EVERETT-GREEN EVELYN

SQUIB AND HIS FRIENDS

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Squib and His Friends:

Содержание

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CHAPTER I.
"THE ODD ONE."

That was the name Squib went by in the nursery and in the household – "the odd one." Not exactly because of any personal peculiarities – although he had a few of these – but because he had no especial brother or sister belonging to him, and seemed to stand alone, whilst all the others could be paired off together.

Norman and Frank were big boys, away at school most of the year, near to each other in age, and always together in the holidays. Philippa and Molly came next, and were girls, devoted to each other and to their family of dolls, and even more devoted to the live dolls in the nursery – the little twin sisters, Hilda and Hulda, whom nobody knew apart save themselves and the nurse. But Squib had no brother or sister to be bracketed with him. The baby who came next in age to him had died in infancy, and was only a dim memory to the brother just above him in age. So he had always been, as it were, "the odd one" of the family, although his sisters were very fond of him, and never refused him a share in their games when he wanted to join in them.

But Squib did not care for dolls, and his tastes lay amongst things beyond the walls of nursery or schoolroom. He wanted always to be out of doors when not busy with his lessons for Mademoiselle (for so far he had not gone to school, but had been taught with his sisters in the schoolroom); and his pursuits were not of a kind to be attractive to the dainty little ladies, Philippa and Molly, or to find favour in the eyes of nurse, who reigned supreme over Hilda and Hulda. So Squib got into the way of amusing himself in his own fashion, and took his name of "the odd one" with great equanimity.

Squib was not his real name, as I suppose I need hardly say; it was a nickname given him by his father some years before my story begins, and it had stuck to him ever since. His real name was Sydenham, and he had been called Syd for a time, till Colonel Rutland had hit upon this other appellation.

And the reason for this was a habit of Squib's which amused his father a good deal. The child had a way of sitting perfectly still and silent for a very long time in the room, not speaking, even when spoken to, until some exhaustive mental process had taken place, after which he would suddenly "go off," as his father expressed it, and talk rapidly and eagerly for several minutes straight on end; then having thus relieved his mind and delivered himself of his thoughts, he would relapse into dead silence until ready for the next explosion. And so his father called him "Squib;" and Squib he became in time to the whole household.

It was commonly whispered about the place that Squib was the

Colonel's favourite amongst his children. Colonel Rutland was not a man who had taken a great deal of notice of his sons and daughters as they appeared upon the scene. He was a busy man, having a large estate to order, being a magistrate, churchwarden, and guardian of the poor-law, and having social duties to attend to as well. He was a most devoted husband; and people used to say that never was there a happier couple than he and Lady Mary, his beautiful wife. He was proud of his fine young family in the aggregate, but did not notice the children very much individually, until one or two small incidents brought Squib before his eyes.

The first of these was a severe altercation which he chanced to overhear between the child and his nurse when Squib was five years old. He was walking through the shrubberies one morning when the sound of raised voices attracted his attention, the first being that of a child lifted in indignant protest.

"It's not a lie. I never tell lies! I *did* hear father sing it his own self!"

"Master Syd, that's not true. Your father never would sing such a wicked song. It only makes it worse, telling stories about it!"

"It isn't a story! – it isn't, I tell you! I heard him my own self, and lots of other people heard him, too. It's you who are wicked, saying I tell lies and father sings wicked songs!" and the crunch of the gravel betrayed the fact that Squib had brought his small foot heavily down upon it in a stamp of passionate wrath.

Colonel Rutland turned a corner and came full upon the combatants. The nurse – a most excellent and trustworthy

woman, who had been for twelve years with them – was looking very grieved and disturbed as she held Squib by the hand, as if with the intention of taking him at once before some domestic tribunal; whilst the child's square, determined face was flushed a deep crimson, his dark-grey eyes looked almost black, as they had a way of doing in moments of passion and excitement, and his whole frame was quivering with anger and protest as he reiterated his assertion that he was speaking nothing but the truth.

"What is all this?" asked Colonel Rutland in a deep voice. "Squib, what do you mean by resisting your nurse like that? I will have no insubordination to authority in my house – you know that as well as I do." For Colonel Rutland, with his military training, was a martinet in his house about discipline, and his children knew perfectly that he would be more severe over an act of disobedience than over any other kind of transgression.

Squib and the nurse both started at the sound of the Colonel's voice, and nurse dropped the hand she was holding and made a respectful courtesy to her master. Squib stood perfectly silent, after his fashion, for a full minute, and then burst into rapid speech, —

"I wasn't resisting her, father. She told me I was telling lies – and I'm not. You did sing it. I heard you; and it isn't wicked – and she didn't ought to say it was. I don't tell lies. I never did. It isn't lies – it's only about them!"

The Colonel held up his hand to command silence.

"What does all this mean?" he asked, turning to nurse.

"If you please, sir, I heard Master Syd singing something that didn't sound right for a young gentleman, and when I told him I wouldn't have wicked words sung, he turned and said that he'd heard you sing them, which I was quite sure was not true, and I told him so. And then he went off into one of his tantrums – which I hoped he was learning to get better of – and that's all I know about it. But I am quite sure he is not speaking the truth."

"Leave him to me and I will get at the rights of the matter," said the Colonel; and nurse, who had an ailing baby indoors (Squib's little brother who shortly afterwards died), was glad to go in to see after him, leaving Squib and his father to settle things together about the song.

"Now, Squib," said Colonel Rutland, with grave severity of manner, "let me hear the whole truth of this from you. What is it you were singing? Don't be afraid to speak the truth."

"I'm not afraid a bit!" cried Squib, after his habitual pause. "I'll sing it to you now. *You'll* know it – it's your own song," and taking a deep breath and swelling himself out in unconscious imitation of a singer about to commence his song, the child broke out with the following words, sung in a deep voice as like that of a man as he could achieve —

> "Fi-ive del dies —
> The father of lies!"

And then suddenly breaking off he looked up at his father and

cried, —

"You know you did sing it yourself, father – so it can't be wicked!"

The Colonel was puzzled. There was something in the rhythm of the notes that was familiar to him; but what could the child mean? How had he got hold of those absurd words, and what was in his head?

"When did you hear me sing it, Squib?" he asked, still not permitting his face to relax.

"Why, father – you know – when all those people came, and you read such a lot of funny things in turn in the drawing-room and sang songs. There was another song about 'Ban, ban, Ca-Caliban' – you *must* remember; but it was you who sang about the father of lies, and it can't be wicked if you did it, though nurse does say so!"

Colonel Rutland broke into a sudden laugh. The whole thing flashed across him now. From time to time in that neighbourhood there were gatherings generally known by the name of "Shakespeare readings" – friends meeting together at one another's houses to read a play of the great dramatist's, the parts being allotted by previous arrangement. Not very long since "The Tempest" had been read in this way at Rutland Chase, and the children had been allowed to come into the room for part of it. It was just the kind of thing to fascinate Squib, and perhaps he had succeeded in hiding away and being up longer than was known. At any rate, he had evidently heard his father sing the

well-known song —

> "Full fathom five,
> Thy father lies;"

and, with the capricious alchemy of a child's mind over anything not understood, had transformed it to the version which had aroused the ire of his nurse.

Something in this little incident tickled the fancy of the Colonel and attracted his attention towards Squib, who had always amused him when he had had time to notice his children; and the bond was more closely drawn between them by two little incidents which occurred, one after the other, during the ensuing year.

The first of these had reference to a very fine Russian wolf-hound, which had been presented to Colonel Rutland a short time before. It was an animal almost as big as a calf, of a slate colour merging almost in black, with a head very broad across the brows, and a voice like a church bell. He was a very magnificent animal, but he had a fierce temper, and made few friends. Colonel Rutland was one of these few, but even he did not feel that he had the dog very well under control, and always took him out with a certain sense of misgiving.

One of the chief difficulties with regard to the creature was that he was so fierce when chained up that it was hardly safe to approach him, either to give him his food or to let him loose

when the time for his daily run had arrived. Colonel Rutland was having a place made for him where he could be shut up without being chained, which he hoped would tend to the humanizing and taming of him; but, meantime, he had to be fastened up in the yard when not at large, and Colonel Rutland made a point of both chaining and loosing him himself – although it was not without misgiving that he approached the great brute straining on his chain, and glaring out at the world with red, defiant eyes.

One day, as he was approaching the kennel, liking the looks of the dog rather less even than usual, he stood meditating at a short distance as to whether it were really safe to keep such a fierce animal on the premises, and whether he might not be running a foolish risk in going near him. He was startled by the sound of a small voice proceeding from an invisible questioner quite near at hand.

"Father," said the little voice, "shall I let Czar out for you?"

Colonel Rutland looked up, and looked down, and looked round about him, and again came the sound of the small voice, saying, —

"I'm in Czar's kennel, father."

The Colonel had certainly never thought of looking in such a place for the speaker. Now, turning his startled glance in that direction, he saw Squib sitting curled up on the clean straw in the huge kennel, looking out from his nest with a friendly smile.

For a moment the fathers heart stood still. Suppose the great brute should turn and see him! It was with difficulty he

commanded his voice to say quietly, whilst himself striving to attract the notice of the dog, "Come out, Squib; come very quietly."

But the child never heard the last words; he jumped up at once and made an outward bound, flinging himself upon the dog as he did so, and throwing his arms about his neck.

"Oh, father, if you would only let me have Czar to go out with me sometimes! We should have such fun together!"

At the touch of those small childish hands the aspect of the dog changed at once. The lifted crest along his back smoothed down, the red light in his eyes changed altogether, the fierce bay ceased, for the creature was engaged in licking the child's hands and face, and in fondling him with evident delight. The father looked on in amaze, and when Squib repeated his question, "Shall I let him out now?" he gave his assent rather by sign than by word, so great was his surprise at what he saw.

"Oh, father, *may* I go with you?" pleaded Squib, with great, wistful eyes. "I've never been out with Czar yet – and I should so like to!"

His father held out a ready hand.

"Come along, my little man. We will go together. How came you and Czar to be such friends? I did not know he had made real friends with anybody yet."

Squib did not immediately answer; he was watching the gambols of the great dog careering round and round them in wide circles – a thing he had never done before when out with

Colonel Rutland, always making a rush ahead, and only coming reluctantly to his side when called with authority. Whenever Squib held out his hand, Czar made a dash at him and licked it; and once the child jumped upon the great creature's back, and Czar took him for a breathless scamper across the park – Squib holding on like a little monkey; and only when he had come back and was holding his father's hand again did he "go off," and enter into explanations of this strange friendship.

"You see, father, it was like this – Czar had nobody to love him. They were all afraid of him. I saw coachman give him his supper one day – he had the stable broom, and he pushed the pan to Czar with it, and never even gave him a pat, or said a kind word to him. And it *did* seem so hard! So when he was gone I just went up and patted him as he was eating his great bones, and then I sat just inside his kennel and talked to him all the time, and made it sociable for him; and he brought me the biggest bone of all, and I pretended I liked it very much, and then I gave it him back and he lay down and ate it, and I stroked him and talked to him all the time. He is such an interesting dog to talk to when you know him. And after that I went every day, and – when I can – I give him his food, and we always have a great deal of conversation, and it isn't nearly so dull for him as it was at first. But I've never been able to go out with him, because coachman says I mustn't loose him. But we've always longed to take walks together, and if you say we may, it *will* be so nice."

Colonel Rutland listened to all this with something of a

shiver. He had not lived all this while without having known many instances of the wonderful understanding between children and animals, or of the forbearance shown often by the fiercest creatures to confiding little children; but, nevertheless, he could not picture the first approach of his small son to that great fierce dog in the midst of his bones without a tremor of thankful relief. Now it was abundantly evident that an excellent understanding existed between them, for Czar would come at the least sound of Squib's voice, and, when bidden to do so, would walk just behind him with docile submissiveness. The conquest made by the little boy, quite unconscious of conquest, was complete, and never had the Colonel felt so secure of training the dog and humanizing him as he did that day.

"If I let you take Czar out into the park every day for an hour, Squib," he said presently, "do you think you can teach him to be more gentle and obedient?"

"Oh, father, I think I can," answered the child with brightening eyes. "I'll explain everything to him so carefully – about being obedient and all that. I think he wants to be good – only he's got nobody to teach him and be good to him. But I should like to teach him. I'm sure he has a very good heart, and he understands what I say, I'm quite sure."

So the experiment was tried, and with signal success. The fierce dog became gradually tamed and dependable, and a fresh link was formed between Squib and his father.

Later on in the same year another incident occurred which

increased the Colonel's interest in "the odd one" of the family.

Like most country gentlemen of some leisure, Colonel Rutland was fond of hunting, although he could not give the time to it that some of his friends were able to do. Still, he had always one, and sometimes two hunters in his stable, and at this time, when Squib was just six years old, his favourite was a horse of the name of Charger, upon whom he had hunted three seasons in succession.

Charger had something of a history of his own with which Squib was not unconnected. Three years before, when the horse was five, and Squib three, the former had been brought up for Colonel Rutland's inspection, as the owner desired to sell him. He was then only just broken, for he had done no work as yet, the farmer who owned him having wished to let him run as long as possible, and then to sell him to some of the gentry as a hunter and weight-carrier. He was a very beautiful creature, with a grand shoulder and very strong hind-quarters, legs as sound and fine as the huntsman himself could wish to see, and a well-turned head and gentle eye. The Colonel and his wife and some of the children all assembled at the front-door to examine and look at the horse, who stood pawing the gravel, seeming as if he knew perfectly the commotion his beauty and strength were exciting. There were several guests in the house who knew something about horses, and a great deal of conversation was going on after the animal had been walked, and trotted fast, his hoofs examined, and his eyes well peered into. He was growing rather restive now with

all the waiting and testing, but was standing pretty quietly, held by the farmer, when suddenly little Squib, who was always very fond of animals, and seemed not to know the meaning of fear, ran forward from the group about his mother, and clasped his arms tightly round the hind leg of the young horse, laying his cheek against it with that caressing movement so common in little children.

A sudden hush fell upon the whole group – every man among them afraid to move or speak lest the horse should be frightened and kick out, as it seemed impossible that he should not do at that strange touch upon his leg. But the creature turned his head round, looked at the little, white clinging figure, and stood perfectly quiet under the unwonted caress. The next moment the Colonel had caught up his daring little son, and one of the gentlemen standing by said to the farmer with a short laugh, —

"I think you may take the horse round to the stables now; he has won himself a home here, or I am much mistaken."

So Charger stayed, and never a horse was better worth his money, as the Colonel often said. He was so gentle that Lady Mary herself sometimes rode to hounds upon him by her husband's side, and so strong and clever and enduring that the Colonel could have sold him for almost any money in his own county if he had wished to part with him.

As for Squib, although he did not long remember the exploit of which he had been guilty that day, the story was often told in his hearing, and it seemed to make a bond between him and Charger

which was closer than between him and any other horse, although the child was fond of them all. He was fonder of Charger than of his own little Shetland pony, although Shag was a great friend and favourite. But Charger was so sensible, so kind, so friendly, and so big! There is always an attraction to a boy of native courage in the sensation of being mounted on a big horse. Often and often, when the great hunter was saddled and about to be brought round to the door, Squib would plead to be allowed to ride round upon him, and though on these occasions coachman himself would take the bridle and not permit any one else to superintend the child's feat, it was accomplished again and again without any danger; for Squib had ridden his own pony bare-backed from the time he could get his small legs across the broad back, and was a veritable monkey for sticking on the back of anything with four legs.

But during this particular autumn, when Squib passed his sixth birthday, and Charger was "rising nine" as coachman called it, one of those sad mischances befell him which are unfortunately only too common with good hunters. He was carrying his master in his own gallant fashion over some very slippery, sticky ground, when, in alighting after a fine leap, he came down upon a treacherous bit of ground where the foothold was very bad. With an effort which seemed to imply that he was thinking first of his rider's safety and second of his own, he avoided the fall which seemed for a moment inevitable, but he slipped badly and only recovered himself after a violent struggle. Colonel Rutland

sprang safely to the ground and helped the gallant animal to get a better footing; but all this was not accomplished before Charger's shoulder was badly strained, and he had to be laid up in a loose box and carefully doctored for many months before any one could think of riding him again.

Squib was constant in his attentions to the disabled favourite all that time, and he and Charger and Czar spent many a happy morning in the paddock together, where Charger was turned out for an hour or two on warm days "to exercise hisself" as the groom called it. Squib also made great friends with the veterinary surgeon who attended Charger, and who would tell him stories of animals by the hour together; and it was from him that Squib first heard the bad news about the poor hunter.

"He won't never be good for hunting again, nor for that matter for riding either. That shoulder will always be weak. He might drop on it any time sudden like, and nobody cares to ride a horse like that. The only thing now is to break him for harness if it can be done; but he's old to take to collar-work – more likely it'll just break his heart instead, poor fellow!"

The tears rose in Squib's eyes as he heard these words.

"They shan't break Charger's heart!" he cried indignantly. "I'm sure my father will never allow it."

"Well, sir, I hope not, for I don't think that horse'll ever break, for all he's so gentle and quiet. He's got a spirit of his own, he has; and when a creature has never had a collar over his head up to nine year old, why, they don't take kind to it, they don't!"

Soon it became known that poor Charger's hunting days were over, and it was quite a trouble to all the household to think that the master could never ride him safely again. Then came the question of breaking him for harness, but the few attempts that were made did not encourage the authorities to persevere.

"He throws hisself about so, sir," coachman would explain to Squib. "He's not used to it, and don't know what it means. He comes from a race of hunters, and don't have them family feelin's as some young hacks do, as takes the collar like mother's milk as you may say. He'll only wrench his shoulder again, and go lame all his life; and that would be a sad pity, seeing as how well he is now."

And then it was that a sudden inspiration seized upon Squib. He went straight from coachman's presence to his father's study, and stood silently beside him as he wrote busily before his table. But when the Colonel presently looked up, as if to intimate that he was ready to hear what his small son had to say, Squib "went off" with unwonted vehemence.

"Father, you know about Charger. Coachman says he won't break, and Mr. Young said he would only break his heart. I don't want his heart to break. He's the nicest horse that ever lived, and I can't bear it. Father, didn't I hear you say that Shag was getting too old to do anything but mow the lawns, and that you must look out for a new pony for me by the time I was seven?"

"Yes, Squib, I think I did. Would you like a little Exmoor? They are very sure-footed and generally fast."

"I don't want an Exmoor, father. I don't want a pony at all. I want Charger instead."

"Charger!"

"Yes, father. Charger could carry me. Coachman says it's no more for him than a fly on his back. He'd be just as if he had nobody, and I've ridden him lots in the paddock. He likes it, and I like it; and he'd be nice, and safer for me than any pony, because he knows the country; you say so yourself, and he's so good, even mother wouldn't be frightened to let me go out on him. Father, I'm rising seven – that's what coachman calls it. I'm rising seven, and I never fall off anything. Let me have Charger instead of a new pony. I shall like it so much better, and so will he!"

Something in the notion tickled Colonel Rutland's fancy, and a little conversation with coachman convinced him that there would be no risk of damage either to the child or to the horse in such an arrangement. The strong trustworthy hunter would carry the light weight of the small boy without the least fear of renewing the strain; and as Squib said, he had a remarkable knack of sticking on, whilst he had "hands as any horse would be proud to answer to," as the old coachman put it. And so his request was granted. The faithful old hunter was neither shot nor broken to uncongenial toil, but was gently and regularly exercised by the little fellow on the turf of the park, or permitted to trot steadily along the roads with his light burden, by the side of the Colonel on his own horse.

Squib was delighted, and his father amused, by the

arrangement and the comments it provoked. The trusty horse justified all the confidence placed in him, and a stronger bond of friendship was thus established between the child and his four-footed friend, as well as between him and his rather stern and commanding father.

CHAPTER II.
GOING AWAY

And now, having introduced my little hero to you, I will lose no more time, but commence the story I have to tell of one particular year of his life.

Squib was by this time "rising nine," as he generally liked to call it. His next and ninth birthday would be in August, and this was May, and at Michaelmas he was to go to school, to his own mingled pride and regret. He enjoyed the thought of being a schoolboy, of gaining the independence and importance that always seemed to attach to his elder brothers from the fact that they only spent the holiday months at home, and were so much away at school; but he did not like to think of having to leave Czar and Charger and all his numerous and peculiar pets. He was not sure that any other person would understand how to manage them or to make them happy, and it weighed on him sometimes to think that they would miss him when he was gone. Still the thing would have to be done whether he liked it or not, and Squib was resolving to take matters philosophically, and look at things on the bright side as far as possible.

A little excitement had lately come into his life from the advent of a new uncle from India, whom Squib did not remember ever to have seen before. Uncle Ronald was their father's

youngest brother, and he had had a bad attack of jungle fever, and was to spend two years in Europe. He came straight to Rutland Chase, and Squib gave up much of his time to the entertainment of this new uncle, who spent a good part of every day in a long bamboo chair in the big hall, and seemed amused by the chatter of his small nephew. Squib felt it the more incumbent upon him to look after his uncle because his father was very busy, and his mother had been ailing all the spring-time, so that there was often nobody else to act as companion to this other invalid – who did not, however, seem to be suffering from anything worse than a little lassitude and languor. Still the doctor came regularly to see both him and Lady Mary Rutland, and one day as the little boy was perched up in the window seat of the big hall, getting up a lesson for Mademoiselle and keeping an eye upon Uncle Ronald at the same time, something very interesting happened.

It was a beautiful warm day early in May, and father had been driving mother out in the pony-carriage for the first time. As Squib was sitting there, the carriage returned, and when Colonel Rutland led his wife into the house the pair seemed to be discussing something very earnestly together. Catching sight of his brother in his favourite chair, the Colonel exclaimed, —

"I say, Ronald, what do you think of a three months' run to Switzerland. We've just met Dr. Dawes in the village, and he says that's what both you and Mary want, to set you up again. I've not had a holiday myself since I don't know when. I'm half-bitten by the notion, and Mary is quite on fire to be off!"

"Oh, Bruce! I did not say that. I confess it has attractions for me; but there is so much to think of. There are the children – "

"Oh, the children will be all right! Mademoiselle will keep guard over the girls, and as for the twins, why, they are as safe with nurse as with us, and the boys are safe at school till the end of July, when we shall be back. There's only Squib, who might get into mischief if left altogether to petticoat government, but I've half a mind to take the child with us. His observations of foreign life would amuse us, and can't he speak German as well as French? I'm sure that Swiss nursemaid of his taught him some barbarous patois of her own."

"Ah yes – Lisa; I'm afraid she did teach him some very outlandish German-Swiss patois, if he hasn't forgotten it by this time. I wonder if he would like to go with us. I should enjoy having one child with me, as you and Ronald are sure to go off mountaineering when he is stronger. Only it would be a great interruption to his lessons."

"Oh, bother the lessons!" cried Uncle Ronald. "Squib knows as much as he needs to make a good start at school – more than I did when I went, I know. He's a sharp little chap, and will soon pick up any lost time. Let's take him along by all means. I shall want an interpreter; I expect Asiatic languages are more in my line than European. Squib shall come as my interpreter. He speaks French first-rate, I know, and he'll do all the talking for me. Hallo! there he is! Come here, Squib, and tell us how you'd like to go to Switzerland."

Squib came forward with eyes shining with excitement. Ever since he could remember anything it had been his dream to go to Switzerland, and he could hardly believe his ears now that he heard the thing spoken of as an immediate prospect. Switzerland was as a dream to him – a dream of wonder and enchantment. From his earliest infancy he had heard entrancing stories of great, lonely snow-peaks, whispering pine woods, little chalets perched high up in green alps, brawling torrents, great, awful glaciers with dark mysterious crevasses, and spirits of the mountains who revealed themselves only to those upon whom the spell of the mountains had fallen. Crowds of images rose up in the child's mind as he slowly came forward, and the stress of his imaginative flights was so great that it held him mute for a longer time than usual; but when he did give expression to his opinion, it was with such enthusiasm and emphasis that his father and uncle both laughed aloud, and it became a settled thing from that time forward that Squib was to accompany the party to Switzerland, whenever the start should be made.

Squib, who was told that he might consider himself free of lessons from this very day until he went to school in September, closed the book he was still holding as though in a dream, and wandered out into the sunny garden with a heart swelling with wonder and delight.

Switzerland! He was really going to Switzerland! He should see with his own eyes the dazzling snow peaks, hear the roar of the avalanches breaking the eternal silence of those lonely

valleys. He would see (as he thought at least) the chamois springing from peak to peak, and hear the yodeling of the peasants as they took their cattle up into the green pastures. He would see it all – hear it all – all those things of which Lisa had told him, of which he had dreamed until he seemed to be able to see them at will when he shut his eyes. Perhaps he would even see Lisa again herself; for had she not returned to Switzerland? And Switzerland was such a little country on the map!

Lisa had been Squib's own peculiar attendant, and he had given to her a very large slice of his childish affections. As has been said in the preceding chapter, Squib had had a little baby brother when he was not much more than a baby himself, and this little brother had been so ailing that nurse had had to give up almost all her time to him, and so Lisa – a young Swiss maid who was leaving a friend's nursery just at that juncture – was engaged to take entire charge of the elder little boy.

Having once come in that capacity, she stayed on for many years – until, in fact, Squib had no longer any need of a nurse; the delicate little brother who died, and the little twin sisters who were still in the nursery, had always occupied all nurse's attention, and Lisa had been retained year after year to attend to Master Squib, and to help with her needle in the care of the little girls' clothes. Lisa had loved Squib from the first with a singular devotion, which he repaid by a warm affection. He had learned to speak her curious patois as naturally as he had learned the English of his parents and sisters, and it seemed as if the power

of using her native tongue again unsealed the silent Lisa's lips, for to Squib she would talk by the hour together of her country, her home, her people, and all the glories and the wonders of that land of mountains and wood and water whence she had come. She had much of the imaginative temperament which is so often found amongst a mountain race, and to her nursling she talked with the utmost freedom and unreserve. Not only did she speak of the things she had heard and seen, but she also told him long stories of fairies and water-spirits, genii of the mountain, and the little brown men who dwelt in the caves and rocks, till the child's head was as full of enthusiasm as her own for her native land, as crowded with fanciful imaginings as if he had been a son of the soil himself.

Lisa had now been gone for nearly a year, and some of these imaginings had been growing a little faint and hazy; but they were all there, lying dormant, and ready to wake into active life on the smallest provocation, and as Squib wandered down the garden and into the yard, and found Czar all ready to share his ramble and his talk, he poured a whole volley of excited information into the dog's ears, lapsing almost unconsciously into Lisa's German patois as he did so, which, however, seemed to make no difference to Czar's power of comprehension.

The next days seemed to go by like magic. Squib found himself raised to a position of some importance in the nursery, on the strength of his approaching departure. The tailor from the next town called to measure him for two new suits of clothes; his

sisters made much of him because they were so soon to lose him; and all the servants talked to him about his journey, and called him a lucky little boy to be taken.

It was rather hard to think of leaving Charger, who was such a very great friend and companion; but coachman said that it would do Charger a "world of good" to get a run out for two months, now that he was growing elderly, and that pleased Squib a good deal, for he did not want his favourite to miss him too much.

"Maybe it'll be a good thing though, sir," said coachman, "since you are going to school by-and-by. It will break him in to having you gone for a spell, and he'll kind of know that you'll be coming back before so very long. I'll see he is well looked after, and he'll be in first-rate fettle for you by the time you get back."

The other trouble, about leaving Czar, was got over in a very unexpected and most satisfactory way; for Squib was told one day that Czar was to be taken with them to Switzerland.

"The master said so himself," the groom told Squib, when he came down to loose him for his morning's run. Czar was by this time a dog of mature years, and he had tamed down wonderfully. Indeed, he was often left loose during the day, and was allowed to lie on the terrace or patrol the gardens. But he lived in his house at night, and several of the men still stood in some awe of him: yet he was thoroughly under control now, and a very valuable watch-dog and guard. He was still devoted to Squib, and would obey him at a word or a look; but by this time he was attached to all the family; and whenever the master of the house was away,

he slept indoors at the foot of the great staircase; and Lady Mary always said that she never felt nervous when she knew that Czar was on guard.

"You see, sir," the groom added in explanation, "them furrain parts is none too safe, what with all these bombs and one thing and another; and the master says as hell feel more happy like to have the dog with him. If so be as he were to go off hunting wolves or boars, or whatever they may have over yonder, or leastways climbing mountains, where her ladyship couldn't go, he'd like to leave the dog behind to look after the house; and so it's all fixed now that Czar is to go."

This was great news for Squib, who quickly found his way indoors to make sure of it. Uncle Ronald was in the hall looking at his guns, and he gave Squib a friendly smile.

"Oh yes, that's all right enough," he answered in response to the eager inquiry. "You see we've heard of a chalet that will just suit your mother, right up in one of those *thals* as they call them, out of the way of regular tourists, where the air is almost enough to keep you going without the superfluities of meat and drink. It's furnished comfortably, too, which is a consideration; and there's an old servant you once had who will come and act maid to your mother, and help her with the foreign ways of housekeeping – "

"What! Lisa?" asked Squib breathlessly.

"I think that was the name – anyway she was the girl who was your nurse so many years. She's going to come to be with you, and Mr. and Mrs. Lorimer are going to come out with us and

share the chalet. You know who the Lorimers are, I suppose?"

"Yes – they come every year to stay here. They are very nice. Mrs. Lorimer is mother's very great friend, I think. We all like her very much."

"That's all right. I've heard as much myself. Well, Mr. Lorimer is a great Alpine Club man, and no end of a mountaineer, and knows all the passes and the peaks and the guides, and the ways of things; and we shall go off from time to time with him and do some climbing, and then your mother and Mrs. Lorimer will be left at the chalet with you for their protector, and we thought that a dog like Czar would be a good addition to the party; so it's settled that he's to go. That's just about how it is, you see."

"I see," answered Squib, looking very thoughtful and contemplative, and after a long pause he asked tentatively, "I suppose we couldn't take Charger with us too?"

"I'm afraid not, old chap. Charger would be rather a large order; and I don't think we'd get him up to the chalet without a steam crane or some trifle of that sort. Swiss Alps aren't just cut out for English horses. I'm afraid Charger must stay at home."

However, to have Czar was much, and Squib was very well content. Czar, he had felt sure, would miss him more than Charger, for he was more with him; and Charger had friends amongst all the stable hands, whilst Czar was regarded with more fear than love in many quarters. It also pleased Squib greatly to be told that on the journey Czar was to be his special care. The party would travel leisurely and easily on account of Lady Mary, and

there would be a good many stoppages at various places before they reached their destination. As they would have a carriage to themselves almost invariably, it was probable the dog would be able to share it with them; but at the stations and all such places Squib was instructed to look after the creature, and have him upon his mind, as there would be other things for the gentlemen of the party to think of. Squib felt a great pride and satisfaction in this charge, and confided all the arrangements to Czar, who heard them with great gravity.

Time flew by so quickly that Squib was almost surprised to awake one morning and find that it was really the day of departure. The start was to be made in the morning. They were to go to London first, and lunch there, and then take the train to Folkestone, where they would sleep and be ready for the boat the next day.

Squib had never been to London even, and his sisters, who had once spent a week there, thought it a pity he would not be able to see the Zoological Gardens, and the Tower, and Madame Tussaud's. But Squib had no room for regret on this score, he was in such a fever to see Switzerland and Lisa again, and the mountains and glaciers and all the wonders of his dreams. He felt very grand, dressed in his new travelling suit of tan-coloured homespun – jacket, knickerbockers, cap, and waistcoat all to match – and strong new stockings of the same shade, with new boots strong enough for mountain scrambling. His sisters had joined together in the purchase of a whistle on a chain, which

they thought would be very useful for calling Czar, if he should wander away in a new place; and Squib wore it for the first time this morning, and felt wonderfully grown up in doing so, for the steel chain looked like a watch chain, and he almost felt as if he were wearing a watch all the time.

The good-byes were rather hard to make, for the little girls all cried, and Squib's own eyes got very moist, and there was a great lump in his throat which half-choked him, whilst everything looked misty and blurred as he went about from one to another, promising to bring all sorts of treasures back with him, and leaving last messages with almost everybody. It made it all the harder because mother was almost crying too as she kissed her little daughters, and left all sorts of last charges with kind Mademoiselle; but Uncle Ronald went about laughing and making jokes, telling his little nieces that they ought to be sent off to India for an indefinite number of years to know what saying good-bye was like; and as for getting up the waterworks because mother was going for a few weeks to Switzerland, why, they were just little geese – he couldn't call them any better name than that!

Uncle Ronald always made people laugh, and so the good-byes were got over at last between smiles and tears, and then the party found themselves skimming along the road to the station, with Czar running silently along behind, more excited than usual, because he knew quite well that something unwonted was afoot, although perhaps he had not realized quite as clearly as Squib believed that he was on his way to Switzerland.

Squib's first sight of the sea was at Folkestone, and very wonderful he thought it. There was just enough breeze blowing to make the waves turn over in great green breakers, and come crashing down on the shingle with that strange sound which is like nothing else in the world. Colonel Rutland indulged his little son with a ramble along the beach after tea, and Squib enjoyed it greatly, especially sending Czar into the water after his father's stick, and his indignant barking at the crested wave, which would not stop for all his barking, nor give back for a second when he flew savagely at it. Other people besides Squib were entertained by the conduct of the great handsome dog, and Squib was very well satisfied with his first day's travel.

But the next one was far more exciting.

They were actually to cross the water in the steamboat which was lying moored alongside the great stone pier. Uncle Ronald took Squib down to look at it some short time before they were allowed on board, and Squib thought it a very wonderful vessel indeed, although Uncle Ronald laughed and called it a "poor little tub," which seemed a very disrespectful way of speaking about it, Squib thought.

When he was once safely on board, he made friends with the sailors, and asked them a number of questions, and then went and looked down at the great throbbing engines, and talked to a smutty man who seemed to know a great deal about them, and who explained a great deal to him very good-naturedly – only, unfortunately, Squib did not understand much better at the end

than he had done at the beginning. However, the man admired Czar very much, and said it wasn't often they saw such a fine dog as that in foreign parts, he was sure; and that pleased Squib very much. So he told his new friends all about his home and his sisters and Charger, and how he was going to Switzerland for two months to take care of his mother when his father went up mountains; and altogether the time passed so quickly and pleasantly that he was quite surprised when the train came puffing up, and everybody got busy, and he was taken away by his uncle to watch the new people coming on board.

Mr. and Mrs. Lorimer were amongst these, and Squib soon picked them out. He did not, however, quit his post of vantage till he had seen all the luggage swung on board by the great crane, which he thought very interesting; and then he went to the very back of the boat where he had seen a nice coil of rope lying, and scrambling up on this he found that he was able to make a fine perch for himself, where he could see the water and have a fine view of the boat, and watch the shore as it seemed to slip away astern.

There was rather a stiff breeze blowing when they got into mid-channel, and the vessel rocked and rolled as the big green waves lifted her up and let her down. Squib thought it better than any rocking-chair or rocking-horse he had ever been on, but he noticed that some of the people began to look very queer. A sort of green hue overspread their faces, and then they generally retired from the scene, and he wondered where they all went.

Poor Czar, too, grew rather restless and unhappy, and got up from beside Squib, and took a turn or two and then came and lay down again, and looked up pitifully at his little master, as if asking for sympathy. He did not seem able to get comfortable, and Squib wondered what was the matter.

"Oh, Lor' bless you, little master, he's only a bit sea-sick, just the same as Christian folks!" said the kindly sailor whose acquaintance Squib had made previously, and who chanced to pass along at that time. "Like enough he'll just be a bit sick, like the other folks, and then be right again. It's a queer thing when you come to think of it, sea-sickness. But Lor' bless you, nine-tenths of the folks as comes aboard in bad weather can't stand up against it. You don't seem no worse yourself though, little master."

"Oh no; I like it. I didn't know what made them all look so queer. I heard mother saying she was afraid it would be rough crossing, and that she would be ill. I hope she isn't."

Poor Czar, however, did not escape, and was very unhappy for a time, and then quite ill; but the passage was quickly made, and once on firm ground again he thought no more of his troubles.

It amused Squib very much suddenly to hear everybody talking French, and to see the men in their blue blouses, and the fisherwomen in their white caps.

"I wish they wore pretty things like that in England," he thought as he looked curiously about him, "and what a noise they do make; and how they jabber, and laugh, and move their

hands about – just like Mademoiselle when she wants to make us understand. Oh, Uncle Ronald, are we going off already? It is such fun watching the people! I think France is a very pretty, funny country. Are we going to the Douane now? Mademoiselle told me all about that. And shall I have to 'declare' Czar? Is he contraband?"

"I don't think so, but you can ask if you like," answered Uncle Ronald, laughing. "Come along this way if you want to see the business. Your father is going to the train with the ladies, and Mr. Lorimer will see to the luggage."

"I should like to go too," said Squib, keenly interested in the proceedings; and accordingly his uncle led him into a great bare room where luggage was being brought in on the shoulders of blue-bloused men, and where officials were gravely asking questions over the counter on which it was placed, and marking off with white chalk the piles of luggage passed. Squib was greatly amused, especially when one man was detected smuggling tobacco under a lot of books. They could not stay to the end of the altercation, but the gestures of the French official amused the child exceedingly, as well as the laborious efforts of the Englishman to follow, and hold his own in conversation.

Then there was a rush for the train, a confabulation with the authorities about Czar, who was finally permitted to go in the carriage with the party, Uncle Ronald feeling sure that the balance in his favour was turned by Squib's pretty childish pleading in French, and his confidence that everybody must see

the many perfections of his four-footed friend. Perhaps the guard did not particularly desire the companionship of the great hound; perhaps Colonel Rutland's air of *milord Anglais* had due effect. Anyway, Czar travelled peacefully to Paris with his owners, and was accorded a like privilege almost the whole way through.

Paris was very gay as the travellers drove through the streets to the hotel in the Rue Rivoli, where Colonel Rutland always stayed. Lady Mary was by this time very tired, and went at once to her room; but Squib was immensely excited by everything, and very anxious to see at least one or two of those sights of Paris over the description of which Mademoiselle had so often grown excited; so Uncle Ronald good-naturedly volunteered to pilot him, provided he would do the talking, to which Squib readily agreed.

First they had some lunch in the Champs Elysées under the trees, which seemed to Squib such a superior arrangement, that he wondered why people ever went indoors to eat. Then they visited the Louvre and spent an hour there, after which a fiacre was chartered to take them to Notre Dame and one or two other places of interest, which Squib felt much elevated by having seen. But the real excitement of the day was when, in returning, Uncle Ronald took him into a shop such as only Paris seems able to produce, and after a great deal of laughing and chaffering with a bright-faced French saleswoman, who was equally amused at Uncle Ronald's bad and Squib's good French, a small silver hunting-watch was purchased, together with a silver chain, and

presented to the astonished Squib by his young uncle.

"Something to remember your first visit to Paris by, old chap," he said, as he led him back to the hotel, "and to tell you the time when you get out amongst the mountains, and have nobody to remind you of it, and no big gong carrying a mile to ring you in."

As for Squib, he hardly knew what to make of his good fortune, and his thanks were so long in coming that it seemed as if Uncle Ronald would have to go without them altogether; but, when they did come, it was with a "chiff and a rush," as he described it afterwards, which was in itself enough to justify the sobriquet by which his small nephew went. Early upon the following morning, the party started for their long journey across France to Switzerland.

CHAPTER III.
THE CHALET IN THE HILLS

"I don't call France pretty at all, though Mademoiselle does call it 'La belle France,'" said Squib from his station at the carriage window, after some hours of silent study. "It's all flat like a map, and the trees look as if somebody had gone round with an axe and taken all their heads off when they were little, and the rivers look like canals. I like the people and the animals. It's nice of the cows to help in the fields and to draw the wagons; and the dogs help too, which is very kind of them; and I like the funny clothes the people wear. I should like a blue blouse myself, when I get to Switzerland. But I don't call it pretty at all; not even the vineyards – and I always thought vineyards would be lovely. England is much prettier – but there's something funny and queer about France, and that makes it interesting. I like the way they build their châteaux – with such queer little pepper-box towers, and such a lot of red roof. I should like to live in one of those little turrets myself, and have a lot of animals there to keep me company. But I don't think there's so very much in France that's amusing."

Squib was keenly interested in all he saw, but his longing all the while was for Switzerland, and the chalet in the hills of which he had heard so much, and Lisa, who was to be waiting for them

there, with her stories of mountain-spirits and the water-fairies. He was almost sorry when he found that a few days were to be spent at Interlaken before they reached their final destination; yet as soon as they crossed the frontier the sense of interest and delight awoke within him, and he had no time for regrets or useless longings.

Even the railway travelling was more amusing now – the little queer carriages with a passage all down them, the blowing of horns when each station was reached or left behind, the costumes of the peasants as the travellers got more and more into the heart of the country, and the increasing beauty and wildness of the views from the carriage window.

It was dark when they reached Interlaken, and Squib had been for some time asleep, leaning against his father's shoulder. He did not remember much about the arrival that night, nor how he got into that funny little narrow wooden bed, with its big square pillows and little white eider-down quilt. But after sleeping the sound, dreamless sleep of childhood for a number of hours, Squib suddenly woke up very wide to find the room bright with sunshine, and to realize, after a few moments of utter perplexity, that he was really in Switzerland at last. With a great throb of sudden excitement he got quickly out of bed and pattered across the cold polished floor to the window. A white curtain was drawn across it, but in a moment Squib had pulled this aside, and then he gave one great gasp and stood perfectly still – a little white figure, with a tumbled head of yellow-brown curls, and a pair

of big grey eyes fixed immovably upon something outside that window, as though they would never be detached from the sight.

And what was it that Squib saw? A great white dazzling peak rising up in stately grandeur against the glorious blue of the summer sky. The sunlight bathed it in golden light. In that wonderful brilliant clearness of early morning, space seemed annihilated, and the grand snow-peak seemed to Squib to be strangely near – keeping silent watch and ward over the valley below and all the inhabitants of it. It was flanked and supported, as it were, by a whole range of rocky, snow-crowned mountains, yet seemed to stand alone, lifting its majestic head into the very heavens. Squib stood and gazed with wonder, awe, and rapture, until the scene was graven into his memory for ever. What Lisa had said about the spell of the snow-mountains was all true. He had begun already to feel it himself. He stood before the window lost to all sense of his surroundings, hearing none of the sounds about him, knowing nothing of where he was – eyes and heart and soul alike gone out to that lonely queen of the mountains, standing out in dazzling radiance against the brilliance of the morning sky. How long he thus stood he never knew, and he was only brought back to the things of the present by the sound of a laughing voice behind him.

"Hallo, old chap! – lost in the clouds already? Has the Jungfrau bewitched you altogether? Or are you ready for anything so sublunary as breakfast?"

Squib turned round with a jump to find that Uncle Ronald had

come in from his room next door, and to feel that his own cheeks were wet, just as if he had been crying, and he was quite positive he had not even been thinking of anything so silly!

"Come, hurry up, youngster! You are late already; and we mean to go off to Grindelwald after breakfast, so you must look sharp! Yes, she's a grand lady is the Jungfrau – she gets at all of our hearts in a fashion; but hurry up now and come down to the breakfast-room. Mountain air gives one a fine appetite, as you'll find out before long."

Squib woke out of his dream only to find himself in a country of enchantment. He hurried through his toilet, and descended to find his party (with the exception of his mother, who was keeping to her room to recover from the fatigues of the journey) seated at one end of a very long table, of which they were the only occupants, and was soon seated beside them discussing omelette and cutlet with fried potato chips, queer curly rolls, and golden honey, with all the zest of a growing boy and of a mountain traveller. Meantime he gleaned from the talk of his companions that they were about to drive into the heart of some of those mysterious regions of which he had hitherto dreamed, without daring to hope to see them. The glacier at Grindelwald, the wonderful fall of the Staubbach, the Wengern Alp, Lauterbrunnen and Mürren! He heard the names in a vague and dreamlike fashion, but hardly knew what was settled, and did not trouble to ask. What did it matter where they went in such a region of wonders? Wherever they went, that great towering

peak must be near at hand, and if he had that to look at he felt he need ask no more.

Three or four wonderful days were passed by Squib in this fairy region. Each day the same carriage came to the door, with the same two strong, small, but willing and active little horses. He was set on the box beside the broad-faced driver, with whom he soon established terms of mutual intimacy, and after a little while he found himself able to exchange ideas with him with perfect freedom. He talked very much the same odd guttural language that Lisa had spoken when she was excited and in earnest, and in a very short time all Squib's old fluency came back to him. He was interpreter to the whole party, and not a little proud of his position in that respect; but what he enjoyed even more was getting Johann to tell him all about the mountains, the people who lived amongst them, what they did in the long, dark winter months, when the snow came down and shut them in week after week and month after month; how the men in summer went out as guides and porters, and took travellers across the passes and up the great white peaks; and how the women stayed at home and tilled the land, and made provision against the winter season, driving their flocks of goats out into the green hills, and making quantities of cheese, some to sell and some to lay by to be consumed when the dark, cold season set in.

Johann had once been a guide himself, till a slight accident had hindered him from any more mountaineering, and had obliged him to take to the less exciting life of a driver during the busy

summer season. But Squib learned, to his deep excitement and delight, that his new friend had twice made the ascent of the Jungfrau, and he made him give him every detail of the climb, and listened with breathless interest to the story each time it was related.

Another friend Squib made at this time was an old man who stood at a certain place in the roadway, where was a wonderful echo, and blew an immense long horn whenever visitors passed, so that they could hear the echoes reverberating and resounding backwards and forwards amongst the hills, till it seemed as if there were hundreds of voices all answering each other in weird cries. Squib could have listened to these echoes for ever, and also to the stories the old man had to tell about the caves in the hills, and the wonders of torrent and valley. He twice spent an hour with him whilst others of the party were resting or sketching, and having won the old man's confidence, both by his talk and by the gift of sundry coins, he was allowed to blow the great horn himself once or twice, a thing which filled him with delight, although he did not find himself very successful in bringing out the deeper and more powerful notes as the old man was able to do.

Of his wonder and awe at the sight of the great glacier and its blue caves, or of those feelings which the sight of the dazzling snow-peaks awoke within him, Squib never tried to speak. Those about him were not even sure whether any very deep impression was made by them; but his observations on the manners and

customs of the country would come out at intervals with a sudden rush, as when sitting at dinner on the eve of their departure for the chalet, he suddenly broke out, —

"I shall be sorry to go away for some things," – this in answer to a question from his mother – "though I want to get to the chalet very much. But everything here is very funny and very interesting. I shall be sorry not to have Johann and the horses any more. Will everything be as funny up there as it is here?"

"How is it all funny?" asked Uncle Roland.

"Oh, every way, you know. But I was thinking of the horses just then. I like the horses here, but I think it's very confusing for them to have to go the wrong side of the road always. I can't think how they remember so well. I think perhaps it's because they grow their manes the wrong side too – to help them to remember. Most of them have them manes on the wrong side. I asked Johann about it, but he didn't seem to understand that it was wrong. I'm glad we didn't bring Charger; he wouldn't have liked it at all. But the horses here don't mind it. I think they are very good-tempered. They have such kind faces, and they like to be talked to. They don't wear blinkers, hardly ever, except in the carriages. I think that's rather nice for them. They can see the country as they go along. I wonder if they like seeing the snow-mountains very much! I think it's nice that they can look about them the same as we do."

But after all, the pleasure and excitement of getting to their mountain home was greater than anything else. It took the best

part of a day to reach it, because, although the distance was not very great, there was no direct road, and they had to take a circuitous route, which Squib found very delightful, though some of the party wished it had been a little less tedious.

First, there was a long carriage drive with Johann, behind a great coach-like conveyance and four horses, through winding, ascending roads, with the usual accompaniments of men with great horns, children selling flowers, women at work by the wayside at their lacemaking, and all the sights and sounds of busy little village communities making the most of their short season of heat and brightness.

Later on there was a short journey in one of those strange *funiculaire* railways, which were such a source of interest and curiosity to Squib. The little trains seemed to him to crawl about the mountains like gigantic serpents, moving silently upwards or downwards, quite independent of the level which had been indispensable to the railway travelling with which he had been previously acquainted. And the sensation of mounting up and up in one of these silent, mysterious little vehicles kept him spellbound with wonder and admiration. Uncle Ronald had explained to him many times already the principle upon which they were worked, but nothing seemed to him to lessen the sense of mystery and unreality that attached to this mode of progression, as he felt himself lifted higher and higher into those regions and altitudes which fascinated him so strangely.

When they left the train they found themselves in a region

unlike any that Squib had seen before. They were all amongst pine woods and those green alps which lie beneath the sterner altitudes of the snow ranges, and are full of flowers and sunshine, and the bleat of goats, and the soft sound of wood and water. There was no regular road here to the chalet, but only a mule path. Some mules were waiting in readiness for the party, but only the ladies cared to ride. The baggage was cleverly packed and strapped on the rest of the docile animals, and the march began through these silent stretches of pine wood, and across bright sloping meadows gemmed with flowers, now dipping downwards to cross a plank-bridge through which the shining water could be seen foaming beneath, now rising by many a zigzag upwards and onwards towards the sloping shoulder of the hillside – onward, ever onward, each turn in the path revealing new beauties, till at last the lad who was leading the way rounded a corner in a woodland path, turned back with a broad smile to Squib, who had kept near to him all the while, the faithful Czar always at his heels, and pointing a little downwards and along the hillside, he said, —

"There!"

Squib reached his side with a bound and looked. They were just clear of the wood now, and were able to see plainly before them. They had crossed the ridge of the hills they had been steadily mounting ever since they left the rail, and now were able to look down into the valley on the other side.

What a valley it was! The sides were clothed with little woods,

some of fir trees, some of young forest trees, clad now in the tender tints of early summer; at the bottom ran a leaping torrent of foaming water, spanned by many a little frail plank-bridge giving access to the green slopes opposite. And these green slopes were dotted with those little low chalets which are used for the shelter of the flocks in bad weather, and for the temporary abode of those who tend them there during the brief summer of the mountains. Above these again lay grim stretches of rock, seamed with dark fissures, and above that again the whiteness of the everlasting snow, as the chain of dazzling peaks lifted itself against the dark blue of the sky.

Squib gazed and gazed with a sense of tremulous wonder and delight. It seemed to him as if this quiet valley were the realization of all his ideals ever since he had begun to think about his sojourn in Switzerland. Wood and water, meadows bright with flowers, green alps and snow mountains beyond! What could the child of man desire more? In one place he could even see the green, mysterious depths of a glacier, and as he stood watching and listening spellbound, the silence was broken by the rumbling sound of the fall of an avalanche! Truly there was nothing left for him to wish for!

But the lad was hardly content with this long silence, and touched the arm of the little boy.

"There!" he said in his rude patois; "there is the place – look! That is the house where the gracious lords and ladies are going."

Squib started into keen interest now. He had realized from the

first moment that this valley was the right one, but he had not had time to think of the chalet itself in his joy at the surroundings.

"Where?" he asked eagerly.

The lad pointed again, and Squib then saw about a mile farther on, and standing upon a little eminence of its own, with a belt of whispering pines behind it, a chalet such as a wealthy man may build for himself as a summer residence amongst the mountains, with the wide-peaked roof, great overhanging eaves, light wooden exterior staircase, and all those accessories in the way of balconies and so forth which tend to make residence in such houses so delightful during the brief but hot summer season of mountain regions.

With a cry of delight and rapture, Squib sprang forward. He had walked far already, but was not in the least tired. He saw before him the home of his dreams, where Lisa was awaiting him, and without thinking of pausing for the rest of the party to come up, he rushed helter-skelter along the narrow mule path, with Czar tearing along beside him, bounding on ahead in his excitement (caught from the child), and then rushing back to see that all was well, and giving vent to a series of deep bays that awoke the echoes in the silent valley.

That sound was heard by a pair of listening ears within the walls of the chalet. As Squib ran breathlessly onwards, he was aware that something human in a fluttering dress, and with something white about the head, was coming rapidly out towards him. In a few minutes, with a rapturous cry, the warm-hearted

little fellow had flung himself into the outstretched arms of his ex-nurse.

"Lisa! Lisa! Lisa!"

"Liebchen! mein Liebchen!"

As for Czar, he was as excited as anybody, and he remembered Lisa as well as his little master. His great black muzzle was thrust between the pair, and faithful Lisa, with a sound between laughing and weeping, threw her arms about the great dog's neck and kissed him between the eyes.

"Kaiser – the good Kaiser!" she cried. "And he knew poor Lisa too. Oh, the good dog – the grand Kaiser!"

Lisa always called him Kaiser. Squib had forgotten that till now, and the familiar sound of it made him laugh with pleasure.

"Oh, Lisa, it is so nice to see you again! I have been looking forward to it all the time. Now take me in and show me the house. I don't think the others will be here just yet; the mules come so slowly up the zigzags. Czar and I just came up straight with the boy, I was in such a hurry to get here. I shall have time to see everything before the rest come."

Lisa led the way back, holding Squib's hand fast in hers, and hardly taking her eyes from his face the whole time. As for Squib, he was perfectly happy having his old nurse back again, answering her questions about home, asking her innumerable questions himself about this valley, and all the wonders and delights he knew it contained.

The chalet itself was soon seen over. After the large house

at home, and the big hotels he had been in since, it seemed to the child quite a little place, fascinating and attractive in its very smallness and queer bareness, but soon seen and disposed of. The rooms were all spotlessly clean, and the polished floors shone like mirrors. The balconies to the rooms were the chief attraction to Squib; and he was greatly charmed at finding that not only had his own little room one of these, but also that it was provided with a tiny external staircase, by which he could get in and out at will. He saw by Lisa's face that she knew she had prepared a pleasant surprise for him in this, and his bright smile and hug of acknowledgment were ample reward.

But it was the outer world that really fascinated Squib. The chalet was very nice as the necessary home during his stay amongst the mountains, but it was the mountains themselves that were everything to the imaginative little boy – the mountains and the brawling torrents, and the whispering woods and the flowers. He had seen gentians by the hundred as he ascended by the mule path, and already he was planning how he should make collections of all the Alpine flowers, pressing some in a book he had brought for the purpose, and taking roots of others home to try to make a bit of Alpine garden in his own special border. Squib was a born collector and naturalist, as well as a dreamer of dreams, and had collections innumerable at home. Lisa had always been his faithful ally in days of old, keeping his rubbish carefully so that the head-nurse might not order wholesale destruction, and she took as keen an interest in the

collections as Squib did himself. He knew that she would help him now, and he soon saw that she knew where every flower of the hills was to be found.

Squib was positively radiant with happiness by the time the rest of the party arrived, and was everybody's assistant and messenger as the task of unpacking and settling down was commenced.

There were other servants in the house, but only Lisa knew anything of English, and Squib's fluency in the odd vernacular of the district was very useful. He had made firm friends with everybody on the place before the first evening had passed, and when they sat down at last to the nondescript travellers' meal that was like dinner and tea rolled into one, Colonel Rutland looked across at his wife, who, tired, but smiling, was seated at the head of the table and doing the honours of the simple repast, and said, —

"I think I did well to bring Squib along with us."

"He is very useful, a capital little interpreter," answered Lady Mary with a smile. "I was horrified once at the frightful jargon Lisa was teaching the child to talk, and almost sent her away for it, fearing that it would be the ruin both of his English and of his German, but it has come in wonderfully useful now. They do not understand my German half so well as his patois. And Lisa's English has got very rusty."

It was very exhilarating to Squib to feel himself of use, and there was nothing which he more desired than to win the approval

of his beautiful mother. Lady Mary was not one of those mothers who are always caressing and fondling their children, and yet they loved her with an almost adoring love, and desired her approval above everything in the world. As she bent a soft, smiling glance on Squib when she spoke, he felt his heart give a great bound, and slipping round the table till he reached her side, he put his small hand gently upon hers.

"I shall have to take care of you when father and Uncle Ronald go to climb the mountains with Mr. Lorimer, shan't I, mother? You see I *can* take care of you now, don't you? I can be useful, and there will always be Czar to keep away anybody who would frighten you. But I don't think there will be anybody to do that in our valley. I think the mountains keep watch over it, as Lisa says, and keep the evil spirits out!"

The mother, who understood the child's mind best, smiled and kissed him as she dismissed him to bed, for the time was getting on now, and the long daylight fading. The gentlemen laughed and teased him a little about his "queer fancies," but Squib did not think them queer at all, he was so sure that there was something personal and protective about those white watchers opposite; and when he knelt to say his prayers that night, he knelt where he had them full in view all the time.

"They have been there always," he said to himself, with a sensation akin to awe, "just as they are now, with nothing between them and God. I think He must have made them so grand and white and beautiful because He liked to look at them,

and if He likes to look down at them, why, it must make them good!"

There was something very grand and wonderful in the way those white peaks stood out against the darkening sky in that clear transparent air. A short time ago they had been dyed a wonderful rose pink, as they caught the reflected glory of the setting sun; now they were rather grey than red, with a look of almost awful aloofness and grandeur as they stood up in their spotless whiteness and purity.

And then as the child watched this change with a strange sense of fascination, the great round moon rose slowly above the ridge, and at once new beauty and grandeur were thrown over the whole world. Great towering shadows seemed to be cast athwart the valley, and then the snow-slopes began to glimmer and shine with a new and almost unearthly radiance. Squib held his breath as he watched the moon rise over the snow-covered ridge, and the transformation of those rugged peaks and fissures into a new world of ebony and silver.

How long he would have watched it, forgetting all besides, may well be questioned, but he was quickly disturbed by an anxious voice, —

"Liebchen! – Liebchen! – what art thou doing? Thou wilt catch thy death of cold up here in the nipping mountain air!"

And Squib was quickly caught up in a pair of strong arms and hustled with ignominious rapidity into the queer little bed which seemed a necessary part of Swiss life.

But he was altogether too happy to be seriously ruffled by any such summary proceeding; and all he did by way of retaliation was to keep fast hold of Lisa's hand and refuse to let her go till she had talked him to sleep with the most entrancing of her stories of the mountains.

CHAPTER IV.
THE LITTLE GOAT-HERD

Surely never had boy been so happy before as was little Squib in his mountain home!

He had perfect liberty to rove where he would, so long as he went nowhere that Czar could not follow him. This stipulation, as Colonel Rutland observed, would keep him from any precipitous ascents or descents, and restrict his wanderings to safe paths; and the fidelity and sagacity of the dog were quite to be trusted should the child lose his way. Czar would be certain to bring him safe home again; but, indeed, there was not much fear that Squib would lose his way. He had a decided "bump of locality," as Uncle Ronald called it, and the green valley with its many attractions was a safe place for the boy to wander in.

For the first fortnight of his residence at the chalet, Squib had no disposition to stray very far away. There were so many attractions close at hand that it was needless to go far afield for his pleasures. Why, just by climbing up through the meadows and wood behind the house you could find more flowers than could be properly pressed and arranged in many days – gentians, small and large, the delicate little soldanella with its cyclamen leaf, the tiny and exquisite pinguicula with its fairy-like white bloom, and the yellow anemones which made quite a carpet in one little

glade, hemmed in between the spurs of a dim fir wood. Then down by the bed of the little brawling torrent, which was always racing and tumbling down the hillside to join the wider river below, grew in obscure and shady corners the golden auriculas with their graceful bells and silvery leaves. As to the lower-lying meadows, they were glorious with their wealth of many-hued flowers, the blue salvia, purple crane's-bill, yellow clover, the wild salsafy with its golden bloom, that Squib believed to be a rudbeckia until somebody told him to the contrary, and warned him against including it in his collection, as it was a tiresome thing to have in the garden, and grew rampant and masterful beyond bearing. The delicate Alpine roses, too, with their white and yellow clusters of blossom, were a perfect delight to the little botanist, and he hardly knew where to begin or where to stop in digging up roots to be kept in his garden behind the chalet, ready for final transportation to England.

His mother took great interest in his flowers and plants, and Mrs. Lorimer knew the names of almost all the Alpine plants, and whereabout they grew, whilst Lisa was able to give him practical help in digging and delving, and told him all sorts of stories about the different properties of the herbs he sometimes brought home, and how they could be distilled into Enzian-schnapps as she called it, though what sort of stuff that might be Squib could never make out.

And then there were all Lisa's stories to be listened to again, with even a greater sense of fascination here amongst the

mountains themselves than in the nursery at home. Why, the little men of the mountains – the Bergmännlein, as Lisa called them – might have their caves in the sides of any of these hills; and it always seemed as if everybody who once strayed in there came out a hundred years older at the end of what had seemed to him a very short time. Squib sometimes wondered with awe if he would ever find his way accidentally into one of these caves one day, and come back to find the chalet in ruins, the saplings grown to monster forest trees, and the glacier rolled farther down into the valley; for Lisa declared that it was always moving on – on – on- although Squib found it hard to believe.

Talking of the glacier always made Lisa speak of the Seligen Fräulein as she called them – the ice-maidens, who loved to woo to sleep the unwary travellers who trusted to their soft guiding voices, and let themselves be lured from the path and down – down – down into some cold dim crevasse or grotto whence no return could be made. Squib listened with a strange sense of fascination as Lisa told him of these snow-white maidens with shining eyes, and hair like powdered crystal, and how they sang to sleep the victims they had lured to destruction, and how that sleep lasted for years and years, and how the sleeper was found at last, still smiling in his dreams, when, after many generations had passed away, the ice-maidens would yield up their prey at a certain icy portal where the river came rushing and sweeping out of a great green ice grotto, in which the Seligen Fräulein were said to hold high revel.

"And do they wake when they come out?" asked Squib with breathless eagerness, but Lisa shook her head.

"Na! na! – they never woke again. Nobody ever woke who had felt the kisses of the ice-maidens. They were jealous – they would not have their captives leave them for others. Na! na! It was an ill thing to get with the Bergmännlein or the Seligen Fräulein. The little Herr must beware of all such things."

How much Squib believed of all these mountain legends, and how much Lisa herself believed, it would be hard to say; but the fascination of the subject was the same, even though there might be a lingering doubt in the mind both of listener and teller. The sense of something weird and unseen, uncomprehended in these lonely mountain heights, grew upon the child rather than diminished as he came to dwell among them. The legends which had grown up in the mouths of the peasants were but the expression of those feelings which life in such lonely heights cannot but suggest – the sense of mystery and unreality, the consciousness of great overwhelming forces at work, the existence of a spiritual and eternal world just beyond the ken of human knowledge and experience.

Often the talk between the pair would drift from the fanciful superstitions of an imaginative peasantry to the region of the world of spirits dimly indicated in Holy Scripture, and Squib would bring out his little Bible and search there for such passages as seemed to give glimpses into the unseen, and strive to translate them into the language so much more familiar to Lisa. The book

of the Revelation was now studied by him with an interest it had never held for him before – though like most children he had often read the mystic words with a strange sense of fascination; but now, as he watched from some lonely knoll or rocky height the gorgeous pageantry of the clouds, or the reflections they cast upon the everlasting snows, he would almost think that he saw the heavens opened and the armies of heaven riding forth on white horses, conquering and to conquer. Or amid the wonderful lights of sunrise or sunset, when the mountains glowed and burned with lambent fire, and the sky was almost too dazzling for the eye to rest upon, he would fancy that, far, far away in its golden depths, he could see the great white gates of pearl, or even the shining city coming down out of heaven, like a bride prepared for the marriage.

But of these things he seldom spoke – perhaps because he had hardly words in which to express them; and besides it was not often that he found time for such solitary musings; for the days were very full of occupation, and Squib might have been "made of gutta-percha," as Uncle Ronald declared he was, for his readiness to go everywhere and see everything.

So what with his own private botanizing excursions, and the walks he took with father and uncle, the days seemed to race by almost faster than he could count; and it was only when the three gentlemen had departed for a mountaineering expedition that was likely to last for some weeks, that Squib felt himself at leisure to go further afield and explore the more distant parts of

his valley.

He had expected to be his mother's companion now, but this expectation was not realized. Not only was there Mrs. Lorimer to be with her, but a party of friends from England, who were travelling about in the neighbourhood, swooped down upon the chalet only the day after the mountaineers had left, and they gladly accepted Lady Mary's cordial invitation to remain her guests there for as long a time as the vacant rooms should be at their disposal.

This sudden invasion made a great deal of difference to Squib's plans. He was no longer wanted as his mother's companion. She was busy and well looked after. Even Czar was not required now, when there were so many people about – and, indeed, the valley seemed as safe as the house at home, and the people far more honest; while all this company made the servants busy, and even Lisa's time was so fully taken up in attending to so many ladies, that she had but little of it to give to the child, and was glad for him to amuse himself in his own way.

It was quite easy for Squib to do this. Indeed, on the whole (since his mother really did not need him), he was very glad of the liberty he now enjoyed to make long expeditions with Czar, and really explore the valley from end to end. He would get something to eat packed in a little satchel in the morning – Lisa always took care that it should be something good, and that there should be plenty of it – and with this little satchel slung on his back, and his iron-pointed stick in his hand, and Czar bounding beside him, the

happy little pilgrim would start off after his early breakfast, long before the visitors had thought of leaving their rooms, and would not return, save by his own wish, till the evening shadows began to lengthen, and the valley to lie wrapped in a soft, tender shade.

As for drink – was not every mountain rill a fountain for him, free from all danger of pollution? And there were scattered huts and chalets, where a drink of goat's milk could always be obtained, and Squib soon came to have many a friend along the various routes which he pursued in turn; for all the simple peasant folk had a ready smile for the little English boy with his big, grey eyes and sunny curls, and square, quaint face so full of thoughtful curiosity.

But though the old folks always looked kindly at him, and exchanged a morning or evening greeting as he passed, Squib had as yet made no way with the bare-headed, bare-footed children who were to be seen from time to time playing round the huts. If he spoke to them they only stared, and they seemed afraid to approach Czar, who generally stood very close to his little master if there were any huts or people near. Sometimes they fled at his approach as if afraid the dog would attack them, and Squib was not able to understand their guttural exclamations as he understood the salutations of the grown-up folks. He was rather sorry for this, as he was a friendly little fellow and would have liked to fraternize with some of the children; but they were rather like little savages up here, he thought, and he went on his way solitary, but happy, satisfied with the companionship of

Czar, and talking to him when the need of speech came over him.

But all this was soon to be changed.

One day Squib took a new route, and dropped almost perpendicularly, by a very tangled path, to the bottom of the valley, instead of skirting along its side as had been his fashion heretofore. It happened to be a very warm day, and this tangled woodland path had greater attractions than those which led through stretches of sunny meadow. The sound of the brawling torrent at the bottom made refreshing music in his ears as he descended, and when at last he found himself at the bottom of the ravine, he was delighted to see that a narrow bridge of planks had been thrown across the torrent there, by which he could easily cross to the other side.

It was a dizzy crossing for any one unused to such transits, but dizziness was a feeling unknown to Squib; nor was Czar in any way disturbed by the passage. He followed his little master soberly and carefully, and in another minute both were on the opposite side of the familiar valley.

This was quite a new world for Squib, for, as is so often the way amongst these hills, one side of a valley seems to open out quite a new region, and it is not easy to believe oneself so near to old haunts.

Squib clambered up the opposite bank of the torrent, which was rather rough and stony, and then found himself at the entrance of a little wood, through which a narrow footpath ran. He followed this upwards for some distance, and found himself

at last out on a green shoulder of the mountain spur, with the top of the ridge only a little above him. He must climb up and look over, he said to himself, and a few minutes' breathless clambering brought him to the top; and now a new world, of which he had never dreamed, lay spread out before him.

From the chalet he had fancied that the range of snow-peaks opposite rose directly from the bed of the torrent he had just crossed. Now, however, he found that a whole panorama of meadow, wood, and water lay between. Sloping gently away from where he stood were emerald-green meadows full of flowers, watered by little sparkling rills and foaming cascades tumbling down the hillsides into a lake at the base as blue as the sky overhead. To the right and left the valley seemed closed in by great snow-peaks, which stood like two silent sentinels looking down upon it; and opposite to Squib were patches of cultivated land, with here and there a little peasant's chalet – the wooden roof weighted by heavy stones, piles of wood cut into lengths heaped up against the wall on the lee side, the whole house raised up on piles to keep it above the level of winter snow, and the overhanging eaves and protected gallery showing that it was lived in all the year round, and not just an abode for the summer months.

The tinkling of many bells was filling the air, and Squib's attention was speedily attracted to a herd of brown goats feeding at a little distance. Seated on a green knoll, with (oddly enough, as it seemed to Squib) a piece of paper and a pencil in his hands,

was a little boy in the rough, snuff-coloured clothes so common in the district, and a flapping felt hat a world too large for him. He sat with his back towards the little intruder, apparently intent upon some task.

At the boy's feet lay stretched a rough-coated dog with his head on his paws. The dog seemed to be guarding both the goats and the boy, for he would rise sometimes and pursue a vagrant goat, who was in danger of straying away too far, and would make use of the opportunity for making a rapid circuit round the whole drove and addressing a word of admonition to them, after which he would return to his old position at his little master's feet.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.