

A HOLE IN THE WALL

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PART I.

If any one had asked Johnny Morris who were his best friends, he would have answered,--

"The sun and the wind, next to mother."

Johnny lived in a little court that led off from one of the busiest streets in the city,--a noisy street, where horse-car bells tinkled and omnibuses rumbled all day long, going and coming from several great depots near by. The court was a dull place, with only two or three shabby houses in it, and a high blank wall at the end.

The people who hurried by were too busy to do more than to glance at the lame boy who sat in the sunshine against the wall, or to guess that there was a picture-gallery and a circulating-library in the court. But Johnny had both, and took such comfort in them that he never could be grateful enough to the wind that brought him his books and pictures, nor to the sun that made it possible for him to enjoy them in the open air, far more than richer folk enjoy their fine galleries and libraries.

A bad fall, some months before the time this story begins, did something to Johnny's back which made his poor legs nearly useless, and changed the lively, rosy boy into a pale cripple. His mother took in fine washing, and worked hard to pay doctors' bills and feed and clothe her boy, who could no longer run errands, help with the heavy tubs, or go to school. He could only pick out laces for her to iron, lie on his bed in pain for hours, and, each fair day, hobble out to sit in a little old chair between the water-butts and the leaky tin boiler in which he kept his library.

But he was a happy boy, in spite of poverty and pain; and the day a great gust came blowing fragments of a gay placard and a dusty newspaper down the court to his feet, was the beginning of good fortune for patient Johnny. There was a theatre in the street beyond,

and other pictured bits found their way to him; for the frolicsome wind liked to whisk the papers around the corner, and chase them here and there till they settled under the chair or flew wildly over the wall.

Faces, animals, people, and big letters, all came to cheer the boy, who was never tired of collecting these waifs and strays; cutting out the big pictures to paste on the wall with the leavings of mother's starch, and the smaller in the scrap-book he made out of stout brown wrappers or newspapers, when he had read the latter carefully. Soon it was a very gay wall; for mother helped, standing on a chair, to put the large pictures up, when Johnny had covered all the space he could reach. The books were laid carefully away in the boiler, after being smoothly ironed out and named to suit Johnny's fancy by pasting letters on the back. This was the circulating library; for not only did the papers whisk about the court to begin with, but the books they afterward made went the rounds among the neighbors till they were worn out.

The old cobbler next door enjoyed reading the anecdotes on Sunday when he could not work; the pale seamstress upstairs liked to look over advertisements of the fine things which she longed for; and Patsey Flynn, the newsboy, who went by each day to sell his papers at the station, often paused to look at the play-bills,--for he adored the theatre, and entertained Johnny with descriptions of the splendors there to be beheld, till he felt as if he had really been, and had known all the famous actors, from Humpty Dumpty to the great Salvini.

Now and then a flock of dirty children would stray into the court and ask to see the "pretty picters." Then Johnny was a proud and happy boy; for, armed with a clothes-pole, he pointed out and explained the beauties of his gallery, feeling that he was a public benefactor when the poor babies thanked him warmly, and promised to come again and bring all the nice papers they could pick up.

These were Johnny's pleasures: but he had two sorrows,--one, a very real one, his aching back; and the other, a boyish longing to climb the wall and see what was on the other side, for it seemed a most wonderful and delightful place to the poor child, shut up in that dismal court, with no playmates and few comforts.

He amused himself with imagining how it looked over there, and nearly every night added some new charm to this unseen country, when his mother told him fairy tales to get him to sleep. He peopled it with the dear old characters all children know and love. The white cat that sat on the wall was Puss in Boots to him, or Whittington's good friend. Blue-beard's wives were hidden in the house of whose upper windows the boy could just catch glimpses. Red Riding-hood met the wolf in the grove of chestnuts that rustled over there; and Jack's Beanstalk grew up just such a wall as that, he was sure.

But the story he liked best was the "Sleeping Beauty in the Wood;" for he was sure some lovely creature lived in that garden, and he longed to get in to find and play with her. He actually planted a bean in a bit of damp earth behind the water-barrel, and watched it grow, hoping for as strong a ladder as Jack's. But the vine grew very slowly, and Johnny was so impatient that he promised Patsey his best book "for his ownty-donty," if he would climb up and report what was to be seen in that enchanted garden.

"Faix, and I will, thin." And up went good-natured Pat, after laying an old board over the hogshead to stand on; for there were spikes all along the top of the wall, and only cats and sparrows could walk there.

Alas for Johnny's eager hopes, and alas for Pat's Sunday best! The board broke, and splash went the climber, with a wild Irish howl that startled Johnny half out of his wits and brought both Mrs. Morris and the cobbler to the rescue.

After this sad event Pat kept away for a time in high dudgeon, and Johnny was more lonely than ever. But he was a cheery little soul, so he was grateful for what joys he had, and worked away at his wall,--for the March winds had brought him many treasures, and after April rains were over, May sunshine made the court warm enough for him to be out nearly all day.

"I'm so sorry Pat is mad, 'cause he saw this piece and told me about it, and he'd like to help me put up these pictures," said Johnny to himself, one breezy morning, as he sat examining a big poster which the wind had sent flying into his lap a few minutes before.

The play was "Monte Cristo," and the pictures represented the hero getting out of prison by making holes in the wall, among other remarkable performances.

"This is a jolly red one! Now, where will I put it to show best and not spoil the other beauties?"

As he spoke, Johnny turned his chair around and surveyed his gallery with as much pride and satisfaction as if it held all the wonders of art.

It really was quite splendid; for every sort of picture shone in the sun,--simpling ladies, tragic scenes, circus parades, labels from tin cans, rosy tomatoes, yellow peaches, and purple plums, funny advertisements, and gay bills of all kinds. None were perfect, but they were arranged with care; and the effect was very fine, Johnny thought.

Presently his eyes wandered from these treasures to the budding bushes that nodded so tantalizingly over the wall. A grape-vine ran along the top, trying to hide the sharp spikes; lilacs tossed their purple plumes above it, and several tall chestnuts rose over all, making green tents with their broad leaves, where spires of blossom began to show like candles on a mammoth Christmas tree. Sparrows were chirping gayly everywhere; the white cat, with a fresh blue bow, basked on the coping of the wall, and from the depths of the enchanted garden came a sweet voice singing,--

"And she bids you to come in,

With a dimple in your chin,

Billy boy, Billy boy."

Johnny smiled as he listened, and put his finger to the little dent in his own chin, wishing the singer would finish this pleasing song. But she never did, though he often heard that, as well as other childish ditties, sung in the same gay voice, with bursts of laughter and the sound of lively feet tripping up and down the boarded walks. Johnny longed intensely to know who the singer was; for her music cheered his solitude, and the mysterious sounds he heard in the garden increased his wonder and his longing day by day.

Sometimes a man's voice called, "Fay, where are you?" and Johnny was sure "Fay" was short for Fairy. Another voice was often heard talking in a strange, soft language, full of exclamations and pretty sounds. A little dog barked, and answered to the name Pippo. Canaries carolled, and some elfish bird scolded, screamed, and laughed so like a human being, that Johnny felt sure that magic of some sort was at work next door.

A delicious fragrance was now wafted over the wall as of flowers, and the poor boy imagined untold loveliness behind that cruel wall, as he tended the dandelions his mother brought him from the Common, when she had time to stop and gather them; for he loved flowers dearly, and tried to make them out of colored paper, since he could have no sweeter sort.

Now and then a soft, rushing sound excited his curiosity to such a pitch that once he hobbled painfully up the court till he could see into the trees; and once his eager eyes caught glimpses of a little creature, all blue and white and gold, who peeped out from the green fans, and nodded, and tried to toss him a cluster of the chestnut flowers. He stretched his hands to her with speechless delight, forgetting his crutches, and would have fallen if he had not caught by the shutter of a window so quickly that he gave the poor back a sad wrench; and when he could look up again, the fairy had vanished, and nothing was to be seen but the leaves dancing in the wind.

Johnny dared not try this again for fear of a fall, and every step cost him a pang; but he never forgot it, and was thinking of it as he sat staring at the wall on that memorable May day.

"How I should like to peek in and see just how it all really looks! It sounds and smells so summery and nice in there. I know it must be splendid. I say, Pussy, can't you tell a feller what you see?"

Johnny laughed as he spoke, and the white cat purred politely; for she liked the boy who never threw stones at her, nor disturbed her naps. But Puss could not describe the beauties of the happy hunting-ground below; and, to console himself for the disappointment, Johnny went back to his new picture.

"Now, if this man in the play dug his way out through a wall ten feet thick with a rusty nail and a broken knife, I don't see why I couldn't pick away one brick and get a peek. It's all quiet in there now; here's a good place, and nobody will know, if I stick a picture over the hole. And I'll try it, I declare I will!"

Fired with the idea of acting Monte Cristo on a small scale, Johnny caught up the old scissors in his lap, and began to dig out the mortar around a brick already loose, and crumbling at the corners. His mother smiled at his energy, then sighed and said, as she clapped her laces with a heavy heart,--

"Ah, poor dear, if he only had his health he'd make his way in the world. But now he's like to find a blank wall before him while he lives, and none to help him over."

Puss, in her white boots, sat aloft and looked on, wise as the cat in the story, but offered no advice. The toad who lived behind the water-barrel hopped under the few leaves of the struggling bean, like Jack waiting to climb; and just then the noon bells began to ring as if they sang clear and loud,--

"Turn again, Whittington, Lord Mayor of London."

So, cheered by his friends, Johnny scraped and dug vigorously till the old brick fell out, showing another behind it. Only pausing to take breath, he caught up his crutch and gave two or three hearty pokes, which soon cleared the way and let the sunshine stream through, while the wind tossed the lilacs like triumphal banners, and the jolly sparrows chirped,--

"Hail, the conquering hero comes!"

Rather scared by his unexpected success, the boy sat silent for a moment to see what would happen. But all was still; and presently, with a beating heart, Johnny leaned forward to enjoy the long-desired "peek." He could not see much; but that little increased his curiosity

and delight, for it seemed like looking into fairy-land, after the dust and noise and dingy houses of the court.

A bed of splendid tulips tossed their gay garments in the middle of a grass-plot; a strange and brilliant bird sat dressing its feathers on a golden cage; a little white dog dozed in the sun; and on a red carpet under the trees lay the Princess, fast asleep.

"It's all right," said Johnny, with a long sigh of pleasure; "that's the Sleeping Beauty, sure enough. There's the blue gown, the white fur-cloak sweeping round, the pretty hair, and--yes--there's the old nurse, spinning and nodding, just as she did in the picture-book mother got me when I cried because I couldn't go to see the play."

This last discovery really did bewilder Johnny, and make him believe that fairy tales might be true, after all, for how could he know that the strange woman was an Italian servant, in her native dress, with a distaff in her hand? After pausing a moment, to rub his eyes, he took another look, and made fresh discoveries by twisting his head about. A basket of oranges stood near the Princess, a striped curtain hung from a limb of the tree to keep the wind off, and several books fluttered their pictured leaves temptingly before Johnny's longing eyes.

"Oh, if I could only go in and eat 'em and read 'em and speak to 'em and see all the splendid things!" thought the poor boy, as he looked from one delight to another, and felt shut out from all. "I can't go and wake her like the Prince did, but I do wish she'd get up and do something, now I can see. I daren't throw a stone, it might hit some one, or holler, it might scare her. Pussy won't help, and the sparrows are too busy scolding one another. I know! I'll fly a kite over, and that will please her any way. Don't believe she has kites; girls never do."

Eager to carry out his plan, Johnny tied a long string to his gayest poster, and then fastening it to the pole with which he sometimes fished in the water-cask, held it up to catch the fresh breezes blowing down the court. His good friend, the wind, soon caught the idea, and with a strong breath sent the red paper whisking over the wall, to hang a moment on the trees and then drop among the tulips, where its frantic struggles to escape waked the

dog, and set him to racing and barking, as Johnny hurriedly let the string go, and put his eye to his peep-hole.

The eyes of the Princess were wide open now, and she clapped her hands when Pippo brought the gay picture for her to see; while the old woman, with a long yawn, went away, carrying her distaff, like a gun, over her shoulder.

"She likes it! I'm so glad. Wish I had some more to send over. This will come off, I'll poke it through, and maybe she will see it."

Very much excited, Johnny recklessly tore from the wall his most cherished picture, a gay flower-piece, just put up; and folding it, he thrust it through the hole and waited to see what followed.

Nothing but a rustle, a bark, and a queer croak from the splendid bird, which set the canaries to trilling sweetly.

"She don't see, maybe she will hear," said Johnny. And he began to whistle like a mocking-bird; for this was his one accomplishment, and he was proud of it.

Presently he heard a funny burst of laughter from the parrot, and then the voice said,--

"No, Polly, you can't sing like that bird. I wonder where he is? Among the bushes over there, I think. Come, Pippo, let us go and find him."

"Now she's coming!" And Johnny grew red in the face trying to give his best trills and chirrup.

Nearer and nearer came the steps, the lilacs rustled as if shaken, and presently the roll of paper vanished. A pause, and then the little voice exclaimed, in a tone of great surprise,--

"Why, there's a hole! I never saw it before. Oh! I can see the street. How nice! how nice!"

"She likes the hole! I wonder if she will like me?" And, emboldened by these various successes, Johnny took another peep. This was the most delicious one of all; for he looked right into a great blue eye, with glimpses of golden hair above, a little round nose in the middle, and red lips below. It was like a flash of sunshine, and Johnny winked, as if dazzled; for the eye sparkled, the nose sniffed daintily, and the pretty mouth broke into a laugh as the voice cried out delightedly,--

"I see some one! Who are you? Come and tell me!"

"I'm Johnny Morris," answered the boy, quite trembling with pleasure.

"Did you make this nice hole?"

"I just poked a brick, and it fell out."

"Papa won't mind. Is that your bird?"

"No; it's me. I whistled."

"It's very pretty. Do it again," commanded the voice, as if used to give orders.

Johnny obeyed; and when he paused, out of breath, a small hand came through the hole, grasping as many lilies of the valley as it could hold, and the Princess graciously expressed her pleasure by saying,--

"I like it; you shall do it again, by and by. Here are some flowers for you. Now we will talk. Are you a nice boy?"

This was a poser; and Johnny answered meekly, with his nose luxuriously buried in the lovely flowers,--

"Not very,--I'm lame; I can't play like other fellers."

"_Porverino_!" sighed the little voice, full of pity; and, in a moment, three red-and-yellow tulips fell at Johnny's feet, making him feel as if he really had slipped into fairy-land through that delightful hole.

"Oh, thank you! Aren't they just elegant? I never see such beauties," stammered the poor boy, grasping his treasures as if he feared they might vanish away.

"You shall have as many as you like. Nanna will scold, but papa won't mind. Tell me more. What do you do over there?" asked the child, eagerly.

"Nothing but paste pictures and make books, when I don't ache too bad. I used to help mother; but I got hurt, and I can't do much now," answered the boy, ashamed to mention how many laces he patiently picked or clapped, since it was all he could do to help.

"If you like pictures, you shall come and see mine some day. I do a great many. Papa shows me how. His are splendid. Do you draw or paint yours?"

"I only cut 'em out of papers, and stick 'em on this wall or put 'em in scrap-books. I can't draw, and I haven't got no paints," answered Johnny.

"You should say 'haven't any paints.' I will come and see you some day; and if I like you, I will let you have my old paint-box. Do you want it?"

"Guess I do!"

"I think I shall like you; so I'll bring it when I come. Do you ache much?"

"Awfully, sometimes. Have to lay down all day, and can't do a thing."

"Do you cry?"

"No! I'm too big for that. I whistle."

"I know I shall like you, because you are brave!" cried the impetuous voice, with its pretty accent; and then an orange came tumbling through the hole, as if the new acquaintance longed to do something to help the "ache."

"Isn't that a rouser! I do love 'em, but mother can't afford 'em often." And Johnny took one delicious taste on the spot.

"Then I shall give you many. We have loads at home, much finer than these. Ah, you should see our garden there!"

"Where do you live?" Johnny ventured to ask; for there was a homesick sound to the voice as it said those last words.

"In Rome. Here we only stay a year, while papa arranges his affairs; then we go back, and I am happy."

"I should think you'd be happy in there. It looks real splendid to me, and I've been longing to see it ever since I could come out."

"It's a dull place to me. I like better to be where it's always warm, and people are more beautiful than here. Are you beautiful?"

"What queer questions she does ask!" And poor Johnny was so perplexed he could only stammer, with a laugh,--

"I guess not. Boys don't care for looks."

"Peep, and let me see. I like pretty persons," commanded the voice.

"Don't she order round?" thought Johnny, as he obeyed. But he liked it, and showed such a smiling face at the peep-hole, that Princess Fay was pleased to say, after a long look at him,--

"No, you are not beautiful; but your eyes are bright, and you look pleasant, so I don't mind the freckles on your nose and the whiteness of your face. I think you are good. I am sorry for you, and I shall lend you a book to read when the pain comes."

"I couldn't wait for that if I had a book. I do love so to read!" And Johnny laughed out from sheer delight at the thought of a new book; for he seldom got one, being too poor to buy them, and too helpless to enjoy the free libraries of the city.

"Then you shall have it _now_." And there was another quick rush in the garden, followed by the appearance of a fat little book, slowly pushed through the hole in the wall.

"This is the only one that will pass. You will like Hans Andersen's fairy tales, I know. Keep it as long as you please. I have many more."

"You're so good! I wish I had something for you," said the boy, quite overcome by this sweet friendliness.

"Let me see one of _your_ books. They will be new to me. I'm tired of all mine."

Quick as a flash, off went the cover of the old boiler, and out came half- a-dozen of Johnny's best works, to be crammed through the wall, with the earnest request,--

"Keep 'em all; they're not good for much, but they're the best I've got. I'll do some prettier ones as soon as I can find more nice pictures and pieces."

"They look very interesting. I thank you. I shall go and read them now, and then come and talk again. Addio, Giovanni."

"Good-by, Miss."

Thus ended the first interview of little Pyramus and Thisbe through the hole in the wall, while puss sat up above and played moonshine with her yellow eyes.

PART II.

After that day a new life began for Johnny, and he flourished like a poor little plant that has struggled out of some dark corner into the sunshine. All sorts of delightful things happened, and good times really seemed to have come. The mysterious papa made no objection to the liberties taken with his wall, being busy with his own affairs, and glad to have his little girl happy. Old Nanna, being more careful, came to see the new neighbors, and was disarmed at once by the affliction of the boy and the gentle manners of the mother. She brought all the curtains of the house for Mrs. Morris to do up, and in her pretty broken English praised Johnny's gallery and library, promising to bring Fay to see him some day.

Meantime the little people prattled daily together, and all manner of things came and went between them. Flowers, fruit, books, and bonbons kept Johnny in a state of bliss, and inspired him with such brilliant inventions that the Princess never knew what agreeable surprise would come next. Astonishing kites flew over the wall, and tissue balloons exploded in the flower-beds. All the birds of the air seemed to live in that court; for the boy whistled and piped till he was hoarse, because she liked it. The last of the long-hoarded cents came out of his tin bank to buy paper and pictures for the gay little books he made for her. His side of the wall was ravaged that hers might be adorned; and, as the last offering his grateful heart could give, he poked the toad through the hole, to live among the lilies and eat the flies that began to buzz about her Highness when she came to give her orders to her devoted subjects.

She always called the lad Giovanni, because she thought it a prettier name than John; and she was never tired of telling stories, asking questions, and making plans. The favorite one was what they would do when Johnny came to see her, as she had been promised he should when papa was not too busy to let them enjoy the charms of the studio; for Fay was a true artist's child, and thought nothing so lovely as pictures. Johnny thought so, too, and dreamed of the happy day when he should go and see the wonders his little friend described so well.

"I think it will be to-morrow; for papa has a lazy fit coming on, and then he always plays with me and lets me rummage where I like, while he goes out or smokes in the garden. So be ready; and if he says you can come, I will have the flag up early and you can hurry."

These agreeable remarks were breathed into Johnny's willing ear about a fortnight after the acquaintance began; and he hastened to promise, adding soberly, a minute after,--

"Mother says she's afraid it will be too much for me to go around and up steps, and see new things; for I get tired so easy, and then the pain comes on. But I don't care how I ache if I can only see the pictures--and you."

"Won't you ever be any better? Nanna thinks you might."

"So does mother, if we had money to go away in the country, and eat nice things; and have doctors. But we can't; so it's no use worrying." And Johnny gave a great sigh.

"I wish papa was rich, then he would give you money. He works hard to make enough to go back to Italy, so I cannot ask him; but perhaps I can sell my pictures also, and get a little. Papa's friends often offer me sweets for kisses; I will have money instead, and that will help. Yes, I shall do it." And Fay clapped her hands decidedly.

"Don't you mind about it. I'm going to learn to mend shoes. Mr. Pegget says he'll teach me. That doesn't need legs, and he gets enough to live on very well."

"It isn't pretty work. Nanna can teach you to braid straw as she did at home; that is easy and nice, and the baskets sell very well, she says. I shall speak to her about it, and you can try to-morrow when you come."

"I will. Do you really think I can come, then?" And Johnny stood up to try his legs; for he dreaded the long walk, as it seemed to him.

"I will go at once and ask papa."

Away flew Fay, and soon came back with a glad "Yes!" that sent Johnny hobbling in to tell his mother, and beg her to mend the elbows of his only jacket; for, suddenly, his old clothes looked so shabby he feared to show himself to the neighbors he so longed to see.

"Hurrah! I'm really going to-morrow. And you, too, mammy dear," cried the boy, waving his crutch so vigorously that he slipped and fell.

"Never mind; I'm used to it. Pull me up, and I'll rest while we talk about it," he said cheerily, as his mother helped him to the bed, where he forgot his pain in thinking of the delights in store for him.

Next day, the flag was flying from the wall, and Fay early at the hole, but no Johnny came; and when Nanna went to see what kept him, she returned with the sad news that the poor boy was suffering much, and would not be able to stir for some days.

"Let me go and see him," begged Fay, imploringly.

"Cara mia, it is no place for you. So dark, so damp, so poor, it is enough to break the heart," said Nanna, decidedly.

"If papa was here, he would let me go. I shall not play; I shall sit here and make some plans for my poor boy."

Nanna left her indignant little mistress, and went to cook a nice bowl of soup for Johnny; while Fay concocted a fine plan, and, what was more remarkable, carried it out.

For a week it rained, for a week Johnny lay in pain, and for a week Fay worked quietly at her little easel in the corner of the studio, while her father put the last touches to his fine picture, too busy to take much notice of the child. On Saturday the sun shone, Johnny was

better, and the great picture was done. So were the small ones; for as her father sat resting after his work, Fay went to him, with a tired but happy face, and, putting several drawings into his hand, told her cherished plan.

"Papa, you said you would pay me a dollar for every good copy I made of the cast you gave me. I tried very hard, and here are three. I want some money very, very much. Could you pay for these?"

"They are excellent," said the artist, after carefully looking at them. "You have tried, my good child, and here are your well-earned dollars. What do you want them for?"

"To help my boy. I want him to come in here and see the pictures, and let Nanna teach him to plait baskets; and he can rest, and you will like him, and he might get well if he had some money, and I have three quarters the friends gave me instead of bonbons. Would that be enough to send poor Giovanni into the country and have doctors?"

No wonder Fay's papa was bewildered by this queer jumble, because, being absorbed in his work, he had never heard half the child had told him, and had forgotten all about Johnny. Now he listened with half an ear, studying the effect of sunshine upon his picture meantime, while Fay told him the little story, and begged to know how much money it would take to make Johnny's back well.

"Bless your sweet soul, my darling, it would need more than I can spare or you earn in a year. By and by, when I am at leisure, we will see what can be done," answered papa, smoking comfortably, as he lay on the sofa in the large studio at the top of the house.

"You say that about a great many things, papa. 'By and by' won't be long enough to do all you promise then. I like now much better, and poor Giovanni needs the country more than you need cigars or I new frocks," said Fay, stroking her father's tired forehead and looking at him with an imploring face.

"My dear, I cannot give up my cigar, for in this soothing smoke I find inspiration, and though you are a little angel, you must be clothed; so wait a bit, and we will attend to the boy--later." He was going to say "by and by" again, but paused just in time, with a laugh.

"Then I shall take him to the country all myself. I cannot wait for this hateful 'by and by.' I know how I shall do it, and at once. Now, now!" cried Fay, losing patience; and with an indignant glance at the lazy papa, who seemed going to sleep, she dashed out of the room, down many stairs, through the kitchen, startling Nanna and scattering the salad as if a whirlwind had gone by, and never paused for breath till she stood before the garden wall with a little hatchet in her hand.

"This shall be the country for him till I get enough money to send him away. I will show what I can do. He pulled out two bricks. I will beat down the wall, and he shall come in at once," panted Fay; and she gave a great blow at the bricks, bent on having her will without delay,--for she was an impetuous little creature, full of love and pity for the poor boy pining for the fresh air and sunshine, of which she had so much.

Bang, bang, went the little hatchet, and down came one brick after another, till the hole was large enough for Fay to thrust her head through; and being breathless by that time, she paused to rest and take a look at Johnny's court.

Meanwhile Nanna, having collected her lettuce leaves and her wits, went to see what the child was about; and finding her at work like a little fury, the old woman hurried up to tell "the Signor," Fay's papa, that his little daughter was about to destroy the garden and bury herself under the ruins of the wall. This report, delivered with groans and wringing of the hands, roused the artist and sent him to the rescue, as he well knew that his angel was a very energetic one, and capable of great destruction.

When he arrived, he beheld a cloud of dust, a pile of bricks among the lilies, and the feet of his child sticking out of a large hole in the wall, while her head and shoulders were on the other side. Much amused, yet fearful that the stone coping might come down on her, he pulled her back with the assurance that he would listen and help her now immediately, if there was such need of haste.

But he grew sober when he saw Fay's face; for it was bathed in tears, her hands were bleeding, and dust covered her from head to foot.

"My darling, what afflicts you? Tell papa, and he will do anything you wish."

"No, you will forget, you will say 'Wait;' and now that I have seen it all, I cannot stop till I get him out of that dreadful place. Look, look, and see if it is not sad to live there all in pain and darkness, and so poor."

As she spoke, Fay urged her father toward the hole; and to please her he looked, seeing the dull court, the noisy street beyond, and close by the low room, where Johnny's mother worked all day, while the poor boy's pale face was dimly seen as he lay on his bed waiting for deliverance.

"Well, well, it is a pitiful case; and easily mended, since Fay is so eager about it. Hope the lad is all she says, and nothing catching about his illness. Nanna can tell me."

Then he drew back his head, and leading Fay to the seat, took her on his knee, all flushed, dirty, and tearful as she was, soothing her by saying tenderly,--

"Now let me hear all about it, and be sure I'll not forget. What shall I do to please you, dear, before you pull down the house about my ears?"

Then Fay told her tale all over again; and being no longer busy, her father found it very touching, with the dear, grimy little face looking into his, and the wounded hands clasped beseechingly as she pleaded for poor Johnny.

"God bless your tender heart, child; you shall have him in here to-morrow, and we will see what can be done for those pathetic legs of his. But listen, Fay, I have an easier way to do it than yours, and a grand surprise for the boy. Time is short, but it can be done; and to show

you that I am in earnest, I will go this instant and begin the work. Come and wash your face while I get on my boots, and then we will go together."

At these words Fay threw her arms about papa's neck and gave him many grateful kisses, stopping in the midst to ask,--

"Truly, _now_?"

"See if it is not so." And putting her down, papa went off with great strides, while she ran laughing after him, all her doubts set at rest by this agreeable energy on his part.

If Johnny had not been asleep in the back room, he would have seen strange and pleasant sights that afternoon and evening; for something went on in the court that delighted his mother, amused the artist, and made Fay the happiest child in Boston. No one was to tell till the next day, that Johnny's surprise might be quite perfect, and Mrs. Morris sat up till eleven to get his old clothes in order; for Fay's papa had been to see her, and became interested in the boy, as no one could help being when they saw his patient little face.

So hammers rang, trowels scraped, shovels dug, and wonderful changes were made, while Fay danced about in the moonlight, like Puck intent upon some pretty prank, and papa quoted _Snout_, [Footnote: A character in Shakspeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream."] the tinker's parting words, as appropriate to the hour,--

"Thus have I, wall, my part discharged so;

And, being done, thus wall away doth go."

PART III.

A lovely Sunday morning dawned without a cloud; and even in the dingy court the May sunshine shone warmly, and the spring breezes blew freshly from green fields far away. Johnny begged to go out; and being much better, his mother consented, helping him to dress with such a bright face and eager hands that the boy said innocently,--

"How glad you are when I get over a bad turn! I don't know what you'd do if I ever got well."

"My poor dear, I begin to think you _will_ pick up, now the good weather has come and you have got a little friend to play with. God bless her!"

Why his mother should suddenly hug him tight, and then brush his hair so carefully, with tears in her eyes, he did not understand; but was in such a hurry to get out, he could only give her a good kiss, and hobble away to see how his gallery fared after the rain, and to take a joyful "peek" at the enchanted garden.

Mrs. Morris kept close behind him, and it was well she did; for he nearly tumbled down, so great was his surprise when he beheld the old familiar wall after the good fairies Love and Pity had worked their pretty miracle in the moonlight.

The ragged hole had changed to a little arched door, painted red. On either side stood a green tub, with a tall oleander in full bloom; from the arch above hung a great bunch of gay flowers; and before the threshold lay a letter directed to "Signor Giovanni Morris," in a childish hand. As soon as he recovered from the agreeable shock of this splendid transformation scene, Johnny sank into his chair, where a soft cushion had been placed, and read his note, with little sighs of rapture at the charming prospect opening before him.

DEAR GIOVANNI,--Papa has made this nice gate, so you can come in when you like and not be tired. We are to have two keys, and no one else can open it. A little bell is to ring when we pull the cord, and we can run and see what we want. The paint is wet. Papa did it,

and the men put up the door last night. I helped them, and did not go in my bed till ten. It was very nice to do it so. I hope you will like it. Come in as soon as you can; I am all ready.

Your friend,

FAY.

"Mother, she must be a real fairy to do all that, mustn't she?" said Johnny, leaning back to look at the dear door behind which lay such happiness for him.

"Yes, my sonny, she is the right sort of good fairy, and I just wish I could do her washing for love the rest of her blessed little life," answered Mrs. Morris, in a burst of grateful ardor.

"You shall! you shall! Do come in! I cannot wait another minute!" cried an eager little voice as the red door flew open; and there stood Fay, looking very like a happy elf in her fresh white frock, a wreath of spring flowers on her pretty hair, and a tall green wand in her hand, while the brilliant bird sat on her shoulder, and the little white dog danced about her feet.

"So she bids you to come in,

With a dimple in your chin,

Billy boy, Billy boy,"

sung the child, remembering how Johnny liked that song; and waving her wand, she went slowly backward as the boy, with a shining face, passed under the blooming arch into a new world, full of sunshine, liberty, and sweet companionship.

Neither Johnny nor his mother ever forgot that happy day, for it was the beginning of help and hope to both just when life seemed hardest and the future looked darkest.

Papa kept out of sight, but enjoyed peeps at the little party as they sat under the chestnuts, Nanna and Fay doing the honors of the garden to their guests with Italian grace and skill, while the poor mother folded her tired hands with unutterable content, and the boy looked like a happy soul in heaven.

Sabbath silence, broken only by the chime of bells and the feet of church-goers, brooded over the city; sunshine made golden shadows on the grass; the sweet wind brought spring odors from the woods; and every flower seemed to nod and beckon, as if welcoming the new playmate to their lovely home.

While the women talked together, Fay led Johnny up and down her little world, showing all her favorite nooks, making him rest often on the seats that stood all about, and amusing him immensely by relating the various fanciful plays with which she beguiled her loneliness.

"Now we can have much nicer ones; for you will tell me yours, and we can do great things," she said, when she had displayed her big rocking-horse, her grotto full of ferns, her mimic sea, where a fleet of toy boats lay at anchor in the basin of an old fountain, her fairy-land under the lilacs, with paper elves sitting among the leaves, her swing, that tossed one high up among the green boughs, and the basket of white kittens, where Topaz, the yellow-eyed cat, now purred with maternal pride. Books were piled on the rustic table, and all the pictures Fay thought worthy to be seen.

Here also appeared a nice lunch, before the visitors could remember it was noon and tear themselves away. Such enchanted grapes and oranges Johnny never ate before; such delightful little tarts and Italian messes of various sorts; even the bread and butter seemed glorified because served in a plate trimmed with leaves and cut in dainty bits. Coffee that perfumed the air put heart into poor Mrs. Morris, who half starved herself that the boy might be fed; and he drank milk till Nanna said, laughing, as she refilled the pitcher,--

"He takes more than both the blessed lambs we used to feed for Saint Agnes in the convent at home. And he is truly welcome, the dear child, to the best we have; for he is as innocent and helpless as they."

"What does she mean?" whispered Johnny to Fay, rather abashed at having forgotten his manners in the satisfaction which three mugfuls of good milk had given him.

So, sitting in the big rustic chair beside him, Fay told the pretty story of the lambs who are dedicated to Saint Agnes, with ribbons tied to their snowy wool, and then raised with care till their fleeces are shorn to make garments for the Pope. A fit tale for the day, the child thought, and went on to tell about the wonders of Rome till Johnny's head was filled with a splendid confusion of new ideas, in which Saint Peter's and apple-tarts, holy lambs and red doors, ancient images and dear little girls, were delightfully mixed. It all seemed like a fairy tale, and nothing was too wonderful or lovely to happen on that memorable day.

So when Fay's papa at last appeared, finding it impossible to keep away from the happy little party any longer, Johnny decided at once that the handsome man in the velvet coat was the king of the enchanted land, and gazed at him with reverence and awe. A most gracious king he proved to be; for after talking pleasantly to Mrs. Morris, and joking Fay on storming the walls, he proposed to carry Johnny off, and catching him up, strode away with the astonished boy on his shoulder, while the little girl danced before to open doors and clear the way.

Johnny thought he couldn't be surprised any more; but when he had mounted many stairs and found himself in a great room with a glass roof, full of rich curtains, strange armor, pretty things, and pictures everywhere, he just sat in the big chair where he was placed, and stared in silent delight.

"This is papa's studio, and that the famous picture, and here is where I work; and isn't it pleasant? and aren't you glad to see it?" said Fay, skipping about to do the honors of the place.

"I don't believe heaven is beautifuller," answered Johnny, in a low tone, as his eyes went from the green tree-tops peeping in at the windows to the great sunny picture of a Roman garden, with pretty children at play among the crumbling statues and fountains.

"I'm glad you like it, for we mean to have you come here a great deal. I sit to papa very often, and get so tired; and you can talk to me, and then you can see me draw and model in clay, and then we'll go in the garden, and Nanna will show you how to make baskets, and then we'll play."

Johnny nodded and beamed at this charming prospect, and for an hour explored the mysteries of the studio, with Fay for a guide and papa for an amused spectator. He liked the boy more and more, and was glad Fay had so harmless a playmate to expend her energies and compassion upon. He assented to every plan proposed, and really hoped to be able to help these poor neighbors; for he had a kind heart, and loved his little daughter even more than his art.

When at last Mrs. Morris found courage to call Johnny away, he went without a word, and lay down in the dingy room, his face still shining with the happy thoughts that filled his mind, hungry for just such pleasures, and never fed before.

After that day everything went smoothly, and both children blossomed like the flowers in that pleasant garden, where the magic of love and pity, fresh air and sunshine, soon worked miracles. Fay learned patience and gentleness from Johnny; he grew daily stronger on the better food Nanna gave him, and the exercise he was tempted to take; and both spent very happy days working and playing, sometimes under the trees, where the pretty baskets were made, or in the studio, where both pairs of small hands modelled graceful things in clay, or daubed amazing pictures with the artist's old brushes and discarded canvases.

Mrs. Morris washed everything washable in the house, and did up Fay's frocks so daintily that she looked more like an elf than ever when her head shone out from the fluted frills, like the yellow middle of a daisy with its white petals all spread.

As he watched the children playing together, the artist, having no great work in hand, made several pretty sketches of them, and then had a fine idea of painting the garden scene where Fay first talked to Johnny. It pleased his fancy, and the little people sat for him nicely; so he made a charming thing of it, putting in the cat, dog, bird, and toad as the various characters in Shakspeare's lovely play, while the flowers were the elves, peeping and listening in all manner of merry, pretty ways.

He called it "Little Pyramus and Thisbe," and it so pleased a certain rich lady that she paid a large price for it; and then, discovering that it told a true story, she generously added enough to send Johnny and his mother to the country, when Fay and her father were ready to go.

But it was to a lovelier land than the boy had ever read of in his fairy books, and to a happier life than mending shoes in the dingy court. In the autumn they all sailed gayly away together, to live for years in sunny Italy, where Johnny grew tall and strong, and learned to paint with a kind master and a faithful young friend, who always rejoiced that she found and delivered him, thanks to the wonderful hole in the wall.