Molesworth Mrs.

Carrots: Just a Little Boy

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I. FLOSS'S BABY

"Where did you come from, Baby dear?
Out of the everywhere into here?

"But how did you come to us, you dear?
God thought about you, and so I am here!"

G. Macdonald.

His real name was Fabian. But he was never called anything but Carrots. There were six of them. Jack, Cecil, Louise, Maurice, commonly called Mott, Floss, dear, dear Floss, whom he loved best of all, a long way the best of all, and lastly Carrots.

Why Carrots should have come to have his history written I really cannot say. I must leave you, who understand such things a good deal better than I, you, children, for whom the history is written, to find out. I can give you a few reasons why Carrots' history should *not* have been written, but that is about all I can do. There was nothing very remarkable about him; there was nothing

very remarkable about the place where he lived, or the things that he did, and on the whole he was very much like other little boys. There are my *no* reasons for you. But still he was Carrots, and after all, perhaps, that was *the* reason! I shouldn't wonder.

He was the baby of the family; he had every right to be considered the baby, for he was not only the youngest, but very much the youngest; for Floss, who came next to him, was nearly four years older than Carrots. Yet he was never treated as the baby. I doubt if even at the very outset of his little life, when he was just a wee pink ball of a creature, rolled up in flannel, and with his funny curls of red hair standing crisp up all over his head, I doubt, if even then, he was ever called "baby." I feel almost sure it was always "Carrots." He was too independent and sensible to be counted a baby, and he was never fond of being petted – and then, too, "Carrots" came so naturally!

I have said that Carrots loved his sister Floss better than anybody or anything else in the world. I think one reason of this was that she was the very first person he could remember in his life, and a happy thing for him that it was so, for all about her that there was to remember was nice and good and kind. She was four years older than he, four years old, that is to say, when he first came into the world and looked about him with grave inquiry as to what sort of a place this could be that he had got to. And the first object that his baby-wise eyes settled upon with content, as if in it there might be a possible answer to the riddle, was Floss!

These children's father and mother were not very rich, and

having six boys and girls you can quite easily imagine they had plenty to do with their money. Jack was a great boy at school when Carrots first joined the family party, and Cecil and Louise had a governess. Mott learnt with the governess too, but was always talking of the time when he should go to school with Jack, for he was a very boy-ey boy, very much inclined to look down upon girls in general, and his sisters in particular, and his little sister Floss in *particularest*. So, till Carrots appeared on the scene, Floss had had rather a lonely time of it, for, "of course," Cecil and Louise, who had pockets in all their frocks, and could play the 'March of the Men of Harlech' as a duet on the piano, were *far* too big to be "friends to Floss," as she called it. They were friendly and kind in an elder sisterly way, but that was quite a different sort of thing from being "friends to her," though it never occurred to Floss to grumble or to think, as so many little people think now-a-days, how much better things would have been arranged if *she* had had the arranging of them.

There was only one thing Floss wished for very, very much, and that was to have a brother or sister, she did not much care which, younger than herself. She had the most motherly heart in the world, though she was such a quiet little girl that very few people knew anything about what she was thinking, and the big ones laughed at her for being so outrageously fond of dolls. She had dolls of every kind and size, only alike in one thing, that none of them were very pretty, or what you would consider grand dolls. But to Floss they were lovely, only, they were *only* dolls!

Can you fancy, can you in the least fancy, Floss's delight – a sort of delight that made her feel as if she couldn't speak, when one winter's morning she was awakened by nurse to be told that a real live baby had come in the night – a little brother, and "such a funny little fellow," added nurse, "his head just covered with curly red hair. Where did he get that from, I wonder? Not one of my children has hair like that, though yours, Miss Flossie, has a touch of it, perhaps."

Floss looked at her own tangle of fluffy hair with new reverence. "Hair something like my hairs," she whispered. "Oh nursie, dear nursie, may Floss see him?"

"Get up and let me dress you quickly, and you shall see him – no fear but that you'll see more of the poor little fellow than you care about," said nurse, though the last words were hardly meant for Floss.

The truth was that though of course every one meant to be kind to this new little baby, to take proper care of him, and all that sort of thing, no one was particularly glad he had come. His father and mother felt that five boys and girls were already a good number to bring up well and educate and start in life, not being very rich you see, and even nurse, who had the very kindest heart in the world, and had taken care of them all, beginning with Jack, ever since they were born, even nurse felt, I think, that they *could* have done without this red-haired little stranger. For nurse was no longer as young as she had been, and as the children's mother could not, she knew, very well afford to keep an under-nurse to

help her, it was rather trying to look forward to beginning again with all the "worrit" of a new baby – bad nights and many tiring climbs up the long stairs to the nursery, etc., etc., though nurse was so really good that she did not grumble the least bit, and just quietly made up her mind to make the best of it.

But still Floss was the only person to give the baby a really hearty welcome. And by some strange sort of baby instinct he seemed to know it almost from the first. He screamed at Jack, and no wonder, for Jack, by way of salutation, pinched his poor little nose, and said that the next time they had boiled mutton for dinner, cook need not provide anything but turnips, as there was a fine crop of carrots all ready, which piece of wit was greatly applauded by Maurice and the girls. He wailed when Cecil and Louise begged to be allowed to hold him in their arms, so that they both tumbled him back on to nurse's lap in a hurry, and called him "a cross, ugly little thing." Only when little Floss sat down on the floor, spreading out her knees with great solemnity, and smoothing her pinafore to make a nice place for baby, and nurse laid him carefully down in the embrace of her tiny arms, "baby" seemed quite content. He gave a sort of wriggle, like a dog when he has been pretending to burrow a hole for himself in the rug, just before he settles down and shuts his eyes, and in half a second was fast asleep.

It was wonderful how trusty she was. And "as handy," said nurse, "indeed far more handy than many a girl of five times her age." "I have been thinking," she said one day to Floss's mother,

"I have been thinking, ma'am, that even if you had been going to keep an under-nurse to help with baby, there would have been nothing for her to do. For the help I get from Miss Flossie is really astonishing, and Master Baby is that fond of her already, you'd hardly believe it."

And Floss's mother kissed her, and told her she was a good little soul, and Floss felt, oh, so proud! Then a second thought struck her, "Baby dood too, mamma," she said, staring up into her mother's face with her bright searching grey-green eyes.

"Yes," said her mother with a little sigh, "poor baby is good too, dear," and then she had to hurry off to a great overhauling of Jack's shirts, which were, if possible, to be made to last him another half-year at school.

So it came to pass that a great deal of Floss's life was spent in the nursery with Carrots. He was better than twenty dolls, for after a while he actually learnt, first to stand alone, and then to walk, and after a longer while he learnt to talk, and to understand all that Floss said to him, and by-and-by to play games with her in his baby way. And how patient Floss was with him! It was no wonder he loved her.

This chapter has seemed almost more about Floss than Carrots you will say, perhaps, but I couldn't tell you anything of Carrots' history without telling you a great deal about Floss too, so I daresay you won't mind. I daresay too you will not care to hear much more about Carrots when he was a baby, for, after all, babies are all very like each other, and a baby that wasn't

like others would not *be* a baby! To Floss I fancy he seemed a remarkable baby, but that may have been because he was her very own, and the only baby she had ever known. He was certainly very good, in so far as he gave nurse exceedingly little trouble, but why children should give trouble when they are perfectly well, and have everything they can possibly want, I have never been able to decide. On the whole, I think it must have something to do with the people who take care of them, as well as with themselves.

Now we will say good-bye to Carrots, as a baby.

CHAPTER II.
SIX YEARS OLD

"As for me, I love the sea,
The dear old sea!
Don't you?"

Song.

I think I said there was nothing very remarkable about the place where Carrots lived, but considering it over, I am not quite sure that you would agree with me. It was near the sea for one thing, and *that* is always remarkable, is it not? *How* remarkable, how wonderful and changeful the sea is, I doubt if any one can tell who has not really lived by it, not merely visited it for a few weeks in the fine summer time, when it looks so bright and sunny and inviting, but lived by it through autumn and winter too, through days when it looks so dull and leaden, that one can hardly believe it will ever be smiling and playful again, through fierce, rough days, when it lashes itself with fury, and the wind wails as if it were trying to tell the reason.

Carrots' nursery window looked straight out upon the sea, and many and many an hour Floss and he spent at this window, watching their strange fickle neighbour at his gambols. I do not know that they thought the sea at all wonderful. I think they were

too much accustomed to it for that, but they certainly found it very *interesting*. Floss had names for the different kinds of waves; some she called "ribs of beef," when they showed up sideways in layers as it were, of white and brown, and some she called "ponies." That was the kind that came prancing in, with a sort of dance, the white foam curling and rearing, and tossing itself, just exactly like a frisky pony's mane. Those were the prettiest waves of all, I think.

It was not at all a dangerous coast, where the Cove House, that was Carrots' home, stood. It was not what is called "picturesque." It was a long flat stretch of sandy shore, going on and on for miles just the same. There were very few trees and no mountains, not even hills.

In summer, a few, just a very few visitors used to come to Sandyshore for bathing; they were always visitors with children, for every one said it was such a nice safe place for little people.

But, safe as it was, it wasn't till Carrots was growing quite a big boy, nearly six, I should think, that Floss and he got leave to go out and play on the shore by themselves, the thing they had been longing for ever since they could remember.

This was how they did get leave at last. Nurse was very, very busy, one day; really quite extra busy, for she was arranging and helping to pack Jack's things to go to a new school. Jack was so big now, about sixteen, that he was going to a kind of college, or grown-up school, the last he would go to, before entering the army. And there was quite a fuss in the house. Jack thought

himself almost as grand as if he was an officer already, and Mott was overpowered with envy. Everybody was fussing about Jack, and no one had much time to think of the two little ones.

They stood at the nursery window, poor little souls, when Floss came up from her lessons, gazing out wistfully. It was a nice spring day, not exactly sunny, but looking as if the sun were only hiding himself to tease you, and might come out any minute.

"If we *might* go down to the shore," said Floss, half to herself, half to Carrots, and half to nurse. I shouldn't have said it so, for there can't be three halves of anything, but no doubt you will understand.

"Go down to the shore, my dear?" repeated nurse, "I wish you could, I'm sure, but it will be afternoon, at least, before I have a minute to spare to take you. And there's no one else to-day, for cook and Esther are both as busy as busy. Perhaps Miss Cecil and Miss Louise will take you when they have done their lessons."

"We don't care to go with them, much," said Floss, "they don't understand our plays. We like best to go with you, nursie, and you to sit down with your sewing near – that's the nicest way. Oh, nurse," she exclaimed, with sudden eagerness, "wouldn't you let us go alone? You can peep out of the window and see us every few minutes, and we'll be so good."

Nurse looked out of the window doubtfully.

"Couldn't you play in the garden at the back, instead?" she said. "Your papa and mamma won't be home till late, and I am always in a terror of any harm happening while they are away."

"We won't let any harm happen," said Floss, "and we are *so* tired of the garden, nurse. There is nothing to play at there. The little waves are so pretty this morning."

There was certainly very little to play at in the green, at the back of the house, which was called the garden. Being so near the sea, the soil was so poor, that hardly any flowers would grow, and even the grass was coarse and lumpy. Then there were no trees, and what is a garden without trees?

Nurse looked out of the window again.

"Well," she said, "if you will really be very good, I think I might trust you. Now, Master Carrots, you will promise to do exactly what Miss Floss tells you?"

"Yes, I promise," said Carrots, who had been listening with great anxiety, though he had not hitherto spoken – he was not a great talker – "I promise, nurse. I will do exactly what Floss tells me, and Floss will do exactly what I tell her, won't you, Floss? So we shall both be *kite* good, that way, won't we?"

"Very well," said nurse gravely, though she felt very much inclined to laugh, "then run and get your things as fast as you can."

And, oh, how happy the two were when they found themselves out on the shore all alone! They were so happy, they did not know what to do; so first of all, they ran races to run away a little of the happiness. And when they had run themselves quite hot, they sat down on a little heap of stones to consider what they should do next. They had no spades with them, for they did not care very

much about digging; children who live always by the sea never care so much about digging as the little visitors who come down in the summer, and whose very first idea at the sight of the sea is "spades and buckets."

"What shall we play at, Carrots?" said Floss, "I wish it was warm enough to paddle."

Carrots looked at the little soft rippling waves, contemplatively.

"When I'm a man," he said, "I shall paddle *always*. I shall paddle in winter too. When I'm a man I won't have no nurse."

"Carrots," said Floss, reproachfully, "that isn't good of you. Think how kind nurse is."

"Well, then," replied Carrots, slowly, "I *will* have her, but she must let me paddle always, when I'm a man."

"When you are a man, Carrots," said Floss, solemnly still, "I hope you will have something better to do than paddling. Perhaps you'll be a soldier, like Jack."

"Killing people isn't better than paddling," retorted Carrots. "I'd rather be a sailor, like papa."

"Sailors have to kill people, too, sometimes," said Floss.

"*Have* they?" said Carrots. Then he sat silent for a few minutes, finding this new idea rather overwhelming. "Naughty people, do you mean, Floss?" he inquired at last.

"Yes," said Floss, unhesitatingly, "naughty people, of course."

"But I don't like killing," said Carrots, "not killing naughty people, I don't like. I won't be a soldier, and I won't be a sailor,

and I won't be a butcher, 'cos butchers kill lambs. Perhaps I'll be a fisherman."

"But fishermen kill fish," said Floss.

"Do they?" said Carrots, looking up in her face pathetically with his gentle brown eyes. "I'm so sorry. I don't understand about killing, Floss. I don't like it."

"I don't either," said Floss; "but perhaps it has to be. If there was no killing we'd have nothing to eat."

"Eggs," said Carrots; "eggs and potatoes, and – and – cake?"

"But even that would be a *sort* of killing," persisted Floss, though feeling by no means sure that she was not getting beyond her depth, "if we didn't eat eggs they would grow into chickens, and so eating stops them; and potatoes have roots, and when they're pulled up they don't grow; and cake has eggs in, and – oh I don't know, let's talk of something else."

"What?" said Carrots, "Fairies?"

"If you like, or supposing we talk about when auntie comes and brings 'Sybil.'"

"Yes," said Carrots, "I like that best."

"Well, then," began Floss, "supposing it is late in the evening when they come. *You* would be in bed, Carrots, dear, but I would have begged to sit up a little longer and – "

"No, Floss, that isn't nice. I won't talk about Sybil, if you make it like that," interrupted Carrots, his voice sounding as if he were going to cry. "Sybil isn't not any bigger than me. I wouldn't be in bed, Floss."

"Very well, dear. Never mind, darling. I won't make it like that. It was very stupid of me. No, Sybil and auntie will come just about our tea-time, and we shall be peeping along the road to see if the carriage from the station is coming, and when we hear it we'll run in, and perhaps mamma will say we may stay in the drawing-room to see them. You will have one of your new sailor suits on, Carrots, and I shall have my white piqué and blue sash, and nurse will have made the nursery tea-table look so nice – with a clean table-cloth, you know, and quite thin bread and butter, and jam, and, perhaps, eggs."

"I won't eat one," interrupted Carrots; "I won't never eat eggs. I'll keep all mine that I get to eat, in a box, till they've growed into chickens."

"But they're boiled when you get them," said Floss; "they wouldn't grow into chickens when they're boiled."

Carrots sighed. "Well, never mind," he said, "go on, Floss."

"Well, then," started Floss again, "you see the nursery tea would look so nice that Sybil would be *sure* to ask her mamma to let her have tea with us, even though it was the first evening. Perhaps, you know, she would be rather *shy*, just at first, till she got to know us. So we would be very, very kind to her, and after tea we would show her all our things – the dolls, only – Carrots, I'm afraid the dolls are getting rather old."

"Are they?" said Carrots, sympathisingly. "When I'm a man I'll buy you such a *lot* of new dolls, Floss, and Sybil, too, if she likes dolls – does she, Floss?"

"I don't know. I should think so," said Floss. "When papa and mamma went to see auntie, they said Sybil was like a doll herself. I suppose she has beautiful blue eyes and long gold curls. That was a year ago; she must be bigger now, Carrots."

"What?"

"We must get up and run about a little now. It's too cold to sit still so long, and if we get cold, nurse won't let us come out alone again."

Up jumped Carrots on to his sturdy little legs. "I'll run, Floss," he said.

"Floss," he began, when they stopped to take breath again, "once I saw a little boy with a hoop. It went so nice on the sands. I wish I had a hoop, Floss."

"I wish you had, dear," said Floss. "I'd buy you one, if I had any money. But I haven't, and we couldn't ask mamma, because I know," and Floss shook her head mysteriously, "I know poor mamma *hasn't any money to spare*. I must think of a plan to get some."

Carrots kept silence for about three quarters of a minute. "Have you thinkened, Floss?" he asked, eagerly.

"Thought," gravely said Floss, "not thinkened, what about?"

"About a plan," replied Carrots. He called it "a pan," but Floss understood him.

"Oh, dear, no," said Floss, "not yet. Plans take a great lot of thinking. They're real things, you see, Carrots, not like fancies about fairies and Sybil coming."

"But when Sybil does come, that'll be real then," said Carrots.

"Of course," agreed Floss, "but fancying about it before, isn't real."

It took Carrots a little while to get this into his head. Then he began again.

"When will you have thinkened enough, Floss? By tea-time?"

"I don't know. No, I think you had better wait till to-morrow morning, and then perhaps the plan will be ready."

"Very well," said Carrots, adding, with a little sigh, "to-morrow morning is a long time, Floss."

"Not very," said Floss, consolingly. "Now, Carrots, let's have one more race, and then we must go in."

CHAPTER III.
PLANS

"'Have you invented a plan for it?' Alice inquired.
'Not yet,' said the knight."

Through the Looking-glass.

The next morning Carrots woke very early, and the first thing he thought of was the plan. Floss and he slept in the night nursery, in two little beds, and nurse slept in a small room that had a door opening into the nursery. She used to sleep there herself, but now that Carrots was so big, Floss and he were quite safe by themselves, and poor old nurse enjoyed having her own little room.

Floss was still asleep, so Carrots only climbed out of his own cot into hers, and crouched himself down at the foot, watching for her to wake. Floss looked very nice asleep; her "fuzzy" hair was tumbling over the pillow, and her cheeks looked pinker than when she was awake.

"I wonder what being asleep is," thought the little boy as he looked at her. "I always go away, such a long way, when I am asleep. I wonder if Floss does."

She couldn't have been very far away just then, for somehow, though Carrots sat so still, she seemed to know he was there. She

turned round and half opened her eyes, and then shut them as if she were trying to go to sleep again, then opened them once more, quite wide this time, and caught sight of the funny little figure beside her.

"Carrots," she said, in a sleepy voice, "Carrots, dear, what are you doing there? You'll catch cold."

"No, I won't. May I come in 'aside you, Floss? I was only watching for you to wake; I didn't wake you, did I?" said Carrots, as Floss made room for him, and he poked his cold little toes down into a nice warm place, "I did so want to know if it was ready, for it's to-morrow morning now."

"If what's ready?" said Floss, for she was rather sleepy still.

"The plan for getting money."

"Oh!" said Floss. "Yes," she went on after thinking for a minute, "yes, it's nearly ready; at least I'm almost sure it is. But it's not quite ready for telling *you*, yet, Carrots."

Carrots looked terribly disappointed.

"I think," went on Floss, "I think it will be ready for telling you after breakfast. And if you like, you may listen to something I am going to ask nurse at breakfast, and, perhaps, that will help you to guess what the plan is."

At breakfast time Carrots was all ears. All ears and no tongue, so that nurse began to wonder if he was ill.

"I shouldn't like you to be ill the very day after Master Jack has gone," she said anxiously (Jack had gone up to town by the night train with his father), "one trouble at a time is quite enough

for your poor mamma."

"Is Jack's going to the big school a trouble?" asked Floss, opening her eyes very wide, "I thought they were all very glad."

"My dear," said nurse solemnly, "one may be glad of a thing and sorry too. And changes mostly are good and bad together."

Floss did not say any more, but she seemed to be thinking about what nurse had said. Carrots was thinking too.

"When I'm a man," he said at last, "I won't go to a big school if Floss doesn't want me to."

Nurse smiled. "There's time enough to see about that," she said, "get on with your breakfast, Master Carrots; you'll never grow a big boy if you don't eat plenty."

"Nurse," said Floss, suddenly, "what's the dearest thing we eat? what costs most?"

"Meat, now-a-days, Miss Flossie," said nurse.

"Could we do without it?" asked Floss. Nurse shook her head.

"What could we do without?" continued the child. "We couldn't do without bread or milk, I suppose. What could we do without that costs money?"

"Most things do that," said nurse, who began to have a glimmering of what Floss was driving at, "but the money's well spent in good food to make you strong and well."

"Then isn't there anything we could do without – without it hurting us, I mean?" said Floss, in a tone of disappointment.

"Oh yes," said nurse, "I daresay there is. Once a little boy and girl I knew went without sugar in their tea for a month, and their

grandmother gave them sixpence each instead."

"Sixpence!" exclaimed Floss, her eyes gleaming.

"Sixpence each," corrected nurse.

"Two sixpences, that would be a shilling. Carrots, do you hear?"

Carrots had been listening with might and main, but was rather puzzled.

"Would two sixpennies pay for two hoops?" he whispered to Floss, pulling her pinafore till she bent her head down to listen.

"Of course they would. At least I'm almost sure. I'll ask nurse. Nurse, dear," she went on in a louder voice, "do you think we might do that way – Carrots and I – about sugar, I mean?"

"I don't see that it would do you any harm," said nurse. "You must ask your mamma."

But Floss hesitated.

"I shouldn't much like to ask mamma," she said, and Carrots, who was listening so intently that he had forgotten all about his bread and milk, noticed that Floss's face grew red. "I shouldn't much like to ask mamma, because, nursie, dear, it is only that we want to get money for something for ourselves, and if we told mamma, it would be like asking her to *give* us the money. It wouldn't be any harm for us not to eat any sugar in our tea for a month, and you could keep the sugar in a packet all together, nurse, and *then* you might tell mamma that we had saved it, and she would give us a shilling for it. It would be quite worth a shilling, wouldn't it, nurse?"

"Oh, yes," said nurse, "I am sure your mamma would say it was." Then she considered a little. She was one of those truly trustworthy nurses whose notions are strong on the point of everything being told to "mamma." But she perfectly understood Floss's hesitation, and though she might not have been able to put her feeling into words, she felt that it might do the child harm to thwart her delicate instinct.

"Well, nurse?" said Floss, at last.

"Well, Miss Flossie, I don't think for once I shall be doing wrong in letting you have a secret. When will you begin? This is Thursday; on Saturday your mamma will give me the week's sugar – suppose you begin on Sunday? But does Master Carrots quite understand?"

"Oh, yes," said Floss, confidently, "he understands, don't you dear?"

"Oh, yes," said Carrots, "we won't eat not any sugar, Floss and me, for a great long time, and nurse will tie it up in a parcel with a string round, and mamma will buy it and give us a great lot of pennies, and then, and then" – he began to jump about with delight – "Floss and me will go to the toy-shop and buy our hoops, won't we Floss? Oh I wish it was time to go now, don't you Floss?"

"Yes, dear, a month's a good while to wait," said Floss sympathisingly. "May we go out on the shore again by ourselves this afternoon, nurse?"

"If it doesn't rain," said nurse; and Floss, who had half an hour

to wait before it was time for her to join her sisters in the schoolroom, went to the window to have a look at the weather. She had not stood there for more than a minute when Carrots climbed up on to a chair beside her.

"It's going to rain, Floss," he said, "there are the little curly clouds in the sky that Matthew says come when it rains."

Floss looked up at the sky and down at the sea.

"The sea looks cross to-day," she said.

There were no pretty ripples this morning; the water looked dull and leaden.

"Floss," said Carrots, with a sigh, "I do get so tired when you are at lessons all the morning and I have *nucken* to do. Can't you think of a plan for me to have something to do?" Carrots' head was running on "plans."

Floss considered.

"Would you like to tidy my drawer for me?" she said. "This isn't the regular day for tidying it, but it is in a mess, because I turned all the things upside down when I was looking for our race horses' reins yesterday. Will you put it *quite* tidy, Carrots?"

"Oh, yes, *quite*, dear Floss," said Carrots, "I'll put all the dolls neat, and all the pieces, and all the sewing things. Oh, dear Floss, what nice plans you make."

So when Floss had gone to her lessons, and nurse was busy with her morning duties, in and out of the room, so as not to lose sight of Carrots, but still too busy to amuse him, he, with great delight, set to work at the drawer. It certainly was much in need

of "tidying," and after trying several ways, Carrots found that the best plan was to take everything out, and then put the different things back again in order. It took him a good while, and his face got rather red with stooping down to the floor to pick up all the things he had deposited there, for the drawer itself was too heavy for him to lift out bodily, if, indeed, such an idea had occurred to him. It was the middle drawer of the cupboard, the top part of which was divided into shelves where the nursery cups and saucers and those sort of things stood. The drawer above Floss's was nurse's, where she kept her work, and a few books, and a little note-paper and so on; and the drawer at the bottom, so that he could easily reach it, was Carrots' own.

One end of Floss's drawer was given up to her dolls. She still had a good many, for though she did not care for them now as much as she used, she never could be persuaded to throw any of them away. But they were not very pretty; even Carrots could see that, and Carrots, to tell the truth, was very fond of dolls.

"If I had some money," he said to himself, "I would buy Floss such a most beautiful doll. I wish I had some money."

For the moment he forgot about the hoops and the "plan" and sat down on a little stool with one of the unhappiest looking of the dolls in his arms.

"I wish I could buy you a new face, poor dolly," he said. "I wish I had some money."

He got up again to put poor dolly back into her corner. As he was smoothing down the paper which lined the drawer, he felt

something hard close to dolly's foot; he pushed away the dolls to see – there, almost hidden by a crumple in the paper lay a tiny little piece of money – a little shining piece, about the size of a sixpence, only a different colour.

"A yellow sixpenny, oh, how nice!" thought Carrots, as he seized it. "I wonder if Floss knowed it was there. It would just do to buy a new doll. I *wish* I could go to the toy-shop to buy one to surprise Floss. I won't tell Floss I've found it. I'll keep it for a secret, and some day I'll buy Floss a new doll. I'm sure Floss doesn't know – I think the fairies must have put it there."

He wrapped the piece of money up carefully in a bit of paper, and after considering where he could best hide it, so that Floss should not know till it was time to surprise her, he fixed on a beautiful place – he hid it under one of the little round saucers in his paint-box – a very old paint-box it was, which had descended from Jack, first to Mott and then to Carrots, but which, all the same, Carrots considered one of his greatest treasures.

When nurse came into the room, she found the tidying of the drawer completed, and Carrots sitting quietly by the window. He did not tell her about the money he had found, it never entered into his little head that he should speak of it. He had got into the way of not telling all the little things that happened to him to any one but Floss, for he was naturally a very quiet child, and nurse was getting too old to care about all the tiny interests of her children as she once had done. Besides, he had determined to keep it a secret, even from Floss, till he could buy a new doll

with it – but very likely he would have told her of it after all, had not something else put it out of his head.

The something else was that that afternoon nurse took Floss and him a long walk, and a walk they were very fond of.

It was to the cottage of the old woman, who, ever since they had come to Sandyshore, had washed for them. She was a very nice old woman, and her cottage was beautifully clean, and now and then Floss and Carrots had gone with nurse to have tea with her, which was a great treat. But to-day they were not going to tea; they were only going because nurse had to pay Mrs. White some money for washing up Jack's things quickly, and nurse knew the old woman would be glad to have it, as it was close to the day on which she had to pay her rent.

Floss and Carrots were delighted to go, for even when they did not stay to tea, Mrs. White always gave them a glass of milk, and, generally, a piece of home-made cake.

Before they started, nurse went to her drawer and took out of it a very small packet done up in white paper, and this little packet she put into her purse.

It was, after all, a nice fine day. Floss and Carrots talked quietly beside nurse for a little, and then she gave them leave to run races, which made the way seem very short, till they got to Mrs. White's.

"How nice it will be when we have our hoops, won't it, Carrots?" said Floss.

Carrots had almost forgotten about the hoops, but now that

Floss mentioned them, it put him in mind of something else.

"Wouldn't you like a new doll, Floss?" he said mysteriously, "a most beautifullest new doll, with hair like – like the angels' hairs in the big window at church, and eyes like the little blue stones in mamma's ring?"

"Of course I would," said Floss, "and we'd call her Angelina, wouldn't we Carrots? But it's no good thinking about it – I shall never have one like that, unless the fairies send it me!"

"If the fairies sended you money to buy one, wouldn't that do?" said Carrots, staring up in her face with a funny look in his eyes.

But before Floss had time to answer, nurse called to them – they were at the corner of the lane which led to Mrs. White's.

Mrs. White was very kind. She had baked a cake only a day or two before, and cut off a beautiful big piece for each of the children, then she gave them a drink of milk, and they ran out into her little garden to eat their cake and look at the flowers, till nurse had finished her business with the old washerwoman, and was ready to go home.

Floss and Carrots thought a great deal of Mrs. White's garden. Small as it was, it had far more flowers in it than their own garden at the back of the Cove House, for it was a mile or two farther from the sea, and the soil was richer, and it was more sheltered from the wind.

In summer there was what Floss called quite a "buzzy" sound in this little garden – she meant that sweet, lazy-busy hum of bees and butterflies and all sorts of living creatures, that you never

hear except in a real old-fashioned garden where there are lots of clove pinks and sweet williams and roses, roses especially, great, big cabbage roses, and dear little pink climbing roses, the kind that peep in at a cottage window to bid you "good morning." Oh, how very sweet those old-fashioned flowers are – though "rose fanciers" and all the clever gardeners we have now-a-days wouldn't give anything for them! *I* think them the sweetest of all. Don't you, children? Or is it only when one begins to grow old-fashioned oneself and to care more for things that used to be than things that are now, that one gets to prize these old friends so?

I am wandering away from Floss and Carrots waiting for nurse in the cottage garden; you must forgive me, boys and girls – when people begin to grow old they get in the habit of telling stories in a rambling way, but I don't find children so hard upon this tiresome habit as big people sometimes are. And it all comes back to me so – even the old washerwoman's cottage I can see so plainly, and the dear straggly little garden!

For you see, children, I am telling you the history of a *real* little boy and girl, not fancy children, and that is why, though there is nothing very wonderful about Floss and Carrots, I hope the story of their little pleasures and sorrows and simple lives may be interesting to you.

But I must finish about the visit to the washerwoman in another chapter. I have made this one rather too long already.

CHAPTER IV.
THE LOST HALF-SOVEREIGN

"Children should not leave about
Anything that's small and bright;
Lest the fairies spy it out,
And fly off with it at night."

Poems written for a child.

There was no buzzy sound in Mrs. White's garden this afternoon. It was far too early in the year for that, indeed it was beginning to feel quite chilly and cold, as the afternoons often do of fine days in early spring, and by the time Floss and Carrots had eaten their cake, and examined all the rose bushes to see if they could find any buds, and wished it were summer, so that there would be some strawberries hiding under the glossy green leaves, they began to wonder why nurse was so long – and to feel rather cold and tired of waiting.

"Just run to the door, Carrots, dear," said Floss, "and peep in to see if nurse is coming."

She did not like to go herself, for she knew that nurse and Mrs. White were fond of a comfortable talk together and might not like to be interrupted by her. But Carrots they would not mind.

Carrots set off obediently, but before he got to the door he

met nurse coming out. She was followed by Mrs. White and both were talking rather earnestly.

"You'll let me know, if so be as you find it, Mrs. Hooper; you won't forget?" Mrs. White was saying – Hooper was nurse's name – "for I feel quite uneasy – I do that, for you."

"I'll let you know, and thank you, Mrs. White," said nurse. "I'm glad I happened to bring some of my own money with me too, for I should have been sorry to put you to any ill-convenience by my carelessness – though how I could have been so careless as to mislay it, I'm sure it's more than I can say."

"It is, indeed, and you so careful," said Mrs. White sympathisingly.

Just then nurse caught sight of Carrots.

"Come along, Master Carrots," she said, "I was just going to look for you. Wherever's Miss Floss? We must be quick; it's quite time we were home."

"I'll tell Floss," said Carrots, disappearing again down the path, and in another moment Floss and he ran back to nurse.

Though they had been very quick, nurse seemed to think they had been slow. She even scolded Floss a very little as if she had been kept waiting by her and Carrots, when she was in a hurry to go, and both Floss and Carrots felt that this was very hard when the fact was that they had been waiting for nurse till they were both tired and cold.

"It wasn't Floss's fault. Floss wanted *you* to come quick, and she sended me to see," said Carrots indignantly.

"Hold your tongue, Master Carrots," said nurse sharply.

Carrots' face got very red, he gave nurse one reproachful look, but did not speak. He took Floss's hand and pulled her on in front. But Floss would not go; she drew her hand away.

"No, Carrots, dear," she said in a low voice, "it wouldn't be kind to leave nurse all alone when she is sorry about something."

"Is she sorry about something?" said Carrots.

"Yes," replied Floss, "I am sure she is. You run on for a minute. I want to speak to nurse."

Carrots ran on and Floss stayed behind.

"Nurse," she said softly, slipping her hand through nurse's arm, which, by stretching up on tip-toe, she was just able to do, "nurse, dear, what's the matter?"

"Nothing much, Miss Flossie," replied nurse, patting the kind little hand, "nothing much, but I'm growing an old woman and easy put out – and such a stupid like thing for me to have done!"

"What have you done? What is stupid?" inquired Floss, growing curious as well as sympathising.

"I have lost a half-sovereign – a ten-shilling piece in gold, Miss Flossie," replied nurse.

"Out of your pocket – dropped it, do you mean?" said Floss.

"Oh no – I had it in my purse – at least I thought I had," said nurse. "It was a half-sovereign of your mamma's that she gave me to pay Mrs. White with for Master Jack's things and part of last week that was left over, and I wrapped it up with a shilling and a sixpence – it came to eleven and six, altogether – in a piece

of paper, and put it in my drawer in the nursery, and before I came out I put the packet in my purse. And when I opened it at Mrs. White's no half-sovereign was there! Only the shilling and the sixpence!"

"You didn't drop it at Mrs. White's, did you? Should we go back and look?" said Floss, standing still, as if ready to run off that moment.

"No, no, my dear. It's not at Mrs. White's. She and I searched all over, and she's as honest a body as could be," replied nurse. "No, there's just the chance of its being in the drawer at home. I feel all in a fever till I get there to look. But don't you say anything about it, Miss Flossie; it's my own fault, and no one must be troubled about it but myself."

"Poor nursie," said Floss, "I'm so sorry. But you're sure to find it in your drawer. Let's go home very fast. Carrots," she called out to the little figure obediently trotting on in front, "Carrots, come and walk with nursie and me now. Nurse isn't vexed."

Carrots turned back, looking up wistfully in nurse's face.

"Poor darlings," said the old woman to herself, "such a shame of me to have spoilt their walk!"

And all the way home, "to make up," she was even kinder than usual.

But her hopes of finding the lost piece of money were disappointed. She searched all through the drawer in vain; there was no half-sovereign to be seen. Suddenly it struck her that Carrots had been busy "tidying" for Floss that morning.

"Master Carrots, my dear," she said, "when you were busy at Miss Floss's drawer to-day, you didn't open mine, did you, and touch anything in it?"

"Oh, no," said Carrots, at once, "I'm quite, quite *sure* I didn't, nursie."

"You're sure you didn't touch nurse's purse, or a little tiny packet of white paper, in her drawer?" inquired Floss, with an instinct that the circumstantial details might possibly recall some forgotten remembrance to his mind.

"*Quite* sure," said Carrots, looking straight up in their faces with a thoughtful, but not uncertain expression in his brown eyes.

"Because nurse has lost something out of her drawer, you see, Carrots dear, and she is very sorry about it," continued Floss.

"What has she lost? But I'm *sure*," repeated Carrots, "I didn't touch nurse's drawer, nor nucken in it. What has nurse lost?"

"A half-sovereign – " began Floss, but nurse interrupted her.

"Don't tease him any more about it," she said; "it's plain he doesn't know, and I wouldn't like the other servants to hear. Just forget about it, Master Carrots, my dear, perhaps nurse will find it some day."

So Carrots, literally obedient, asked no more questions. He only said to himself, with a puzzled look on his face, "A half sovereign! I didn't know nurse had any sovereigns – I thought only Floss had – and I never saw any broken in halfs!"

But as no more was said in his hearing about the matter, it passed from his innocent mind.

Nurse thought it right to tell the children's mother of her loss, and the girls and Maurice heard of it too. They all were very sorry for nurse, for she took her own carelessness rather sorely to heart. But by her wish, nothing was said of it to the two other servants, one of whom had only lately come, though the other had been with them many years.

"I'd rather by far bear the loss," said nurse, "than cause any ill-feeling about it, ma'am."

And her mistress gave in to her. "Though certainly *you* must not bear the loss, nurse," she said, kindly; "for in all these years you have saved me too many half-sovereigns and whole ones too for me to mind much about the loss of one. And you've asked Carrots, you say; you're sure he knows nothing about it?"

"Quite sure, ma'am," said nurse, unhesitatingly.

And several days went on, and nothing more was said or heard about the half-sovereign. Only all this time the little yellow sixpenny lay safely hidden away in Carrots' paint-box.

In a sense he had forgotten about it. He knew it was safe there, and he had almost fixed in his mind not to tell Floss about it till the day they should be going to the toy-shop to buy their hoops. Once or twice he had been on the point of showing it to her, but had stopped short, thinking how much more delightful it would be to "surprise" her. He had quite left off puzzling his head as to where the little coin had come from; he had found it in Floss's drawer, that was quite enough. If he had any thoughts about its history, they were that either Floss had had "the sixpenny" a long

time ago and had forgotten it, or that the fairies had brought it; and on the whole he inclined to the latter explanation, for you see there was something different about this sixpenny to any he had ever seen before.

Very likely "fairies' sixpennies" are always that pretty yellow colour, he thought.

One day, about a week after the loss of the half-sovereign, Maurice happened to come into the nursery just at the little ones' tea-time. It was a half-holiday, and he had been out a long walk with some of his companions, for he still went to school at Sandyshore, and now he had come in tremendously hungry and thirsty.

"I say, nurse," he exclaimed, seating himself unceremoniously at the table, "I'm awfully hungry, and mamma's out, and we shan't have tea for two hours yet. And Carrots, young man, I want your paint-box; mine's all gone to smash, and Cecil won't lend me hers, and I want to paint flags with stars and stripes for my new boat."

"Tars and tipes," repeated Carrots, "what's tars and tipes?"

"What's that to you?" replied Mott, politely. "Bless me, I am so thirsty. Give me your tea, Carrots, and nurse will make you some more. What awful weak stuff! But I'm too thirsty to wait."

He seized Carrots' mug and drank off its contents at one draught. But when he put the mug down he made a *very* wry face.

"What horrible stuff!" he exclaimed. "Nurse, you've forgotten to put in any sugar."

"No, she hasn't," said Carrots, bluntly.

Nurse smiled, but said nothing, and Floss looked fidgety.

"What do you mean?" said Mott. "Don't you like sugar – eh, young 'un?"

"Yes, I do like it," replied Carrots, but he would say no more.

Floss grew more and more uneasy.

"Oh, Mott," she burst out, "please don't tease Carrots. It's nothing wrong; it's only something we've planned ourselves."

Mott's curiosity was by this time thoroughly aroused.

"A secret, is it?" he exclaimed, pricking up his ears; "you'd best tell it me. I'm a duffer at keeping secrets. Out with it."

Floss looked ready to cry, and Carrots shut his mouth tight, as if determined not to give in. Nurse thought it time to interfere.

"Master Maurice," she said, appealingly, "don't tease the poor little things, there's a good boy. If it is a secret, there's no harm in it, you may be sure."

"Tease!" repeated Mott, virtuously, "I'm not teasing. I only want to know what the mystery is – why shouldn't I? I won't interfere."

Now Mott was just at the age when the spirit of mischief is most apt to get thorough hold of a boy; and once this *is* the case, who can say where or at what a boy will stop? Every opposition or contradiction only adds fuel to the flames, and not seldom a tiny spark may thus end in a great fire. Nurse knew something of boys in general, and of Mott in particular; and knowing what she did, she decided in her own mind that she had better take the

bull by the horns without delay.

"Miss Floss," she said seriously, "and Master Carrots, I think you had better tell your brother your secret. He'll be very kind about it, you'll see, and he won't tell anybody."

"Won't you, Mott?" said Floss, jumping up and down on her chair in her anxiety. "Promise."

"Honour bright," said Mott.

Carrots opened his mouth as if about to speak, but shut it down again.

"What were *you* going to say?" said Mott.

"Nucken," replied Carrots.

"People don't open their mouths like that, if they've 'nucken' to say," said Mott, as if he didn't believe Carrots.

"I didn't mean that I wasn't *going* to say nucken," said Carrots, "I mean I haven't nucken to say now."

"And what were you going to say?" persisted Mott.

Carrots looked frightened.

"I was only sinking if you knowed, and nurse knowed, and Floss knowed, and I knowed, it wouldn't be a secret."

Mott burst out laughing.

"What a precious goose you are," he exclaimed. "Well, secret or no secret, I'm going to hear it; so tell me."

Floss looked at nurse despairingly.

"You tell, nurse, please," she said.

So nurse told, and Maurice looked more amused than ever. "What an idea!" he exclaimed. "I don't believe Carrots'll hold

out for a month, whatever Floss may do, unless he has a precious lump of ac – ac – what is it the head people call it? – acquisitiveness for his age. But you needn't have made such a fuss about your precious secret. Here, nurse, give us some tea, and you may put in all the sugar Floss and Carrots have saved by now."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.