

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE ENCHANTED ISLAND

June and July passed, and the lonely two lived a quiet life in the brown house. Everything was so still and fair--no sound but the coming and going tide, and the swaying wind among the pine-trees, and the tick of the clock, and the whirr of the little wheel as Mrs. Pennel sat spinning in her door in the mild weather. Mara read the Roman history through again, and began it a third time, and read over and over again the stories and prophecies that pleased her in the Bible, and pondered the wood-cuts and texts in a very old edition of Æsop's Fables; and as she wandered in the woods, picking fragrant bayberries and gathering hemlock, checkerberry, and sassafras to put in the beer which her grandmother brewed, she mused on the things that she read till her little mind became a tabernacle of solemn, quaint, dreamy forms, where old Judean kings and prophets, and Roman senators and warriors, marched in and out in shadowy rounds. She invented long dramas and conversations in which they performed imaginary parts, and it would not have appeared to the child in the least degree surprising either to have met an angel in the woods, or to have formed an intimacy with some talking wolf or bear, such as she read of in Æsop's Fables.

One day, as she was exploring the garret, she found in an old barrel of cast-off rubbish a bit of reading which she begged of her grandmother

for her own. It was the play of the "Tempest," torn from an old edition of Shakespeare, and was in that delightfully fragmentary condition which most particularly pleases children, because they conceive a mutilated treasure thus found to be more especially their own property--something like a rare wild-flower or sea-shell. The pleasure which thoughtful and imaginative children sometimes take in reading that which they do not and cannot fully comprehend is one of the most common and curious phenomena of childhood.

And so little Mara would lie for hours stretched out on the pebbly beach, with the broad open ocean before her and the whispering pines and hemlocks behind her, and pore over this poem, from which she collected dim, delightful images of a lonely island, an old enchanter, a beautiful girl, and a spirit not quite like those in the Bible, but a very probable one to her mode of thinking. As for old Caliban, she fancied him with a face much like that of a huge skate-fish she had once seen drawn ashore in one of her grandfather's nets; and then there was the beautiful young Prince Ferdinand, much like what Moses would be when he was grown up--and how glad she would be to pile up his wood for him, if any old enchanter should set him to work!

One attribute of the child was a peculiar shamefacedness and shyness about her inner thoughts, and therefore the wonder that this new treasure excited, the host of surmises and dreams to which it gave rise, were never mentioned to anybody. That it was all of it as much authentic fact as the Roman history, she did not doubt, but whether it had

happened on Orr's Island or some of the neighboring ones, she had not exactly made up her mind. She resolved at her earliest leisure to consult Captain Kittridge on the subject, wisely considering that it much resembled some of his fishy and aquatic experiences.

Some of the little songs fixed themselves in her memory, and she would hum them as she wandered up and down the beach.

"Come unto these yellow sands,  
And then take hands;  
Courtsied when you have and kissed  
The wild waves whist,  
Foot it featly here and there;  
And, sweet sprites, the burthen bear."

And another which pleased her still more:--

"Full fathom five thy father lies;  
Of his bones are coral made,  
Those are pearls that were his eyes:  
Nothing of him that can fade  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange;  
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:  
Hark, now I hear them--ding-dong, bell."

These words she pondered very long, gravely revolving in her little head whether they described the usual course of things in the mysterious under-world that lay beneath that blue spangled floor of the sea; whether everybody's eyes changed to pearl, and their bones to coral, if they sunk down there; and whether the sea-nymphs spoken of were the same as the mermaids that Captain Kittridge had told of. Had he not said that the bell rung for church of a Sunday morning down under the waters?

Mara vividly remembered the scene on the sea-beach, the finding of little Moses and his mother, the dream of the pale lady that seemed to bring him to her; and not one of the conversations that had transpired before her among different gossips had been lost on her quiet, listening little ears. These pale, still children that play without making any noise are deep wells into which drop many things which lie long and quietly on the bottom, and come up in after years whole and new, when everybody else has forgotten them.

So she had heard surmises as to the remaining crew of that unfortunate ship, where, perhaps, Moses had a father. And sometimes she wondered if he were lying fathoms deep with sea-nymphs ringing his knell, and whether Moses ever thought about him; and yet she could no more have asked him a question about it than if she had been born dumb. She decided that she should never show him this poetry--it might make him feel unhappy.

One bright afternoon, when the sea lay all dead asleep, and the long,

steady respiration of its tides scarcely disturbed the glassy tranquillity of its bosom, Mrs. Pennel sat at her kitchen-door spinning, when Captain Kittridge appeared.

"Good afternoon, Mis' Pennel; how ye gettin' along?"

"Oh, pretty well, Captain; won't you walk in and have a glass of beer?"

"Well, thank you," said the Captain, raising his hat and wiping his forehead, "I be pretty dry, it's a fact."

Mrs. Pennel hastened to a cask which was kept standing in a corner of the kitchen, and drew from thence a mug of her own home-brewed, fragrant with the smell of juniper, hemlock, and wintergreen, which she presented to the Captain, who sat down in the doorway and discussed it in leisurely sips.

"Wal', s'pose it's most time to be lookin' for 'em home, ain't it?" he said.

"I am lookin' every day," said Mrs. Pennel, involuntarily glancing upward at the sea.

At the word appeared the vision of little Mara, who rose up like a spirit from a dusky corner, where she had been stooping over her reading.

"Why, little Mara," said the Captain, "you ris up like a ghost all of a sudden. I thought you's out to play. I come down a-purpose arter you. Mis' Kittridge has gone shoppin' up to Brunswick, and left Sally a 'stent' to do; and I promised her if she'd clap to and do it quick, I'd go up and fetch you down, and we'd have a play in the cove."

Mara's eyes brightened, as they always did at this prospect, and Mrs. Pennel said, "Well, I'm glad to have the child go; she seems so kind o' still and lonesome since Moses went away; really one feels as if that boy took all the noise there was with him. I get tired myself sometimes hearing the clock tick. Mara, when she's alone, takes to her book more than's good for a child."

"She does, does she? Well, we'll see about that. Come, little Mara, get on your sun-bonnet. Sally's sewin' fast as ever she can, and we're goin' to dig some clams, and make a fire, and have a chowder; that'll be nice, won't it? Don't you want to come, too, Mis' Pennel?"

"Oh, thank you, Captain, but I've got so many things on hand to do afore they come home, I don't really think I can. I'll trust Mara to you any day."

Mara had run into her own little room and secured her precious fragment of treasure, which she wrapped up carefully in her handkerchief, resolving to enlighten Sally with the story, and to consult the Captain

on any nice points of criticism. Arrived at the cove, they found Sally already there in advance of them, clapping her hands and dancing in a manner which made her black elf-locks fly like those of a distracted creature.

"Now, Sally," said the Captain, imitating, in a humble way, his wife's manner, "are you sure you've finished your work well?"

"Yes, father, every stitch on't."

"And stuck in your needle, and folded it up, and put it in the drawer, and put away your thimble, and shet the drawer, and all the rest on't?" said the Captain.

"Yes, father," said Sally, gleefully, "I've done everything I could think of."

"'Cause you know your ma'll be arter ye, if you don't leave everything straight."

"Oh, never you fear, father, I've done it all half an hour ago, and I've found the most capital bed of clams just round the point here; and you take care of Mara there, and make up a fire while I dig 'em. If she comes, she'll be sure to wet her shoes, or spoil her frock, or something."

"Wal', she likes no better fun now," said the Captain, watching Sally, as she disappeared round the rock with a bright tin pan.

He then proceeded to construct an extemporary fireplace of loose stones, and to put together chips and shavings for the fire,--in which work little Mara eagerly assisted; but the fire was crackling and burning cheerily long before Sally appeared with her clams, and so the Captain, with a pile of hemlock boughs by his side, sat on a stone feeding the fire leisurely from time to time with crackling boughs. Now was the time for Mara to make her inquiries; her heart beat, she knew not why, for she was full of those little timidities and shames that so often embarrass children in their attempts to get at the meanings of things in this great world, where they are such ignorant spectators.

"Captain Kittridge," she said at last, "do the mermaids toll any bells for people when they are drowned?"

Now the Captain had never been known to indicate the least ignorance on any subject in heaven or earth, which any one wished his opinion on; he therefore leisurely poked another great crackling bough of green hemlock into the fire, and, Yankee-like, answered one question by asking another.

"What put that into your curly pate?" he said.

"A book I've been reading says they do,--that is, sea-nymphs do. Ain't



sea-nymphs and mermaids the same thing?"

"Wal', I guess they be, pretty much," said the Captain, rubbing down his pantaloons; "yes, they be," he added, after reflection.

"And when people are drowned, how long does it take for their bones to turn into coral, and their eyes into pearl?" said little Mara.

"Well, that depends upon circumstances," said the Captain, who wasn't going to be posed; "but let me jist see your book you've been reading these things out of."

"I found it in a barrel up garret, and grandma gave it to me," said Mara, unrolling her handkerchief; "it's a beautiful book,--it tells about an island, and there was an old enchanter lived on it, and he had one daughter, and there was a spirit they called Ariel, whom a wicked old witch fastened in a split of a pine-tree, till the enchanter got him out. He was a beautiful spirit, and rode in the curled clouds and hung in flowers,--because he could make himself big or little, you see."

"Ah, yes, I see, to be sure," said the Captain, nodding his head.

"Well, that about sea-nymphs ringing his knell is here," Mara added, beginning to read the passage with wide, dilated eyes and great emphasis. "You see," she went on speaking very fast, "this enchanter had been a prince, and a wicked brother had contrived to send him to sea

with his poor little daughter, in a ship so leaky that the very rats had left it."

"Bad business that!" said the Captain, attentively.

"Well," said Mara, "they got cast ashore on this desolate island, where they lived together. But once, when a ship was going by on the sea that had his wicked brother and his son--a real good, handsome young prince--in it, why then he made a storm by magic arts."

"Jist so," said the Captain; "that's been often done, to my sartin knowledge."

"And he made the ship be wrecked, and all the people thrown ashore, but there wasn't any of 'em drowned, and this handsome prince heard Ariel singing this song about his father, and it made him think he was dead."

"Well, what became of 'em?" interposed Sally, who had come up with her pan of clams in time to hear this story, to which she had listened with breathless interest.

"Oh, the beautiful young prince married the beautiful young lady," said Mara.

"Wal'," said the Captain, who by this time had found his soundings; "that you've been a-tellin' is what they call a play, and I've seen 'em

act it at a theatre, when I was to Liverpool once. I know all about it. Shakespeare wrote it, and he's a great English poet."

"But did it ever happen?" said Mara, trembling between hope and fear.

"Is it like the Bible and Roman history?"

"Why, no," said Captain Kittridge, "not exactly; but things jist like it, you know. Mermaids and sich is common in foreign parts, and they has funerals for drowned sailors. 'Member once when we was sailing near the Bermudas by a reef where the Lively Fanny went down, and I heard a kind o' ding-dongin',--and the waters there is clear as the sky,--and I looked down and see the coral all a-growin', and the sea-plants a-wavin' as handsome as a pictur', and the mermaids they was a-singin'. It was beautiful; they sung kind o' mournful; and Jack Hubbard, he would have it they was a-singin' for the poor fellows that was a-lyin' there round under the seaweed."

"But," said Mara, "did you ever see an enchanter that could make storms?"

"Wal', there be witches and conjurers that make storms. 'Member once when we was crossin' the line, about twelve o'clock at night, there was an old man with a long white beard that shone like silver, came and stood at the masthead, and he had a pitchfork in one hand, and a lantern in the other, and there was great balls of fire as big as my fist came out all round in the rigging. And I'll tell you if we didn't get a blow

that ar night! I thought to my soul we should all go to the bottom."

"Why," said Mara, her eyes staring with excitement, "that was just like this shipwreck; and 'twas Ariel made those balls of fire; he says so; he said he 'flamed amazement' all over the ship."

"I've heard Miss Roxy tell about witches that made storms," said Sally.

The Captain leisurely proceeded to open the clams, separating from the shells the contents, which he threw into a pan, meanwhile placing a black pot over the fire in which he had previously arranged certain slices of salt pork, which soon began frizzling in the heat.

"Now, Sally, you peel them potatoes, and mind you slice 'em thin," he said, and Sally soon was busy with her work.

"Yes," said the Captain, going on with his part of the arrangement, "there was old Polly Twitchell, that lived in that ar old tumble-down house on Mure P'int; people used to say she brewed storms, and went to sea in a sieve."

"Went in a sieve!" said both children; "why a sieve wouldn't swim!"

"No more it wouldn't, in any Christian way," said the Captain; "but that was to show what a great witch she was."

"But this was a good enchanter," said Mara, "and he did it all by a book and a rod."

"Yes, yes," said the Captain; "that ar's the gen'l way magicians do, ever since Moses's time in Egypt. 'Member once I was to Alexandria, in Egypt, and I saw a magician there that could jist see everything you ever did in your life in a drop of ink that he held in his hand."

"He could, father!"

"To be sure he could! told me all about the old folks at home; and described our house as natural as if he'd a-been there. He used to carry snakes round with him,--a kind so p'ison that it was certain death to have 'em bite you; but he played with 'em as if they was kittens."

"Well," said Mara, "my enchanter was a king; and when he got through all he wanted, and got his daughter married to the beautiful young prince, he said he would break his staff, and deeper than plummet sounded he would bury his book."

"It was pretty much the best thing he could do," said the Captain, "because the Bible is agin such things."

"Is it?" said Mara; "why, he was a real good man."

"Oh, well, you know, we all on us does what ain't quite right sometimes,

when we gets pushed up," said the Captain, who now began arranging the clams and sliced potatoes in alternate layers with sea-biscuit, strewing in salt and pepper as he went on; and, in a few moments, a smell, fragrant to hungry senses, began to steam upward, and Sally began washing and preparing some mammoth clam-shells, to serve as ladles and plates for the future chowder.

Mara, who sat with her morsel of a book in her lap, seemed deeply pondering the past conversation. At last she said, "What did you mean by saying you'd seen 'em act that at a theatre?"

"Why, they make it all seem real; and they have a shipwreck, and you see it all jist right afore your eyes."

"And the Enchanter, and Ariel, and Caliban, and all?" said Mara.

"Yes, all on't,--plain as printing."

"Why, that is by magic, ain't it?" said Mara.

"No; they hes ways to jist make it up; but,"--added the Captain, "Sally, you needn't say nothin' to your ma 'bout the theatre, 'cause she wouldn't think I's fit to go to meetin' for six months arter, if she heard on't."

"Why, ain't theatres good?" said Sally.

"Wal', there's a middlin' sight o' bad things in 'em," said the Captain, "that I must say; but as long as folks is folks, why, they will be folksy;--but there's never any makin' women folk understand about them ar things."

"I am sorry they are bad," said Mara; "I want to see them."

"Wal', wal'," said the Captain, "on the hull I've seen real things a good deal more wonderful than all their shows, and they hain't no make-b'lieve to 'em; but theatres is takin' arter all. But, Sally, mind you don't say nothin' to Mis' Kittridge."

A few moments more and all discussion was lost in preparations for the meal, and each one, receiving a portion of the savory stew in a large shell, made a spoon of a small cockle, and with some slices of bread and butter, the evening meal went off merrily. The sun was sloping toward the ocean; the wide blue floor was bedropped here and there with rosy shadows of sailing clouds. Suddenly the Captain sprang up, calling out,--

"Sure as I'm alive, there they be!"

"Who?" exclaimed the children.

"Why, Captain Pennel and Moses; don't you see?"

And, in fact, on the outer circle of the horizon came drifting a line of small white-breasted vessels, looking like so many doves.

"Them's 'em," said the Captain, while Mara danced for joy.

"How soon will they be here?"

"Afore long," said the Captain; "so, Mara, I guess you'll want to be getting hum."