UNCLE JACOB.

CHAPTER I.

"WHAT'S the good of girls?" said Tom; "they're no use."

The young gentleman had some excuse, perhaps, for entertaining such a sentiment, though none for expressing it, considering all the fuss made about himself, and of how little consequence his six sisters were in the house. He lay on his back upon the floor, balancing an old drum upon the soles of his feet, "like the circus man," May, said—faithful five-year-old May, who was in attendance to pick up said drum whenever it fell. Joan, two years his elder, was struggling under the big, lumbering sofa, only one foot and a corner of brown holland frock visible from beneath it, and all in Tom's service!

"What is the matter now, King Tom?" asked the pleasant voice of Mildred, a tall, fair girl of seventeen, as she stood in the doorway between the large, airy day-nursery and the adjoining schoolroom—"what is the matter now? *You* to say that girls are of no use, indeed! I believe these poor children think they were invented to wait upon you."

"Well; they can't find my cricket-ball; my best—take care, May, it's down again." May bowled after the drum, and replaced it upon the feet of the performer. "You see I've no more tin, and I *must* have the ball found."

"Find it yourself," began Mildred, but Carry pushed her round, good-tempered face and red locks under her sister's arm.

"Have you looked in the rubbish hole?" she said, and forthwith plunged into that aptly-named receptacle, the bottom part of the nursery cupboard. Meantime Joan emerged from under the sofa, her hair one mass of dust, her frock soiled and crumpled, and her face and hands none of the cleanest. "I can't find it," she observed, mournfully, submitting at the same time to be "put to rights" by her elder sister.

Tom had no mind, however, to submit to the lecture which Mildred read him while engaged in brushing poor Joan's tangled curls; he raised himself on one elbow and called—

"Fanny! I say, old Fan!"

"Now, Tom, how can you be so selfish!" exclaimed Mildred; "I *will* not have Fan bothered; she is lying down, so tired from our walk."

"How was I to know?" growled the little tyrant; but a soft clear voice was heard from the schoolroom.

"Silly children! Who has looked on the top of the cupboard?"

A general shout, and rush towards the cupboard took place; but Mildred mounting on a footstool, looked down from her superior height, and reaching up her hand produced the ball.

"Oh, I remember now!" exclaimed Joan; "nurse shied it up there the last time it hit baby."

"Nurse did—*what?*" asked Mildred, severely; "Joan, I'm ashamed of you." At that moment Miss Pinner appeared in the doorway, "Lessons, young ladies," she said, adding, as the three girls followed her into the schoolroom, "I shall be ready for you at eleven, Tom."

Tom rolled over and over on the floor in disgust. He knew that his lessons were not ready; but it took time for him to make up his mind to do them, and it was perilously near eleven o'clock before he ordered May to set out his slate and books—spelling-book and all, for the truth must be told, at seven and a half, and although he had actually begun Latin with papa, Tom was by no means a good reader, and was obliged still to learn a column of spelling every day!

While he is occupied with his lessons, and little May is patiently making very long stitches in her hemming, and pricking her finger with the greatest perseverance and courage, we will look back a few years.

When Mildred was born, Uncle Jacob considerately remarked, "One girl will be useful; she can mend the boys' gloves, and sew buttons on their shirts." And he sent her, besides her silver mug, a knife, fork, and spoon in a morocco case.

Uncle Jacob was a bachelor himself, an "old" bachelor, people began to call him. He had a fine place down in Hampshire, and Mildred's eldest brother would be his heir.

But where was Mildred's brother?

After two years, Fanny appeared upon the scene. "Humph!" said Uncle Jacob, doubtfully. "But Milly might be lonely amongst the boys; two girls are not too many: they are companions for one another," and he sent the child a mug like her sister's.

Another interval, and Caroline was born.

"There must be some mistake!" exclaimed Uncle Jacob, when he

heard of it. This time he sent no present at all; and when poor little Joan came into the world he set off on an expedition to the interior of Africa. "Cut it up; cut it up!" he wrote angrily—he meant the property—"cut it up amongst a set of miserable girls! no boy? What a shocking thing!" Mildred, old enough then to understand something of all she heard, was present when the letter was read; it puzzled her.

"What is p'operty, nursie?" she asked, at bedtime; "is it as good as twelf-cake? Will Milly get a big bit when papa cuts it up?"

Nurse shook her head; it was a sore subject with her; she was very indignant that any one should think her nurslings "mistakes;" yet she did wish heartily "that Miss Joan at least had not thrust herself before her brother."

But more than two years passed, and they had become so used to girls in that house—Uncle Jacob being away too—that one fine day when nurse had promised Joan a new little sister, who would not leave her to go to lessons, as Carry already did, but would be in the nursery all day long—one day they were all quite taken by surprise, for instead of the promised new sister, Master Tom himself appeared at last. And when King Tom came, he ruled the house.

"Why should he not?" asked nurse, proudly, as she watched the fine fellow kicking about in his cot or held him enthroned in state upon her knee. The elder girls did lessons in the schoolroom, *when* Tom did not happen to want them to sing to him or play Bo Peep; little Joan was his willing slave all day; mamma lay on the drawing-room sofa and gave orders to the whole household; papa came home from his office in the evening, and every one minded his least word; but for all that Tom ruled the house. Every one came to pay homage to him in his cradle, and later, when his fat little legs began to carry him into all parts of his dominions in pursuit of his subjects, he was a complete tyrant. As a rule, the children were only admitted to the drawing-room at certain stated hours; but if it was Tom who presented himself with his cheerful, "Here's me, mamma!" he was never turned out; his mother, lying on her sofa, would watch him as he played about the room, not dreaming of sending him away, and only trusting that he would do nothing very damaging to himself or to the furniture. Tom's voice—he was blessed with good lungs—filled all the house as he stood at the top of the stairs, with his legs far apart, and his head well thrown back, shouting for papa when the so-called master of the

house came home; and however tired poor papa was, he seldom failed to obey the summons, and give the boy a ride on his shoulder; whereupon his little majesty's shouts of triumph would collect his whole court around him to share his enjoyment. His sisters were far from jealous of his privileges; they fully shared nurse's conviction that their only use in life was to wait upon him, and later still it was no uncommon sight to see them all four, in the square gardens, harnessed together with red worsted reins, Tom driving the team. But as the boy grew out of his white frocks, grew out of his babyhood altogether, his best friends began to think that it was time for him to grow out of his tyrannical ways too: but, behold! the habit was fixed—not so much of Tom's ruling the whole house as of the whole house being ready and willing to *be* ruled by him. May was born, and mamma fondly hoped that, in nursery parlance, her son's "nose would be put out of joint;" but no, little May learned to yield in everything to her brother, and as she grew older only furnished him with one devoted slave more, perhaps the most devoted of all. There must have been something very loveable about this small tyrant, for they all doted on him; his subjects never rebelled, and even Mildred, the only one who *said* he was spoilt, spoiled him herself as much as the others. Uncle Jacob had been travelling so long and so far that no one knew where to find him, and Tom was four years old before the congratulatory letter on his birth reached his parents. And when he did write this was what Uncle Jacob said: "So you have got a boy: I hope you whip him well: he must be a big fellow by now. How he will be ruined amongst you all! Mind what I say now, and whip him well." Strange to say, Tom *was* whipped for some audacious piece of mischief, and, moreover, told that it was by his uncle's desire, whence the habit arose of holding up poor Uncle Jacob as the bogey of nursery and schoolroom—hardly fair on him! Whenever punishment was called for papa would say, "You know what your Uncle Jacob desired me to do." Tom had no very agreeable associations with his uncle's name, and of course the younger girls, May especially, followed suit, and said that they "hated him." By the time that Master Tom was nearly eight years old he had naturally learnt that he must give up sometimes to his sisters; but unfortunately the habit of being all his life so much considered had made him very apt to fancy that nothing ought to stand in the way of his wishes; and although by that time a brave,

truthful little fellow, and generally very obedient to a direct command, he was constantly in scrapes from thoughtlessness. It was enough if *he* wished a thing: provided no one was there to forbid it, the thing was done without a thought of whether it were right or wrong. And it was so often wrong.

It was very hot in London. The white glare on the pavement made people's heads ache, and what a relief it was when a water cart came splashing past! The children had been for some time taking their walks in the early morning, starting as early as seven o'clock, and coming home about the time that papa and mamma came down to breakfast. The trees and bushes in the square gardens were covered with dust—not the white dust that lay thick on road-side hedges in the country, but dirty London dust—and the grass was burnt up and brown. Nurse used to take a thick shawl and spread it in the shade for baby Flo to roll upon while May sat still making daisy chains; and not even Tom could tempt the girls away from the favourite bench in the long walk where the trees met overhead, and they could see the cool shadows in Regent's Park instead of the glaring streets. In the schoolroom they were dull and languid: Miss Pinner herself had headaches. The outside shutters were closed, but the plants in the windows were almost baked in their red pots, and the flowers drooped. Mary, the schoolroom maid, declared that she was quite tired of answering the bell, which was ringing, she averred, from morning to night, and always for "more iced water." In the nursery nurse complained that it was "one person's work to keep Miss May cool, let alone amusing the baby, who was *that* fretful there was no bearing it, poor little lamb!" In short, every one felt the heat, and all were longing for the word of command to begin packing up for the summer trip—put off later than usual this year, that papa might be able to be of the party himself. Every day the impatient young ones saw more houses shut up, more cabs loaded with luggage driving off, and knew that more happy children had started for the country. Their own turn came at last; papa was ready, and they were told, to their infinite delight, that he had hired a house for six weeks in the beautiful New Forest. Mamma was so far from strong, that it was decided Miss Pinner should go too and take all trouble off her hands; but Tom need not have troubled himself to hide his Latin Grammar. No lesson books were to be taken with them, every one was to have a holiday, and

when papa asked for the book it was only to insure its being forthcoming on their return,—Tom's lesson books had such a trick of losing themselves.

He brought it, and had to listen to a long lecture upon diligence by-and-by when he came back, winding up very pleasantly to him with the words—

"Work you must, my boy, for after Christmas you are going to school."

"Hurrah!" cried Tom; "school at last; and not to learn of Miss Pinner any more."

"What an ungrateful boy!" said his mother's soft voice from the sofa, for Miss Pinner was very kind to Tom.

"Oh, I know she's nice; I do like her: she's nice enough, but then —she's a woman, you see."

"She can't help that."

"No, poor thing, no more she can," said Tom, seriously, and very much as if he pitied her.

On the platform at the railway station next morning, Tom was quite in his element; not so poor Miss Pinner; she and nurse, with all the children excepting the two elder girls, who went with papa and mamma, filled a carriage by themselves, and her one desire was to get the whole party seated in it, although it still wanted nearly a quarter of an hour to the time of starting. This disgusted Master Tom excessively; he preferred loitering on the platform, watching all that was going on, and did hesitate as long as possible before obeying the call to come and take his place. He had only just made up his mind to do as he was bid when papa saw him, and took pity on the boy, keeping him with him till the very last moment—quite to the last, so that Tom had to give a great jump into the carriage, helped by a porter, and then tumbled in upon nurse and baby head foremost. Once started, what a fidget he was! Up and down every moment, his head incessantly thrust out of window, changing places a dozen times over with one or other of his sisters, sitting astride on the arm of his seat, imitating the whistle of the engine, singing, dancing even, and going through a thousand antics, very amusing to himself, putting the silly little girls into fits of laughter, and to which nurse was philosophically indifferent, but which kept poor Miss Pinner in a terrible state of nervousness.

Worse was to come, however.

At Basingstoke there was a delay of ten minutes, and out got Tom with the rest of the passengers. He went to invest in buns for himself and his sisters; but getting in again was another matter. Papa returned to his carriage, nearly every one else had taken their seats, and still Tom lingered.

"Come this moment," said the governess, decidedly.

"Yes," answered Tom, moving slowly a hair's breadth nearer.

"You'll be left behind, my dear! indeed you will," exclaimed nurse.

"Oh, don't bother; I'm coming," but as Tom spoke, down went a bun: he stooped to pick it up, and out popped papa's head from a carriage lower down. One sharp, "In with you, Tom! leave the bun and get in," and the boy was seated beside his sisters—"in less than no time," as Joan remarked. The eating of the buns promoted peace and quietness for some time, but, alas! the buns were dry, the day was hot, and there was nothing to drink.

"Never mind, girls;" said Tom, "at the next station I'll get you all some water."

Miss Pinner privately determined that he should do no such thing. She did not consider that, having hitherto only attended the children for a few hours each day as daily governess, her authority was not yet fully established; it was something new to have to mind her out of lesson hours, and though the girls were obedient enough, Tom was a little inclined to defy her. One or two stations they rushed through without stopping at all, but at last they slackened speed, and gradually came to a standstill. In a moment out sprang the boy; Miss Pinner called to him to come back.

"I'm only going to ask papa if I may," he shouted, and ran down the platform, passed the right carriage in his hurry, found himself at the engine. Fascinating sight! how he wished he was a fireman!—could not resist pausing for a moment, then turned and dashed back again. This time his father was looking out and caught sight of him.

"No time allowed here," he called; "back to your place! no, stay, jump in here, we are off!"

Tom did not obey *on the instant*, as a child should; he glanced along the train; Joan held open the door, and called to him—

"Oh! run, run!"

He hesitated, lost his presence of mind, and ran towards her. A whistle sounded, the train began to move, Joan still held the door,

Miss Pinner in an agony of fright held Joan; Tom made a frantic rush, and felt himself caught round the waist and held fast.

"Too late, sir," said the porter.

"How dare you!" cried Tom, passionately.

The man let go of him, took off his hat, scratched his head, and stared after the rapidly disappearing train. Not only papa's head and Joan's, but the heads of half the passengers were thrust out of window, to look at Tom—Tom left there all alone at a little roadside station. After a minute or two he sat down, disconsolately enough, upon an empty hamper that stood near, kicking his heels and choking down a very uncomfortable feeling in his throat. He was not going to cry, not he! with the porter looking at him. But the man went away into the ticket office muttering something or other, which Tom did not catch, and then he began to feel more uncomfortable still. "Why didn't the stupid fellow tell him what he was to do? Perhaps he was gone to order the special train for him, or would they send him on by telegraph?" Tom was not quite sure what a telegraph was. Then he remembered that his mother would be anxious, and perhaps have one of those bad headaches that always come whenever there was what the children called "a fuss." How he wished he had minded Miss Pinner! As for papa, he knew that he would be displeased with him. "But all this time why didn't that stupid porter come and attend to him?" No one was in sight. There lay the long, black rails upon the glaring white road going so far and so straight, seeming to touch the sky. Some men were busy in the sheds behind the station, loading or unloading hops. The fragrant scent of the hops perfumed the air: two or three fowls came clucking on to the platform, and began to peck amongst the gravel, but these were all the signs of life Tom saw. The station-master's little daughter was peeping at him over the blind, but he did not see her. Presently a cart came along the pretty country road—the road all flecked with the shadows of trees, and the driver pulled up when he reached the level crossing over the rails, for the gates had not been opened yet, since the express had passed through. The man shouted for the gatekeeper; when he came, as he slowly pushed back the heavy gates, he looked towards Tom sitting on the platform, perched on a hamper, and said something, at which both men laughed. Tom felt hot all over. He thought he would go and look at the time table and find out when the next train passed, but something

kept him chained to his basket. He would have liked to show himself so manly and independent, instead of which he was shy and uncomfortable, very like what he really was—a silly, helpless little child.

Of course he had not been forgotten all this time, and as soon as he was able the station-master came to see into the matter.

"Left behind, sir, eh!" he said, pleasantly; "why, what is to be done now, I wonder?"

Tom wished to be dignified, but he only succeeded in being cross.

"Send me on by the next train, of course," he grunted.

"And where was you going, sir?"

Tom—*did not know!*

He had never heard the name of the station, or even of the place to which they were going; he only knew that it was in the New Forest. That did not help matters much, for the station-master said that the New Forest was a large place. Tom thought that things looked very serious indeed now, and wondered that the man did not seem at all disturbed; the little boy's ill-temper was vanishing fast, all lost in anxiety.

"Don't you worry, sir," said his new friend; "your papa is sure to telegraph the first time she stops."

"The first time *who* stops?" asked bewildered Tom.

"Why the train, to be sure. You just come along in out of the sun, and play with my little girl, and you'll get a message for certain before long."

The little girl with smooth, closely-cropped hair, and face as shiny as fresh water and yellow soap could make it, welcomed Tom with a broad smile, and the boy was delighted at the sight of a companion. They were told not to leave the ticket office just yet in case of a telegram arriving; but Ruth said by-and-by they would go to the shed, and climb about on the big hop pockets. "They do just smell good," said she. Tom was puzzled about the "pockets," till he heard that the sacks were so called. Ruth could tell about the picking too, and she showed how her hands were stained with the fresh hops. Tom was too polite to say so, but he could not see much difference between their colour and that of the brown little face. Ruth told, too, how "mother" was dead, and she, Ruth, took care of father, cooked his dinner, and kept house for him. The chickens had to be fed by this time, and while the children were throwing down the grain to them, Tom heard a sound like a little bell, clear and sharp, which made him look round.

"All right, sir," said the station-master, "that will be your papa talking to you."

Tom drew near, awestruck and puzzled, and when the words were laid before him he really did feel that there were many wonderful things which even he—King Tom—could not understand. The message was simply, "Send the little boy on by next train to Lindhurst Road Station."

(*To be continued.*)

UNCLE JACOB.

(*Concluded.*)

CHAPTER II.

IT wanted more than two hours to the time when the next train would pass, but with his mind relieved, Tom began to recover his spirits and to enjoy his adventure. His happiness was complete when a goods train came up, was loaded with hops, and went on again. Now it takes a long time to start a goods train. Perhaps you have sometimes been kept at a level crossing while one was crawling backwards and forwards, the engine snorting and puffing, giving out clouds of steam, the heavy-laden trucks all fastened to it—then a shrill whistle and off they set. Oh, dear no! nothing of the kind; they go snorting up the line only to come crawling back again, and this time, perhaps, the engine stops just opposite the gate, and the horses prick their ears and look at it as if they did not like it, not at all as if they were grateful to the wonderful steam power which has saved so much hard work for so many weary horses. And so the monster crawls backwards and forwards for ever so long, until suddenly it seems to take it into its head to go straight on, and they are really off at last.

This was just what Tom's goods train did, and during all the going up and down where do you suppose the happy boy was? Why actually on the engine. With his usual sociability he had made friends not only with Ruth and her father and the men with the hops, but even with his old enemy the porter and with the fireman: it was a very grimy, but also a very satisfied, delighted little boy who stood upon the platform when the goods train had really crawled quite away. After that Ruth suggested that he should wash his face and hands, and get the dust and ashes brushed off him, and also share her tea before his own train was due. He was nothing loth, and though she had only a very stale loaf to offer him, because the baker had forgotten to call, and there was no milk in the tea because it was not yet milking time, he enjoyed the meal very much. By this time one or two people began to collect—people who were going by the train.

There were not many passengers; only two or three farmers, a servant girl, and a boy a year or two older than Tom, who came on foot to the station, and asked for a first-class ticket to Lindhurst Road. Tom, quite himself now, in tiptop spirits, was loitering up and down the platform, his hands in his pockets, his straw hat very much on one side of his curly head, where it always did contrive to get, however nicely it was put on at first, whistling, and nodding to Ruth, who was busy in the house, but came to the window every two minutes to look at him. At sight of the new comer Tom ceased whistling to stare at him. The boy was a tall boy; his jacket was too short in the sleeves, and his trousers not quite long enough in the legs; he had white hair and eyebrows, and looked delicate, but Tom was chiefly struck by his height, for he did not look very much older than himself.

"Halloa!" says Tom, "you're going to Lindhurst Road?"

"Well, I know that."

"Let's go together."

"All right." So that matter was settled.

"What's your name?" was Tom's next question.

"Abel Short," answered the tall boy.

Tom laughed.

"What are you grinning for?" said the stranger, rather fiercely. "Let's hear the joke if there is one."

"I thought you were chaffing, calling yourself Abel Short," said poor Tom, humbly enough, "you're such a long fellow, you know."

They got on together pretty well after that: Tom told all his adventures of that day, and heard, in return, that Abel was on his way to spend his holidays at his uncle's, who lived in the same neighbourhood as that in which Tom's father had hired a house.

The train came up in due time, and the boys bolted in hot haste into the first carriage they saw, Tom immediately bolting out again to say good-bye to Ruth, to the station-master, who was too busy to attend to him, to the porter, who was explaining all about him to the guard, and then once more to Ruth, thereby all but losing his place, and being left behind again.

The carriage was occupied by two old ladies and a young man, and during the journey Tom made himself very agreeable to the whole party. Perhaps he was showing off before Abel Short, perhaps the young man amused himself by leading the boy on, perhaps the old ladies'

praises—flattery would be a better word—encouraged him; certain it is that he was good enough to sing his best comic songs, to go through all his tricks of mimicking his acquaintance, and to give a very detailed and animated account of his whole adventure. He made himself out a very fine fellow, quite able to take care of himself; truthful as he had ever been, he was carried away by the spirit of boasting, and made every one believe that he had never felt afraid at all. Did he forget how he had sat there in the hot sun on an old basket feeling ready to cry? However, every one was very much pleased with him; Abel looked upon him as a hero; the old ladies were delighted; and in spite of fun he contrived to be courteous and polite all the journey.

The sun was setting when they reached Lindhurst Road; Tom saw his father watching for him. When the door was opened, and he pushed his way across the carriage towards it, one of the ladies called out cheerfully to the grave, silent gentleman who stood there waiting—

"Here he is, sir; here is your charming little boy, and we are quite sorry to lose him."

Out jumped Tom; but what a fall his pride had! Then and there on the platform, before all eyes, papa boxed the ears of his "charming little boy." Before the old ladies, before the young man who looked laughing from the carriage window, and, worse than all, before Abel Short, who had also left the train, and was staring at Tom and his papa. Poor King Tom! he followed his father silently, choking down his tears, and without the comfort of seeing that his father had almost as much trouble to suppress *his* smiles. He knew so exactly how conceited his little son had been, what a fine fellow he thought himself, and could not help being amused at his sudden downfall. It was not till they had passed over an open tract of forest, gone across a little bridge over a running stream, and were walking along by a hedgerow in sight of a pretty house with green balcony and gay garden, that papa held out his hand.

"Well," he said, "what did I box your ears for?"

"Because I disobeyed Miss Pinner," said Tom, humbly, glancing up to see if he were forgiven.

"Of course," said papa, squeezing the hot little hand tight in his own. "You are to mind every one set over you exactly as you mind me, and you know it."

Tom trudged along by his side, feeling tired and subdued, but not unhappy, for papa had forgiven him; but as they stopped at the garden gate he asked in a very low voice:

"Has mamma a headache?"

"Ah, my boy!" said papa, kindly, "I am glad you can think of your mother. She is better now, and will be quite well when she sees you. Only next time try and remember her *before* you get into mischief."

CHAPTER III.

WHAT happy holidays those were! The children thought that they had never enjoyed any others so much. Papa was with them, to begin with; he took them long rambles in the forest, where one day they had a picnic and boiled the kettle for tea under the trees. Even Fanny went, Fan, who was always tired in London, and up to very little besides telling stories to the little ones. A great tall girl she was, who had outgrown all her strength; but her gentle ways and loving words kept Tom out of more mischief than anything else did, and indeed mamma was often comforted by seeing how much influence for good Fanny had over all the younger ones. Here, in the fresh country air, she began to get a little colour in her cheeks, and to feel able to join in her sisters' out-of-door amusements. They had not far to go to the real forest, for if they crossed their own tiny lawn and one field that lay beyond it, they found themselves at once under the beautiful trees; it could not tire mamma herself to walk that little distance. Abel Short came now and then to see Tom, but the boys were not very good friends; Abel was unkind and ungenerous enough to laugh at poor King Tom for that unlucky box on the ear, and the boy could not stand it; but then Abel knew the forest well, or he said that he did so, and it was very convenient to have a guide, for it is the easiest place in the world in which to lose oneself. Tom's father gave him a little compass one morning, and promised to show him, some time or other, how to find his way by that; the little that he did say on the subject the impatient boy thought quite enough to make him understand the matter thoroughly, and he only hoped that they might soon get lost so as to test it at once. Miss Pinner and the girls, however, did not share his love for adventure, and only went so far as to be quite sure of the road home, so that Tom was really glad one afternoon when

he saw Abel looking over the garden rail, which was his way of offering a visit instead of coming up like a gentleman to the front door.

"Come a walk?" sang out Tom.

Abel nodded, and leave obtained, the boys set off, but were only half-way across the meadow, when May ran after them. "Take me, do!" she begged.

"Nonsense! don't let's be bothered with a baby," said Abel, crossly. And for the sake of contradicting him, and also because he was always angry when any one but himself snubbed his sisters, Tom took hold of her hand and said, "Yes." He did hesitate half a moment, for he knew May also ought to ask leave before going out of sight of the house, but only half a moment, and then—without remembering mamma!—Tom plunged into his second piece of mischief those holidays.

For some time all went well; the boys did not quarrel themselves, or hurry May when she saw treasures of acorns and moss, with which she thought it necessary to fill her pockets, or lovely heath bells which it was impossible to pass, or even tempting banks, on which she should so like to rest. By-and-by, too, Abel began to tell the most interesting stories of "last half" at school, without thinking it at all necessary to say that his *last* half had been also his *first*, and though May did not understand much of these Tom was charmed. So they roamed on through the forest under the glorious old trees, now and then coming out into an open glade where the sun was too hot to be pleasant, making, however, the plunge into the cool shade on the other side even more enjoyable. They had long rests, too, and even refreshment, in the shape of two pieces of gingerbread which May produced, a whole handful of nuts, found in Tom's pocket, and a very warm apple which emerged from Abel's. But at last May's perfect happiness was rudely interrupted; as they sat themselves down at the foot of a tree, a slight rustle was heard in the grass, and a snake glided away.

"Oh, let's go home!" cried the little girl in sudden terror: the whole forest changed at once for her, from the beautiful playground it had been an instant before into a terrible wilderness, full of unknown horrors. But the boys were already in hot pursuit; of course they did not kill the snake, and of course poor May was doubly terrified at having been left a few moments alone. When they rejoined her she was crying.

"Cry babby!" said Abel, rudely. "I told you how it would be."

Tom took his sister's part; it must be time to go home, he said; which was the way? Abel pointed confidently to the right, and they set off.

"Is there any sorts more of live beasts in the wood?" asked May.

"Plenty of cattle," Abel answered; "I wonder we haven't come across any bulls."

"Oh!" said May, coming very close to Tom, "I don't like bulls."

"Well, pigs then; there's lots of them too; they turn them loose here to eat the acorns."

"I don't think I like pigs either," said May; "but they're not so bad as bulls."

"There were deer once," remarked Tom; "papa said so; they used to come quite up to the palings by our house."

At that moment Abel stopped and held up his finger; "Ponies!" he whispered; "see, here they come; how do you like these?"

A trampling of feet was heard, a troop of forest ponies passed across one of the open glades, on the edge of which the children were standing; rough, ugly little horses enough, but the boys were charmed with them. May, however, did not stay quiet long; the child's fears having been once excited could not easily be lulled again; she felt half afraid even of the ponies. She begged her brother to go on home; "Is it a long way now?" she asked. Tom appealed to Abel.

"I don't know; I think we must have missed the way; do you remember this open place?"

"Oh, yes!" answered unobservant Tom, "we passed lots of them."

"Yes, but not this one; we never passed that big tree with bare arms, nor all that fern either."

Tom got cross. "You said you knew the way," he grumbled, "and now you don't."

"Well, and you said you could find your way anywhere, whether I knew it or not, with your fine compass. Come now, you lead on."

Tom took out his compass.

"That's north," he said, "now if we go on we shall get there."

"Get where?"

"Why to the north; the thing always points straight."

"I dare say; but do you know if your house lies north?"

"How should I?" says Tom, fiercely.

The other laughed. "Well done, Mr. Wiseacre! much good a compass is to you!"

Poor little May not understanding all this, only understood that the way was doubtful; she sat down on the grass crying.

"We is all loosed," she said, pitifully, "and I'm tired. I want to go home to tea, and there's to be jam for tea."

"Oh, you baby!" cried Abel, not only laughing at her, but seizing hold of her hand roughly to pull her up.

"You let her alone!" exclaimed Tom, flying at him; and then kneeling down by his little sister he put one arm round her, and even kissed her, and Tom was chary of his kisses.

Abel said that they *must* come on unless they wanted to stop out all night, and as the compass was no good they must trust to their wits; but May was really tired, and could not be persuaded to stop crying, or to get up off the ground; whereupon Master Short, the eldest of the party, and the most bound to think of the others before himself, left them, and set off alone, not before he had wickedly tried to frighten the children by talking again of the bulls, with which he declared the forest abounded. Now it so happens that there are cattle in the forest. but it also so happens that you may wander there for hours and never meet with anything of the kind.

Tom watched Abel disappear among the trees; then he looked at poor tired little May, still sobbing; then at the long shadows on the ground, which papa had taught him showed that evening was coming near, and he felt very much inclined to cry too. That would do no good, however; so after some time, when May was rested, he coaxed her on again, and wearily side by side they trudged through the forest. Trees upon trees, nothing but trees, never a house or a cottage, never a man or a boy, nothing stirring but now and then a herd of pigs grunting and routing in the ground under the leafy branches, or those dreadful snakes gliding away through the grass. Out in the open spaces where the purple heather grew, and where, now that the heat of the day was over, a fresher air blew than in the wood, the little figures plodded on with weary feet, the brave boy doing his best to encourage his sister, all the time that his own little heart was swelling at the thought of his mother's anxiety, his father's displeasure, and the dark night which was so surely coming upon them very soon. If only he had not brought May! He himself had had leave to go as far as he

liked with Abel, and after all it was only a misfortune, not a fault, having lost the way, but he knew that May would not have been allowed to come. By-and-by she really could walk no longer, and laid herself quite down, refusing to stir, or to do anything but cry; indeed she began to be very cross, poor child! which was not to be wondered at. Tom was at his wits' end.

"Oh, May! get up," he begged; "only a little way now, and we'll find a nice house perhaps, and the man will take us home."

He had been promising that this "man" would make his appearance for the last two hours, and the child was not to be coaxed into believing in him any longer.

"It's a naughty story. You're a bad boy, and there's no man. Don't touch me. I won't get up. I will lie here; and I *will* go home to tea." She lifted up her little hand and gave poor Tom two or three hearty thumps, then burst into louder crying than before.

"Hush! what's all this?" said a voice, which seemed to come from overhead; "quarrelling? Why don't you know how you frighten away the fairies? They can't bear quarrelling; it's like a thunder-storm to them. There they go flying away as fast as they can."

The children stared at each other; then stared up into the sky, and seeing nothing there looked a little lower. At a few paces distant, on the top of a high bank, there stood a stout gentleman in brown gaiters, shooting coat, and wideawake. May clapped her hands, and no one could say how glad Tom felt.

"It *is* the man!" cried May, joyfully; "he's come!" and scrambling to her feet she ran up to him. "Man, please take care of us 'cause we're loosed," she said.

Matters were soon explained, and the stout gentleman readily undertook the care of them. "We must walk on still half an hour or so," he said, "and then we shall be all right."

"Then you must carry May," remarked Tom, very decidedly.

"Must I? well, so be it," and he picked up the tired little woman and set off at a good pace, Tom trotting by his side. It was wonderful how much faster they got on now they were no longer alone; May put her arm round the stout gentleman's neck, and leaned her head on his shoulder, and was almost asleep when he broke the silence by asking Tom his name. At the answer he suddenly stopped short.

"Halloa!" he exclaimed, looking at Tom very queerly, the boy

thought. "You don't mean to say ——;" but there he broke off again and strode on faster than ever; too fast for poor Tom; he could hardly keep his feet. The little fellow was quite done, and at last further progress was put a stop to by his throwing himself on the ground. "I can't go on," he said.

"Too fast, eh, my boy? well, we must rest a bit, or, no; you must choose whether you will go on slowly or stay here alone till I send for you; there is no time to lose."

"How far?" asked the poor tired boy. The stout gentleman said that they would not be more than ten minutes walking the rest of the distance, so Tom picked himself up and stumbled on again as best he could. He had been on his feet, more or less, since two o'clock, and after all his feet were not quite eight years old—it was too much to expect of them.

At last they came in sight of a pretty little house, a cottage it seemed to be, though it was in reality the lodge to a very fine place; but the gentleman, glancing first at the little boy and then at the long avenue which led towards the house, shook his head and went up, still carrying May, to the lodge door. A clean, tidy woman came at his call; to her he confided the weary children, with orders to give them something to eat and then put them to bed. They were almost too tired to do more than taste the food set before them, and May could hardly keep awake to be undressed; in half an hour after they were both sound asleep.

As for the stout gentleman, he had set off at a rapid pace up the avenue without an instant's delay as soon as he had seen the little ones in safety. If Tom had been awake he would have heard, soon after, the sound of horses' hoofs clattering along, and the voice of a man, apparently in great haste, shouting to the lodgekeeper to open the gate. But Tom was fast asleep.

When May awoke the next morning she was quite puzzled to find herself in a strange bed in a strange room, and her little tongue went very fast indeed, asking a hundred questions in a minute. When she came down stairs Tom was already dressed and waiting for her before the door, fresh and strong again after his good night's rest. They were told to walk steadily up the avenue to the big house, the chimney of which they could see above the trees, and charged not to leave the path. The dew was still glittering on every blade of grass; the air was

fresh and cool; the great branches of grand old trees, with trunks nestled in fern, gave a pleasant shade, and from out the fern stately stags bounded away or stood knee deep in the green leaves gazing with large eyes at the two children. Half way up the avenue the stout gentleman met them with the welcome news that breakfast was ready, and that after eating it he would himself drive them home. The house, and, above all, the garden, delighted the little ones. Such gay borders; such a fountain with a great marble basin, where gold and silver fish swam about; such a broad terrace, where lovely peacocks strutted up and down in the morning sun, and, in doors, *such* a breakfast! Eggs, toast, marmalade—all sorts of good things; and May poured out the tea, with the "big man," as she called him, holding his big hand over her tiny one because the teapot was so heavy. When the meal was over they all went on to the terrace to wait for the pony carriage.

"Is this your home, this pretty house?" asked May of her friend; "did you have a mamma here when you was a little boy?"

"Yes; but that is a long time ago. My dear mother is dead. When she was alive, I wonder if I ever gave her such a fright as your poor mamma had yesterday."

"But we are going home," said May. "Was mamma frightened in the night? Did she think the bulls would get us?"

Now Tom had been thinking of his mother several times that morning, and these few words quite upset him; rolling on the grass as he was he could not restrain his tears.

"When *will* the carriage come?" he asked, impatiently; then with a great sob, "Mamma! mamma!" and turning over to hide his eyes poor King Tom fairly cried.

The stout gentleman stood pulling his moustache and thoughtfully looking down at the boy. Presently he touched him gently with his foot; "Come, my little fellow," he said, "get up and listen to me."

Tom did not get up, but he rolled over again and listened.

"So you do love your mother. What a pity you didn't think of her *before* you got into this scrape!"

"Oh! oh!" groaned Tom; "Papa said that!"

"I am afraid she has been very miserable about your sister; you see *you* had leave to go, and boys seldom come to much harm; you might have found your way together, you and that nice young gentleman, Mr. Abel Short, but a little girl——"

"That's just it!" cried Tom, "girls *are* no good!"

"I fear your poor mother must have suffered, and you say she is not strong."

"Oh, don't!" cried penitent Tom, twisting himself about on the grass.

"As I said," went on the gentleman, gravely, "she must have suffered anxiety, but not all night: I sent off a messenger as soon as we got here; she knew by eight o'clock that you were safe."

Her little son felt that that was some comfort at least, and he dried his eyes, but remained in a very subdued frame of mind. May chatted on: "Have you got an uncle?" she asked at last, and asked very seriously.

"An uncle?" said her friend; "why let me see; yes, I do believe I have an uncle somewhere or other."

"Oh!" said May gravely, "isn't it horrid?"

"Halloa!" said the stout gentleman; "horrid! And why should it be 'horrid' to have an uncle, pray?"

"Ours is horrid," answered May; "ours is Uncle Jacob, and he's very horrid."

"He got me a thrashing!" said Tom.

"He said we would all ruin a boy," added May.

"He wouldn't let me go to school till I could read and write; but I *am* going after Christmas," exclaimed Tom.

"He said us girls was a mistake!" May wound up with, in a climax of ungrammatical indignation.

The stout gentleman laughed heartily. "A terrible fellow this Uncle Jacob! a very terrible fellow: and what is he like to look at?"

"Never seen him," said Tom, "and don't want to."

"He doesn't come," May remarked; "he only writes."

At that moment the prettiest basket pony carriage that the children had ever seen came to the door. Happy Tom was allowed to drive great part of the way home, which way was much shorter than he had any idea of. They must have gone round and round in a circle in their wandering of the day before; for hardly two hours after they had started they came in sight of their own house. Papa was at the gate, which he threw open when he saw them coming, returning to the house himself, where he met them under the ivy-covered porch.

Tom thought that it must be by mistake that his father threw an

arm round *both* children, pressing them closely to him: he fancied papa was in such a hurry to embrace May that he accidentally included Tom, who had led her into such a scrape.

He did not think that it was by mistake his mother kissed him, and the boy's eyes were wet again when he at last lifted his curly head from her shoulder.

May was wild to show mamma "the big man who let me make tea;" and presently he came into the drawing-room followed by papa; but what was the children's boundless astonishment when mamma went straight up to the stout gentleman, and stretching out both hands to greet him, exclaimed, "Oh Jacob, Jacob! if you had not sent that message I think I should have died before morning!"

"*Jacob?*" Uncle Jacob! Yes; it was really him himself.

"Was it so very 'horrid' to have an uncle?" he asked May, laughing—laughing, too, at Tom, who stood there open-mouthed. It was a long time before he could take it in at all—a long time before Tom or May either would believe that their kind friend was "hateful Uncle Jacob;" but if they were agreeably surprised in him, it is also true that he himself found King Tom very different from the hopelessly spoiled boy whom he had expected to meet with. Certainly Uncle Jacob opened his eyes very wide, and said "Halloa," in his gruffest voice, on hearing some of his nephew's uncourteous remarks about the uselessness of girls; but he soon saw—as, indeed, the boy's kindness to little May proved—that though he was fond of talking nonsense, and thought it a fine thing to pretend to look down upon his sisters, he was in reality very fond of them, and, at the bottom of his heart, far from ungrateful for the love and petting lavished upon him. Indeed he clung to his home more and more as the time drew near for him to leave it. Many an afternoon, with May's tiny hand in his, during their walks, and Carry and Joan, as usual, devoted to him—many an evening, kneeling by Fanny's sofa, listening to the stories which the children so loved to hear, while kind Milly sat by working at the sails of his boat, or the tail of his famous kite, he was tempted to wish that there was no such thing as school in the world. Meanwhile the holidays were none the less enjoyed because varied by many a visit to the "pretty house," where they would have been spent altogether, only that Uncle Jacob's return home had been quite unexpected; and after the holidays Tom really did work so well as to be fully fit for school in the winter.

And here we must take leave of "King Tom," only glad that, in doing so, we can record a far more chivalrous sentiment of his majesty's than that with which our story opened, for certain it is, that in one of his letters home occur the following remarkable words, proving, either a change in his opinions, or, which is more likely, that he had at last discovered that there was no need to be ashamed of those which he really entertained.

Speaking of one of his companions, Tom writes—"I'm sorry for Brown; there are no girls in his house, and there is nothing jollier than for a fellow to have lots of sisters!"

THE LOST LEGENDS OF THE NURSERY SONGS.

"Bye, Baby Bunting,
Father's gone a-hunting,
Mother's gone a-milking,
Sister's gone a-silking,
Brother's gone to buy a skin,
To wrap the Baby Bunting in."

BABY BUNTING was the youngest child of Captain Bunting, a brave old sailor, who was the owner of a ship in which he went fighting or trading according as he was wanted. Soon after Baby Bunting was born, Captain Bunting went on a trading trip, in which he was very successful. He was coming home well laden, and with heaps of presents for his wife and children left on shore, when one gusty morning he saw one poor vessel attacked by two great pirate ships. "Hulloh! that's not fair!" said Captain Bunting, and up he sailed with all speed, and helped the vessel to fight the two pirates. A hard fight they had of it; however, they beat them at last, and made the pirates prisoners on board their own ships. Now, the ship that Captain Bunting had saved was a royal ship, although not of his own country, and it had the King himself on board. As soon as the fight was over, the King sent for Captain Bunting into his own cabin, and thanked him for his help. "Keep close to my vessel," said the King, "and sail home with me to my own land, and I will reward you richly for saving me and my crew."