear me company. He is a good dog, and very funny sometimes, but still I have a good deal of time on my hands, and nothing amuses me so much as to watch all that is going on down on your planet, and see what people in general, and children in particular, are doing, every day and all day. You may wonder how I can see so far, and see distinctly, but that is easily explained. I have a great, monstrous mirror, which is – oh! well, if I were to tell you how big it is, you would not believe me, so I will only say that it is very big indeed. This mirror has also the advantage of being a very strong magnifying glass, and as I can tip it in any direction I please, you will easily understand that I can see just what is going on in any part of the world that I happen to be interested in. For instance, Tommy Tiptop, the glass was tipped towards New York this morning, and I saw you take away your little sister's stick of candy, you greedy boy! Yes, and I saw you put in the closet for it, too, so that was well ended. Children are the same, I find, all the world over, for it was only yesterday that a little boy in Kamschatka (an ugly little Tartar he is, and not so very unlike you), named Patchko, while his father was out hunting, took away a tallow candle from his sister, which seemed just as good to her as the barley sugar did to little Katie.

But, children all, I beg your pardon! I am not writing this book for Tommy Tiptop, and I hope that most of the boys who read it will be better than he is. I do want, however, to tell you about some children of whom I am very particularly fond, and whom most of you do not know. These children live in the town of Nomatterwhat, which, as you are probably aware, is in the State of Nomatterwhere, which again is, or really ought to be, one of the United States of America. Perhaps these are Indian names; similarly, perhaps they are not. There are five of these children, and I call them my Five Mice; and the queer house that they live in I call the Mouse-trap. They are such funny children! I watch them sometimes all day long, their pranks are so amusing; and then when night comes, I slide down a moonbeam and sit by their pillows, and tell them stories and sing them songs. Ah! they like that, you may believe! And you all shall hear the stories and songs too, if you like, for I will write them down. So now, children all, listen! in America, Jennie and Johnny; in France, Marie and Emil; in Germany, Gretchen and Hans; in Italy, Tita and Nanni; in Kamschatka, Patchko and Tinka. Listen all, great and small, to the old

MAN IN THE MOON

CHAPTER II.
THE MOUSE-TRAP

Many years ago, *very* many years as you would think, though the time seems short enough for me, there came to the little village (as it then was), of Nomatterwhat, an old man. He was a very queer old man, and nobody knew where he came from, or anything about him, except what he told them himself; and that was very little besides the fact that his name was Jonas Junk, that he had come to Nomatterwhat because he chose to come, and that he would stay exactly as long as it pleased him and no longer. The good people of the village, finding him such a very gruff and crusty old fellow, thought it best to let him alone; and this being exactly what old Jonas Junk wanted, he was well satisfied. Apparently what he wanted beside was to build a house for himself: at all events, that is what he did. He bought a large piece of ground and built a high wall all round it, and put the ugliest and most vicious looking iron spikes that you can imagine all along the top of the wall. Then he chose the sunniest and most sheltered spot he could find on the place, and there the old man built his house. Well, to be sure, what a queer house it was! in the first place, there were three separate flights of stairs, one for old Jonas himself, one for his cat, and one for his dog. His own staircase was very easy, with broad low steps, and two landings, though the distance was very short from the first story to the second; but the poor cat and dog must have had a hard time of it. The other two staircases were so crooked it seemed as if the carpenter must have built them in his sleep, and have had the nightmare to boot. Each step was set at a different angle from the one below it; and they were high, and steep, and dark – ugh! I don't like to think about them. I remember I tried to send a moonbeam down the cat's stairs once, through a little skylight over the landing; and the poor thing got lost and wandered about for an hour before it could find its way back again. There's a flight of stairs for you! and everything else in the house was just as queer. There were large rooms and small rooms, long rooms and square rooms; there were cupboards everywhere, you never saw so many cupboards in your life. Some close to the floor so that you bumped your head in looking into them, others so high up in the wall that nothing short of a step-ladder could reach them; cupboards in the chimneys, and cupboards under the stairs; yes, there was no end to them.

Well, Jonas Junk furnished his house, and there he lived for many a year, with his dog and his cat, and nobody else. All the ground about the house he made into a beautiful garden, full of pear trees and apple trees and all kinds of fruit trees. People used to say, by the way, that the reason these apple trees were so crooked, was because they tried to look like old Jonas himself; but I don't know how that was. Certainly, Jonas was not a beauty, and I am sorry to say the boys were disposed to make fun of him whenever he ventured out of his queer house into the village. "But what has all this to do with mice and a mouse-trap, you ask?" Patience! patience! we are coming to that very soon. I am an old man, older than all of you and all your great-grandmothers put together, so you must let me tell my story in my own way. If Jonas Junk had lived on till to-day, his house would never have been turned into a mouse-trap; but one dark night, you see, he fell down the dog's stairs and broke his neck, and there was an end of him. For a long time nobody lived in his house, and the garden was all going to rack and ruin, when one fine day a gentleman from a neighboring town came to see the old house and took a great fancy to it; and finally he bought it, cat-stairs, dog-stairs, cupboards, garden and all.

Now this gentleman happened to be Uncle Jack, the uncle and guardian of the Five Mice, whose father and mother were dead; and then it was, when he came to live in it with his five nephews and nieces, and Mrs. Posset the nurse, and Susan the cook, and Thomas the gardener, then it was, I say, that the old Junk-shop, as the villagers called it was turned into the most delightful house in the world, which I call my MOUSE-TRAP.

CHAPTER III.
THE MICE

Nibble, Brighteyes, Fluff, Puff, and Downy the baby. There are the names of the mice, all written out nicely for you, and there in a corner is a glimpse of the mouse-trap. Of course the children have real names, just like other children; but I have given them mouse-names, which I very much prefer to Harry and Bessie, and – but oh! dear, I didn't mean to tell you any of their real names. Nibble is the oldest. He is now a fine bright boy-mouse of twelve, but when he first came to the mouse-trap he was only eight years old, and Brighteyes, the oldest girl-mouse, was seven. Then came Fluff and Puff, the twins, who were just five, and Downy the baby, a fat little fellow of three. You see their ages were quite near enough for them all to be great friends and playmates, and so they were. I never shall forget the day they came. It was a fine bright day in May, and Spring was just awake in the old garden. The short new grass was like emerald; the old gnarled apple-trees, which certainly did look like Jonas Junk when their branches were bare, had lost all trace of such likeness, for each was crowned with a pink and white snowdrift of blossoms. Down in the neglected flower-beds the crocuses and snowdrops were nodding and whispering to each other. "Yes," they said, "some new people are coming to live in the old house, and there are children among them. Mr. Breeze, the postman, knows all about them, but he could not stop to tell us much this morning, for he was in a hurry. Now we shall be cared for, and watered, and there will be some pleasure in blossoming. When the children come, we will tell them how those vulgar weeds pushed and crowded us last year." And they did tell the children, but children do not understand flower-talk, I find. And yet it is a very simple language. You see, I hear a great deal of flower-gossip, for my moonbeams are sad chatterboxes, and they bring me back all sorts of news when they come home in the morning. How the burglar-bees robbed old Madam Peony, how the daffodils in the long border had been flirting with the regiment of purple flags behind them, when the Tulip family are expected; yes, there is no end to the things I hear. But if I told all I know, everybody would be as wise as I am, so let us go on about the mice.

Well, at about three o'clock in the afternoon of this fine day that I have been describing, a large carriage, drawn by two fine black horses, drove through the old gateway and down the quiet, lovely lane, and stopped in front of the house. The very instant the wheels ceased to turn, the door of the carriage burst open with a crash, and out jumped, rolled, and tumbled my five mice. First came Nibble, in jacket and trousers and cap. One jump out of the carriage, another to the top of a post, and there he was. Next came Brighteyes, all flying, feet and curls and hat and ribbons. Then one of the twins rolled out, and the other tumbled out; and one was hurt, and the other was not. That is always the way with those two children. One is lucky, and one unlucky. Puff always falls on her feet. Fluff always falls on her head. Uncle Jack often calls them Hap and Hazard, and that is the only difference between them. However, when they got up and shook themselves, I saw that they were very pretty little girls. Now I will make you a picture of them. Yes, I can draw pictures too; in fact, there are very few things that I cannot do if I try. Here they are, Puff and Fluff, two of the dearest mice in the world.

Next a gentleman stepped out of the carriage; a very, very tall gentleman, with very broad shoulders, and very bright eyes. That was Uncle Jack; and he helped Mrs. Posset to get out, for she had Downy asleep in her arms, and he was a pretty good armful. Then Uncle Jack took some bags and bundles out of the carriage; then he turned round and said "Now, children, we will" – There he stopped, for not a child was to be seen, except little fat Downy, fast asleep. Uncle Jack stared about him. Posts, trees, house, but no children. "Sure they're all gone, surr," said John the coachman. "'Twould be as aisy to ketch the wind and kape it still as thim childher." And John never said a

truer word in his life. If my mirror were not so big, even I could not have seen them all. Nibble was up in a tree, of course, picking apple-blossoms, for which he ought to have been whipped. Indeed, the old tree did its best, for it caught him by the leg, and tore a hole in his new trousers, which was shocking to think of. Then he found an old bird's nest; and on the whole, the tree seemed so very "jolly" that he decided to stay there; so that was why Uncle Jack did not see *him* when he looked round. Brighteyes, after seeing her brother safely up in the tree, flew off like a bird, here and there and everywhere. First she filled both hands with dandelions. Then she saw a butterfly; down went the dandelions; off went her best hat to serve as a butterfly-net; and away she went. A pretty chase Master Butterfly led her, through last year's brambles and this year's mud, until at last he left her high and dry on the top of a fence, and flew off so fast that he was soon out of sight. There I left her too, for I wanted to see what the twin mice were about.

I looked this way and that, but they were nowhere to be seen. At length I caught a glimpse of something blue, among some very thick bushes. I looked closer, and saw a sight that was truly melancholy. Among these bushes stood a huge old wooden trough, which old Jonas had built to receive the water that bubbled out of a spring close by. So the trough was full of water, and this being the case, of course Fluff the unlucky had fallen into it. How she had done it I do not know, but there she was, splashing about in fine style.

"Give me your hand, Fluffy, and I'll pull you out!" said Puff.

"Oh! no, you can't!" cried poor little Fluff. "You're not any bigger as I am, Puffy, and I'm so wet I feel very heavy."

And no wonder she did, for she had on a long thick coat which was completely soaked. But Puffy was very sure about it. She gave a great pull, and Fluff made a scramble, and out she came, knocking Puff down and tumbling on top of her. Well, they were both wet enough when they got up. Just then a very loud and strange noise was heard. At least, it was strange to me, but the children cried "Oh! the rattle, the rattle!" and away they scampered towards the house, as fast as they could go.

Poor Uncle Jack! he had been working hard all the afternoon, with John and Thomas, (who had come in a cart with the other servants and the trunks and the dogs), clearing away rubbish and unpacking furniture, while Mrs. Posset and the maids were busy in the house. He had been rather glad to have the children out of the way for a little while, but now that it was six o'clock, and tea was laid in the dining-room, and a bright wood fire blazing in the great open fireplace, he began to wonder where his chickens were.

"Bless me!" he said. "Where is the rattle?" and opening a bag, he took out a huge watchman's rattle, and sprung it briskly, making the strange loud noise that Puff and Fluff had heard down by the spring. Presently he heard a voice, then another, and then another. "Here I am, Uncle!" "What is the matter, Uncle Jack?" "Hi! supper! come on, Brighteyes!" and up scampered from all directions, the four mice in about as pretty a plight as mice can well be in. Brighteyes was panting for breath and limping, one shoe gone, no hat, and any number of scratches. Puff and Fluff were wet, and muddy, and forlorn beyond description; while with Nibble the only question was, which was bigger, his knickerbockers or the hole in them.

Uncle Jack held up his hands in amazement, and then sat down on a packing-box and laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks. "Oh! you children, you children!" he cried. "This is what comes of bringing you to the country to keep you out of mischief. Go in to Mrs. Posset at once, give her my compliments, and tell her I wish her joy of you. And as soon as you are fit to be seen, come down to supper, or Downy and I will eat it all up."

Away went the mice into the house and upstairs, where Mrs. Posset scolded, and brushed, and washed, and wiped and mended to an alarming extent. The trunk in which Nibble's clothes were packed had not yet arrived, so the young gentleman had to wait after the others were gone down to tea, while Mary, the housemaid, mended his trousers.

Bread and butter and raspberry jam are always good, but they must have seemed particularly good that evening to those five hungry mice. Little Downy soon finished his bowl of bread and milk, and was just thinking about some jam when Mrs. Posset appeared in the doorway. I have a great respect for Mrs. Posset. She is very faithful, and as fond of the mice as if they were her own children; but I do wish she would not wear green and yellow ribbons in her cap. It makes her look so like a stout elderly daffodil, but that is neither here nor there. She appeared in the doorway and looked at Downy. Downy looked at her, but did not move. Then Mrs. Posset said, "Downy come with his Possy, and put on his ittle nightcoatie, and go to his 'ittle beddy-house?" (That's another thing, she always talks to that mouse as if he and she were both idiots). "No!" said Downy. "Not want any beddy-house. Possy go away!" "Come, Downy," said his uncle. "You have had a long day, little man, and bed is the best place for you. Nice bed! I wish I were in mine." "Not nice!" cried Downy. "Naughty bed! take it away! A-a-a-ah!" and the poor little boy, who was really tired out, began to scream and cry lustily. "Hush!" cried Uncle Jack hastily. "Hush, Downy! the bed will hear you, and then who knows what may happen?" Downy paused a moment and looked at his uncle in astonishment. "What *do* you mean, Uncle Jack?" asked Brighteyes. "Beds cannot hear."

"Perhaps their posts are their ears," said Fluff.

"Oh! Fluffy," said Puff, "you *know* their posts are their legs, so they can't be their ears."

But Uncle Jack looked very grave, and said, "Have you never heard the story of Little Willy and his bed? listen then, and I will tell it to you."

"One night, little Willy thought he did not want to go to bed. In fact, he felt very sure about the matter. He had had his supper and it was half past six o'clock. There was his bed, standing firmly on its four fluted yellow legs, the white sheet turned down, and the pillow plumped up, looking as inviting as a bed possibly could; but into it little Willy would not go. First he kicked, and then he screamed, and then he did both together. 'I *won't* go to bed!' he cried. 'I hate my bed! it's cold, and horrid, and ugly. I will *never* get into it! naughty bed!'

"He was lying on the floor, kicking the bed as hard as he could, when suddenly what do you think happened? I shall shock you very much, but it is best that you should know. The bed began to move! slowly it lifted its fluted yellow legs, slowly it marched across the room until it reached the window, and then, if you will believe me, it coolly marched *out* of the window, and thump! thump! thump! off it went down the street.

"Little Willy ran to the window, and looked out, with eyes and mouth wide open, in great surprise. Yes, it was really true. The bed was gone; there it went, tramping down the middle of the street. Its pillow had fallen a little to one side, which gave it a jaunty and rakish air. 'Humph!' said Willy. 'Well, I'm glad the ugly old thing is gone. Now I shall not have to go to bed at all.'

"That was all very well for an hour or so, but after that the little boy began to grow very sleepy in spite of himself. He rubbed his eyes, he yawned, he tried to shake himself broad awake, but it was of no use. For some time longer he fought against the sleepiness, but at last he went to his mother, looking very much ashamed, and said:

"'Please, mamma, I want to go to bed!' 'I am very sorry, Willy,' said his mother; 'but you have no bed to go to. You have driven away your good bed by ill-treatment, and now you must sit up all night.'

"Poor little Willy! he tried to go to sleep in a chair, but his head kept tumbling backward or forward and waking him. Oh! he was wretchedly uncomfortable, and finally he burst into tears. 'Oh! my dear bed!' cried he. 'My nice, soft, warm, pretty bed! why did I ever treat you so badly? oh! dear good bed, if you will only come back to me, I will never, *never* call you names again. Oh! oh! oh! how tired I am, and cold, and – ' but suddenly he stopped crying, for he thought he heard a noise outside. He listened. Yes, through the open window came a faint sound – thump! thump! thump! Willy flew to the window. Oh joy! there was the bed, stumping back up the street on its fluted yellow legs. Back it came, in at the window and across the room, till it stood in its

accustomed place. In about three minutes Willy's head was on the pillow, and I believe he has never called his bed names since."

"Why! bless me!" said Uncle Jack, looking down. "Here is Downy asleep too. Let us go upstairs and see if his bed is there all right. I hope it did not hear what he said about it, for you see they are sensitive fellows, these beds. Now then, up we go! I will carry Downy, Mrs. Posset, and do you bring Puff and Fluff with you, for it is high time that they were in bed too."

Well, Uncle Jack is a very wise man in most things, but I should have thought he would have known better than to try the cat-stairs for the first time at night, with a candle in one hand, and a child in his arms. At the first step he bumped his own head; at the second he bumped the child's head; at the third he bumped the candle, and put it out, so there he was in the dark. A sad plight he would have been in if it had not been for my beams; but two or three of the boldest and most skilful of them popped down through the skylight and showed him the way up: for which, by the way, he might have thanked them, but I dare say he did not think of it. After stumbling over a trunk, and a chair, and nearly breaking his nose against the edge of a door, poor Uncle Jack finally reached the large room which he had chosen to be the nursery. Puff and Fluff, who had tumbled up behind him, looked eagerly to see if Downy's bed was there. Yes, there it stood, drawing its white curtains primly round it, and looking very amiable. Fluff gave a sigh of relief.

"Oh," she said, "I was *so* afraid it had heard what Downy said."

"I think, perhaps, it is a little deaf," said Puff. "It never seems to mind, and yet he calls it all sorts of names sometimes."

"Can a thing be deaf in its legs, Uncle Jack?" asked Fluff.

But Uncle Jack began to laugh, and that hurt Fluff's feelings, so she said nothing more. And now Mrs. Posset came, and the three dear little mice were soon snugly tucked up in bed; the twins together, with their arms round each other's necks, and little Downy curled up alone in his pretty white nest, the sweetest mouse that ever was seen.

Ah! now it was my turn. As soon as Mrs. Posset had left the room, down I came post-haste, on Flash, my swiftest beam. I sat down on Fluff's pillow, and soon introduced myself to the little mice. They were fast asleep, of course, but that is the best time to take children. In fact, I never can get on with them when they are awake, their heads are full of so many things. "Yes," I said, "I really am the Man in the Moon. I live in a silver palace – "

"*Really* silver?" asked Puff.

"Yes, really silver, from top to bottom, from roof to cellar, walls and floors, tables and chairs, dishes and spoons are all silver, as bright as Flash, who is dancing about the room here."

"I should think a silver bed would be rather hard," said Fluff.

"Not when it has a cloud mattress and pillow," I replied. "That makes it soft enough, I can tell you."

Then I told them how the clouds were divided into three classes, and how one kind was good to sleep on, and another good to ride on, and the third good (*very* good, too,) to eat.

"Does it taste like the white part in floating island?" asked Fluff.

"Rather like it, but a great, great deal nicer, more like whipped cream."

"And is that all you have to eat?"

"Oh, no! I have ice cream whenever I want it. All the mountains up here are covered with ice cream instead of snow, and I have only to send a beam out a few steps and I have all I want; pink or white, or any color I choose."

"Oh, how lovely!" sighed Fluff. "Tell us more, Mr. Moonman!"

So I told them about my neighbors, the stars, and my elder brother in the Sun, with his splendid palace of gold and diamond. We are very fond of each other, but we cannot often visit each other, so we send letters and messages by the comets, who come and go, or by the merry meteors.

Well, well, how many questions they did ask, those mice. I had been telling them about my big mirror, and "Oh!" cried Puff, "can you really see all the people in the world?"

"Yes, indeed, but not all at once. As I tip my glass this way or that, so I see this place or that place. Yesterday I saw a fine sight, I can tell you."

"Oh! what was it? what was it?" cried the three mice.

"You shall hear," I said, "if you will be quiet. Listen now, for it is nearly time for me to go home, and Flash is looking pale.

"Well, I saw some wolves go to a concert, and that is more than any of you ever saw, I'll warrant. In a certain wild part of northern Germany, there lived three good brothers whom I know very well. Their names are Hans, Karl, and Wilhelm; and they are musicians by trade; that is to say, Hans plays on the violoncello, which is a very big fiddle, about half as big as himself, while Wilhelm has a small fiddle, and Karl toots away on a kind of little brass trumpet called a cornet. So, now you know about the men as if you had seen them, for they do nothing in the world but play on their several instruments. Now, yesterday there was to be a wedding, and the three brothers were asked to come and play for the guests to dance. Their way led through a wild and gloomy forest, where many wild beasts roamed about; but the three started merrily, and strolled along singing and talking together. Suddenly they stopped singing, for they heard a noise that was not so pleasant as their song; it was a long, low howl, and soon came another, and another. Then they knew that the wolves were coming, and their hearts sank within them. Anxiously they looked about them. They were in an open space in the wood. Now a rustling was heard, and out came a gray wolf and looked at them. The teeth of the three brothers chattered in their heads; it was like the sound of castanets, as I hear them played in Spain by the black-eyed dancing-girls. Another wolf came out, and he came yet nearer, and then two more. 'If I had but my gun!' cried Hans. 'If I had but my hunting-knife!' said Karl. 'Ah! brothers,' said Wilhelm, 'we have nothing, so we must die. Nevertheless, let us die merrily, so take your instruments and we will play a tune for these beasts, that we may all dance together.'

"So the three brothers took their instruments, the big fiddle, and the little fiddle, and the trumpet, and began to play. As the first notes sounded the wolves stopped short. Seeing this, the brothers played the faster a merry waltz, which they had meant to play at the wedding. 'Tra-la-la! tra-la-la!' gaily rang out the notes in the clear air, while the musicians' teeth rattled like the castanets, and their limbs trembled, and their hands could scarcely hold the instruments; for they were playing for their lives, you see! yes, and they won the game, for the wolves, who were not used to concerts, did not know what to make of this sort of thing. They began to be frightened, to wonder what strange beasts these were, with such wild voices. They looked at each other and drew back a step or two, it was well to be near the forest in any case. Further and further they retired toward the shade of the trees, and finally, as the music changed to a furious jig, and the trumpet sounded out like the scream of a panther, the terrified wolves turned tail and ran as fast as their fright and their four legs could carry them. Off as fast in the opposite direction ran also Hans, Karl, and Wilhelm, playing as they went. They played and ran, ran and played till they reached the open fields and the houses; and then they sat down under a haystack and did not move for the rest of the day. Ah! that was a fine concert! but there was no music at the wedding, which is sad to think of."

With that I kissed my three mice, and bade them good-night, though it was nearly morning; then mounting my moonbeam I whisked away, and soon left mice and mouse-trap far behind.

Wake! wake! children, wake!
Here we're singing for your sake.
Chirrup! chirrup! chirrup! chee!
Sweet a song as sweet can be.

Rise! rise! children, rise!
Shake the poppies from your eyes.
Sweet! sweet! chirrup! tweet!
Morning blossoms at your feet.

Song and sweetness, dawn and dew,
All are waiting now for you.
Wake! wake! children, wake!
Here we're singing for your sake.

CHAPTER IV.
JOLLYKALOO

Now is not that a pretty song? and so simple, I should think a baby might understand it. And yet Downy did not seem to understand a word of it, though the birds that sang it were just outside his window in the great linden-tree.

He only said, "Oh! so pitty bird finging!" (he cannot say S, so he says F instead, which sounds very funny). And then he rolled out of bed; and then Fluff and Puff rolled out of bed. Puff ran to the window and put back the curtains. The birds were still singing, and the soft May breeze was blowing, and a perfect gust of song and sweetness came in at the little old window as she pushed it open.

"Oh! lovely, lovely!" cried Puff. "And look, Fluffy, from this other window. What a fine play-ground! Oh! Possy, do give us tubby-rubby quickly, and let us get out of the window!"

"Out of the window!" cried Mrs. Posset; "The child is mad!" but then she came and looked for herself.

Yes, it was indeed a fine place. One part of the house was lower than the rest, and this lower part had a flat roof, covered with gravel, and with an iron railing round it. Two of the nursery windows opened directly on this sunny flat place, so that it really was a most delightful spot. In a very few minutes there were three mice tumbling about on the gravel, and then presently there were two more, for other windows opened on the flat roof also, and Nibble and Brighteyes were not the mice to be behindhand when any fun was going on. Ah! that was the way to get an appetite for breakfast. Jump, dance, run, tumble, till the rattle sounded from below; then whirr! downstairs all like a flock of pigeons. They never lost any time in getting from one place to another, these mice.

"Uncle Jack," said Nibble, "What shall we call this place?"

"This dear, delightful place!" cried Brighteyes.

"Dis dear, 'lightful plafe!" murmured Downy, with his mouth full of bread-and-butter.

"Well," said Uncle Jack, "now let us see. It certainly ought to have a name."

"Oh! of course!" said all the mice very decidedly.

"Suppose we call it the Garden House," said Uncle Jack.

"Oh, no!" said Nibble. "That isn't jolly enough, Uncle Jacket! it's such a *jolly* place, you know. I want to call it Jollykaloo!"

And then in a chorus rose the five voices, "Jollykaloo! Jollykaloo!" so Jollykaloo it was named then and there, and it has been called so ever since.

"And now, children," said Uncle Jack, when breakfast was over, "We must go and see how our four-footed friends have passed the night. You may find some new friends too, I think, with two feet. Come Nibble, Brighteyes, Puff – "

"Uncle Jack," said Puff, very gravely; "Fluff and I have not unpacked the dolls yet, and I think it is both of our duty to take care of our children first, before we see the animals. Don't you think so, Uncle?"

"Both of your duty, eh?" said Uncle Jack, laughing. "Well, Puffsy, perhaps it is. It is also both of your duty to learn grammar, but you need not begin just yet. Off with you!"

So the twins went one way, and Uncle Jack went the other. Which way shall I take you first, all you other children? shall we follow the twins first, and take a peep at the dolls? by all means! I cannot say that I care much for dolls myself, but I always like to see what interests children, and certainly Puff and Fluff did take great interest in their china and wax babies. By and by I shall have some funny stories to tell you about these dolls, for they have seen more of life than any dolls that

I have ever known, but we will not stop now, for we all want to go and see the animals, I am sure. We will just take a peep at them and see what they are like.

See, here they are, six of them. The one sitting in the chair, with curls and flowers, is Vashti Ann. She was the head doll at that time, and a person of great importance. Next to her is Tina, her daughter, a fine baby rather larger than her mother; and then comes Rosalie, a Swiss doll, with fine long hair. The doll in the lower left-hand corner is the unfortunate Sally Bradford, the maid-of-all-work; next comes Fanny Ellsler, the dancer, and the last is Katinka, a Polish lady of high rank.

The dear little twin mice unpacked all these creatures with the utmost care.

"I think they are all ill after the journey, Puff!" said Fluffy, with a sigh.

"We was better put them all to bed. Tina is very pale, and Rosalie is very red."

"Then one has a chill, and the other has a fever," said Puff.

"Yes, they must go to bed; and I will get the bed ready, Fluffy, if you will read them a story to amoose them."

"Oh! but, Puffy, if you put them both in the same bed it will be chills-and-fever, and then we shall catch it and be ill ourselves!" exclaimed Fluff with a distressed look.

"Fluff," said Miss Puff severely; "You are sometimes a foolish child!"

Well, Fluff knew that she was foolish, because she was often told so, and she was a child who always believed what was said to her, so she meekly sat down and read a story to the dolls. It was one of "Aunt Bathsheba's" stories, and they are so funny that I always write them down when I hear them. Listen to this, now!

THE PUDDING-STICK AND THE ROLLING-PIN

Said the Pudding-stick so the Rolling-pin,
"Let's take a dip in the sugar-bin!"
Said the Rolling-pin to the Pudding-stick,
"We'll eat and we'll stuff till we make ourselves sick."
Off they set with a fine bold stride,
That brought them soon to the sugar-bin's side.
"Oh! how shall we reach that keyhole high?
We might as well try to storm the sky!"

"Let me mount on your shoulder thin,
And I'll pick the lock!" said the bold Rolling-pin.
The Pudding-stick swelled with angry pride,
"That my figure is fine has ne'er been denied,
I'll give you a slap for your impudence!"
"Well!" said the Roller: "This *is* immense!"
So they rolled and they fought,

They thumped and they hit.
Till they trod on the tail of the cook's pet kit.
Then the cook rose up in dreadful wrath,
And laid them out on the kitchen hearth.

There were fine doings in the garden all this time, as I found when I turned my eyes in that direction. Three mice and an uncle, (it would not be polite to call Uncle Jack a rat, and yet if a

mouse's uncle is not a rat, what is he, I should like to know?) and John and Thomas, and three dogs and two horses and a donkey, there were enough to make things lively, you will confess.

The dogs interested me particularly, as I have a dog of my own, you know. Ah! he is a good fellow, that dog of mine! His name is Bmfkmgth, and none of you will be able to pronounce that, except the children who live in Wales. It is rather a hard name, but he came from the Dog Star, and the language there is somewhat difficult. Say it to your dogs, however, and see if they do not wag their tails. Yes, they understand each other. Bmfkmgth is green, a color that I never see in dogs on your planet; but that may be because he eats so freely of the green cheese which grows here instead of grass.

Well, there were three dogs at Jollykaloo, as perhaps I said before. There was Gruff the big dog, and Grim the middle-sized dog, and Grab, the little dog.

Gruff was a fine fellow, indeed; a great St. Bernard, clever and good-natured, and certainly with nothing gruff about him except his name and his bark. Indeed, it was well that he was of a cheerful turn of mind, for he had to take a good deal of rough usage, though it was only in play, to be sure.

Fancy trying to drive three dogs tandem, all of different sizes and dispositions! Yes, if you will believe me, that was what Nibble was trying to do when I looked down into the garden that morning. He had a very nice little cart which Thomas, the gardener, had made for him, and in this he often drove Gruff, who did not object at all to being harnessed, and in fact rather enjoyed dragging the children about. But when it came to having two other dogs harnessed in front of him, dogs who could run about twice as fast as he could, and who took a fancy to sit down and scratch their ears just as he had started into a good swinging trot – that was rather more than Gruff could endure. But Nibble was full of his new sport.

"Downy, baby!" he cried, "Come, Downy, and brother will give you a fine ride! come along, little man!"

So Downy came toddling up, and Nibble lifted him into the cart, and then got in himself, and took the reins and the whip.

"Now, Downy boy, you shall have the best ride that any one ever had. Hi! my gallant steeds! Now Dasher, now Dancer, now Prancer! Oh, dear!" cried Nibble, "I wish I had eight reindeer like St. Nicholas, instead of only three dogs. But still I can say, 'Now dash away, dash away, dash away all!'" and the young charioteer stood up in the cart and waved the whip round his head, while Downy clapped his hands and shouted with glee. Yes, that was pride! but the fall also was not wanting.

Away went the three dogs, poor old Gruff forced into a lumbering gallop by the pace of the two others, who capered along, and let the big old dog do all the pulling. Round the house they went once and twice, the little cart rocking from side to side in rather an alarming way. Then, as they came round the third time – they saw a cat! Nibble saw it first, and tried like a clever mouse as he is, to turn his gallant steeds' heads away before they also saw it: but it was too late. "Yap! yap! yap!" went little Grab; "Woof! woof!" added Grim, struggling to free himself from the harness. Good old Gruff held out bravely for a moment or two; but finally he could not resist.

A mighty "*Bow*, wow WOW!" a leap and a plunge, and then for a moment I could see nothing but a cloud of dust, from which came barks and shrieks which were truly dreadful to hear. In a moment, however, the cart luckily was caught between two bushes, and there it stuck, while the dogs rushed to the foot of the nearest apple-tree, to leap and howl there in vain excitement, while the peaceful cat smiled at them in safety from the topmost bough.

At the moment the explosion took place, two people came upon the scene, one from the barn and one from the house. They were Uncle Jack and Mrs. Posset. The latter had happened to look out of the window just as the grand turn-out came round for the third time, and she had flown down stairs to rescue her Downy, but arrived only in time to snatch him from the ruins of the cart, very much frightened and covered with dust, and what was worse with blood, which flowed from a cut

in his forehead. As for Uncle Jack, he had been very busy in the barn arranging matters with John and had supposed that Downy was quite safe with Nibble and Gruff to look after him.

"If you please, sir," cried Mrs. Posset in an angry tone, "what is to be done with Nibble? this blessed child's life is not safe with him for an instant, so it isn't! putting three dogs tantrum (Mrs. Posset meant tandem, but she was too much vexed to think about her words,) with an innocent baby behind them and the garden as full of cats as his head is of mischief!" and the good woman's breath fairly failed her, from haste and vexation combined. Uncle Jack looked very grave as he came up.

"How did this happen, Nibble?" he asked. "Mrs. Posset, if you will take Downy into the house and bathe his forehead, I will come in and find some court-plaster to put on that cut. Now my boy," he added, turning to Nibble, "tell me all about this!"

Nibble hung his head and looked very much ashamed.

"I – I did have them tandem," he said. "I never thought of cats, and Downy likes to ride so much!"

"I am very sorry, Nibble!" said Uncle Jack, "I certainly thought I could trust you to take care of your little brother for ten minutes. There are plenty of ways of amusing a little child without putting him in danger of his life; for Downy might have been very much hurt, perhaps even killed, and then you would never have forgiven yourself. Remember, my boy, that there is a great difference between three years and eight years, and that what may be harmless for you may be very dangerous for your little brother."

"Indeed, Uncle, I am very sorry!" said Nibble earnestly; "and I will try to be more careful. And – and what shall I do now, Uncle? there isn't any punishment tree here, is there?"

This question puzzled me at the time, but I found out afterwards that in the place where they had lived before, there was one special tree into which Nibble always had to climb when he had been naughty, and where he had spent many hours of penance.

Uncle Jack smiled kindly on the boy – I mean the mouse – and said "I have not found one yet, dear child! but I think that if you were to spend the rest of the morning in the house, and try to console Downy for his bumps and bruises, it would be a very good thing."

Nibble looked grave at this. He would have preferred sitting in a tree, and hearing the birds sing, and wondering where their nests might be, and how many eggs there might be in them, to spending the lovely, sunny morning in the house. But he went in without a word, remembering that Downy also had to stay in the house through his carelessness, and with aches and pains which he somehow had escaped.

He found the baby mouse curled up on the sofa in the library, looking very forlorn, with a handkerchief tied round his head. Mrs. Posset was sitting beside him, reading to him, for though Downy was a very little boy, he was very fond of stories. His eyes brightened when he saw Nibble. "Oh! Nibby!" he cried. "Did dey catf de cat?"

"Indeed, I hope not!" said Mrs. Posset. "It is a strange thing in the nature of boys, that they like to see cats tormented."

"But I don't like to see them hurt, Mrs. Posset!" said Nibble. "It *is* fun to see them run, but the dogs never catch them, so no harm is done. And it is good for the cats to have a little exercise, I am sure, for they are lazy creatures."

"Humph!" said Mrs. Posset. "Well, I am reading to Downy now, Master Nibble, so – "

"Wouldn't you like me to take the book, Mrs. Posset?" asked Nibble. "I must stay in the house till dinner, and I could read to Downy."

"Oh! yes, Nibby, read!" cried Downy.

"Very well, Master Nibble, and that is just what will please me, for I have not my spectacles by me, and the print troubles my eyes. Besides, the child's clothes are torn to shrivers, (this was a pet word of Mrs. Posset's, and I think she must have invented it herself,) and I must attend to them at once."

So Mrs. Posset, with an approving nod, trotted off to the nursery, and Nibble sat down by the sofa.

"What shall I read, Downy boy?" he asked.

"Wead Pinfkin!" said Downy very decidedly.

"'Princekin,' eh?" said Nibble, "Well, here it is, so listen! And perhaps, if you were to shut your eyes, Downy, you might see some of the pretty things that Princekin saw."

So Nibble opened the book, from which Mrs. Posset had been reading, and read this little rhyme:

PRINCEKIN

"Princekin sits on his nursery throne,
Prettiest Princekin, all alone,
Sighing a sigh, and moaning a moan,
'Oh – dear —*me!* oh!'
'Princekin beautiful, Princekin dear,
Tell us your troubles, and do not fear!'
'Nobody come, and nobody here,
Nobody p'ay wiz me, oh!'

"'What! no little boys, and no little girls,
To play with Princekin, pearl of pearls?
Then lift your head, with its crown of curls,
And we'll do better without, oh!
Open the window and call the flowers
Birds and beasts from their trees and bowers,
To come and play with this Prince of ours,
And make him with laughter shout, oh!'

"Princekin raises his sapphire eyes,
Diamond tear-drop quickly dries,
Stares and stares in such great surprise
He doesn't know what to do, oh!
In at the window, low and high,
Hundreds of creatures creep and fly,
Vines and flowerets clambering by,
Of every shape and hue, oh!

"Doves are lighting on Princekin's knee,
Close in his curls hums a honey bee,
Roses are climbing around his wee
Sweet hands, for to cling and kiss, oh!
Beetles hover on gauzy wing,
Blue-bells, lily-bells, chime and ring,
Bull-frogs whistle and robins sing,
And see, what an owl is this, oh!

"Squirrel is whispering in his ear,

'Princekin beautiful, Princekin dear,
Leave this stupid close nursery here,
Come to the woods with me, oh!'
Daisy is murmuring at his feet,
'Princekin lovely, and Princekin sweet,
Come live with us, 'mid the corn and wheat,
Out in the field so free, oh!'

"Round they flutter, and round they dance,
Wheel and hover and creep and prance,
Bird, beast, blossom, all bent on the chance
Of winning the pearl of boys, oh!
Clinging and kissing o'er and o'er,
Singing, chattering, more and more, —
But *oh!*– who slammed the nursery door,
And made such a dreadful noise, oh!

* * * *

"Princekin sits on his nursery throne,
Prettiest Princekin, all alone.
Sighing a sigh and moaning a moan,
'Oh – dear —*me*, oh!
Had such a bootiful, bootiful p'ay!
No! I *not* been as'eep, I say!
And now dem's everyone gone away,
Nobody left but me, oh!'"

Then Nibble stopped reading, and closed the book softly, for Downy was just as fast asleep as Princekin had been.

"That is always the way!" he said to himself. "I never saw a child sleep so much in the daytime. In fact, there is no use in reading to him, unless you want him to go to sleep. But perhaps," he added "that is just what Mrs. Posset did want, and it is the best thing to do when one cannot go out of doors. Heigh ho! how pleasant it is out there! I wonder where Brighteyes is! She might come in and stay with me, I think, if she knows I am in the house." And Nibble sat down by the window, and looked mournfully out into the garden.

I also had been wondering where Brighteyes was, for I had not seen her since breakfast. I was just going to look in another part of the mirror, (for I can see the whole of the garden in it, and more too,) when I heard a deep sigh at my elbow. I turned, and saw my dog standing by, gazing into the mirror with a very wistful look. I followed the direction of his eyes, and saw that the cat was still up in the tree, and the dogs still at the foot of it. Gruff was tired of jumping, which indeed was not exactly in his line; and had gone quietly to sleep; but Grim and Grab kept up the game, occasionally lying down to rest and take breath, and then going at it again.

"What ails thee, Bmfkmgth?" I asked. "Doth the sight of the other dogs grieve thee?"

"Nay, master!" he answered. "But oh! I fain would have a cat to chase. Is there no Cat-Star, good master, whence thou couldst get me a cat? see now, how merry these dogs have been!"

"Truly," I replied, "there is no Cat-Star; and if there were, thou wouldst be none the better off, for I would not have such noise and strife in my quiet home. Art thou not happy? here thou hast no work to do; canst eat green cheese all day, if it please thee, and sport with the merry beams which my brother Sun sends over. Perhaps thou wouldst like to go back to the Dog Star, whence thou camest. There thou hadst work enough and to spare, for thou wast servant to Prince Canis, and he is a hard master." And I tipped the mirror, so that we could see Sirius (which is the name of that star,) and what was going on in it. There sat Prince Canis on his throne, richly dressed. Hundreds of servants bowed before him, or hurried hither and thither to do his bidding. He spoke harshly to them, and flourished a huge whip, which was his sceptre, about their ears, making them howl with pain.

"Wilt thou go back?" I asked.

"Oh, no, no!" cried the dog, shrinking back. "Tip the glass away, my master, lest he see me and carry me off! I promise thee I will never complain again!"

"That is well!" I said. "And if thou wantest something to chase, thou mayest chase me, though that would not be very exciting. So now, we will look for Brighteyes, and see what has become of the child."

I tipped the glass, and again the garden blossomed before me, sunny and bright, shining with grass-emerald and dandelion gold, under the drifts of apple-blossoms. Yes, it was a pretty sight, and whichever way I may tip my glass, I see no prettier sight than this garden, in the spring of the year.

CHAPTER V.
TOMTY

Brighteyes had been spending the morning with Tomty of course; anyone might have known that, for she was always with Tomty whenever she could not be found anywhere else. Tomty was the gardener, and his real name was Thomas Wilson, but the mice thought that Tomty was a much better name, and I think so too. He was the kindest gardener that ever lived, I think, and I have seen a good many. He liked nothing better than to have all the five mice trotting at his heels while he went about his work. They might hide his shears, and run off with his trowel, and take his rake and hoe for hobbyhorses, but Tomty was never out of patience with them.

"Sure, they're young things!" he used to say. "Let them enjoy themselves now, for they'll be older before they're younger!" Which was a very sensible remark.

"Tomty!" said Brighteyes.

"Yes, miss."

"I want to go into the barn-yard again to see José."

"And that is just where I am going, miss," said Tomty; "so if you will sit in the wheelbarrow, I'll give you a ride!" so Brighteyes jumped into the wheelbarrow and was wheeled off in fine style.

"Do you know who invented the wheelbarrow, Tomty?" she asked as they went along.

"Yes miss," replied Tomty. "Hiram Deluce made this one, miss."

"I don't mean this one," said Brighteyes. "I mean the first one that ever was made. It was a great painter, one of the greatest painters that ever lived, only I can't remember his name. Uncle Jack told me about him."

"Yes Miss!" said Tomty. "More likely a *car*-painter, Miss. I don't know what a painter would want of a barrow, unless to paint it, and that's soon done."

A car-painter! Brighteyes thought that was very funny, and she thought Tomty was very clever.

But now they were in the barn-yard, and she straightway forgot about wheel-barrows and painters, for José, the little brown donkey, was loose, and was trying with might and main to open the further gate of the yard, a trick of which he was extremely fond, and in which he certainly excelled.

"Oh! Tomty," cried Brighteyes, "shut the gate, and let us catch José. Naughty donkey, how did you get out? Come here, good José! come here, poor fellow!" But José (that is a Spanish name, by the way, and is pronounced Hosay,) had no idea of going there.

"I wont!" he said. "I wo-*hon't!* go away-*hay!*" and up went his heels, higher than ever. It must be very provoking to animals to have human beings pay absolutely no attention to their remarks. Really, it is so stupid sometimes. There was José, speaking quite distinctly for a donkey, and Brighteyes only clapped her hands to her ears and cried "Oh! what a dreadful bray!" and in the barn, meanwhile, Pollux, the off horse, was saying to John, over and over again, "I don't like this stall, John! please give me another. And do loosen this strap a little, for it makes my head ache." To which John replied, "So, boy! quiet now!" which must have been extremely aggravating.

Why, I saw a little girl once, – a little German girl she was, named Hannchen, – sit for half an hour listening with great delight to a bird which was singing away with all its might, perched on a neighboring twig. And what do you think the bird was saying in its song?

"You horrid little monster, why will you not go away? I want to get some caterpillars from that tree behind you, and I cannot get at them while you are there. My children are waiting for their dinner, and though I have asked you fifty times, as politely as I could, to move, you will not stir,

but just sit there and look silly. Oh! you provoking little creature! I should like to peck you!" And little Hannchen, smiling, said "thank you, pretty bird, for your sweet song!"

It was quite a piece of work to catch Master José, but John came out to help Thomas and finally the obstinate little brown gentleman was fairly cornered, and had to submit to the halter.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.