

With a New Introduction by the Author's Daughter



# *The* WOLVES of WILLOUGHBY CHASE



*Joan Aiken*

*For John  
and Elizabeth  
and Torquemada*

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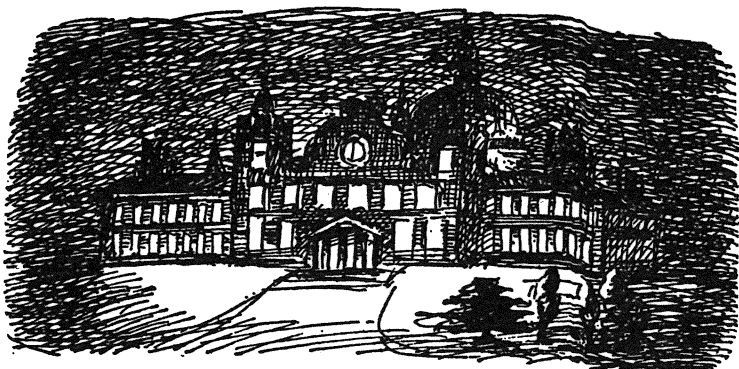
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available upon request.

ISBN: 978-0-440-49603-8

Printed in the United States of America  
46 45 44 43

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# ONE



It was dusk—winter dusk. Snow lay white and shining over the pleated hills, and icicles hung from the forest trees. Snow lay piled on the dark road across Willoughby Wold, but from dawn men had been clearing it with brooms and shovels. There were hundreds of them at work, wrapped in sacking because of the bitter cold, and keeping together in groups for fear of the wolves, grown savage and reckless from hunger.

Snow lay thick, too, upon the roof of Willoughby

Chase, the great house that stood on an open eminence in the heart of the wold. But for all that, the Chase looked an inviting home—a warm and welcoming stronghold. Its rosy herringbone brick was bright and well-cared-for, its numerous turrets and battlements stood up sharp against the sky, and the crenelated balconies, corniced with snow, each held a golden square of window. The house was all alight within, and the joyous hubbub of its activity contrasted with the somber sighing of the wind and the hideous howling of the wolves without.

In the nursery a little girl was impatiently dancing up and down before the great window, fourteen feet high, which faced out over the park and commanded the long black expanse of road.

“Will she be here soon, Pattern? Will she?” was her continual cry.

“We shall hear soon enough, I dare say, Miss Bonnie,” was the inevitable reply from her maid, who, on hands and knees in front of the fire, was folding and goffering the frills of twenty lace petticoats.

The little girl turned again to her impatient vigil. She had climbed up on to the window seat, the better to survey the snowy park, and was jumping on its well-sprung cushions, covered in crimson satin. Each time she bounced, she nearly hit the ceiling.

“Give over, Miss Bonnie, do,” said Pattern after a while. “Look at the dust you’re raising. I can hardly see my tongs. Come and sit by the fire. We shall hear soon enough when the train’s due.”

Bonnie left her perch reluctantly enough and came to sit by the fire. She was a slender creature, small for her



age, but rosy-cheeked, with a mass of tumbled black locks falling to her shoulders, and two brilliant blue eyes, equally ready to dance with laughter or flash with indignation. Her square chin also gave promise of a powerful and obstinate temper, not always perfectly controlled. But her mouth was sweet, and she could be very thoughtful on occasion—as now, when she sat gazing into the fire, piled high on its two carved alabaster wolfhounds.

"I hope the train hasn't been delayed by wolves," she said presently.

"Nonsense, Miss Bonnie dear—don't worry your pretty head with thoughts like that," replied Pattern. "You know the porters and stationmaster have been practicing with their muskets and fowling pieces all the week."

At that moment there was a commotion from downstairs, and Bonnie turned, her face alight with expectancy. As the noise of dogs barking, men shouting, and the doorbell clanging continued, she flew recklessly along the huge expanse of nursery floor, gleaming and polished as glass, and down the main staircase to the entrance hall. Her impetuosity brought her in a heap to the feet of an immensely tall, thin lady, clad from neck to toe in a traveling dress of swathed gray twill, with a stiff collar, dark glasses, and dull green buttoned boots. Bonnie's headlong rush nearly sent this person flying, and she recovered her balance with an exclamation of annoyance.

"Who is guilty of this unmannerly irruption?" she said, settling her glasses once more upon her nose. "Can this hoydenish creature be my new pupil?"



"I—I beg your pardon!" Bonnie exclaimed, picking herself up.

"So I should hope! Am I right in supposing that you are Miss Green? I am Miss Slighcarp, your new governess. I am also your fourth cousin, once removed," the lady added haughtily, as if she found the removal hardly sufficient.

"Oh," Bonnie stammered, "I didn't know—that is, I thought you were not expected until tomorrow. I was looking for my cousin Sylvia, who is arriving this evening."

"I am aware of the fact," Miss Slighcarp replied coldly, "but that does not excuse bad manners. Where, pray, is your curtsy?"

Rather flustered, Bonnie performed this formality with less than her usual grace.

"Lessons in deportment, I see, will need priority on our timetable," Miss Slighcarp remarked, and she turned to look after the disposition of her luggage. "You, sir! Do not stand there smirking and dawdling, but see that my valises are carried at once to my apartments, and that my maid is immediately in attendance to help me."

James, the footman, who had been exchanging grimaces with the butler over the fact that he received no tip, at once sprang to attention, and said:

"Your maid, miss? Did you bring a maid with you?"

"No, blockhead. The maid whom Lady Green will have appointed to wait on me."

"Well, I suppose Miss Pattern will be helping you," said James, scratching his head, and he shouldered one

of the nine walrus-hide portmanteaux and staggered off to the service stairs.

"I will show you the way to your room," said Bonnie eagerly, "and when you are ready I will take you to see Papa and Mamma. I hope we shall love each other," she continued, leading the way up the magnificent marble staircase, and along the portrait gallery. "I shall have so much to show you—my collection of flint arrowheads and my semiprecious stones."

Miss Slighcarp thinned her lips disapprovingly and Bonnie, fearing that she had been forward, said no more of her pursuits.

"Here is your apartment," she explained presently, opening a door and exhibiting a commodious set of rooms, cheerful with fires and furnished with elegant taste in gilt and mahogany. "And here is my maid Pattern to help you."

Miss Slighcarp drew down her brows at this, but acknowledged the remark by an inclination of her head. Pattern was already kneeling at the dressing case and drawing out such articles as the governess might immediately need.

"I shall leave you, then, for the moment," said Bonnie, preparing to go. She turned to add, "Shall I come back in half an hour?" but was arrested by the sight of Miss Slighcarp snatching a heavy marble hairbrush from its rest and striking a savage blow at the maid, who had taken out a little case apparently containing letters and papers.

"Prying wretch! Who gave you permission to meddle with my letters?" she cried.

Bonnie sprang back in an instant, all her violent temper roused, and seized the brush from Miss Slighcarp's hand, hurling it recklessly through the plate-glass window. She picked up a jug of warm water which a housemaid had just brought, and dashed it full in the face of her new instructress.

Miss Slighcarp reeled under the impact—her bonnet came off; so did her gray hair, which, apparently, was a wig, leaving her bald, dripping, and livid with rage.

"Oh dear—I am so sorry!" said Bonnie in consternation. "I did not mean to do that. My temper is a dreadful fault. But you must not strike Pattern. She is one of my best friends. Oh, Pattern—help her!"

The maid assisted Miss Slighcarp to replace the damp wig and repair the damage done by the water, but her compressed lips and nostrils showed how little she relished the task. An angry red weal was rising on her cheek where the brush had struck her.

"Go!" said Miss Slighcarp to Bonnie, pointing at the door.

Bonnie was glad to do so. Half an hour later, though, she returned, having done her best in the meantime to wrestle with her rebellious temper.

"Shall I escort you to Mamma and Papa now?" she said, when the governess bade her enter. Miss Slighcarp had changed into another gray twill dress with a high white collar, and had laid aside her merino traveling cloak.

She permitted Bonnie to lead her toward the apartments of her parents, having first locked up several drawers in which she had deposited papers, and placed the keys in a chatelaine at her belt.

Bonnie, whose indignation never lasted long, danced ahead cheerfully enough, pointing out to her companion the oubliette where Cousin Roger had slipped, the panel which concealed a secret staircase, the haunted portico, the priests' hole, and other features of her beloved home. Miss Slighcarp, however, as she followed, wore on her face an expression that boded little good toward her charge.

At length they paused before a pair of doors grander than any they had yet passed, and Bonnie inquired of the attendant who stood before them if her parents were within. Receiving an affirmative answer, she joyfully entered and, running toward an elegant-looking lady and gentleman who were seated on an ottoman near the fireplace, exclaimed:

"Papa! Mamma! Such a surprise! Here is Miss Slighcarp, come a day earlier than expected!"

Miss Slighcarp advanced and made her salutations to her employers.

"I regret not having come up to London to make arrangements with you myself," said Sir Willoughby, bowing easily to her, "but my good friend and man of business Mr. Gripe will have told you how we are situated—on the eve of a departure, with so much to attend to. I had been aware that we had a distant cousin—yourself, ma'am—living in London, and I entrusted Mr. Gripe with the task of seeking you out and asking whether you would be willing to undertake the care of my estates and my child while we are abroad. My only other relative, my sister Jane, is, as perhaps you know, too frail and elderly for such a responsibility. I hope you and Bonnie will get on together famously."

Here Miss Slighcarp, in a low and grating tone, told him the story of the hairbrush and the jug of water, omitting, however, her unprovoked assault in the first place upon poor Pattern. Sir Willoughby burst into laughter.

"Did she do that, the minx? Eh, you hussy!" and he lovingly pinched his daughter's cheek. "Girls will be girls, Miss Slighcarp, and you must allow something for the natural high spirits and excitement attendant on your own arrival and the expected one of her cousin. I shall look to you to instill, in time, a more ladylike deportment into our wild sprite."

Lady Green, who was dark-haired and sad-eyed, and who looked very ill, here raised her voice wearily and asked her husband if that were not a knock on the door. He called a summons impatiently, and the stationmaster entered—a black, dingy figure, twisting his cap in his hands.

"The down train is signaled, Squire," he said, after bobbing his head in reverence to each of the persons present in the room. "Is it your pleasure to let it proceed?"

"Surely, surely," said Sir Willoughby. "My little niece is aboard it—let it approach with all speed. How did you come from the station, my man? Walked? Let orders be given for Solly to drive you back in the chaise—with a suitable escort, of course—then he can wait there and bring back Miss Sylvia at the same time."

"Oh, thank you indeed, sir," said the man with heartfelt gratitude. "Bless your noble heart! It would have taken me a weary while to walk those ten miles back, and it is freezing fast."

"That's all right," said Sir Willoughby heartily. "Mustn't let Miss Sylvia die of cold on the train. Besides, the wolves might get you, and then the poor child would be held up on the train all night for want of the signal. Never do, eh? Well, Bonnie, what is it, miss?"

"Oh, Papa," said Bonnie, who had been plucking at his sleeve, "may I go with Solly in the chaise to meet Sylvia? May I?"

"No indulgence should be permitted a child who has behaved as she has done," remarked Miss Slighcarp.

"Oh, come, come, Miss Slighcarp, come, come, ma'am," said Sir Willoughby good-naturedly. "Young blood, you know. Besides, my Bonnie's as good a shot at a wolf as any of them. Run along, then, miss, but wrap up snug—remember you'll be several hours on the road."

"Oh, thank you, Papa! Goodbye! Goodbye, Mamma dear, goodbye, Miss Slighcarp!" and she fondly kissed her parents and ran from the room to find her warmest bonnet and pelisse.

"Reckless, foolish indulgence," muttered the governess, directing after Bonnie a look of the purest spite.

"But hey!" exclaimed Sir Willoughby, recalled to memory of Miss Slighcarp's presence by the sound, though he missed the sense, of her words. "If the train's only just signaled, how did you come, then, ma'am? You can't have flown here, hey?"

For the first time the governess showed signs of confusion.

"I—er—that is to say, a friend who was driving over from Blastburn kindly offered to bring me here with my baggage," she at length replied.



A bell clanged through the apartment at that moment.

"The dressing bell," said Sir Willoughby, looking at a handsome gold watch, slung on a chain across his ample waistcoat. "I apprehend, Miss Slighcarp, that you are fatigued from your journey and will not wish to dine with us. A meal will be served in your own apartments."

He inclined his head in a dignified gesture of dismissal, which the governess had no option but to obey.

# TWO

Two days before these events a very different scene had been enacted far away in London, where Bonnie's cousin Sylvia was being prepared for her journey.

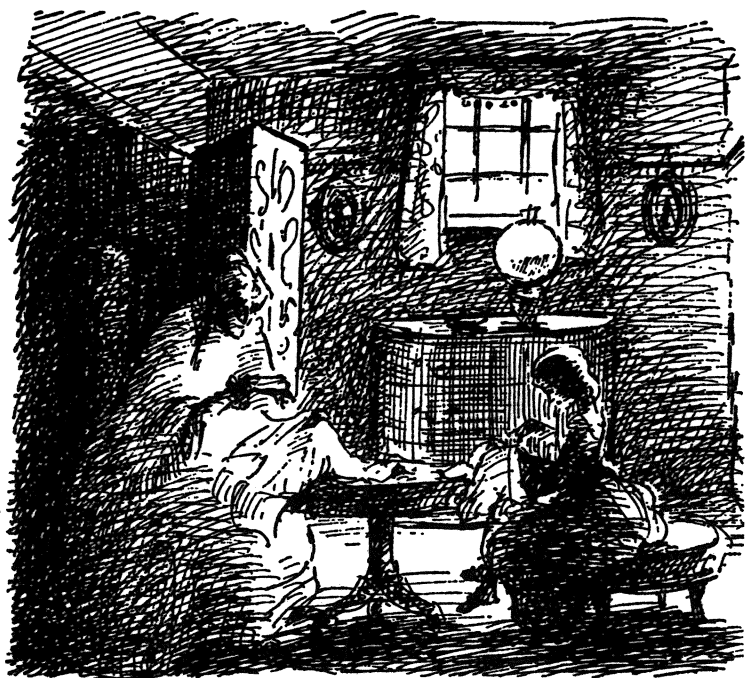
Sylvia was an orphan, both her parents having been carried off by a fever when she was only an infant. She lived with her Aunt Jane, who was now becoming very aged and frail and had written to Sir Willoughby to suggest that he took on the care of the little girl. He had agreed at once to this proposal, for Sylvia, he knew, was delicate, and the country air would do her good. Besides, he welcomed the idea of her gentle companionship for his rather harum-scarum Bonnie.

Aunt Jane and Sylvia shared a room at the top of a house. It was in Park Lane, this being the only street in which Aunt Jane could consider living. Unfortunately, as she was very poor, she could afford to rent only a tiny attic in such a genteel district. The room was divided into two by a very beautiful, but old, curtain of white Chinese brocade. She and Sylvia each had half the room at night, Aunt Jane sleeping on the divan and

Sylvia on the ottoman. During the daytime the curtain was drawn back and hung elegantly looped against the wall. They cooked their meals over the gas jet, and had baths in a large enameled Chinese bowl, covered with dragons, an heirloom of Aunt Jane's. At other times it stood on a little occasional table by the door and was used for visiting cards.

They were making Sylvia's clothes.

Aunt Jane, with tears running down her face, had taken down the white curtain (which would no longer be needed) and was cutting it up. Fortunately it was large enough to afford material for several chemises, petticoats, pantalettes, dresses, and even a bonnet.



Aunt Jane, mopping her eyes with a tiny shred of the material, murmured:

"I do like to see a little girl dressed all in white."

"I *wish* we needn't cut up your curtain, Auntie," said Sylvia, who hated to see her aunt so distressed. "When I'm thirty-five and come into my money, I shall buy you a whole set of white brocade curtains."

"There's my angel," her aunt replied, embracing her. "But when you are thirty-five I shall be a hundred and three," and she set to work making the tucks in a petticoat with thousands of tiny stitches. Sylvia sighed, and bent her fair head over another, with stitches almost equally tiny. She was a little depressed—though she would not dream of saying so—at the idea of wearing nothing but white, especially at her cousin Bonnie's, where everything was sure to be grand and handsome.

"Now let me think," muttered Aunt Jane, sewing away like lightning. "What can we use to make you a traveling cloak?"

She paused for a moment and glanced round the room, at the lovingly tended pieces of Sheraton and Hepplewhite furniture, the antimacassars, the Persian screen across the gas-jet kitchen. The window curtains were too threadbare to use—and in any case one must have window curtains. At last she recollected an old green velvet shawl which they sometimes used as an extra bedcover when it was very cold and they slept together on the ottoman.

"I can use my jet-trimmed mantle instead," she said reassuringly to Sylvia. "After all, one person cannot be so cold as two."

By the day of departure, all the clothes had been finished. Nothing much could be done about Sylvia's

shoes, which were deplorably shabby, but Aunt Jane blacked them with a mixture of soot and candle grease, and Sylvia's bonnet was trimmed with a white plume from the ostrich-feather fan which her aunt had carried at her coming-out ball. All Sylvia's belongings were neatly packed into an old carpet-bag, and Aunt Jane had made her up a little packet of provisions for the journey, though with strict injunctions not to eat them if there were anyone else in the compartment.

"For ladies *never* eat in public."

They were too poor to take a hackney carriage to the station, and Aunt Jane always refused to travel in omnibuses, so they walked, carrying the bag between them. Fortunately the station was not far, nor the bag heavy.

Aunt Jane secured a corner seat for her charge, and put her under the care of the guard.

"Now remember, my dear child," she said, kissing Sylvia and looking suspiciously round the empty compartment, "never speak to strangers, tip all the servants immediately (I have put all the farthings from my reticule at the bottom of your valise); do not model yourself on your cousin Bonnie, who I believe is a dear good child but a little wild; give my fond regards to my brother Willoughby and tell him that I am in the pink of health and *amply* provided for; and if anyone except the guard speaks to you, pull the communication cord."

"Yes, Auntie," replied Sylvia dutifully, embracing her. She felt a pang as she saw the frail old figure struggling away through the crowd, and wondered how her Aunt Jane would manage that evening without her little niece to adjust her curlpapers and read aloud a page of Dr. Johnson's Dictionary.

Then all Sylvia's fears were aroused, for a strange man entered the compartment and sat down. He did not speak, however, and took no notice of her, and, the train shortly afterward departing, her thoughts were diverted into a less apprehensive vein as she watched the unfamiliar houses with their lighted windows flying past.

It was to be a long journey—a night and a day. The hour of departure was six o'clock in the evening, and Sylvia knew that she did not arrive at her destination until about eight of the following evening. What strange forests, towns, mountains, and stretches of countryside would they not have passed by then, as the train proceeded at its steady fifteen miles an hour! She had never been out of London before, and watched eagerly from her window until they had left the houses behind, and she was driven to study the toes of her own shoes, so lovingly polished by Aunt Jane.

The thought of the old lady, carefully preparing for her solitary slumbers, was too much for Sylvia, and tears began to run silently down her cheeks, which she endeavored to mop with her tiny handkerchief (made from a spare two inches of white brocade).

"Here, this won't do," said a voice in her ear suddenly, and she looked up in alarm to see that the man at the other end of the compartment had moved along and was sitting opposite and staring at her. Sylvia gave her eyes a final dab and haughtily concentrated on her reflection in the dark window, but her heart was racing. Should she pull the communication cord? She stole a cautious glance at the man's reflection and saw that he was standing up, apparently extracting something from a large leather portmanteau. Then he turned toward

her, holding something out: she looked round enough to see that it was a box of chocolates about a foot square by six inches deep, swathed around with violet ribbons.

"No, thank you," said Sylvia, in as ladylike a tone as she could muster. "I never touch chocolate." All the same, she had to swallow rapidly a couple of times, for the tea which she had shared with Aunt Jane before the journey, although very refined, had not been substantial—two pieces of thin bread-and-butter, a cinnamon wafer, and a sliver of caraway cake.

She knew better, however, than to accept food from strangers, and as to opening her own little packet while he was in the carriage—that was out of the question. She shook her head again.

"Now come along—do," said the man coaxingly. "All little girls like sweeties, I know."

"Sir," said Sylvia coldly, "if you speak to me again I shall be obliged to pull the communication cord."

He sighed and put away the box. Her relief over this was premature, however, for he turned round next minute with a confectioners' pasteboard carton filled with every imaginable variety of little cakes—there were jam tarts, maids of honor, lemon cheese cakes, Chelsea buns, and numerous little iced confections in brilliant and enticing colors.

"I always put up a bit of tiffin for a journey," he murmured as if to himself, and, placing the box on the seat directly opposite Sylvia, he selected a cake covered with violet icing and bit into it. It appeared to be filled with jam. Sylvia looked straight ahead and ignored him, but again she had to swallow.

"Now, my dear, how about one of these little odds and

ends?" said the man. "I can't possibly eat them all by myself—can I?"

Sylvia stood up and looked for the communication cord. It was out of her reach.

"Shall I pull it for you?" inquired her fellow traveler politely, following the direction of her eyes upward. Sylvia did not reply to him. She did not feel, though, that it would be ladylike to climb up on the seat or armrest to pull the cord herself, so she sat down again, biting her lip with anxiety. To her inexpressible relief the stranger, after eating three or four more cakes with every appearance of enjoyment, put the box back in his portmanteau, wrapped himself in a richly furred cloak, retired to his own corner, and shut his eyes. A subdued but regular snore soon issuing from his partly opened mouth presently convinced Sylvia that he was asleep, and she began to breathe more freely. At length she brought out from concealment under her mantle her most treasured possession, and held it lovingly in her arms.

This was a doll named Annabelle, made of wood, not much larger than a candle, and plainly dressed, but extremely dear to Sylvia. She and Annabelle had no secrets from one another, and it was a great comfort to her to have this companion as the train rocked on through the unfamiliar dark.

Presently she grew drowsy and fell into uneasy slumber, but not for long; it was bitterly cold and her feet in their thin shoes felt like lumps of ice. She huddled into her corner and wrapped herself in the green cloak, envying her companion his thick furs and undisturbed repose, and wishing it were ladylike to curl her feet up beneath her on the seat. Unfortunately she knew better than that.



She dreamed, without being really asleep, of arctic seas, of monstrous tunnels through hillsides fringed with icicles. Her traveling companion, who had grown a long tail and a pair of horns, offered her cakes the size of grand pianos and colored scarlet, blue, and green; when she bit into them she found they were made of snow.

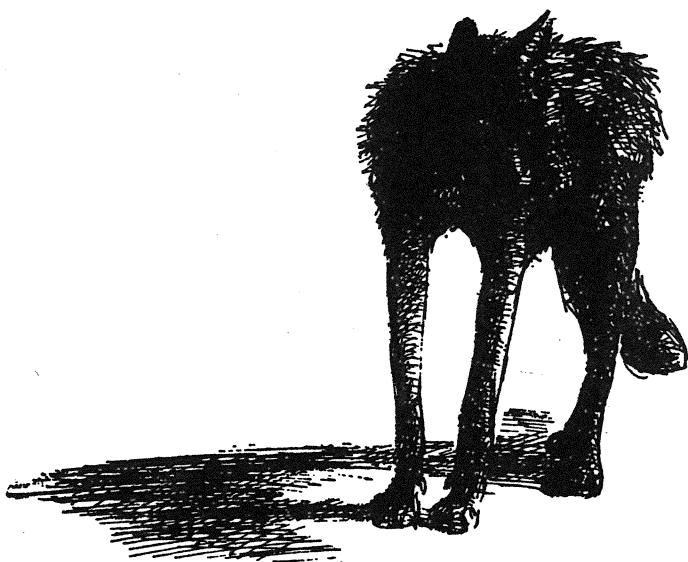
She woke suddenly from one of these dreams to find that the train had stopped with a jerk.

"Oh! What is it? Where are we?" she exclaimed before she could stop herself.

"No need to alarm yourself, miss," said her companion, looking unavailingly out of the black square of window. "Wolves on the line, most likely—they often have trouble of that kind hereabouts."

"Wolves!" Sylvia stared at him in terror.

"They don't often get into the train, though," he



added reassuringly. "Two years ago they managed to climb into the guard's van and eat a pig, and once they got the engine driver—another had to be sent in a relief engine—but they don't often eat a passenger, I promise you."

As if in contradiction of his words a sad and sinister howling now arose beyond the windows, and Sylvia, pressing her face against the dark pane, saw that they were passing through a thickly wooded region where snow lay deep on the ground. Across this white carpet she could just discern a ragged multitude pouring, out of which arose, from time to time, this terrible cry. She was almost petrified with fear and sat clutching Annabelle in a cold and trembling hand. At length she summoned up strength to whisper:

"Why don't we go on?"

"Oh, I expect there are too many of 'em on the line ahead," the man answered carelessly. "Can't just push through them, you see—the engine would be derailed in no time, and then we *should* be in a bad way. No, I expect we'll have to wait here till daylight now—the wolves get scared then, you know, and make for home. All that matters is that the driver shan't get eaten in the meantime—he'll keep 'em off by throwing lumps of coal at them, I dare say."

"Oh!" Sylvia exclaimed in irrepressible alarm, as a heavy body thudded suddenly against the window, and she had a momentary view of a pointed gray head, red slavering jaws, and pale eyes gleaming with ferocity.

"Oh, don't worry about that," soothed her companion. "They'll keep up that jumping against the windows for

hours. They're not much danger, you know, singly; it's only in the whole pack you've got to watch out for 'em."

Sylvia was not much comforted by this. She moved along to the middle of the seat and huddled there, glancing fearfully first to one side and then to the other. The strange man seemed quite undisturbed by the repeated onslaught of the wolves which followed. He took a pinch of snuff, remarked that it was all a great nuisance and they would be late, and composed himself to sleep again.

He had just begun to snore when a discomposing incident occurred. The window beside him, which must have been insecurely fastened, was not proof against the continuous impact of the frenzied and ravenous animals. The catch suddenly slipped, and the window fell open with a crash, its glass shivering into fragments.

Sylvia screamed. Another instant, and a wolf precipitated itself through the aperture thus formed. It turned snarling on the sleeping stranger, who started awake with an oath, and very adroitly flung his cloak over the animal. He then seized one of the shattered pieces of glass lying on the floor and stabbed the imprisoned beast through the cloak. It fell dead.

"Tush," said Sylvia's companion, breathing heavily and passing his hand over his face. "Unexpected—most."

He extracted the dead wolf from the folds of the cloak and tipped its body, with some exertion, out through the broken window. There was a chorus of snarling and yelping outside, and then the wolves seemed to take fright at the appearance of their dead comrade, for Sylvia saw them coursing away over the snow.

"Come, that's capital," said the man. "We'd better shift before they come back."

"Shift?"

"Into another compartment," he explained. "Can't stay in this one now—too cold for one thing, and for another, have wolves popping in the whole time—nuisance. No, come along, now's the time to do it."

Sylvia was most reluctant, and indeed almost too terrified to accompany him, but she saw the force of his proposal and watched anxiously as he opened the door and glanced this way and that.

"Right! Just pass me out those bags, will you?" He had placed both his and hers ready on the seat. She passed them out. Holding them in one hand, he made his way sideways along the footboard to the next carriage door, which he opened. He tossed in the bags, returned for his cloak and rug, and finally reappeared and held out his hand to Sylvia.

"Come along now, my dear, if you don't want to be made into wolf porridge," he exclaimed with frightening joviality, and Sylvia timorously permitted him to assist her along the narrow ledge and into the next carriage. It was with a sense of unbounded relief and thankfulness that she heard him slam the door and make sure that the windows were securely fastened.

"Excellent," he remarked with a smile at Sylvia which bared every tooth in his head. "Now we can have another forty winks," and he wrapped himself up again in his cloak, careless of any wolf gore that might remain on its folds, and shut his eyes.

Sylvia was too cold and terrified to sleep. She crouched, as before, in the middle of the seat—icy, shiv-

ering, and expecting at any minute to hear the wolves recommence their attack against the window.

"Here, we can't have this," said a disapproving voice, and she turned to see the man awake again and scrutinizing her closely. "Not warm enough, eh? Here . . ." and then as he saw her wince away from his cloak, he unstrapped a warm plaid traveling rug and insisted on wrapping her in it. Tired, frozen, and frightened, Sylvia was unable to resist him any longer.

"Put your feet up and lie down," he ordered. "That's right. Now shut your eyes. No more wolves for the time being—they've been scared away. Off to sleep with you."

Sylvia was beginning to be deliciously warm. Her last recollection was of hearing his snores begin again.

# THREE

When Sylvia woke, it was broad daylight and the train was running through a mountainous region, wooded here and there, and with but few and scattered dwellings. Her companion was already awake, and munching away at an enormous piece of cold sausage.

Sylvia felt herself to be nearly dead of hunger. She remembered Aunt Jane's precept, "Never eat in front of strangers," but surely Aunt Jane had not intended her to go for a whole night and a day without taking *some* refreshment? And moreover, the good soul could not have anticipated the dreadful perils that her niece was to encounter, perils which had left Sylvia so weak and faint that she felt she might never reach Willoughby Chase alive unless she could open her little packet and consume some of its contents. Perhaps, she thought, the shared adventure of the wolves formed some sort of an introduction to her fellow traveler.

She pondered over this matter for some time and at length, driven by her ravenous appetite, and with many timorous glances at the strange man, she opened her

carpet-bag and took from her parcel of food one or two of the little dry rolls her aunt had provided—rolls that contained in each a tiny sliver of ham, frail and thin as pink tissue paper. The remainder she put back for later in the day. After this frugal meal she felt greatly restored, and was not too discomposed when she saw that the man, having devoured his sausage down to the twisted end, was now smiling at her in a manner that was evidently intended to be the height of amiability.

"There! Now we both feel better," he remarked.

"It was most kind of you, sir, to lend me your rug," Sylvia faltered.

"Couldn't let you freeze to death, m'dear, could I? Not after you'd shown such pluck and spirit over the wolves. Some little gels would have screamed and cried, I can tell you!"

"Will they come back again?" inquired Sylvia, glancing anxiously out. The train was now running across a wide snowy plain, dazzlingly bright under the sun of a clear blue morning.

"Not till this evening," he told her. "When we get to the wolds at dusk you can depend on it there'll be wolves there to meet us. No need to worry, though."

Sylvia looked her doubt of this statement, and he exclaimed, "Pshaw! Wolves are cowardly brutes! They won't hurt you unless they outnumber you by more than ten to one. If you feel anxious about it I'll get my gun, though I don't generally use it for small fry."

And to Sylvia's alarm he pulled down a canvas-wrapped bundle that she had taken for fishing rods and took from it a long, heavy, glinting blue gun. Opening a smaller bag, he brought out a few cartridges and clapped

them into the breech. Then, turning to Sylvia—she winced away in alarm—he said, “Now, my dear, shall I give you a proof of my marksmanship? Shall I, eh?”

“Oh, no, sir, please don’t! Please do not! Indeed, indeed, I am sure you can shoot extremely well!”

“Can’t be sure till you have seen me! And it will pass the time for us both.”

So saying, he opened the window at one end of the compartment while Sylvia, with her hands to her ears, pressed herself as far as possible into a corner at the other end.

“Now then, what’s there to shoot? Can’t very well shoot cattle, though it would be a rare joke, ha ha! There’s a bunny, bang! Got him—did you see him go head over heels?” Sylvia had seen no such thing, for her hands were over her eyes, and her nose buried in the red-and-black patterned upholstery.

“Now a rook—he’s flapping along slowly, I’ll wait till we catch him up—there! Tumbled down like a stone. The farmer’ll wonder where he came from.”

He fired one or two more shots and then remarked, “But I mustn’t waste all my cartridges, must keep some for the wolves, what?” and put the gun back in its case, carefully cleaning it before he did so. The compartment was reeking with acrid blue smoke and Sylvia was nearly choking.

“There, I never asked if you’d like to try a shot,” the man said, “but I fancy the gun would be a bit heavy for you, as you’re on the small side—a lighter fowling piece would be the thing for you.”

“Indeed, I hope I shall never need to shoot at all,” said Sylvia, horrified at the very possibility of such an idea.



"Never know when it might come in useful—my old mother used to say that every little girl should be able to cook, play the piano, sing, and shoot."

Sylvia thought of Aunt Jane's very different catalogue of accomplishments for little girls, in which crewel work, purse netting, and making paper doilies took high place, and could not agree with him. The thought of Aunt Jane made her sad once more and she sighed deeply.

"Are you going far?" the man asked. "Let's get acquainted. My name's Grimshaw—Josiah Grimshaw."

Sylvia did not much wish to confide in him, but she felt that if she did not talk to him he might get bored and recommence shooting out of the window. Anything was preferable to that. Accordingly she told him her name, and that she was traveling to the house of her uncle, Sir Willoughby Green.

He expressed great interest in this.

"Ah yes, yes indeed. I've heard of Sir Willoughby. Richest man in five counties, isn't he?"

Sylvia knew nothing of that.

"And you'll have a fine time there, eh? Shall you be staying there long?"

"Oh yes. You see, my dear mamma and papa are dead, and so I am to live there now with my cousin Bonnie."

"And your uncle and aunt will look after you," he said, nodding.

"Oh, not for very long," she told him. "My poor Aunt Sophia is very delicate, and it is necessary for my uncle to take her on a voyage south for her health, so they will be leaving very soon after I get there. My poor cousin Bonnie, how she will miss them! But we shall have a

governess who is related to us, and of course there are many servants there to look after us. And I hope that Aunt Sophy will soon be better and come back to England—Aunt Jane says that she is so pretty and kind!”

He nodded again.

Afternoon was now come upon them—gray, with promise of more snow. The train had left the levels and was running into more upland country—waste, wide, and lonely, with not a living thing stirring across its bare and open expanses. It was bleak and forbidding, and Sylvia shivered a little, thinking what a long way there was yet to go before she reached her unknown destination.

The day dragged on. To her relief Mr. Grimshaw presently fell asleep again and sat snoring in his corner. Sylvia took out Annabelle once more and showed her the landscape—it seemed to her that the poor doll looked somewhat startled and dismayed at the dreary prospect, which was not surprising, since her painted eyes had never before surveyed anything wilder than Hyde Park on a sunny morning.

“Never mind, Annabelle,” Sylvia said, comforting her, “we’ll be there soon, and there will be warm fires and many beautiful things to look at. I expect Bonnie will have many doll-friends for you to play with. Oh dear, I only hope they won’t laugh at you in your funny little old pelisse!”

She felt rather self-reproachful about Annabelle’s old clothes, but there really had not been a scrap of the white curtain left by the time her own outfit had been completed. She consoled herself and the doll as best she could, and presently sang some quiet songs in an undertone when it seemed fairly sure, judging by the loudness

of Mr. Grimshaw's snores, that she would not wake him with her singing.

At length darkness came, and poor Sylvia was dismayed by the sight, while it was yet dusk, of many animal shapes streaming in a broken formation across the snow. She heard again that lonely, heart-shaking cry of the wolves and wondered whether to waken Mr. Grimshaw and tell him.

But the train chugged on its way without slowing, and the wolves came and went in the shadows of the trees, never approaching very near, so that she felt it would be cowardly to disturb him, and as long as there was no immediate danger she greatly preferred to let him sleep on.

It was now quite dark, and Sylvia wished very much that she had some means of knowing the time. Mr. Grimshaw had a great gold watch in his waistcoat, but this was covered up, and she could not tell whether she was likely soon to reach her journey's end. She had been in readiness since twilight, with the last little hard roll eaten and the carpet-bag buckled up, and Annabelle safely tucked away under her cloak once more.

All at once there was a grinding jerk and the train came with violent abruptness to a halt, the wheels screeching in protest and the windows almost starting from their frames.

"Oh, what has happened? What can it be?" cried Sylvia.

Mr. Grimshaw leaped to his feet and reached upward to pull down his portmanteau from the rack. But either from clumsiness or on account of the jolt with which the next coach struck theirs as it slid to a halt, he gave

the case too vigorous a tug. It tipped forward and fell with a most appalling crash directly upon his head, felling him to the floor. He lay apparently stunned.

Sylvia was terrified. She sat utterly fixed for two or three seconds, and then rushed to the window, which had fallen open when the train stopped, and thrust out her head to see if there was anyone to whom she might appeal for help.

Greatly to her relief and joy, she discovered that they had actually stopped at a little forest station. Her portion of the train was at the extreme end of the platform, and the wildly swinging and flickering lamps did not enable her to read the name upon the notice board, but she saw that a little group of persons carrying lamps and bundles were rapidly approaching down the length of the station, appearing to glance into each compartment in turn as they proceeded. She could not distinguish individuals of the group, but gathered an impression of urgency from their manner, an impression which was intensified by some indistinguishable shouts from the engine driver, borne back on the wind.

"Help!" called Sylvia, leaning from her window. "Help, please!"

She was afraid that her faint cry would not be heard, but at least one member of the group responded to it, for there was an answering halloo, and a small figure detached itself from the rest and darted forward.

"Sylvia! Is it you?"

Sylvia had hardly time to register more than a pair of bright, dark eyes, rosy cheeks, black locks escaping from under a little fur cap, before with a cry of "Mind, now,

Miss Bonnie, don't get so far ahead!" a man had come up and was busy undoing the fastening of the compartment door.

"Miss Sylvia, is it, miss? We'll soon have you out of there," he called cheerily, wrestling with the frozen and snow-covered handle, while Bonnie somewhat impeded his activities, dancing up and down, blowing kisses to Sylvia, and crying, "Poor dear Sylvia, you must be frozen! Never mind, you'll soon be warm and snug, we have a foot warmer and ever so many blankets in the carriage. Oh, how I am going to love you! What fun we shall have!"

Sylvia responded heartily to these overtures, and then exclaimed urgently to the man, who had now undone the door, "There is a gentleman here in need of assistance. I greatly fear that he has been stunned by his suitcase. Pray, pray, can you help him?"

"Let's have a look at him, then, miss," the man said. "You pop out with Miss Bonnie and let James take you back to the carriage. That will be safest for you."

But Bonnie exclaimed, all interest, "A man hurt? Oh, the poor fellow! We must help him, Solly. We had better take him home."

The other members of the group had come up by now, and there was clamor and discussion.

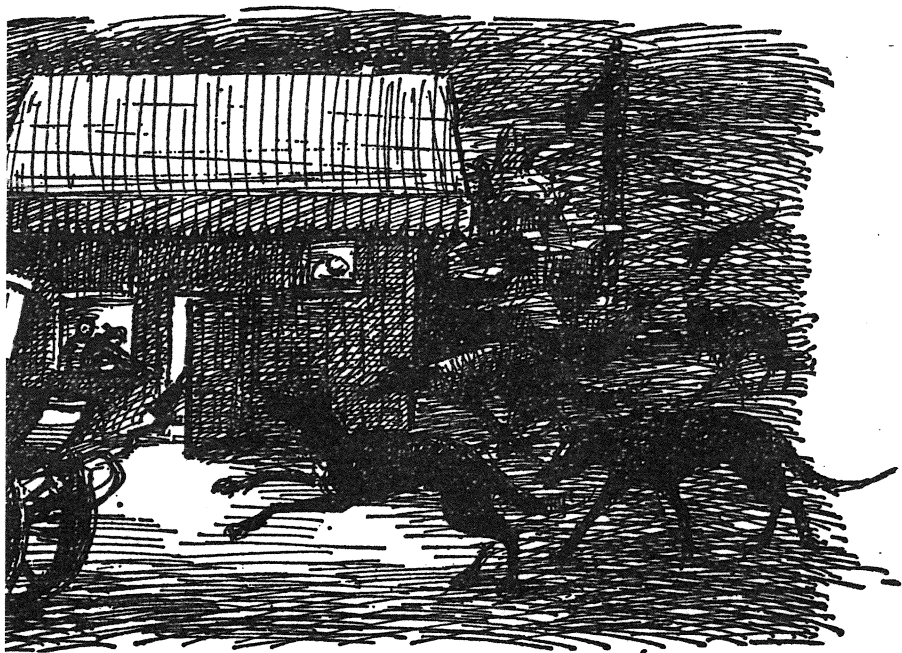
"What's to be done? Can't leave the poor gentleman in the train like that, 'tis another two hours to Blastburn and like as not he'd freeze to death."

"Well, whatever you do," said a whiskered man in a flat cap who appeared to be the stationmaster, "do it quick, or the wolves'll settle the matter. Hark, I hear



them now! We've not a moment to spare." And an anxious toot from the engine driver's whistle seemed to indicate that he was likewise of this opinion.

"Take him out, then," cried Bonnie, "put him in the carriage! I am sure my father would wish it." And James and Solly agreeing, Mr. Grimshaw and his luggage were lifted forth, together with Sylvia's carpet-bag, the door was slammed, and the guard waved his green lamp. Smoke and sparks puffed back on the wind as the engine heaved itself under way and the train slowly ground forward, the guard nimbly swung himself on board as the rear of the train passed them, and Sylvia, glancing back as she was hurried along the platform by Bonnie's eager hand, saw its serpent line of lights disap-



pear winding through the trees. Now the grinding and hissing of the engine was gone, Sylvia could hear the howls of wolves, distinct and frightening, and she understood the haste of the party to be gone.

She received a confused impression of the small station building, with its fringed canopy and scarlet-painted seats, as she was hustled through, and then they came to the neat little carriage in front of which six black horses were steaming, stamping, and shivering under their rugs, as impatient as the humans to be off.

"Lay him on the seat!" cried Bonnie. "That's it, James! Now wrap a rug over him, so—is his luggage all there? Capital. Now, Sylvia, spring in!" But poor Sylvia was too exhausted and cold to manage it, and James the

footman lifted her carefully up and deposited her on the opposite seat, wrapping her in a beautiful soft blue merino rug and placing her feet upon a foot warmer. Bonnie snuggled in beside her and cried, "Now we can go!"

And indeed, it was only just in time. As James and Solly swung themselves up and the station staff dashed inside their little edifice, there was a chorus of yelps and howls, and the first of a considerable pack of wolves came loping into the station yard. There was a flash and a deafening report as James fired his musket among them. Solly whipped up the horses, who needed no whipping, and the carriage seemed almost to spring off the ground, so rapid was the motion with which it left the building and lights behind.

There had been a new fall of snow and their progress was silent as they flew over the carpeted ground, save for the muffled hoofbeats and the cry of the wolves behind them.

"Those poor men in the station!" exclaimed Sylvia. "Will they be safe?"

"Oh yes," Bonnie told her reassuringly. "They have plenty of ammunition. We always bring them some when we come, and food too—and the wolves can't get in. It's only troublesome when a train has to stop and people get out. But tell me about that poor man—what is the matter with him? Was he taken ill?"

"No, it was his portmanteau that fell on him and knocked him unconscious," Sylvia explained. "The train stopped with such a jerk."

"Yes, the drivers always do that. You see, if the wolves notice a train slowing down, they are on the alert at



once, and all start to run toward the station, so as to be there when the passengers get out. Consequently, if a train has to stop here, the driver goes as fast as he can till the very last moment, in order to deceive them into thinking that he is going straight through. But now tell me about yourself," said Bonnie, affectionately passing an arm round Sylvia and making sure that she was well wrapped up. "Did you have a pleasant journey? Are you hungry? Or thirsty?"

"Oh no, thank you. I had some provisions with me for the train. We had quite a pleasant journey. A wolf jumped into our compartment last night, but Mr. Grimshaw—that gentleman—stabbed it to death and we moved into another compartment."

"Is he a friend of yours?" Bonnie said, nodding over this incident.

"Oh dear no! I had never seen him before. Indeed, I did not like him *very* much," Sylvia confessed. "He seemed so strange, although I believe he meant to be kind."

The two children were silent for a moment or two, as the carriage galloped on its way. The soft rugs were delicious to Sylvia, and the grateful warmth of the foot warmer as it struck upward, gradually thawing her numbed and chilled feet, but the sweetest thing of all was the friendly pressure of Bonnie's hand and the loving brightness of her smile as she turned, every now and then, to scan her cousin.

"I can't believe you are really here at last!" she said. "I wonder which of us is the taller? What delightful times we shall have! Oh, I can't wait to show you everything—the ponies—my father has bought a new little

quiet one for you, in case you are not used to riding—and the hothouse flowers, and my collections, and the wolfhounds. We shall have such games! And in the summer we can go for excursions on the wolds with the pony trap. If only Mamma and Papa did not have to go away it would be quite perfect."

She sighed.

"Poor Bonnie," said Sylvia impulsively, squeezing her cousin's hand. "Perhaps it will not have to be for very long." She received a grateful pressure in return, and they were silent again, listening to the crunch of the wheels on the snow and the cry of the wolf pack, now becoming fainter behind them in the distance.

There was something magical about this ride which Sylvia was to remember for the rest of her life—the dark, snow-scented air blowing constantly past them, the boundless wold and forest stretching away in all directions before and behind, the tramp and jingle of the horses, the snugness and security of the carriage, and above all Bonnie's happy welcoming presence beside her.

After a time Bonnie said, "I wonder how that poor man is. What did you say was his name?"

"Mr. Grimshaw."

Bonnie leaned across and plucked gently at his hand. "Mr. Grimshaw? Mr. Grimshaw? Are you any better?" But there was no reply. "He must be unconscious still," she said. "I wish we had some restoratives to give him—however, we shall be at home in another hour. Pattern and Mrs. Shubunkin will know what to do for him. Pattern is my maid—and oh! such a dear—and Mrs. Shubunkin is the housekeeper."

Presently Sylvia began to nod, and found her eyelids closing despite all her efforts to keep awake. But she had hardly more than dozed off when the carriage stopped with a clattering and a barking of dogs, and many shouts of greeting. Looking eagerly out of the window, she saw the great, rosy, glittering façade of Willoughby Chase, with every window shining a golden welcome. They had arrived.

Bonnie did not wait for James to open the carriage door. She had it unlatched in a moment and leaped out into the snow, turning to help her cousin with affectionate care. Sylvia was stiff and dazed with fatigue, and as Bonnie led her tenderly up the great curving flight of steps and into the hall she received only a vague impression of many lights and much warmth, people rushing hither and thither, and a kindly voice (that of Pattern, the maid) saying, "Poor little dear, she is wearied to death. James, do you carry her upstairs while I ask Mrs. Shubunkin for a posset."

The posset came, steaming, sweet, and delicious, and Pattern's gentle hands removed Sylvia's traveling clothes. Sylvia was too sleepy to study her surroundings before she was placed between soft, smooth sheets and sank deep into dreamless slumber.

Later in the night she awoke, and saw stars shining beyond the white curtain at her bed's foot. Suddenly she recalled Aunt Jane's voice, teaching her astronomy: "There is Orion, Sylvia dear, and the constellation resembling a W is Cassiopeia." Oh, poor Aunt Jane! Would she be lying awake too, watching the stars? Would she be warm enough under the jet-trimmed mantle? What would she do at breakfast-time with no



niece to warm the teapot, brew the Bohea, and make the toast gruel?

Tears began to run down Sylvia's cheeks and she drew a long breath, trying to suppress her silent sobs.

The next moment she heard feet patter across the

carpet, and two small, comforting arms came round her neck. A cheek was rubbed lovingly against her wet one.

"What is it, Sylvia dear? Are you homesick? Shall I come into bed with you?"

Sylvia was on the point of revealing her worries about Aunt Jane. Then she realized that she must not. Aunt Jane's pride would not let her accept help from her brother, and so Sylvia must not disclose that she was lonely and cold and poor. But oh, somehow she must find a means of helping her aunt—she must! She must!

"Don't cry," Bonnie whispered. "This is your home now, and we shall do such delightful things together. I am sure I can make you happy." She hugged Sylvia again, and, slipping into the bed, began telling her of all the plans she had, for sledging and skating, and picking primroses in spring, and days on the moors in summer. Sylvia could not help being cheered by this happy prospect, and soon both children fell asleep, the dark head and the fair on one pillow.

# FOUR

Next morning the children had breakfast together in the nursery, which was gay with the sunshine that sparkled on crystal and silver and found golden lights in the honey and quince preserve.

Miss Slighcarp, it seemed, was to take her meals in her own apartments, and of this Sylvia was glad, for when she met the governess after breakfast she found her a somewhat frightening lady, cold and severe and forbidding. However, Aunt Jane had taught Sylvia well, and in many respects it was found that she was ahead of Bonnie.

"You will have to work, miss," said Miss Slighcarp curtly to Bonnie. "You will have to work hard to catch up with your cousin."

"I am glad," said Bonnie, hugging Sylvia. "I want to work hard. It is delightful that you are so clever, we shall study all sorts of interesting things, botany and Greek and the use of the globes."

They did not do many lessons that morning. After they had lain on their backboards while Miss Slighcarp

read them a short chapter of Egyptian history, they were dismissed to their own devices. Sir Willoughby and Lady Green would be departing at midday, and he wanted to instruct Miss Slighcarp in various matters relating to the running of the estate and household, of which she was to be in charge while he was away.

"Let us go and see how poor Mr. Grimshaw is this morning," Bonnie proposed. "I am longing to take you to Mamma and Papa, but Miss Slighcarp is with them now. We will wait until she comes back."

They ran along to the chamber where the unfortunate traveler had been placed, and found there an elderly whiskered gentleman, Dr. Morne, in consultation with round, rosy Mrs. Shubunkin, the housekeeper.



They curtsied to the doctor, who patted their heads absently.

"It is a most unusual case," he was saying to Mrs. Shubunkin. "The poor gentleman has recovered consciousness, but he has clean lost all recollection of his name and address and who he is. I have ordered him some medicines, and he must be kept very quiet and remain in bed until his memory returns. I will go and speak to Sir Willoughby on the matter."

"Perhaps if he were to see Sylvia he would remember the train journey," Bonnie suggested. "He told you his name, did he not, Sylvia?"

"Yes—Mr. Grimshaw, Josiah Grimshaw."

"It would be worth a trial," the doctor agreed, and, a footman just then arriving to inform him that Sir Willoughby was at liberty, he left them, while the children ventured unescorted into Mr. Grimshaw's chamber.

What was their surprise to discover that the patient was not in bed but up and standing by the fire, wrapped in a crimson plush dressing gown! Moreover, he seemed to have been burning papers, for the fireplace was full of black ash, and the room of blue smoke. He started violently as they entered, slammed shut the lid of a small dispatch box, and flung himself back into bed.

"What the deuce are you doing here?" he growled. "Who are you?"

"Don't you remember Sylvia, Mr. Grimshaw?" said Bonnie. "I am Bonnie Green, and Sylvia is my cousin who traveled with you on the train yesterday."

"Never seen her in my life before. And name's not Grimshaw," he snapped. "Don't know what it is, but not Grimshaw."



"He's wandering, poor fellow," whispered Bonnie. "He must have got out of bed in delirium. We had best send Mrs. Shubunkin to sit with him and see he does not do himself a mischief."

Mr. Grimshaw was plainly most displeased at their presence in his room, so they went off to tell the housekeeper that the invalid should not be left alone.

"Now come," said Bonnie then, taking her cousin's hand, "Papa and Mamma must be free now, for I saw Miss Slighcarp downstairs as we crossed the stair-head."

When they reached Lady Green's sitting room, they found the doctor there speaking with Sir Willoughby.

"And so you will let this poor man remain here so long as he is in need of attention?" the doctor was saying. "That is most kind of you, Sir Willoughby, and like your liberality."

"Eh, well," Sir Willoughby said, "couldn't turn the poor fellow out into the snow, what? Plenty of room here. He can remain till he gets his wits back—till we return, if need be. Looking after him will give the servants something to do while we are away. You'll come in and see him from time to time, Morne?"

The doctor departed, promising careful attendance on the stranger and wishing Lady Green a speedy return to health.

"Nothing like a sea voyage, dear lady, to bring roses back to the cheeks."

"And so this is Sylvia," said Lady Green very kindly, when the doctor had gone. "I hope that you and Bonnie are going to be dear friends and look after one another when we are away."

"Oh yes, Mamma!" Bonnie exclaimed. "I love her already. We are going to be so happy together . . ."

Then her face fell and her bright color faded, for at that moment Lady Green's maid entered the room with wraps and a traveling mantle.

"Are you leaving *now*, Mamma? So soon?"

"It wants but five minutes to midday, my child," said Lady Green as she wearily allowed herself to be swathed in her cloak. Sylvia observed how thin her aunt's wrists were, how languid her beautiful dark eyes.

Silently the children followed downstairs in the bustle of departure. Servants darted here and there, mound upon mound of boxes went out to the chaise, Sir Willoughby tenderly supported his wife to the hall door. There she enveloped Bonnie in a long and loving embrace, had a warm kiss, too, for Sylvia, and, pale as death, allowed herself to be lifted into the carriage. They saw her face at the window, with her eyes fixed yearningly on Bonnie.

"It won't be long, Mamma," Bonnie called. Her voice was strained and dry.

"Not long, my darling."

"Be good children," said Sir Willoughby hurriedly. "Mind what Miss Slighcarp tells you, now." He pressed a golden sovereign into each of their hands, and jumped quickly into the carriage after his wife. "Ready, James!"

The whip cracked, the mettlesome horses blew great clouds of steam into the frosty air, and they were off. The carriage whirled over the packed snow of the driveway, passed beyond a grove of leafless trees, and was lost to view.

Without a word, Bonnie turned on her heel and

marched up the stairs and along the passages to the nursery. Sylvia followed, her heart swollen with compassion. She longed to say some comforting words, but could think of none.

"It may not be long, Bonnie," she ventured at length.

Bonnie sat at the table, her hands tightly clenched together. "I will not, I *will* not cry," she was saying to herself.

At Sylvia's anxious, loving, compassionate voice she took heart a little, and gave her cousin a smile. "After all," she thought, "I am lucky to have Papa and Mamma even if they have gone away; poor Sylvia has no one at all."

"Come," she said, jumping up, "the sun is shining. I will show you some of the grounds. Let us go skating."

"But Bonnie dear, I have no skates, and I do not know how."

"Oh, it is the easiest thing in the world, I will soon show you; and as for skates, Papa thought of that already, look . . ." Bonnie pulled open a cupboard door and showed six pairs of white kid skating boots, all different sizes. "We knew your feet must be somewhere near the same size as mine, since we are the same age, so Papa had several different pairs made and we thought one of them was certain to fit."

Sure enough, one of the pairs of boots fitted exactly. Sylvia was much struck by this thought on the part of her uncle, and astonished at the lavishness of having six pairs made for one to be chosen.

Likewise, Pattern pulled out a whole series of white fur caps and pelisses, and tried them against Sylvia until she found ones that fitted. "I've hung your green velvet

in the closet, miss," she said. "Green velvet's all very well for London, but you want something warmer in the country."

Sylvia could not help a pang as she remembered the cutting of the green velvet shawl and saw the sumptuous pile of white fur; how she wished she might send one of the pelisses to Aunt Jane. But next moment Bonnie caught her hand and pulled her to the door.

"Don't go outside the park now, Miss Bonnie," Pattern said.

"We won't," Bonnie promised.

Snug in their furs, the two children ran out across the great snow-covered slope in front of the house, through the grove, and down to where a frozen river meandered across the park, after falling over two or three artificial cascades, now stiff and gleaming with icicles.

The children sat on a garden bench to put on their skates. Then, with much laughter and encouragement, Bonnie began to show Sylvia how to keep her balance on the ice.

"Why, Sylvia, you might have been born to it, you are a thousand times better than I was when I began."

"Perhaps it is because Aunt Jane took such pains teaching me to curtsy and dance the gavotte balancing Dr. Johnson's Dictionary on my head," Sylvia suggested, as she cautiously glided across to the opposite snow-piled bank and then hurriedly returned to the safety of Bonnie's helping hand.

"Whatever the reason, it is perfectly splendid! We can go right down the river to the end of the park, much farther skating than we can walking. The wolves, you see, cannot catch us on the ice."

"Is the river frozen all the way down?"

"Yes, all the way to the sea. Oh, I can't wait for you to see this countryside in summer," Bonnie said, as they skated carefully downstream. "The river is not nearly so full then, it is just a shallow, rocky stream, and we bathe, and paddle, and the banks are covered with heather and rockrose, it is so pretty."

"Is it far to the sea?"

"Oh, far—far. Fifty miles. First you come to Blastburn, which is a hideous town, all coal pits and ugly mills. Papa goes there sometimes on business. And then at the sea itself there is Rivermouth, where Papa and Mamma will go on board their ship the *Thessaly*." Bonnie sighed and skated a few yards in silence. "Why!" she exclaimed suddenly, "is not that Miss Slighcarp over there? It is not very safe to go walking so near the park's boundary. The wolves have more than once been known to get in. I wonder if she knows, or if we should warn her?"

"Are you sure it is Miss Slighcarp?" said Sylvia, straining her eyes to study the gray figure walking beside a distant coppice.

"I think it is. Are you tired, Sylvia? Can you manage another half-mile? If we continue down the river it will curve round and bring us near to her. I think we should remind her about the wolves."

Sylvia protested that she was not at all tired, that she could easily skate for another hour, two hours if necessary, and, increasing their speed, the children hastened on down the frozen stream. The bank soon hid Miss Slighcarp from their sight.

"It is very imprudent of her," Bonnie commented. "I

suppose, coming from London, she does not realize about the wolves."

Sylvia, secretly, began to be a little anxious. They seemed to have come a very long way, the house was nearly out of sight across the rolling parkland, and when they rounded the curve of the river they saw that Miss Slighcarp had cut across another ridge and was almost as far from them as ever. Sylvia's legs and back, unused to this form of exercise, began to feel tired and to ache, but she valiantly strove to keep up with the sturdier Bonnie.

"Just round this next bend," Bonnie encouraged her, "and then we *must* meet her. If not, I do not know what we can do—we shall have reached the park boundary, and moreover, the river runs into woods here, and the ice is treacherous and full of broken branches."

They passed the bend and saw a figure—but not the figure they expected. A stout woman in a red velvet jacket was walking away from them briskly into the wood. She was not Miss Slighcarp, nor in the least like her.

"It isn't she!" exclaimed Sylvia.

At the sound of her voice the woman swung round sharply and seemed to give them an angry look. Then she hurried on into the wood and disappeared. A moment later they heard the sound of horses' hoofs and the rumbling of carriage wheels.

"How peculiar! Can we have been mistaken? But no, we could not have confused a gray dress with a red one," Sylvia said.

Bonnie was frowning. "I do not understand it! What can a strange woman in a carriage have been doing in



our woods? The road runs through there, but it goes nowhere save to the house."

"Perhaps when we get back we shall find her. Perhaps she is a neighbor come calling," Sylvia suggested.

Bonnie shook her head. "There are no neighbors." Then she seized Sylvia's arm. "Look! *There* is Miss Slighcarp!" Sure enough, the gray figure they had first observed was now to be seen, far away behind them, walking swiftly in the direction of the house.

"She must have turned back when we were between the high banks," Bonnie said repentantly. "And I have brought you so far! Poor Sylvia, I am afraid that you are dreadfully tired."

"Nonsense!" Sylvia said stoutly. "We had to come. And I shall manage very well."

But she was really well-nigh exhausted, and could not help skating more and more slowly. Bonnie bit her lip and looked anxious. The sky was becoming overcast

with the promise of more snow, and, worse, it would not be long until dusk.

"I have done very wrong," Bonnie said remorsefully. "I should have made you turn back, and come on myself."

"I should not have let you."

A sudden wind got up, and sent loose snow from the banks in a scurry across the gray ice. One or two large flakes fell from the sky.

"Can you go a little faster?" Bonnie could not conceal the anxiety in her tone. "Try, Sylvia!"

Sylvia exerted herself valiantly, but she was really so tired that she could hardly force her limbs to obey her.

"I am so stupid!" she said, half-laughing, half-crying. "Suppose I sit here on the bank, Bonnie, while you go home for assistance?"

Bonnie looked as if she were half-considering this proposal when a low moaning sound rose in the distance, a sound familiar to Bonnie, and, since yesterday, full of terrible significance for Sylvia. It was the far-off cry of wolves.

"No, that is not to be thought of," Bonnie said decisively. "I have a better plan. We must take off our skates. Can you manage? Make haste, then!"

They sat on a clump of rush by the river's edge, and with chilled fingers tugged at the knots in their boot-laces. Sylvia shivered as once again the wolf cry stole over the frozen parkland; it had been bad enough heard from the train, but *now*, when there was nothing between them and those pitiless legions, how dread it sounded!

The children stood up, slinging their skates round their necks.



"Now we must climb this little hill," Bonnie said. "Here, I'll take your hand. Can you run? Famous! Sylvia, you are the bravest creature in the world, and when we get home I shall give you my little ivory work-box to show how sorry I am for having led you into such a scrape."

Sylvia did her best to smile at her cousin, having no breath to answer, and tried to stifle all doubts that they ever *would* get home.

Arrived at the top of the hill, Bonnie stood still and, as it seemed to Sylvia, wasted precious moments while she glanced keenly about her through the rapidly thickening snowstorm.

"Ah!" she cried presently. "The temple of Hermes! We must go this way." She tugged Sylvia at a run down the slope and across a wide intervening stretch of open ground toward a little pillared pavilion that stood on an artificial knoll against some dark trees. They had now put the river between them and the cry of the wolves, which was comforting, but Sylvia was dismayed to see that Bonnie was once more leading her away from the house.

"Where are you going, Bonnie?" she panted, fighting bravely to keep up.

"I have a friend who lives in the woods," Bonnie returned. "I only hope he is not away. Let us rest a moment here."

They stood struggling to get their breath in the temple of Hermes, which was no more than a roof supported on slender columns.

"Oh, Bonnie, look, look!" Sylvia cried in uncontrollable alarm, pointing back the way they had come.

Through the dusk they could just distinguish two small black dots at the top of the slope, which were soon joined by several others. After a moment all these dots began coursing swiftly down the hillside in their direction.

"There is not a moment to be lost," Bonnie said urgently. "Make haste, make haste!" Half-leading, half-supporting the exhausted Sylvia, she urged her on through the deepening wood. Here Bonnie seemed to know her way almost by instinct. She passed from tree to tree, scanning them, apparently, for signs invisible to her cousin.

"Here we are!" she exclaimed in a tone of unutterable thankfulness, and, to Sylvia's astonishment, she put her fingers to her lips and gave vent to a long, clear whistle. More surprising still, she was instantly answered by another whistle which seemed to come from the very ground beneath their feet.

A clear, ringing voice called, "Here, Miss Bonnie! Here, quick!"

Sylvia found a lithe, bright-eyed boy beside her, helping her on. Taller than Bonnie, he was dressed entirely in skins. He wore a fur cap, carried a bow, and had a sheaf of arrows slung over his shoulder.

As the first of the wolf pack found their track in the temple of Hermes and came raging after, along the clear scent, the boy turned, fitted an arrow to his bow, and sent it unerringly into the midst of the pursuers. One wolf fell, and his companions immediately hurled themselves upon him with starving ferocity.

"That gives us a breathing space!" the boy exclaimed. "Inside, Miss Bonnie! Don't lose a moment."

With Bonnie tugging at her hand, and the boy guard-

ing the rear, threatening the wolves with his bow, Sylvia found herself whisked down a long narrow path, or passageway, snow-lined at first, then floored with dead leaves. It was dark, she was in a cave! And more curious still, she could feel a number of live creatures pushing against her legs, almost overbalancing her. They were soft and smooth, and she could hear an angry hissing coming from them which almost drowned the clamor of the wolves outside. She would have cried out in fright if she had had any breath left—and then she and Bonnie rounded a corner in the passage and saw before them the comfortable glow of a fire burning on a sandy hearth.

Heaped-up piles of ferns and dead leaves, covered with furs, lay against the cave walls, and on these Bonnie and Sylvia flung themselves, for even Bonnie could now acknowledge that she was nearly fainting from weariness.

"There!" said the boy, following them in. "I've shut the gate. They'll not catch you this time! But what was you doing, Miss Bonnie, so far from the house on a night like this? It's not like you to take such a foolish risk."

As Bonnie began explaining how it had come about, Sylvia was amazed to see a number of large white geese waddle after the boy into the cave. They looked rather threateningly out of their flat, black, beady eyes at Sylvia and Bonnie. One or two of them thrust out their necks and hissed, but the boy waved them back into the passage and flung them a handful of corn to keep them quiet.

Lulled by the flickering firelight and the long white necks weaving up and down in the entrance as the geese

pecked their corn, Sylvia, who was half-stupefied by exhaustion, fell fast asleep.

When she awoke it was to the sound of voices. Bonnie was saying anxiously:

"But, Simon, we cannot stay here all night! My dear Pattern will be so worried! She will be certain the wolves have got us. And Miss Slighcarp, too, will be concerned. Perhaps they have already sent the men out searching for us."

"I'll have a look in a moment," the boy returned. "Now, if you'll wake your cousin, miss, the cakes are ready, and you'll both feel better on full stomachs than empty."

He spoke with a pleasant country burr. Sylvia, lying drowsy on her heap of leaves, thought that his voice had a comfortable, brown, furry sound to it.



"Sylvia! Wake up!" Bonnie said. "Here's Simon made us some delicious cakes. And if you are like me you are ravenous with hunger."

"Indeed I am!" Rubbing her eyes and smiling, Sylvia brushed off the leaves and sat up.

The boy had separated the fire into two glowing hillocks. From between these he now pulled a flat stone on which were baking a number of little cakes. The two children ate them hungrily as soon as they were cool enough to hold. They were brown on the outside, white and floury within, and sweet to the taste.

"Your cakes are splendid, Simon," Bonnie said. "How do you make them?"

"From chestnut flour, Miss Bonnie. I gather up the chestnuts in the autumn and pound them to flour between two stones."

While they were eating he went along the entrance passage. In a minute he came back to say, "Wolves have gone, and it's a fine, sharp night, all spiky with stars. No signs of men out searching, Miss Bonnie. It's my belief we'd best be off now while the way's clear. Do you think you can walk as far as the house now, Miss Sylvia?"

"Oh yes, yes! I feel perfectly rested," declared Sylvia. But she was obliged to acknowledge when she stood up that she still found herself stiff and tired, and would be unable to keep up a very fast pace.

"I have badly overtaxed your strength this first day," exclaimed Bonnie self-reproachfully. "Still, if you *can* walk, Sylvia, I think we should be off now and save our poor Pattern some hours of dreadful worry."

"Certainly I can walk," Sylvia said stoutly, "let us start at once," though inwardly her heart quailed somewhat

at the thought of the wolves very likely still in the neighborhood.

"A moment before we start." The boy Simon dug in shallow sand at the side of the cave and brought out a large leather bottle and a horn drinking cup. He gave the girls each a small drink from the bottle. It was strong, heady stuff, tasting of honey.

"That will hearten you for the walk," he said.

"What is it, Simon?"

"Metheglin, miss. I make it in the summer from the heather honey."

He picked up his bow and flung a few logs on the fire. The children resumed their furs, which they had taken off at their first entry into the warm cave.

"I do love your home, Simon!" Bonnie exclaimed. "I hate to leave it!"

"You, miss?" he said, grinning, "with your grand house and a different room for each day in the year?"

"Well, yes, of course I love that too, but this is so snug!"

Simon quieted the geese, who raised their necks and hissed as the children passed them.

"I wish I had another weapon to defend you with," he muttered. "One bow is hardly sufficient for three. I will cut you a cudgel when we are outside, Miss Bonnie."

"I know, Simon!" Bonnie cried. "My old fowling piece that I left here that rainy day last autumn! I have never thought of it since. Have you it still?"

"Of course I have," he said, his face lighting up. "And carefully oiled, too, with neat's-foot oil. It is in good order, Miss Bonnie. I am glad you reminded me of it—what a fool I was not to think of it before!"

He took it down from where it hung on the passage wall in a leather sack. Bonnie, somewhat to her cousin's alarm and amazement, handled the gun confidently and soon satisfied herself of its being in excellent order and ready to fire.

"Now let us be off," she said gaily. "I can keep the villains at a distance with this."

They went out into the clear, sparkling night. The new snow, which had obliterated both their footprints and those of the wolves, made a crisp carpet beneath their feet. Bonnie and Simon kept a vigilant lookout for wolves, and Sylvia did too, though secretly she felt she was almost less afraid of the wolves than her cousin Bonnie's gun. However, there was no occasion to use the fowling piece, as the wolves appeared to have left that region for the moment, drawn away, doubtless, by some new quarry.

Their journey back to the house was quiet and uninterrupted.

"It is strange," remarked Bonnie in a puzzled voice, "that we do not see men out everywhere with lanterns searching for us. Why, the time I was late back from picking wild strawberries, my father had every man on the estate out with pitchforks and muskets!"

"Aye," said Simon, "but your father's from home now, isn't he, Miss Bonnie?"

"Yes he is," answered Bonnie sighing. "I suppose that is the reason."

And she fell into rather a sad silence.

When they reached the great terrace, Bonnie suggested that they should go in by a side entrance, and thus avoid informing Miss Slighcarp of their return.

"For it is possible that Pattern, fearing her anger, has left her in ignorance that we were out," she suggested thoughtfully. "I believe Pattern is a little frightened of Miss Slighcarp."

"I am sure I am," Sylvia agreed. "There is something so cold and glittering about her eyes, and then her voice is so disagreeable. I dare say that is the reason, Bonnie."

As they passed a large, lighted window, Bonnie murmured, "That is the great library, Sylvia, where my father keeps all his books and papers. I will show you over it tomorrow . . . Why, what a curious thing!" she exclaimed. For, glancing in as they walked by, they saw Miss Slighcarp, under the illumination of numerous candles, apparently hard at work searching through a mass of papers. There were papers on chairs, on tables, on the floor. Beyond her, at the far end of the room, similarly engaged, was a gentleman who looked amazingly like Mr. Grimshaw. Could it be he? But at the slight noise made by their feet on the snow, Miss Slighcarp turned. She could not see the watchers, who were beyond the lighted area near the window, but she crossed with a decisive step and flung to the heavy velvet curtains, shutting off the scene within.

"What can she be doing?" Bonnie exclaimed. "And was not that Mr. Grimshaw? Dr. Morne said he should not get out of bed!"

"Perhaps she is familiarizing herself with the contents of your father's papers," Sylvia suggested. "Did you not say she was to look after the estate? And I am not *sure* that was Mr. Grimshaw. We had hardly time to see."

Arrived at the little postern door, they had scarcely





knocked before it was flung open and Pattern had enveloped them in her arms.

"Oh, you naughty, naughty, precious children! How could you? How *could* you? Here's my poor heart been nearly broke in half with fright at thinking you was eaten by the wolves, and Miss Slighcarp saying no such thing, you'd come home soon, and me saying 'Begging your pardon, miss, but you don't know this park and these wolves as I do,' and begging, *begging* her to tell the men and sound the alarm, but no, my lady knows best what's to be done and it's my belief nothing ever *would* have been done till we found some boots and buttons of you in the snow and the rest all ate up by wolves if you hadn't come home all by yourselves, you good, wicked, precious, naughty lambs—*oh!*" and the faithful Pattern relieved herself by a burst of tears.

"Not by ourselves, Pattern," said Bonnie, hugging her tightly. "Simon brought us home. We *were* chased by wolves—though it wasn't exactly our fault—and he hid us in his cave till they were gone."

"Never will I hear a word said against that boy. Some say he's a wicked, vagabond gypsy, but I say he's the best-hearted, trustiest . . . Ask him in, Miss Bonnie, and I'll give him the Christmas pudding that was too big to go in my lady's valise."

But the silent Simon, overwhelmed, perhaps, by Pattern's flow of words, had melted away into the night without waiting to be thanked.

"Will he be all right?" breathed Sylvia, big-eyed with horror. "Won't the wolves get him on the way home?"

"I don't believe they could ever catch him," Bonnie reassured her. "He can run so fast! Besides, he has his

bow, and then, too, he can climb trees and swing from branch to branch if they get near him."

"Never mind about him, nothing ever hurts Simon," bustled Pattern, half-pushing, half-pulling them up the little back stairs. "Come on with you now till I get a posset inside you."

Cold in spite of their furs, the children were glad to be sat down before a glowing fire in the night nursery, while Pattern scolded and clucked, and brushed the tangles out of their hair, brought in with her own hands the big silver bathtub filled with steaming water, in which bunches of lemon mint had been steeped, giving a deliciously fragrant scent, and bathed them each in turn, afterward wrapping them in voluminous warm white flannel gowns.

Next she fetched little pipkins of hot, savory soup, sternly saw every mouthful swallowed, and finally hustled them both into Bonnie's big, comfortable bed with the blue swans flying on its curtains.

"For if there's any nightmares about wolves, at least that way you'll be able to comfort each other," she muttered. "And as for Miss Slighcarp, let *her* rest in uncertainty till the morning, for I'm not going to her again. Coming home soon, indeed! As if such a thing were likely!"

And off she tiptoed, leaving a rose-scented night light burning and the peaceful crackle of the fire to lull them to sleep.