EDITH NESBIT

THE MAGIC WORLD

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Edith Nesbit
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I
THE CAT-HOOD OF MAURICE

To have your hair cut is not painful, nor does it hurt to have your whiskers trimmed. But round wooden shoes, shaped like bowls, are not comfortable wear, however much it may amuse the onlooker to see you try to walk in them. If you have a nice fur coat like a company promoter's, it is most annoying to be made to swim in it. And if you had a tail, surely it would be solely your own affair; that any one should tie a tin can to it would strike you as an unwarrantable impertinence – to say the least.

Yet it is difficult for an outsider to see these things from the point of view of both the persons concerned. To Maurice, scissors in hand, alive and earnest to snip, it seemed the most natural thing in the world to shorten the stiff whiskers of Lord Hugh Cecil by a generous inch. He did not understand how useful those whiskers were to Lord Hugh, both in sport and in the more serious business of getting a living. Also it amused Maurice to throw Lord Hugh into ponds, though Lord Hugh only once permitted this liberty. To put walnuts on Lord Hugh's feet and then to watch him walk on ice was, in Maurice's opinion, as good as a play. Lord Hugh was a very favourite cat, but Maurice was discreet, and Lord Hugh, except under violent suffering, was at that time anyhow, dumb.

But the empty sardine-tin attached to Lord Hugh's tail and hind legs – this had a voice, and, rattling against stairs, banisters, and the legs of stricken furniture, it cried aloud for vengeance. Lord Hugh, suffering violently, added his voice, and this time the family heard. There was a chase, a chorus of 'Poor pussy!' and 'Pussy, then!' and the tail and the tin and Lord Hugh were caught under Jane's bed. The tail and the tin acquiesced in their rescue. Lord Hugh did not. He fought, scratched, and bit. Jane carried the scars of that rescue for many a long week.

When all was calm Maurice was sought and, after some little natural delay, found – in the boot-cupboard.

'Oh, Maurice!' his mother almost sobbed, 'how *can* you? What will your father say?'

Maurice thought he knew what his father would do.

'Don't you know,' the mother went on, 'how wrong it is to be cruel?'

'I didn't mean to be cruel,' Maurice said. And, what is more, he spoke the truth. All the unwelcome attentions he had showered on Lord Hugh had not been exactly intended to hurt that stout veteran – only it was interesting to see what a cat would do if you threw it in the water, or cut its whiskers, or tied things to its tail.

'Oh, but you must have meant to be cruel,' said mother, 'and you will have to be punished.'

'I wish I hadn't,' said Maurice, from the heart.

'So do I,' said his mother, with a sigh; 'but it isn't the first time; you know you tied Lord Hugh up in a bag with the hedgehog only last Tuesday week. You'd better go to your room and think it over. I shall have to tell your father directly he comes home.'

Maurice went to his room and thought it over. And the more he thought the more he hated Lord Hugh. Why couldn't the beastly cat have held his tongue and sat still? That, at the time would have been a disappointment, but now Maurice wished it had happened. He sat on the edge of his bed and savagely kicked the edge of the green Kidderminster carpet, and hated the cat.

He hadn't meant to be cruel; he was sure he hadn't; he wouldn't have pinched the cat's feet or squeezed its tail in the door, or pulled its whiskers, or poured hot water on it. He felt himself ill-used, and knew that he would feel still more so after the inevitable interview with his father.

But that interview did not take the immediately painful form expected by Maurice. His father did *not* say, 'Now I will show you what it feels like to be hurt.' Maurice had braced himself for that, and was looking beyond it to the calm of forgiveness which should follow the storm in which he should so unwillingly take part. No; his father was already calm and reasonable – with a dreadful calm, a terrifying reason.

'Look here, my boy,' he said. 'This cruelty to dumb animals must be checked – severely checked.'

'I didn't mean to be cruel,' said Maurice.

'Evil,' said Mr. Basingstoke, for such was Maurice's surname, 'is wrought by want of thought as well as want of heart. What about your putting the hen in the oven?'

'You know,' said Maurice, pale but determined, 'you *know* I only wanted to help her to get her eggs hatched quickly. It says in "Fowls for Food and Fancy" that heat hatches eggs.'

'But she hadn't any eggs,' said Mr. Basingstoke.

'But she soon would have,' urged Maurice. 'I thought a stitch in time – '

'That,' said his father, 'is the sort of thing that you must learn not to think.'

'I'll try,' said Maurice, miserably hoping for the best.

'I intend that you shall,' said Mr. Basingstoke. 'This afternoon you go to Dr. Strongitharm's for the remaining week of term. If I find any more cruelty taking place during the holidays you will go there permanently. You can go and get ready.'

'Oh, father, *please* not,' was all Maurice found to say.

'I'm sorry, my boy,' said his father, much more kindly; 'it's all for your own good, and it's as painful to me as it is to you – remember that. The cab will be here at four. Go and put your things together, and Jane shall pack for you.'

So the box was packed. Mabel, Maurice's kiddy sister, cried over everything as it was put in. It was a very wet day.

'If it had been any school but old Strong's,' she sobbed.

She and her brother knew that school well: its windows, dulled with wire blinds, its big alarm bell, the high walls of its grounds, bristling with spikes, the iron gates, always locked, through which gloomy boys, imprisoned, scowled on a free world. Dr. Strongitharm's was a school 'for backward and difficult boys.' Need I say more?

Well, there was no help for it. The box was packed, the cab was at the door. The farewells had been said. Maurice determined that he wouldn't cry and he didn't, which gave him the one touch of pride and joy that such a scene could yield. Then at the last moment, just as father had one leg in the cab, the Taxes called. Father went back into the house to write a cheque. Mother and Mabel had retired in tears. Maurice used the reprieve to go back after his postage-stamp album. Already he was planning how to impress the other boys at old Strong's, and his was really a very fair collection. He ran up into the schoolroom, expecting to find it empty. But some one was there: Lord Hugh, in the very middle of the ink-stained table-cloth.

'You brute,' said Maurice; 'you know jolly well I'm going away, or you wouldn't be here.' And, indeed, the room had never, somehow, been a favourite of Lord Hugh's.

'Meaow,' said Lord Hugh.

'Mew!' said Maurice, with scorn. 'That's what you always say. All that fuss about a jolly little sardine-tin. Any one would have thought you'd be only too glad to have it to play with. I wonder how you'd like being a boy? Lickings, and lessons, and impots, and sent back from breakfast to wash your ears. You wash yours anywhere – I wonder what they'd say to me if I washed my ears on the drawing-room hearthrug?'

'Meaow,' said Lord Hugh, and washed an ear, as though he were showing off.

'Mew,' said Maurice again; 'that's all you can say.'

'Oh, no, it isn't,' said Lord Hugh, and stopped his ear-washing.

'I say!' said Maurice in awestruck tones.

'If you think cats have such a jolly time,' said Lord Hugh, 'why not *be* a cat?'

'I would if I could,' said Maurice, 'and fight you – '

'Thank you,' said Lord Hugh.

'But I can't,' said Maurice.

'Oh, yes, you can,' said Lord Hugh. 'You've only got to say the word.'

'What word?'

Lord Hugh told him the word; but I will not tell you, for fear you should say it by accident and then be sorry.

'And if I say that, I shall turn into a cat?'

'Of course,' said the cat.

'Oh, yes, I see,' said Maurice. 'But I'm not taking any, thanks. I don't want to be a cat for always.'

'You needn't,' said Lord Hugh. 'You've only got to get some one to say to you, "Please leave off being a cat and be Maurice again," and there you are.'

Maurice thought of Dr. Strongitharm's. He also thought of the horror of his father when he should find Maurice gone, vanished, not to be traced. 'He'll be sorry, then,' Maurice told himself, and to the cat he said, suddenly: —

'Right – I'll do it. What's the word, again?'

' – ,' said the cat.

' – ,' said Maurice; and suddenly the table shot up to the height of a house, the walls to the height of tenement buildings, the pattern on the carpet became enormous, and Maurice found himself on all fours. He tried to stand up on his feet, but his shoulders were oddly heavy. He could only rear himself upright for a moment, and then fell heavily on his hands. He looked down at them; they seemed to have grown shorter and fatter, and were encased in black fur gloves. He felt a desire to walk on all fours – tried it – did it. It was very odd – the movement of the arms straight from the shoulder, more like the movement of the piston of an engine than anything Maurice could think of at that moment.

'I am asleep,' said Maurice – 'I am dreaming this. I am dreaming I am a cat. I hope I dreamed that about the sardine-tin and Lord Hugh's tail, and Dr. Strong's.'

'You didn't,' said a voice he knew and yet didn't know, 'and you aren't dreaming this.'

'Yes, I am,' said Maurice; 'and now I'm going to dream that I fight that beastly black cat, and give him the best licking he ever had in his life. Come on, Lord Hugh.'

A loud laugh answered him.

'Excuse my smiling,' said the voice he knew and didn't know, 'but don't you see – you *are* Lord Hugh!'

A great hand picked Maurice up from the floor and held him in the air. He felt the position to be not only undignified but unsafe, and gave himself a shake of mingled relief and resentment when the hand set him down on the inky table-cloth.

'You are Lord Hugh now, my dear Maurice,' said the voice, and a huge face came quite close to his. It was his own face, as it would have seemed through a magnifying glass. And the voice – oh, horror! – the voice was his own voice – Maurice Basingstoke's voice. Maurice shrank from the voice, and he would have liked to claw the face, but he had had no practice.

'You are Lord Hugh,' the voice repeated, 'and I am Maurice. I like being Maurice. I am so large and strong. I could drown you in the water-butt, my poor cat – oh, so easily. No, don't spit and swear. It's bad manners – even in a cat.'

'Maurice!' shouted Mr. Basingstoke from between the door and the cab.

Maurice, from habit, leaped towards the door.

'It's no use *your* going,' said the thing that looked like a giant reflection of Maurice; 'it's *me* he wants.'

'But I didn't agree to your being me.'

'That's poetry, even if it isn't grammar,' said the thing that looked like Maurice. 'Why, my good cat, don't you see that if you are I, I must be you? Otherwise we should interfere with time and space, upset the balance of power, and as likely as not destroy the solar system. Oh, yes – I'm you, right enough, and shall be, till some one tells you to change from Lord Hugh into Maurice. And now you've got to find some one to do it.'

('Maurice!' thundered the voice of Mr. Basingstoke.)

'That'll be easy enough,' said Maurice.

'Think so?' said the other.

'But I sha'n't try yet. I want to have some fun first. I shall catch heaps of mice!'

'Think so? You forget that your whiskers are cut off – Maurice cut them. Without whiskers, how can you judge of the width of the places you go through? Take care you don't get stuck in a hole that you can't get out of or go in through, my good cat.'

'Don't call me a cat,' said Maurice, and felt that his tail was growing thick and angry.

'You *are* a cat, you know – and that little bit of temper that I see in your tail reminds me – '

Maurice felt himself gripped round the middle, abruptly lifted, and carried swiftly through the air. The quickness of the movement made him giddy. The light went so quickly past him that it might as well have been darkness. He saw nothing, felt nothing, except a sort of long sea-sickness, and then suddenly he was not being moved. He could see now. He could feel. He was being held tight in a sort of vice – a vice covered with chequered cloth. It looked like the pattern, very much exaggerated, of his school knickerbockers. It *was*. He was being held between the hard, relentless knees of that creature that had once been Lord Hugh, and to whose tail he had tied a sardine-tin. Now *he* was Lord Hugh, and something was being tied to *his* tail. Something mysterious, terrible. Very well, he would show that he was not afraid of anything that could be attached to tails. The string rubbed his fur the wrong way – it was that that annoyed him, not the string itself; and as for what was at the end of the string, what *could* that matter to any sensible cat? Maurice was quite decided that he was – and would keep on being – a sensible cat.

The string, however, and the uncomfortable, tight position between those chequered knees – something or other was getting on his nerves.

'Maurice!' shouted his father below, and the be-catted Maurice bounded between the knees of the creature that wore his clothes and his looks.

'Coming, father,' this thing called, and sped away, leaving Maurice on the servant's bed – under which Lord Hugh had taken refuge, with his tin-can, so short and yet so long a time ago. The stairs re-echoed to the loud boots which Maurice had never before thought loud; he had often, indeed, wondered that any one could object to them. He wondered now no longer.

He heard the front door slam. That thing had gone to Dr. Strongitharm's. That was one comfort. Lord Hugh was a boy now; he would know what it was to be a boy. He, Maurice, was a cat, and he meant to taste fully all catty pleasures, from milk to mice. Meanwhile he was without mice or milk, and, unaccustomed as he was to a tail, he could not but feel that all was not right with his own. There was a feeling of weight, a feeling of discomfort, of positive terror. If he should move, what would that thing that was tied to his tail do? Rattle, of course. Oh, but he could not bear it if that thing rattled. Nonsense; it was only a sardine-tin. Yes, Maurice knew that. But all the same – if it did rattle! He moved his tail the least little soft inch. No sound. Perhaps really there wasn't anything tied to his tail. But he couldn't be sure unless he moved. But if he moved the thing would rattle, and if it rattled Maurice felt sure that he would expire or go mad. A mad cat. What a dreadful thing to be! Yet he couldn't sit on that bed for ever, waiting, waiting, waiting for the dreadful thing to happen.

'Oh, dear,' sighed Maurice the cat. 'I never knew what people meant by "afraid" before.'

His cat-heart was beating heavily against his furry side. His limbs were getting cramped – he must move. He did. And instantly the awful thing happened. The sardine-tin touched the iron of the bed-foot. It rattled.

'Oh, I can't bear it, I can't,' cried poor Maurice, in a heartrending meaow that echoed through the house. He leaped from the bed and tore through the door and down the stairs, and behind him came the most terrible thing in the world. People might call it a sardine-tin, but he knew better. It was the soul of all the fear that ever had been or ever could be. *It rattled.*

Maurice who was a cat flew down the stairs; down, down – the rattling horror followed. Oh, horrible! Down, down! At the foot of the stairs the horror, caught by something – a banister – a stair-rod – stopped. The string on Maurice's tail tightened, his tail was jerked, he was stopped. But the noise had stopped too. Maurice lay only just alive at the foot of the stairs.

It was Mabel who untied the string and soothed his terrors with strokings and tender love-words. Maurice was surprised to find what a nice little girl his sister really was.

'I'll never tease you again,' he tried to say, softly – but that was not what he said. What he said was 'Purrrr.'

'Dear pussy, nice poor pussy, then,' said Mabel, and she hid away the sardine-tin and did not tell any one. This seemed unjust to Maurice until he remembered that, of course, Mabel thought that he was really Lord Hugh, and that the person who had tied the tin to his tail was her brother Maurice. Then he was half grateful. She carried him down, in soft, safe arms, to the kitchen, and asked cook to give him some milk.

'Tell me to change back into Maurice,' said Maurice who was quite worn out by his cattish experiences. But no one heard him. What they heard was, 'Meaow – Meaow – Meeeaow!'

Then Maurice saw how he had been tricked. He could be changed back into a boy as soon as any one said to him, 'Leave off being a cat and be Maurice again,' but his tongue had no longer the power to ask any one to say it.

He did not sleep well that night. For one thing he was not accustomed to sleeping on the kitchen hearthrug, and the blackbeetles were too many and too cordial. He was glad when cook came down and turned him out into the garden, where the October frost still lay white on the yellowed stalks of sunflowers and nasturtiums. He took a walk, climbed a tree, failed to catch a bird, and felt better. He began also to feel hungry. A delicious scent came stealing out of the back kitchen door. Oh, joy, there were to be herrings for breakfast! Maurice hastened in and took his place on his usual chair.

His mother said, 'Down, puss,' and gently tilted the chair so that Maurice fell off it. Then the family had herrings. Maurice said, 'You might give me some,' and he said it so often that his father, who, of course, heard only mewings, said: —

'For goodness' sake put that cat out of the room.'

Maurice breakfasted later, in the dust-bin, on herring heads.

But he kept himself up with a new and splendid idea. They would give him milk presently, and then they should see.

He spent the afternoon sitting on the sofa in the dining-room, listening to the conversation of his father and mother. It is said that listeners never hear any good of themselves. Maurice heard so much that he was surprised and humbled. He heard his father say that he was a fine, plucky little chap, but he needed a severe lesson, and Dr. Strongitharm was the man to give it to him. He heard his mother say things that made his heart throb in his throat and the tears prick behind those green cat-eyes of his. He had always thought his parents a little bit unjust. Now they did him so much more than justice that he felt quite small and mean inside his cat-skin.

'He's a dear, good, affectionate boy,' said mother. 'It's only his high spirits. Don't you think, darling, perhaps you were a little hard on him?'

'It was for his own good,' said father.

'Of course,' said mother; 'but I can't bear to think of him at that dreadful school.'

'Well – ,' father was beginning, when Jane came in with the tea-things on a clattering tray, whose sound made Maurice tremble in every leg. Father and mother began to talk about the weather.

Maurice felt very affectionately to both his parents. The natural way of showing this was to jump on to the sideboard and thence on to his father's shoulders. He landed there on his four padded feet, light as a feather, but father was not pleased.

'Bother the cat!' he cried. 'Jane, put it out of the room.'

Maurice was put out. His great idea, which was to be carried out with milk, would certainly not be carried out in the dining-room. He sought the kitchen, and, seeing a milk-can on the window-ledge, jumped up beside the can and patted it as he had seen Lord Hugh do.

'My!' said a friend of Jane's who happened to be there, 'ain't that cat clever – a perfect moral, I call her.'

'He's nothing to boast of this time,' said cook. 'I will say for Lord Hugh he's not often taken in with a empty can.'

This was naturally mortifying for Maurice, but he pretended not to hear, and jumped from the window to the tea-table and patted the milk-jug.

'Come,' said the cook, 'that's more like it,' and she poured him out a full saucer and set it on the floor.

Now was the chance Maurice had longed for. Now he could carry out that idea of his. He was very thirsty, for he had had nothing since that delicious breakfast in the dust-bin. But not for worlds would he have drunk the milk. No. He carefully dipped his right paw in it, for his idea was to make letters with it on the kitchen oil-cloth. He meant to write: 'Please tell me to leave off being a cat and be Maurice again,' but he found his paw a very clumsy pen, and he had to rub out the first 'P' because it only looked like an accident. Then he tried again and actually did make a 'P' that any fair-minded person could have read quite easily.

'I wish they'd notice,' he said, and before he got the 'l' written they did notice.

'Drat the cat,' said cook; 'look how he's messing the floor up.'

And she took away the milk.

Maurice put pride aside and mewed to have the milk put down again. But he did not get it.

Very weary, very thirsty, and very tired of being Lord Hugh, he presently found his way to the schoolroom, where Mabel with patient toil was doing her home-lessons. She took him on her lap and stroked him while she learned her French verb. He felt that he was growing very fond of her. People were quite right to be kind to dumb animals. Presently she had to stop stroking him and do a map. And after that she kissed him and put him down and went away. All the time she had been doing the map, Maurice had had but one thought: *Ink!*

The moment the door had closed behind her – how sensible people were who closed doors gently – he stood up in her chair with one paw on the map and the other on the ink. Unfortunately, the inkstand top was made to dip pens in, and not to dip paws. But Maurice was desperate. He deliberately upset the ink – most of it rolled over the table-cloth and fell pattering on the carpet, but with what was left he wrote quite plainly, across the map: —

'Please tell Lord Hugh to stop being a cat and be Mau rice again.'

'There!' he said; 'they can't make any mistake about that.' They didn't. But they made a mistake about who had done it, and Mabel was deprived of jam with her supper bread.

Her assurance that some naughty boy must have come through the window and done it while she was not there convinced nobody, and, indeed, the window was shut and bolted.

Maurice, wild with indignation, did not mend matters by seizing the opportunity of a few minutes' solitude to write: —

'It was not Mabel it was Maur ice I mean Lord Hugh,'

because when that was seen Mabel was instantly sent to bed.

'It's not fair!' cried Maurice.

'My dear,' said Maurice's father, 'if that cat goes on mewing to this extent you'll have to get rid of it.'

Maurice said not another word. It was bad enough to be a cat, but to be a cat that was 'got rid of'! He knew how people got rid of cats. In a stricken silence he left the room and slunk up the stairs – he dared not mew again, even at the door of Mabel's room. But when Jane went in to put Mabel's light out Maurice crept in too, and in the dark tried with stifled mews and purrs to explain to Mabel how sorry he was. Mabel stroked him and he went to sleep, his last waking thought amazement at the blindness that had once made him call her a silly little kid.

If you have ever been a cat you will understand something of what Maurice endured during the dreadful days that followed. If you have not, I can never make you understand fully. There was the affair of the fishmonger's tray balanced on the wall by the back door – the delicious curled-up whiting; Maurice knew as well as you do that one mustn't steal fish out of other people's trays, but the cat that he was didn't know. There was an inward struggle – and Maurice was beaten by the cat-nature. Later he was beaten by the cook.

Then there was that very painful incident with the butcher's dog, the flight across gardens, the safety of the plum tree gained only just in time.

And, worst of all, despair took hold of him, for he saw that nothing he could do would make any one say those simple words that would release him. He had hoped that Mabel might at last be made to understand, but the ink had failed him; she did not understand his subdued mewings, and when he got the cardboard letters and made the same sentence with them Mabel only thought it was that naughty boy who came through locked windows. Somehow he could not spell before any one – his nerves were not what they had been. His brain now gave him no new ideas. He felt that he was really growing like a cat in his mind. His interest in his meals grew beyond even what it had been when they were a schoolboy's meals. He hunted mice with growing enthusiasm, though the loss of his whiskers to measure narrow places with made hunting difficult.

He grew expert in bird-stalking, and often got quite near to a bird before it flew away, laughing at him. But all the time, in his heart, he was very, very miserable. And so the week went by.

Maurice in his cat shape dreaded more and more the time when Lord Hugh in the boy shape should come back from Dr. Strongitharm's. He knew – who better? – exactly the kind of things boys do to cats, and he trembled to the end of his handsome half-Persian tail.

And then the boy came home from Dr. Strongitharm's, and at the first sound of his boots in the hall Maurice in the cat's body fled with silent haste to hide in the boot-cupboard.

Here, ten minutes later, the boy that had come back from Dr. Strongitharm's found him.

Maurice fluffed up his tail and unsheathed his claws. Whatever this boy was going to do to him Maurice meant to resist, and his resistance should hurt the boy as much as possible. I am sorry to say Maurice swore softly among the boots, but cat-swearing is not really wrong.

'Come out, you old duffer,' said Lord Hugh in the boy shape of Maurice. 'I'm not going to hurt you.'

'I'll see to that,' said Maurice, backing into the corner, all teeth and claws.

'Oh, I've had such a time!' said Lord Hugh. 'It's no use, you know, old chap; I can see where you are by your green eyes. My word, they do shine. I've been caned and shut up in a dark room and given thousands of lines to write out.'

'I've been beaten, too, if you come to that,' mewed Maurice. 'Besides the butcher's dog.'

It was an intense relief to speak to some one who could understand his mews.

'Well, I suppose it's Pax for the future,' said Lord Hugh; 'if you won't come out, you won't. Please leave off being a cat and be Maurice again.'

And instantly Maurice, amid a heap of goloshes and old tennis bats, felt with a swelling heart that he was no longer a cat. No more of those undignified four legs, those tiresome pointed ears, so

difficult to wash, that furry coat, that contemptible tail, and that terrible inability to express all one's feelings in two words – 'mew' and 'purr.'

He scrambled out of the cupboard, and the boots and goloshes fell off him like spray off a bather.

He stood upright in those very chequered knickerbockers that were so terrible when their knees held one vice-like, while things were tied to one's tail. He was face to face with another boy, exactly like himself.

'*You* haven't changed, then – but there can't be two Maurices.'

'There sha'n't be; not if I know it,' said the other boy; 'a boy's life's a dog's life. Quick, before any one comes.'

'Quick what?' asked Maurice.

'Why tell me to leave off being a boy, and to be Lord Hugh Cecil again.'

Maurice told him at once. And at once the boy was gone, and there was Lord Hugh in his own shape, purring politely, yet with a watchful eye on Maurice's movements.

'Oh, you needn't be afraid, old chap. It's Pax right enough,' Maurice murmured in the ear of Lord Hugh. And Lord Hugh, arching his back under Maurice's stroking hand, replied with a purrrr-meaow that spoke volumes.

'Oh, Maurice, here you are. It *is* nice of you to be nice to Lord Hugh, when it was because of him you – '

'He's a good old chap,' said Maurice, carelessly. 'And you're not half a bad old girl. See?'

Mabel almost wept for joy at this magnificent compliment, and Lord Hugh himself took on a more happy and confident air.

Please dismiss any fears which you may entertain that after this Maurice became a model boy. He didn't. But he was much nicer than before. The conversation which he overheard when he was a cat makes him more patient with his father and mother. And he is almost always nice to Mabel, for he cannot forget all that she was to him when he wore the shape of Lord Hugh. His father attributes all the improvement in his son's character to that week at Dr. Strongitharm's – which, as you know, Maurice never had. Lord Hugh's character is unchanged. Cats learn slowly and with difficulty.

Only Maurice and Lord Hugh know the truth – Maurice has never told it to any one except me, and Lord Hugh is a very reserved cat. He never at any time had that free flow of mew which distinguished and endangered the cat-hood of Maurice.

II
THE MIXED MINE

The ship was first sighted off Dungeness. She was labouring heavily. Her paint was peculiar and her rig outlandish. She looked like a golden ship out of a painted picture.

'Blessed if I ever see such a rig – nor such lines neither,' old Hawkhurst said.

It was a late afternoon, wild and grey. Slate-coloured clouds drove across the sky like flocks of hurried camels. The waves were purple and blue, and in the west a streak of unnatural-looking green light was all that stood for the splendours of sunset.

'She do be a rum 'un,' said young Benenden, who had strolled along the beach with the glasses the gentleman gave him for saving the little boy from drowning. 'Don't know as I ever see another just like her.'

'I'd give half a dollar to any chap as can tell me where she hails from – and what port it is where they has ships o' that cut,' said middle-aged Haversham to the group that had now gathered.

'George!' exclaimed young Benenden from under his field-glasses, 'she's going.' And she went. Her bow went down suddenly and she stood stern up in the water – like a duck after rain. Then quite slowly, with no unseemly hurry, but with no moment's change of what seemed to be her fixed purpose, the ship sank and the grey rolling waves wiped out the place where she had been.

Now I hope you will not expect me to tell you anything more about this ship – because there is nothing more to tell. What country she came from, what port she was bound for, what cargo she carried, and what kind of tongue her crew spoke – all these things are dead secrets. And a dead secret is a secret that nobody knows. No other secrets are dead secrets. Even I do not know this one, or I would tell you at once. For I, at least, have no secrets from you.

When ships go down off Dungeness, things from them have a way of being washed up on the sands of that bay which curves from Dungeness to Folkestone, where the sea has bitten a piece out of the land – just such a half-moon-shaped piece as you bite out of a slice of bread-and-butter. Bits of wood tangled with ropes – broken furniture – ships' biscuits in barrels and kegs that have held brandy – seamen's chests – and sometimes sadder things that we will not talk about just now.

Now, if you live by the sea and are grown-up you know that if you find anything on the seashore (I don't mean starfish or razor-shells or jellyfish and sea-mice, but anything out of a ship that you would really like to keep) your duty is to take it up to the coast-guard and say, 'Please, I've found this.' Then the coast-guard will send it to the proper authority, and one of these days you'll get a reward of one-third of the value of whatever it was that you picked up. But two-thirds of the value of anything, or even three-thirds of its value, is not at all the same thing as the thing itself – if it happened to be the kind of thing you want. But if you are not grown-up and do not live by the sea, but in a nice little villa in a nice little suburb, where all the furniture is new and the servants wear white aprons and white caps with long strings in the afternoon, then you won't know anything about your duty, and if you find anything by the sea you'll think that findings are keepings.

Edward was not grown-up – and he kept everything he found, including sea-mice, till the landlady of the lodgings where his aunt was threw his collection into the pig-pail.

Being a quiet and persevering little boy he did not cry or complain, but having meekly followed his treasures to their long home – the pig was six feet from nose to tail, and ate the dead sea-mouse as easily and happily as your father eats an oyster – he started out to make a new collection.

And the first thing he found was an oyster-shell that was pink and green and blue inside, and the second was an old boot – very old indeed – and the third was *it*.

It was a square case of old leather embossed with odd little figures of men and animals and words that Edward could not read. It was oblong and had no key, but a sort of leather hasp, and was

curiously knotted with string – rather like a boot-lace. And Edward opened it. There were several things inside: queer-looking instruments, some rather like those in the little box of mathematical instruments that he had had as a prize at school, and some like nothing he had ever seen before. And in a deep groove of the russet soaked velvet lining lay a neat little brass telescope.

T-squares and set-squares and so forth are of little use on a sandy shore. But you can always look through a telescope.

Edward picked it out and put it to his eye, and tried to see through it a little tug that was sturdily puffing up Channel. He failed to find the tug, and found himself gazing at a little cloud on the horizon. As he looked it grew larger and darker, and presently a spot of rain fell on his nose. He rubbed it off – on his jersey sleeve, I am sorry to say, and not on his handkerchief. Then he looked through the glass again; but he found he needed both hands to keep it steady, so he set down the box with the other instruments on the sand at his feet and put the glass to his eye again.

He never saw the box again. For in his unpractised efforts to cover the tug with his glass he found himself looking at the shore instead of at the sea, and the shore looked so odd that he could not make up his mind to stop looking at it.

He had thought it was a sandy shore, but almost at once he saw that it was not sand but fine shingle, and the discovery of this mistake surprised him so much that he kept on looking at the shingle through the little telescope, which showed it quite plainly. And as he looked the shingle grew coarser; it was stones now – quite decent-sized stones, large stones, enormous stones.

Something hard pressed against his foot, and he lowered the glass.

He was surrounded by big stones, and they all seemed to be moving; some were tumbling off others that lay in heaps below them, and others were rolling away from the beach in every direction. And the place where he had put down the box was covered with great stones which he could not move.

Edward was very much upset. He had never been accustomed to great stones that moved about when no one was touching them, and he looked round for some one to ask how it had happened.

The only person in sight was another boy in a blue jersey with red letters on its chest.

'Hi!' said Edward, and the boy also said 'Hi!'

'Come along here,' said Edward, 'and I'll show you something.'

'Right-o!' the boy remarked, and came.

The boy was staying at the camp where the white tents were below the Grand Redoubt. His home was quite unlike Edward's, though he also lived with his aunt. The boy's home was very dirty and very small, and nothing in it was ever in its right place. There was no furniture to speak of. The servants did not wear white caps with long streamers, because there were no servants. His uncle was a dock-labourer and his aunt went out washing. But he had felt just the same pleasure in being shown things that Edward or you or I might have felt, and he went climbing over the big stones to where Edward stood waiting for him in a sort of pit among the stones with the little telescope in his hand.

'I say,' said Edward, 'did you see any one move these stones?'

'I ain't only just come up on to the sea-wall,' said the boy, who was called Gustus.

'They all came round me,' said Edward, rather pale. 'I didn't see any one shoving them.'

'Who're you a-kiddin' of?' the boy inquired.

'But I *did*,' said Edward, 'honour bright I did. I was just taking a squint through this little telescope I've found – and they came rolling up to me.'

'Let's see what you found,' said Gustus, and Edward gave him the glass. He directed it with inexpert fingers to the sea-wall, so little trodden that on it the grass grows, and the sea-pinks, and even convolvulus and mock-strawberry.

'Oh, look!' cried Edward, very loud. 'Look at the grass!'

Gustus let the glass fall to long arm's length and said 'Krikey!'

The grass and flowers on the sea-wall had grown a foot and a half – quite tropical they looked.

'Well?' said Edward.

'What's the matter wiv everyfink?' said Gustus. 'We must both be a bit balmy, seems ter me.'

'What's balmy?' asked Edward.

'Off your chump – looney – like what you and me is,' said Gustus. 'First I sees things, then I sees you.'

'It was only fancy, I expect,' said Edward. 'I expect the grass on the sea-wall was always like that, really.'

'Let's have a look through your spy-glass at that little barge,' said Gustus, still holding the glass. 'Come on outer these 'ere paving-stones.'

'There was a box,' said Edward, 'a box I found with lots of jolly things in it. I laid it down somewhere – and – '

'Ain't that it over there?' Gustus asked, and levelled the glass at a dark object a hundred yards away. 'No; it's only an old boot. I say, this is a fine spy-glass. It does make things come big.'

'That's not it. I'm certain I put it down somewhere just here. Oh, *don't*!'

He snatched the glass from Gustus.

'Look!' he said, 'look!' and pointed.

A hundred yards away stood a boot about as big as the bath you see Marat in at Madame Tussaud's.

'S'welp me,' said Gustus, 'we're asleep, both of us, and a-dreaming as things grow while we look at them.'

'But we're not dreaming,' Edward objected. 'You let me pinch you and you'll see.'

'No fun in that,' said Gustus. 'Tell you what – it's the spy-glass – that's what it is. Ever see any conjuring? I see a chap at the Mile End Empire what made things turn into things like winking. It's the spy-glass, that's what it is.'

'It can't be,' said the little boy who lived in a villa.

'But it *is*,' said the little boy who lived in a slum. 'Teacher says there ain't no bounds to the wonders of science. Blest if this ain't one of 'em.'

'Let me look,' said Edward.

'All right; only you mark me. Whatever you sets eyes on'll grow and grow – like the flower-tree the conjurer had under the wipe. Don't you look at *me*, that's all. Hold on; I'll put something up for you to look at – a mark like – something as doesn't matter.'

He fumbled in his pocket and brought out a boot-lace.

'I hold this up,' he said, 'and you look.'

Next moment he had dropped the boot-lace, which, swollen as it was with the magic of the glass, lay like a snake on the stone at his feet.

So the glass *was* a magic glass, as, of course, you know already.

'My!' said Gustus, 'wouldn't I like to look at my victuals through that there!'

Thus we find Edward, of the villa – and through him Gustus, of the slum – in possession of a unique instrument of magic. What could they do with it?

This was the question which they talked over every time they met, and they met continually. Edward's aunt, who at home watched him as cats watch mice, rashly believed that at the seaside there was no mischief for a boy to get into. And the gentleman who commanded the tented camp believed in the ennobling effects of liberty.

After the boot, neither had dared to look at anything through the telescope – and so they looked *at* it, and polished it on their sleeves till it shone again.

Both were agreed that it would be a fine thing to get some money and look at it, so that it would grow big. But Gustus never had any pocket-money, and Edward had had his confiscated to pay for a window he had not intended to break.

Gustus felt certain that some one would find out about the spy-glass and take it away from them. His experience was that anything you happened to like was always taken away. Edward knew that his

aunt would want to take the telescope away to 'take care of' for him. This had already happened with the carved chessmen that his father had sent him from India.

'I been thinking,' said Gustus, on the third day. 'When I'm a man I'm a-going to be a burglar. You has to use your headpiece in that trade, I tell you. So I don't think thinking's swipes, like some blokes do. And I think p'r'aps it don't turn everything big. An' if we could find out what it don't turn big we could see what we wanted to turn big or what it didn't turn big, and then it wouldn't turn anything big except what we wanted it to. See?'

Edward did not see; and I don't suppose you do, either.

So Gustus went on to explain that teacher had told him there were some substances impervious to light, and some to cold, and so on and so forth, and that what they wanted was a substance that should be impervious to the magic effects of the spy-glass.

'So if we get a tanner and set it on a plate and squint at it it'll get bigger – but so'll the plate. And we don't want to litter the place up with plates the bigness of cartwheels. But if the plate didn't get big we could look at the tanner till it covered the plate, and then go on looking and looking and looking and see nothing but the tanner till it was as big as a circus. See?'

This time Edward did see. But they got no further, because it was time to go to the circus. There was a circus at Dymchurch just then, and that was what made Gustus think of the sixpence growing to that size.

It was a very nice circus, and all the boys from the camp went to it – also Edward, who managed to scramble over and wriggle under benches till he was sitting near his friend.

It was the size of the elephant that did it. Edward had not seen an elephant before, and when he saw it, instead of saying, 'What a size he is!' as everybody else did, he said to himself, 'What a size I could make him!' and pulled out the spy-glass, and by a miracle of good luck or bad got it levelled at the elephant as it went by. He turned the glass slowly – as it went out – and the elephant only just got out in time. Another moment and it would have been too big to get through the door. The audience cheered madly. They thought it was a clever trick; and so it would have been, very clever.

'You silly cuckoo,' said Gustus, bitterly, 'now you've turned that great thing loose on the country, and how's his keeper to manage him?'

'I could make the keeper big, too.'

'Then if I was you I should just bunk out and do it.'

Edward obeyed, slipped under the canvas of the circus tent, and found himself on the yellow, trampled grass of the field among guy-ropes, orange-peel, banana-skins, and dirty paper. Far above him and every one else towered the elephant – it was now as big as the church.

Edward pointed the glass at the man who was patting the elephant's foot – that was as far up as he could reach – and telling it to 'Come down with you!' He was very much frightened. He did not know whether you could be put in prison for making an elephant's keeper about forty times his proper size. But he felt that something must be done to control the gigantic mountain of black-lead-coloured living flesh. So he looked at the keeper through the spy-glass, and the keeper remained his normal size!

In the shock of this failure he dropped the spy-glass, picked it up, and tried once more to fix the keeper. Instead he only got a circle of black-lead-coloured elephant; and while he was trying to find the keeper, and finding nothing but more and more of the elephant, a shout startled him and he dropped the glass once more. He was a very clumsy little boy, was Edward.

'Well,' said one of the men, 'what a turn it give me! I thought Jumbo'd grown as big as a railway station, s'welp me if I didn't.'

'Now that's rum,' said another, 'so did I.'

'And he *ain't*,' said a third; 'seems to me he's a bit below his usual figure. Got a bit thin or somethink, ain't he?'

Edward slipped back into the tent unobserved.

'It's all right,' he whispered to his friend, 'he's gone back to his proper size, and the man didn't change at all.'

'Ho!' Gustus said slowly – 'Ho! All right. Conjuring's a rum thing. You don't never know where you are!'

'Don't you think you might as well be a conjurer as a burglar?' suggested Edward, who had had his friend's criminal future rather painfully on his mind for the last hour.

'*You* might,' said Gustus, 'not me. My people ain't dooks to set me up on any such a swell lay as conjuring. Now I'm going to think, I am. You hold your jaw and look at the 'andsome Dona a-doin' of 'er griceful barebacked hact.'

That evening after tea Edward went, as he had been told to do, to the place on the shore where the big stones had taught him the magic of the spy-glass.

Gustus was already at the tryst.

'See here,' he said, 'I'm a-goin' to do something brave and fearless, I am, like Lord Nelson and the boy on the fire-ship. You out with that spy-glass, an' I'll let you look at *me*. Then we'll know where we are.'

'But s'pose you turn into a giant?'

'Don't care. 'Sides, I shan't. T'other bloke didn't.'

'P'r'aps,' said Edward, cautiously, 'it only works by the seashore.'

'Ah,' said Gustus, reproachfully, 'you've been a-trying to think, that's what you've been a-doing. What about the elephant, my emernent scientister? Now, then!'

Very much afraid, Edward pulled out the glass and looked.

And nothing happened.

'That's number one,' said Gustus, 'now, number two.'

He snatched the telescope from Edward's hand, and turned it round and looked through the other end at the great stones. Edward, standing by, saw them get smaller and smaller – turn to pebbles, to beach, to sand. When Gustus turned the glass to the giant grass and flowers on the sea-wall, they also drew back into themselves, got smaller and smaller, and presently were as they had been before ever Edward picked up the magic spy-glass.

'Now we know all about it – I *don't* think,' said Gustus. 'To-morrow we'll have a look at that there model engine of yours that you say works.'

They did. They had a look at it through the spy-glass, and it became a quite efficient motor; of rather an odd pattern it is true, and very bumpy, but capable of quite a decent speed. They went up to the hills in it, and so odd was its design that no one who saw it ever forgot it. People talk about that rummy motor at Bonnington and Aldington to this day. They stopped often, to use the spy-glass on various objects. Trees, for instance, could be made to grow surprisingly, and there were patches of giant wheat found that year near Ashford that were never satisfactorily accounted for. Blackberries, too, could be enlarged to a most wonderful and delicious fruit. And the sudden growth of a fugitive toffee-drop found in Edward's pocket and placed on the hand was a happy surprise. When you scraped the pocket dirt off the outside you had a pound of delicious toffee. Not so happy was the incident of the earwig, which crawled into view when Edward was enlarging a wild strawberry, and had grown the size of a rat before the slow but horrified Edward gained courage to shake it off.

It was a beautiful drive. As they came home they met a woman driving a weak-looking little cow. It went by on one side of the engine and the woman went by on the other. When they were restored to each other the cow was nearly the size of a cart-horse, and the woman did not recognise it. She ran back along the road after her cow, which must, she said, have taken fright at the beastly motor. She scolded violently as she went. So the boys had to make the cow small again, when she wasn't looking.

'This is all very well,' said Gustus, 'but we've got our fortune to make, I don't think. We've got to get hold of a tanner – or a bob would be better.'

But this was not possible, because that broken window wasn't paid for, and Gustus never had any money.

'We ought to be the benefactors of the human race,' said Edward; 'make all the good things more and all the bad things less.'

And *that* was all very well – but the cow hadn't been a great success, as Gustus reminded him.

'I see I shall have to do some of my thinking,' he added.

They stopped in a quiet road close by Dymchurch; the engine was made small again, and Edward went home with it under his arm.

It was the next day that they found the shilling on the road. They could hardly believe their good luck. They went out on to the shore with it, put it on Edward's hand while Gustus looked at it with the glass, and the shilling began to grow.

'It's as big as a saucer,' said Edward, 'and it's heavy. I'll rest it on these stones. It's as big as a plate; it's as big as a tea-tray; it's as big as a cart-wheel.'

And it was.

'Now,' said Gustus, 'we'll go and borrow a cart to take it away. Come on.'

But Edward could not come on. His hand was in the hollow between the two stones, and above lay tons of silver. He could not move, and the stones couldn't move. There was nothing for it but to look at the great round lump of silver through the wrong end of the spy-glass till it got small enough for Edward to lift it. And then, unfortunately, Gustus looked a little too long, and the shilling, having gone back to its own size, went a little further – and it went to sixpenny size, and then went out altogether.

So nobody got anything by that.

And now came the time when, as was to be expected, Edward dropped the telescope in his aunt's presence. She said, 'What's that?' picked it up with quite unfair quickness, and looked through it, and through the open window at a fishing-boat, which instantly swelled to the size of a man-of-war.

'My goodness! what a strong glass!' said the aunt.

'Isn't it?' said Edward, gently taking it from her. He looked at the ship through the glass's other end till she got to her proper size again and then smaller. He just stopped in time to prevent its disappearing altogether.

'I'll take care of it for you,' said the aunt. And for the first time in their lives Edward said 'No' to his aunt.

It was a terrible moment.

Edward, quite frenzied by his own courage, turned the glass on one object after another – the furniture grew as he looked, and when he lowered the glass the aunt was pinned fast between a monster table-leg and a great chiffonier.

'There!' said Edward. 'And I shan't let you out till you say you won't take it to take care of either.'

'Oh, have it your own way,' said the aunt, faintly, and closed her eyes. When she opened them the furniture was its right size and Edward was gone. He had twinges of conscience, but the aunt never mentioned the subject again. I have reason to suppose that *she* supposed that she had had a fit of an unusual and alarming nature.

Next day the boys in the camp were to go back to their slums. Edward and Gustus parted on the seashore and Edward cried. He had never met a boy whom he liked as he liked Gustus. And Gustus himself was almost melted.

'I will say for you you're more like a man and less like a snivelling white rabbit now than what you was when I met you. Well, we ain't done nothing to speak of with that there conjuring trick of yours, but we've 'ad a right good time. So long. See you 'gain some day.'

Edward hesitated, spluttered, and still weeping flung his arms round Gustus.

''Ere, none o' that,' said Gustus, sternly. 'If you ain't man enough to know better, I am. Shake 'ands like a Briton; right about face – and part game.'

He suited the action to the word.

Edward went back to his aunt snivelling, defenceless but happy. He had never had a friend except Gustus, and now he had given Gustus the greatest treasure that he possessed.

For Edward was not such a white rabbit as he seemed. And in that last embrace he had managed to slip the little telescope into the pocket of the reefer coat which Gustus wore, ready for his journey.

It was the greatest treasure that Edward had, but it was also the greatest responsibility, so that while he felt the joy of self-sacrifice he also felt the rapture of relief. Life is full of such mixed moments.

And the holidays ended and Edward went back to his villa. Be sure he had given Gustus his home address, and begged him to write, but Gustus never did.

Presently Edward's father came home from India, and they left his aunt to her villa and went to live at a jolly little house on a sloping hill at Chiselhurst, which was Edward's father's very own. They were not rich, and Edward could not go to a very good school, and though there was enough to eat and wear, what there was was very plain. And Edward's father had been wounded, and somehow had not got a pension.

Now one night in the next summer Edward woke up in his bed with the feeling that there was some one in the room. And there was. A dark figure was squeezing itself through the window. Edward was far too frightened to scream. He simply lay and listened to his heart. It was like listening to a cheap American clock. The next moment a lantern flashed in his eyes and a masked face bent over him.

'Where does your father keep his money?' said a muffled voice.

'In the b-b-b-b-bank,' replied the wretched Edward, truthfully.

'I mean what he's got in the house.'

'In his trousers pocket,' said Edward, 'only he puts it in the dressing-table drawer at night.'

'You must go and get it,' said the burglar, for such he plainly was.

'Must I?' said Edward, wondering how he could get out of betraying his father's confidence and being branded as a criminal.

'Yes,' said the burglar in an awful voice, 'get up and go.'

'*No*,' said Edward, and he was as much surprised at his courage as you are.

'Bravo!' said the burglar, flinging off his mask. 'I see you *aren't* such a white rabbit as what I thought you.'

'It's Gustus,' said Edward. 'Oh, Gustus, I'm so glad! Oh, Gustus, I'm so sorry! I always hoped you wouldn't be a burglar. And now you are.'

'I am so,' said Gustus, with pride, 'but,' he added sadly, 'this is my first burglary.'

'Couldn't it be the last?' suggested Edward.

'That,' replied Gustus, 'depends on you.'

'I'll do anything,' said Edward, 'anything.'

'You see,' said Gustus, sitting down on the edge of the bed in a confidential attitude, with the dark lantern in one hand and the mask in the other, 'when you're as hard up as we are, there's not much of a living to be made honest. I'm sure I wonder we don't all of us turn burglars, so I do. And that glass of yours – you little beggar – you did me proper – sticking of that thing in my pocket like what you did. Well, it kept us alive last winter, that's a cert. I used to look at the victuals with it, like what I said I would. A farden's worth o' pease-pudden was a dinner for three when that glass was about, and a penn'orth o' scraps turned into a big beef-steak almost. They used to wonder how I got so much for the money. But I'm always afraid o' being found out – or of losing the blessed spy-glass – or of some one pinching it. So we got to do what I always said – make some use of it. And if I go along and nick your father's dibs we'll make our fortunes right away.'

'No,' said Edward, 'but I'll ask father.'

'Rot.' Gustus was crisp and contemptuous. 'He'd think you was off your chump, and he'd get me lagged.'

'It would be stealing,' said Edward.

'Not when you'll pay it back.'

'Yes, it would,' said Edward. 'Oh, don't ask me – I can't.'

'Then I shall,' said Gustus. 'Where's his room.'

'Oh, don't!' said Edward. 'I've got a half-sovereign of my own. I'll give you that.'

'Lawk!' said Gustus. 'Why the blue monkeys couldn't you say so? Come on.'

He pulled Edward out of bed by the leg, hurried his clothes on anyhow, and half-dragged, half-coaxed him through the window and down by the ivy and the chicken-house roof.

They stood face to face in the sloping garden and Edward's teeth chattered. Gustus caught him by his hand, and led him away.

At the other end of the shrubbery, where the rockery was, Gustus stooped and dragged out a big clinker – then another, and another. There was a hole like a big rabbit-hole. If Edward had really been a white rabbit it would just have fitted him.

'I'll go first,' said Gustus, and went, head-foremost. 'Come on,' he said, hollowly, from inside. And Edward, too, went. It was dreadful crawling into that damp hole in the dark. As his head got through the hole he saw that it led to a cave, and below him stood a dark figure. The lantern was on the ground.

'Come on,' said Gustus, 'I'll catch you if you fall.'

With a rush and a scramble Edward got in.

'It's caves,' said Gustus. 'A chap I know that goes about the country bottoming cane-chairs, 'e told me about it. And I nosed about and found he lived here. So then I thought what a go. So now we'll put your half-shiner down and look at it, and we'll have a gold-mine, and you can pretend to find it.'

'Halves!' said Edward, briefly and firmly.

'You're a man,' said Gustus. 'Now, then!' He led the way through a maze of chalk caves till they came to a convenient spot, which he had marked. And now Edward emptied his pockets on the sand – he had brought all the contents of his money-box, and there was more silver than gold, and more copper than either, and more odd rubbish than there was anything else. You know what a boy's pockets are like. Stones and putty, and slate-pencils and marbles – I urge in excuse that Edward was a very little boy – a bit of plasticine, one or two bits of wood.

'No time to sort 'em,' said Gustus, and, putting the lantern in a suitable position, he got out the glass and began to look through it at the tumbled heap.

And the heap began to grow. It grew out sideways till it touched the walls of the recess, and outwards till it touched the top of the recess, and then it slowly worked out into the big cave and came nearer and nearer to the boys. Everything grew – stones, putty, money, wood, plasticine.

Edward patted the growing mass as though it were alive and he loved it, and Gustus said:

'Here's clothes, and beef, and bread, and tea, and coffee – and baccy – and a good school, and me a engineer. I see it all a-growing and a-growing.'

'Hi – stop!' said Edward suddenly.

Gustus dropped the telescope. It rolled away into the darkness.

'Now you've done it,' said Edward.

'What?' said Gustus.

'My hand,' said Edward, 'it's fast between the rock and the gold and things. Find the glass and make it go smaller so that I can get my hand out.'

But Gustus could not find the glass. And, what is more, no one ever has found it to this day.

'It's no good,' said Gustus, at last. 'I'll go and find your father. They must come and dig you out of this precious Tom Tiddler's ground.'

'And they'll lag you if they see you. You said they would,' said Edward, not at all sure what lagging was, but sure that it was something dreadful. 'Write a letter and put it in his letter-box. They'll find it in the morning.'

'And leave you pinned by the hand all night? Likely – I *don't* think,' said Gustus.

'I'd rather,' said Edward, bravely, but his voice was weak. 'I couldn't bear you to be lagged, Gustus. I do love you so.'

'None of that,' said Gustus, sternly. 'I'll leave you the lamp; I can find my way with matches. Keep up your pecker, and never say die.'

'I won't,' said Edward, bravely. 'Oh, Gustus!'

That was how it happened that Edward's father was roused from slumbers by violent shakings from an unknown hand, while an unknown voice uttered these surprising words: —

'Edward is in the gold and silver and copper mine that we've found under your garden. Come and get him out.'

When Edward's father was at last persuaded that Gustus was not a silly dream – and this took some time – he got up.

He did not believe a word that Gustus said, even when Gustus added 'S'welp me!' which he did several times.

But Edward's bed was empty – his clothes gone.

Edward's father got the gardener from next door – with, at the suggestion of Gustus, a pick – the hole in the rockery was enlarged, and they all got in.

And when they got to the place where Edward was, there, sure enough, was Edward, pinned by the hand between a piece of wood and a piece of rock. Neither the father nor the gardener noticed any metal. Edward had fainted.

They got him out; a couple of strokes with the pick released his hand, but it was bruised and bleeding.

They all turned to go, but they had not gone twenty yards before there was a crash and a loud report like thunder, and a slow rumbling, rattling noise very dreadful to hear.

'Get out of this quick, sir,' said the gardener; 'the roof's fell in; this part of the caves ain't safe.'

Edward was very feverish and ill for several days, during which he told his father the whole story – of which his father did not believe a word. But he was kind to Gustus, because Gustus was evidently fond of Edward.

When Edward was well enough to walk in the garden his father and he found that a good deal of the shrubbery had sunk, so that the trees looked as though they were growing in a pit.

It spoiled the look of the garden, and Edward's father decided to move the trees to the other side.

When this was done the first tree uprooted showed a dark hollow below it. The man is not born who will not examine and explore a dark hollow in his own grounds. So Edward's father explored.

This is the true story of the discovery of that extraordinary vein of silver, copper, and gold which has excited so much interest in scientific and mining circles. Learned papers have been written about it, learned professors have been rude to each other about it, but no one knows how it came there except Gustus and Edward and you and me. Edward's father is quite as ignorant as any one else, but he is much richer than most of them; and, at any rate, he knows that it was Gustus who first told him of the gold-mine, and who risked being lagged – arrested by the police, that is – rather than let Edward wait till morning with his hand fast between wood and rock.

So Edward and Gustus have been to a good school, and now they are at Winchester, and presently they will be at Oxford. And when Gustus is twenty-one he will have half the money that came from the gold-mine. And then he and Edward mean to start a school of their own. And the boys who are to go to it are to be the sort of boys who go to the summer camp of the Grand Redoubt near the sea – the kind of boy that Gustus was.

So the spy-glass will do some good after all, though it *was* so unmanageable to begin with.

Perhaps it may even be found again. But I rather hope it won't. It might, really, have done much more mischief than it did – and if any one found it, it might do more yet.

There is no moral to this story, except… But no – there is no moral.

III
ACCIDENTAL MAGIC; OR DON'T TELL ALL YOU KNOW

Quentin de Ward was rather a nice little boy, but he had never been with other little boys, and that made him in some ways a little different from other little boys. His father was in India, and he and his mother lived in a little house in the New Forest. The house – it was a cottage really, but even a cottage is a house, isn't it? – was very pretty and thatched and had a porch covered with honeysuckle and ivy and white roses, and straight red hollyhocks were trained to stand up in a row against the south wall of it. The two lived quite alone, and as they had no one else to talk to they talked to each other a good deal. Mrs. de Ward read a great many books, and she used to tell Quentin about them afterwards. They were usually books about out of the way things, for Mrs. de Ward was interested in all the things that people are not quite sure about – the things that are hidden and secret, wonderful and mysterious – the things people make discoveries about. So that when the two were having their tea on the little brick terrace in front of the hollyhocks, with the white cloth flapping in the breeze, and the wasps hovering round the jam-pot, it was no uncommon thing for Quentin to say thickly through his bread and jam: —

'I say, mother, tell me some more about Atlantis.' Or, 'Mother, tell me some more about ancient Egypt and the little toy-boats they made for their little boys.' Or, 'Mother, tell me about the people who think Lord Bacon wrote Shakespeare.'

And his mother always told him as much as she thought he could understand, and he always understood quite half of what she told him.

They always talked the things out thoroughly, and thus he learned to be fond of arguing, and to enjoy using his brains, just as you enjoy using your muscles in the football field or the gymnasium.

Also he came to know quite a lot of odd, out of the way things, and to have opinions of his own concerning the lost Kingdom of Atlantis, and the Man with the Iron Mask, the building of Stonehenge, the Pre-dynastic Egyptians, cuneiform writings and Assyrian sculptures, the Mexican pyramids and the shipping activities of Tyre and Sidon.

Quentin did no regular lessons, such as most boys have, but he read all sorts of books and made notes from them, in a large and straggling handwriting.

You will already have supposed that Quentin was a prig. But he wasn't, and you would have owned this if you had seen him scampering through the greenwood on his quiet New Forest pony, or setting snares for the rabbits that *would* get into the garden and eat the precious lettuces and parsley. Also he fished in the little streams that run through that lovely land, and shot with a bow and arrows. And he was a very good shot too.

Besides this he collected stamps and birds' eggs and picture post-cards, and kept guinea-pigs and bantams, and climbed trees and tore his clothes in twenty different ways. And once he fought the grocer's boy and got licked and didn't cry, and made friends with the grocer's boy afterwards, and got him to show him all he knew about fighting, so you see he was really not a mug. He was ten years old and he had enjoyed every moment of his ten years, even the sleeping ones, because he always dreamed jolly dreams, though he could not always remember what they were.

I tell you all this so that you may understand why he said what he did when his mother broke the news to him.

He was sitting by the stream that ran along the end of the garden, making bricks of the clay that the stream's banks were made of. He dried them in the sun, and then baked them under the kitchen stove. (It is quite a good way to make bricks – you might try it sometimes.) His mother came out, looking just as usual, in her pink cotton gown and her pink sunbonnet; and she had a letter in her hand.

'Hullo, boy of my heart,' she said, 'very busy?'

'Yes,' said Quentin importantly, not looking up, and going on with his work. 'I'm making stones to build Stonehenge with. You'll show me how to build it, won't you, mother.'

'Yes, dear,' she said absently. 'Yes, if I can.'

'Of course you can,' he said, 'you can do everything.'

She sat down on a tuft of grass near him.

'Quentin dear,' she said, and something in her voice made him look up suddenly.

'Oh, mother, what is it?' he asked.

'Daddy's been wounded,' she said; 'he's all right now, dear – don't be frightened. Only I've got to go out to him. I shall meet him in Egypt. And you must go to school in Salisbury, a very nice school, dear, till I come back.'

'Can't I come too?' he asked.

And when he understood that he could not he went on with the bricks in silence, with his mouth shut very tight.

After a moment he said, 'Salisbury? Then I shall see Stonehenge?'

'Yes,' said his mother, pleased that he took the news so calmly, 'you will be sure to see Stonehenge some time.'

He stood still, looking down at the little mould of clay in his hand – so still that his mother got up and came close to him.

'Quentin,' she said, 'darling, what is it?'

He leaned his head against her.

'I won't make a fuss,' he said, 'but you can't begin to be brave the very first minute. Or, if you do, you can't go on being.'

And with that he began to cry, though he had not cried after the affair of the grocer's boy.

* * * * *

The thought of school was not so terrible to Quentin as Mrs. de Ward had thought it would be. In fact, he rather liked it, with half his mind; but the other half didn't like it, because it meant parting from his mother who, so far, had been his only friend. But it was exciting to be taken to Southampton, and have all sorts of new clothes bought for you, and a school trunk, and a little polished box that locked up, to keep your money in and your gold sleeve links, and your watch and chain when you were not wearing them.

Also the journey to Salisbury was made in a motor, which was very exciting of course, and rather took Quentin's mind off the parting with his mother, as she meant it should. And there was a very grand lunch at The White Hart Hotel at Salisbury, and then, very suddenly indeed, it was good-bye, good-bye, and the motor snorted, and hooted, and throbbed, and rushed away, and mother was gone, and Quentin was at school.

I believe it was quite a nice school. It was in a very nice house with a large quiet garden, and there were only about twenty boys. And the masters were kind, and the boys no worse than other boys of their age. But Quentin hated it from the very beginning. For when his mother had gone the Headmaster said: 'School will be out in half-an-hour; take a book, de Ward,' and gave him *Little Eric and his Friends*, a mere baby book. It was too silly. He could not read it. He saw on a shelf near him, *Smith's Antiquities*, a very old friend of his, so he said: 'I'd rather have this, please.'

'You should say "sir" when you speak to a master,' the Head said to him. 'Take the book by all means.' To himself the Head said, 'I wish you joy of it, you little prig.'

When school was over, one of the boys was told to show Quentin his bed and his locker. The matron had already unpacked his box and his pile of books was waiting for him to carry it over.

'Golly, what a lot of books,' said Smithson minor. 'What's this? *Atlantis*? Is it a jolly story?'

'It isn't a story,' said Quentin. And just then the classical master came by. 'What's that about *Atlantis*?' he said.

'It's a book the new chap's got,' said Smithson.

The classical master glanced at the book.

'And how much do you understand of this?' he asked, fluttering the leaves.

'Nearly all, I think,' said Quentin.

'You should say "sir" when you speak to a master,' said the classical one; and to himself he added, 'little prig.' Then he said to Quentin: 'I am afraid you will find yourself rather out of your element among ordinary boys.'

'I don't think so,' said Quentin calmly, adding as an afterthought 'sir.'

'I'm glad you're so confident,' said the classical master and went.

'My word,' said Smithson minor in a rather awed voice, 'you did answer him back.'

'Of course I did,' said Quentin. 'Don't *you* answer when you're spoken to?'

Smithson minor informed the interested school that the new chap was a prig, but he had a cool cheek, and that some sport might be expected.

After supper the boys had half an hour's recreation. Quentin, who was tired, picked up a book which a big boy had just put down. It was the *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

'Hi, you kid,' said the big boy, 'don't pretend you read Shakespeare for fun. That's simple swank, you know.'

'I don't know what swank is,' said Quentin, 'but I like the *Midsummer* whoever wrote it.'

'Whoever *what*?'

'Well,' said Quentin, 'there's a good deal to be said for its being Bacon who wrote the plays.'

Of course that settled it. From that moment, he was called not de Ward, which was strange enough, but Bacon. He rather liked that. But the next day it was Pork, and the day after Pig, and that was unbearable.

He was at the bottom of his class, for he knew no Latin as it is taught in schools, only odd words that English words come from, and some Latin words that are used in science. And I cannot pretend that his arithmetic was anything but contemptible.

The book called *Atlantis* had been looked at by most of the school, and Smithson major, not nearly such an agreeable boy as his brother, hit on a new nickname.

'Atlantic Pork's a good name for a swanker,' he said. 'You know the rotten meat they have in Chicago.'

This was in the playground before dinner. Quentin, who had to keep his mouth shut very tight these days, because, of course, a boy of ten cannot cry before other chaps, shut the book he was reading and looked up.

'I won't be called that,' he said quietly.

'Who said you wouldn't?' said Smithson major, who, after all, was only twelve. 'I say you will.'

'If you call me that I shall hit you,' said Quentin, 'as hard as I can.'

A roar of laughter went up, and cries of, 'Poor old Smithson' – 'Apologise, Smithie, and leave the omnibus.'

'And what should I be doing while you were hitting me?' asked Smithson contemptuously.

'I don't know and I don't care,' said Quentin.

Smithson looked round. No master was in sight. It seemed an excellent opportunity to teach young de Ward his place.

'Atlantic pig-swine,' he said very deliberately. And Quentin sprang at him, and instantly it was a fight.

Now Quentin had only once fought – really fought – before. Then it was the grocer's boy and he had been beaten. But he had learned something since. And the chief conclusion he now drew from his

memories of that fight was that he had not hit half hard enough, an opinion almost universal among those who have fought and not won.

As the fist of Smithson major described a half circle and hurt his ear very much, Quentin suddenly screwed himself up and hit out with his right hand, straight, and with his whole weight behind the blow as the grocer's boy had shown him. All his grief for his wounded father, his sorrow at the parting from his mother, all his hatred of his school, and his contempt for his schoolfellows went into that blow. It landed on the point of the chin of Smithson major who fell together like a heap of rags.

'Oh,' said Quentin, gazing with interest at his hand – it hurt a good deal but he looked at it with respect – 'I'm afraid I've hurt him.'

He had forgotten for a moment that he was in an enemies' country, and so, apparently, had his enemies.

'Well done, Piggy! Bravo, young 'un! Well hit, by Jove!'

Friendly hands thumped him on the back. Smithson major was no popular hero.

Quentin felt – as his schoolfellows would have put it – bucked. It is one thing to be called Pig in enmity and derision. Another to be called Piggy – an affectionate diminutive, after all – to the chorus of admiring smacks.

'Get up, Smithie,' cried the ring. 'Want any more?'

It appeared that Smithie did not want any more. He lay, not moving at all, and very white.

'I say,' the crowd's temper veered, 'you've killed him, I expect. I wouldn't like to be you, Bacon.'

Pig, you notice, for aggravation – Piggy in enthusiastic applause. In the moment of possible tragedy the more formal Bacon.

'I haven't,' said Quentin, very white himself, 'but if I have he began – by calling names.'

Smithson moved and grunted. A sigh of relief swept the ring as a breeze sweeps a cornfield.

'He's all right. A fair knock out. Piggy's got the use of 'em. Do Smithie good.' The voices hushed suddenly. A master was on the scene – the classical master.

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