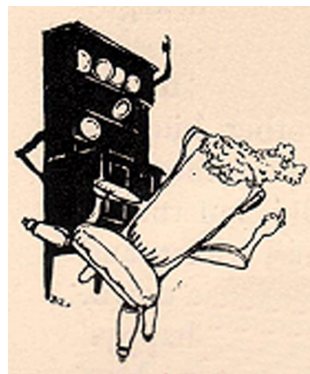
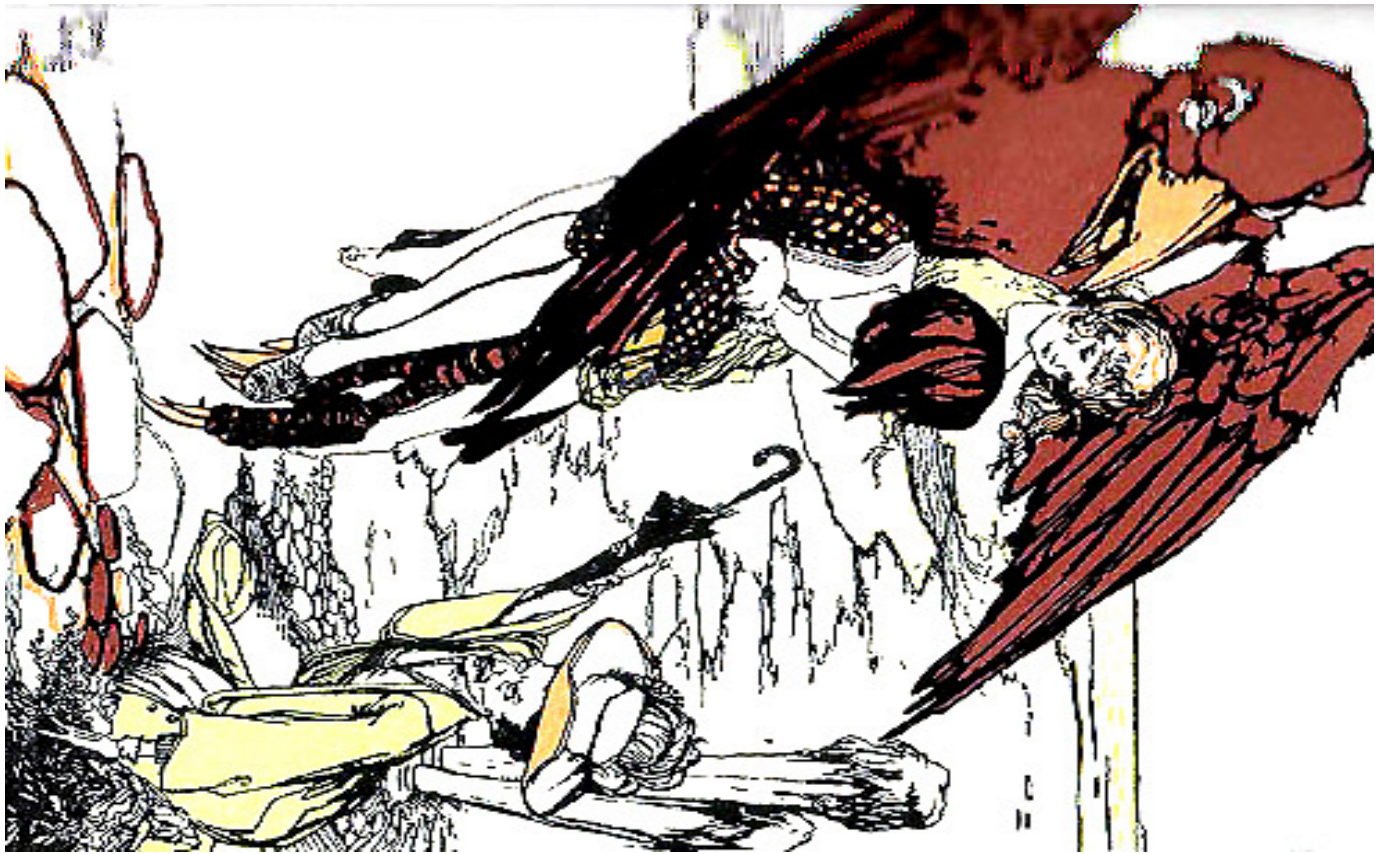
BERYL IRVING

The Dawnchild





CHAPTER ONE

Mig Meets The Dawnchild

On the window-sill something stirred.

Mig turned over in bed, but fell asleep again.

Something tapped at the window and called her name.

Mig started up at this and looked around.

Upon the yellow blinds she saw the shadows of the ivy-leaves and of what appeared to be an extraordinary bird seated on the sill.

For one second Mig gazed at the sleeping form by her side. Cousin Belinda was not beautiful – she had a hungry-looking beaky nose and it made her snore. She was very fast asleep, so Mig clambered silently out of bed, and ran across the room on tiptoe, but when she pushed aside the blind all that greeted her was a whirr of wings, and nothing to be seen.

Mig looked at the uncared for garden a long time, but nothing was changed. It still looked like a lost child, crying for the hands of its mother. The dew sparkled more every minute; she felt sure something ought to happen. The birds began a sleepy 'cheerup-cheerup', echoed gradually by all the others.

'Perhaps I'll see the grass turn into an army,' said Mig, hopefully hunting to the unknown. Then it happened. There was a shy squawk from the sycamore and apple-tree that grew closely together by the window, and there she saw five birds behaving in a very odd manner. They seemed to be bowing before some one very great; indeed the early autumn robin scraped his head on the branch each time, he bowed so low.

'It must be some one very great for him to keep doing that,' thought Mig. 'I banged my head once yesterday and cried.'

And now there appeared at the end of the branch the extraordinary bird whose shadow Mig had already seen. I must describe him, for he is very important, in fact he is the Prime Minister of the King of Dawnland.

His feathers looked very black and dowdy, until he ruffled them, when they shone green and purple. His eyes were full of wisdom. Truly he was a dear old bird, with kindly lines round the place whence his beak grew, and above each eye a white eyebrow, who-would-have-thought-of-meeting-you-here!'

He advanced slowly, in what he thought was a dignified manner, with a hop-hop-hop, lurching dangerously from side to side.

Every now and then he gave a sneeze.

Mig could not help laughing, but he turned and looked at her solemnly, then let out a peculiar chirrup, which sounded like 'curroutuwhee'.

'I beg your pardon!' said Mig politely.

'Comoutowe!' It sounded like a command. It was very awkward not being able to understand and she did not quite know what to do. It seemed so rude not to answer, so she said she was deaf.

'You're not!' said the Bird. 'I said "Come out to we."'

'Oh well,' said the little girl, who loved an argument, 'we is bad grammar.'

'And you've bad manners,' said the Bird 'to say you're deaf. You're no deafer than other humans who can't hear bird-language.

Time upon time I've tried to talk to them,' he said aggrievedly, and ruffled his feathers until they shone green and violet and scarlet. 'Well, anyway, get dressed and come down. I've come to take you to Her, and to make you happy.'

For Mig was very unhappy. Her mother, Mrs.McArthur, had died two years before, leaving her all alone in the old grey house with cross old Belinda who had come to live there. Belinda had always been jealous of pretty Mrs. McArthur's good looks, never losing an opportunity of doing her some ill turn or another. But now Mrs. McArthur was dead, and it afforded Belinda much satisfaction to know that the child was in her power, a fact of which she took full advantage.

Mig dressed and went downstairs.

How gloomy the house was. A grey light filtered through the drawn blinds, but Mig was not afraid of it, nor of the dark, like other children. It was the days he feared, ruled by Cousin Belinda's sharp tongue and faultfinding ways. Cousin Belinda did not like noise; indeed after living with her for any length of time, no one felt happy enough to make a noise, and that was why, all through the day, an angry spirit seemed to be about, and the very air in the old house seemed to be rebelliously quiet, as though, when this cruel woman suddenly appeared, all the furniture was holding its breath in terror and rage. But at night and in the early morning when she slept, the house was quiet and peaceful; and once when Mig awoke in the middle of the night and Belinda's evil presence was not felt, she heard sounds downstairs as of the furniture dancing for joy – which was really the case.

And so she crept fearlessly down to the side door.

The bolts were stiff and rusty for her little fingers, and Mig grew scarlet in the face with exertion. Panting and struggling, she could not get it to move, and was giving it up in despair when she heard the Bir's voice outside:

'I am pushing a jar of grease under the door. Rub it on the bolt, and hurry up – I can't wait here all day.' By now Mig knew that in

spite of his sternness, the Old Bird was really not a bad old fellow.

She bent down thankfully to look for the jar, but there was no sign of it on the dirty, unswept floor.

'Got it?' asked the Bird. 'Do hurry!'

'It's not here,' shrieked Mig in a stage-whisper.

'Don't be silly,' said the Bird wearily, 'I pushed a tremendous jar through!'

Mig, feeling anxiously in the dust, knocked a little lump of hard dust away. It rolled into a corner, glimmering strangely. It was the jar! But such a wee little thing – this tremendous jar! -no bigger than a boot-button, with a shining golden lid on which was inscribed very small and neatly:

'Grease.'

'I've got it,' cried Mig, frowning and trying to read the lettering.

She rubbed some on the bolt.

'Hurry up,' said the Bird, 'otherwise She may go.'

Mig wondered who She was, but now the grease had made the bolt move easily, and she passed out into the early morning mist.

'Come, let us hurry. I must take you to Her.'

With these words the Bird set off down the path which led through long, rough grass to a small wood at the end of the lawn. The tall sunflowers on either side of them nodded graciously to Mig, with sleepy, half-shut eyes, for it was very early, and the sun was still hidden behind banks of clouds. She never remembered seeing the flowers bowing before, or seeing the Old Bird, but they seemed to know him quite well. Her heart beat fast at the thought of the thrilling adventures that might await her, and all around the dew glittered on the long grass, on the fruit-laden trees, and beside her trotted her strange companion with a hop, hop, hop, a lurch and a sneeze.

In sheer joy she gave a little skip and sprang into the air, catching at a tall willowy spike of plums that grew up from a tree beside her. Of course a shower of dew fell on her, drenching her hair, and two

over-ripe plums bounced off her forehead, but she only laughed.

'That's right,' said the Bird, and he sounded very kind, 'that's the first time we've seen you happy for many a long day.'

'Oh, you know me then?' asked the child, balancing on the cobbles that still untidily edged the flower-beds.

'Know you? But of course,' said the Bird, turning his half-surprised, humorous-looking eyes towards her.

As they walked still further Mig saw the hilly meadow, far away on her left. It was damp

and green; at the top seven elm-trees loomed through the mist, waving blobby arms like tremendous giants. Everything looked adventurous.

'Something exciting is now going to take place,' announced the Bird in solemn, majestic tones.

'What? What?' shrieked Mig, and would have sprung ten feet into the air if she had been able. As it was, she only managed six inches, and touching a bough, brought another shower of rich autumn fruit and dew around them. The Bird sneezed and said angrily:

'I wish you wouldn't do that – you've simply soaked my new feathers!'

Mig forgot to answer, for the feeling was very strong on her again that something was gong to happen – very soon – in fact, now.

The dew sparkled more brightly, as though a diamond necklace had been broken and scattered around; leaves started quivering, apples and plums grew slowly more golden and purple, and in a rhododendron bush where one or two out-of-season blossoms still lingered, a thrush set up the most heart-stirring song.

Never had Mig heard such a wonderful melody as that which came pouring happily from all the tiny bird-throats, hidden in the bushes and trees around.

'The Dawnchild is coming,' sang a pigeon, flying by flapping its tail in Mig's face.

'The Dawnchlid is coming,' cried the Old Bird, excitedly sneezing.

From the ground, which became more springy every minute, Mig raised her eyes to the air and was fascinated to see the wreathing shapes of the morning mist. Separating, disappearing, floating together again, faster and faster it twirled, and now it began to sparkle really strangely.

The sun appeared slowly from behind a grey bank of cloud at the side of the houses, and a ray, finding its way through the branches of the old sycamore, pierced the whirling mist before her. On all sides the voices sang of the Dawnchld as the golden shimmering vapour floated a little further off, then gradually sank to the ground in a shower of separate pieces of light some distance from Mig and the Bird, where it disappeared in the long, wet grass.

Forgetting the Bird who now looked rather bored as though he had seen this sort of thing before, Mig ran forward to the spot where the golden shower had fallen, thinking that perhaps she might pick some of it up.

And now she could catch glimpses of it – yes, there it was – she could see it – how it glittered! She sped towards it still more quickly and pulled up with a jerk. At her feet it lay, a shining heap of light.

She gave a little cry of delight, and falling on her knees, gingerly touched it, but could not feel it at all. So, growing bolder, she scooped up a handful, and never noticed that at each touch of her human fingers the fairy light disappeared, for she was so amazed at what lay beneath.

Amazement is hardly the word for Mig's feelings as she gazed at the wonderful surprise.

There lay a child of about her own age, peacefully sleeping, right in the middle of the light. Fair to behold, with shining golden curls and the very faintest golden tint in her white skin, at Mig's cry of joy the child awoke, and sitting up smiled sweetly.

The sun burst out and shone on everything because the Dawnchld

was awake. Mig dare not speak lest the child should melt away, as show now perceived the light to have done. They looked at each other in a friendly way.

'Well, Mig,' said the Dawnchild at last, 'how are you?'

Mig could only stammer shyly, 'How wonderful your eyes are – they look sort of silver!' And that is what they were, silver like the garments the lovely child wore.

The Dawnchild laughed and sprang gracefully to her feet.

'I'd rather have grey like yours,' she declared, and flung her arms round Mig's neck.

It was good indeed to feel loving arms again, for Cousin Belinda's were never near her, unless the hands on the end of them were slapping her, or administering medicine.

'Oh, who are you?' cried Mig.

The Dawnchld laughed.

'You ought to know me – I've often lain across the sky in the east, watching you,' she said, still holding Mig's hand.

'Of course she doesn't!' said the Bird irritably, who had been asleep for the last few minutes. 'All humans are blind.'

'You're always saying that, Old Bird, but anyway we're going to teach Mignonette not to be blind,' said the Dawnchild, and turning to Mig she asked, 'Are you happy with Cousin Belinda?'

'No, no,' said Mig quickly.

'I'm awfully glad you're not,' answered the Dawnchild, 'because father's given me leave to bring you to our Court, if you aren't happy.'

'Oh, how lovely,!' cried Mig. 'Who are you? Do tell me?'

'I am the Dawnchild, and I am the daughter of the Sky and the Sea,' said the child.

'Then' said Mig 'you must be a fairy!'

'A fairy? I suppose I am! I never thought about it before. Now listen to me, Mig. Once a year, my father, who is King of a beautiful

land, gives me and my sisters permission to fetch any earth-child who is unhappy and bring her to our land to live there for ever and ever.'

'Oh, let's start at once,' said Mig, hopping up and down. The Old Bird, who was just near her feet, flew hastily to a tree, where he showed his disgust by sneezing loudly.

The Dawnchild looked at Mig. 'I hope you've plenty of pluck,' she said slowly; 'it's a long journey to our land, and it depends a lot on you as to whether you ever get there. We have lots of enemies who are always waiting to get hold of the earth-child we are bringing, but if you do everything I tell you, you will be safe, and also if you are as good as possible.'

Mig looked rather blank – she did not think she had ever been good in her life. The Dawnchild seemed to know what she was thinking.

'Cheer up – I expect you'll be all right, but you see I had to tell you to be good because if you do anything really wicked, I may be lost to you for ever, and – however -' She would say no more.

The sun was well risen, and the Dawnchild told Mig to return to the house in case Cousin Belinda should suspect anything.

Aren't you going to take me now?' asked Mig disappointedly. 'It's long past breakfast-time, and Cousin Belinda will be so angry.'

'Can't be done,' interrupted the Old Bird, awkwardly alighting himself beside her, 'the journey mayn't start for a week.'

'But, never mind – we'll see Cousin Belinda doesn't hurt you,' said the Dawnchild, 'and meanwhile -' She flung a piece of fairy light from her hair into the air, and waited, frowning.

'The Noseyface is a long time coming,' she said.

There was a crackling laugh and they all wheeled round. There, on the path seated in a tiny cart drawn by a caterpillar, they saw the funniest little sight. A very old nosey-faced man, reading deep in a book. It was he who had laughed.

'Really, you are too bad,' cried the Dawnchild, stamping her foot;

'why didn't you come at once?'

'I was reading such a nice book,' he answered.

'Who is he?' whispered Mig.

'Here, Noseyface,' cried her new friend, 'this is the new little girl.'

The old man shut the book carefully, placed it under one arm, then drove up to Mig's foot and jumping out of the cart held out one foot.

'How are you?' he said genially.

'Quite well, thank you,' said Mig rather timidly.

'Have you hurt your foot?'

'Ah'm, ahem!' coughed the Bird, and said, behind one claw, 'He always shakes feet, instead of hands, and he gets awfully angry if you don't understand. Rather weak brain, you know!'

Mig gripped the foot hastily, just as the little man was withdrawing it offendedly, and at once a pleased smile spread over his face as he said 'I hope we shall like one another.'

'Yes,' said Mig; 'please Dawnchild, what will he do for me?'

'He plays jokes on every one, you know,' said the Dawnchild. 'I thought you might like to have him about the house, till we fetch you. He will report to us if Belinda is very unkind to you, and punish her by playing tricks on her. He's quite invisible. And now, good-bye for a week.'

'Shan't I see you till then? How shall I know when you're coming?' asked Mig, who did not want to part with her new friends.

'Silly child,' muttered the Old Bird, 'you'll know right enough when we're there!'

'Yes,' said the Dawnchild, floating up into the sky, 'you'll know. We'll fetch you,' and laughing gaily she flew still higher with the Old Bird, and they suddenly vanished.

Mig turned round in a bewildered way but the Noseyface was gone too. She might have dreamt it all.

'Mig, Mig!' came a voice from the house, 'where is the little brat? Mig! Mig!'

'Coming,' said Mig dolefully, and ran up the garden path to the house, saying to herself as she ran, 'I believe I imagined it all.'

CHAPTER TWO

Noseyface Makes His Presence Felt

Cousin Belinda was seated at the breakfast table when Mig entered the room. She was munching a piece of dry toast so vigorously that it seemed to Mig as though her nose and chin flew together, and just as they were on the point of meeting, as rapidly went the other way, each horrified at the other's ugliness.

Mig slipped meekly into her place at table, hoping not to be scolded too much, but strangely enough, her cousin seemed to be quite good tempered to-day, for her.

True, as she passed Mig a cup of tea, she dug her nails into the poor child's fingers, but then that was more of a habit than anything else. When Mig was started on the wee bowl of porridge which was all that she was allowed, Cousin Belinda said 'I had a letter from your uncle this morning, sending you two pounds for your birthday to buy you clothes with.'

'Oh, how lovely!' cried Mig. She had an unfortunate habit of bobbing up and down when excited, and so of course she upset her tea.

With a cry of rage, Cousin Belinda sprang up from her chair, and hurling herself across the table seized Mig by the hair.

'You little wretch!' she exclaimed, and seizing the nearest weapon, which happened to be the teapot, she actually tried to thump it down on Mig's head! You will probably think this very strange behaviour on the part of a grown-up lady, but, as you will see later, Mrs McArthur's family had fairy blood in their veins, which, of course, may be good or bad. Miss Belinda's unfortunately came under the latter heading. But what was this that was happening to the angry woman? Slowly her hand was forced back up into the air, still grasping the teapot, and both hand and teapot were made to come down, with a crash, on her own forehead! At the same time Mig heard a cracked laugh and a rumble of little wheels driving through the air. Her friend, the Noseyface had indeed remembered her!

Not waiting to see how Cousin Belinda had taken the strange event, Mignonette dashed speedily from the room, and hid under the drawing-room sofa. But she was not left in peace for long, for her cruel cousin came creeping after her, armed with a poker, too dazed from the blow on her forehead to wonder how it got there. Mig held her breath as the door was slowly pushed open to admit Belinda on tiptoe.

She might just as well have walked on her large, sensible flat feet, for her elastic-sided boots creaked loudly when she tiptoed. Mig, hidden behind the folds of chintz, could just see those terrible determined-looking feet tiptoeing round the room in search of her. Here, when her dearly loved mother had been alive, she had often played hide-and-seek and, when caught, the punishment had been three kisses for luck. But oh! what a change now! When Belinda's spiteful toes and keen nose had carried her from under the table to behind the curtains, from behind the curtains to between the cabinet and the piano, and finally to the sofa, she was rudely dragged out.

'Oh, Cousin Belinda! Don't hit me!' cried the child in fear, but the cruel thing only laughed and, raising the poker high, was just

going to administer a beating to the poor little girl when some memory of what had happened to the teapot made her pause.

Mig shivered and called out:

'Oh, Noseyface – help me!'

This infuriated Belinda, who naturally thought Mig was daring to call her Noseyface! She spoke in great anger.

'I know how I'll punish you, Mignonette McArthur! I will buy myself clothes with that two pounds of yours.'

'But' said Mig, whose clothes were nearly in rags, 'it's mine.'

'Never mind!' said the cracked voice of the little Noseyface, 'we'll give you some pretty clothes when you come to us, and pay Belinda out!'

For one brief second Mig thought she saw the Noseyface driving across the floor at a terrific rate in his caterpillar cart, and even bumping over Belinda's foot. Certain it is, that Belinda leaped into the air with a yell, and then looked very foolish.

'Yours, indeed,' she said, rubbing her damaged foot in a puzzled manner, 'I am sure your uncle would prefer me to have it, when he knew how naughty you were!'

At this minute the door was opened by the old servant, and a prim-looking gentleman was ushered in. He was tall and think like Belinda, and on his nose rode a pair of eyeglasses over which he peered with a gentle smile at Miss Belinda Baggs. He advanced with outstretched hand.

'My dear Miss Baggs!' he said, 'I am charmed to see you. A naughty little maiden? How sad!'

Mig scowled at him because he was not nice. Belinda laid her hand on the little girl's shoulder, pretending to be sad and gentle, but in reality she was holding Mig's shoulder very hard.

'Oh, dear Mr Appleby,' she answered, 'she is naughty. She struck me upon the head with a teapot this morning! There's a disposition for you!' Was there ever anybody as wicked as Belinda Baggs? Fancy any grown-ups, except witches, telling stories!

The gentleman clucked his tongue sympathetically.

'Tst! Tist! I feel quite afraid of her!' he declared, backing away from where Mig stood, her feet wide apart, arms folded, and underlip stuck out.

'Will she eat me?'

'You needn't be afraid I'll eat you,' said Mig very clearly, 'I don't like foreign mutton.'

'Mig!' exclaimed Belinda in a great rage, and looked as if she wanted to smack her.

'Nay, Miss Belinda,' said Mr. Appleby blushing, and eyeing Mig with dislike, 'do not strike her. We will reason with-'

'Foreign mutton – foreign mutton!' chanted Mig, and suddenly dropping on all-fours dived between his knees and would have escaped, but they were too quick for her.

She was caught and told to dust the drawing-room very carefully for punishment.

'And I' added Belinda triumphantly 'must go and buy a new pale green silk coat for myself. My brother' she told Mr. Appleby as they left the room, locking Mig in 'has sent me, only this morning, the money to do so, as a birthday present.' Mig heard this through the keyhole, and ground her teeth with rage.

And so she was left to dust the drawing-room.

She began with the mantelpiece, which was very hard to dust, as it was full of a thin, breaky kind of china. Belinda was so wicked, that if Mig even chipped one of the ornaments, she fed her on bread and water for a fortnight and made her sleep on the broken bits. Oh, cruel Belinda! How you shall be punished for this some day!

Dusting soon became boring, so Mig started to pretend that the chairs were rocks in the middle of the carpet-sea, and she was wildly leaping from one 'rock' to another, when she suddenly heard the wheels of the caterpillar cart rumbling through the air.

She wished she could see him – it was so dull. She tried speaking

to him.

'Hallow, Noseyface!' she said loudly. No answer, but she heard the little man gathering up the reins, the bells on the caterpillar's collar tinkling, and off he started again. It seemed as though the noise came from the ground now, and Mig jumped off the arm of the chair, and gazed at the carpet. Jingle, jingle, came the bells, nearer and nearer, and although the cart and its driver were still invisible, Mig could see the tracks the wheels were making in the soft Persian carpet. Excitedly she followed them over the drawing-room floor (being careful not to take big steps in case she should tread on the little man) until they reached a dark alcove and were lost to sight amongst the legs of the furniture. Try as she would she could find no trace; the tracks stopped abruptly by a cabinet laden with costly Japanese jars and antique brass bowls, and in the end Mig sighed sadly and returned to her dusting.

In her mother's day, the drawing-room had been a most beautiful room, filled with lovely chintzes, and silks, and the windows curtained with glowing rich-coloured Eastern hangings. Firelight would be reflected in the mysterious locked cabinets where one could catch a glimpse of quaint bronze figures and china; reflected, too, in the chestnut locks of Mrs. McArthur as she had sat in the big old armchair, mending Mig's clothes. It has been a cosy, homely room the, but now – Mig shivered and nearly dropped a Toby jug, as she thought of Belinda's grim face bending over the slippers she was wont to embroider for the curate 'in a sensible black and brown wool'. And the fire was never lit.

Thinking of all this, Mig arrived again at the alcove and started on the cabinet. Here there were vases she loved, so they received an extra special attention, and she spent quite a quarter of an hour on the upper shelves before she knelt down to tackle the lower shelf. This was very thick with dust, and Mig was gently removing the tall blue Japanese jar from the left-hand side of the carved ebony chest when an exclamation of delight escaped her. The track of the caterpillar cart was plainly visible in the dust! In and out of the jars it wound until Mig wondered where it would end and if

anything should be awaiting her at the end of it. At last it dived behind the ebony chest and again was lost to sight. She could just get her hand in between the chest and the wall and there to her delight her fingers closed on something. On withdrawing her hand she found it to be a small twist of paper, which, when smoothed out, proved to contain the following words:

'To Mig. A WARNING FROM WE.

Do not let Cousin Belinda know about anything you saw in the garden this morning, or the consequences will be dreadful!'

At the same moment a heavy hand fell upon her shoulder, and Belinda's well-known voice said:

'Give me that paper!'

In vain Mig tried to keep it from her; her cousin's hand closed over the crumpled piece of paper, and Mig's cries of distress were ignored. With one hand she was held in a grip of iron, while Belinda read the words aloud.

'Don't let Cousin Belinda know anything you saw in the garden this morning, or the consequences will be dreadful!'

For a minute her cousin stared at the paper blankly.

'What does it mean, Mignonette McArthur?' she thundered.

Mignonette McArthur hated telling stories, so she remained obstinately silent, although her cousin shook her and pinched her, and did everything in her power to make her speak. In the end Belinda said, 'You shall at least tell me where you found it.'

Mig thought there could be no harm in answering that, so she said at once, 'Behind the ebony chest.'

Immediately Belinda went over to the cabinet and bending down to examine the lower shelf, discovered the tracks of the caterpillar cart.

'Ha!' she said triumphantly, 'these are the marks of fairy wheels. I sed to see them about the house when your mother was alive.'

'What!' exclaimed Mig incautiously, 'did Mother see fairies,

too?'

'Aye, that she did,' answered Belinda sourly, for she had been jealous of Mrs McArthur's magic power; 'strange things used to go on in this house when she was alive, but thank heaven there's no more of that going on. I scared them all away!'

'Who?' asked Mig.

'The fairies. I smeared the window-sills and doorsteps and chimneys with the juice of the crab-apple, and they can't step over that.'

'But she forgot the waste-pipe of the bath,' said the gleeful little voice of the Noseyface from where in the air.

Mig laughed.

'What are you laughing at?' said Belinda suspiciously. 'If I ever catch you having any dealings with fairies, I'll flay you alive,' and she meant it, too.

Mig said nothing.

Belinda gathered up her parcels, including the pale green silk coat, which she had laid on a chair as she entered noiselessly a few minutes before.

'So you won't tell me what the paper means?' she said suddenly, as they went upstairs to wash for lunch.

'No!' said Mig obstinately, and stuck her underlip out. Belinda paused with her hand on the door-knob of her room. Her face flushed angrily, and her little beady black eyes glittered, but she answered very sweetly.

'Very well, dear – I expect it was only one of your childish games.'

In spite of her sweet tone, Mig knew very well that Belinda intended to watch, and therefore she must be very careful.

In bed that night, she waited until she thought that Cousin Belinda must be asleep, and then said aloud, 'Please, Dawnchild, come very soon. I can't stand it much longer,' but never an answer came, not even the rumble of the caterpillar cart. It was foolish

of Mig to say that aloud, because Belinda gave a loud snore, and privately opening one beady eye cautiously whispered to herself – 'Dawnchild, Dawnchild – who is it? I must watch well!'

CHAPTER THREE

A day Trip To Totterslip-on-Sea

The next morning Belinda said no more about the tracks of the caterpillar cart, but whenever Mig turned suddenly she found her cousin's eyes fixed on her, full of dark questions; if she sang, Belinda's ears pricked up like a dog's, for she thought that Mig might be singing a message to some unseen fairy.

Two days passed by and there was no message from the Dawnchild, nothing to show she had remembered the poor little earth-child who was no unhappy. And at least it came to the sixth day, and then Mig had a crushing disappointment.

They were sitting on the lawn after tea, reading. It had been a very hot day, considering it was nearly October, and Belinda had felt the heat very much; her temper had felt it, too.

Belinda laid down her book and spoke. 'To-morrow,' she said, 'if it is fine, Mr. Appleby and you and I are going to spend the day at the sea. It is only ten miles from here, and should prove a very pleasant excursion.'

At ordinary times, Mig would have been overjoyed at the

prospect, but now she was horrified, for it meant that she would miss the Dawnchild or her messengers. She could not answer for a minute, or she would have burst into tears.

'Well,' said Belinda, eyeing her narrowly, 'aren't you pleased?'

Before Mig could answer, the latch of the gate clicked and there was the gentleman advancing towards them.

'A pleasant evening to you, Miss Baggs,' he said cordially.

'And the same to you, Mr. Appleby,' responded Belinda. 'Mignonette dear, run and play in the wood. Mr. Appleby wishes to discuss plans for to-morrow. Say ho-d'you-do first.'

Mig scowled at him and thrust out an unwilling hand,, then ran off to the wood.

'A singularly unpleasant child,' she heard Mr. Appleby say. 'have you discovered anything yet?'

When Mig heard that she knew that Belinda must have confided in Mr. Appleby about the fairies, and so she returned, and scrambling up the tree that sheltered the two, without being seen or heard listened to the conversation.

Of course I oughtn't to listen,' she said to herself, 'but I must find out how much they know about the Dawnchild.'

Belinda arranged her skirts gracefully and said, 'I cannot tell you how glad I am that you can come to the sea with us to-morrow.'

'At what time do we start?' inquired Mr. Appleby, 'and shall we take our lunch with us?' He was very fond of food.

Belinda fanned herself gently.

'If it is fine – ? she started.

'Oh, let it be wet,' said Mig rather loudly. Belinda started and looked round.

'I could have sworn I heard a voice,' she muttered, and went on, 'if it is fine we will catch the nine-thirty train and arrive at Totterslip-on-Sea about ten-thirty. Thus we shall have a nice long day before us, in which to explore the principal buildings of the place. After tea, we will take a short stroll along the seashore, and return home

by the six thirty-five train, and –'

'But the food?' said the gentleman eagerly. 'What shall we take with us?'

'I think buns and beef lozenges for lunch,' said Belinda brightly, 'with perhaps a few evaporated bananas by way of dessert.'

Mig had never heard such a long word before, and fell to wondering what it could mean. By the time she had given up grown-ups as hopeless she heard Belinda saying, 'And so I am determined to watch.'

And Mr. Appleby was saying in a low, secret voice, 'But do you actually mean that some Strange Being is going to fetch Mig – to steal her from you?'

'Exactly,' said Belinda.

'How did you find out? he asked in bewilderment.

Belinda's face assumed a strange expression. Leaning forward, she grasped him by the arm, looking cautiously around.

'Listen!' she hissed. 'You know that big walnut cupboard in the sitting-room?'

Mig listened. She knew the cupboard well, and had hated it for years – it had somehow always given one the impression of being a wicked cupboard, and once when the house was full of her mother's friends, she had had to sleep in the sitting-room. Waking in the middle of the night, the cupboard had appeared to loom nearer and nearer, until it was towering over her. And then when it had seemed that something terrible must happen,

Mig's mother had popped her head into the room and said, 'Did you call, my poppet? I thought you wanted me.' Everything had been all right then.

Now Mig listened to the strangest tale that her wicked cousin was telling Mr. Appleby, under the tree.

'You know the cupboard, Mr. Appleby?' she was saying, 'well it has the strangest history. It has been handed down for hundreds of years in our family – no one knows quite where it came from, but

rumour says it was presented to a McArthur about six hundred years ago by a gipsy, who professed to be a master in black arts. The tale about it is that it has an extraordinary power, and can help any wicked McArthur. Of course I am not wicked -'

'Oh no,' said Mr. Appleby timidly.

'But would you believe it,' continued Belinda, 'the night before last, when I was putting a book away inside that same cupboard, it suddenly started creaking. At first I didn't realise what was happening, but suddenly the voice spoke to me from its depths.'

Here Belinda paused and appeared to be slightly confused. And this was because the cupboard had made the following remarkable statement, which she did not like to tell Mr. Appleby.

'Belinda,' the cupboard had said, 'you are the first wicked descendant of the McArthurs who has been born since this cupboard was given to your family. We will not let Mig slip away from us!' And after that it had told her how Mig was gong to be rescued from the clutches of Belinda, by the Dawnchild.

Of course Belinda could not tell Mr. Appleby this because he was a good man, and thought Belinda was good, too, so she merely said that a voice from the cupboard had told her everything.

'And so' she continued triumphantly. 'I have arranged for us to take Mig to the sea to-morrow, and shall not let her out of my sight till then. To-morrow, apparently, is the last day that the Dawnchld can come. We must not let Mig get into the hands of such a terrible creature, dear Mr. Appleby,' ended Belinda cunningly. 'The only way to keep such a naughty child from becoming worse, is by retaining her in my charge.'

'Exactly,' said Mr. Appleby. He did not know how wicked Belinda was, for she always pretended to be very charming when he was there.

'Mig, hidden up in the tree, stamped her foot on a rotten branch in rage and disappointment, and the branch, cracking at once, fell on to Belinda's head.

'Help! Help! ' she cried, as her false hair fell over one eye, then

toppled on to the ground. 'An earthquake, I'm sure!'

'No-no,' said the gentleman gently, as he scuffled the hair towards Miss Belinda's feet, pretending he had not seen it. He looked upwards, so that Belinda might pick up her false hair, unseen, and, of course, discovered Mig, lying across a branch overhead. He jumped.

'That child again!' he exclaimed. 'She has been there all the time!'

Belinda gave a cry of rage and shook the trunk of the tree.

'Come down at once!' she exclaimed, and when Mig crept down, she dragged her to the houses and locked her up until they started next day.

They next day dawned fine and clear and with much bustle Belinda arose to get everything ready. She packed some evaporated bananas and digestive biscuits into her sensible string bag, and told Mig to put on her little woolly cap. It was nearly nine o'clock and Mr. Appleby might be expected at any moment.

'For goodness' sake' she said to Mig 'get some colour in your cheeks, and try to look as though you were going to enjoy yourself!'

Mig was too miserable to answer, for this was the last day the Dawnchild might come, and how would she know Mig had been taken off to the sea? She scowled savagely at Mr. Appleby when he arrived and refused to speak to him.

'A wilful little maiden!' he murmured sadly as they started. 'It grieves me to see her thus!'

'We have plenty of time for the train,' said Belinda, but Mr. Appleby thought it was always better to be too early than too late, so presently they arrived, and after taking their tickets, stood about on the platform. There were only two other people there- an old man dressed in a severe black suit and a big panama, accompanied by a prim little girl in a school hat.

The little girl was studying a small book very seriously; Mig tried to make out the name, but could only see 'How to get to -'

'Doesn't matter,' she decided miserably, 'they both look bores, and everything's horrid.' She kicked the platform with her heel.

'Don't fidget, Mig,' said Belinda crossly. Then a porter appeared, the train steamed in noisily and they secured seats in an empty carriage. Mig wondered idly if the old man and his little girl were gong off by the same train, and felt rather disgusted when they got into the same carriage and took two of the window seats.

'Belinda is sure to say I ought to be prim like that pig-child,' she thought, looking at the child. Belinda had taken one window seat, and Mr. Appleby the other, which annoyed Mig more than ever as they did not want to look out, while she did. Her glance again wandered to the little stranger's book.

'How to get to Ireland.'

How disappointing, and what a stupid book it must be! Mig yawned, and suddenly the old man spoke. He bowed very deeply to Belinda and said in a funny hoarse voice.

'May I have the window down, please?

'Certainly,' said Belinda politely, 'I approve of fresh air.'

Mr. Appleby did not, but was too polite to say so. However, the next minute, much to every one's surprise, the old man, after suddenly sneezing loudly, bent forward and bowing even more deeply to Mr. Appleby said, 'Do you mind if I put the window up?'

Even the little girl looked up and frowned and the old man said humbly, 'I'm sorry, Marjorie.'

'It is quite all right, I thank you,' she answered in a dignified voice. The old man beamed again. Mig thought it all very strange, and then he glanced at every one kindly and spoke:

'Perhaps you are all going to Totterslip for the day like ourselves?'

'We are!' said Belinda coldly, for she did not quite approve of talking to strangers.

'Ah – a lovely spot, a lovely spot,' signed the old man. 'I remember catching Umpis there when I was a lad.'

'Umpis?' said Belinda and Mr. Appleby in chorus.

'What on earth are they?'

'You little sister will soon know,' said the old man smiling, rather strangely it seemed.

'A kind of fish,' said his little girl quickly.

'Mignonette is not my sister, 'she is my cousin's daughter.'

'A bonny little maid,' said the old man.

Belinda's brows met in anger and jealousy.

'A bony little maid,' she said sourly, and snapped her lips together.

'But not as pretty as you,' said the strange little girl softly, so of course Cousin Belinda became good tempered again, and said, 'Is this your little daughter?'

'No,' answered the old man solemnly, 'she is my grand-maiden.'

No one had ever heard of such a relationship before, but he seemed a pleasant, if slightly mad, old man, and it was soon arranged that they should all join forces and spend the day together. Ten minutes later they alighted at Totterslip. The old man suggested going straight to the sea, but much to Mig's disappointment, Belinda declared that they must not miss the opportunity of seeing the old church, and the Museum, the latter being full of the remains of the ancient town of Totterslip that had been washed away in a gale.

'A chance' she declared warmly 'that we may never get again.' Mig did not see why, but was too unhappy to mind much.

On hearing what they meant to do, the little girl drew the old man aside and whispered to him. He nodded cheerfully and then off they all went.

Relics of ancient Totterslip did not amuse Mig. She did not want to gaze upon the ear-trumpet of the Mayor who had died three hundred years ago. She tried in vain to get any fun out of her companion.

'Aren't you sick of these fusty, stupid old things?' she asked.

'Oh no,' said the little girl primly, 'I find them very enjoyable.'

'Yah!' said Mig rudely, 'I'm going to climb that ladder.' A ladder had been placed against a wall at the other end of the Museum and Mig was just going to climb it when she heard a shriek from her companion.

'Come away from it.' She was half sobbing, white with terror. 'Look – can't you see?' She was pointing to a small black object on one of the rungs.

'Why, it's only a dead beetle,' said Mig; 'how white you are.'

'I thought it was an Umpi,' said the little girl, and her teeth chattered.

'You said an Umpi was a fish,' argued Mig, at a loss to account for the little girl's terror.

'Well it isn't,' said the child, and then the grownups joined them.

They ate their lunch in a corner of the Museum, and every minute Mig grew more unhappy.

'I shall run away,' she said to herself obstinately, 'I will never live with cruel old Belinda again.'

After lunch they were taken over all the 'interesting' public buildings, and it was half-past give before the old stranger succeeded in persuading Belinda to let the children have a run on the sands.

So when Belinda at last said 'Yes' they all trooped down to the beach, which was now nearly deserted.

The tide was very far out and had left little rocky pools. The waves had ribbed the sand; all was silent until a gull called in the distance to another and at the sound the old man pricked up his ears and let out a piercing yell like an angry bird. Every one jumped.

'I beg your pardon for starting you,' he said, bowing deeply three times, while his eyes glittered curiously. 'I learnt that peculiar cry long ago. It belongs to a very rare bird.'

'How curious!' said Belinda feebly. The cry upset Mr. Appleby's nerves so much that he said he could go no further, but would sit down on a break-water and wait for them. So the two elders paced

slowly along the sand, the children walking primly in front.

The other child still hugged her book, and now Mig found she had made a mistake.

The last word of the title was not Ireland, for she distinctly saw the letters 'DAW-' through the child's fingers. But she forgot it in the joy of being on the beach.

'Let us run,' said the little stranger, and her eyes twinkled strangely.

The sun, which was getting low in the heavens, shed that soft, after-tea glow of September over everything.

Belinda, in the coat bought with poor Mig's money, paced beside the old man, admiring the view. The children took hands and ran, leaping the little streamlets that trickled down to the sea, over pebbles and sand.

The little girl burst into song:

'Streamlets trickle to the sea
Over sandy little stones,
Stumbling o'er the wide seashore,
Trickle ever more and more.
Streamlets, tell me why you never
Fill the ocean to the brim?
Streamlets, if you ever speak,
Tell me does the ocean leak?'

'What a funny song,' said Mig breathlessly. They raced along, their feet skimming the stones. The little stranger could run, indeed it seemed at times as if her feet did not touch the ground at all. Belinda did not see this however, for she was far too interested in watching the strange shape that the old man's hat was becoming. Surely it could not be her imagination, but the top of it seemed to be hopping up and down!

'It must be the effect of the heat,' she thought.

In front of her the two children raced tirelessly.

'Funny I'm not tired,' said Mig, turning to look at her companion. And then it was that she noticed that the brim of the child's ordinary

old school hat was shining! Even as she gazed it seemed to melt into the air, the plain dark linen frock gave out a peculiar tinkling sound, and with a gasp Mig realised that the frock seemed to be getting prettier every minute. And now she saw the title of the book in full – 'How to get to Dawnland.'

'What's happening?' she cried excitedly.

The child laughed, all her primness gone. 'Look at me,' she said.

Mig looked and gasped again, for it was the silver eyes of the Dawnchild that met hers. 'It was you all the time!' she cried gladly.

'Yes – it's I,' said the Dawnchild laughing. 'We played a trick on you. Look!' They were standing still now. Mig looked behind just in time to see the old man spring upon a rock with his peculiar yell, flap his arms wildly, and change into the Old Bird!!! Mig broke into a peal of laughter', and so did the fairy child. Belinda was just gazing at a shell and saying, 'A razor shell, I think,' when all this happened, and her surprise and range cannot be related, so strong and great were they. She gave a shriek and ran forward as the Old Bird, several sizes larger than when Mig last saw him, flew over to the children.

The Dawnchild put one arm round Mig's waist, and the floated up to meet the Old Bird, where she flung the other round his neck.

'Come, Belinda, chase us!' she cried gaily.

'I will not be foiled,' howled Belinda. The children laughed gaily, and floated along about two feet above the sands, now touching the sands, now darting up higher as Belinda, stumbling along behind them, nearly caught them.

They fluttered over a heap of dried seaweed, and landed on the other side.

'Catch us, Belinda!' cried Mig with fearful joy.

The wicked Belinda came running and panting along. She leapt at them with her umbrella ready crooked to hook into their clothes, but they rose gracefully into the air again and she fell short.

But what was happening to her? Her feet went down, down! She had leapt into a deep pool of mud! Up to her knees she sank, and waved her umbrella wildly. 'If I ever get near you,' she cried, 'I'll punish you, you wicked child!'

Meanwhile Mig and the Dawnchild soared upward with the Old Bird, until they looked like mere specks in the sky. A shower of gold and silver dust fell down on Belinda from where they had disappeared, covering her from head to foot, and mingling with the slimy mud from the quicksand. What a mess she was in! That nice new pale green silk coat was ruined, and as for her temper...

Well, on the cliffs sat an artist, sketching, and he soon heard her cries of distress. Mr Appleby heard them, too, so together then ran to the sport and helped her out.

The children flew up, up into the air, Mig's happiness getting greater with every flap of the

Old Bird's wings. At last they reached a cloud, and rested on its puffy depths for a minute. 'I always wanted to float on a cloud,' said Mig.

'Taste it,' said the Dawnchild, smiling. Mig stared, and then taking up a handful licked it cautiously.

'Ripping! It's like meringues and strawberry ices, only more so,' she announced delightedly.

'Yes,' answered her companion, 'when we go a flying-journey we live on it for months. Now I think you are looking rather tired. Just lie down and pull the cloud over you, I'll wake you when it's time to start.'

Mig did as she was bid; the cloud felt very soft and nice.

'Start,' she queried drowsily, 'where for?' and fell asleep before she heard the answer.

Down below, far below on the sands, Belinda was brushing the mud off her skirts and saying to Mr Appleby – 'I shall not leave Totterslip till I have recovered that wicked child.'

'What will you do?' he asked, while the artist went back to his

sketch.

Belinda said she 'knew intimately the wife of the doctor who lived at Totterslip and would ask her to put her up while she made inquiries.'

'For' she concluded ' I somehow feel that that horrible Dawnchild will hover around with Mig for a day or two to tease me. And I think that by being on the spot where they vanished, I may learn more.'

So Mr. Appleby said good-bye to her sadly, and went back by the next train.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Annual Meeting Place

It seemed to Mig that she had only been asleep a minute, when she suddenly found that they were flying again. The Dawnchild still had her arm round Mig's waist, but when she saw that Mig had woken up she took it away, saying , 'It is quite time you learnt to fly by yourself now, Mig. I shall not always be with you to help.'

Mig felt rather wobbly, but did her best, wishing she could fly like the Dawnchild who, now rising, now dipping, would sometimes make little darts forward or circle gracefully round her while Mig flounderingly tried to keep up in the air.

'Try to go more slowly,' advised the Dawnchild, as Mig nearly turned a somersault in her efforts.

'She's top heavy,' grunted the Old Bird, who flew just behind and playfully nipped poor Mig's legs whenever he caught her up. That is why she was trying to go too quickly of course.

'You be quiet,' said the Dawnchild severely. 'I can see you pecking her legs!'

'I – I didn't, I didn't,' spluttered the Old Bird, 'I'm far too

dignified.'

They flew on for a few minutes, and then Mig asked where they were going. She had felt too odd to look below before, but now the Dawnchild told her to do so and she looked down.

A big wood lay below and in front of them. Beneath them was a town and the sea in the distance. The town was a mass of spires and roofs, and as Mig gazed at the setting sun shone on the roof of one building. It was the dull old Museum!

Mig was very much surprised, for she had thought they were miles away, but the fairy child said they had been circling round the town all the time, in order that Mig might practise her flying.

'Shall I have wings?' asked Mig, and she was rather disappointed to hear that none of them would.

'Let's play a joke,' said a well-known voice. The caterpillar cart rattled through the air, and Mig was now able to see her old friend, the Noseyface. She started to thank him for all he had done, but he blushed hard and muttered, 'Nothing at all – I assure you,' and wriggled shyly. Mig liked him.

'Let's fly lower,' he said. Mig asked how to do this, and he said, 'Move your little toe on your left foot,' but when she did that she fell head downwards through the air. He had purposely told her the wrong one.

'Noseyface!' cried the Dawnchild, 'you ought to be ashamed of yourself,' and she had to fly down to pull Mig up again.

Now they had reached the forest and were sinking slowly through the air. Tall oak-trees rose up to meet them, and the silvery birches looked friendly and kind. They alighted in a clearing where a little stream sang pleasantly. On either side the ground sloped up and down again to dells where water lay still and cool among the ferms or meandered on in countless streams. They sat at the foot of a birch.

'What a wet wood,' said Mig, looking about her.

'It's a very nice wood,' said the Old Bird sharply, 'and its wetness makes it safer!'

'Safer?' echoed Mig. 'What from?'

'The Umpis,' he answered mysteriously, and became silent again.

In the distance Mig could hear children's voices – lots of them. Now and again their laughter rang out. Her eyes filled with tears.

'How they laugh!' she said. 'Shall I be happy like that?'

'Of course,' grunted the Old Bird, and blew his nose very hard on a red spotted handkerchief which he replaced in a little feathered pocket.

'Of course,' said the Dawnchild. 'Listen, they're coming nearer.

'But surely they mustn't see you,' cried Mig in alarm, and wondered at the way in which the Dawnchild sprang up and stood looking through the trees in a very eager, excited manner.

And now the Dawnchild gave a bird-like call which all the distant voices echoed.

Through the trees burst a band of children – quite sixty of them.

Some were clad in short green frocks amidst which silver shone and tinkled. All were bare-footed, but the thorny paths did not seem to hurt them as they sped carelessly along, singing and laughing, to the three who awaited them. And now about twenty of them, more shining and bright than the rest, came forward, and crowding round, each in turn, flung their arms round the Dawnchild's neck.

'Dear Dawnchild,' they all cried, 'tell us what luck you've had!'

'Here she is, Dawnchildren,' cried Mig's Dawnchild, who seemed to be the chief one. 'See her!' And she pointed to Mig.

Twenty pairs of eyes were bent upon Mig, who wriggled and turned scarlet under their piercing gaze.

'She'll do,' they all cried suddenly, and one added, 'Not like Sylvaina's earth-child, who was cheeky and had to be taken back.' Every one laughed, and one Dawnchild, evidently Sylvaina, humped up her shoulders and walked off sulking. Then

everything was explained to Mig. They sat her down on some moss, brought her some clouds to eat (and this time the clouds tasted like lovely roast chicken and potatoes) and told her how all the Dawnchildren met in this wood every summer, bringing with them the earth-children. More Dawnchildren arrived each minute as the tale was being related, but Mig noticed that her Dawnchild commanded the others. This she was told was because they were really only part of her – that she divided up like quicksilver.

Mig was told that if one Dawnchild accidentally touched another, they melted into one child for a time, just like quicksilver, and that they often chose that as a way of settling their quarrels, for if they melted into only one child, they could not very well fight with themselves. But the Dawnchild being the head of them all never melted. Mig listened to all this with wonder.

'Now, Mig,' said the Dawnchild after telling her all this, 'we stay here till the autumn and then start on our journey.'

'Why not till then?' asked Mig disappointedly.

'Well, you see, it is because of the Umpis; they are our chief enemies. They live in woods and pursue us everywhere till the autumn when they wither, and one can see them clinging to the boughs of old trees, quite dead and harmless for the winter. But as long as we are round this tree, we are safe' – the Dawnchild pointed to the gigantic birch at whose roots they were sitting – 'or in its branches we are safer still. And when we leave this wood we ought always to carry a bit of the bark of this tree.

They told Mig fearfully how the Umpis were funny, frog-like little things, with eyes like currants; and after that every one climbed up into the tree and went to sleep on the branches.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Journey to Dawnland

For some time the children lived happily in the wood, the fairy children teaching the little mortals many new things.

Every morning they had a flying lesson from the top of the tree, and Mig easily beat the others, whereupon some of the earth-children grew so angry and jealous that they had to be sent back home until next year, when they would be fetched again if they had become better behaved. A good many of the Dawchildren 'rolled up' into the others, too. It was the funniest sight to see. They gave a squeak and three skips, then turned head over heels so quickly that one had not time to take a breath before they had disappeared into another Dawnchild.

Meanwhile, what had happened to Cousin Belinda? Belinda Baggs was puzzled because she could hear no news of her little cousin.

She stayed for a month with her friend the doctor's wife, until the latter became very tired of her and her nose. She complained to her husband that 'dear Belinda's nose was a great misfortune.

One could see it coming round the corner before the rest of her appeared.'

One Sunday the doctor and his wife, accompanied by Cousin Belinda, came out of church into the sunshine of an autumn morning, and walked over the flagged path of the churchyard and in the shade of the cedars towards a little side-gate.

'My poor dear little Mignonette,' said Belinda, pretending to week,' she used to say these lovely old cedars were like pancake-trees,' and she sobbed bitterly.

'Why?' asked Mrs Pipsnatch polite, as the doctor was evidently thinking too deeply to hear.

'Because they are so fl-flat,' sobbed Belinda.

'Oh, don't worry, Miss Belinda,' said the doctor absent-mindedly, 'your feet aren't so very flat!'

Miss Belinda went scarlet. 'Sir! I was not talking of my feet!' she snapped. Suddenly there was a whirr of wings, and a cloud of white birds flew overhead, high up in the sky; they sang with a strange musical note, almost like children's voices.

'Horrid creatures!' said Belinda, for she was jealous of anything beautiful. 'I hope we never see them again!' Then she jumped nearly a foot in the air, for she distinctly heard a little crackling voice say in her ear, 'And I hope you never will.

'What is the matter?' cried her friends. 'You look as though you'd seen a ghost.'

'Fairies are at work!' muttered Miss Belinda fiercely. 'Mig was there among the birds I'm sure! I will *not* be foiled!'

The doctor and his wife exchanged glances. He tapped his forehead.

'Mad!' he whispered, and his wife slipped her arm through Belinda's. 'Come,' she said soothingly, 'the heat makes you ill. We will walk home along the cool sea-front.'

Little did she know a greater shock awaited Miss Belinda there.

They strolled along the front, among all the other good people

coming out of church, and Belinda had calmed down somewhat, when through the groups of well-dressed people of Totterslip, burst a ragged band of children.

Dirty, torn and hatless, with unkempt hair and bare feet – thus they appeared to the onlookers; with rude shouts and playing a boisterous game of 'touch' they dashed along. Two children reached Belinda and dodged round her, playing roughly, somehow managing to knock her hat off, tear her umbrella, bang her nose, and oh! worst of all – knock her false teeth out! Belinda turned purple and collapsed into the arms of the stout doctor. His wife wrung her hands and called for water for her poor friend.

'A handsome reward for anyone who brings her water!' she cried wildly.

Near by sat a blind beggar. He sprang up and jumping down on to the beach ran towards the sea.

Every one wrung their hands. 'He will drown, poor fellow,' they cried. 'He cannot see!' But he was a fraud. His eyes were as good as Belinda's, which had distinctly seen Mig among the apparently ragged children before she fainted.

The doctor poured sea-water over her out of the beggar's tin mug, but she would not come to. He shook the last drop violently on her face, and the bottom fell out of the mug and nearly broke her nose. She came to with a yell like an old witch and sprang to her feet, waving her umbrella in the air.

'Where are those children?' she cried. Every one looked round. They had forgotten all about the, and now there was not a trace to be seen. Only high up in the air, a shining flock of white birds drifted across the sky. The Brotherhood of Totterslip Professors were there watching. 'Marvellous,' they said, 'they haunt this town every year about this time. They are a species of iguanapopisplitusavis.'

Over the roast beef and Yorkshire pudding of their Sunday lunch Miss Belinda and her friends discussed the disgraceful behaviour of the ragged children, but no one seemed to have seen Mig amongst them except Belinda.

Out in the woods behind the town the children roared with laughter and discussed the shocked grown-ups, and while Belinda was saying, 'I shall go home and think over how I can find Mig, for the police here have no clue!')but what she really wanted to do was to get help from the Wicked Voice in the cupboard), the Dawnchild was saying. 'The Umpis are withering, it is time we were starting on our journey.' All the children cried out joyfully at this, for they had had many narrow escapes from Umpis, and they were glad to know that the time was nearly over when these creatures could do any harm.

The next day was bright and there was an autumn nip in the air. The children awoke at sunrise, and when they were all assembled under the big birch-tree, the Dawnchild told them that the time had come.

'To-day' she said 'we start for the land where my father lives. It is a long dangerous journey that lies before us, and I want to tell you earth-children that you need fear nothing, as long as you do exactly what you are told. But should you disobey me or my sisters, you will have to go forward alone, not knowing whether you will arrive at my father's land or suddenly find yourselves back in your own homes. Please, children, take heed of what I say, for it will be very hard for me to help you, once you have got separated from us.' As she spoke her silver eyes rested with so much love and sadness on Mig, that the little girl felt quite uncomfortable.

'I am sure she thinks I am going to do wrong,' she said to another earth-child, with whom she had made friends. This little girl, Fanny, had a cruel stepmother who not only starved her but made her do all the heavy work in the house, and one of the Dawnchildren had brought her to the wood the day after Mig came.

'And now' said the Dawnchild 'I want you all to collect birch-bark. Take a piece from every birch-tree in the wood, and bring it to me here to burn under this tree, for I must make a charm. If the charm works this will be the last day that the Umpis can hurt us. Should it fail, any Umpis that have not withered before twelve o'clock this morning, will have the power to change into ordinary-

looking people and disturb us on our journey. So see that you get a piece of bark from every birch-tree in the wood, for if one is left out the charm may fail!'

The children ran off with their fairy sisters, the wood resounding with their gay laughter as they collected the birch-bark. Mig went off by herself down a cool-looking glade; from tree to tree she ran, collecting from each birch a piece of bark.

The boughs were already covered with Umpis as dead and withered as they possibly could be. They grew to the branches, but some that were not quite dead, kicked and spat viciously at Mig as she passed them. She knew that once they had settled on a branch to wither they could do nothing harmful, so she only laughed at them and gaily twitched the branch they were on, making them mad with rage.

As she went about her task, a stray Umpi occasionally passed but contented himself with buzzing rudely at her, for they only attacked in numbers, settling on their victim like swarm of bees, and biting with their huge, flat mouths. As to their clothes, they wore a suit very like a beetle's only not so shiny; their bodies were black all over, and they looked like a cross between a beetle and a frog; the little creatures were barely an inch or two in height.

The sunlight fell in wavy patterns on the grass and the thousand little streams tinkled murmurously. Mig paused to look about her.

'I think that's all,' she said aloud, and then she saw some one advancing down the glade towards her. Surely she knew that short, thin figure? She stood rooted to the spot. An awful fear took possession of her – she could not move. It was Belinda.

On Belinda's shoulders perched countless Umpis, on her outstretched palm sat two more to whom she talked lovingly. She advanced slowly to where Mig stood, her cruel eyes flashing as she gnashed her teeth at the child.

'Haha!' she said, 'so you thought you would escape me? But the Umpis and I, we are too strong for you!'

And then she told poor Mig that when she had returned home

yesterday and sought the advice of the wicked cupboard the Voice inside it had told her to feel along a little ledge in the top shelf on the right-hand side. Belinda had done so, and had found a little black box, which she was unable to open. But the Voice itself came out of that little box, saying that the King of the Umpis was inside. He had been imprisoned there for hundreds of years, growing more wicked very minute.

'See!' said Belinda triumphantly, drawing out of her reticule a little black box. 'And he told me you were in this wood, so I've come to catch you.' She held Mig firmly as she concluded, 'One of your ancestors who was a good magician shut him in.'

At that minute there came a squeaky little voice out of the box, 'Yes, and he bewitched me so that I couldn't escape till a wicked descendant of the McArthur family should promise to help me. And even now I can't get out till a little girl should be born called Mignonette McArthur, who will be captured by the Umpis. When she is caught I shall be free!'

'Oh!' cried Mig and tried to run away, but her cousin held her fast. The little voice went on. 'And that's why we make war on the Dawnchildren, for we have always known that one day the Dawnchild would try to take you to her home.'

Belinda nodded and smiled like a cat.

'Yes,' she said, 'and the dear king says that he will give me magic power to catch you and bring you to Umpiland, and then I am to be Queen of the Umpis!'

At this outstanding news Mig was very afraid, and twisting herself free, ran for her life, with Belinda and the swarm of Umpis following close behind.

'Umpi! Umpi!' shrieked Mig as she ran, in warning to the other children, who at her cry came pouring out of the dells: up and down the little hills and slopes they ran, splashing into water, tripping over roots, and getting tied up in the bracken; all rushing to get to the shelter of the friendly birch-tree. Apparently there were more Umpis about than they had thought, and the Dawnchild danced

up and down the boughs of the old birch-tree in great distress, wringing her hands and calling her children, fairy and mortal.

One by one they gained the tree, beating off the Umpis as they ran, though they could not always escape being bitten in the fight.

As each one came dashing along they had to jump across a shallow swampy ditch wit steeply sloping sides, spring up at one of the branches of the birch, then by this means draw themselves up into a kind of hollow where all the boughs mete. The Dawnchild counted the children as they arrived.

'Fifty-seven, fifty-eight, fifty-nine,' she panted. Fifty-nine was an earth-child badly bitten. She howled a lot and rubbed the places with birch-bark which cured them magically.

Sixty-oh, where was sixty, and the Dawnchild cried 'Where's my Mignonette?' And then Mig came bounding along, Belinda and the Umpis close behind her. She was limping badly, for an Umpi had fastened on to her ankle, and she staggered once, nearly falling. An excited buzz arose from the Umpis, and the children cried,

'Don't give in, Mig! Remember you're English! Hold on, you're nearly home! Look out for the ditch!'

Mig gathered herself together for the jump, and just cleared the swampy ditch; living with the fairy children had made her as light as a feather. Belinda tried to do the same but she had eaten a big pork chop for lunch and could not rise so gracefully as Mig. She floundered in the swamp just as not long before she had fallen into the quicksand. Mig gave a joyful cry, and leapt for the branch, but her ankle gave way and she slipped, falling heavily, just as Belinda and the Umpis rose out of the swamp.

'Mine!' cried Belinda as she stretched out a bony hand to where Mig lay, half-fainting from pain.

'Ours!' buzzed the Umpis, preparing to swarm over her. The King of the Umpis possessed such magic power, that for a time they were able to come much nearer than usual to the big birch-tree.

'Help, help!' sobbed Mig, and just in time the Dawnchild leant

perilously far out of the tree and pulled Mig up into safety. The Umpis' power was not strong enough to avail them further and they fell back disappointedly.

I'll catch you yet!' cried Belinda, backing away from the tree, for the children were throwing twigs at her. 'I'll follow you wherever you go – never fear!' Her voice died away as she disappeared in the forest followed by the Umpis.

Then they attended to Mig's wounds. She had a bad Umpi-bite on her shoulder, and another on her ankle, but these were soon cured by means of the magic birch-bark. As they rubbed it on, the sound of a chiming bell was wafted faintly to them on the breeze. The Dawnchild sprang down from the tree with a cry and made a heap of all the birch-bark that they had collected. It began to smoulder.

'Oh!' she cried. 'Twelve o'clock is striking! We are too late to collect all the birch-bark!'

'What shall we do?' wailed the other Dawnchildren. 'There are quite a lot of threes that we haven't touched.'

One Dawnchild wailed despairingly. 'We shall never get to our land with the children. We had better send them home again.' At this, a cry went up from all the earth-children, and with one accord they turned to the Dawnchild and held out beseeching arms.

When the Dawnchild saw their faces, she said, 'Never! Oh, but we must manage somehow! I think we have got a piece of bark from all but about seven trees. That means the remaining Umpis will be able to chase us on the journey until the spring, when the whole Umpi-army will be after us if we have not gained home by then. Never mind, we will outwit them somehow.'

Some of the less brave Dawnchildren protested.

'You know what will happen if they prevent our getting the earth-children to our home,' they said to her: 'they will capture the earth-children, and we shall have to spend a hundred years in the Deserted Planet!'

So they decided to vote. The Dawnchild climbed the tree and

cried, 'All children that want to risk great dangers and come with us, hold up your hands.'

Twelve, including Mig and Fanny, at once voted in favour of going, and the Old Bird who had been dozing at the top of the tree ever since sunrise gave a tremendous sigh of relief as he alighted beside Mig.

'Phew!' he said to Mig, mopping his brow with his little red handkerchief, 'it made me quite hot for a minute. I thought you were going to refuse to go !' And then he sneezed and hopped himself up to the top of the tree again, muttering as he went, 'Strange – how fond I am getting of that earth-child – hope no one has guessed – most undignified!' For he was quite proud of his reputation as a surly, unloving old fellow.

So the rest of the earth-children who were too afraid, were put on the top of the wind and blown back home, and then the Dawnchild made her plans.

'It is now time to start on our journey,' she said, 'You Dawnchildren can take charge of all the earth-children except Mig -but Mig and I will go alone part of the way. We will meet you, you know where.' Then she added in a mysterious sing-song voice – 'Mig and I lead the way'. First of all she gave them each a piece of birch-bark as a charm, then springing down from the tree, she collected some Dawnchildren and they all joined hands round the smouldering birch-bark. A big black cloud drifted across the sun; in the suddenly dull light their green frocks shone silver, and a little breeze blew the ashes of the fire up into the air. The Dawnchildren whirled round and round in a mazy dance, their draperies wafting the ashes about until both dancers and ashes were mixed up together in flying confusion. Up above, the earth-children crouched on the branches listening to the music that seemed to arise gradually from the ashes, grey weird music that was, nevertheless, very soft and sweet.

'Do you think we shall be happy in their land?' whispered Fanny. 'I shall dance like that when I am happy!' But Mig did not answer. She was leaning forward, staring right into the centre of the ashy

whirlpool, and listening to a strange song that came from its depths.

'In the rush of the wind, in the glimmering night,
In the hiss of the sea over sand;
In the hush of green trees, in the shimmering light,
Float ashes, float, and protect our elf-band.
Down by the pool where the water-rats laugh,
Down where the water-gnome sings;
Down where the frogs smile at cockchafers' chaff,
Float ashes, float, in your magical rings.'

That was all Mig heard. She had been staring for ages at the middle of the whirling mass until it seemed to be coming nearer-nearer. With a start she realised that she was falling softly out of the tree right into the ashes. Down, down, down, then they bore her up and she floated with them, thinking to herself that it was rather like taking gas pleasantly at the dentist's. And through he fast-shutting eyes she thought she could see the other earth-children's surprised faces looking at her out of the tree, but she really could not be sure of anything, until suddenly the Dawnchild's voice sounded quite plainly, 'Don't be afraid, Mig dear – it's always like this.' She opened her eyes, and suddenly felt very well and strong. It was most extraordinary. She was standing in a tremendous forest. The forest was absolutely unlike the 'wet wood' as they called the other, for this one was filled with pines. The red sandy soil rose up in little hills and crags or fell steeply into hollows where a few stunted blackberry bushes straggled. Mig received quite a painful crick in her neck from trying to see to the top of the trees. They grew up and up into a green vault where hundreds of little birds sang. Except for these latter and the sound of their wings flapping against the foliage as they flew from tree to tree, all was very still.

'Have you recovered?' asked a well-known voice beside her, and Mig turned. There stood the Dawnchild.

'What from?' asked Mig, and her companion laughed.

'Why, you've been standing there for ever so long, fast asleep,' she replied. 'All earth-children do when they come through the

Ash-Whirl.'

'How did I get here?' asked Mig curiously.

The Old Bird flew down from a high bough.

'It's quite obvious,' he grunted, 'the Ash-Whirl twiddled you here.'

'How – why?' began Mig. 'Well, where are we, anyway? Are we there, or are we still in England?'

'England?' The Old Bird held his sides with his claws and laughed loudly. (Having only two claws he had nothing left to support him, so was obliged to balance on the tip of his tail.) 'Well, in a sort of a way, but you might say we're in the Horizon now.'

Mig looked rather flabbergasted; she had always imagined the horizon to be an imaginary place, but she did not want to show her ignorance, so she said nothing.

The Dawnchild then pointed to a tangle of low blackberry bushes, just in front of them.

'That's the way we go,' she said solemnly. Picking a blackberry, she threw it with all her might into the centre of the bushes, and a column of smoke shot up.

'Oo!' said Mig as it changed into a fountain of bright coloured water, sparkling high up in the air, then slowly died down again. In its place grew a weird flower with brown and purple petals. That too died down and the smoke broke forth once more. When it had cleared away the Dawnchild jumped into the middle of the bushes, the thorns of which did not seem to harm her.

'These signs are sent to show me that all is well beneath. If they had not been there' she said 'I could not have come this way.' As she spoke she stamped her foot twice and a hollow rumble came up from the earth.

Calling to Mig and the Old Bird to follow, she sprang lightly down a hole that appeared in the ground among the bushes, then disappeared from sight. The Old Bird told Mig to go first, but she was afraid to jump over, because of the prickles, so he jumped over

and down the hole to show her that they did not hurt. Even then she could not raise enough courage to follow – twice she tried and failed. Beneath her feet the Dawnchild's voice came – 'Jump, Mig, jump quickly – something evil is coming – my piece of birch-bark is quivering!' And Mig took a desperate leap. But what was this that happened? Even as she

'I've got you, my fine McArthur!' And from the little black box inside Miss Belinda's bag came a hoarse little chuckle, as Mig was dragged away ruthlessly by her hair, over brambles and stones. Underneath the ground, the Dawnchild was saying to the Bird, 'Mig is very timid. You run up and fetch her.' But when they reached the surface again she was nowhere to be seen.

Belinda Baggs hurried on with her victim until they reached the edge of the forest, and found themselves on a big white highroad with telegraph-poles. Along this they walked until they came to a signpost with 'To DYNGORD STATION' written on it.

'Ha!' snorted Belinda, 'Just what I wanted!'

She hurried along, dragging Mig with her, glancing neither to the right not left, until they reached the station. Here there were a crowd of people waiting for the trains.

Belinda booked two thirds for Hildred Hollow, their home, and whilst she did so, Mig noticed that her little green and silver frock that had been given her by the Dawnchild, had become the most ordinary-looking green frock, and once again her legs were clad in shoes and stockings. But she was getting used to being bewildered now, and was really too hopelessly unhappy to care.

Dyngford had many platforms. On No. 2 Belinda saw a notice, 'This platform to Hildred Hollow,' and lots of people were crowded there. They waited.

'Why!' said Belinda crossly, and pinching Mig's wrist to which she still clung, 'there's a porter changing that notice.' She dragged Mig up closer to see the words on the board. Sure enough, a porter was covering it up with another placard -'Train for Hildred Hollow leaves platform No. 3.' Then he turned and winked at Mig, which

surprised her very much. Laughing loudly he picked up some parcels he had put down, shouldered his way through the crowd and disappeared. No one seemed to take any notice of the new announcement, or even to see it.

'Well, I shan't tell them if they're so blind,' said Belinda; 'let them take the wrong train!'

She hastened with Mig to Platform 3 and they waited there. At Platform 2 a train hustled in, and took away all the misguided passengers, who evidently thought it would travel with them to Hildred Hollow.

'A very good joke, indeed!' murmured Miss Belinda, smiling placidly. Ten minutes went by, then twenty, but no Hildred Hollow train came.

'Really this is too bad, having to wait all this time,' said Belinda, but on reflecting that she had let every one else go off in the wrong train, and that they would find themselves in a far worse plight, she became more pleased, for she enjoyed seeing others in trouble. After an hour a train came in very, very slowly. The station was now deserted and no porters appeared, but the train was crowded. It was marked 'Hildred Hollow', and Mig's spirits sank, for somehow right up to this moment she had hoped for a rescue.

When a good many people had got out – they seemed to vanish into space they went so quickly – Miss Baggs found two corner seats for Mig and herself. The engine gave a dismal yell, the train moved slowly off, and Mig burst into tears. They were on their way back to Hildred Hollow, back to the old grey house, standing amidst the overgrown unkempt gardens, that once had been so bright with flowers.

The flying landscape showed blurred through her tears, but she fixed her gaze on it without blinking, not wanting to show her distress to the crowded compartment, least of all to Belinda, who would only jeer. Presently, however, stealing a glance at her cruel cousin, she saw that she was dozing. The landscape was whirling by, faster than ever – she wished she dare jump out; then she heard

one of the people say, 'Now why on earth is this train stopping here?'

'Must be a cow on the line,' grunted an old man from behind his paper.

'How stupid,' thought Mig, 'it's not stopped!' for she could still see trees whizzing by, but as the people continued to talk about it, she turned to look out of the other side windows. It was most peculiar: the landscape was not moving there. They had evidently stopped. She looked through her window, but there the land and sky and trees were still moving! And then it was that she saw in the distance ahead the Dawnchild and all the others standing on a piece of now slowly gliding landscape, and holding out their arms to her. They were coming to her rescue, they were calling – she must go, or they would glide past.

'Oh, look!' she cried suddenly, pointing out of the opposite window to distract attention from her own movements. Miss Belinda awoke with a jerk and peered out, as did all the other people.

While their backs were turned Mig sprang for the door. By a stroke of luck she managed to open it, and race across the line, now closely followed by the shrieking Belinda, who was the first of the passengers to discover the trick played on them.

The train disappeared suddenly into space. There was a low hedge dividing the line from the ground where the Dawnchildren clustered; Mig scrambled through it as best as she could, and found herself racing up a slope where grass and stones were mixed together. On a mass of gently gliding stones the children came by. (The ground on which Mig ran was quite still.) They stretched out their arms and dragged her on to their moving land. Belinda, whose huge flat foot was raised to step on too, fell flat on her back, as the moving ground gave a sudden leap upwards and began to whizz off at a furious speed.

Mig was hugging her friend, and all the fairy children tried to explain at once how the fairy trains worked, for it was a fairy railway on which she had just been travelling.

'They run the opposite way to ordinary ones,' Mig was told: 'instead of the train moving, it sometimes stands still while some of the scenery moves past it, so if you are in a hurry we advise you to get on to the scenery.'

And then they told her how the porter who had winked at her was really the Noseyface in disguise; he had changed the numbers of the platforms on purpose, and they had run a fairy train into Platform 3.

'It was very simple,' they assured Mig. 'We never intended to let her get hold of you.'

'But where is the train?' asked the bewildered child.

'Gone back to Fairyland! It's the Fairyland Express,' they told her. 'We are in the Horizon now.'

'It's very like England!' said Mig.

'The Horizon is England and everywhere else. You'll find it wherever you go, but it's only a few that can get into it,' and then they pointed to Belinda, now a fat speck in the distance.

Far away as she was, one could see her waving her arms furiously in the air, and stamping her flat feet on the ground. As far as they could see the strip of land they were seated on was moving, and every now and then Belinda, overcome with fury, would try to spring on to the edge near her. But she had only evil power which availed her nothing, and if she did get a foothold among the loose rolling stones, at the edge, she was speedily pushed off by the ever-increasing crowds of fairies and gnomes that now appeared to be travelling in the same strange way. At intervals they passed a train standing still on the line, and caught a glimpse of very usual-looking travellers reading their papers or talking, and Mig was told that that every morning by mistake a business man had got into the Fairyland Express and was still there reading his paper, thinking he was gong to London. She felt sorry for him.

Then Mig turned her attention to her own mode of conveyance. It was now filling up every minute with all kinds of fairies from splendid, lowering-browed poppy maidens, to little wizened green

gooseberry elves. All of them seemed to have heard of Mig, and one jocular little fellow in white with buzzing wings came up to the Dawnchild, and the following conversation took place.

'Hallow! hallo! Here we are again, Miss Dawnchild! I see you have your usual autumn band of earth-children. Summer is over – ah, well!'

'Yes, Mr. White Aphis – and are you just returning from your summer round? Done good business?'

'Very good indeed,' replied the little man earnestly, 'the cucumbers are so jealous of the tomatoes that they paid me a lot of money to leave my special White Aphis blight on the tomato leaves, and the tomatoes were so frightened that they actually paid me eight million gold pieces not to leave my blight on their leaves -'

'You are an old swindler,' said the Dawnchild, pushing him away and laughing. 'This is Mig.'

'Ah yes – so I've heard – the unhappiest child on earth, I believe. You did well to bring her. Has she got her birch-bark?'

'Of course – ' said the Dawnchild, and then stopped at the look on the poor child's face.

'Oh, Dawnchild,' cried Mig in a tragic voice, 'I have lost it!'

Every one cried out in horror and then started talking at once, but of course nothing could be done. The Dawnchild arranged that Mig must always keep very close to her, and said perhaps it would be all right.

They were now passing through a wild and mountainous place, and the journey became very bumpy.

Over dark, purple, rugged mountains they went, while on their left and lower down lay a still mountain lake, rather cold and grey. It was here that the Dawnchild came up to Mig, who was playing about their strip of land with some fairies, and drew her aside.

'Mig,' she said, 'some one is following us – I do not know whether they are evil or good. But I feel that it concerns you. Can you see that speck in the air?' Mig looked and saw a speck every increasing

in size, which gradually resolved itself into a bird – not the Old Bird, who was on the moving land with them, but a greyish, long-necked, rather fine-looking creature. As it alighted at the Dawnchild's feet, every one clustered round and they saw that it had a beautiful golden crest on its head. It was a crane. In its beak it carried a scroll of paper with a royal seal attached, of the same design as his crest. 'My father's seal!' exclaimed the Dawnchlid. 'Something must be wrong!' She turned pale and breaking the seal with haste, read the following to every one who crowded round:

'MY DEAREST DAUGHTER, –

'News has reached me that your dear aunt's troubles are nearly over. As you know she has for many years been trying vainly to find traces of her missing lover, who vanished the day before the wedding, and so sad has she become that she has retreated to a mountain-top in the northern fastness of her kingdom, whither her loyal subjects throng daily to comfort her and to try to find a means of helping her. Now news has reached her by means of an old wise woman that he is imprisoned by the Witch of Worum. He can only be rescued by one who bears the mark of a clover leaf on her back. All else are powerless against the Witch. The wise woman who brought this news remarked that she thought that the rescuer would probably be travelling on the Fairy Express from Dyngford.

'Dear daughter, I know you will do all in your power to save your aunt. Should such a one be travelling with you, tell him or her that my sister is known in the Horizon as "The Lady who Sighs upon a Mountain-Top", warn them that the task to rescue is long and arduous, and imprisonment in the Worum may attend their failure.

'Farewell, my dearest child; matters are running smoothly at the Court, and your mother sends her love. She grows more beautiful every day. Farewell!'

There was a short silence as the Dawnchild rolled the letter up, and then gave orders for the royal crane to be served with refreshment. He and the Old Bird had a wordy argument on the way to the meal. The Old Bird thought the crane's head-dress too gaudy (it consisted of golden spikes with golden bells on the top of them, and was the king's livery), while the crane termed him 'a dull fellow in dusty black'. When peace was restored the Dawnchild returned and said to every one with a sigh of relief: 'I quite thought it was bad news when I saw my father's handwriting – what a relief! Has anyone here got a clover mark on their back?'

'No,' called thousands of voices.

'It's very strange,' said the Dawnchild, 'that old wise woman must have made a mistake. Lots of them are frauds of course,' she added doubtfully.

'Yes! said an earth-child, 'we have some in London. Daddy says they ought to be imprisoned.' No one looked at Mig. She was very pale, and was clenching her fists. Something terrible must have upset her. Look into her mind and see what she is thinking. She is saying over and over again that 'if she says nothing, it will not be telling a lie. For she has the clover mark upon her back! She had forgotten its existence until now, when the Dawnchild read the letter, and it had been like a knife stabbing her heart. What! go away and leave these Dawnchildren, to brave unknown dangers for an unknown fairy lady?'

Poor little Mig, She was not unselfish, for life with Belinda had been spoiling her better impulses. She did not remember that the Dawnchild had told her that 'no one could reach that wonderful land was very naughty', and so when at length the Dawnchild, noticing her paling cheek and trembling mouth, asked what was amiss, she answered: 'Why, nothing Dawnchild'. Though she felt that awful choky wave that sweeps into our throats when we know we have done wrong, and cannot confess.

'I expect she's tired,' said an old fairy kindly; 'come here, my pretty, and lay your head in my lap'.

But Mig ran right away to the edge of the moving land and refused to speak to anyone for the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER SIX

The Dwarf Village & Deserted Planet

In the night, the land that had been gliding like a snake over mountains and valleys, stopped when every one was sleeping, so that when they awoke they found themselves in a sunny smiling field, high upon a hill, overlooking the sea from which a fresh breeze blew in. Baby clouds and huge white clouds chased across the sky, and although it was now October, daisies nodded in the grass which was of the brightest green.

Here Mig and the Dawnchild said good-bye to their fellow travellers, including the other Dawnchildren and their charges.

'Shall we never see them again?' asked Mig sadly. She was not quite happy yet, her conscience still pricking because of her unspoken lie.

The Dawnchild answered her that they would meet again at midnight that night, and after that at different stages of the journey, and then she said, 'Now I should like to visit my friends in the dwarf village. It lies on one of these wooded cliffs by the sea, and will be a nice walk.

So they left the pleasant field and struck into a highway. Here many people passed, some quite ordinary mortals, others obviously from Fairyland. The mortals did not take any notice of Mig. Her friend told her they were human beings who had got into the Horizon by mistake, and were too busy getting out again to notice her.

They left the road and plunged into a little wood, where cool green depths lured them, and streams splashed hidden under rocks.

'Let's rest,' said Mig. 'I'm hot,' so they sat down and presently the Dawnchild said:

'Mig, I wonder if you are good, for if you are too bad, you will lose me and my land for ever.'

Mig was silent, and the Dawnchild said, 'I do want you to come back and live with me for ever in Dawnland, darling Mig! I'm going to give you a test. Put your ear to the ground.'

Mig did so.

'I can hear nothing,' she said.

'Perhaps you are not good enough to hear Her voice,' signed the Dawnchild.

'Whose voice?' asked Mig wistfully, for she hated to disappoint the Dawnchild.

'Mother Earth's voice,' said the latter. 'We fairies, and the children of nature, and all those who are pure in heart are the only ones who can hear her voice when we are in need. She tells us what to do.'

'Once I had a boy cousin,' said Mig thoughtfully.

'I played Red Indians with him, and we put our ears to the ground and listened for the palefaces 'footsteps.''

That's not at all the same thing,' replied the Dawnchild. 'Oh, Mig, Mig, do try and hear Her voice. I do so want you to be good, then you can come to father's wonderful kingdom.'

'I'll try,' said Mig uncomfortably, and tried hard, but all her past naughty thoughts and deeds rose up and clouded her hearing and it was no good.

The Dawnchild besought her to think of something very beautiful,

so Mig thought and thought, but she could only think of Cousin Belinda chasing her round the room with a fly-wisp.

'If only she had been kind like my dead mummy,' thought Mig, and suddenly she remembered how her mother used to sit up late at night darning Mig's stockings, and straining her kind brown eyes, and a great tear welled up in her own eyes and dropped on the earth.

'Mig. Mig! Can you hear anything?' sand the Dawnchild dancing on the grass, for she had seen the tear.

'No-no-yes-wait!' cried Mig. And at first she heard nothing, then there came a faint tremor in the earth beneath her something almighty, millions of miles down, up-heaving itself. Then there came a rumble like a waterfall, the lap-lap-lap of the water lily-clogged river against a boat's sides, the cool underground trickle of a stream in a pinewood, the homeward hum of a honey-laden bee – they all blended and rose and sank into one wonderful voice – so rich, so soft, and yet so rolling in sound that it seemed as though it echoed from mountain-top to mountain-top. The voice was so wonderful, telling her about all the things growing around, and making Mig hear them, that in time it ceased to say real words but seemed to be living right in Mig's heart.

For a long time she lay listening in drowsy content, slipping into a dream-world from which she was awoken as it were by feeling a touch on her shoulder, and hearing the Dawnchild say happily:

'That is enough for now, Mig. It is time for us to go to the dwarf-village.'

So they went on through the little wood, going uphill until they found themselves in a clearing where on one side they obtained a glimpse of the sea below. A winding sandy path led down through sand-hills to a swampy stretch of sand, and the sea, now restless and grey, tumbled beyond.

In the clearing stood several little cottages, out of which many busy sounds issued. Little shrill voices could be heard giving directions, or whistling and singing, and small hands shook featherbeds out of

windows. Out of the door of the cottage nearest Mig came a dwarf woman with a red scarf tied jauntily round her funny face. In her arms she bore a huge little basin of flour which she planted on a table before the cottage and then began to knead the contents into dough.

'Good morning, Redcap!'

Redcap looked up.

'Why, it is the Dawnchild,' she squeaked delightedly, and picking up a handful of earth threw it at her gently. The Dawnchild replied in the same manner, much to Mig's surprise, until her friend whispered that it was their form of greeting. So Mig threw some, too.

'Good morning, Dawnchild,' she squeaked. 'I knew you were coming, for my big toes have been twitching all the morning. That's what I told Miss Baggs just now!'

'Miss Baggs? shrieked the children together.

'Belinda! What is she doing here?'

The dwarf-woman was very surprised to hear that she was their cruel enemy.

'She seemed so nice,' she said, 'such a kind woman. 'Oh dear, I told her all about you, Dawnchild, and how you would soon be passing on your way home with the earth-children. I hope I've not done wrong. She said at once that she must go, but would be back in half an hour to give you a nice surprise! I thought it so sweet of her!'

'There's only one thing to be done,' said the Dawnchild with an air of determination. 'We must hide, and when she comes back, we must overhear her plans. You, Redcap, must pretend to be her friend. Tell her that you know all and would like to help her to catch us. Say that to-night at midnight we are all meeting in that field we have just left and advise her to catch us there.'

The dwarf-woman promised faithfully, and hid them in a very large meat-safe outside her house. Scarcely had she done so when the undergrowth crackled on the right of the clearing, and Belinda

hurried out, still carrying the Umpi-King in her reticule.

'Redcap, Redcap,' she called harshly, 'have they come yet?'

Redcap tossed her dough up into the air twice before she answered. Then she said, 'No, Miss Baggs dear, but something tells me the little wretches won't be long.'

'Wretches?' echoed Belinda. 'You call them wretches? You don't like them either, then? Help me to catch them and I will reward you handsomely.' She told the dwarf all about it, and the children inside the safe held their breath lest she should discover them.

And so on Redcap's advice Belinda decided to catch Mig that night.

'I shall be there with a thousand Umpis,' she said.

'This time they shall *not* escape me; we intend to capture them all,' and she chuckled, showing her big teeth. 'Besides, even if they do escape me again, I shall follow them – I know the path they take.'

'Do you?' whispered the Dawnchild fiercely. 'We'll see about that!'

'I am rather hungry' pursued Cousin Belinda. 'What have you in the meat-safe?' She moved towards it and Mig's heart stood still.

'Ow, ow, o!' shrieked the dwarf-woman, 'a wasp has stung my foot.' she hopped about, holding it and wailing to her daughter to bring her the blue-bag. Her daughter ran out and examined the foot, while Miss Belinda sniffed hungrily but pretended to be very sorry for Redcap.

'Why, mother,' said Redcap's daughter, 'I can't see-' She became silent, for she received a vicious kick on her long nose from the 'injured' foot!

At length Redcap's foot appeared to be better, although no sign of the sting was to be seen. She commanded her daughter to bring out soup and bread for the hungry guest, and when Belinda at length rose to go it was on the understanding that she was to catch the children at midnight that night, in the field where the fairy

train had stopped the night before.

When she had been gone five minutes, Redcap unlocked the meat-safe and let the children out.

'Now what are you going to do?' she asked.

The Dawnchild shook her head sadly. 'I must consult with the others,' she said; 'it's going to be very difficult. Is there any telephone growing near?' This sounded very funny to Mig. She waited to see what would happen. The dwarf-woman saying there was some telephone, pointed to an old tree the roots of which were covered with ivy.

The Dawnchild went over to it, and settling herself comfortably, picked up a strand of ivy and shook it.

A faint tinkle was heard and she said, 'Hallo – I want to speak to the Dawnchildren.' Mig thought it delightfully simple.

'Hallo, Dawnchildren,' said her friend, 'something terrible has happened! Belinda has got here again! Meet me in the field and hour before midnight to discuss plans. Whatever happens we must leave the field before midnight. Good-bye.' She carefully replaced the strand of ivy, exactly where it was growing before, putting it into place with her wonderful fairy fingers.

All fairies use ivy for telephones, because it creeps all over the place, and no human beings suspect if of being anything but a plant.

Just as she finished the Old Bird came hopping along.

'You might have waited for me,' he grumbled, sneezing loudly, 'always in a hurry.'

After he had been told what had happened, they all went into the dwarf-house to rest until midnight. It was a sweet little house; Mig was shown up into a spotless white bedroom, with a tiny bed in it.

'You may rest here,' said the dwarf-woman kindly, and Mig did not like to say that she was sure the bed was too short. She turned rather red and thanked her busy little hostess, and when the latter had left the room, tried to lie down; her feet hung right over the

end of the bed, but tired out with her strange new life she soon fell asleep.

Outside, the bright, windy coldness of the October day faded, and dark set in. Late at night Mig was woken by the dwarf-woman who was bending over her with a lighted candle. The shadows leapt queerly on the ceiling, and the dwarf-woman's richly coloured garment shone green and ruby in the flickering light.

'Get up,' she whispered, gently shaking Mig with her gnarled hands, 'tis near midnight.'

The Dawnland now entered. The candlelight reflected itself also in the silver green of her frock, and glittered in her silver eyes. 'Is Mig awake?' she asked. 'Then hurry!'

They helped her dress, and then the two children and the Bird hurried out into the starlit night.

The wind had died away and everything was very dark and silent, as they retraced their way to the field where they had parted from their companions in the morning.

Mig kept close to the Dawnchild, was rather quiet and kept looking up at the stars; the Old Bird hopped in front.

Presently they left the road and entered the field. As they turned in at the gate, some one spoke from the hedge, in a sonorous mellow voice.

'Who goes there?' Mig started, for the voice actually came from a withered group of wild onions, which grew in the hedgerow.

'Friend,' said the Dawnchild.

'Password?' came the voice in a solemn deep tone.

'Ashes of the Birch,' answered the Dawnchild.

'Pass, friend, all's well,' the wild onion's melancholy voice rang out into the night, and the children moved forward.

Through the darkness the trees loomed up in weird shapes, and the starlight gradually became veiled by a slight mist.

They stumbled over the uneven grass until they reached that part of the slope which overlooked the sea. Far out the lights of

ships twinkled; down below they could faintly see the waves which came hissing in over the sand. And now the other Dawn and earth-children arrived to discuss what they might do to escape from Belinda and the Umpi-King. Several suggestions were made and the time went by, but nothing could be decided upon, so at last the Dawnchild decided to listen to the voice of the Earth, and see whether it had any advice to offer. Dropping on one knee she bent gracefully to the ground and a great silence fell on the assembled children.

High up in the sky the stars disappeared gradually and the mist gave place to lowering black clouds; through the murky blue darkness, a wind sprang up; it sobbed and signed and moaned. The shining band of Dawnchildren alone showed radiant, when the newly risen moon's weak rays glinted through a rift in the clouds.

At length the Dawnchild arose, and her eyes were troubled as she spoke.

'The Earth says this misfortune has fallen upon us because some one among us has done wrong.' She stopped and her eyes searched the assembly sorrowfully. Mig nearly confessed then, but could not raise enough courage to do so. The Dawnchild continued:

'The Voice of the Earth says that at midnight Belinda and the Umpi-King will arrive here with the thousand Umpis who have escaped our spell. They will try to capture us, seize Mig, and take her back to Umpiland, where she is to be shut up for ever.'

A wail of fear came from Mig, who was crouching on a hummock. Her beloved Dawnchild ran over and put her arms round her.

'Darling Mig!' she cried, 'all may yet be well. The Earth says there is only one thing to do. We shall have to spend the winter in the Deserted Planet, which, as we fairies know, is not so deserted as it seems! There, neither Belinda nor the Umpis can follow us, and when the spring comes we will fly the whole way from the planet to Dawnland.'

'But how shall we get up to the planet?' asked one Dawnchild, 'the earth-children cannot fly so far yet.'

'That is quite all right,' said the Dawnchild; 'this wind that is rising will carry us easily – hark!'

In the distance a church clock was striking; the wind arose with a shriek.

'Tis midnight! Spring up into the air, earth – and Dawnchildren – the wind will carry us!'

The hitherto peaceful night was now blustering and wild. Ragged clouds sailed across the dark sky, and the pale yellow moonlight shining through added to the eerie feeling in the air.

'I'm frightened,' whimpered one earth-child, 'What is that buzzing coming nearer?'

'Spring! spring!' cried the Dawnchild, 'the Umpis are coming – Belinda is flying in their midst!'

She sprang into the air as she cried out these words, pulling Mig up with her just as the Umpis burst into sight, buzzing madly. In their midst was Belinda, seated in a chariot which was lined with slimy seaweed, and drawn by Umpis. Her toque was tied down with a veil, and in one hand she held her umbrella; the other clasped her reticule, with the King inside.

'Stop! stop!' she shouted, when she saw the screaming band of children above her. In her excitement she dropped the Umpi-King into the darkness below and waved her umbrella in the air, a habit of hers when angry.

And now the children floated quickly, higher and higher on the top of the wind, looked down and saw with fear that though the Umpis could fly no higher and were falling back, fortune had favoured Belinda. That same wind which had helped them, had now seized Belinda's umbrella, blown it inside out and wafted it up in the air with Belinda still clinging to it like grim death. What a funny sight she looked – her form blown hither and thither, and her large flat feet waving helplessly.

Every now and then the children cried out in fear when a sudden gust of wind blew her too close to them, and all the time they were getting nearer and nearer to the stars. They passed several which

blazed so brightly that they were obliged to shield their eyes. It was whilst passing one of these that Belinda was punished. She had just been blown near enough to hook her umbrella round Mig's leg, and the other children were beating her off, when suddenly the gust of wind that propelled her died away; Belinda's umbrella blew the right way out again, and she sank through the air rapidly, kicking and plunging.

Ghashing her teeth horribly, she tried to spring up again, but it was to no avail. With one last cry she fell straight on to the point of a star which was twinkling round and round. Here she regained her feet, but finding that the only way to keep herself from falling off was to run from point to point, she was obliged to do this, and the children said it was worth the fright they had had to see her running round and round like a mouse on a treadmill, still waving her umbrella.

Here we will leave her for the present, whilst we follow the children, who were now used to flying and were continuing their flight upwards. Far beneath them the Brotherhood of Totterslip Professors were all busy examining the extraordinary appearance of Belinda's star. The First professor was peering with the others through a powerful telescope.

'It looks to me' he said 'as if some one had been running round the points of this star. They are all bent as if beneath some great weight.'

'Which of course is absurd,' said the Second professor. It was the only bit of Euclid he could remember at the time.

The First professor then said he could see a fat little speck bobbing angrily from point to point.

'Nonsense,' said all the others. 'We can see nothing?' That settled it. No one saw anything, and so nobody else heard about it in the papers.

The children had now left all the stars below them, save one which was some way overhead with a pale green light. The Dawnchild said something tot he Old Bird, who immediately disappeared into

the sky above. As they approached the planet its light was seen to waver and grow dim, until presently it seemed as though there were only a film of transparent green and mauve like the outside of a bubble between them and the centre of the star. At length they flew so near that they could see dimly through this filmy substance a rather desolate land of crags and craters and wind-swept trees.

'This is the Deserted Planet,' cried the Dawnchild. 'Fly straight through the wall of filmy light.'

They flew through it, and as the entered the wall of light, it seemed to fade, leaving only the green and violet colour, floating about them. As they flew through, a sharp tingling swept over the earth-children, rather like the sensation of sniffing bath water up one's nose. But this passed away and they found themselves suddenly standing on firm ground again.

The wall of foggy light concealed the empty space behind them, out of which they had just flown, and they afterwards found that it possessed the power to keep them from falling off the planet. In front of them lay a land of grey twilight, which looked very lonely. No sign of life was to be seen; dull grey poplars waved by the side of a grey common that stretched before them. Everything was grey except the walls of the planet which separated it from Space.

'Here we wait,' said the Dawnchild. Her sisters and she were bright and happy as usual, so Mig's spirits rose again. Something nice must happen soon, she reflected, even though it was her fault for half-telling a lie that they were there. She wondered what they were waiting for.

Suddenly the long grass on the right parted and two lads stepped out, with the Old Bird hopping beside them. They were very alike, and looked about fifteen or sixteen years of age. Each was dressed in a grey tunic, breeches and long boots, whilst on their heads were red leather hunting-caps which they plucked off as they approached. With a cry of delight the Dawnchild ran forward to meet them and embraced them warmly.

'You have the house read?' she asked.

'Yes,' said the elder of the two. 'The Bird gave us your message, so we built a house for you in five minutes, and mother went over and spread a supper. Will you come straight to it?'

Every one said 'Yes' eagerly, so the boys led the way across the common to a house where lights twinkled cosily out into the cold twilight.

They boys seemed to know the Dawnchild well, and presently Mig understood that the Dawnchild had sometimes flown here for protection from Umpis, when escorting her yearly band of earth-children to her home. But though she loved the boys and their mother, who lived all alone as caretakers of the planet, she did not really like coming here, for it involved a great deal of danger as will be seen presently.

One of the boys produced a large key and unlocked the green door of the house. Then he opened it and went in, followed by every one. A savoury smell arose from some pot cooking by itself over the fire of the room in which they found themselves. Mig was rather disappointed with the room for it was not 'fairyish' enough. Comfortable chintz armchairs were drawn up to the fire, a revolving bookstand stood on the pretty carpet, in fact it was like any ordinary drawing-room – at first. But after she had been in it five minutes, she changed her opinion. The fairy feeling was in the air; the furniture seemed unreal, and there was that feeling in the air of waiting for something to happen which always means that fairies are about. And the room was only lit by firelight.

The children were now tired. Mig was pleased to see Fanny again, and they were given sweet little beds next to each other in a little room above, which was also lit by the flow of a fire. Next day the Dawnchild took over the housekeeping, and though lovable was strict enough to make every one do as they were told. But later on, each was allowed in turn to try her hand at housekeeping for one day.

Now they had not spent many days in the planet before all the earth-children noticed that as it was always twilight outside, the curtains of the house were always drawn, and yet the only light

in the house was that of the fire. Lamps stood about but were never lit. Of course this seemed very funny, especially when the Dawnchild solemnly warned them never to light a lamp. All the earth-children's curiosity was aroused, but they could not get her to tell them more, for as a matter of fact she did not know what would happen, save that it meant misfortune.

And so for the time they forgot it.

They spent a happy time there while autumn changed to winter. In the mornings the Dawnchildren taught the earth-children the history, geography and grammar of Dawnland, which was much more exciting than ordinary lessons, especially the history. In the afternoons they would skate on the frozen ponds, returning home at night to drawing their chairs round the blazing log-fire and listen to the tales the Dawnchildren told of Dawnlandish adventure.

And then it was, the Dreadful Thing happened.

One night after supper, they pushed back the table, and clustered round the fire as usual. Did I ever mention before that there were several boys among the party of earth-children? These were rather quarrelsome, as boys generally are, and always tried to take the best seats by the fire. To-night Mig had a fearful quarrel with one of them, for he took her pet seat, which was next to Fanny, who sat in the corner.

'Let me have it, pig!' she said rudely.

'I don't see what you're grumbling at,' said the aggravating boy in a righteous tone. 'I've given you up the middle seat – right in front of the fire!'

Now that's all very well, but every one knows that thought it looks the best seat, to be in the middle, it is really most uncomfortable, for the fire scorches one's face. Mig became angry and punched the boy's nose. He pulled her hair and the Dawnchildren tried to separate them, but the angry little mortals took no notice; presently all their friends took sides and fought with each other. Chairs were overturned, the tablecloth and plates dragged off the table, and at last the Dawnchildren became thoroughly frightened, and flew

out of the house in a shining band to fetch the mother of the two lads who lived in the Deserted Planet, to see if she could stop the mortals from squabbling.

For a few minutes the fight continued, then it gradually died down, and it was not long before perfect peace was restored.

'Where are all the Dawnchildren?' Mig asked then.

'Gone to fetch the mother of Aska and Lichil,' answered some one. 'They'll not be gone long I expect.'

For some time the children sat and waited, but the fairies did not return. Somehow it was not half such fun without them, and at length every one sat silently staring into the fire. But Mig could not sit still for long and suddenly she jumped up with an ear-piercing yell. Every one sprang up and asked what was the matter.

'Nothing, nothing,' said Mig airily, 'I'm dull. I had to do something to wake you up. :Let's do something wildly exciting.'

'What, what?' clamoured every one. If there was any mischief going, Mig was always the leader.

Half a mile away the Dawnchildren were hurrying back over the snow without the woman, for she was out when they reached her house.

'Oh, do let's hurry,' said the Dawnchild; 'I'm sure those children will get into mischief. I hope they've stopped fighting.'

Inside the little house, the children were racing round the room, jumping from pieces of furniture and trying to fly. But they found they had no power to do so when their fairies were not there.

Mig had just succeeded in leaping from the table to the armchair, and was balanced there laughing merrily. Her laughter reached the Dawnchildren just outside, and they sighed with relief. The Dawnchild said that as everything was evidently all right, she would just slop round and peep in at the window.

To her alarm she saw Mig reach out her hand from the armchair and lay it on the screw of a lamp that was suspended from the ceiling.

'Now, girls,' she was saying, 'I am going to turn up this light – the room is too dark!'

Every one laughed, for it had been so firmly impressed on them not to touch the lights, that every one knew she must be joking/ And so she was, until the boy with whom she had fought came and stood in front of her. He was an ugly red-headed boy with a surly expression.

'You daren't really,' he said, making a face at her.

'Hugh! Don't I?' said Mig angrily, 'I'm not afraid of anything.'

'You daren't! You daren't!' chanted the boy.

The Dawnchild beat with her delicate little hands on the glass. She tried to tell Mig through the window that she must take no notice of the boy. But Mig heard nothing, for her temper deafened her ears.

'I dare!' she shrieked recklessly, and regardless of the frightened children, turned up the screw just as all the Dawnchildren rushed in.

The lamp flared up, then grew brighter and brighter, until the room was filled with blinding silver light; this was followed by a terrific roaring and crashing, then everything was enveloped in pitch black.

High above the noise sounded the poor earth children's frightened screams and the wailing of the Dawnchildren. The floor seemed to sink beneath Mig's feet, broken pieces of furniture flew about, and she felt herself falling, falling. A gentle hand pressed hers; a sad voice sighed 'Farewell, Mig.' Mig must have fainted, for the next thing she knew was that she was stumbling along in the darkness, a cold night air beating on her face. She could not see or hear anything, 'but somehow my feet keep on walking,' she reflected. 'I wonder where I am.'

She walked and walked in the darkness for what seemed days, not feeling hungry or thirsty, only very sad and tired.

'I wonder if this is my punishment,' she thought; 'perhaps I'll be left walking all my life. How wicked I am!'

She tried calling the Dawnchild, but no answer came. Her feet were beginning to ache now, but something made her go on.

After a long dreary time a light suddenly shone out; a door opened about three yards away from her, and Mig stumbled in, out of the cold and dark.

The underground room in which Mig found herself was evidently a kitchen; a long narrow place, suffused with a soft and warm light that seemed to have in it the now we-know fairy-feeling. At a very ordinary-looking kitchen table a woman was rolling pastry into little squares; her young son was stirring soup by the fire. All the usual things were there that Mig had ever seen in a kitchen, but on looking at them she found that they had a fairy-twist in them. For all that, it was a good place to be in, and Mig felt sure everything would come right now.

She looked at the woman who was now filling the squares with interesting-looking stuff, and noticed that she was clad in a shining green and gold garment that clung tightly to her rather thin figure. A sequinned covered scarlet handkerchief tied at the back adored her head, and this gave out a curious jingle at each movement. The woman spoke. 'Come right in,' she said. Mig jumped. She had not thought the woman had seen her.

'Shut the door,' the woman continued, 'else you'll blow my fire out. The children have just been here.'

'The children?' cried Mig joyfully. 'Where are they?'

'Gone on ahead. They left word that you were to follow, if you could, after I'd given you something to eat.'

It was then that Mig noticed many plates lying empty round the table, but one stood clean, ready for her use. At the same minute she saw also, that what she had at first thought were panels all round the walls were doors, and at the end of the room facing her

She sat down when the woman told her to, and the boy poured out some soup.

She was ravenously hungry, and did not speak until she had finished, when she asked to be allowed to find the others.

'They left a message, dearie,' said the woman, coming back from the oven, where she had just placed her pastry. 'The children said you were to follow them out of that, no – I think this door – no, perhaps it was that one'; she clasped her hands agitatedly, for her memory was very bad. The door she had just pointed to opened and a lad entered. He was evidently a student, for he carried some books slung over his back, and his shoulders were hunched as he pored over a volume in this hand.

'Good evening, Mig,' he said, coming up to her, as she scraped up the last spoonful of soup. 'I've just been reading the story of your life in this' – he held out the book. Mig saw that it was marked with the word 'MAGIC', the letters of which glowed and changed colour every minute.

'Oh, do tell me which door I am to go out of then,' cried Mig, half-crying, 'your mother can't remember.'

'It does not say,' said the boy, peering gravely at her through his large horn-rimmed spectacles; 'it only appeared on this page after you have done it.'

'I know!' cried the woman suddenly, 'try them all – perhaps you will see the children in the distance through the doors.'

Mig opened one or two of the doors but was greeted by cold, draughty blackness in each case.

Then her eye lighted on the brass-bound door. It looked very sinister but she moved towards it.

'Perhaps if I opened that one a weeny bit and listened,' she said. The mother and boy looked at each other and nodded.

'I shouldn't think it would hurt,' said the mother, 'in fact I believe they did say that door.'

So Mig ran over to it and up the three steps in front of it. Standing on tiptoe she turned the handle. The door swung open, and a tremendous draught blew in out of the damp, dark passage it displayed. With it suddenly came the sound of the children's laughter!

'They are here! They are here!' cried Mig gladly, and sprang out

into the dark.

'Come back, come back!' cried the mother and son, 'we remember-it is the wrong door! And it is written in the book this minute!' Mig stood hesitating, but suddenly the door swung to behind her and she was left alone in the dark. Still she could hear the children, and now they were calling her name. The passage ran past the door either way. Which way should she go? The icy air suddenly blew her off her feet, and she started running to the right. To her horror she heard the children's voices getting farther and farther away, but some invisible power made her feet run on. After a long time she was brought up short in front of a wall, through which shone a crack of light. The crack widened and the light became blinding; she crawled through it suddenly finding she had grown smaller. Now she was crawling through thick dust, with a brick wall on one side, and on the other what seemed to be a wall of wood with a pattern all over it. The floor also was wood; she could see herself reflected in it. Then she suddenly fell into something soft and thick, shot up to her usual size again, and opened her eyes. Horrors! she was back in Belinda's drawing-room, sitting on the carpet by the cabinet from which she had just fallen. 'The question is, what to do next!' she thought.

'I cannot stay with that nasty old Belinda.' She felt for the crack, bit it had vanished. Suddenly she jumped.

Belinda was sleeping by the fire with her mouth open. She snored like a motorcar.

Mig crept softly to the door, but slipped on a mat along the polished boards and fell; this awakened Belinda, and the horrid think took in the situation at a glance. With one bound she crossed the room and seized Mig.

'Ha! You have returned,' she cried triumphantly. 'How did you come?'

'How did you get back?' asked Mig. 'Did you fall off the star?'

'I should think I did,' said Belinda aggrievedly, 'it was a shooting star and I fell right into the Horizon, and I was blown here. It's all

your fault, little pig,' she concluded, giving Mig a pinch.

Mig did not see this, and wondered what unpleasant thing would happen next. Belinda sat down and glared at her fiercely, yet somehow she did not seem so dreadfully frightening as before. Mig noticed that she was not carrying her reticule.

'What have you done with the Umpi-King?' she suddenly asked, thinking it very curious that he should not be near.

'You may as well know,' said Belinda very gloomily, 'for you're sure to find out: I dropped him that night, and have never been able to find him since. But don't you worry, something tells me he will soon return, and then I shall delivery you into his hands. We will all go to Umpiland together. Till then you shall be locked in a garret so that you shall not escape!'

At this horrid news Mig's heart sank. As her wicked cousin dragged her upstairs she made sure that she would never see her beloved Dawnchild again. If only she had not been so wicked! Firstly she had half-told a lie, secondly she had lighted the lamp in the plant, and the Dawnchild had told her that she would never reach Dawnland if she were too naughty. And what of the Dawnchildren? Had they escaped the terrible calamity in the planet? Well, she would never know now.

Her heart was too heavy for mere tears, as Belinda dragged her upstairs. Half-way up they paused at an oriole window through which the light of the setting sun streamed in its glorious beauty. Great bars of pearl clouds hung above a roses-pink and pallid green sky.

'Look well at that, Mignonette McArthur,' said Cousin Belinda grimly, "tis the last you will see for many a long day.'

Mig gazed at the scene before her, for she loved beauty in any form; and as she did so the Dawnchild's face and form seemed for one minute to float all silver in the sky among the rosy streaks. She held out her arms entreatingly to Mig, then faded away.

Mig followed her cousin up to the garret, with a new hope in her heart.

'Go in,' said Belinda, giving her a push. She stumbled across the threshold – there was a click – the cruel Belinda had locked her in.

What a bare and ugly place! No pretty wallpaper, or silken eiderdown, but damp walls off which the paper hung in strips, one rickety old bed, bare boards, and two packing-cases. The floor was littered with rubbish, and there was no window, only a skylight, through which a pale green strip of sky could still be seen.

'Oh dear,' sighed poor little Mig, 'this is most unpleasant!' She undressed and crept into bed, there to lie staring at the skylight which gradually darkened, until it was just a piece of pallid black cut out of the darkness around. Presently she drifted into that happy dreamy state when all troubles are forgotten, just before we fall asleep. When she did so, the bright and radiant form of the Dawnchild stood before her.

'Mig, Mig,' she sighed, 'when will you be able to come to us?' Two silver tears fell on Mig's face. She opened her eyes, but the Dawnchild had vanished.

Once again that night, when she had just been dreaming that she was promising her dead mother to be good, the Dawnchild's voice floated in the air. This time Mig lay with her eyes tight shut, and listened.

Evidently the Dawnchild was bending over her, for a sweet breath fanned her cheek.

'Alas!' she heard her say, 'I have tried to appear to Mig, but she cannot see me.' And then the other Dawnchildren floating in the air around, answered, 'Cannot we tell her that when she sees or thinks or hears of anything beautiful, you can appear? But if she thinks of naughty things, she will lose you?'

Mig could keep her eyes shut no longer. She sat up in bed and held her arms out. 'Indeed, indeed, I'll try,' she cried, but only the corners of the garret mocked her cry.

It was empty, save for herself.

But now Mig understood. If she thought or saw something

beautiful, perhaps the Dawnchild could appear, but she would never be able to come if Mig was naughty. Perhaps one day she would once again start on that journey, and then she would succeed. Comforted with this hope she fell asleep.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Back at Home The Umpi King Returns

Some days passed, but still no Umpi-King turned up in his little black box, and still Mig was imprisoned in the garret. She grew thin and pale from lack of fresh air, and the only person she ever saw was Belinda. The only mortal, that is to say, for sometimes the Dawnchild was able to appear faintly or else make her voice heard just when Mig was falling asleep.

One evening, she sat as usual on the edge of the packing-case, thinking of the Dawnchild, while the shadows crept in to fill the corners of the garret, and a bright star twinkled through the skylight.

Belinda was sitting downstairs, talking to Mr. Appleby and wondering about Mig; of course no one k new that she had imprisoned the child, for she had given out that Mig was still lost. Mr Appleby had been invited to take supper with Miss Belinda, so he had donned a red spotted tie for the occasion and thought he looked very smart.

'Good evening,' he had said, shaking hands with her. 'Spring is

coming at last, Miss Belinda.'

'Yes,' Miss Belinda had replied, 'as I leant out of my window this morning, the merry birds were twittering.'

She led the way into the dining-room, where they sat down to a well-provisioned table. Upstairs Mig crunched hungrily at a stale crust, while Belinda and Mr. Appleby ate veal and ham pie, with lovely jelly between the meat and the pastry.

Poor Mig was feeling rather sad again this evening for she was thinking about what the Dawnchild had told her last time she had heard her voice – how her naughtiness in the Deserted Planet had condemned the earth-children to be changed into stars, and they could be freed when Mig had become good enough to reach Dawnland.

Downstairs the two grown-ups were still at supper.

'No news of Mig, I suppose?' asked Mr. Appleby, sipping a choice wine.

'Alas, no,' murmured Miss Belinda, dabbing at her eyes, 'I fear the poor child is lost for ever.'

'Storyteller!' screamed a fierce, grating voice in her ears, and an unseen bird flew by, flapping its large wings in her face. She jumped up, clutching her hair. It was the Old Bird, though she did not know it.

'What is the matter?' cried Mr. Appleby, springing to her side.

'Nothing, nothing,' she answered, 'I feel faint.'

Her guest pressed a glass of wine on her, and presently she recovered sufficiently to go on eating her veal and ham pie. But though she chatted pleasantly enough, her ears were strained to catch any sound of fairies again; presently it came.

She had just finished telling Mr. Appleby how she had loved Mig like a daughter when there was a rattle of wheels and the mouthful of blancmange she was raising to her lips was sent tumbling across the table and it hit Mr, Appleby's nose. He rose angrily, his eyes glittering with annoyance, a piece of blancmange balanced on his

nose.

'Really, Miss Belinda!' he exclaimed, 'a very poor joke! I will wish you good night.'

He hurried away from the table as fast as his long legs would carry him, for he felt really insulted to think that his nose, which was rather long, had been made fun of by a lady whom he had intended to ask to be his wife.

Miss Belinda clasped her hands and protested that 'she was sure she never meant to offend her dear friend, and would he not finish his supper?'

'No!' said Mr. Appleby. 'Madam, I am offended. But before I go I must not forget to tell you that some one – an old woman with curiously black, beady eyes, stopped me in the road, and asked me to give this to you ' – he drew out of his pocket a small parcel, and continued, 'The woman disappeared so quickly that one might almost say she vanished into space – therefore I was not able -' He stopped, surprised to see Belinda, who had unwrapped the parcel, suddenly break into a joyful dance; with her back bent, and her elbows crooked above her head, her long grey skirt trailing after her, she looked a funny sight, as she hopped round the table.

'She has gone off her head,' gasped Mr. Appleby and bolted out of the room.

When the door had shut, Miss Belinda stopped dancing and kissed the little black box which she had taken out of the wrappings.

The Umpi-King had returned! All around, the air suddenly became thick with Umpis. Belinda sat in the tall-back oak chair, and they swarmed over it and on to her, buzzing loudly, and hailing her as their future Queen. And now a weak, acid little voice came from the box.

'Really, Belinda, you might have the decency to ask how I am, considering you dropped me that night. I fell into a rabbit-hole and remained there till my faithful Umpis, who searched all day and night, found me. Now take me upstairs, please, and creep into the garret. There you will find Mig and the Dawnchild. Attack them

with my followers, and then we will go to Umpiland.'

Needing no more bidding, Belinda seized the box, and crept upstairs, followed by the buzzing little fellows, intend on doing mischief.

Mig went to bed early that night, and while Belinda was entertaining her guest downstairs, she lay awake and stared into the darkness, hoping that the Dawnchild would pay her a visit.

Presently a click sounded in the air, and looking up she saw a tiny door open in the darkness; the Noseyface came out, whistled for his caterpillar cart, and drove off in it. Silence! Mig held her breath, and then there came faint rattle of wheels in the distance, nearer-nearer-rattle, rattle, rattle across the white counterpane on the bed, over the hummock caused by Mig's bent knees, and then it stopped on her chest, and she saw the welcome little Noseyface jump out. He handed her a tiny scroll and drove off her chest.

'From We to you,' he said, bowing low.

A light filled the room, and Mig looking up, saw that there were many bright stars peeping through the skylight, and in the centre of each was framed an earth-child's face. As she looked they came nearer; the skylight floated away, and the earth-children clustered round the hole in the roof, with shining stars still framing their faces. They held out their hands entreatingly, and their faces looked hopeful and eager. The red-headed boy was not there. He had been sent back home long ago, as a hopeless case.

Mig unfolded the scroll and read, by the light the children shed:

'OUR DARLING MIGNONETTE, -

'We have known all along that you bore the mark of the clover-leaf on your back, but hoped you would have confessed. Now, however, we know that you are very sorry.

'Father says if you will go to the Witch of Worum and rescue my aunt's lover, you shall come to the Dawnland after all – if you get through the dangers in the Worum. Do try, we want you so much and long to see you properly

and be with you again.'

Yrs lovingly – WE'

'Of course I will go,' cried Mig gladly, waving the paper, and the Old Bird suddenly flew down from the skylight-hole.

'Here I am and ready for travelling, I am coming some of the way with you,' he cried, and seemed quite glad to see Mig. She tried not to laugh at his travelling-clothes , for she did not want to hurt his feelings. He was attired in a grey top hat and button boots, out of which his red legs stuck, looking very thin and scaly, and over one wing he carried a light fawn dust coat; a tiny little Gladstone bag was strapped on his neck.

'She's going! She's going!' he suddenly broke out excitedly, and seizing Noseyface round the waist with one claw, jigged him up and down violently. Then he suddenly remembered that he was a solemn old thing and dropped the poor Noseyface on the bed so suddenly that he rolled off the edge. Mig laughed out loud, and Belinda, who had been creeping upstairs, suddenly ran the rest of the way and burst into the room, followed by the Umpis. Here a strange sight met her eyes. Down from the skylight leant starry children, throwing a starry silken ladder to Mig, and they sang as they threw it. Belinda paused spellbound.

Mig caught hold of the slippery sides of the ladder, and climbed up to where the earth-children clustered, with the Dawnchild and the Old Bird in their midst.

The Noseyface drove up after her.

'Draw up the end of the ladder – Belinda is following,' croaked the Old Bird. Many willing little hands drew up the silken ladder just as Belinda and the Umpis tried to ascend it.

Belinda stood at the bottom and shook her fist.

'Do not worry,' she said, 'the Umpis will fly with me in their chariot. I can easily get up -' She did not finish her sentence, for a shower of birch-bark fell on her suddenly.

She sank down beneath its weight, saying the most dreadful things; it did not hurt her or the Umpis either, but its magic power

prevented them from moving for some hours. The birch-bark fell until all was covered except her big beaky nose, which looked very quaint sticking out.

And the lid of the skylight was replaced with a bang, by the children up there.

Mignonette McArthur had escaped again!

CHAPTER EIGHT

The World of Enchantment

The Dawnchild clustered eagerly round Mignonette and said how glad they were to see her again. When the first joy of their meeting was over, they all ran lightly over the uneven roof, two of them taking her hands and holding her up. At the edge overlooking that part of the garden immediately below her window, they paused, and the Dawnchild stepped forward, followed by the Old Bird.

'Mignonette darling,' she said, hugging her tightly, 'You have a hard task before you, but you've got to win through, because if you don't the earth-children will be stars for the rest of their life. It is only for an hour each night that they can come down as they have to-night. Good-bye, Mig, the Old Bird will accompany you on your journey.

'Now have no fear, but jump boldly off this roof into the garden. Walk straight down into the copse at the bottom, leaving the Bird outside. There you will meet some one who can help you on your journey.' She laid her hand on Mig's brow, infusing her with magic power, then gave her a gentle push. The child jumped and found she was floating gently off the roof. When she looked up to wave to

the others there was nothing to be seen save a gold and glittering shower that arose to the moonlit sky.

How desolate it all seemed! Mig glanced about at the old uncared-for garden that lay sleeping in the moonlight. The sunflowers had long ago withered away, and their place was taken now by masses of chrysanthemums tightly closed for the night; dark yews and cedars stretched their shadows across the grass and the old stone wall on the left shone out in a ghostly manner.

Suddenly Mig noticed that a mist floated about amongst the flowers and everywhere else. At the same minute, the Old Bird appeared beside her, and said:

'Step softly, Mignonette. The garden is enchanted to-night. You entered the world of Enchantment the minute the Dawnchild laid her hand on your brow.'

They moved down the path between rows of sleeping chrysanthemums, and as they passed them, one saucy fellow opened itself to wink a dull pink eye at her, then closing it sleepily swayed to the music that floated from the next one; it was really very interesting.

'Why is it making music?' Mig whispered to the Old Bird.

'Ask it,' he answered gruffly, and hopped on ahead to lurch and sneeze three times.

Mig halted in front of it.

'Please, Chrysanthemum! What's happening in side?' For answer it slowly opened its gigantic pink head, and displayed to Mig a brilliantly lighted little room where many couples of elves were dancing.

She watched breathlessly; it was just like a doll's house come to life, and a fearful curiosity took possession of her. Gently leaning forward she placed her forefinger in the middle of the little ballroom. It created a dreadful commotion; the couples scattered hither and thither giving forth tiny shrieks; and the flower closed upon Mig's finger, though its soft petals could not hold her.

'Come on, come on,' croaked the Old Bird. 'I'm sure I wish I'd

never told you to look out for Enchantment.'

She withdrew her finger hurriedly and he bustled her through the various bewildering things that now began to happen; trees solemnly waltzed with each other across the lawn and back to their places again, where the earth fell in order round their roots as though nothing had happened; paths rose up in front of her and steeply fell away if she dared to place a toe on them; pebbles changed into sweets but did not taste at all; and most comical of all, when they got to the sundial, half buried beneath ivy and moss, a row of strawberries as fat as life suddenly advanced, and joining fat little hands, solemnly barn-danced round the sundial singing:

'Where d'you get the hat? Where do you get the tile?

'Tis a very nobby one and in the latest style -'

a song Mig had once heard a jolly uncle sing. The Old Bird took off his hat, then solemnly hopped in time to the tune, for it had such a lilt that he could not help himself.

''But what are you doing here?' cried Mig to the strawberries. They stopped dancing, and one said, eyeing her up and down suspiciously:

'And why not, pray?'

'Well – well,' faltered Mig, 'you're out of season!'

'I'm not,' retorted Mig; 'if you're rude I'll eat you!' The strawberries ran away in terror, their little fat red legs bobbing up and down anxiously. When they disappeared, the Old Bird mopped his forehead, said dancing made him hot and that it was time they got to the copse. For some time past the night had not been so pitch black, and just before the entered the still dark copse, a streak of grey in the east heralded dawn.

'We have really arrived at the best time,' said the Old Bird, 'I'll wait for your here – go and find the one who will help you.'

Mig hung back feeling rather frightened.

'Nonsense, child, nonsense,' said the Old Bird shortly, 'there's nothing to be afraid of. Just be very polite to her.'

'So it's a "her", reflected Mig, and plucking up her courage, she ran into the wood.

After running a few paces she stopped, feeling rather nervous at the way the trunks gleamed at her in the ghostly light. But telling herself that it was no good being frightened she shook herself and went on, although it was not a bit like a copse of ordinary times. Soon a glimmer showed through the trees ahead, and as she ran towards it quickly, a mist filtered through the trunks and surrounded her, blotting out what lay behind. The trees became more scarce and finally came to an end; she was in a clearing through which wreaths and wreaths of white mist floated. A low murmur greeted her, and through the mist every now and then she caught sight of a grey, shadowy figure. The murmur continued; the mist floated aside, showing a grey woman who sat with her hands loosely flopping over her knees. As she swayed backwards and forwards a monotonous hum, out of tune and dreary, issued from her lips. Her long grey hair floated and curled damply into the mist around; on all sides dull-coloured poppies grew – dull mauve, pink, dead crimson, brown and grey. The darkness had now given place to the delicate pearl of dawn, and the air was lazy and cold.

'Ow-ow-ow,' chanted the weird woman. 'Oo-ow-ow-oo'.

'Are you in pain?' whispered Mig softly.

The weird woman sprang to her feet, and kneeling down, felt about among the poppies all wet with dew. Then she arose amidst them, shook her long grey hair over all, and out of her hair fell glittering dust of gold, in a myriad sparkling colours.

Flinging her arms high above her head she broke into another tuneless chant, every now and then shaking her gold dust into the poppies. It possessed but two lines, this chant:

'O you wet poppies in the gra-aa-aa-aa-ss!

O you shaking grass in the dew-ew-ew-ew-ew!'

Now she bent down, and plunging her hands among the wet poppies and grass dragged out a pair of curiously embroidered little gold and blue shoes.

'Take them,' she said, flinging them at Mig, and taking no further notice of the little girl she sat down, rocking drearily, emitting the same monotonous hum as before. Mig stood and watched the strange creature for a few minutes, then asked her what they were for.

Twice she asked but got no answer, so presently she crept along with them softly through the long wet grass and poppies, until she was out of sight and hearing of the weird creature. Then she sat down to think.

She examined the shoes: they were such a dainty little pair, made of blue and gold embroidery, with furry edges all the way round the top. On turning them over, she found words scratched on the leather sole which were very difficult to read as the letters were all uneven, but finally she spelt out:

'Wear us, and you will not be tired.'

Throwing her other shoes away she slipped the new ones on, finding that they fitted exactly and were so comfortable that she could not help dancing about in the pretty things. The sun had now risen, calling to her mind that she ought to be getting back to the Bird, yet the enchanted wood looked so tempting by daylight that she could not resist plunging farther into its depths.

She had not gone very far when she stopped to disentangle her dress from a bramble.

'What a troublesome thing brambles are,' she said aloud, and was surprised to hear a chuckle come from the bramble, although no one was to be seen when she hunted about. So she went on tugging at her skirt, while the bramble chuckled spitefully and held her firm.

'Let go!' said Mig, stamping angrily, only to find that she could not move her foot – it remained where she had stamped. It was really too annoying.

'Will you let go?' she stormed and raged, which of course only made the enchantments enjoy themselves more. A chorus of chuckles came from all sides, while one tree commenced to laugh

so hard that as it swayed about holdings its sides, it split all down the centre.

'Now I know where the expression "to make one's sides split" comes from, 'Mig began, then stopped in amazement as the daintiest little creature stepped out of the split in the trunk, dressed in a rainbow-coloured wisp of gossamer. She ran up to Mig.

'Poor little girl,' she said, 'I'll free you!' And producing a tiny knife chopped away the brambles. Their chuckles soon changed to howls of rage, and the grass that held Mig's foot let go lest it should receive the same treatment. Mig turned to thank her deliverer, but the little creature ran back into the tree with a gay laugh and disappeared.

Mig had now lost her way, and she wandered to and fro disconsolately.

'I wish I'd never entered Enchantment,' she said, stopping beside a pool.

Here one water-lily bud lay dreaming amongst its leaves. Mig sat down and watched it. Between the stems the golden depths of water showed dark yet clear; a hum sounded and a gaily coloured dragonfly skimmed over the surface. For one instant it rested on the water-lily bud, shaking its silver and blue wings. A sigh came from the bud, and it slowly unfolded into a full white, pink-tipped flower. The dragonfly kissed it, and strolled gaily off after one of the water-boatmen that darted to and fro, now under, now just over the surface. Then it flew off through the trees.

The child stood and watched it. At that moment a man dashed through the trees with a dark cloak muffled round him and a wide felt hat. In one long white hand he carried a book from which he chanted to himself softly, following the place with the forefinger of the other hand. He seemed about to seat himself on a log, but suddenly catching sight of the interested child he gave a startled yelp and fled away, colliding with the trees, and bouncing from one to another like an india-rubber ball.

'What a funny man,' said Mig, and took a step forward in order

to see which way he had gone.

There came a shrill squeal from her feet, and an angry little voice said:

'Really, you might look out where you're going!'

On looking down she saw a flat little water-rate chattering angrily on the other side of the pool. She wore a neat little dark print dress and a red check calico apron. In her arms she rocked a minute baby rat.

'I'm awfully sorry,' said Mig humbly.

'I should think so! Tst, tst, tst! There's the kettle boiling over. Here, hold baby a minute,' said Mrs. Rat, and she tried to push the baby-rat into Mig's arms and complained, 'You're too big, oh dear, oh dear, that kettle!'

Mig knelt down and took the baby-rat gingerly between finger and thumb,

'That's not the way to hold a baby,' said her new acquaintance, 'anyone can see you're not used to them – rock it in your arms.'

Considering the whole creature, long clothes and all, was only about three inches long, this was rather hard, especially as the baby insisted on walking up and down her arm, instead of lying still like any well-brought up child. Meanwhile, its mother had hurried off between the reeds that fringed the pool to a hole in the muddy ooze by the roots of an old willow. The hiss of the kettle stopped immediately, and a clatter of little tongues came out of Mrs. Rat's house. Presently she reappeared, beaming with smiles.

'I'm so sorry I was snappy just now, my dear,' she gushed, coming up to Mig, 'but you've no idea how worrying household matters are!'

'Don't mention it, ' said Mig politely, as she had heard Cousin Belinda say sometimes to the Vicar, though why you shouldn't mention it had often puzzled her.

'Breakfast is ready,' said Mrs. Rat, taking the baby just in time to prevent it falling off Mig's arm,' 'come in and have some.'

Mig followed Mrs. Rat cautiously through the mud; they went to the roots of the willow and arrived in front of what she now observed to be a little house built by the willow-roots. It had a nameplate above the door 'Mud View'.

'How funny, I thought it was only a hole before,' Mig remarked as Mrs. Rat paused proudly in front of her abode in order to let her see its beauty.

'Hole indeed!' sniffed the owner, 'why, it's a mansion! Certainly, when my husband and I first took it, it was not so large and airy, but we soon went at it and gnawed the willow trunk away till it became as large as it now is. Besides, look at the situation! Just above the water, right in the mud, and not too high to be nice and damp. In the evening the mist rising from the water absolutely fills the place, I can assure you. Beautiful place!'

Of course this all sounded very funny to the guest as she stood outside, but after all Mrs. Rat liked it – that was the most important thing. And now a voice came from the house:

'Wife! Wife! Come and get me my breakfast, or I shall be late for business.' At the same minute, Mr. Rat appeared in the doorway, combing his whiskers pompously.

'Oh, we have visitors,' he said, stepping forward, 'and what do you think of the house?'

'Don't mention it,' said Mig, meaning to be very polite. But of course as she did not know the meaning of the words, they did not come in the right place. Both the rats looked quite pleased, however, and Mr. Rat offered Mig his arm and took her in to breakfast. He was dressed in a black-and-white-check suit, with neat little brown leather boots, and evidently considered himself a fearfully gay fellow, for his coats were cut with a waist, and his boots were pointed and rather high-heeled. Mig found the inside of the house very interesting. The floor was all mud in which played several babies, dressed as their fond mother told Mig in 'check calico cut from the same piece as my apron'. On the walls hung pictures of fine, fat frogs to which they bowed, and there was one drawing of a

dog, their enemy, which they pelted every now and then with sticks and stones.

Breakfast was now ready, so they sat down on their little chairs, the seats of which were made of rush, at a table covered with check calico 'also out of the same piece as my apron'. said Mrs. Rat.

To Mig's horror, Mrs. Rat uncovered a huge joint of frog and asked her to have some. 'Oh no, thank you – really I couldn't,' answered Mig distressfully, and with scarlet cheeks.

'Tut tut!' said Mr. Josiah Rat, looking up from his paper, 'in my young days we ate what was given us. Have some vegetables than?'

'Oh yes, please, ' gasped Mig with relief, but when she came to eat them she found they consisted of roots of plants she had never seen before. However, she could not offend the good couple, so was obliged to take a mouthful, whereupon she discovered that they were quite nice after all. Mr. Rat now got up, and after taking down a soft felt hat, which he perched jauntily on the side of his head, folded up and put the paper in his pocket, and said good-bye. Mig thought it was very rude of him to take the paper, as she would have liked to look at it herself, but Mrs. Rat was evidently used to it.

Figure
The bough was hollow and was labelled 'No 5. Stops by request at Mudwalk Lane'.

She bustled Mig to the door to see him start and wave to him. He hopped gaily down the path and sprang on to a passing bough that was floating to the other side. The bough was hollow and was labelled 'No 5. Stops by request at Mudwalk Lane'. It was laden with other rats, and was navigated by one with a conductor's cap on his head, who sat at the back and steered with his tail.

They were just walking back up the little path, bordered with stones, when they heard Mr. Rat's voice in the distance:

'Stop! Stop! I'm on the wrong bough!' They turned to look, and saw that several other bough were coming up quickly behind No. 5

so that when it stopped, with a grinding of tails, oh, horrors! No.2 ran into it behind!

Mrs. Rat squealed shrilly and flung her apron over her head, as all the rat were thrown into the water, but they swam lustily for the shore, and did not seem to be hurt, then bade her kind hostess good-bye. Just at that minute, she heard the Old Bird's voice saying on the other side of the reeds:

'Oh dear, what a nuisance – I wonder where that child's got to! I do hope she's not got into an enchantment. Besides that, she knows how I hate woods -so damp – give me rheumatism.' Mig felt very ashamed of herself for her thoughtlessness.

'Here I am!' she said, pushing her through the reeds.

The old Bird lurched and sneezed and scolded her.

'You made me quite anxious,' he declared, 'I thought you Umpis and all sorts of things.'

'Well, you shouldn't let me go in your silly old enchanted wood all alone,' said Mig in a grumpy voice, 'I've not had such a nice time either – never knowing what's going to happen next!'

'You are very, very rude,' said the Bird with dignity. 'I came in to help you if necessary. I shall not walk with you any more on the way out. You can follow behind.' He lurched and hopped and sneezed three times, then settling his hat firmly on his head flew away. Now when the Bird became angry the feathers on his head rose upright, and when this happened of course his hat tipped over his nose, even falling right off sometimes. This happened now, but the Bird was too angry to think it funny, and when Mig laughed he flew into a fearful rage; flying back he picked up the hat, and went off again, saying over his shoulder, 'Very well, my dear, get out of the wood as best you can,' and disappeared.

Mig hurried after him, rather repentant now, but he went so quickly that she soon lost sight of him altogether.

Soon the forest grew denser. Great, smooth-looking beech-trees reared up into the vast leafy roof above; everywhere a dim green light glowed. High up in a tree an unseen bird sang, the liquid notes

pouring forth with unearthly beauty. Somewhere in the distance water splashed.

'It is almost too beautiful,' said Mig aloud, 'I would like to stay here all my life.' A curious longing to do so had seized her; she sank sleepily on the ground and closed her eyes. Immediately a stealthy rustling in the undergrowth began, and a thousand Umpis stole out, headed by Belinda. In a trice they had her bound, though with all her sleepiness disappeared, she fought hard. Belinda stepped up to her when the task was complete, and smiled triumphantly at her. Even then, Mig noticed with surprise that Belinda had changed: she was shorter and fatter and her eyes were more boot-buttony than ever. The truth flashed into her mind: Belinda was gradually changing into an Umpi! She was dressed all in scaly green and black, and save for her reticule, her umbrella, and her large, flat button boots she seemed to grow more like an Umpi every minute.

'Ho! Umpis!' she called, 'away with this child, Do not spare her but drag her over the brambles, and bump her over the stones!'

The Umpis obeyed her command and started to drag poor Mig along, but she had only been bumped once, when the ropes caught in a tree and she was flung violently against it, bringing down a shower of leaves and rotten bark. They all gathered round to disentangle it, shouting angrily, when all of a sudden their shouts turned to yelps of pain, for it was a shower of birch-bark that had fallen upon them!

In a minute they were spellbound, while Mig's bonds withered and fell off, leaving her free to run away as hard as she could. When she was quite far enough off to be safe she stopped running, and ambled slowly along, determining not to give way to any sleepiness again as it was undoubtedly magic brought by the Umpis.

She had now wandered into a glade where a waterfall splashed noisily over rocks. The fear of Umpis had somehow left her, so when she saw a little creature seated reading on a stone beside the stream into which the water fell, she did not feel in the least afraid. At first sight it seemed to be rather an ordinary small, middle-aged lady, primly dressed, but when Mig drew nearer she chucked and

coyly hiding her face, bent lower over her book. Suddenly Mig felt an overwhelming desire to know what was in the book; she felt sure that this creature must be nice and kind. The lady looked up, disclosing a wrinkled, smiling face, though rather long-nosed it is true.

'Oh, you pretty child!' she exclaimed in a pleasant voice, 'come and see my picture book.' But Mig felt shy, and hung back.

'Come, dear,' said the strange woman, 'you are not afraid of me surely? And why are you all alone in the enchanted wood? There are all kinds of dangers.' Mig's shyness went, and she ran forward. The lady slipped her arm round Mig and drew her close.

'Look in my picture book,' she murmured, and her arm tightened, 'look-look -'

Mig was just about to do so when with a harsh cry the Old Bird flew through the trees and catching the book in his beak, snatched it out of their hands and flung it far out into the stream where it disappeared.

Then he turned with an angry hiss and flying straight at the lady with outstretched beak he would have attacked her, but flinging up her arms with a squeal, she vanished. He turned to Mig who felt very frightened again.

'You are stupid,' he said 'why on earth didn't you examine her? Couldn't you see her pointed shoes and the points on her back where the wings were hidden? If you had looked into her book you would never have been seen again – she is a wicked fairy. Whenever you see pointed things about people you may be sure you have a met a fairy. Oh dear oh-dear oh me! What an escape! And you've made me lose my hat, too, in the excitement!' He produced a red silk handkerchief out of his breast-pocket and mopping his face hopped about until he found his hat.

'Now look here,' he said, 'it's quite certain that you cannot continue this journey to the Worum with nothing to keep you safe. I'll tell you what!'

Then he told her how when the moon was risen that night, she

must creep down to the shores of the lake near by.

'Lake!' said the bewildered Mig, 'but aren't we still in the wood near home? There's no lake there!'

'We are not,' said the Bird, 'we are in Enchantment. Kindly do not interrupt me again. I dislike it intensely!'

He continued his instructions. She was to wait, hidden in the reeds, till the waters of the lake receded as they always did at midnight. The water water-gnomes would swim to shore to play, for an hour on the sand, carrying a book with them. This book they valued very much, as it was The Guide to Ghomia, a land through which Mig must now travel to get to the Worum. So afraid were the little men that some one might steal the book of which there was only one copy, that even when they held their nightly sports on the shore they brought it with them that it might be under their eye. Mig must somehow manage to steal this book, for in it verses would appear, written about every creature Mig might meet on the way, also warnings about the same, and prescriptions for vanishing, etc.

'In short, it is very valuable,' said the Old Bird; 'carry this book with you through Gnomia, where I may have to leave you, and I am sure you will get to the Midnight Sea all right, across which you must sail to the Worum.'

'I've never heard of the Midnight Sea,' said Mig thoughtfully.

'Do you mean to say it isn't in your geography books?' cried he in surprise. 'Why, it's in all ours. It is the sea that stretches between Gnomia and the Worum.'

Mig said nothing – she had not known she was so appallingly ignorant.

It was now long past noon and she was beginning to feel very hungry. On telling the Old Bird this, he merely said 'Look to the right', and what was her surprise to see a notice hanging on an oak-tree, very untidily printed:

'The Happy Oak. Luncheons
Served Here.'

'Oh, how lovely,' she cried, clapping her hands, 'but where, where?'

'I know this place well,' the Bird said, hopping towards it, 'often stop here for a snack on my way through the wood. Come on! We ought to get a table as we're quite early.'

Mig thought fairy life was sometimes quite like our own She now saw that there was a split in the trunk of the oak, through which a weird assembly were pouring. Squirrels, rabbits, rats, weasels, doves – all sorts of birds and beats and many elves and fairies.

Outside the entrance stood a tiny mole in uniform who stopped each one and said something as they went in.

The mole seemed a very stupid person, for when the two approached, he asked in a squeaky voice:

'Excuse me for asking a question discreet,
But have you – oh! pardon – a licence to eat?'

'What does he mean?' whispered Mig in agony.

'S'h!' hissed the Old Bird, 'you must answer by rhyming your name with something or they'll know you're not an inhabitant of the Wood.'

She never made up a rhyme before but she answered gaily:

'Oh please, Mr. Mole,
I like sausage roll
And pig
And fig
My name is Mig.'

She was beginning to enjoy herself with rhyming up pig and Mig, when the Old Bird pulled her sleeve and said 'That's enough.' They passed through the crack in the oak and found themselves descending some rough and uneven steps cut inside the tree. All the way down there were notices hung:

'HAVE YOU A LICENCE TO EAT?'

'PLEASE LEAVE YOUR WINGS OUTSIDE.'

'THOSE WHO CAN'T PAY GO AWAY.'

And then a notice 'No foot to-day' was hung up by a busy gnome right at the bottom of the staircase – he who hung it was a strange little fellow, putty-coloured all over with poppy stamens growing out of the top of his head; in fact Mig soon discovered that his head was a poppy-box with the petals fallen off.

When this notice appeared a disappointed howl came from the hungry little people, and turning round they charged madly up the stairs again; but on reaching the top another gnome was observed to be hanging up another notice: 'Heaps of food – go downstairs,' so they all rushed down again, those in front who had seen the notice first, colliding with those who were still coming up.

Mig and the Bird managed to make their way to the weirdest place she had seen for a long time. It was a long room hollowed out of the underground roots of the oak; the furniture was cut out of the same, and gaily coloured little lanterns, orange, green, blue, and brown, hung from a gnarled ceiling and lit up the brown twisted roots that formed the walls. Although many of the creatures were still running up and down the staircase, there were yet a good many seated at the little tables, although many of them did not seem to be eating anything. Some stood on their heads, others chatted gaily together; and every now and then a poppy-gnome would drag a huge basket of flower-petals, which he scattered broadcast. There was a terrific scramble for these, and those who were lucky enough to get one was presented with a meal, after answering the strange question as to whether they had a licence to eat. In fact it all seemed very odd.

Mig and the Old Bird sat there for some time, but though there were many waiters scurrying about, they did not seem to take any notice. At last she became so hungry that she said timidly, 'Old Bird, don't you think we could get something to eat? I'm awfully hungry.'

'Of course, of course, I had forgotten,' said he, getting up suddenly. He seized a hook lying on the table, and hooking it into a poppy-gnome's coattails, he dragged the creature towards him.

'Waiter, get this lady and myself two dozen caterpillars,' he

ordered, and went on talking to Mig.

The poppy-gnome shot away like an arrow from a bow, so hastily indeed that he left his coattails hanging on the end of the hook, while at least three tables were knocked over as he sped across the room. The fairies seated at these did not seem to mind but went on eating off the floor. They heard the poppy-gnome's voice in the distance shouting:

'Two dozen caterpillars for one lady and a bird-gent. Two dozen caterpillars for -'

'Don't think we have any,' replied a faraway voice, 'the last one ran back home.'

As Mid told the Dawnchild afterwards, her cheeks went white with horror. Had she to eat caterpillars, and alive? Before she could say anything, the poppy-gnome reappeared dragging a chain at the end of which were twenty-four caterpillars who walked solemnly in with their feelers on each other's hips and waving from side to side, singing:

'Four-and twenty caterpillars,
Four-and-twenty caterpills,
Have you e'er seen caterpillars
Fatter cater-cater-pills?'

And on the last line every one joined in the song, banging their forks on the table. They trailed in and out of the tables, getting nearer to Mig each time, shooting a leg out at the side to mark time, and now they turned upside down and sang on their heads:

'Four-and-twenty paterpillars,
Four-and-twenty paterpills,
No more pig to rhyme with Mig,
For we're the cat that pater kills.'

Back on their feet again, with the whole room singing now, the threaded their way round the last line of tables, singing with great emphasis:

Caterpillars green and fresh,
Caterpillars by the yard,

Caterpillars fried in lard
Are a very dainty dish.'

The cook, another gnome, appearing for one instant out of the steam and hiss coming from the end of the room where his kitchens were, beat time on a frying-plan, then threw it far among the diners and disappeared with a yell and a jump.

And now the caterpillars linked arms and bowed in front of Mig, while their captor ran away to attend to some very grand dames who had just arrived, dressed in gossamer and gold.

'What do I do?' whispered Mig uncomfortably,

'Hush!' said the Old Bird, 'they are gong to speak!'

The caterpillars chanted anxiously with a slight swaying movement:

'Do you like us for a dish?
Is it really your wish?
Sure you'd rather not have trout?
We can easily go out...?'

Mig muttered 'No – I don't like you.'

So then the caterpillars grew more anxious and sang, still swaying:

'What is wrong we beg you tell?
The cook who cooked us cooked us well!
And we were put in soon enough,
Perhaps we are not done enough'

and they pronounced it 'doon' to rhyme with 'soon'/

'It's not that,' said Mig in great distress, 'it's really most embarrassing to say – but I simply can't bear caterpillars.'

At this the caterpillars let their feelers, which had been raised high, drop despairingly to their sides again, and then hung their heads sadly.

'You've made them cry,' whispered the Old Bird reproachfully, as great fat tears gathered in their eyes and rolled down their plump little green cheeks. The Old Bird wiped them away with his

handkerchief and patted each one on the back.

'Oh dear, oh dear,' sighed Mig, 'what shall I do to comfort them?'

'Better eat them' advised the Old Bird.

'But I don't like them,' whimpered Mig, ready to cry herself. At this the caterpillars wailed:

'She doesn't like us caterpillars
Simply can't bear caterpills,
Don't and can't eat caterpillars,
Won't and shan't eat c-cater-pills-oo-e-i-ooo.'

and they flopped miserably from side to side. It was most heartrending – of course there was only one thing to do.

'Very well, poor caterpillars,' said Mig sadly, 'I suppose I must eat you.'

Like lightning they sprang up, while all the diners around who had been listening anxiously, sighed with relief.

'Here's a fork,' said the Old Bird, 'we will share it, and take it turn and turn about. Stick it in – it doesn't hurt, they love it!'

Mig took the fork, even now hoping that something would happen to prevent her eating this unknown and fearful dainty. At last she addressed the caterpillars.

'Dear caterpills,' she said, 'I cannot hear to stick forks in you myself, but here is one which you may all dig yourselves with and perhaps some one else will eat you.' The biggest caterpillar seized the fork. He had been looking rather queer for some time past, and just as he stuck the fork into himself he seemed suddenly to grow a skin, and wind himself up in it. As the fork disappeared into the folds of this extraordinary-looking creature the manager, a fat gnome, bustled forward and cried 'Stop him, you fellows – he's turning into a chrysalis, and he's got one of my forks inside him!' A general rush was made at the wicked thing, but with a final chuckle the caterpillar gave a wriggle and the end of the fork disappeared inside his new-grown skin. He had indeed turned into a chrysalis, and every one was obliged to treat him with respect,

for fairy creatures are bound by the laws of Enchantment to protect all chrysales. So with every mark of honour, the twenty-three remaining caterpillars bore him solemnly away.

But now a most unpleasant thing happened. The manager demanded to know who had been so foolish as to let the caterpillar take the fork inside his chrysalis shell with him.

'It was Mig! Mig! Mig!' resounded on all sides.

He turned and looked her up and down. 'Ho!' he said gruffly, 'and who is Mig? What does she rhyme with? Everything rhymes here!'

'Pig! Fig!'cried every one.

'We must go into this matter!' exclaimed the manager agitatedly. 'Pig and Fig are both things to eat. Have you a licence to eat?' At the dread question Mig leapt to her feet and ran past him out of an open door near' at hand.

'After her! After her!' cried every one, and Mig found herself tearing up a long, dark passage with the Old Bird by her side.

'That was a narrow escape,' said the Old Bird, mopping his brow, 'I wish you wouldn't be so naughty, Mig. You stir up the fairies wherever you go.'

The sounds of their pursuers died away, and a moment later they found themselves out in the open. Mig did not say anything, for she knew that he was right; but really, she argued to herself, fairies were so teasable that one simply had to aggravate them sometimes.

They were now walking along a woodland path when suddenly the sound of her pursuers' voices, now facing away, now coming nearer, was wafted on the air.

'What will they do if they find me?' she quavered.

'I am afraid they will try and chain you up in place of the twenty-fourth caterpillar,' said the Old Bird, as their cries sounded louder and louder.

'Where's Mig? We want Mig! Fetch her here! Chain her up to the caterpillars,' and it was plain that in another minute she would be

found. Even the Old Bird was upset.

'Dear! Dear! Dear!' he said, hopping about anxiously and sneezing, 'it's most upsetting! Of course I can fly up and hide in a tree, but you -'

'Little girl,' said a voice close at hand, 'come and hide in my nest.' It evidently came from a bush of wild rhododendrons on her right, and after searching about for a few minutes she saw high up above her a thrush's nest, where a bright-eyed little mother sat on five eggs.

The Old Bird hid in the top of a tree just as the mob of pursuers swept round the corner at the distant end of the path.

Mig climbed up and taking a little spring, landed just on the edge of the nest.

'Come in,' said the mother-thrush amiably, 'and see that you don't step on my eggs. I expect them to hatch any minute. Dear me! You do look puffed – never mind, dearie, they won't catch you here.' She talked and chattered ceaselessly. Presently there was a crack, and one little blue egg burst. Out came a baby thrush.

'Oh oh oh!' squeaked the mother delightedly, 'aren't his eyelids like father's? Isn't he sweet?... Father will be pleased!'

As she and Mig were examining the baby anxiously to see that it was all right, Mig's pursuers swept by.

They stopped just under the bush where she was hidden.

'Let us divide into parties,' she heard the manager of the Happy Oak suggest, 'we will hunt till nightfall, but not later for we had better not stay out of our homes at midnight in the Enchanted Wood.' Off they went, the manager promising the finder a free lunch.

Mig heaved a sigh of relief and examined the baby again. He was a dear bare little ball of a thing with beady black eyes and a huge beak which he kept wide open. His little pink chest panted up and down.

'He's gorgeous!' she said. 'May I hold him?'

'Yes, dear – do,' said his proud mother, 'and I wonder if you would mind sitting on the rest of the eggs and keeping them warm while I go and find my husband! He ought to have been back ages ago – I hope nothing's happened – and I must find a worm for baby, too'; so Mig promised faithfully to sit on the four eggs with a clamouring bird-baby in her arms. I expect you wonder why she did not crack them. I think that in the enchanted wood, she must have grown smaller, when occasion demanded. One is always told that mortals overcome the difficulty this way in enchanted woods.

Crack went one of the eggs, and another baby appeared, which she managed to hold in her arm, scuffling the shell carefully on one side with her foot.

'I hope no more appear,' she said; 'unless I can hold them in my feet I don't know what I shall do.'

After half an hour Mrs. Thrush came flying back, sobbing miserably. She told Mig that a dreadful thing had happened – Mr. Thrush was impaled on a thorn, and unless help were forthcoming, he would be caught by some bird of prey or animal.

'What can I do?' she moaned.

Immediately Mig tumbled the babies into the nest and said she would go.

'You!' cried Mrs. Thrush. 'But those creatures may chase you again.'

But Mig would go. She had a very tender heart and could not hear to think of the poor little bird. So she clambered down, and following the directions Mrs. Thrush had given her found him not far away, his poor plump little chest pierced with a wicked thorn.

He lay there quivering and fluttering his wings feebly. High up a cruel hawk was hovering, watching for foot; luckily he had not espied Mr. Thrush as yet.

As Mig stood looking at him she found the Dawnchild standing beside her, all shining.

'I was able to appear, Mig,' she said, clasping her in her arms, 'because you were doing an unselfish think, in risking being

captured.'

As she spoke she gently lifted the little bird off the thorn, and held him to her breast for a minute, then let him go, tossing him gently in the air, quite well and free.

'Fly home, little bird,' she said, and off he flew singing joyously, as though his little feathery throat would burst.

But before he went he wheeled round and flew back to the children.

'Thank you, thank you,' he carolled, 'back to my nest – good-bye!' And circling three times round their heads, flew off.

'There's a surprise for you at home,' sang out Mig after him, which made him fly all the quicker. When he had disappeared, the Dawnchild said:

'It is getting late, Mig. Climb into a tree, and hide there till its dark, then go straight down to the lake. You will have to go alone now, for my father has sent to recall the Old Bird. Later on he may journey with you again.'

'It will be very lonely without him,' said Mig huskily, and trying not to cry, 'and how can I get through this big wood at night? I heard the animals say they do not like being out at night here.'

'Hold this on high' said the Dawnchild' and you will be safe.' Then she vanished. Mig looked at her palm, into which the Dawnchild had pressed a small, hard lump of brightest blue stone roughly fashioned into a strange shape. Mig held it up in order to see the light through it, and immediately the familiar shower of gold and many-coloured dust fell from it – the symbol of the Dawnchild.

She played with it for some time, trying to think beautiful thoughts, and make the Dawnchild reappear, but nothing happened, so after a time she selected an easy tree, which she climbed.

There she perched till nightfall. Gradually the wood-sounds ceased, and Mig was able to watch the shutting up of an enchanted wood for the night.

The first to go home were the birds – they flew to their different

trees, some carrying music under their arms, from which they had evidently been singing – these were the ones, of course, who could not make up their own songs.

Next the rabbits and other animals bustled by, and in the pool near by, she heard the hooting of the 'rat-buses' as they were steered homewards. At the same time many important little bees came buzzing along, grand little fellows in brown and gold liveries, carrying long poles.

'Bzzzz! Clo-o-o-oosing time,' they chanted, and the pretty little fairies hastened into flowers for the night. Apparently in the wood seasons did not count, for foxgloves, bluebells, primroses and all kinds of sorrel grew together, and were now rapidly filling up with fairies. As each one crept in, the bees catching their poles in some invisible hook in the petals, closed the flower with a snap. Presently when every flower in sight was closed, there came a rush in the air, and a dainty little thing flew up, dressed in a floating, shining pink frock. She had short gold curls clustering round her face – the sweetest, loveliest face. She flew straight to a fast-closed harebell and hammered on it.

'Oh let me in, let me in,' she sobbed; but the flower remained shut.

'Oh, please, Mr. Bee,' she implored of a passing bee, 'unlock it!'

He did so with much grumbling; she darted in and the flower closed; Mig was very relieved.

The last bee disappeared, and now all the wood was still. Night had come, and Mig must perform her task.

CHAPTER NINE

The Journey to the Worum

Noiselessly creeping down from the tree, she started her journey along the deserted woodland path. From the boughs of forbidding-looking trees, the night-creatures came out and gibbered at her. Pale blue and green they were, not unlike monkeys in shape, only smooth-skinned. They swung by their tails and called out rude things.

'She has eyes like snail's horns!'

'What long thin legs!'

'What a hairy head!' they shrieked.

Through the trees on her right crashed the cloaked man still chanting, and disappeared.

She held her magic blue stone on high, and all the night-creatures shrank away as the golden dust fell from it, lighting up the path, and shining on her magic shoes. Since she had worn them she had not known tiredness, nor had she faltered and wondered which way led to the Worum, for they also possessed the power to guide her. And so she continued her journey, unharmed by the night-

denizens of the wood.

Presently the moon arose with a whizzing sound, and its light shone through the black-looking trees, revealing an immense lake lying beyond them on the border of the wood.

Pale and majestic it lay there, and when she stepped from the edge of the wood and reached the shore, its calm white shining waters were still as glass save for the tiny lapping wave at the shore. A voice sang:

'Calm lies the pale, majestic lake,
Faint is its lapping at the shore,
Nor does its deep, still bosom shake
At the young wind's sigh, or the old wind's roar.
Down in the clear still waters deep,
Look! 'Mid the rocks and swaying weeds
The water-gnomes and fishes sleep,
Till in the night the tide recedes,
Till in the night the tide recedes.
O waters, that a little way
Ebb from the sand and leave it dry,
Nor heed its call, nor hear it say
"Cover me up – I'm cold and grey,"
Flow to the sand on the sad lake shore,
Lap at the pebbles among the reeds,
Let not the sand its fate deplore,
"Cold and grey when the tide recedes!"
Step boldly to the water's edge,
O human child with the eyes like day,
Hide in the sedge, the dank green sedge,
When you hear the mournful, wet sand say,
"Cover me up, I'm grey and cold,
Cover me up, I'm growing old!"'

The voice sank away in a sobbing silence, save for the gentle lap at the water's edge.

Mig stood all alone, with the tiniest little waves breaking at her feet. The other side was hidden in darkness. On either side the

sand stretched, all goldy-grey, and the reeds stood ankle deep in the water, tall and proudly straight, as though defiantly guarding a secret. The waves ceased to play at her feet and she realised that the waters were receding. What had the voice said?

'Hide in the sedge, the dank green sedge.'

What was the sedge, anyway? She supposed it meant those rushes growing there, but there was another instruction to follow yet – and just then a voice rose out of the sand – a dry sounding sandy voice:

'Cover me u-u-up – I'm grey and cold.'

It rang out into the night. Again it came:

'Cover me up – I'm growing o-old – '

A heartbreaking sigh followed, but the cruel water gave a lapping laugh and ebbed swiftly out some distance away where it lay lazily on the small stones. And now there appeared several little bobbing spots in the water, which swam hastily to shore singing:

'Water-gnomes, water-gnomes, swim tot he shore,
There's plenty to do there and then plenty more.
Swim like a duck with your toes all outspread
Though webbed feet we've not, nor a nose in our head
Like a water-duck's nose which does nothing but quack,
And nor does the water kerplop off our back.
Water-gnomes, water-gnomes, why do you wait?
Hear the sand weeping aloud for its mate!
Hurry to dance on the moonlighted sand,
Ere the water steals back with a wave in its hand
To throw with a splash in the reed's haughty eye
And make it bend down to the water and cry!'

Mig hid in the reeds as the little men approached, and now she saw that several of them were carrying some heavy burden with them, for many pairs of gnomy arms were raised, holding some square-looking object out of the water's reach.

'I expect' she observed to no one in particular 'that that is the

book I was told to get hold of.'

'Sssssh!' whispered the reeds, swaying slightly.

Reaching shallow water now, those gnomes who were ahead of their companions splashed through it, knocking each other over; tearing up to the sand, and hurling it at each other; rolling over and over in it and altogether delighting in a thousand different games.

They each had something to do; those n charge of the book had laid it carefully on a boulder which fortunately for Mig was just near her hiding-place. Seven little men produced fishes' backbones and played upon them most weird and haunting melodies with dried fins, while others spread a feast of strange undersea sweets for those who were playing and dancing.

One gnome mounted the boulder where the book was lying unguarded.

He had a shock of short black hair, and a pale green body; like the others his tail bore a fin at the end of it and his feet were webbed. Settling the fish bone comfortably in the position of a 'cello' he produced such a weird and beautiful melody from it that all the gnomes commenced to dance.

'Dance while the sand is calling, water-gnomes, off you go – now one foot, now the other. You'll soon fall into the way of it.' The gnome was playing called out squeakily, keeping time with one foot, and all the flying figures laughed as they leaped and whirled a bout, colliding with each other, then bouncing away again as lightly as India-rubber balls. It was an amusing sight, but Mig had other work to do than to watch them. While the waters of the lake crept slowly and shamefacedly back to the sand which they nightly deserted, Mig quietly parted the rushes and crept along in the shadow of the boulder.

The gnome-music stopped with a crash, and for one instant they all stood still in the weird postures of the dance as if spellbound. That minute gave Mig time to escape. She steered her course towards the trees of the enchanted wood, hoping that the gnomes,

like the daylight inhabitants of the wood, would not venture abroad in it after dark.

'A mortal has watched us dance!'

'She must have seen us come!'

'She must have seen the Book!'

'Where is the Book?'

'SHE HAS STOLEN IT!'

'SHE HAS IT UNDER HER ARM!'

With one yell of rage they flew after her, but were too late. Mig reached the border of the wood just before they caught her, then paused, holding on to one of the trees while she recovered her breath. With the other hand she waved the Guide to Gnomia triumphantly in the air.

'Hurrah!' she cried, 'I've got it!'

But to her dismay the gnomes burst into tears. They had drawn up short on the edge of the wood, which they dared not enter, and now wailing and weeping they held out pleading hands to her.

'Give it back, give it back,' they sobbed.

'I'm awfully sorry,' said Mig firmly, 'but I was told to take it.'

'Oo-ooooo!' howled the gnomes, dropping their heads in their hairy hands, 'give it back!'

'No,' said Nig, 'not now – but if I reach the end of my journey I will see that it is returned.'

This seemed to satisfy the creatures, and falling into double file, they trooped slowly back to the shore singing a melancholy ditty about their book. It quite upset her for a time, but she could not really help it, so when the last little man had entered the water and sunk slowly to the bottom of the lake, she turned and re-entered the wood.

The night creatures were still about; they stalked her behind bushes as she went along. She did not quite know where to go, but felt that the shoes were guiding her, so when she reached the water-rat pool she sat down on a boulder, and holding the magic stone on high to keep away evil, started to read the book by the stone's

blue light.

It was a very big book, the covers of which seemed to be made of dry seaweed, bound in gnomes' tails laid across in strips. The corners were clamped with some heavy greenish metal which also formed the clasp, and gave forth a gentle glow. When she undid the clasp, something small and black, with boot-buttony eyes, hopped out and away under a bush where it sat glowering at her from beneath the branches. It was the familiar spirit of the Witch of Worum. The latter had sent it to discover who was coming to rescue the prince, for she knew some one was coming; and knew also that this rescuer would come and steal the Guide to Gnomia. Therefore she had sent her familiar to find out all about it. Mig did not know this of course, but it did not matter particularly, as the spirit met with a misfortune that night. It was accustomed to carry all its power in its right foot, but while hopping out of the bush its right foot got caught in that same mischievous bramble that had held Mig prisoner earlier in the day. The foot was so much hurt that the spirit had to sit there for weeks, nursing the magic power back to life.

Meanwhle, Mig pored over the book, but could see nothing but blank pages.

'What a stupid book!' she exclaimed, 'it must have been a very stupid man who wrote nothing but empty pages.'

A slight rustle in the willow-tree overhanging the pool made her look up. A night-creature was letting himself down to the pool by his tail. At last he could get no farther, and swinging backwards and forwards he remained there with his little pointed red tongue trying to lap at the water. The book in her lap suddenly jumped, which made Mig start more than ever.

'I suppose it wants me to open it,' she said, and spread it wide. Immediately a verse in flaming letters flashed on to the page and then disappeared.

'At moon dew when the panther sleeps
There is a harmless thing
Which softly to the water creeps

And by its tail doth swing
Near to the water, nearer still
Until its tail quite taut is.
Alas! it cannot drink its fill
Because its tail too short is!'

'Humph!' said Mig, 'evidently that's all right. He won't hurt me.'

She arose, and tucking the book under her arm, let the shoes lead her on through the forest, until she reached what must be the edge of it, where a white road glimmered through the darkness. For a minute she was almost afraid to venture there, lest she should again see that dread signpost, 'TO DYNGFORD STATION', and once more feel Belinda's cruel grasp on her think little shoulder. But presently, plucking up courage, she crept a few steps away from the sheltering trees.

As nothing happened, she left the patch of grass by the wayside and started off along the road, which soon divided into four roads, with, oh horrors! a signpost at the meeting of the ways.

Down one of the roads came a flying figure. It was that same fierce, cloaked fellow of the woods. As he neared Mig, he chanted wildly into the night; again the book jumped, and as she hastily opened it a verse flamed out:

'Hark! What is the sound
That creeps with midnight stealth?
It is the weird Lemound
Chants verses to himself!
Be not rude,
He is good.'

'Thank goodness,' said Mig aloud, and sighed with relief. The Lemound, one white finger still pointing to his book, looked up at her from under the brim of his shady hat, then started and seemed inclined to run away.

He looked so absurdly like a dog just meditating theft from a butcher's shop, and ready to run every second, that Mig went up and laid her hand on his arm in order to hold him back. He peered

at her.

'I seem to know your face, child,' he said, catching hold of it; 'let me hold it up to the light.'

He started waggling it about and exclaimed in a surprised voice:

'Why – it won't come off!'

'Come off – I should think not!' said Mig indignantly. 'Will yours?'

'But of course,' said the Lemound courteously, and unhooking his countenance from his hair, handed it to her for inspection. But as Mig dropped it with a shriek, he hastily picked it up and put it back again, sighing deeply.

'Strange things you mortals are,' he observed; 'well, where did I meet you?'

'In the wood, but you seemed rather in a hurry,' said Mig.

'Of course I was in a hurry – else I shouldn't get there.'

'Where?' asked Mig.

'The Worum,' said he. 'I am bound for the Worum.'

Mig nearly jumped out of her skin. 'So am I!' she answered excitedly.

'You!' exclaimed the stranger, 'a child like you! How extraordinary! Come, unhook your face, and let me read your secrets in your eyes.'

'I told you before that it wouldn't come off,' said Mig. 'Why are you going to the Worum?'

The stranger, who had just started chanting mournfully again in some unknown language, stopped and said:

'I am a poet!' He took a step backwards to see whether his announcement had impressed Mig, viewing her with half-closed eyes, his head on one side, but as she said nothing, he continued, 'I am therefore going to the Worum to find the last line to a very beautiful verse I have composed. I was told I should find it in the Worum.'

'What is the beautiful verse?' asked Mig, who loved poetry.

The melancholy poet stood still and recited it all in one breath:

'It is called the "Lover's Lament!,' he answered.

'The cabbages have lost their sting,
The bees refuse to boil,
Since you no longer butter bring,
To burn as midnight oil.
I bless the day you brought a pig
To be my bosom friend.
O, cannot you return the fig
That you refused to send?
O pigs and figs and cabbages,
And bees that will not boil,
Tell her I sit and dream of her
And drink the midnight oil.
And when I look at you, O pigs
(Figs, cabbages and unboiled bees),
I think I see her face in yours
And once more seem to hear her wheeze
Like grampi on some foreign shores -'

He stopped abruptly, his face working with emotion.

'It's no good,' he said despairingly, 'I cannot find a suitable last line – and it's the masterpiece of my life.' he groaned loudly.

Mig felt sorry for him, but just as she was trying to make out the meaning of this verse the Guide to Gnomia gave a tremendous jump. She hastily opened it.

'Horrors! What did she read there?:

'Flee, you small girl, like the wind,
Belinda follows close behind.'

With a shriek, Mig took the book's advice and flew along the dark road. Presently she heard a voice behind:

'Wait! wait! I'm coming too! Why on earth did you run off like that?' The Lemound came pattering after her, but Mig was too frightened to stop. Gradually, however, he caught her up and as

they ran Mig panted out her story. Once she looked back over her shoulder and saw a figure bobbing along behind in the darkness – undoubtedly Belinda.

After a time the Lemound panted out, 'I'm tired, let's rest,' and so rather unwillingly Mig allowed him to lead her through the hedge at the side of the road to a riverbank. Here they crouched, and soon out of the darkness came the steady pad-pad of Belinda's huge flat feet as she ran at a steady trot along the highroad in search of her little cousin, who sat trembling beside the Lemound.

Mig's heart galloped up into her mouth – so close did the flat feet of her tormentor pass by, but Belnda never guessed that she was near and soon her footsteps died in the distance.

Then the Lemound and Mig danced round and round, chuckling with glee. The Lemound had now quite determined to travel with Mig all the way to the Worum. For one thing her Guide to Gnomia was quite as useful to him as it was to her; besides, he was a kind-hearted fellow and did not like to think of her travelling alone.

'So dull and yet so dangerous!' he said.

They had not been sitting there many minutes before Mig noticed a little boat tied tot he stump of a birch-tree hard by. Her magic shoes made her get up and go towards it, and soon she and her strange companion were in it, gliding down the stream.

'I wonder where we are going,' said Mig sleepily.

Everything was very peaceful around; the moon had set, and there was just the same sleepy chill in the air before dawn as there had been when she had received the magic shoes. In the rushes by the banks a frog's concert had begun; she could hear the deep-voiced ones tuning up.

'I wonder where we are gong,' she repeated, still more sleepily. The Lemound did not answer. He had washed his nice movable face in the river, settled himself at the end of the boat, and had gone to sleep with his face all wet.

'It will get ever so sore,' thought the child. The last thing she remembered was seeing two water-gnomes (a lady and a gentleman)

seated on a twig, floating beside them. The gentleman gnome was playing a piece of music on his tail, using it like a flute, to the gnome-looking lady who had on a green leaf for a skirt. Mig felt the faithful book jump in her hands and red through fast-closing eyes:

'A water-gnome sings to a gnomess his song
With many high twiddly wail,
And when the song's ended or seems a bit long
He plays her a tune on his T-A-I-L

CHAPTER TEN

The Race By River to The Midnight Sea

The sun was high when Mig awoke next morning. She could not think where on earth she was at first, but sat blinking dazedly. Once glance showed her that the Lemound was still asleep, so she scoped up a handful of water and threw it all over his face.

'Woffprsch!' he spluttered, 'it's all in my eyes. I shall have to take my face off now!'

'Oh no – please,' begged Mig, 'I hate seeing it off.'

'It's very handsome,' said the Lemound in a wounded voice, 'I won a prize for it at the Horticultural Show, not long ago.'

'How huffy people are in Enchantment,' thought Mig, but to change the subject, she said, aloud: 'What are we going to do about breakfast?'

The Lemound looked worried for a minute, but soon his face cleared and he said: 'I know!'

Plunging a hand up under his hat he drew forth a battered piece of cheese-rind, and one cherry.

'Which will you have?' he asked politely.

Mig took the cherry, evidently much to his relief, for he simply snatched at the rind and bolted it without biting it up.

'You'll get indigestion if you eat like that,' she said gravely, biting her cherry. It was all withered inside and quite tasteless, which made her hungrier than ever.

At that moment on the left bank they saw an old woman, dressed like a gipsy, holding out an invitingly red apple.

'Steer your boat in closer, my pretty dear,' she called out, 'and I'll give you this nice apple.' But it did not need the book's warning jump to tell Mig that this was some one evil. Could she not see, herself, the suspicious pointing shoes of the old woman? Indeed there were funny little points all over her.

'Go away,' cried the child, 'I know you are a bad creature! And your disguise is as old as the hills – you can't take me in, like Snow White in the fairy-tale!'

The gipsy clothes fell off and Belinda stood revealed, a swam of Umpis round her. On her wrist swung the reticule where the wicked King of Umpis lay in his little black box. Mig splashed water at Belinda, but Belinda started to run beside them on the bank. It was a race between them to the Midnight Sea, which no Umpi could cross.

The little boat swung on bravely in midstream; the Lemound did not seem frightened but stood in the bows, his cloak billowing out behind him in weird shapes, and he chanted verses containing spells to keep the Umpis from flying over to the boat. And now it became strangely twilight, although it had been a brilliantly sunny morning until a few minutes ago. At first Mig thought it was on account of the interlacing branches overhead which mingled from either side of the narrow stream. Great water-lilies clogged the boat in some parts, whilst in others it almost went aground in the shallow water that ran over the pebbles, where bright little fishes darted hither and thither. On either side the banks stretched up into steep woods, and the river contained numerous twists and curves. And all the time the light faded and faded, and Belinda kept tireless pace with

them on the bank. It grew darker yet.

'We are nearing the Midnight Sea,' chanted the Lemound. The little boat bumped and scraped over the shallows, then tore on faster than ever; the chase grew furious. Suddenly the boat got caught in the weeds, tried hard to move, shivered, and STOOD STILL, and the stream bubbled by gaily. Mig closed her eyes in fear. Surely she would be caught now? Luckily for them, Belinda and the Umpis were a little behind them but they came nearer and nearer, and still the boat could not move. It was awful; they could even feel it trying to dislodge itself, but at last Belinda drew level with them, and there they were, still stuck fast. With a yell of triumph, she began climbing towards them over a fallen tree that stretched half-way across the stream. Mig gave herself up for lost, as her cousin stretched out a hand towards her, but at that minute the boat jerked itself free, nearly upset, righted itself and flew on again. This so surprised Belinda that she lost her balance and fell head-first into the stream, damaging her nose severely, while the Umpis flew up with a frightened hiss when they saw the calamity that had befallen their mistress.

The stream widened out and flowed swiftly towards the sea. Round a bend it carried the boat, and they found themselves within sight of the sea.

Through the dull twilight came the heavy murmurous sound of waves.

'The sea! The sea! The Midnight Sea!' cried the Lemound suddenly, in the midst of his chants.

A fresh salt breeze beat at his face, and blew back his straggly locks.

'I shall never keep my hat on,' he said and taking it off, tossed it at Mig, who pulled it well down on her own head.

'I shall never keep my face on,' he said a minute later, and began to take that off, too, but remembering that Mig did not like him to, he held it on by the forehead and chin. Presently he fell to chanting again.

'The sea! The sea! We are saved!'

Mig wished he would not do it – she had always heard that boasters came to no good end, and this seemed very like boasting. And were they saved? As the river widened it spread out into many little streams and rushed towards the waves which thundered on the sand. As the boat rushed onwards, too, Mig became aware of some heavy weight hanging on the back, and although the wind rushed past her ears deafening her she distinctly heard a fat chuckle and a voice mutter:

'I've got her now!'

She turned round with a gasp, and saw the awful Belinda hanging on to the boat. Her hat was all crooked, and she carried her reticule in her teeth, which made her look as though she were grinning.

The Lemound saw that she could not climb in, so whispered that they must pretend to parley with Belinda, then dive over her head, swim to the stretch of sand on the left, and run across to the sea.

'But will there be a boat for us?' asked Mig.

'Sure to; there is always a boat, I have heard,' answered the Lemound, 'Can you dive?'

As it happened Mig could swim, and could also manage a sort of dive, so they boldly addressed Belinda who, certain that she had got them now, was content to hang on without attempting to get in.

The Lemound politely doffed his hat.

'Madam!' he said courteously, 'what would ye?'

'Give me Mig, I will have Mig,' cried her cousin.

'And who is Mig?' asked he.

'Don't ague with me!' shrieked Belinda.

'But of course we won't,' said the Lemound. 'You aren't worth it, madam – fare ye well,' and seizing Mig's hand he leapt about six feet into the air over Belinda's head, the child and himself arriving gracefully in the water. For one minute Belinda was so stupefied that she allowed the little boat to carry her onwards, then with a cry of fury she let go and plunged back after the other two.

But they had now reached the bank and scrambling up on to the sand, started running over to the sea. A minute later and Belinda was also on the sand, while the boat, light and empty now, gathered force and flew on like lightning right into the open sea. Here it darted back along the seashore on the left of the river mouth and grated on the shingles out of reach of the bigger waves, waiting for Mig and the Lemound to get to it again.

As they cut across the sand to the sea, Mig turned round and saw Belinda taking a short cut to head them off from the boat.

The Lemound saw her, too, and redoubled his efforts, nearly dragging Mig's arm out of its socket as he sped along, on his long thin legs. Thanks to the magic shoes, Mig was able to keep up with him, though even they could not prevent her from being breathless from the pace the Lemound set. Nearer and nearer they came to the welcome, kindly little boat waiting for them; and running across to get between them and the boat came Belinda.

Mig's breath came in short sharp gasps; five years more – four – three -

Belinda's ankle gave way and made her lose a yard; then staggering and stumbling, Mig splashed through the foam of a small wave, and fell over the side and into the bottom of the boat, followed by the Lemound who leapt over her head, in his own peculiar way, just as Belinda reached them. Quick as thought the Lemound raised one foot and shoved off, by the simple means of planting his foot in the middle of Belinda's face. But she was not done yet! She sprang into the waves; one knocked her over and washed her back to shore, but she got through the next, and splashed on through the water, for all the world like a dog after a stick.

'Look!' cried Mig who was watching excitedly from the boat, 'she's got on to something!'

Yes, Belinda had mounted a porpoise which, with lashing tail, came straight after them. She was guiding it with her waist belt through its mouth, and for one minute Mig thought they might yet be caught, but just then a tremendous hairy hand came up from

under the waves, seized Belinda by one ear, and pulled her off, while a tremendous voice roared out:

'Let me catch you riding the King of the Midnight Sea's royal porpoise again!'

A huge wave hid Belinda from view, and tired out with the strange adventures, Mig once more drifted off to sleep while the boat flew on over the Midnight Sea, and the Lemound chanted into the darkness, his voice ringing out over the tumbling waste of waves around.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

They Arrive At the Worum

The boat grated against something, and Mig, who had lain half awake for some time staring into the blackness of the Midnight Sea, fanned by wet winds and soothed by the melancholy chants of the gentle Lemound, awoke fully. It was still dark but they could just see that the boat had run on the shore of some land, so the Lemound leapt out and pulled the boat up high and dry with Mig still sitting inside. She saw dimly that the Lemound gave a jump or surprise when his feet touched dry shore and heard him exclaim:

'By the nose of the first gnome!'

'What's the matter?' asked Mig, beginning to get out.

'Matter? Can't you see?' he cried.

'No, I'm not a cat that I can see in the dark,' said Mig, climbing over the side of the boat; but just then her foot touched dry shore, and a wonderful thing happened. The darkness disappeared in half a second, and everything was dazzling sunshine. They stood on a seashore surrounded by frowning cliffs and desolate stretches of rocks, over which hovered many sea-gulls. It seemed hard to believe that if they set but one foot in the sea all would become

darkness again, but it was so, for Mig tried, and very soon took her foot out when she found what happened.

She would have liked to play about the rocks for a bit, when when she approached the nearest one it hissed angrily, then actually arose and walked away, which was very annoying.

'But Enchantment follows us everywhere,' said the Lemound, hurriedly dodging a piece of seaweed that kept following him, and placing itself under his foot to make him slip.

It certainly was a very weird shore, for the rocks were continually moving; heaving up and down or changing places, while every now and then the sun went in, a chill wind blew, and everything became covered with snow. When this happened the air resounded with horrible laughter like a thousand tins being clattered together, and four old grey hags appeared from nowhere, placed something no the sand and danced round it with joined hands, while the mist round the tops of the cliffs whirled down to meet them. When the sun came out the mists floated up again, and snow and witches disappeared. They took no notice of the two who watched them.

When the laughter sounded for the third time, Mig began to feel rather uneasy.

'Do you think it is laughing at us for coming?' she asked the Lemound.

'I don't know – I wouldn't like to say – I'm sure I can't tell you, and I haven't the vaguest idea,' replied the strange creature, nervously looking around.

'I wonder if this is the Worum?' Mig started, but the Lemound, who was growing more nervous every minute, interrupted, 'I don't know – I don't know, but I think we ought to get up those cliffs and view the land.'

'Oh,' said Mig and her eyes grew round, for she saw that the cliffs were so high that clouds floated round the top.

The Lemound started towars the cliffs and Mig followed him. It was then they noticed that the cliff possessed a face – large and flabby, but undoubtedly a face. When they tried to climb it they

found it was made of a jelly-like stuff which wobbled so that they kept falling off. Of course the Lemound did not mind this as he was an expert leaper, but Mig found it very painful; and each time they fell the cliff shook with silent laughter, while a pleased smile stretched across its gluey face. Another unpleasant thing kept happening, too; feeling the two walking over its face evidently made it tickle, so it kept on twitching its features, and this either made them lose their balance or shot them down again.

After a particularly hard fall, Mig absolutely refused to try again. In vain the eager Lemound coaxed her.

'It is no good, Lemound,' she said, 'I am not going to. It probably isn't the way to the Worum either.'

'It is, it is! I'm sure it is! I tell you I'm half a fairy on my mother's side and I ought to know,' he urged. Just then the sun went in, snow covered everything again, and all was grey and miserable. Then four old hags appeared and danced again round their mysterious possession.

'I wonder what they're for, and what they're dancing round,' said Mig, watching them. Then Lemound sprang up suddenly.

'I'm sure that they've got something that can help us,' he said, 'you're so good at stealing – go and see!'

'Stealing!' cried Mig. 'I've never done such a thing in my life!'

'You didn't said the Lemound gravely, 'you stole the Guide to Gnomia.'

'For goodness sake!' exclaimed Mig, 'I've left that book in the boat. I'd better run a fetch it.'

She started running down the beach, towards the place where the little boat lay on its side amidst a mass of seaweed. But as she reached it, she saw a little green hand steal up over the side and grab at the previous book which lay neglected in the bottom of the boat. Quick as lightning Mig sprang into the boat, seized the other end of the book and rapped smartly on the knuckles of the hand with a small stone which she happened to be carrying. The fingers let go hastily and she heard a tiny squeak, so she bent over the side

and poked among the seaweed. Instantly the seaweed heaved first in one place and then in another. It was suspicious to say the least of it, and looked remarkably as if the thief were running about beneath it all, so Mig waited for a second, hoping the thief would think she had gone away. Her patience was rewarded; a second later the seaweed was raised up, and the head of a water-gnome appeared.

Mig grabbed at it, and pulled him up into view, then shook him.

'You're a nasty, mean little creature,' she said, 'you know you agreed that I was to return the book when I've finished with it, well – I haven't yet, and giving him a final shake, she dropped him into the seaweed, and clambered out of the boat. He did not go, but sat cracking the seaweed pods dejectedly; finally his head dropped on his little green breast and he burst into tears. Mig was very tender-hearted, she could not bear to see the poor little water-gnome crying, so she asked what she could do.

'Only give me the book,' he sobbed, 'else our King says he will have me turned into a-an e-ee-eel. And I couldn't bear to be t-t-turned into an e-ee-e-eel – they are so l-long and thin' – he was quite a fat little person himself and it was evidently a great tragedy.

'Very well,' said Mig with a sigh 'here you are – but it will be you fault if I can't get through the dangers in the Worum.' She gave the book to the little man, who seized it rapturously and hugged it, then climbed off the clump of seaweed on which he had been sitting.

'A thousand thanks,' he cried. 'If you ever are in danger and should be near water at the time, spring into the water and cry "Oh to the North, South, East and West!"'. So saying he ran lightly over the seaweed and plunged into the surf where Mig lost sight of him.

She ran up the beach towards the old grey hags who were still dancing, and on nearing them saw that they were twirling round a little box made of some dull greyish stone. When she tried to break through them, they all fixed her with their eyes, which were so

dazzlingly bright that they made her stagger back, nearly blinded. This they did without stopping their dance, and at the same time the horrible metallic laughter rang through the air again, shaking the cliffs into life, and heaving the rocks together in the grip of laughter. As Mig stood there perplexedly wondering what to do, the Lemound came leaping towards her, crying 'I was right. There's an inscription cut into the cliffs saying:

"If you would these cliffs ascend
If you wish your way to wend
Right into the Worum,
Op' the box the grey ones guard,
Though to get it may be hard.
Just to cherr you while you try
We would fain politely cry
No one yet has ever won it,
No one yet has ever done it
– Got into the Worum."

'Of course said the Lemound, looking rather excited about the whole thing 'it's very bad verse – I'm a poet, you see – I know and I'm sure those lines about "done it" and "won it" are just put there to rhyme because nothing could be easier than to get the box away from those hags.' Just then one of the hags turned her flashing eyes on him. The Lemound squealed with surprise at the blinding light, and when he could see properly again, the sun had come out, while the hags with their mysterious box had disappeared.

'There now!' said Mig, 'what shall we do if the sun doesn't go in again?'

But the Lemound had a plan. He said they must sit and wait. They tried to sit down on a rock, but it blew up with a hiss and a bang. Out came a cloud of steam, and from the flying fragments leapt a huge hermit-crab which ran away to the sea, bearing its shell in a very offended manner.

Before they had got over this surprise, the sun went in and all the usual things happened. The witches danced more wildly than ever; the rays from their eyes looking like searchlights.

'Now's our chance!' cried Mig, and they ran towards the hags. When they were about three yards away, the Lemound stopped and took off his face, handing it to Mig. It was just like a mask after all, so she did not mind holding it. He sprang into the middle of the hags' dance and seized the box.

They took no notice of him. He came bounding back to Mig, the empty space under his hair making him look like a doll which has lots its face.

The sun came out and the witches disappeared, not seeming to notice that their treasure had gone.

'Let's open it,' said Mig excitedly. The clasp was easy. She snapped the lid open. There lay a huge sweet!

They wondered what they were supposed to do with the stupid thing, as they examined the big pink and yellow sugary lump.

Just then the Lemound said 'Look at the cliff!'

Mig turned and saw its face grinning widely, while its eyes rolled greedily at the sweet in her hand which strange to say was gradually growing bigger. When it grew to the size of a football Mig thought it time to put it on the ground where it stopped growing.

As she and the Lemound stood looking at it, wondering what to do, the crack in the cliff which represented its mouth suddenly opened, and a fat, rumbling voice came out of its depths:

'Give me that sweet, little girl.'

'What will you give me?' called out Mig in her clear voice.

The cliff laughed fatly and blew out its cheeks which seemed to be made of some kind of india-rubbery stuff. 'I will give you what you most want.' he chuckled. 'Mount on to the right-hand corner of my mouth and I will twitch you up into the Worum!' It shook silently with laughter. In the end the two adventurers decided to risk it, though they did not trust the cliff absolutely. But first of all it seemed best to return the box to the weird sisters, so when the sun went in, the Lemound who had put on his face again, threw the box between the witches as they danced. Then he and Mig felt ready to tackle the climb up to the mouth of the cliff. This time

they reached it without mishap, and stood upon the right-hand corner of its mouth while the cliff begged greedily for the sweet. As they stood there its voice came rumbling out with such force that they were obliged to block their ears. Mig peered into the mouth, and found that the inside was like a vast cavern reaching into the heart of the cliff.

'Give me the sweet,' urged the cliff; so, holding on to her friend's hand very tightly, for she was rather afraid, Mig threw the big round sweet into the great mouth. It ate the sweet with a big sigh of enjoyment, and the sigh it gave was so big that the Lemound's hat was wafted into the cavern-like mouth.

The Lemound was very angry, even when the cliff, to make up for this mishap, twitched them on its mouth nearly up to the summit. It was a giddy journey, and they were glad when they reached a ledge, and the mouth shot itself down again. Even then the Lemound grumbled hard.

'One does not like to have one's hat eaten before one's eyes,' he observed in dignified displeasure.

'One does not, ' agreed Mig sympatheticallly.

'One thinks of the price one has paid for it,' he continued gloomily.

'One does,' said the child, who was longing to continue their journey.

'But being a gentleman, though half a fairy, one can only hope one's hat will start indigestion inside the cliff,' he concluded, brightening a little. They climbed to the next ledge and then up the last ledge where they reached an ever-ascending hilly sward. Here they paused to recover breath, flinging themselves down on the smooth green slope, and Mig peered over the edge for one last look at the cliff.

'Why!' she exclaimed in surprise. 'What is happening to the poor old cliff-face?'

The Lemound peered over, too, and an expression of satisfaction settled on his features, as he saw the cliff-face shaken from time to

time with a sort of spasm.

'Ha!' he said, 'one's hat has given the cliff-face hiccoughs! One is glad!'

'So's this one,' said Mig, thinking what a funny fellow he was. 'Shall we go and see what's the other side of this slope now?'

They stood up. They were now so high up that the sound of the waves miles below was lost, though still at intervals they could hear the horrid tiny laughter of enchanted nature. Clouds drifted round the, but it was not too cold, although the Lemound grumbled that it was hard to keep one's face on without one's hat, and presently they reached the top of the slope, and looked over the other side, half-fearing what new, wild, desolate country they might behold.

How they were surprised! There lay a lovely glittering town at the bottom of the slope where cattle fed. Through the meadows wound a silvery river. The town was surrounded by green hills, except the part directly opposite them, where many rough and wild crags up-reared themselves. Then Mig saw what she had come to seek. There stood a crag, covered with black-looking trees; through them gleamed white, chalky ground in patches, and there on the highest pinnacle was perched a castle all black save for a dazzling light shining from the battlements.

'The Witch's Castle!' said Mig in an awed voice.

A road wound up to it, shimmering strangely, but no one walked on it, though on all the other roads leading to the town many people hurried about their business.

'How the spires and peaks glitter!' cried Mig rapturously 'But look! Half-way up to the Castle there are no more red roofs of houses showing. 'Why?'

'Mystery attends the Castle,' said the Lemound.

'Question is – How to get in,' murmured Mig.

The Lemound did not seem to hear her; he was looking about him, saying over and over again:

'The Worum! The Worum! Over the Midnight Sea tot he Worum!

We are actually here – Here! Perhaps I shall find my last line here. Let me try-' He took a step backwards, puffed his chest out and recited the poem all over again, obviously getting very excited as he neared the last line. Bit it was no good.

'Like grampi on some foreign shores-' he repeated despairingly.

'Never mind,' said Mig comfortably, 'you are sure to find that last line. I don't quite understand it. Is it true? Is it some one you loved?

'Yes,' said the Lemound, walking quickly down the slope, 'she used to steal butter for me to burn when my midnight oil ran short – I was writing a dictionary in verse then – a wonderful volume – wonderful...Her mother was a gnome,' he sighed in a melancholy way, and walked quicker than ever, so that Mig found it very difficult indeed to keep up with him.

They were now at the bottom of the slope, and Mig thought it high time to arrange some plan, so they sat down and talked. The Lemound announced almost at once that they must separate.

'I shall live among the peasants and inquire among them for that last line. Perchance they may have had it handed down in their family from generation to generation.'

So saying he leapt to his feet and wished Mig good-bye. 'It is best that we should not be seen entering the town together, ' he said; 'should we meet we will pretend not to now each other. I wish you luck and hope one day to meet yo u again.' He swept his face off with a tremendous flourish, as he had no hat, and then departed, leaping along the road which ran near by. The last she saw of him was when he stopped to speak to a peasant and they went off arm-in -arm. It was all right for him to be in the Worum as he was half a fairy and could move his face about, but Mig was only an ordinary little girl whose only magic possession was her shoes and the clover-mark, which would guide her aright and carry her any distance. She had, needless to say, already lost the blue stone. How she longed for the Guide to Gnomia, but that was gone, too, and she must just trust to her own cleverness, so she remained sitting

behind a hedge trying to think how to rescue the Prince, but no thoughts would come, and when a big red cow came up and mooed at her, she ran out into the road, and started walking along towards the town, for want of something better to do. Presently she espied a man trudging along towards her, carrying a pole over one shoulder with strings of onions hanging from it. He stopped.

'Good morrow,' he said, 'whither away?'

'I don't know,' said Mig.

The man gaped at her, and observed, 'I fare homewards. I have been to the town and am now hurrying home. I would advise you to hurry, too.'

'Why?'

'The Witch is out!'

'The Witch of Worum?' breathed Mig excitedly.

'Aye,' said the man, 'who else? And bent on mischief, too.'

'Where does she live?' asked Mig, 'I've got to get into her palace.'

'Up yonder,' said the peasant, and jerked his thumb in the direction of the black castle that seemed to frown down upon them, 'but I see you are a stranger in the Worum. And as to getting into her palace – you must be mad! One or two people have tried for various reasons, but – they have never come out – those who have got past the Water Hill, that is to say!'

'The Water Hill,' echoed Mig, 'I don't know what it is – Oh please help me!' and she clasped her hands together agitatedly.

The peasant told her all he knew; how the witch ruled them all with a rod of iron, yearly exacting a toll of seven people from them, the face of whom no one knew, while every week the best of their vegetables and cattle must be taken to a certain point half-way up the crag and left for her.

Sometimes she drove like a whirlwind through the town, scattering the people to right and left; so quickly went her steeds that they could not be seen and some said her chariot was fastened

to the feet of the whirlwind, but the peasant had had a confused vision of leaping green things that pulled it.

'Is that all?' asked Mig, wondering how on earth she should get into the place.

'Aye,' said the peasant, 'save that under the castle, deep in the crag, they say there is a cavern where she holds her revels with others older and uglier than herself. You will be lucky if you get in – luckier still to get out.' He shook his head mournfully and sighed so deeply that his onions overbalanced from their pole, and scattered all over the road.

'There now!' he said, 'that's your fault for making me sigh!'

Mig thought this very unfair, but grown-ups' reasons are very hard to understand sometimes, even among themselves, so she helped pick them, up, saying as she did so:

'I think you aren't very cheerful. But you see I've just remembered something in my favour. I have three magic possessions.'

'A child like you!' said the peasant unbelievingly, shouldering his onions again. 'What are they?'

'Well, these shoes will guide me anywhere, and never let me be tired. When I am in danger I can call a water-gnome by jumping into the water and saying, "o ho! tot he North, South, East and West," and lastly – I have a closer-mark on my back, which means I am the only one who can rescue the lover of the Lady who Sighs upon the Mountain Top,' she ended, quite tired of her long speech.

'Well, God speed you,' said the peasant, preparing to go on his way. 'Follow this road straight on to the last of the red-roofed houses. There the town ends: round the bend of the road we dare not go, save when we leave our offerings just beyond it. The road winds from there onwards and I cannot tell you what lies beyond. Farewell – I am sorry to see a pretty child going to certain disaster.'

'You are a cheerful pig,' said Mig, laughingly, and very pleased to hear him say 'a pretty child'. She had not realised how pretty she had grown, away from Belinda's influence. She bade the mournful

peasant good-bye, and started along the road.

'How am I to do it? she wondered, 'How? If I fail I shall lose my beloved Dawnchild – I must not fail. What a mournful fellow – I suppose that's what you call a "peasant". But I've a piece called "The Merry Peasant".' She stopped thinking then to look about her at the town she was now entering. It looked just like the towns in her old fairy-books; queerly dressed people hurried about their business, buying from booths set up in the street; in all the doorways old women stood, gossiping about the fine ladies who drove by every now and then in beautiful chariots. From an open doorway issued the clang of the blacksmith's anvil; sparks few up and a rollicking song came forth. No one took much notice of her, and Mig hurried on till she had left the town. She came to the last of the red roofs, and there was the bend in the road.

Woods lined the road on either side. Within sight everywhere, stood that forbidding-looking crag topped by the castle. Mig gathered her courage together and stepped round the bend of the road; no fearful sight greeted her, only a stretch of long white road which would round another corner far ahead. When she had rounded this latter corner, however, a faint murmurous sound came to her, and she found the road led up-hill, and evidently led straight led straight to the castle, though she could not see over the brow of the hill. She moved forward briskly among the loose stones which glistened in the sun; it seemed as though they were wet, indeed as though water had just sunk into the earth, yet how could this be? The hill stretched long and white in between the patches of grey shadow cast by trees on either side. The murmur had stopped, but at the top of the hill it started again with a faint swishing sound which sounded like water.

The Water Hill, the peasant had said – what was that? Over the brow of the hill a wave came sweeping quickly. It spread over the road and rushed down upon Mig, and although it was only about six inches in depth, it was very strong and she was afraid she would be swept away. But no, a strange thing happened; directly it touched Mig, it became a gentle wave of shallow water, sparkling

in the sun, and reflecting the trees and sky happily in a thousand colours as it sank away into the earth! If Mig had not possessed the magic clover-mark, she would have been swept away like other adventurers.

As she waded up through the water, wave after wave rose at the top of the hill and rushed angrily down, but when it reached her it flowed along gently until it disappeared among the stones and the grass at the side of the road.

First of all she took off her magic shoes, because it was very nice to squelch her toes about in the water, but presently put them on again, and waded solemnly on till she reached the top where the water rose out of the ground. Just where it spouted out, it seemed to try and reach her, hissing angrily, but the clover-mark magic was too strong, and it fell away baffled. Above on a jagged rock stood the castle. Mig looked back; the water was now foaming and dashing down the hill, and it seemed certain he would never escape that way if she wished to do so. So she must just go on. It all looked very firm, but there was no good being frightened, so she climbed up the cliff to the castle, the jagged rocks cutting and bruising her hands. At last she was there at the palace of the Witch of Worum, and panting but triumphant, she drew herself up on to the very summit of the crag. The castle was tremendous so she could see through a huge open door leading into the courtyard at the side of the building, and as there seemed to be no one about she crept in through the door which was made of oak, a foot thick and studded with nails as thick as a finger. She had never expected a witch's home to be as weirdly beautiful as this; all was black, and so polished that as she pattered across the courtyard she could see herself reflected on all sides. Even the cobbles beneath her feet were black. Finding that she was at the back of the castle now she said to herself:

'Come, this won't do! You must enter boldly by the front, and if you don't show fear all will be well.'

So far she had not met a soul, for the peasant had told her it was market-day. Evidently all the witch's household were out shopping,

so she walked back quite boldly and passing out of the courtyard turned to her left, there coming to the main entrance of the castle. At the foot of a big tower, a flight of steps led up to the door, and on either side crouched a huge stone lion which suddenly became alive as she set one foot on the lowest step. They roared loudly and sprang across the steps, but evidently could not leave them, for they made no attempt to chase her when she ran away, but settled down into stone figures again. She tried twice more and at the third roar from the lions the big door flew open and a gigantic black cat in the livery of a footman, all in deep black, stood owing before her.

'If you had run the bell, madam,' he purred politely, 'I would have come to your assistance, and saved you the inconvenience of passing my mistress's pet dogs.'

He stood at the top of the steps, and Mig stood at the bottom, a minute figure in green, who called out defiantly:

'That's all very well – but considering I should have to pass those huge lions to get to the bell I think you are very foolish. Let me in, please!'

'I can't, madam; I have orders to let no one in.'

'Nonsense,' called Mig; 'if you'd let me come up those steps, I'll explain who I am, but I can't stand here shouting.'

The cat eyed her doubtfully, then told the lions 'to lie down quietly while the lady stepped up'.

Trembling inside, Mig passed them and stood safely beside the footman. A brilliant idea occurred to her.

'Look out!' she cried. 'Dogs!'

The cat's tail fluffed out, his ears went flat, and he raced down the steps.

'Where? Where?' he hissed.

'April foot!' called Mig, and tore into the castle as fas as her legs could go. It was most exciting. Where should she hide? Without stopping to think, she crossed the black shining hall, catching a confused glimpse of huge jars, suits of armour and old oak chests.

She darted down a long black passage. Behind her she heard the cat run back into the hall, mewing with rage, and she jumped into a red and black jar standing at one side of the passage just in time. Here she was safe, she thought, and listened gleefully to the cat's paws clopping along the floor as he hunted for her.

'Come out! Come out !' he was calling angrily, as he came down the passage where she lay hidden. Mig's heart stood still as she heard him pattering along, stopping every minute to look behind the furniture of peer into a jar. Nearer and nearer her came and at last paused by her hiding-place. Now though he was nearly as big as Mig he could not see over the top of that vase, so off he went to get a chair.

First of all though, he tried to balance himself on the top of his tail, and if he could have remained on it long enough, he would have been able to look down inside the vase and see Mig. Then this tale would have been ended, but luckily for her he over-balanced at once and went away to the entrance-hall to get a chair.

The instant he was out of sight, Mig clambered out, and running softly after him had just time to hide herself in a smaller jar, which he had already searched. So when he finally looked inside her first hiding-place, there was no one there. And now Mig heard another pair of clays come clopping along – evidently the other cat-footman.

'Hallow, old boy – what's wrong? she heard the new-comer ask.

A dismal 'ma-rriaw' was the only answer.

'Tell a fellow,' persisted the voice, and she was sure the owner had laid a furry arm round the other's shoulders.

'Mo-rraow-owow,' wailed the first cat, 'there is a stranger in the Witch's castle. I let her in. It means my death! I've searched the whole place!'

Mig felt very sorry, but she did not exactly want to spring out and comfort them, so she remained very still. Both the cats were now caterwauling mournfully.

'Well, I am sure there is only one thing to do.'

'Ma-rriawow, what's that?'

'You'll have to run away – and I'll come with you. I'm tired to being in the Witch's service anyhow. Let's go now, for if the Witch returns and discovers the stranger, all will be lost.

Without another word, the two cats tore out of the castle and were never seen again, and that is how Mig gained entrance to the castle of the Witch of Worum.

Not sure whether this was only a trick to lure her out, Mig remained hidden for quite a long time after their departure, and it was late in the evening when she finally ventured out.

Directly opposite, a double door stood open, leading into what was evidently a banqueting-hall, a tremendous apartment, the roof of which was lost in darkness. Here all was not black, but black and gold, and the walls were covered with gorgeously carved panels. And the whole place was big enough for a giant. A table ran down the centre of the hall, laden with choice viands, and at one end a chair was pulled up ready for the Witch when she returned from the town.

Figure 32
Mig heard another pair of claws come clopping along – evidently another cat-footman.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Mig Meets The Witch of Worum

Presently there arose a commotion outside, so Mig ran to one of the tall windows, and climbing up on to a chest, peeped out. She had a brief vision of a chariot whirling by and pulling up at the big door, driven by a wild-haired creature, when a voice in the hall outside caused her to slip behind one of the heavy embroidered curtains. Evidently the Witch must fly, rather than walk, thought Mig, peeping through a hole, for already she stood there in the doorway. And this is what she looked like: Neither old nor young, this weird ageless elf-woman poised on the threshold, one hand clutching a heap of mauve and grey poppies, her fierce wild eyes darting hither and thither suspiciously. A shock of dark hair than night waved up into the air in some slight breeze that Mig afterwards learnt, always played round her, and the colour of her elfin garments seemed to change from palest yellow to violet in the shadow, but when she moved in the sunlight, all was dull grey, save for her raven locks. She was not terrible and ugly like the old witches in Mig's fairy books, and yet she was not at all beautiful.

'She is just elfin,' whispered Mig to herself. 'I wonder where she

has the prince imprisoned.'

She saw the creature move forward and sit down and begin to eat heartily from the various dishes. Then she sharply pulled a silver cord hanging from the roof. Far away a bell pealed, and a second later the doors opened, to admit a procession of many cat-footman, each four bearing a whole cooked ox, all save the hooves, which she threw at the footmen, who, taking no notice, stepped one pace backwards, and allowed the next four to come forward with their ox. Five oxen vanished in this way, and then Mig saw that the Witch became bigger with each mouthful, until she nearly touched the roof.

She ate at lightning speed, and finished with the sixth ox, then gradually resumed her normal size; not quite, however, but Mig excused her the few extra inches.

'No one can eat six oxes without swelling a little,' she said to herself. The footmen removed the hooves and dishes and the feast was over. The Witch arose and crossed the hall to a little door in a panel. This she went through, leaving it ajar. Immediately Mig slopped out and followed her. She had no plan in her mind, but she thought it would be fun to creep after the Witch unseen, wherever she went. So she slipped through the little door, though not before she had helped herself hungrily from the beautiful apples lying in a golden dish on the table. She found herself in a long and narrow passage lit only by the Witch who evidently carried her own lighting about with her, for a curious glow seemed to emanate from her witchy clothes.

Mig following far behind, saw her stop suddenly. The Witch had evidently come to the end of the passage and was now unlocking another door. Mig ran and caught her up; by good fortune she had not shut this door either, and peeping through she saw that a handsome chamber lay beyond. The walls were all of red, silver and gold tiles with precious stones imbedded in them, the floor was shining black and there was no furniture save a large brazier which stood smoking in the centre, and another of those red and black jars of which the Witch seemed so fond.

When the Witch bent down and pulled up one of the tiles in the floor, Mig seized the chance and slopped across the room meaning to hide in the jar. Thanks to her training among the Dawnchildren she was as light as a feather, and there was no difficulty in slipping down inside it. But what was her horror when she heard the Witch come over to the jar! The next thing she knew was that the Witch had lifted the jar bodily, and had taken it over to the brazier full of live coals. Mig felt an unpleasant warmth when the jar was balanced above the brazier, until the creature poured some ice-cold water over her. It was all she could do to prevent herself from crying out, but somehow she did, though she sat there up to her neck in water which was cold at first but gradually grew warmer every minute. It was most unpleasant. Plomp! a live frog landed on her head; evidently the Witch was making spells. Was she going to be boiled alive? Plomp! a dead snake fell over her nose. This was getting unbearable! What should she do? A handful of the mauve and grey poppies fell in and clung to her hair, then came all kinds of things, including the tile, which raised a bump on her forehead.

The water was getting unpleasantly warm. Suddenly the Witch burst into a high, wailing song, stamping with her feet in time to it.

Spell or no spell, Mig could stand it any more. Crying out, 'I shall be boiled alive if I stay here,' she sprang out of the jar. What was her surprise to hear the Witch exclaim: 'My spell has worked at last!'

And then Mig understood. The Witch actually thought she was made from a spell!

The Witch seemed beside herself with joy. She clutched Mig round the waist, but the child broke away timidly.

'Ho! You're afraid of me?' snorted the creature. 'You are made out of my spell, so you're mine. Once I made another child, but she faded after half a day. I used too delicate a recipe. She was made of apple-dew with a sprinkling of butterfly veins, and just a touch of first-love thoughts.'

'How sweet she must have been,' said Mig.

'Yes,' said the Witch, 'but too frail. Now you – I hope the toad's curse I threw in will make you more robust. You are made of dead frogs and snakes, and fit to be a witch-child! I shall call you "Windsbreath".' She dressed Mig n a little frock of some golden material, then said: 'Come, Windsbreath, I will show you my castle.'

The Witch took her hand and jumping up into the air, whizzed through the ceiling (it did not hurt either of them) and landed in her bedchamber.

It was a tremendous gloomy apartment; no day-light shone, and all was lit by dimly burning lamps, which shone on the richly coloured hangings of the apartment, and the tremendous four-poster bed.

Mig examined this bed with interest. Up the posts were carved snakes with jewel-like green eyes, and in the purple coverlet an embroidered sea raged with a ship tossing on its bosom. How strange that anyone should find rest in such a restless bed, thought Mig, but the Witch seemed to enjoy it. Throwing herself down on it, she yawned and said:

'I am tired, Windsbreath. I shall show you my castle to-night. Bring me that golden ewer and wash my hands and feet.'

Mig obeyed at once and fetched the golden basin which already had water in it. She felt rather alarmed in case the Witch should have claw-like feet, but they were merely long and bony like her hands. Then the Witch said:

'By a lamb's tail! I have not made you a bed!'

She sprang up and on the ground at the foot of her big bed, laid her hand, then slowly raising it in the air, said the word 'Bed'. Immediately a little golden bed arose out of the ground, and stood there invitingly.

'Jump in,' said the Witch, and got into the four-poster. The snakes writhed, the sea on the coverlet swayed ceaselessly and the bed started to jump up and down. Softly in the air came a gentle sound

of music, which swelled and swelled until it filled the air.

'Sn-m-m-m-wouph!' came from the big four-poster bed. The Witch of Worum was asleep.

'S-s-s-s-ss!' sighed Mig, and followed her example.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Mig Tours the Witch of Worum's Castle

Life in the Worum was now strange, to say the least of it. Mig found it rather interesting, for she had many duties to perform, in the fulfilment of which there were many opportunities to search for the Prince.

The morning after her arrival, the Witch took her round the castle, and finally led her up a winding staircase to a tremendous room where she kept her museum. It was seemingly endless, for there were many alcoves, twists and turns which hid the end of the chamber from view. Indeed it took Mig some time to explore the whole place, for there were such fascinating sights everywhere that one corner of its vastness was interesting enough to last a lifetime.

It was like no other museum she had ever seen, for there were living people forming part of the exhibits. Directly opposite the door stood a table at which several men sat busily writing, occasionally looking at each other with long level glances. One would push what he had written over to another, who would study it intently, then shake his head and return it.

'What are they?' whispered Mig loudly.

'Hush! They are Big Business Men,' answered the Witch; 'they are trying to cheat eat other.'

Mig gazed at them round-eyed.

'How did you get them here?' she asked.

'Stole them one evening, just as they were coming out of their offices into the roar of London,' said the Witch; 'you should have seen the people stare! I swooped down and caught first one up under my arm, then the other, hurled them into my chariot which was hovering in the sky, and drove back into the Worum. Nearly got upset too – my steeds got tangled up in the Houses of Parliament.'

She moved on, pointing out various objects of interest to Mig, such as wishing carpets, wizards' tooth-glasses, a princess's finger-nails, necklaces of phoenix eyes, and many hideous animals. And each one that the Witch's finger touched, shivered and told its history in the whining voice of a professional beggar.

'I-I-ii-was a wizard's tooth-glass,' droned one in a common voice.

'Shining and clean and bright like yourself, lady.

'What does my ma-aster clean his teeth in now?

'The Witch ha-as sto-olen me.

'Lidy, you've got a ki-ind fice.

'Lidy, be a friend, lidy.

Figure
'Hush! They are Big Business Men,' answered the Witch;

'Lidy, spare a copper.'

'I'm sorry, I have no coppers,' said Mig, moving on.

The Witch presently left her alone, after telling her to dust the museum all the morning. The Witch gave her a neatly hemmed gossamer duster which seemed rather useless, but she started off

with it obediently. She thought as she worked that after all it was all very like Madam Tussaud's. Everything was neatly labelled too.

'THIS IS THE ORIGINAL PAIR OF WINGS WORN BY THE LORD MAYOR OF LONDON, WHEN HE WAS BEWITCHED BY THE WITCH OF WORUM,' AND 'THE FIRST UMBRELLAR USED IN FAIRYLAND.'

This was a very odd affair made of mushroom, stiffened with spider's legs. Mig tried to open it, but it squealed harshly at her, so she dropped it hastily, and moved on to a funny-looking furry object, of which she could make neither head or tail, till she read the inscription:

'TRUE LOVER'S KNOT OF CAT'S' TAILS, PRESENTED TO VELVETNOSES, 5TH KING OF CATLAND, BY HIS BRIDE.'

Mig left behind the 'Ears and Teeth of the Ancient Corobba', and several really beautiful bowls that shone with a thousand lights, and suddenly turning a corner came face to face with the First Professor of the Totterslip Brotherhood! He was running round in circles and had a little raised off enclosure all to himself like the animals in the Zoo. He sang a little song and did not seem unhappy.

'Di diddy um di, Di ddy ack,
Di diddy um di, how shall I get back?'

'Stop singing,' cried Mig, 'and tell me how you got here!'

The Professor turned a merry eye on her. 'I don't know,' he chuckled, 'but somehow I am quite happy. Good-bye! See you again in the world some day!' He went on dancing; apparently he did not mind being labelled:

'Highly Lively Species of Mad Professor. Presented to the museum by the Horizon.'

'Poor man! He can't stay there,' thought Mig; 'if I ever get out of this with the Prince I shall try and take him along too. Now I wonder if the Prince is here.' She searched anxiously for him but could see nothing even remotely resembling a prince; still, the museum was so big that she had not got to the end of it, and when

the Witch came to fetch her at dinner-time, she was still confident of finding him soon.

'See,' said the Witch, pausing on the way out in front of a glass tank, 'this is my most treasured possession; at the bottom lies that which is very dear to me and others – see the ferms and weeds waving down there -' Mig looked and saw masses of weeds growing in the green depths of the tank and thought they were very uninteresting, till the creature continued: 'Those weeds improve my best spells, by reason of what they grow from,' She laughed in a bloodcurdling way, and passed on out of the museum with her new child 'Windsbreath'.

That night after supper the Witch took Mig for a drive. She harnessed her green goblins to the chariot, then throwing up in the air a long silken cord caught it on to the feet of the West Wind which was blowing the way she wanted to go, and off they went at a terrific pace. Out across the black courtyard, with a wild clattering over the cobbles, and the green goblins bobbed about and flew forward. Very high above, the feet of the West Wind were visible occasionally as a faint grey shape drifting between them and the moon.

Mig held her breath as the chariot plunged over the edge of the crag; down, down, till they reached a road and went bowling swiftly along its smooth white surface through the sleeping village. And now the Witch stood up to drive her steeds, tossing off songs about skulls and bones, the sound of which was lost in the rush of the West Wind about them. The village was left behind and they struck into a road which wound between tall upstanding corn; the Witch pulled up and tied the chariot to a post.

'What are you going to do?' asked Mig, as they jumped out and moved towards the corn which gleamed all greeny-silver in the pale light.

The Witch said nothing but glided through it, bending here and there to examine the ears more closely. Behind them the country stretched into a moonlit distance, and the road melted into the shadowy hills.

The Witch of Worum shook her head.

'They are not ready,' she muttered, 'not half grown. Were I to take them now there would be none next year.'

'No what?' asked the child, but the Witch merely said, 'We will go on to the irises.'

She seemed rather gloomy as they got into the chariot, and much to the West Wind's relief started off again. For he knew the people would be wondering why she had stopped blowing, and would never guess that the wicked Witch of Worum had hitched her car on to his feet, and then chained it up till she wished to move again.

They drove on, leaving the corn behind, till they came to a place where irises grew as far as one could see in a mist of purple and brown. The glory of the night increased at sight of them, for their thick heavy scent rose upon the night as though it were their voice. The witch approached them. Stronger and stronger the scent grew until it seemed as though they had some story and were trying to tell it in the only means possible to them. One other flower does this too, and that it the passion-flower.

Over the flowers the Witch spread her arms, then slowly raised them, working her fingers as though drawing something out of the very heart of the flowers. She stood there in the moonlight, her short writhing black hair gleaming, her garments pale green; and a little stream of what seemed like dust arose out of each iris. It was their souls. The child saw their pale delicate faces for one minute, then the witch stuffed them into a wallet hanging at her waist, easing them in with her long pointed fingers. When the soul of each flower in that huge stretch had been extracted, the Witch returned to Mig, whom she had left in the chariot, and jumped in.

'Home,' she said to the green things, and whipped them up. Mig looked back as they started off.

Already the irises were hanging their heads listlessly.

'Oh why did you take their souls?' she cried. 'To put in my museum,' grunted the strange creature,' and when the soul of the corn if grown I take that too. Every year I replenish my museum,

for the souls only last one year away from their flowers.'

Mig was silent. She felt very sad. 'And if you show any tender heartedness' said the Witch fiercely 'I'll take your soul too. Windsbreath and frog-born though you are!'

It was on the tip of Mig's tongue to say, 'You can't! I'm a Christian,' but realising that it would give away the fact that she was a mortal child, she wisely kept silent. But it was

In the following days the Witch began to be very harsh to poor Mig, and soon she became actually cruel. She took away her little golden bed and made Mig sleep at the foot of her own, where she received many a vicious kick, did the Witch happen to be feeling annoyed.

Over her daily job of dusting the museum Mig shed many tears and called on the Dawnchild to come to her rescue, but the Dawnchild was silent, and soon Mig began to feel desperate, for she had searched the museum from end to end and discovered nothing that looked like a Prince.

One morning she came to where the Professor was twirling happily. Occasionally he would talk to her a little, never stopping his ceaseless running round, and to-day he said: 'Di diddy um di – what do you think I heard the Witch saying to herself to-day – di ddy ack – very funny -' he went on with his song, and Mig feeling very curious, was disappointed that he would not go on. In vain she said, 'Well, what did she say?' The Professor only smiled foolishly and wagged his finger at her roguishly, saying, 'Ah, what indeed?'

Mig felt a strong desire to bite the finger, but deciding that his twirling was sending him really mad, went on with her work, determining to have nothing more to do with such a foolish old man. But next day, when she passed him with her head in the air, he called out coaxingly:

'Little girl, I'll tell you if you like – di-diddy-'

'Thanks, I don't want to hear,' she said haughtily.

'Bit I want to tell you,' he cried, and seeing that she was going on called after her:

'It's awfully exciting – di diddy ack -'

'Di diddy um di,' she said, 'to-night I shall have the glass tank taken to the cave and we shall eat him! Diddy um di -how shall I get back?'

'Who?' cried Mig suddenly, but the irritating old thing merely seized his coat-tails and went on dancing. Just as Mig was wondering whether the Prince was at the bottom of the tank she heard a furious noise outside, the door was opened by the Witch, and who should be dragged into the room but Belinda, securely held by two cat-footmen as big as herself!!! Behind her came Mr. Apply, more quietly, led by only one footman. Belinda's neat Alpine hat with a feather in it was pushed crooked, and with her purple cheeks and popping black eyes she looked for all the world as though she were going to burst.

Mig slipped quietly behind a tremendous dragon's heart in a glass case, and noticed with relief that Belinda no longer carried the reticule with the King of the Umpis in it. Afterwards Mig learnt that when her cousin had found that Mig had escaped her again, she grew so angry that she threw the reticule in the fire, where the King perished miserably in the flames, also that Belinda and Mr. Appleby had made it up and at the next new moon Belinda had waited in the garden by the sundial till spirits were abroad. Belinda having the Evil Eye was easily able to attract a horde of wicked spirits round her, whom she had fed with toadstool broth, after which they declared their willingness to conduct her and Mr. Appleby to the Worum. They were very seasick crossing the Midnight Sea, and had only been able to get up the Worum cliffs with the help of the evil spirits. And then the Witch had caught them in a fishing-net from her chariot, as they walked up the slope, and brought them home for her museum.

'It's disgraceful! It's disgraceful! I shall write to the papers about it!' shrieked Belinda indistinctly, for the Witch had stolen her teeth, thinking them a great curiosity. Mr Appleby remained very silent, but his long check legs quivered whenever the witch-woman bent her terrible eyes upon him.

'You, I think,' said the Witch to him, 'shall be hung up on the ceiling – a hook into your waistband and your arms and legs looped up like star-points, that will show off your check suit very well – and this woman too,' she continued, turning to Belinda, who was foaming with rage, 'she shall also be hung like a pheasant – till seasoned enough to be eaten – both of you!'

Belinda uttered a more piercing yell than she had yet managed, and fainted away in a cat-footman's arms, who laid her down in a relieved way, and started nibbling her hair. None of the inhabitants of the museum appeared in the slightest way concerned with these goings on; the business men continued trying to cheat each other, the Professor twirled, and the 'shoes of the dancer' danced unendingly under their glass case; heel and toe they pattered up and down.

While the Witch watched the footmen hanging up Belinda and Mr. Appleby, who were now green and yellow with fear, Mig slipped out unseen, and hid for the rest of the day in the banqueting-hall, for she had decided to follow the Witch down to the cave that night, in order to try and save the Prince whom she was now sure lay enchanted in the tank. She knew that the cave lay directly beneath the hall, for once in the middle of the night she had awoken very hungry and seeing that the Witch's bed was empty she had slipped down to the banqueting-hall to see if any food was left about. On reaching the hall she had heard fiendish yells and laughter and groans coming up from beneath her feet. This had led her to believe that these sounds must be coming from the cave, and so she had hidden till all was silent again and later she had seen the Witch return, coming from the passage that led to the red and silver room.

So now she hid under the table and waited till evening.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Mig Meets The Prince

When a far-away church bell in the town below started ringing at sunset, the door was thrown open by the footmen and the Witch tore in to her supper, evidently in a fearful temper: dirty grey rags were her clothes, with a necklace of live beetles in her hair, and her eyes fierce-darting.

'Where is Windsbreath?' she shrieked. 'The child has been hiding from me all day – I'll skin her alive when I get hold of her! And just as I'm holding a party in the cave to-night. We'll eat her too.'

She stormed and raved and threw the dishes at the cats, then ordered them out of her sight. As the door shut behind them, the Witch finished her last ox, then rose, and went to the little door. Trembling with excitement Mig followed, keeping carefully hidden.

Evidently the Witch thought she was late, for her feet flew down the passage until, just as the door of the red and silver chamber was in sight, she struck off down an opening on the left. This passage, Mig found, was all in pitchy darkness when she reached it.

However, she plunged bravely onward after the Witch, hoping that the latter would not discover her.

The path sloped gradually downwards. All was silent save for the patter of the Witch's footsteps ahead, and also when once Mig accidentally kicked a loose stone and sent it flying away into the darkness with a rattling echo. Horrified lest she should be found out she squeezed into a crevice in the wall and held her breath, but evidently the Witch did not hear, so presently she went on down again, running softly to catch up. She kept bumping her head against the rocky walls which felt cold and clammy; soon a dull green light filtered through the air, by which one could see that the walls were dripping damp, and were covered with extraordinary fungi. The light grew brighter and brighter until it resolved itself into a lurid flame coming up from the ground.

For one instant the Witch was visible, a shadowy grey figure before the green glow, then she jumped straight down into the heart of the light.

'Good gracious!' cried the child to herself, 'where's she jumped to?'

Mig ran up and stopped short at the edge of a huge hole in the ground whence came the light, then she knelt down and peered over. A cave lay below with a fire of pale green and rose and flame burning, in the centre, a fire which lighted up the glistening walls but left all the corners in solemn and mysterious darkness. All that is save one corner where the firelight was reflected on something long and big. It was the glass tank, and behind it the rocky wall was so uneven that it would be easy enough to climb down it, thought Mig. So when they Witch was busy stoking up the fire and muttering 'They are late – they are late', the child wormed herself along a narrow ledge till she was hanging directly over the glass case, then quickly clambered down unseen. There was just room enough to squeeze down between the glass case and the wall; there she hid, settling as comfortably as she could, and not having the vaguest idea how she was going to rescue the Prince. But somehow she had such trust in all her fairy friends that she felt bound to come

through all right. She waited gazing through the glass, but the weeds were too thick to reveal anything. The Witch waited too, sitting on her haunches and tapping her long thin fingers restlessly on the ground. The fire grew low.

'When will they, whoever they are, come?' wondered Mig, and nearly screamed when she saw several grey shapes slink out of the shadows, and range themselves round the fire beside the Witch of Worum.

They were old and grey and colourless with horrid bony faces, and they sat there silently, cracking their fingers. The Witch of Worum looked elfishly beautiful beside them, but as wicked as her friends.

Soon the circle was complete, save for the eighth, and when she arrived crawling on all-fours, pushing the wisps of hair out of her eyes, and apologising for her lateness, the meeting began. The Witch rose to her feet and threw in a handful of some powder, so that the fire glared fiercely again. Then joining hands they whirled round the fire, the breeze caused by their movements blowing the smoke in and out amongst them.

Sometimes a flaming log fell out of the centre of the fire and then one of them would twitch it back again with her long toes, or playfully hurl it at her friends. Their dance grew wilder and wilder; the smoke now formed into a gigantic snake's head, now into a lion's, and now that of a rat. Whenever it looked like a rat, fierce yells of joy went up from the horrid creatures, for they worshipped rats, and Mig was nearly choking with the desire to laugh when in the mazes of their dance their hang became tangled up together so that they could not separate, but stood there stamping with their faces in a bunch over the fire.

'If only they would do that when I want to escape,' thought Mig.

And now bobbing out of the shadows came a line of grey cats, and dancing round the fire disappeared.

'Evil is growing!' growled one witch. '"Tis time for spells.'

'Worum Witch, what have you for us to munch to-night?' quoth

another.

'A tasty dish,' chuckled the Witch. 'See yon glass tank -you shall eat of that from which those weeds grow!'

'A poor joke,' mumbled one toothless old thing; 'weed roots are not to my taste. Give me a nice juicy mortal.'

'Exactly!' cried the Witch. 'Come look into yon tank, and tell me what lies at the bottom!' She made a pass above the water which immediately parted, the thick weeds waved aside, and a young man was seen to be lying there, apparently asleep, and deathly pale. The hags all crowded round and peered over the rim, poking and pinching him, but he did not move. Mig crouched trembling in her corner, thankful for the shadows of the witches which the fire threw over her, hiding her from their gaze. So evil were they, however, that their shadows lay thick and damp upon her, leaving her choking for breath when they went back to the fire.

When they were seated again, and listening to the Witch's account of his capture, Mig bent closer and looked through the glass. The weeds were still parted and she saw the Prince's gentle pure face and the fair gold hair that waved back from it. Suddenly a sigh shook him, while a look of suffering passed over his countenance. Mig knocked gently on the side of the tank; the hags did not hear for they were quarrelling as to whom they should eat first, the Prince or Mig, when she should be found.

His eyes opened and looked straight into Mig's. She smiled and longed to speak to him as he lay there under the water, the Witch's spell preventing him from drowning, but owing to the water and the glass sides of the tank she could not maker herself heard, so she laid her fingers on her lips, nodding cheerfully, and a look of gladness and surprise came into the young man's grey eyes. Mig determined to save him.

The Witch was now standing up with a bowl raised in both hands.

'Ai-e-ya Ai-e-ya,' she was chanting, with a peculiar rhythm, 'he who lies there in the weeds of the tank shall be raised.

Deep beneath the weeds of the water there floats a still form.
How his white hands pulled and clutched the long weeds and water!
But he's enchanted and won't rise again to the surface
Till I the potion shall brew with a haie and a yaie ya!
And he who was stole from the Mountain-Top Lady who sighed
Shall rise and be eaten when we pour the brew on the water
Before we can get at him we must remove all the water...all the water.'

Mig did not listen to the end of the chant, for an idea had struck her. Why wait until the potion had released the Prince from the tank? He was lying in water, and had not the water-gnome said, 'if you are near water and want help, jump in and cry "Oho! to the North, South, East and West"'?

She would test this offer. Choosing a moment when the witches were engrossed in their spells, she climbed on to a boulder, then dropped into the glass tank, just near the Prince's feet. It was so big that she stood up to her waist in water; turning to the north, south, east and west, she said softly, 'Oho!' Immediately in the distance there came the sound of a faint splash, and little pattering feet came nearer and nearer! Mig's eyes became fixed on a hole in the rocks, through which gleamed black water in a pool. From the banks of this pool hurried the water-gnome, jumped through the hole and perched on the edge of the tank, rubbing his elbow where he had knocked it on the rocks.

'You called me?' he said.

'Yes,' whispered Mig quickly, for at any moment the witches might turn and see what was happening. 'Get the Prince out of here. I think he can rise when the enchanted water has been lifted off him.'

'Is that all?' said the gnome, and leaning down lapped steadily till the tank was dry. Then, looking slightly bulgy, he nodded po-

litely and crawled away.

The Prince sat up and hailed Mig as his deliverer. He made so much noise about it that she whispered hastily:

'There's not a moment to be lost – let's run!'

'Where?' asked the Prince.

'I don't know,' said Mig; 'let's try that hole that the gnome came through.' Without another word the Prince climbed out of the tank, feeling quite strong and well, and began to follow Mig through the hole in the wide passage beyond, where lay the pool. It was so narrow, that the Prince got stuck half-way through, and suddenly one of the hags saw him and raised a fearful din.

'Worum Witch, Worum Witch, where is our supper? Worum Witch Worum, it's crawling away!'

The Worum Witch sprang forward and seized the Prince's legs, while Mig the other side of the crevise clutched at his head. The Prince yelled loudly, and tried to help himself through with his hands, but it was no good, and he was just being pulled back when the water-gnome came running up.

'Pretend to let go,' she said, so Mig just kept hold loosely, then pretended to let go. The witches who were pulling hard suddenly topped over backwards and the Prince got safely through.

'Plunge into the water,' called the gnome. 'I will follow.'

They all three plunged in, the gnome last, just as the witches hurled their skinny bodies through the hole, and stood for one minute shrieking on the bank, then plunged in too.

Mig and the Prince swam quickly on into the darkness, but the gnome stayed behind paddling in the water.

'Oh, Gnome, Gnome!' shrieked Mig, 'they will get you!'

'Not they,' replied the gnome. His hair flew up like a lid and out of the top of his head came a long spurt of water which fell into the pool with a hiss between him and the witches. With a cry of rage they remained still, unable to get beyond the spot where it had fallen, for it was the enchanted water which the gnome had swal-

lowed, and which he had been saving up for emergencies; when he swallowed too much he always let it out of his brains.

Then he swam after the others.

After some time their feet touched the ground again, and they were soon wading up a shallow slope, till at last they reached dry ground. A dull roar was plainly to be heard now, which shook the sides of the caves, and soon they came to a place where water sprang up out of the rocky floor, disappearing into the darkness above.

'Where are we?' whispered Mig, frightened of the sound.

'Under the Water Hill,' said the gnome. 'Now I must leave you! Keep straight ahead – good-bye!'

He plunged upwards with the water and vanished.

Mig and the Prince were gazing after him when they heard a chuckle beside them.

'Got you, my pretty dears,' said a low voice, and the Witch of Worum sprang forward to take hold of them. As it was her spell the enchanted water had not stopped her coming. But when she laid a cruel hand on Mig's back she sprang back with a snarl of pain.

'What have you on your back?' she shrieked.

'The clover-mark,' cried Mig gleefully; then the Prince seized her hand and they ran straight on for a long time, closely followed by the Witch, who tore shouting after them.

And now the path sloped upwards, and a faint glimmer of light showed far ahead.

Mig's magic shoes made her run as quickly as the Prince, but the Witch was gaining on them every minute, tearing along, her short black hair flying behind her. Nearer and nearer came the glimmer and all the walls seemed red now and shaking. A familiar sound dawned on Mig's ears; it was the laughter like a thousand tins on the shore of the Midnight Sea! As they ran up the remaining distance to the opening through which the light came, Mig realised that they must be inside the cliff-face, and that its mouth was a hidden way out of the Worum.

As if to emphasise this, the mouth suddenly blew them out. They hurtled through the air so far that they landed just by the waves. It was light here, though apparently inside the Worum it was night; the hags still danced round the box, never dreaming that its contents were stolen.

'Oh for a boat – a boat!' cried Mig.

'One certainly wants a boat!' cried a well-known voice, and the Lemound came leaping towards her.

'Why, it's the Lemound!' exclaimed Mig, then glanced back. The Witch was climbing slowly and painfully down the face of the cliff; which kept twitching her up again with disgust plainly written on its face.

And now across the Midnight Sea came a sound of singing as a beautiful ship hove in sight and made slowly for land.

Mig gave a cry of joy, for it was crowded with the Dawnchildren, while in the prow stood her own beloved Dawnchild with the Old Bird. Everywhere the children were hanging over the sides of the vessel and clinging to the rigging, while above it drifted a cloud of white birds circling round the masts.

'Oh, quick! quick!' cried Mig to them. 'Look! the Witch has got down!'

The Witch reached the foot of the cliff just as the ship furled its sails, let go its anchor and a small boat put off for the shore.

When the Witch saw this, she paused but one instant to tell the old grey hags about Mig's stealing their possession (for she had discovered the truth about her 'Windsbreath'), then ran down to the edge of the sea, followed by the old grey hangs, all mad with rage at being tricked by a mortal. But they were too late.

Silvery arms stretched out and drew Mig, the Prince and the Lemound into the boat and rowed them out of reach to the ship.

The Witch and the old grey sisters champed on the shore but could not do anything, for they were made from Worum mud and could not live in the Midnight Sea. As the little boat reached the ship a high agitated female voice floated to them from the top of

the cliffs:

'Hey! Stop a moment, please!'

There were Belinda and Mr. Appleby with their travelling-rugs and bags in their hands! Tired of being strung up on the museum ceiling, as though for ever flying towards each other, they had managed to escape, and now stood there, hoping to be rescued.

'Does that boat go to England?' screamed Belinda in the usual harsh voice in which she spoke to porters. She could not see who was in it.

'Full up! full up!' called the Old Bird.

'Shall we leave her behind?' asked the Dawnchild.

'Oh no!' cried Mig, 'She's been cruel to me, but the Witch is too awful a fate even for her. Let her be punished another way!'

'Let her be punished,' shrieked every one in delight, 'let's take her to Dawnland and try her in Court!'

So the Old Bird was told to fly ashore, and fetch Belinda and Mr. Appleby off.

The Old Bird flew off and eventually returned with them both. At first Miss Belinda had refused to hang on to one wing, thinking it most shocking and unladylike to fly, but when the Old Bird, who became impatient, pretended to leave her and went off with Mr. Appleby clinging gaily to the left wing, his long legs trailing in the air, she cried and begged to be taken too.

Imagine their disgust when they saw who manned the vessel, but they were allowed to say nothing, being speedily pushed into two tubs, and tied up. Their punishment had begun!

And then they set sail for Dawnland. Soon afterwards the Midnight Sea became dark again, for it had remained light till every one was taken safely aboard.

When all was quite dark, a shower of stars fell suddenly down on the deck, from the sky, and changed into children. They were the earth-children, freed by Mig. They clasped her in their arms and the boat sailed on to the sound of the children's voices singing.

And when the sound floated back to the shore, the old grey hags forgot Mig and returned to their dancing, but the Witch of Worum lay down and wept, and kicked holes in the sand till her feet fell off.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Dawnland

The boat sailed on and on to the east and gradually the darkness grew thinner.

The waves rushed up to her bow, there cleaving in two and frothing past on either side as the good ship cut through them. Behind lay a boiling wake of foam, and now the shine of the Dawnchild was reflected in the waters. The stars paled, the chill of dawn grew in the air and the skies brightened until a peculiar misty sea-coloured light lit up everything. Rocks rose up out of the waters, to which were clinging thousands of tiny babies half-buried in the seaweed, or swimming round and round. These were baby mermaids of course, but they had not grown their tails yet.

Belinda and Mr. Appleby were still imprisoned in their tubs, and screaming the place down.

As Mig passed them, Belinda Baggs stretched out her hand and caught Mig's sleeve.

'Let me out! let me out!' she squealed. 'Is this the way you repay my loving care?'

For one minute Mig pitied her and was about to untie her, but just at that moment Belinda pinched her hard from force of habit, so Mig passed on to where the Lemound and the Prince stood talking. The Lemound was saying:

'Yes, my dear sir! A crushing disappointment! All the way to the Worum, and when I got there a peasant directed me to a graveyard, where, he said, I might get help about the last line of my verse.'

'Oh yes! the last line!' cried Mig, joining in, 'did you find it?'

The Lemound started crying into his handkerchief.

'Y-yes!' he sobbed, 'but it was quite dead! The g-graveyard was where the last lines of poems are buried, and I f-found mine there. Oh, it is too bad! And after I came all that way. The grave-digger told me he had only buried it that morning. It grew so tired of waiting to be written that it lay down and d-died.'

It seemed rather funny to cry about, Mig thought, but soon forgot it all in the wonder of everything around. The cold steely tinge of the sea was now lit up by a yellow glow. They sailed right for the centre of this glow, and so bright was it that everything became one whirling mass of light which so blinded and hurt the poor earth-children's eyes that they covered them with their hands.

When Mig at length opened her eyes, she found they had become used to this light.

Suddenly a terrific bump came which threw all the children flat on the deck.

'What is that?' they cried.

'Nothing much,' was the Dawnchild's gay answer.

'It is low water and we touched as we went over the horizon.'

'Over the Horizon into the Dawn,' echoed a thousand sweet voices, and all the earth-children sang for joy to think of the happy life awaiting them. As each song left their mouths it changed into a dove which gaily flew up to join the flock of birds accompanying the ship. The horizon now lay behind them, and Mig at once saw that it was in reality a sharp grey wall rising out of the water.

'Now I know my governess was wrong' said she 'when she said the horizon was an imaginary line.'

'Ah,' replied the Dawnchild, 'in the world that is quite true, but when you have passed through the Horizon, Enchantment and Gnomia, over the Midnight Sea and into the Worum, then you begin to see with fairy eyes.'

'I am quite a travelled young gentlewoman, as old Belinda would say,' laughed Mig. 'What are you going to do to her and Mr. Appleby?'

'Wait!' said the Dawnchild mysteriously. 'Look!'

Mig gazed at the splendid vision now before her – stretching on either side as far as she could see lay a long low wall of mother-o-pearl, over the top of which hung a pale mist, shimmering with dewdrops.

In the centre of the wall stood a tall golden gate between marble pillars, towards which they slowly directed their course.

The Dawnchildren sprang up into the rigging again, singing triumphantly, and from the prow blared forth a trumpet-call. The Old Bird stood there importantly with a silver trumpet.

Behind him stood twelve Dawnchildren with twelve silver trumpets, and ere the last echoes of his call had died away into the mist, theirs caught it up, on a shrill sweet note.

Tinkling out across the misty water floated a thin, high answer, as two elfin people sprang on to the marble pillars and gave their answer with long trumpets pointed to the sky. When this had happened the golden gate swung slowly open, and the ship sailed through into a wide canal. The gates closed.

'We are in Dawnland,' cried the Dawnchildren.

'We are in Dawnland,' cried the earth-children and nearly wept for joy.

The banks were crowded with shining elves who tossed lupin-flowers into their midst, plucked from the many bushes around.

'Why is it all lupins?' asked every one, and they were told that

this was the chosen flower of the King of Dawnland. Gradually the bushes grew denser and denser as they sailed up the canal, till at length they were surrounded by lups of every colour from warmest blue to palest pearl. At dusk the fairy lupins would glow, lighting up the way, rearing their lamp-like heads on curved branches.

The Prince stood at the side of the boat and gazed rather wistfully at all the glory around them, as the Dawnchild joined him.

'I am thankful for my rescue,' he said, 'but where, oh where, is my princess?'

'Yonder, Prince,' said the Dawnchild.

Far ahead a mountain glittered through the veil of mist. She pressed her hand over the Prince's eyes.

'What do you see?' she said.

'I see a lady seated on a mountain-top,' said the Prince, 'her shoulders droop sadly. She raises her head – why, it is my princess!' he exclaimed gladly.

'Let me go to her!'

'No, Prince,' said the fairy-child, 'for she will have arrived at my father's Court as soon as we. I have sent a messenger to her who will drive her in my father's fastest chariot. See, she has already left the mountain-top.'

The ship sailed on through the lupins, and suddenly Mig heard a well-known sound in the air – the rattle of wheels, and a cracked laugh -!

'Haha!' said the Noseyface as he became visible and reined up in the air beside her. 'Like the land of lupins, eh?'

'Very much, thank you,' said Mig, rather afraid of what practical joke he might play on her.

He chuckled again.

'Let's go and look at Belinda!' he said. 'We've just ten minutes before we reach the Court.'

Nothing loth, Mig accompanied him to where Belinda and Mr. Appleby were imprisoned, bent in two – rammed into tubs – so

that only their heads and feet stuck out.

'Good morning, madam,' he said, tying up his cart in the air, and doffing his little red cap.

'G'morn',' mumbled Belinda sulkily, her eyes darting hither and thither, seeking some means of escape.

Mr. Appleby was fast asleep, with quite a peaceful smile on his face.

'You seem rather looped up into knots,' remarked the Noseyface in a polite tone. 'Can I do anything? Do you know how the lupin got its name?'

'No, and I don't want to,' shrieked Miss Baggs in sudden fury. 'If I ever get out, I'll kill Mig, and drown you in boiling water.' She kicked viciously, and with such a jerk that hte barrel overbalanced and she fell on her face. The Noseyface helped Mig put it the right way up again and said gravely:

'You are old enough to know better, Miss B aggs, in spite of your being bent up in that funny position.'

Belinda gnashed her teeth and clenched her toes.

'Do you know what you are like the lupin?' asked the Noseyface, as he bent forward and tickled her nose.

'Because some one's been loopin' you up,' he cried, and they both ran away from her kicking feet. She was angry at having been taken in by such a feeble joke! Sail had been gradually shortened as they came up the canal so that they were scarcely moving when Mig saw a beautiful flight of mother-o'-pearl steps leading up to a gate among the lupins, a little way ahead, at the end of the canal. At the top stood a tall handsome King whose clothes were a mass of jewels.

He held out his arms, and the Dawnchild flew out of the boat and straight into them with an excited cry of 'Father!' Silver ropes were thrown to elves ashore who made them fast around mother-o'-pearl bollards, and when the boat was quite stationary at the steps, the other Dawnchildren all 'rolled up' and finally disappeared inside the Dawnchild, like little bits of quicksilver. She shone more

brightly than ever, as she called the earth-children to come out and be introduced.

They felt very shy, for as they had never been to Court they did not know what to do.

'I think we ought to bow or curtsy, or something,' whispered little Fanny, whom Mig had met again. So Mig pretended to herself that she was not nervous, and headed the procession of children up the steps.

The Old Bird hopped beside her and whispered, 'Mind you curtsy,' so that it was all right, and Mig knew what to do.

She curtsied fairly gracefully, and was very pleased when the King said in his rather jolly voice:

'How-d'you-do, Mig? I've been wanting to meet you for a long time. We are very pleased with your behaviour.'

Just then the crowd of Dawnlanders parted, and a beautiful lady came sweeping through them.

It was the Lady of the Mountain-Tops, and she came expressly to thank the earth-child for rescuing her lover from the Worum.

While she was speaking, the King drew aside the Old Bird and spoke to him, looking very mysterious, and presently two pages jumped up and blew their silver trumpets. Every one became silent as the Old Bird made the following announcement:

'I am asked to say that to-morrow, the Most Royal Sister of the King (hitherto known as the "Lady Who Sighs upon The Mountain-Tops") will wed the Prince of Everbeautiful. Before the wedding, however, the guests are asked to assemble in the Judgement Hall, to try the case of Miss Belinda Baggs and Mr. Appleby!'

'Hear! hear!' cried the Noseyface gruffly, and every one clapped loudly.

The Old Bird went on:

'After this the wedding will proceed joyously, with much pomp and splendour. The invitations are already being issued all over the lands of the Horizon, Enchantment, Gnomia, Dawnland and

other lands, by birdwing.' (They call their post 'birdwing' because birds flew with the letters in their mouths.)

There was much clapping of hands, and then every one disappeared to prepare for the event.

Belinda squealed dismally in her tub all the time, but Mr. Appleby snored sweetly through it all.

And now Mig had time to look about her.

There were nothing but lupins and lupins everywhere, from which came many bird-noises.

The King was very jolly. He swung Mig up on his shoulder, knocking his crown crooked, and said she should be his niece now and call him 'Uncle Y'majesty', which made every one laugh. And the Dawnchild ran along beside him holding his free hand, and the Old Bird walked on his right, for he was Prime Minister of Dawnland. And the other earth-children trooped after them, singing and laughing and quarrelling, and readily making friends with the Court officials and other fairies who walked with them.

Behind them came the tubs containing the villainous Belinda and Mr. Appleby, slung on poles and carried by four fairy footmen.

Suddenly the path they all trod among the flowers wound round a corner, and there stood the palace of the King.

They reached it, and were going up the steps, when a footman hurried forward and asked where they should put the barrels.

'Oh, in the courtyard,' said the Old Bird carelessly, but the footman said hastily:

'Oh, if it please you, sir, we can't get near the barrels. The Lidy bit me 'and just now something 'orrible, and 'E is using 'is feet freely in kicking right and left.'

'Dear! dear!' said the Old Bird. 'Well, knock the barrels over, and roll them along with a long pole.'

How Belinda shrieked and threatened revenge! But Mr. Appleby made the best of it, and managed to snatch a little sleep again. Soon the day passed and it was twilight. The moon was

rising; a mist lay over the lupins which glowed like lamps as the fairies again led the children down the lupin path to a greasy knoll on the right, where a lovely feast lay spread on a huge mushroom.

They all sat round on little toadstools, and the King and Queen presided, with gracious and beaming smiles for every one. The Queen was the sweetest, fat fairy, with the kindest face.

As they drank honey nectar, and ate strawberry-flavoured dewdrops and other things, music came tinkling out of the long grass around. It was the familiar, fish-bone music of the gnomes, and afterwards Mig met them and made it up with them about the book.

At length the moon began to set, and a party of very tired earth-children were bundled back to the palace to bed.

Mig's Bedroom was very nice. It was hung with rose petals, the furniture was pink, and had the funny, fairy look about it, and the bedclothes were soft, warm, pink clouds.

There was a funny old fairy-maid to help her undress and put her to bed, and when this was done she hobbled off to help the other earth-chldren.

Mig lay down in bed.

It was very comfortable but she felt just a little alone because she had no mother. Just then a tap came at the door and round the corner of it the King poked his head. He had exchanged his jewelled robes for an amethyst dressing-gown with pyjamas to match.

'I've come to tuck you,' he said in his jolly voice, 'I thought you might be lonely, and we always tuck each other up here. Er – you needn't tell the Queen I came. She might laugh.'

'What fun!' said Mig, as he tucked her up, and then after kissing her good night, started to creep out. Just then the door was pushed gently open and the Queen rustled in, so the King hid behind it, then crept out unseen while the Queen came over to Mig's bed.

She had taken off her crown, her hair was tied up in pretty little

bows all over her head, and her dressing-gown was of quilted rainbow silk. She wore spectacles for reading in bed.

'I've come to tuck you,' she said, 'we all tuck each other up here, because we love each other so. You must call me Auntie Majesty. Good night, darling.' She hugged Mig and went out of the room.

Presently a rap came at the door, and this time it was the Mountain-Top Lady, and the Prince. His eyes were shining as he bent over and tickled Mig till she chuckled. They both re-tucked her, and kissed her a lot for they were very happy.

'Do you love her very much?' whispered Mig when the Prince kissed her.

'Too much,' laughingly whispered the Prince to his lady, as they went out of the room.

Last of all came the sound of flying feet along the passage and the Dawnchild burst in, dancing about in her silver night-dress and bare toes.

'Dawnchild! Dawnchild! Come back at once,' called agitated voices in the distance. 'You know how tired and cross you'll be to-morrow – and you'll look so pale at the wedding -' The voices trailed away, the Dawnchild fled, Mig pulled up the cloud-blankets and fell asleep at once.

Down below in the courtyard Mr. Appleby spent a miserable night, for Belinda yelped unceasingly till daybreak, rendering sleep impossible.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Belinda's Trial and The Wedding

There was that warm, still feeling in the air, when Mig woke next morning, that means that it is going to be a very hot and lovely day later on. Across the silence of the morning came the Court parrot's shrill whistle, and his latest squawk, copied from Belinda's screams of the night before.

Presently the Dawnchild crept in and got into Mig's bed. They talked excitedly until the Queen bustled in.

'Get up, you lazy children!' she cried. 'Your cloud-sheets are waiting to float out of the window and join the sun.'

And no sooner had they got up than off sailed the clouds.

'It's a lovely day,' said Mig, skipping about; 'it feels like Saturday morning here, when there's no lessons.'

'Now that's very funny that you should say that,' observed the Queen, 'because it is always Saturday here. In fact the old chronicles still refer to Dawnland as the Land of Saturday Morning.... Lubelia!'

At the call the old nurse-fairy hobbled in with a little heap of

glittering clothes over her arm.

'See, Mig, Lubelia has brought you some lovely wedding-clothes,' said the Queen. 'We had the fairies down in the orchard, spinning them all night.'

With these words Lubelia slipped the loveliest blue and silver garments over Mig's head; then they all went down to breakfast. Hardly had they finished than the first guests began to arrive, including the Lemound, who was spending a few days in Dawnland.

'What a nuisance!' said the King, who was disappointed because there had been no sunflower-honey for breakfast. 'Can't they be shown into the ante-room. I haven't finished yet – I want another cup of coffee.'

But he soon recovered his good temper, and every one trooped off to the Judgement Hall to see the fun at the trial of Belinda and Mr. Appleby.

When every one was seated, the Old Bird called for the prisoners, who were then rolled in, still in their barrels.

Belinda was in a terrible fury. She rolled her eyes, gnashed her teeth, and bit and grabbed at anyone who came too near.

The King got up and said:

'Belinda, you are a horrible lady! Your sins are so many and so black that I can't bother to recite them!'

'Hear! hear!' called every one, and the King leant down out of his judge's seat tot he Old Bird, who was sitting near, and said to him, 'How does that speech strike you?'

'A little bit undignified,' said the Old Bird. 'Ask her if she's sorry.'

'Are you sorry?' asked His Majesty.

'How are you insult me so!' yelled Belinda, and she got so excited and wriggled so much that the barrel hopped about. 'Let me get at Mig, I'll sorry her – I'll kill her!'

'How shall we punish her!'

'I won't be punished,' stormed Belinda, 'I'm GROWN-UP! Let me go.'

'Shall we have a good old-fashioned punishment, and put her in a sack full of nails and roll it about among the stinging-nettles of the waste fields?'

'Yes! Yes!'

'Shall we sew her in a dead fish's skin and sell her by the pound like salmon?'

'Yes! Yes!'

'Shall we pinch her as she pinched Mig?'

'Yes! Yes!'

Belinda went green with fright and fury and said she had never meant any harm.

She even tried to blame her friend Mr. Appleby for it all, and he was not really a wicked man. So it was no good; the villainous woman was carried away, and had all the punishments inflicted on her, save that they found that they could not sell her by the pound for she was so tough that she could not be cut.

Then came Mr. Appleby's turn. He looked trembly and pale and kept swallowing inaudibly.

'Mr. Appleby,' said the King sternly, 'we know that you were not nearly as bad as Belinda, but a man of your age should know better. You are annoying and boring, so you shall have a boring punishment.' He turned to the guards. 'Take the gentleman down to the sea in his tub' he ordered 'and provide him with a paddle. He shall paddle himself back to England.'

'B-but how shall I know the way?' wailed the unfortunate man as he was carried off in the tub.

'It's on the right-hand side of the map,' called the King after him, 'you can't miss it.'

And then he seized his ruby-coloured coat-tails, and danced down the middle of the court in great joy.

'Come to the wedding now, good people,' he called. Mig marvelled

that such a wonderful man as the King of Dawnland should have such a lot of fun in him, but she soon learnt that he was very, very good, and had never grown out of his love of jokes, although he could be stern on occasions.

The wedding feast was held under some may-trees. Just as it started, the footmen came running up, all bowing and backing.

'Make way for the illustrious sister of the Queen of Dawnland,' they called. A beautiful woman came sweeping up to the Queen and embraced her tenderly.

The Queen was just saying 'My dear sister! How pleased I am that you were able to come after all these years' when Mig, who thought that the stranger's face seemed well known to her, realised who it was! At the same minute, the Queen's sister turned and scanned the crowd.

'Some one's heart called me,' she said and then her eye fell on the earth-child. 'Mignonette! Mig!' she cried.

'Mother!!!' gasped Mig, and ran into her arms. And then it all came out, that Mig's mother was half a fairy, as may have been mentioned before, and how she had not really died, but had been called to a land in the Horizon to join her husband, who, though not a fairy, had gone there many years before, when Mig was still a babe.

The Royal family of Dawnland were as surprised as anyone to find all this out, and one of the exciting things to be realised was that the King and Queen really were Mig's uncle and aunt, and the Dawnchild was her cousin! When the excitement had died down, they went on with the wedding. The ceremony ended with the Prince and his Lady being led to the lupins, where all stood silent.

'If the lupin-pods pop' said the Dawnchild 'it means good luck all their life.'

Suddenly the pods began bursting with a dry crackling sound-one-two-three.

'The omen! The omen!' cried every one.

At the third crackle the Prince and the Mountain-Top Lady rose up in the still, sweet air, fluttering their shining, new wings.

(These were the gifts of the fairies.)

They paused but one instant to shower down lupin-flowers on the happy throng, then rose up into the blue, calling farewell.

And so Mig came to live in Dawnland and be happy ever after. She often saw her mother who promised that one day Mig would be able to come and live with her, and meanwhile she was so happy in Dawland that she forgot all her unhappy life with Belinda at Hildred Hollow.

It was rather a nuisance that Belinda should survive all her punishments, because they did not quite know what to do with her. It must have been the last remains of Umpi-power

In this job she became quite tame, and any day may be seen shuffling about in a pair of torn carpet slippers with a pail of dirty water and a broom.

And now we will leave Mig in Dawnland, and you will all know that after passing through so many adventures she was bound to be happy in such a wonderful place.

Children, should you ever gaze hard at the sunset some fine evening, and think only beautiful thoughts, perhaps for one minute you too may see Mig and the Dawnchild stretched across the silver clouds, or you may hear the kindly cracked laugh of the Noseyface as he drives up your counterpane.

If so, you must count yourselves very lucky. Most grown-ups cannot hear or see these things, but if you keep the memory of them in your heart, you will have a hidden well of happiness to draw from on the dullest, wettest day.