Polly Evans' Story Page for Boys and Girls

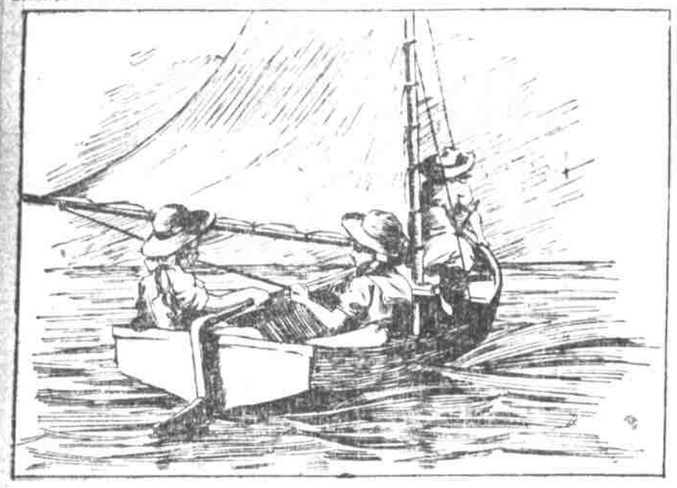
The Misses Crusoe

"ISN'T she the sweetest castaway that ever happened?" cried Millie, darting a roguish glance at "Captain" Hattie, who was superintending the sailing of the little yacht Sunbeam.

"And dauntless, too," agreed Ellie. "I believe she would make a splendid Crusoe."

Thereupon Hattie replied loftily:

"Any one could live just as well as Robinson Crusoe, if he merely used a wee bit of common sense. A crystal from one's watch would provide fire. It should be quite a simple matter to kill small game for food, and clothing as well, while a person who is not entirely ignorant would be bound to recognize nourishing plants growing wild. Really, I can see no excuse for castaways being forlorn under such circumstances."



ABOARD THE "SUNBEAM"

"How I WOULD like to see her a castaway!" teased Millie, as she playfully let fall into the water a rope attached to the mast.

All at once the boat was jerked forward; the rope Millie had thrown overboard tautened, and the yacht went through the water at flying speed.

"I wonder what can be towing us!" gasped Hattie. She seized a hook, leaned over as far as she dared, and beat about the water.

"Cut the rope," advised Ellie.

"I'd be glad to," Hattie replied, "if I only had a knife, but I haven't, and the rope is stretched too tightly to untie."

Quite a distance had they sailed from the shores of the Caribbean sea, when the creature towing them made directly for an island. Not until it reached the surf was any part of its body visible. Then Hattie cried, with a shudder:

"Ugh! It's a big devil fish!"

At the same instant the octopus released hold of the rope, and the yacht was struck broadside by the waves, capsizing.

THEY HELPED ONE ANOTHER UP THE CLIFFS

DOWN the roof Tommy climbed, until he was immediately over the eaves. Stealthily then his hand disappeared. A moment later he drew it forth. With the sparrow's nest in his hand he made his way back over the roof and crawled through the attic window.

"Teacher said there was something wonderful in the way birds build their nests," said he, "but now that I've studied this nest specially I can't see that it's so much."

Tommy thoughtfully pulled apart the twigs, moss, fragments of cord and hair of which the nest was composed, and then leaned back on the old chest to gaze at the particles strewn at his feet.

It seemed that not more than a second's time had elapsed before a tiny sprite flew in at the window and perched herself before the astonished Tommy.

"I'm the Bird Fairy," said she by way of introduction, "and I come to tell you that the birds are protesting against your scorn of their ability as architects. They wish me to prove to you that they are quite as skilful builders, in their way, as your people."

As the fairy said this she took from her robe a pair of tiny wings. These she fastened to Tommy's shoulders. With a wave of her wand she then reduced him to the size of herself. In obedience to her command, Tommy followed the fairy out through the attic window.

BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

Straight into the apple tree they flew. And here on a topmost bough Tommy saw the wonderful little nest of the goldfinch, contrived so as to imitate perfectly the branch upon which it was built. Then, over the currant bush, where the catbird had built his simple nest, they passed to an elm from which a dainty hummingbird had suspended her dwelling. Long, delicate grass fibres were cleverly woven with strings and threads and the nest where placed, hung in the flexible limbs, where each passing breeze would gently sway it.

"But if you would see a real, tip-top carpenter, come and watch the woodpecker," remarked the Bird Fairy, in response to Tommy's words of praise for the humming bird's cunning.

"I never really noticed how hard the old fellow did work," Tommy admitted, after he saw that the woodpecker never ceased pecking away at the wood until he had entirely hollowed out his nest in the dead tree.

Over sea and land for many thousands of miles the two then took their flight until they landed in Asia. Here, in China, they saw swallows build their nests in caves. These birds carried their own plaster and mortar with them, for they possessed certain glands in their mouths in which was secreted a certain sticky substance. With this material, together with a few twigs, the swallows constructed basket-like nests and glued them securely to the walls.

EDIBLE BIRD HOUSES

"And people are very fond of eating the houses swallows build," explained the fairy. "Now you must admit that people can't eat their own houses—unless they're made of gingerbread."

They saw other swallows, too. Some built their nests in chimneys, others (who were real engineers) tunnelled their way into a bank of earth, where they laid their eggs.

Thousands of other miles the fairy led Tommy until the two stood in Australia. Tommy examined with great interest the nest of the prairie lark, carefully hidden from sight in the low shrubbery.

"You will remember," said the fairy, "that the Israelites in Egypt were unable to build houses because they didn't have straw for their bricks. But observe that the prairie lark not only builds a cozy little nest from the very scarce material offered by shrubs hereabouts, but hides it, as well."

When next they paused in their flight they were in Europe, where, among the willow trees, Tommy visited the bower of a certain pied wagtail. Exceedingly well built was it, and as comfortable a home as one could wish for.

In South America Tommy inspected the nest of the "Great Pointer," which looked for all the world like a big pudding with a hole in the top. Coming north he paid his respects to Mrs. Sedge-Warbler, and complimented her upon the neat appearance of her little home, supported at its four corners by stout stems. And Tommy was duly sympathetic when Mrs. Warbler complained:

"My sister has had the misfortune to hatch out another cuckoo. You know, the mother cuckoo always lays her eggs in other birds' nests, and then the poor birds have to wear themselves out trying to feed their hungry charges after they break their shells. But you can't fool my cousin, Mrs. Summer Warbler. If she comes home and happens to find a cuckoo egg in her nest of cobwebs and bark and grass, she will build a second story to the nest and leave the eggs in the old nest to perish, rather than hatch out a cuckoo."

Tommy was intensely interested. And his interest held while he inspected the many different kinds of houses erected by the thrasher. They weren't very elaborate nests, but they were constructed almost everywhere—even in thorn bushes, brush heaps and in the corners of projecting fences. From these nests the boy and his guide passed to the substantial structures built in crotches of small saplings by the wood thrush.

As he two flew over a field of swaying weeds, Tommy pointed below, asking:

"Isn't that a nest?"

"Yes," replied the fairy, "that is where the bunting dwells. He likes the wind to swing him to and fro, therefore he builds among the weeds. Nearby, on the ground, is the nest of a bobolink. This is in the form of a little hollow made at the root of a bunch of weeds, and it is lined with dry grass."

"The kingbird never changes his home," explained the fairy, as they came to a nest built in an orchard, of weeds, grass, roots, and lined with horsehair and other light material.

HOME AGAIN

In the twinkling of an eye Tommy found himself perched upon the windowsill of the attic.

"Are you convinced of the birds' skill now?" demanded the fairy. "You must bear in mind, too, that, whereas comparatively few human beings construct their own homes, all birds do—that is, all except the goatsuckers, the nighthawks, cowbirds, and a very few others."

"Yes, I confess that I didn't know anything about it before, and that I sadly misjudged the birds," replied Tommy, as the fairy removed the wings from his shoulders and he grew again to his right size. "Why, some of your birds are weavers, carpenters and masons all in one! Wonderful, isn't it?"

And Tommy was of the same opinion after he awoke, for it is true that he had not budged from the chest during all these adventures.

Where The Feathered People Home

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An Unfriendly Host

"EVEN camping in the woods of Maine may become wearisome if one looks at the same scenery all the time," remarked Don Morton, with a yawn.

"That's so," assented Tom Fortney; "let us do a little exploring."

Paddling across the lake, they rounded a tall bluff and entered the stream. Their course no longer lay straight before them, but wound tortuously through the forest. At times, too, they were obliged to shoot miniature rapids. However, this provided just the spice of danger they longed for.

But their success in avoiding rock and boulder in places where the current was swift, made them somewhat reckless.

The canoe struck a snag, capsized, and the boys were thrown into the water.

Don and Tom swam with their canoe to the bank, where they discovered a great hole in the boat. They also found to their dismay that the provisions, which they imagined had been fastened securely, were lost.

"And I was just preparing for a meal!" grumbled Don.

Tom threw back his head and strongly whiffed the breeze.

"Did you smell that, Don?" he asked, excitedly.

"There's some fresh meat cooking hereabouts, and it smells mighty nice," was the interested rejoinder.

"Well, I'm off in search of the meat," returned Don.

"WATCHED THE MADMAN"

Tom awaited his chum with more eagerness than patience. In about half an hour Don burst in upon him.

"There's a funny old chap in a hut back there," said he. "The old codger has lots of things to eat and he invites us to take pot-luck with him, though, to my mind, it doesn't look as though hospitality agrees with him."

Without further words the boys carried the canoe to their host's dwelling.

Tom admitted to himself that Don was right when he said the man wasn't glad to see them. He was a surly fellow, with matted hair which covered pretty nearly all his face. Nor did he speak more than a few words.

After the meal, however, he invited them to share the cabin with him that night. The boys accepted, and soon lay down upon the spruce branches spread in one corner. Their host left the cabin, nor did he return until after the lads were asleep.

Dawn had already come when Tom opened his eyes with a start. To his horror, he saw their host with a long, keen knife bending over Don. For a moment Tom gazed, fascinated. Then he leaped forward, pushed the man sprawling, and yanked Don toward the door.

The next instant the lads were in flight. They tore through the forest with greatest speed, while the man pursued hotly.

Suddenly they came to the banks of the stream.

"This way!" gasped Don, pointing to where a slender tree trunk bridged the rapids.

Both dashed out upon this dangerous bridge. But they were still some distance from the farther bank when their pursuer appeared. With a fiendish yell he seized the end of the trunk and jerked it out of place.

Had Tom and Don had time to think they would have assured themselves that they would be dashed to pieces on the rocks below.

Fortunately, they fell into a little pool partly sheltered from the swirling rapids, and without much difficulty managed to secure a grasp upon their "bridge," which had fallen with them.

"All right, Tom?" chattered Don, when he had gained his breath.

"Yes," replied Tom. Then he whispered:

"I think we'd better hide until that bloodthirsty maniac disappears."

So they remained low in the water watching the crazy man waving his murderous-looking knife in the air. At last, with a horrible chuckle of satisfaction, he departed.

Fifteen minutes later the lads were trudging back toward their camp, sorrowful because they had lost their canoe, but thankful for having escaped the madman.

"I don't know but what I should prefer the sameness of camp life to encounters with lunatics," remarked Tom, when they were again by the side of the lake, and Don agreed with him.

Seats of a King

ONE is accustomed to think of a king or queen's throne. But most rulers have several thrones. King Edward of England has six. The most costly, that at Windsor Castle, is composed entirely of carved ivory inlaid with precious stones. Most ancient of the thrones is that at Westminster, where the rulers of Great Britain are always crowned. It is of massive oak, and has beneath the seat a sandstone block, known as the stone of destiny from Scone, which was the emblem of power of the Scottish kings.

Another throne, of Burmese teak, carved, gilded and studded with crystals, stands beneath a great gilt canopy in the House of Lords. The throne in St. James' Palace is very large and imposing, having a canopy overlaid with crimson velvet, which is embroidered with crowns set with fine pearls.

Detectives of Animal World

BIRDS and insects are wonderfully clever detectives. Upon one occasion a gentleman living in India observed a large flock of crows leaving a tree near his house. Shortly after they were gone violent disease broke out in that vicinity.

An English beekeeper placed a quantity of what he believed to be the best quality of sugar in his hives. But the bees promptly turned it out, and the man found later that the sugar was a cheap imitation.

Swallows and other birds that migrate always choose as their dwelling places localities which are healthful. People knowing this, watch these birds and build their own houses accordingly.

Then there are bird and insect policemen which kill the rogues among their kindred. Ladybirds for instance, keep the green flies off roses, and the ichneumon fly patrols the cotton fields and keeps them clear of the destructive cotton boll-weevil.

Yusuf's Gratitude

"SOON I'll be my own master!" Yusuf cried joyfully within his heart.

Even though his master drove a sharp bargain in the matter of hire, the lad was, indeed, prosperous. The thought that within a very few days he would have a donkey of his own, to carry up from the fountain the skins filled with water, to be vended through the streets, would put him in highest spirits.

Only one grief had he—he would miss sorely the companionship of the donkey who had become such a chum. But the poor beast was now so old as to be good for little else, and Yusuf knew it would be most unwise to try to purchase him.

Today the donkey looked very aged—and sad, too. For he would glance piteously up into Yusuf's face, as though he understood that the lad was about to leave him. Yusuf at seemed that the faithful beast was pleading not to be left alone. And the more the boy talked to the animal he liked the idea of deserting his comrade. Why, neither donkey might sometimes prefer that his animal was sold to a kind master, and willing to labor indeed, when Yusuf was quite rested and he came to feel the load was not so great. Then, over the rough roads, he would gladly carry him even though it greatly increased the burden.

As the couple plodded up and down the narrow streets which led this way and that way up the side of the city, the donkey began to waver in his stride. In spite of Yusuf's encouragement, the animal's pace grew slower and slower, until at last, with a groan he sank upon the roughly paved street. Truly his working days were over. It may be that something told him he was to lose his master, and he no longer wished to live.

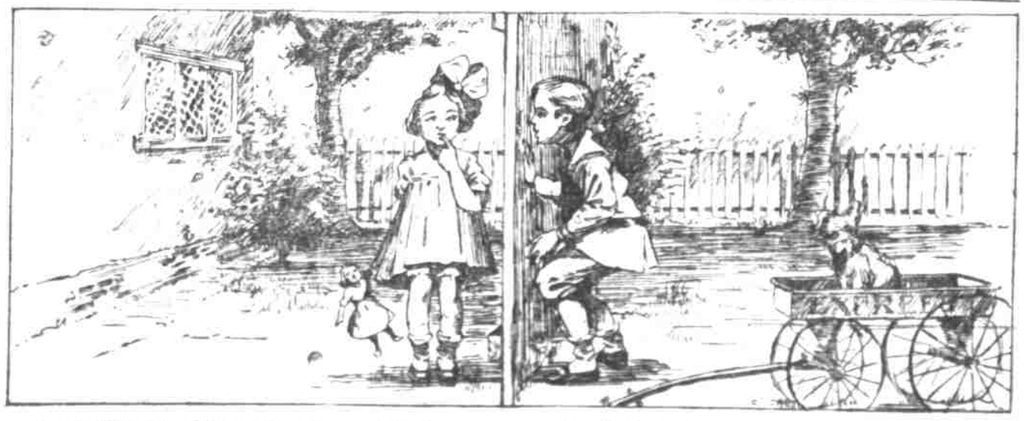
Without a moment's hesitation, Yusuf poured the water from the saddlebags on the donkey. Then he emptied the rest of the bottles and filled the skins upon the way back. After a while, with the lad's help, the donkey was able to shuffle slowly toward his stable.

Meanwhile Yusuf was thinking very hard. He knew well that his master would abandon the poor beast, now that it was no longer able to work. He couldn't bear to think of this. Suddenly he made up his mind. Into the donkey's ear he whispered:

"Cheer up, my comrade. You do not know how much I have appreciated your friendliness. And now I am going to see that you live in comfort the rest of your days. I shall buy you so that you will be my very own. In my business article I can easily earn enough to keep us both. What matters it if I hire myself out for a few more years? We shall be happy, you and I. You will graze and take your leisure during the day. In the evening we shall be together, and on Fridays we shall go on an enjoyable trip out in the country."

The donkey heard. He raised his drooping ears and looked so gratefully into Yusuf's eyes that the lad already felt repaid for his great deeds.

Girly Girl—Who Lives Next Door



NURSE told me a horrible, fierce grizzly bear
And monsters and goblins quite wicked lived there.
On t'other side of the big fence,
I used to believe everything nurse said;
I'd never climb over—I'd look through, instead,
A hole that I found in the fence.

I saw there a garden with weeds overgrown
And everything mussy, 'twas easily shown
Nobody now gave it a care.
But while not a person could I ever see,
I'd no better luck with the beasts nurse told me
Were sure to be found living there.

I looked and I looked hard as ever I could,
No monster or goblin or bear even would
Of himself give me one tiny peep—
'Till once, when I thought through the hole I would spy,
I saw at the hole glued another bright eye
And a watch ever me it did keep.

"Oh, monster, don't dare look at me!" did I cry;
Then a nice, rosy mouth took the place of the eye,
And it said, with the scornfulest curl
"It ISN'T a monster I will have you know,
And it isn't polite for a boy to say so—
It's only just me—Girly Girl."

Tale of the Star Princess

THROUGH the heavens there once journeyed a great fairy princess. Attended by her mystic court she swirled through the skies in a golden cloud-chariot. Radiantly beautiful was she, and her countenance glowed with the light of a shining star. And kind and thoughtful and generous she was, too. No good quality did she lack, and but one bad quality did she possess, and that was overweening vanity.

But for ages nothing happened to disturb the happiness of this fairy princess. Then there came a time when from afar off she saw approaching another star princess with her fairy court—and all in a blaze of glory that truly outrivaled her own splendor. Deeply hurt was the vanity of the princess.

"Why is it," she cried to the attendant star-maidens, "that you have not made me to glow with the radiance of this stranger princess?"

And she bowed her head with the shame of it. Quickly, however, she bestirred herself, and commanded her maidens:

"Go you through the skies. Gather the brightest of the little stars, and weave them into a robe that will surpass in its brightness everything that gleams in the heavens."

So the star maidens went forth upon their quest. In their robes they imprisoned thousands of twinkling stars, without so much as asking, "By your leave."

Lovely, indeed, was the princess' robe when completed. Surely there never was its equal. Proud of herself and her royal robe, the princess haughtily floated by the stranger whom she had envied.

But sad to say, the magic of this stranger was more powerful than that of the princess. Angry was she at this affront to her dignity. And in a voice that trumpeted clearly through the heavens, she pronounced the sentence:

"Glory, my dear princess, you have won with your gown of stars. But the glory shall be to the robe, not to you. Hereafter, you shall be invisible as you ride through the skies, and only your dazzling robe will be seen."

Thus it was that the renown of the star princess came to an end. But in the stars that shine in the Milky Way you still see the brilliants woven into this wonderful robe of light.