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Star of Light

Patricia St. John

Revised by Mary Mills

Illustrated by Gary Rees

MOODY PUBLISHERS
CHICAGO

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Kinza



A little girl came running down the side of the mountain one midday in spring. Pulling her cotton dress up around her knees, she skipped as lightly as a lamb on her bare brown feet, leaping over the bright orange marigolds that shone up at her. Baby goats jumped among the wildflowers, and the storks had begun to build their nests on the tops of the thatched houses.

Rahma was seven years old. She was small because she never had enough to eat. Her stepfather and his elder wife didn't like her and sometimes beat her. Her clothes were very ragged, and she had to work very hard. But today she was going to have a treat, and nothing could spoil her happiness. She had been

asked to look after the goats alone while her brother went on some mysterious trip with their mother.

She was free and alone with just the goats and storks for company—two whole hours to play in the sunshine with the goat kids, with no one to shout at her, or make her grind the millstone, or carry heavy buckets of water.

She spotted Hamid, her brother, rounding up a couple of mischievous black kids who were trying to get into a patch of young wheat. Spring was making them feel excited, and they were jumping about all over the place. Hamid joined in with them and then Rahma, too, her smooth dark hair blowing about her face, her black eyes shining brightly.

Laughing and shouting together, they steered the kids away from the patch of wheat and on to the open hillside where the rest of the flock was scattered. Then Hamid turned, surprised, to look at his little sister. He had not often seen her so happy and carefree, for country girls were taught to behave themselves properly.

“What have you come for?” he asked.

“To look after the goats. Mother wants you.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know—she wants you to go somewhere. She has been crying and looking at Little Sister. I think perhaps Little Sister is ill.”

Her sparkling eyes looked sad as she remembered her mother’s tears, for she loved her mother—only the sunshine and freedom had made her forget all about them.

“All right,” said Hamid, “but take good care of the

goats. Here's a stick for you."

He turned away and climbed the valley between the two green arms of the mountains. He walked fast because he did not want to keep his mother waiting, but he did not skip or look about him as Rahma had done, for his mind was full of questions.

Why did his mother look so worried and full of fear these days? Why was she always hiding away his baby sister, keeping her out of sight whenever she heard her husband or the older wife approaching? Of course, neither of them had ever really liked Baby Sister, but they knew she was there, so why hide her? Mother even seemed afraid of Hamid and Rahma playing with the baby nowadays. She would drive them away and hide in a corner of the room, her little daughter clasped against her, and always with that fear in her eyes. Was it evil spirits she feared? Or poison? Hamid did not know, but perhaps today his mother would tell him. He walked faster.

He sighed as he climbed the hill, because until a few months ago his mother had never looked frightened, and he and Rahma had never been knocked about or considered in the way. They had lived with their mother and their father, who loved them, in a little thatched home down the valley. There had been three other curly-headed children younger than Rahma, but they had started coughing and grown thin. When the snow fell, and there was hardly any bread or fuel, they grew weaker and died within a few weeks of each other. Their little bodies were buried on the eastern slope of the mountain facing the sunshine, and marigolds and daisies grew on their graves.

Their father coughed that winter, too, but no one took any notice because, after all, a man must earn his living. So he went on working, and plowed his fields in spring and sowed his grain. Then he came home one night and said he could work no more. Until the following autumn, he lay on the rush mat and grew weaker. Zohra, his wife, and Hamid and Rahma gathered in the ripened corn and gleaned what they could so they could buy him food, but it was no use. He died, leaving his wife, still young and beautiful, a poor widow with two little children.

They sold the house and the goats and the hens and the patch of corn, and went to live with their grandmother. A few months later Little Sister was born, bringing fresh hope and sunshine to the family. They called her Kinza, which means “treasure,” and everyone loved and cuddled her. Yet, strangely, she never played or clapped her hands like other babies. She slept a lot and often seemed to lie staring at nothing. Hamid sometimes wondered why she didn’t seem pleased with the bunches of bright flowers he picked for her.

When Kinza was a few months old, a man offered to marry their mother. She accepted at once, because she had no work and no more money to buy food for her three children, and the family moved to their new home.

It was not a very happy home. Si Mohamed, the husband, was already married to an older wife, but she had never had any children, so he wanted another wife. He did not mind taking Hamid, too, because a boy of nine would be useful to look after

the goats. He also thought Rahma could be a useful little slave girl about the house. But he could not see that a baby was any use at all, and he wanted to give Kinza away.

“Many childless women will be glad of a girl,” he said, “and why should I bring up another man’s baby?”

But Zohra had burst into tears and refused to do any work until he changed his mind, so he rather crossly agreed to let Kinza stay for a while. No more was said about it—unless perhaps something had been said during the past few weeks, something that Hamid and Rahma had not heard. Could that be why their mother held Kinza so close and looked so frightened?

A voice above Hamid called to him to run, and he looked up. His mother was standing under an old, twisted olive tree that threw its shade over a well. She carried two empty buckets, and baby Kinza was tied on her back with a cloth. She seemed in a great hurry about something.

“Come quick, Hamid,” she said impatiently. “How slowly you come up the path! Hide the buckets in the bushes—I only brought them as an excuse to leave the house, in case Fatima should want to know where I was going. Now, come with me.”

“Where to, Mother?” asked the little boy, very surprised.

“Wait till we get around the corner of the mountain,” replied his mother, leading the way up the steep, green grass and walking very fast. “People will see us from the well and will tell Fatima where

we have gone. Follow quickly. I'll tell you soon."

They hurried on until they were hidden from the village and were overlooking another valley. Zohra sat down and laid her baby in her lap.

"Look well at her, Hamid," she said. "Play with her and show her the flowers."

Hamid stared long and hard into the strangely old, patient face of his little sister, but she did not stare back or return his smile. She seemed to be looking at something very far away and did not see him at all. Suddenly feeling very afraid, he flicked his hand in front of her eyes, but she didn't move or blink.

"She's blind," he whispered at last. His lips felt dry and his face was white.

His mother nodded and quickly stood up. "Yes," she replied, "she's blind. I've known it for some time, but I haven't told Fatima or my husband because they will probably take her away from me. Why should they be bothered with another man's blind child? She can never work, and she will never marry."

She started to cry, and tears blinded her as she stumbled on the rough path.

Hamid caught hold of her arm. "Where are we going, Mother?" he asked her again.

"To the saint's tomb," answered his mother, hurrying on, "up behind the next hill. They say he is a very powerful saint and has healed many people, but Fatima has never given me the chance to go. Now she thinks I'm drawing water, and we must return with the buckets full. I wanted you to come with me, because it's a lonely path and I was afraid to go by

myself.”

They climbed silently to a small cave that had been hollowed out of the rock. There was a bush outside with many dirty, rolled-up pieces of paper tied to its branches. These all told tales of sorrow and sickness. People brought their burdens to the bones of this dead man, and they all went home unhealed and un comforted.

They laid Kinza at the mouth of the cave, then Zohra lifted herself up again, calling on the name of a god whom she didn't know, and the prophet Mohammed. It was her last hope. As she prayed, a cloud passed over the sun and a cold shadow fell on the baby. Kinza shivered and began to cry and reached out for her mother's arms. Zohra gazed eagerly into her little daughter's face for a moment, and then picked her up with a disappointed sigh. God had not listened, for Kinza was still blind.

Hamid and his mother almost ran down the hill. They were late, and the sun was already setting behind the mountains. The storks flew past with their rattling cry, black against the sky. Hamid was angry and bitterly disappointed. What was the good of it? Kinza would never see. God did not seem to care, and the dead saint would do nothing to help. Perhaps he wasn't interested in baby girls.

They reached the well in silence. Hamid drew the water for his mother, gave her the buckets, then dashed off down the valley to collect Rahma and the goats. He met them halfway up the hill, for Rahma was afraid of the evening shadows and had wanted to get home. She held her brother's hand, and the

goats, who also wanted to go home, huddled against their legs.

“Where did you go?” asked Rahma.

“To the saint’s tomb,” answered Hamid. “Rahma, our little sister is blind. Her eyes see nothing but darkness—that’s why Mother hides her away. She does not want Fatima and Si Mohamed to know.”

Rahma stood still, horrified. “Blind?” she echoed. “And the saint—couldn’t he make her see?”

Hamid shook his head. “I don’t think that saint is much good,” he said rather boldly. “Mother went there before, when Father coughed, but nothing happened. Father died.”

“It is the will of God,” said Rahma, and shrugged her shoulders. Then, clinging close together because night was falling, they climbed the hill, and the goats’ eyes gleamed like green lanterns in the dark.

“I hate the dark,” whispered Rahma with a little shiver.

Hamid stared up into the deep blue sky. “I love the stars,” he said.

THE
TANGLEWOODS'
SECRET

Patricia St. John

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About Ourselves



Philip and I lived with our Aunt Margaret in a white house on the side of a hill. It was a lovely home, with a garden and an orchard of apple trees. We slept in two attic bedrooms at the top of the house and had our doors open so we could shout across to each other. Philip's window looked out on the garden with the hills behind it, and it made me feel very safe. My window looked out over the countryside of Worcestershire, with the hills of Herefordshire in the distance, where I had never been. My view made me long for adventure.

I loved looking at the hills, and when Philip came to sit on my bed in the morning to listen to the first bird songs or watch the sun rise, we used to make up

stories about strange animals that lived on them.

Philip was a year and a half older than me, and I loved him more than anyone else on earth. He was gentle and thoughtful, and once he had made up his mind about something, he wouldn't change it! He had always been my friend and protector, and we were never apart, except when we were at school. We were so different. Philip was a big, strong boy with a round face and blue eyes. I was small and thin with dark, untidy hair and a pointed chin. Philip was good and obedient, but I was naughty and hated being told what to do. Aunt Margaret really loved Philip, but she shook her head sadly when she looked at me.

At the time of this story, we had been living with Aunt Margaret for five years. We had forgotten what Mum and Dad looked like. They lived and worked in India and they had sailed away when I was just four years old. Mum was going to come home, but the war stopped her.

I was worried that Mum wouldn't like me if she did come back, as Aunt Margaret kept telling me how disappointed she would be with me because I was so bad. In her letters, Mum sounded as if she loved me very much, but I thought that must be because she didn't know what I was like. I was sure she would like Philip much better than me because he was a good boy, and grown-ups always liked him. Philip would like Mum, too, because Philip likes everybody. I wanted Philip all to myself, so I tried not to think about Mum coming home. I didn't want to share him with anybody—not even our mother.

But Philip could remember her, and sometimes he talked to me about her. I remember one evening, when I was about eight years old, I had been sent to bed without any tea because I had been naughty. I was lying on my bed feeling hot and angry and very hungry, waiting for Philip to climb the stairs on his way to bed. As usual, he came straight into my room. He bent down and struggled to get something out of his sock. It was a sugar bun that looked rather squashed, and it had lots of wool sticking to the sugar. Philip was very proud of it, as he had managed to get it into his sock, under the table, without Aunt Margaret seeing him. I ate it happily while Philip sat on my pillow and put his arm around me.

“What else did you have for tea?” I asked, with my mouth full of bun.

“I’m afraid we had meatballs,” he replied, “but they were too squashy to put down my sock. They weren’t very nice. You didn’t miss much.”

“It’s very unkind of Aunt Margaret to send me to bed without my supper,” I whined. “If Mum was here, she wouldn’t be unkind to me like that.”

“No, she wouldn’t,” agreed Philip. “But then, you see, you were really, really rude to Aunt Margaret, and you would never have been rude to Mum.”

“How do you know? I might,” I said.

“Oh, no, you definitely wouldn’t,” said Philip. “There wouldn’t be anything to be rude about. You’re only rude when you’re cross, and we were never cross with Mum. She was so happy and bright. If we were a bit naughty, she used to pick us up in her arms and tell us lovely stories. Then we’d forget

all about being naughty. I wish you could remember her, Ruth.”

I was just about to ask Philip more about Mum, but he suddenly hopped off my bed and dived across to his own room like a frightened rabbit. I heard Aunt Margaret’s footsteps on the attic stairs.

She went into Philip’s room, and I heard her cross over to him and tuck him in. I heard him say, “Good night, Auntie” in a breathless sort of voice. Then she came across and stood in the doorway of my room.

“Good night, Ruth,” she said.

If I had answered and said I was sorry, she would have come over and tucked me in, too. But I hated saying sorry, so I pretended to be asleep and gave a very loud snore. Of course, she didn’t believe me.

“I’m sorry you are still in such a naughty temper,” she said in a cold voice, then she turned away and went downstairs.

“Did she see you weren’t undressed?” I whispered across to Philip.

“No,” answered Philip. “I pulled the bedclothes around my neck. Good night, Ruth.”

“Good night, Phil,” I answered, then turned over toward the window and stared out into the darkness. I kept thinking about what Philip had said about Mum. Mum would have come across and kissed me, whether I was sorry or not, and then of course I would have really been sorry, and Mum and I would have looked out at the stars together. She would have told me stories. As I fell asleep, I could almost feel her arms around me, but in my dreams she ran away from me, and she and Philip went away together, and I was left behind.

Holiday Plans



This story begins two years after the night I told you about in Chapter One.

I was now nine and a half, and Philip was nearly eleven. On the first day of the Easter holidays, Philip came into my room in his pajamas at half past six in the morning. He curled up on the end of my bed with a notebook and pencil in his hand. Together we leaned our elbows on the windowsill to watch the birds and to make plans.

Bird-watching was our great hobby that holiday. We had a notebook in which we recorded each different kind of bird we saw and everything we noticed about it—its song, its nest, its habits. Philip had made the book himself, and it was very neat. He did

all the writing and I painted the eggs when we found them. Philip's work was exactly right but my drawings were not very good.

Philip longed for a camera so he could photograph the nests. "If only I could take photos of them," he would say over and over again, "I might be a great naturalist—My book might even be printed."

But the cheapest camera in the shop windows cost pounds, and our money box held exactly nine shillings and sixpence, even though we had been saving for weeks and weeks. We emptied the coins onto the bed and counted them once again, just in case we'd made a mistake the time before. But we hadn't. Philip sighed deeply.

"I shall nearly be going to boarding school by the time I get that camera," he said sadly. "I wish we could earn some money, Ruth."

We gazed out into the garden rather sadly, trying hard to think of a plan, but we couldn't think of anything we could do. It was April, and the first fruit trees were all covered in lacy white blossom. Yellow primroses and daffodils shone brightly in the sun.

All of a sudden I felt Philip's body go stiff beside me, and he half dived out of the window.

"Tree creeper—on the plum," he hissed.

I leaned out beside him and we watched a neat brown bird running up the plum tree, tapping the bark for insects. Philip was alert now, noticing everything he could about the little bird until it spread its wings and disappeared. Then out came his notebook, and for the next five minutes Philip was busily writing down everything he could remember

about the tree creeper.

Then he looked up. "Ruth," he said eagerly, "we must get to the woods early today and have plenty of time. And Ruth, I was thinking in bed last night, we should have a naturalists' headquarters. We should have a place where we could keep pencils and paper and tins of food, instead of always carrying them with us, because we shall go every day during the holidays. We must escape early before Aunt Margaret thinks of jobs we ought to do."

I nearly fell out of bed with excitement. "Yes! We'll race through our holiday jobs, and I'll be as good as gold so she'll hardly notice me, and she won't watch me, and when I've swept and dusted in the lounge, I'll just slip out before she thinks of anything else. If she asks where we've been, we'll say we've been getting wood. And we'll bring some back to make it true. But I don't see why we should have to work at all on our holidays! I know what I'll do. I'll dress quickly and go down now and help Aunt Margaret with breakfast to make her think how good I'm being!"

I was out of bed in a flash, and ten minutes later I was down in the kitchen with a clean apron on and my hair neat and tidy.

"Can I help you, Aunt Margaret?" I asked politely. "I got up early in case you might need me."

My aunt looked very surprised, as I was usually very late in the mornings.

"Thank you, Ruth," she answered pleasantly, hiding her surprise. "You can lay the table for me. I should be very glad."

Everything went smoothly. Philip and I ate our breakfast very fast and sat impatiently while Aunt Margaret and Uncle Peter slowly sipped their second cups of coffee, discussing the day ahead. Then Uncle Peter went off to work and Aunt Margaret turned to us.

“And what plans have you two made?” she asked.

Philip had the answer all ready. “As soon as we’ve done our holiday jobs, we’re going to get wood in the Cowleighs, Aunt Margaret,” he replied in his sweetest voice.

“Very well,” my aunt answered, sounding a bit doubtful. “But you must remember I need your help in the mornings. Ruth is old enough to help in the house now. She can start with wiping up and doing the lounge, and then we’ll see.”

I could be quick when I liked, and I wiped up the breakfast things in a very short time. Then, without saying anything more to my aunt, I seized the broom and duster and headed for the lounge. I flicked the dust off the shelves at high speed. I pushed the broom wildly around the edges of the room, then lifted the carpet and swept the pile of dust under it, as I couldn’t find the dustpan. Then I tiptoed back to the kitchen, put the broom and duster back in the cupboard, and ran out of the front door like a streak of lightning.

Out and free on an April morning, with the sun shining and the birds singing and the lambs bleating! I tore around the back and pounced upon Philip all unexpectedly, nearly knocking him over. But he was quite used to me by now, so wasn’t really alarmed.

“Finished already?” he inquired, rather surprised.

“Yes, haven’t you?”

“No,” he answered. “I’ve got to chop these sticks into kindling wood. It will take ages.”

“Oh,” I cried. “We can’t wait! You’ve made quite enough of those silly bundles. No one will know we haven’t chopped them all up if they can’t see the rest. Quick—give those sticks to me!”

Before Philip could say anything, I had thrown the rest of the sticks into the ditch and was kicking dead leaves over them. “Just think,” I shouted, jumping up and down, “how quickly we shall find them when we are sent to get more!” And with a final leap I was away across the orchard and out through the gap in the back hedge like a young rabbit, with Philip at my heels.

No one else knew about our gap in the hedge. It was our own special right of way. Aunt Margaret could see the gate from the kitchen window, and sometimes we didn’t want anyone to know about our comings and goings. So we had found a gap behind the hen house that was invisible to anyone else because it was covered by overhanging branches, which we brushed aside. It led out into another meadow, which led to the road and in turn led to our dear woods.

Once on the road I danced and shouted like a young mad thing. It was sheer joy to be alive on such a morning. Philip followed more quietly, his eyes fixed on the hedges, now and then stopping to listen or to watch. I did not wait for him. I felt as if spring had gotten into my feet. I think I scared away most

of the birds before Philip came anywhere near them.

I jumped over the gate that led through the meadow and stood still for a minute, watching the mother sheep with their joyful, long-legged lambs, leaping, like me, among the daisies. As I watched, one of the lambs with a smudged nose and black socks suddenly saw me and came rushing toward me, giving little bleats of welcome. I bent down and held out my arms. He ran straight into them and started licking my face with his eager, warm tongue.

“Philip,” I cried. “Look what’s happening!”

Philip was beside me by this time, and together we knelt in the grass while the little lamb prodded us, licked us, and leapt from one lap to another. As we played, an old shepherd came and leaned over the gate, smiling at us.

“That’s the little orphan,” he explained. “He’s bottle fed, and he’s not afraid of anyone. The other sheep push him away, so off he goes on his own. He’s always in trouble, the little rascal!”

The lamb at this moment leaped from my knee and ran to the gate. The old man stooped and picked it up.

“He knows my voice all right, don’t he?” he remarked, smiling. Then, tucking it inside his coat, he turned away toward the farm.

“That’s a new shepherd,” I said to Philip. “I’ve never seen him before.”

“I have,” answered Philip. “He’s over from Cradley for the lambing season. Come on, Ruth! We’re wasting time!”

He jumped up, and we raced across the open

meadow with the wind blowing my plaits out behind me. Then over a stile, and we were standing in our woods.

THE SECRET
AT
PHEASANT
COTTAGE

Patricia St. John

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Awkward Questions



I can clearly remember the first time I really began to wonder about the mystery that surrounded my early life. I was at kindergarten, sitting with my friends under the apple tree in the playground. It was a perfect morning in May and we were drinking mugs of milk at break time.

“Lucy, why do you live with your gran? Why don’t you live with your mum and dad, like everybody else?”

Harvey Chatterley-Foulkes fixed his goggle-eyes on me as he asked his question.

I had to think of an answer quickly, and looked around hopefully for Miss Hunt, my teacher, thinking she would help me, but she had gone to look for someone in the cloakroom. I stared at Harvey, think-

ing he looked like a fat frog, and said, "Because I don't. Wipe your mouth, Harvey. You've got a milk mustache." I thought this would make me sound grown up and confident, but Harvey took no notice.

"But why not?" he insisted. "I mean, where are they? You must have been born from someone."

There was silence. If I said, "I don't know," they would all laugh at me, and I might cry. Now, all eyes were fixed on me, waiting for my answer.

"Perhaps they're dead," said Mary cheerfully.

"Or perhaps they've run away and left you," breathed Janie.

"Or perhaps they're divorced," broke in Billy, who seemed to know all about it.

I looked around desperately and breathed a great sigh of relief, for Miss Hunt was coming across the playground. I went over to her and felt safe, but Harvey was still determined to find out about my private affairs.

"Miss Hunt," he squeaked excitedly, "why does Lucy live with her gran? I mean, why hasn't she got a dad and—"

Miss Hunt's clear voice silenced him.

"If I had a gran like Mrs. Ferguson, I wouldn't mind too much if I had parents or not; she's as good as a mum and dad rolled into one. You're a lucky girl, Lucy. My gran died when I was a baby. Now, wipe your mouth, Harvey; you've got a milk mustache. And now, everybody listen. Since it's the first of May . . ."

Everyone immediately forgot about me being parentless as we fixed our eyes on Miss Hunt, wonder-

ing what delight she was going to surprise us with because it was the first of May.

“Because it’s the first of May,” she repeated, “instead of going back in the classroom for math, we’re all going for a walk up to the wood on the hill to pick kingcups—they’re just out.”

There was a shout of joy as sixteen happy children raced toward the meadow. Miss Hunt walked behind, and I trotted quietly beside her, still feeling rather shaken.

I knew now that Harvey’s question had been there for a long time, buried deep and never asked. Now, all of a sudden, everyone had asked it; and there was no answer.

I knew that I had not always lived at Pheasant Cottage with Gran. A long time before that there had been somewhere else, where a very tall man had carried me in his arms, and I remember very clearly that he had once gone down on all fours and let me ride on his back. As I grew older, I used to wonder if he could have been my father, but, strange to say, I had never asked.

I’ll ask Gran today, I said to myself, and then forgot all about it in the delight of the outing. Miss Hunt was in front now, because the hill was steep for small legs. She looked like the Pied Piper with all her class puffing and hurrying behind her, while she called back exciting instructions.

“See how many different kinds of wildflowers you can find . . . not all dandelions, Sally! Look very quietly in the hedges—you might see a nest. Harvey, stop chattering! We want to listen to the birds, and you

are frightening them all away. Now, stand still, everybody . . . you, too, Lizzie; stop jumping up and down! Now, be very quiet. Can anyone hear that thrush singing?"

Then we plunged into the oak wood, and I was the first to spot a gleam of gold in the shadows and shout, "Kingcups!"

Everyone broke into a charge through the undergrowth, but Miss Hunt shooed us back onto the path so that we didn't get stuck in the swamp. But there were plenty of flowers to be reached from the path, and we returned home later with muddy feet and pollen-powdered noses.

Parents were waiting by the schoolroom door, and one by one the children went home, clasping their golden bunches. I lived a long way out, and it was four o'clock before Miss Hunt put me on the school bus.

Gran was standing at the bus stop with Shadow, our black Labrador, who was straining at his lead and barking for joy because he knew I was coming. We usually chased each other madly home, but Shadow must have been disappointed that afternoon because I did not feel like playing. I walked quietly beside Gran, hugging my kingcups, and then, suddenly, I asked my question.

"Gran, why do I live with you and Grandpa? Didn't I ever have a mum and dad? Most of the other children have them."

It seemed very quiet after I spoke. I could hear a bee buzzing in the lilac tree and a blackbird singing. At last Gran answered.

“Your mummy was our dear daughter Alice, Lucy. She died when you were a tiny baby, and there was no one else to look after you, so Grandpa and I took you as our own little girl.”

“But didn’t I have a daddy?” I persisted. “And why didn’t he look after me? Is he dead too?”

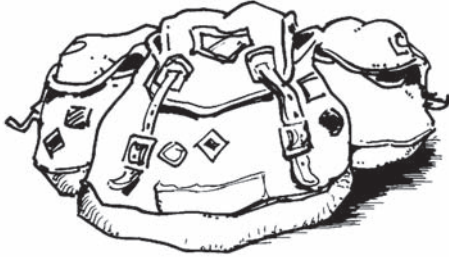
There was a long silence while I waited confidently for the answer, because I knew Gran always spoke the truth.

“He went right away,” said Gran slowly, “and we never saw him again. He would not have looked after you properly, Lucy. You belong to us now, and always will, just as though you were our own little girl. Look, there’s Grandpa! He’s seen us.”

We had reached our garden, and by the way she changed the subject and pressed her lips together, I knew that I was not expected to ask any more questions ever again. I did not mind. A delicious smell of baking came from the cottage, and Grandpa waved from his vegetable patch, his rosy face beaming a welcome. Home was a perfect place. What did I want with a father? I really didn’t need one!

Yet somehow that old faraway memory puzzled me and wouldn’t go away. For if that tall man *had* been my father, then he could not have been completely bad, or he would not have held me in his arms, nor would he have gone down on all fours and let me ride on his back. But it was a puzzle without an answer, and for five whole years I never mentioned it again to anyone.

Guide Camp



Those five years passed very quickly, and life was happy and exciting. I loved living in the countryside, watching the changing of the seasons. I never minded being an only child, or not doing the things that the other children did.

Sometimes, when the girls at school laughed at me because I'd never seen the sea, I would grow restless and wonder whether I would ever travel or do anything different from going to school, coming home, and going to church on Sundays. I did not see how I could, really, because my grandparents were growing older every year, and Grandpa, who had been head gardener at the castle on the nearby Eastwood Estate for thirty years, only had a small pension. They were perfectly content to remain in their cottage,

and, apart from occasionally visiting relatives in Birmingham, they had no wish to take holidays, and could not, in any case, because of having to look after the chickens. And, except when my friends made fun of me, I was content, too, content to play in the woods and climb the hills, to read, and to scribble stories about children who went on long journeys and travelled to all the countries I learned about in geography lessons. I had my own jobs to do in the cottage and garden, too, and the days never seemed long enough.

Sometimes my best friend, Mary, came to spend the day, and I would take her onto the estate. But Mary was a sturdy, practical child who preferred to arrive somewhere than just to wander. She would often say, "Where are we going, Lucy?" which really annoyed me. My unchanging reply probably annoyed her too. "We're not going anywhere; we're just walking!" And after a time we would turn back and play games in the garden. I really liked Mary, but she belonged to my school world, and my woods and countryside bored her.

But from all my happy childhood memories, one event stands out, clear and unforgettable, and that is the Whitsun Guide Camp in the Cotswolds when I was eleven years old. When Gran told Captain I could go, I was so excited that I hardly slept for two nights. And when we actually set off in the bus with our knapsacks and bedding, I could hardly speak. I sat squeezing my clasped hands between my knees, bottling up my joy, because living with elderly people had made me rather a quiet child. But gradually,

as we traveled for hours through leafy lanes, I relaxed. We sang, we chattered, we giggled, we ate sandwiches and drank lemonade out of bottles; and then we were there, high on a hill at the edge of a great beech wood, overlooking the Gloucester plain, and Captain and Lieutenant were showing us where to put up our tents and how to light a fire.

That holiday was everything I had hoped it would be. I shared a tent with Mary, and every waking hour was thrilling, from the moment we crawled out into the sweet-smelling morning to the moment we snuggled into our sleeping bags in the dark, shrieking in pretend terror when the owls hooted in the woods behind us. But I remember most vividly the early morning when I woke before anyone else and, slipping on my jumper and shoes, crept out into the waking world. The sun had not long risen; a cuckoo called from the beeches. Captain was up and wandering about, and she saw me.

“Lucy,” she said, “would you like to dress and take a message to the farm for me? Straight through the wood and climb over the stile and cross the hay field. You’ll find the farmers milking the cows. Ask them to save us fifteen fresh eggs, and we’ll fetch them later.”

I was slipping on my dress when Mary’s tousled head appeared out of her sleeping bag. She blinked at me.

“Where are you going?” she yawned. “Shall I come too?”

“No, no,” I replied hurriedly. “I won’t be long. I’ve got to go to the farm with a message. I’ve got to go now, at once. You can come and meet me if you

like.” I shot outside, for this was my special expedition and I had to go alone. I ran through the sunlit wood, climbed over the stile, and saw the hay field—a tangled mass of wildflowers, all sparkling with dew.

I went mad! I flung my shoes backward over the stile and leaped and danced barefoot along the path, the flowers tickling my legs. I laughed and clapped my hands, carried away with the joy of being alive on such a morning, loving the feel of the cold grass between my toes. Then, having delivered my message, I turned back and walked more slowly, wanting this hour to last and last. But it was not to be. Mary was trotting toward me, and by the look on her round face, I knew she had a secret to tell me.

“Lucy,” she began mysteriously, “do you know what?”

“What?” I answered.

“Well, I came to meet you through the wood, and Captain and Lieutenant were standing by the stile.”

“So what?”

“Well, they *saw* you!”

“I don’t care.”

“Yes, but Lucy, they talked about you; I heard them. They didn’t see me, ’cause I waited behind a tree, and I *heard* them, Lucy.”

I was silent, desperately curious to know, but I wasn’t going to show it!

“Lucy, shall I tell you what they said about you?”

“What, then?”

“Captain said”—and here Mary’s voice changed to sound like a grown-up’s—“‘Fancy good little Lucy

going all wild like that! There's more in that child than meets the eye.' And Lieutenant said, 'Oh, Lucy's got plenty in her. Her teacher says her essays are brilliant. She needs to get away from those grandparents of hers occasionally and start living.' That's what they said, Lucy. There was more, but I can't remember it all; and anyhow they turned around and saw me."

"How silly," I replied rather crossly. "I live just as much as they do." But somehow the sparkle had gone out of the day, and all that morning while we ate breakfast and tidied up and swam in the river, I puzzled over their remarks. What was wrong with being good? And what was wrong with my grandparents? And what had I been doing all these eleven years except living? I supposed that they said it because I hadn't done all the things the others had done, and because I'd never been to the sea. But, after all, they knew nothing about my real life, and they'd never even set foot in the Eastwood Estate. I felt rather cross all day, and they must have wondered what was the matter with me, until the delight of cooking sausages on the campfire drove the whole thing out of my mind.

But it had stirred up all the old questions. I was different.

That night I lay awake for a long time, with Mary snoring beside me, and listened to the owls and the rustle of the beech leaves, and tried to remember the face of the tall man who had gone down on all fours. But it was no good. It had gone forever.

Rainbow Garden

Patricia M. St. John

Revised by Mary Mills

Illustrated by Gary Rees

MOODY PUBLISHERS
CHICAGO

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Land of Sunshine



It all began one cold January night when I was kneeling in front of my mother's fireplace, drying my hair. Outside, the snow was falling over London, and the footsteps and the noise of the traffic were muffled, but inside my mother's pink bedroom, with the velvet curtains closed and the lamps casting down rosy light, we were very warm and cozy.

I was enjoying myself, for it was one of those very rare evenings when my mother was at home and seemed to have nothing to do except be with me. This was so unusual that at first we had not quite known what to say to each other, but we had watched television, and then she had brought out a pile of magazines full of patterns and had let me

choose a new summer dress. After that, she had washed my hair and dried it while I watched in the long mirror and ate chocolates.

It should have been a lovely evening. Mrs. Moody, the housekeeper, had a day off and had gone home to Golders Green, and the flat somehow seemed brighter without her. I was fond of Mrs. Moody, who looked after me far more than my mother did, but she was not a very cheerful person to have around. She disapproved of Mummy because she went to so many parties and stayed out late at night and got up late in the morning. Mrs. Moody, in her young days, went to bed at ten and got up at six, and no nonsense, but as Mummy usually went to bed at two and got up at ten, I couldn't see that she was really any lazier than Mrs. Moody. They both spent exactly the same number of hours in bed.

Mrs. Moody disapproved of me, too, because she thought I had too many party clothes and too many cream cakes for tea. I had heard her tell the cook in the flat downstairs that I would grow up to be a butterfly like my mother. The cook had replied that, for all my fine clothes, I was a plain little thing; but I didn't understand what she meant.

"Mummy," I said, tossing back my hair and looking up at her, "you still haven't told me what day I'm going back to school. It must be soon now."

My mother was silent for some minutes, and I began to wonder what was the matter. I had asked twice before, and she had changed the subject.

"When, Mummy?" I repeated impatiently.

Instead of answering this simple question, my

mother suddenly said, "Elaine, would you like to go to the country?"

I twisted my head around and stared at her. "The country?" I repeated. "Why? Where? Do you mean instead of going to school?"

"Well, no," replied my mother, "not exactly. I mean, you'd go to school in the country, and I'm sure you'd love it when spring comes. The thing is, Elaine, I've got the offer of a marvelous job; but it means travelling about and going abroad and I just can't take you with me."

"Well," I said, after thinking it over for a few minutes, "I think I'd rather stay here with Mrs. Moody. I'd be at school all day, and we'd be all right in the evenings. You'd be home for the holidays, wouldn't you?"

"But, darling," answered my mother rather impatiently, because she always liked everyone to agree with her plans at once, "you don't understand! We couldn't possibly afford to keep the flat and Mrs. Moody just for you. You'll simply love it in the country, and there is such a nice family who is willing to have you. They've got six children, and there is a girl called Janet who is only a few months younger than you."

"But if you give up the flat and Mrs. Moody," I said blankly, "where will my home be? I mean, I won't belong anywhere."

My mother gave a little shrug of annoyance, and I knew she thought I was being naughty and difficult, but I couldn't help it. I didn't particularly mind Mummy going, for I never saw her much in any case.

But Mrs. Moody and the flat were a different matter. I would be like a stray cat and not belong anywhere. Besides, if I did go to the country and didn't like it, or if those six children turned out to be horrible, where would I come back to?

"Don't be silly, Elaine," pleaded my mother. "Of course when I come back we'll get a new home, and you'll always belong to me. Do try to be sensible. I don't want to leave you, but it will be much better for you later on if I earn more instead of what this part-time job I've been doing pays. Besides, I've always wanted to go abroad, and this is a marvelous chance."

I sat staring into the red glow of the fire, my mouth closed in an obstinate line. Six children in the country sounded horrible to me; I didn't want to go at all.

My mother was quite annoyed by my silence. She started again in a coaxing voice.

"You've no idea how nice it will be," she urged. "And I've taken such trouble to find a really nice place for you. Mrs. Owen was at school with me and, although we lost touch, I liked her better than any other girl I knew. Then when your daddy was killed, she wrote to me. She saw the news of the plane crash in the paper, and she wanted to know all about you and asked if she could be of any help. Of course, you were only tiny then, but I wrote to her a little while ago and asked if she knew of a nice boarding school, and she answered by return mail, offering to have you in her home so that you could go to school with her daughter Janet. It was very, very good of her, Elaine, and you must try to be a

sensible girl. France isn't far away, and I will come over and see you from time to time."

I just sat silent, but I could see her face by glancing in the mirror, and it was clear that she was worried and frowning.

"Elaine," she said suddenly, "I'm going to have a little party tomorrow night to say good-bye to a few friends. You can help me get it ready, and then you can put on your best party dress and come to the beginning of it. Won't that be fun?"

I looked up quickly. "Tomorrow? Already?" I cried. "Then when are we going?"

"Well," said my mother hesitatingly, "there'll be such a lot to do packing up the flat, I thought you'd better go fairly soon. I told Mrs. Owen you'd go on Friday."

Friday! I thought to myself. *Today is Tuesday—just three more days!* I suddenly felt terribly lonely, but I wasn't allowed to say no, and it didn't seem much good making a fuss when it was all settled. Nor did there seem to be anything else to talk about, so I escaped as soon as I could and crept away to bed.

The next day was busy, and I almost forgot my fears in the preparations for the party. The guests were coming at 8:30, and by half-past seven I was all ready in my best dress with my hair carefully curled. I had never been to a grown-up party before, and I wondered what we'd do.

I was disappointed on the whole, for although everyone made a fuss of me to begin with, they very soon forgot about me. There were no other children,

and we didn't play games, although I think they were going to play cards later on. They sat about eating and smoking and making jokes I couldn't understand. I began to feel dizzy from the heat and smoke and rather sick from all the cakes I'd eaten. Mummy was busy pouring drinks, and I didn't think anyone would notice if I went away.

I slipped out and went into the kitchen. Mrs. Moody at least had not forgotten me. She was sitting in an armchair mending my clothes. "Come along, Elaine," she said sharply. "It's time you were in bed. You're half asleep!"

I still felt sick and leaned up against her. "Come with me, Mrs. Moody," I whispered. "I feel sick!"

"I'm not surprised, such goings-on at your age," retorted Mrs. Moody, getting up at once. But she put her arm around me very gently and led me to my room and helped me get ready for bed. Then she fetched me a hot-water bottle because I was shivering.

"Mrs. Moody," I said suddenly, "I'm going to the country, and Mummy's going to France."

"So I understand," she replied stiffly.

"Mrs. Moody," I whispered, "have you ever lived in the country?"

A slow smile spread over Mrs. Moody's face. "I was brought up in Sussex," she said, "in a little cottage with a garden full of lavender and sweet peas and roses. To my mind, it's a better place than London for children."

I snuggled closer. It sounded like the nicest kind of story. In my imagination I could see Mrs. Moody as

a little girl, thin and straight-backed and solemn, with her hair pulled back behind her ears.

“Go on,” I whispered. “Tell me more.”

She gave one of her rare little chuckles. “I can’t remember much about it now, Elaine,” she said, “except the swallows making nests under the thatch and the stream where we used to play, all goldenlike, and the posies we used to pick. My granddad knew the names of all the wildflowers.”

A burst of laughter exploded across the passage. I nestled closer to Mrs. Moody. We seemed shut in by ourselves in a world of happy memories.

“Mrs. Moody,” I said pleadingly, “why don’t you come with me?”

“Because I’m not invited, love,” she answered, “and you’re a big girl now. I’ve got another job as housekeeper, but I shall miss you, dearie, I really will.”

“Tell me more about the country then,” I said, and she chatted on about lambs and cows and fruit picking and orchards. I felt cool and well again, and I lay listening until I fell asleep.

Treasures of the Snow

Patricia St John

Revised by Mary Mills

Illustrated by Gary Rees

MOODY PUBLISHERS
CHICAGO

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Christmas Eve



It was Christmas Eve, and three people were climbing the steep, white mountainside, the moonlight throwing shadows behind them across the snow. The middle one was a woman in a long skirt with a dark cloak over her shoulders. Clinging to her hand was a black-haired boy of six, who talked all the time with his mouth full. Walking a little way away from them, with her eyes turned to the stars, was a girl of seven. Her hands were folded across her chest, and close to her heart she carried a golden gingerbread bear with eyes made of white icing.

The little boy had also had a gingerbread bear, but he had eaten it all except the back legs. He looked at the girl spitefully. "Mine was bigger than yours," he said.

The girl did not seem upset. "I would not change it," she replied calmly, without turning her head. Then she looked down again with eyes full of love at the beautiful bear in her arms. How solid he looked, how delicious he smelled, and how brightly he gleamed in the starlight. She would never eat him, never!

Eighty little village children had been given gingerbread bears, but hers had surely been by far the most beautiful.

Yes, she would keep him forever in memory of tonight, and whenever she looked at him she would remember Christmas Eve—the frosty blue sky, the warm glow of the lighted church, the tree decorated with silver stars, the carols, the crib, and the sweet, sad story of Christmas. It made her want to cry when she thought about the inn where there was no room. She would have opened her door wide and welcomed Mary and Joseph in.

Lucien, the boy, was annoyed by her silence. "I have nearly finished mine," he remarked, scowling. "Let me taste yours, Annette. You have not started it." But Annette shook her head and held her bear a little closer. "I am never going to eat him," she replied. "I am going to keep him forever and ever."

They had come to where the crumbly white path divided. A few hundred yards along the right fork stood a group of chalets with lights shining in their windows and dark barns standing behind them. Annette was nearly home.

Madame Morel hesitated. "Are you all right to run home alone, Annette?" she asked doubtfully, "or

shall we take you to the door?"

"Oh, I would much rather go home alone," answered Annette, "and thank you for taking me. Good night, Madame; good night, Lucien."

She turned and ran, in case Madame should change her mind and insist on seeing her to the door. She so badly wanted to be alone.

She wanted to get away from Lucien's chatter and enjoy the silence of the night. How could she think, and look at the stars, when she was having to make polite replies to Madame Morel and Lucien?

She had never been out alone at night before, and even this was a sort of accident. She was supposed to have gone to the church on the sleigh with her parents. They had all been thinking about it and planning it for weeks. But that morning her mother had been taken ill and her father had gone off on the midday train to fetch the doctor from the town up the valley. The doctor had arrived about teatime, but he could not cure her in time to get up and go to church as Annette had hoped he would, so to her great disappointment she had to go instead with Madame Morel from the chalet up the hill. But when she had reached the church it had been so beautiful that she had forgotten everything but the tree and the magic of Christmas, so it had not mattered so much after all.

The magic stayed with her, and now, as she stood alone among snow and stars, it seemed a pity to go in just yet and break the spell. She hesitated as she reached the steps leading up to the balcony and looked around. Just opposite loomed the cowshed;

Annette could hear the beasts moving and munching from the manger.

An exciting idea struck her. She made up her mind in a moment, darted across the sleigh tracks, and lifted the latch of the door. The warm smell of cattle and milk and hay greeted her as she slipped inside. She wriggled against the legs of the chestnut-colored cow and wormed her way into the hayrack. The cow was having supper, but Annette flung her arms around its neck and let it go on munching, just as the cows must have munched when Mary sat among them with her newborn baby in her arms.

She looked down at the manger and imagined Baby Jesus was lying in the straw with the cows, still and quiet, worshipping about Him. Through a hole in the roof she could see one bright star, and she remembered how a star had shone over Bethlehem and guided the wise men to the house where Jesus lay. She could imagine them padding up the valley on their swaying camels. And surely any moment now the door would open softly and the shepherds would come creeping in with little lambs in their arms and offer to cover the child with woolly fleeces. As she leaned further, a great feeling of pity came over her for the homeless baby who had had all the doors shut against him.

“There would have been plenty of room in our chalet,” she whispered, “and yet perhaps after all this is the nicest place. The hay is sweet and clean and Louise’s breath is warm and pleasant. Maybe God chose the best cradle for his baby after all.”

She might have stayed there dreaming all night if it

had not been for the gleam of a lantern through the half-open door of the shed and the sound of firm, crunchy footsteps in the snow.

Then she heard her father call her in a quick, hurried voice.

She slipped down from the rack, dodged Louise's tail, and ran out to him with wide-open arms.

"I went in to wish the cows a happy Christmas," she said, laughing. "Did you come out to find me?"

"Yes, I did," he replied, but he was not laughing. His face was pale and serious in the moonlight, and he took her hand and almost dragged her up the steps. "You should have come in at once, with your mother so ill. She has been asking for you for half an hour."

Annette suddenly felt very sorry, for somehow the Christmas tree had made her forget about everything else, and all the time her mother, whom she loved so much, was lying ill and wanting her. She had thought the doctor would have made her better. She took her hand out from her father's and ran up the wooden stairs and into her mother's bedroom.

Neither the doctor nor the village nurse saw her until she had crept up to the bed, for she was a small, slim child who moved almost silently. But her mother saw her and half held out her arms. Annette, without a word, ran into them and hid her face on her mother's shoulder. She began to cry quietly, for her mother's face was almost as white as the pillow and it frightened her. Besides, she felt sorry for having been away so long.

"Annette," whispered her mother, "stop crying. I

have a present for you.”

Annette stopped at once. A present? Of course, it was Christmas. She had quite forgotten. Her mother always gave her a present, but she usually had it on New Year's Day. Wherever could it be? She looked around expectantly.

Her mother turned to the nurse. “Give it to her,” she whispered. The nurse pulled back the blanket and lifted out a bundle wrapped in a white shawl. She came around to Annette and held it out to her.

“Your little brother,” the nurse explained. “Let us go down by the fire and you shall rock his cradle. We must leave your mother to sleep. Kiss her good night.”

“Your little brother,” echoed her mother's weak voice. “He is yours, Annette. Bring him up and love him and look after him for me. I give him to you.”

Her voice trailed away and she closed her eyes. Annette, too dazed to speak, allowed herself to be led downstairs by the nurse. She sat down on a stool by the stove to rock the wooden cradle where her Christmas present lay covered in shawls and blankets.

She sat very still for a long time staring at the bump that was her little brother. The house was very still, and the Christmas star shone in through the windows as it had shone on that other Christmas baby in the stable at Bethlehem, with Mary sitting watching God's little Son, just as she was sitting by the stove watching her little brother.

She put out gentle fingers and touched the top of his downy head, which was all she could see of him.

Then with a tired sigh she leaned her head against the cradle and let her imagination go where it would—stars, shepherds, little new babies, shut doors, wise men, and gingerbread bears—they all became muddled up in her mind, and she slid gradually onto the floor.

It was here that her father found her an hour later, lying as peacefully asleep as her new baby brother, her bright head resting on the cradle rocker.

“Poor little motherless creatures,” he said as he stooped to pick her up. “How shall I ever bring them up without her?”

For Annette’s mother had gone to spend Christmas in heaven.

Grandmother Arrives



So Daniel Burnier, age three hours, became the special property of Annette Burnier, age seven years.

Of course, the kind village nurse stayed for some time to bathe and feed him, and when she left, her father paid a woman from the village to come and nurse him. But Dani belonged to Annette, and nobody ever spoke of him as anything but Annette's baby.

For once the first great shock of losing her mother was over, Annette gathered up all the love of her sad, lonely little heart and poured it out on her little brother. She held his bottle while he sucked and sat quietly by his cradle in case he should wake and want her. It was Annette who ran to him in the night if he woke or whimpered, and who carried him out

onto the balcony at midday so that the sun might shine on him. And with so much love and sunshine surrounding him, the baby grew strong, until there was no other baby of his age in the valley who was as healthy and beautiful. He slept and woke and chuckled and fed and kicked and slept again. In fact, he never gave a moment's worry to anyone.

"He was born under a lucky star," exclaimed a woman from the village, gazing at him thoughtfully.

"He was born under a Christmas star," said Annette solemnly. "I think he will always be good and happy."

And how he grew! By the time the sun was beginning to melt the snow, and the crocuses were pushing up in the pale fields, Annette was having to think about new clothes. As soon as the cows had gone up the mountain, Dani cut his first tooth. As Annette knew nothing about first teeth, and expected no trouble, the baby himself forgot that it should have been a painful time, so instead of fretting and crying he just giggled and sucked his fists.

Soon Dani was moving around, and his cradle could hold him no longer. He wanted to explore everything from the stove to the balcony steps, and Annette spent an anxious few weeks keeping him out of danger. In the end she decided to tie him by one pink foot to the leg of the kitchen table and he explored in circles, and life became more peaceful.

It was just about this time that Annette, slipping down to the living room after tucking Dani up in his cradle, found her father sitting by the stove with his head in his hands, looking old and tired and grey. He

had often looked old and tired since his wife died, but tonight he looked worse than usual. Annette, who tried hard to make up for her mother, climbed onto his knee and laid her soft cheek against his bony brown one.

“What is the matter, Papa?” she asked. “Are you very tired tonight? Shall I make you a cup of coffee?”

He looked down at her curiously for a minute or two. She was so small and light, like a golden-haired fairy, but how sensible and womanly she was! Somehow during the past year he had made a habit of telling her his troubles and even listening to her serious advice. So now he pulled her head against his shoulder and told her all about it.

“We shall have to sell some of the cows, little daughter,” he explained sadly. “We must have some more money or there will be no winter boots for you.”

Annette lifted her head and stared at him in horror. They only had ten cows, and each one was a personal friend. Any one of them would be missed terribly. She must think of a better way to earn money than that.

“You see,” her father went on, “other men have wives to look after their little ones. I have to pay a woman to nurse Dani, and it is expensive. Yet someone must look after him, poor little lad.”

Annette sat up very straight and tossed back her plaits. She knew exactly what to do, and all she had to do was make her father agree.

“Papa,” she said very slowly and distinctly, “you

do not need Mademoiselle Mottier any longer. I am eight and a half now, and I can look after Dani as well as anyone. You will not have to pay me anything, and then we can keep the cows. Why, think, Papa, how unhappy they would be to leave us! I do believe Paquerette would cry!”

“But you must go to school,” said her father rather doubtfully. “It would not be right to keep you at home, and anyhow it is against the law. The school-master would want to know why, and he would tell the mayor and we should get into trouble.”

“But it is much more important to look after Dani,” answered Annette, wrinkling her forehead, “and if you explained to the master, he would understand. He is a kind man, and he is a friend of yours. Let’s try it and see what happens. I will do my lessons here in the kitchen, Papa, every morning, and Dani can play on the floor. In any case, it’s only for four years. When Dani is five he will go to the infant school, and I can take him down and go to the big school.”

Her father continued to look at her thoughtfully. Although she was small, she was as clever as a woman in looking after the baby, and she was very handy about the house. But she could not do the cooking, or knit the stockings, or do the rough heavy work. And besides, she ought to have some schooling. He sat thinking in silence for a full five minutes. Then *he* had an idea.

“I wonder if your grandmother would come,” he said suddenly. “She is old and has rheumatics, and her sight is poor, but she could do the cooking and

mending perhaps, and she could help you with your lessons in the evenings. It would be company for you, too, when I am up the mountain. You're a little girl to be left alone all day long. If I write a letter to the schoolmaster telling him that Grandmother will give you a bit of teaching, maybe he will agree to keep quiet about it."

Annette climbed off his knee, and fetched two sheets of paper and a pen and ink from the cupboard.

"Write to them both now," she said, "and I will post them when I go for the bread. Then we shall get the answers nice and quickly."

Both letters were answered that week. The first answer was Grandmother herself, who arrived by train, bent and crippled, with a wooden box roped up very securely. Annette went down to meet her and watched the little electric train twisting its way up the valley between the hay fields like a caterpillar. It was rather late, the driver explained angrily, because a cow had strayed onto the line and the train had had to stop. He moved off so quickly that Grandmother hardly had time to get down, and her wooden box had to be thrown out after her while the train was moving away.

Grandmother, however, did not seem at all worried. She leaned on her stick and wanted to know how she was going to get up the hill. Annette, who knew nothing about rheumatism, suggested that they should walk, but Grandmother said, "Nonsense, child," and in the end they got a lift in an empty farm cart that had brought cheeses down to the train

and was now going back up the mountain.

The road was stony, the wheels wooden, and the mule uncertain, and Annette enjoyed the ride very much more than Grandmother did. But the old woman gritted her teeth and made no complaint. She only let out a tired sigh of relief when she found herself safely on the sofa by the stove, with a cushion at her aching back and Annette bustling about getting her some tea.

Dani came out from under the table, getting along on his bottom. He stuck three fingers in his mouth and laughed at Grandmother, who put on her glasses to see him better. They sat for some moments staring at each other, her dim old eyes meeting his bright blue ones, and then Dani threw back his head and laughed again.

“That child will wear out his trousers,” said Grandmother, taking a piece of bread and butter and cherry jam. “He should be taught to crawl.”

She said no more until she had finished her tea, and then she flicked the crumbs from her black skirt and got up, leaning heavily on her stick.

“So,” she remarked, “I have come. What I can I will do; what I cannot you must do for me. Now, Annette, turn that baby the right way up and come and show me around the kitchen.” And from that moment Grandmother did what she could, Annette did the rest, and the household ran like clockwork. All except for Dani, who continued to move round and round the table legs on his bottom in spite of Grandmother. So after a few days Annette was sent to the village to buy a yard of thick, black felt, and

Grandmother sewed round patches onto the seats of all Dani's trousers. He did look rather odd in them, but they served their purpose very well indeed, and after all they were hardly ever seen because they were nearly always underneath him.

The second answer arrived in the shape of the old village schoolmaster, who walked wearily up from the valley late on Saturday afternoon to call on Monsieur Burnier. He was milking cows and saw him coming out the cowshed window. He did not want to argue with the schoolmaster because he was afraid of getting the worst of it, so he ran out the back door and hid in the hayloft. Annette, who was also looking out of the living room window, saw her father's legs disappear up the ladder just as the schoolmaster came around the corner, and she understood perfectly what was expected of her.

She opened the door and invited the master in, offering him most politely the best chair with a smart red seat. He was very fond of Annette, and Annette was very fond of him, but today they were a little bit shy of each other. Grandmother folded her hands and sat up straight like an old warhorse ready for battle.

"I have come to see your father," began the schoolmaster, coughing nervously, "to discuss his letter about you being away from school. I cannot say that I think it right for a little girl of your age. Besides, it is against the law of the State."

"The State will know nothing about it unless you choose to mention her," said Grandmother. "Besides, I will teach the child myself. I do not think it right

for a little boy of Dani's age to be left without his sister to look after him."

"But can't you look after him?" suggested the schoolmaster gently.

"Certainly not," snapped Grandmother. "My sight is so poor that I cannot see where he is going, and my arms are so rheumatically that I cannot pick him up if he falls. Besides, he moves like an express train, and I am nearly eighty. You do not know what you are talking about."

The schoolmaster gazed at Dani, who was face-downwards in the woodpile eating shavings. There was nothing much to be seen of him but the black felt patches and his dimpled brown legs. The master realized Grandmother would not be able to manage him.

The schoolmaster didn't know what to do. Perhaps his old friend Monsieur Burnier would be more reasonable. He turned to Annette. "When will your father be in, Annette?" he asked.

"I don't know. He has gone out and he may not be back for some time. It is not worth your while to wait, monsieur," replied Annette steadily, knowing perfectly well that her father would return just as soon as the master disappeared down the valley.

The schoolmaster sat thinking. He was a good man, and really cared about Annette and his duty toward her. Yet he did not want to give up his old friend into the hands of the law, especially when it was quite clear that the child was needed at home. At last he had an idea. He did not think that it was a very good one, but it was better than nothing.

“I will let the matter rest,” he said at last, “on one condition only. And that is that every Saturday morning, when Annette comes down for the bread, she shall visit me in my house and I will test her. If I find she is making progress I will say no more, but if I find she is learning nothing then I shall feel it my duty to insist that she attends school like other children.”

He tried to speak sternly, but Annette beamed at him, and Dani, sensing a family victory, suddenly turned himself the right way up and crowed like a cock. The schoolmaster looked at the two fair, motherless children for a moment, smiled very tenderly, and said good-bye. As soon as he had disappeared into the pine wood Annette ran to the door and called to her father to come down from the hay loft, and she told him the good news.

So it was that every Saturday morning Annette rapped at the front door of the tall, white house where the schoolmaster lived, with her bread-basket on her back and her tattered exercise book in her hand, and the schoolmaster joyfully let her in. In the winter they sat by the stove, ate spiced fruit tart, and drank hot chocolate, and in the summer they sat on the veranda and ate cherries and drank apple juice. After that the tests would begin.

They always started with arithmetic, but Annette was not good at arithmetic. As she never knew the answers, the schoolmaster would feel, after a few minutes, that it was a waste of time to ask any more questions, so they would pass on to history, and here Annette never needed any questions. She would lean

forward, clasping her knees, and relate how William Tell had won the freedom of Switzerland, and how the brave little son had stood still while the apple on his head was split by the whizzing arrow. Annette knew all about the brave Swiss heroes, and she and the schoolmaster would look at each other with shining eyes, for they both loved courage. After this they would turn to the Bible, which Annette was beginning to know quite well, for she read it aloud to Grandmother every evening.

By this time the schoolmaster would have forgotten to tell Annette off because she couldn't do her sums, and instead he would give her fresh books to read and would fill the gaps in her bread basket with spiced gingerbread hearts and knobby chocolate sticks wrapped in silver paper. Then they would say good-bye to one another, and he would stand at the door and watch her until she reached the edge of the pine wood, because here she always turned around to wave.

Years ago the schoolmaster had loved a golden-haired girl who lived high up in the mountain, and he had bought this white house and made it beautiful for her. But she went out to pick soldanellas and was killed by a treacherous fall of late snow. So the schoolmaster really lived alone. But in his dreams she was always there, and also a little daughter with corn-colored plaits and eyes like blue gentians who sat on a stool close to his knees. And on Saturday mornings that part of the school-master's dream came true.

Where the River Begins

Patricia M. St. John

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1

The Cherry Tree

"*Francis!*" shouted his stepfather, "*will you behave yourself! Leave your little sister alone! It's crazy, a boy your size!*"

Francis gulped down his mouthful and started the usual argument.

"I tell you, Dad, she kicked me first—she always does, and you always think—"

"I didn't."

"You did."

"I didn't."

"Francis, hold your tongue! Can't you see how you're upsetting your mother and bringing on her headache? Don't you *care?*"

"Well, I'm only telling you—"

"You just stop telling us then. Take your lunch and finish it in your bedroom and stay there till I call you. I'm dead sick of all this quarreling. Anyone would think you were a baby!"

Francis seized his plate, snatched a jam tart from the middle of the table, set it down in the middle of his gravy, aimed a last deadly kick at Wendy's shins, and made for the door. Her yells followed him down the hall. But he did not go up to his bedroom. He sneaked through the living room, stuffed his Star War

comic down his jersey, and streaked out of the back door into the yard. He must not walk in front of the kitchen window, where they were finishing lunch, so he tiptoed round the house and made a run for the hedge. Stooping low, he crept through the long grass behind the apple trees and reached the cherry tree at the very end of the yard in safety.

Nobody quite knew who the cherry tree belonged to, for its roots were half in Francis's yard and half in old Mrs. Glengarry's next door. That imparted an exciting trespassing sort of feeling to begin with. It was fun to peer over into other dangerous territory and pretend he must not be seen, although Mrs. Glengarry had long ago noticed the dangling legs; and when Francis's sandal had once dropped into her lavender bushes, she had come out and handed it back. She rather liked the dangling legs; they reminded her of something she had lost many years ago.

But nobody from his own house had yet discovered Francis's hiding place in the cherry tree, for it was hidden by an evergreen and was not easy to climb. In fact, climbing was impossible with a plate, so he finished his dinner crouched in the bushes, squashed his tart into his pocket and jumped for the lowest bough. He kicked up his legs to catch hold of it and hauled himself up and over. Then, hand over hand, he climbed to a big fork in the trunk where there was a kind of seat and a hollow large enough to contain a tin box.

Francis settled himself comfortably and checked the contents of the tin box. It was all there—three dinky cars, fifty football cards, and a bag of mints.

He ate up the crumbs of his tart and started to think over his position.

He did not mind being sent away from the table. In fact, when Dad was in a temper and Mum had a headache and Wendy was in a bad mood, it was far pleasanter to have lunch in the cherry tree. Nevertheless his heart was sore. Wendy *had* kicked first—she always did—and Dad always blamed him because he was the oldest, and it was not fair. If he had been Dad's son, Dad would have liked him as much as Wendy and Debby, and it was not true that he did not care about Mum's headaches. He did care, and he would do anything for his mother, but somehow he never got a chance to tell her so. *And Dad said I was naughty, and Mum always believed him, and it wasn't fair— Wendy kicked first, and they never said Wendy was naughty. Dad always blames me.*

His thoughts were going round and round in the same old circle, back to the same place. *It wasn't fair—it wasn't fair.* He said it to himself in bed at night, so that he sometimes would not sleep, and he said it himself in class so he could not listen to what the teacher was saying, and she had said on his last report that he was inattentive. Then Dad had been cross and said he was naughty again, and Mum had believed him. *And it wasn't fair.*

But here in the cherry tree it was easier than anywhere else to forget that it was not fair, because there were so many things to look at. He could see Mrs. Glengarry coming out, wrapped in shawls, to feed her cats, and Mrs. Rose, two doors away, hanging out her dish towels. He could spy on everyone's back yard and on beyond the yards to where cars and trucks

roared along the main street and on to where the woods began and little hills rose behind with warm acres of pink Warwickshire soil, farms, and pastures, and somewhere, between two dips in the hills, the river. It was March and the end of a wet winter. The river would be flooding its banks in parts and nearly reaching the bridges.

Then he looked round on his own yard. The crocuses were ragged and dying, but the daffodil spears were pushing through the grass. It was very quiet except for the birds, and he wondered what they were all doing. Mum would have gone to bed with her headache, and Dad would be with Wendy and Debby because it was Saturday afternoon. He would probably take them to ride their bicycles in the park and buy them ice cream. And, no doubt, he would soon go up to Francis's bedroom to tell him that if he would behave and say sorry to his little sister he could come too. Francis had to admit that Dad quite often tried to be kind.

But he did not want anyone's kindness, and he was not going to say sorry to Wendy or ride his bicycle with little girls, and he had enough money in his pocket to buy himself ice cream. Spring was in the air, and he would go off by himself and have an adventure. He would go to the river, and Mum would not worry because she would be asleep, and Dad would probably be only too glad to get rid of him. He pocketed the mints and scrambled cautiously down the tree, peering through the evergreen to make sure the coast was clear. His bicycle was in the toolshed and not hard to get at. Another few moments and he was out the gate pedaling madly and breathing hard. He had made it!

Francis had a vague idea of getting to the river, but he had never been so far by himself, and by the time he had reached the bottom of his road, he was beginning to wonder whether an adventure by himself would be much fun. He even found himself thinking longingly of Dad, Wendy, and the park and half hoped the others would catch up.

But they were nowhere in sight, and he suddenly realized that he was standing at the bottom of a street where the houses were smaller than those on his road and that down this street lived Ram, a boy from India who went to his school. He had never taken much notice of Ram. Nobody did, because he was very shy and small for his age, and he could not speak much English. But Ram had a bicycle and would be someone to share an adventure with. Francis pedaled to number 8 and knocked on the door.

Ram's mother came to the door, wearing a deep blue sari, her hair hanging in a braid down her back, and a tiny girl on her hip. She did not know much English either and looked rather frightened. She called Ram, who came running out and introduced everybody. His little sister was called Tara, and she stared solemnly at Francis with huge, unwinking black eyes. Francis decided that he liked her much better than Debby.

Ram's mother seemed pleased that Francis had come to invite Ram to go for a bicycle ride, because no other child had visited, and her little boy was lonely here in England where they found it so hard to communicate. While Ram pumped up his bicycle tires, she prepared them a little picnic. Francis sat and waited in a room that smelled pleasantly of curry, and tried, unsuccessfully, to make Tara smile at him.

Then they were off, pedaling along the grassy edge of the great main road that led southward from the city and out toward the open country. Francis knew the way for he had been there once or twice with his step-father.

"Where are we going?" asked Ram, his black eyes sparkling.

"To the river," shouted Francis, forging ahead.

2

The River

They turned off the main road after about a mile and coasted along a country lane toward a picturesque village with old beamed cottages and a blacksmith's shop on a small village green. They stopped to buy pop and then cycled across the bridge to find a nice place for a picnic. The big river had risen almost to flood level, but there was a smaller tributary farther on, away from the village, where they could amuse themselves privately. Francis was not quite sure how to reach it, but he pedaled on and Ram followed trustfully. They turned into a gate that did not say Private, hid their bicycles behind the hedge, and trotted up a path that led to the top of a hill.

"I think the river is down the other side," said Francis. "Hurry up, Ram."

It was a lovely place. Great beeches with gray forked boughs arched the path, perfect for climbing. The leaves were not yet sprouting, but catkins pranced above the undergrowth, and the birds were already chattering and trilling about mating and nesting. The air was full of sunshine, life, and pollen, and Francis flung out his arms like the wings of a plane and made off down the hill as fast as he could run.

"There's the river," he shouted. "I told you so! Race me down to the bridge, Ram."

But Ram was not used to steep muddy paths. He caught his foot in a rabbit hole and fell on his nose. Being a brave and polite little boy he got up and apologized, but he was plainly worried about the mud on his trousers. "We go home soon?" he inquired hopefully.

"Home!" yelled Francis. "Not on your life! Look, I told you I knew where the river was. Come on, Ram. Step on it!"

"Why go river?" protested Ram. "De water cold and I no swim." But he followed obediently toward the bridge. They sat on a log and ate their picnic while the golden water, at flood level, hurried past, swirling round the trunks of the alders. Francis munched his sandwich and thought that this was the most wonderful afternoon he had ever experienced. Wendy and his stepfather seemed very far away and unimportant. He was free to do what he liked and to go where he pleased, and the river itself was only the beginning of adventure.

He looked around. Behind him was a sloping field where black and white cows grazed. Beyond it was a farmhouse with a barn and other buildings, and beyond that, light soil sowed with young wheat and a spring sky with white clouds scudding across it. Then he turned to look at the river, and as he did so, the sun came out, sparkling on the celandines and colts-foot on the bank and glistening on the water.

He jumped up and ran to an alder whose trunk sloped out far over the river. His next adventure would be to scramble up it and look down on the current, but when he reached the roots he suddenly saw

another adventure so dangerous and exciting that he gave a little cry of mingled fear and joy, and Ram got up and came and stood beside him.

They were looking down at a little inlet, roofed over and well hidden, where a small boat had been beached and tied to a post. But the flood had lifted it so that it rocked on a backwater—a shabby little dinghy waiting for its spring coat of paint. Francis was down the bank in a moment and sitting in it. The oars had been removed and there was no rudder. It was just a little toy craft for children to jump in and out of on a hot summer day. But to Francis it was an adventure to end all adventures. He was already working at the knots and shouting at Ram to get in.

Ram stood in the mud, tense with fear and indecision. He realized at once that to launch the little boat was exceedingly dangerous, but he knew, too, that he was quite incapable of controlling Francis, and that he could not desert him. He made one last appeal.

“No, Francis,” he cried, spreading out his hands in supplication. “Come back—not good—I no swim—*Francis!*”

For the last knot had slipped, and the boat, caught on a sideways swirl of water, was heading for the main river. Ram, who dreaded being left alone more than anything else, made a jump for it and landed in the boat beside Francis. It rocked alarmingly but held to its course. In another moment they had left the backwater behind them and were launched suddenly into midstream.

Francis fell silent, and his face grew rather pale. He had never dreamed of anything like this happening. He had imagined himself holding onto the boughs

of trees at the edge of the river and going for a nice little ride, but the boat was now completely out of control. It pitched along through the foaming current. Ram behind him was sobbing and muttering, sure that his last hour had come, and Francis rather thought it had too. He clung to the side and tried to think, but the boat was moving so fast that he could not think at all. If only he could steer it shoreward and catch hold of a branch or bump into a reed island—but he could not do anything, only cling.

Then above the rush of water he heard shouting—loud frightened shouting—from the bank. He glanced round and saw a man—a very large, angry man—running as fast as he could with two little boys running behind, followed by a furiously barking sheep dog.

“The dam’s just ahead, you little idiots,” yelled the angry man. “Turn the boat in! Trail your coats on the right side.”

He was running faster than the boat and had gotten well ahead of them. Then the smaller boy clasped the hand of the older boy, who clung to some rope or belt tied around the middle of the angry man, who plunged into the river in all his clothes, reminding Francis of a furious hippopotamus.

“Can you swim?” bellowed the angry man.

“I can—he can’t,” yelled Francis.

“Then jump,” shouted the angry man, thrashing the water with his arms. “The dam’s just ahead. *Jump*, I tell you.”

Francis glanced ahead and, sure enough, the river seemed to disappear with a roar. Ram saw it too, gave a loud squeal, and jumped. The angry man caught him and held him fast.

"Pull," he shouted to the boys on the bank. "And you—hang on."

There was a great splash and a struggle. Francis seemed to swallow the river and go down to the bottom. Then he surfaced and found his hands being guided onto the dog leash, and he was being pulled ashore. The angry man was already struggling out of the water with Ram in his arms, and a moment later Francis was picked up like a drowned puppy and thrown on the grass, soaked, frozen, and sobbing.