

The Wondrous Child

by

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Far away on the edge of a great creek, that stretched inland from the endless sea, there lay a peaceful village.

Here the husbandmen led a happy, prosperous life. They rose early, so that in the cool grey morn they heard the lark, all invisible in the height of the dawn, singing the morning hymn that he never forgets.

As sunset came stealing on, they returned to their homes, glad of the rest that nightfall brought to them.

In the autumn, when the harvesting was to be done, they worked late, as they were able to do; for at that time the kind Sun and his wife the Moon have a compact that they will help those who work at the harvest. So the sun stays up a little longer, and the moon gets out of her bed in the horizon a little earlier, and thus there is always light to work by.

The red, broad, full-faced moon that looks down on the husbandmen at work is called the Harvest Moon.

The Lord of the Manor of this peaceful village was a very good, kind man, that helped the poor always. At meal-time the door of his mansion stood open; and all who were hungry could enter if they chose, and take seats at the table, and be welcome guests.

This Lord of the Manor had three children, Sibold and May, and one little Baby Boy just come home who had no name as yet.

Sibold had just reached his eighth birthday, and May was within two months of her sixth. They were very fond of each other - as brother and sister should be - and had all their plays together. May thought that Sibold was very big and strong, and whatever he wished to do she always agreed to.

Sibold loved finding things and exploring; and at different times the two children had been over all the domain of their father.

They had certain secret haunts that nobody knew of except themselves. Some of these were very queer, delightful places.

One was in the centre of a hollow Oak tree, where so many squirrels lived that the branches were quite like the streets of a town, with their going to and fro.

Another place was the top of a rock, which was only reached by a narrow path between high bushes of ivy. Here there was a sort of great chair made in the rock, which just held the two; and here they often brought their lunch, and sat half the day looking out over the tree tops to where, far away in the distance, the white edge of the horizon lay on the glittering sea.

Then they would tell each other what they thought about, and what they would like to do, and what they would try to do when they grew up.

There was also another place, which was their favourite of all.

It was under a great Weeping Willow. This was a mighty tree, many hundreds of years old, which towered aloft above the other trees which dotted the sward. The long branches fell downwards so thickly, that even in winter, when the leaves held fallen and the benches were bare, one could hardly see into the hollow that lay within.

When the new spring clothes came home, the whole tree, from its high top even to the mossy ground from which it rose, was a mass of solid green; and it was difficult to get within even if one knew the way.

In one place one of the trailing branches had, a long time ago, been broken in a great storm, winch had laid low many forest trees; but the branches which hung next to this

sent forth new green shoots to fill the empty space, and so the opening was covered with thin twigs instead of strong branches.

In summer the leaves covered all with a mass of green; but those who knew the opening could push the twigs aside, and so enter into the bower.

It was a most beautiful bower. No matter how strong the sun glared without, it was within cool and pleasant. From the ground even up to the top, till the very roof where the dark branches meeting made a black mass, all was a delicate green, for the light without came through the leaves softly and gently.

Sibold and May thought that so the sea must look to the Mermaids, who sing and comb their long hair with golden combs down in the cool depths of the ocean.

In the sward around this great tree were many beds of beautiful flowers. Asters, with their wide faces of many colours, staring up straight at the sun without ever winking, and round and over which flitted the gorgeous butterflies, with their wings like rainbows or peacocks or sunsets, or aught that is most beautiful. Sweet Mignonette, where the bees hovered with grateful hum. Pansies, with their delicate big faces trembling on their slender stalks. Tulips, opening their mouths to the sun and the rain; for the Tulip is a greedy flower, that opens his mouth till at last he opens it so wide that his head falls all to pieces and he dies. Hyacinths, with their many bells clustered on one stalk - like a big family party. Great Sunflowers, whose drooping faces shone like children of the parent Sun himself.

There were also great Poppies, with spreading, careless leaves, thick juicy stalks, and grand scarlet flowers, which rise and droop just as they please, and look so free and careless and independent.

Both Sibold and May loved these Poppies, and went every day to look at them. In the beds in the mossy sward, from which the great Willow rose, they grew to an enormous size; so high that when Sibold and May stood hand in hand beside the bed, the great Poppies towered over them till Sibold, standing on tiptoe, could not reach the scarlet flowers.

One day after breakfast, Sibold and May took their lunch with them, and went out to spend the day together wandering about among the woods, for it was a holiday with them. A little tiny Boy brother had arrived in the house, and everybody was busy getting things for him. The children had just seen him for an instant.

Hand in hand Sibold and May went round all their favourite spots. They looked at the cave in the Oak tree, and said "How do you do?" to all the squirrels that lived in the tree, and told them of the new Baby that had come home. Then they went to the rock, and sat together in the seat, and looked away over the sea.

There they sat for a while in the hot sunlight, and talked together of the dear little baby brother that they had seen. They wondered where he came from, and they made up a plan that they would look and look till they found a baby too. Sibold said that he must have come over the sea, and been laid in the parsley-bed by the Angels, so that nurse might find him there and bring him to comfort their poor sick mother. Then they wondered how they would be able to get away over the sea, and they planned that some day Sibold's boat would be made bigger, and they would get into it and sail away over the sea, and search for another little baby all for themselves.

After a while they got tired of sitting in the hot sun; so they left the place, and, hand in hand, wandered on till they came to the level sward where the great Willow tree rose, and where the beds of flowers made the air seem full of colours and perfume.

Hand in hand they walked on, looking at the butterflies, and the bees, and the birds, and the beautiful flowers.

In one bed they found a new flower had come out. Sibold knew it, and told May it was a Tiger-lily; she was afraid to go near it till he told her it could not hurt her, as it was only a flower.

As they went on Sibold picked some flowers from every bed, and gave them to his sister; when they were going away from the Tiger-lily he pulled the flower, and as May was afraid to carry it, he took it himself.

At last they came to the great bed of Poppies. The flowers looked so bright and cool for all their flaming colour, and so careless, that May and Sibold both together thought that they would like to take a lot with them into the Willow Bower; for they were going to eat their lunch there, and they wished the place to be as gay and pretty as possible.

But first they went back to the Oak tree to gather a lot of leaves, for Sibold suggested that they would make the new baby brother the King of the Feast, and that they would make for him a crown of oak. As he would not be there himself, they would put the crown where they could see it well.

When they got to the Oak tree May called out,

"Oh look, Sibold, look, look!"

Sibold looked, and saw that on nearly every branch were a whole lot of squirrels sitting two and two, with their bushy tails over their backs, eating nuts as hard as ever they could.

When the squirrels saw them they were not frightened, for the children had never done them any harm. They gave a sort of queer croak all together, and a funny little skip. Sibold and May began to laugh, but they did not like to disturb them, so they gathered as many oak leaves as they wanted, and went back to the Poppy bed.

"Now, Sibold, dear," said May, "we must get lots of Poppies, for the dear Ba is very very fond of them."

"How do you know?" said Sibold.

"Because he ought to be," she answered. "You and I are, and he is our brother, so of course he is."

So Sibold pulled a lot of the Poppies, and some he took with many of the cool green leaves attached, till they had each an armful of them. Then they gathered up all the other flowers, and entered the Willow Bower to eat their lunch. Sibold went to the spring that rose in the garden, and that ran through it down to the sea. There he filled his cap with water, and brought it back as steadily as he could, so as not to spill much; and returned to the bower. May held open the leafy branches as he came, and when he passed in she let them fall again. As the leafy curtain hung all round them, the two children were alone in the Willow Bower.

Then they set to work to deck their leafy tent with the flowers. They twisted them round the hanging branches, and made a wreath, which they put round the trunk of the tree. Everywhere they put the Poppies as high as they could reach, and then Sibold held up May while she stuck the Tiger-lily in a cleft in the tree-trunk above all the other flowers.

Then the children sat down to their lunch. They were very tired and very hungry, and they enjoyed the rest and the food very much. There was only one thing which they wanted, and that was the new little Baby Brother, so that they might make him the king of the feast.

When lunch was finished, they felt very tired, so they lay down together with their heads on each other's shoulders and their arms twined; and there they went to sleep with the scarlet Poppies nodding all round them.

After a time they were not asleep. It did not seem to be any later in the day, but to be the early morning. Neither of them felt the least sleepy or tired; on the contrary they both wanted to go on a longer expedition than ever.

"Come down to the creek," said Sibold, "and let us get out my boat."

May arose, and they opened the leafy door and went out. They went down to the creek; and there they found Sibold's boat with all its white sails set.

"Let us get in," said Sibold.

"Why?" asked May.

"Because then we can have a sail," he answered.

"But it will not hold us; it is too small," said May, who was rather afraid to go sailing, but did not like to say so.

"Let us try," said her brother. He took hold of the cord that tied the boat to the bank, and drew it in. The line seemed very long, and Sibold appeared to be pulling it in for a great while. However, the boat came in at last. As it drew nearer, it got bigger and bigger, till when it touched the bank, they saw that it was just large enough to hold them both.

"Come, let us get in," said Sibold.

Somehow May did not feel afraid now. She got into the boat and found that in it there were silken cushions of the colour of the Poppy flowers. Then Sibold got in, and pulled away the rope that tied the boat to shore. He sat in the stern, and held the tiller in his hand; May sat on a cushion in the bottom of the boat, and held on to the sides.

The white sails swelled out with a gentle breeze, and they began to move away from the shore; the tiny waves rippled from the bow of the boat. May heard the lap, lap, lap, as they touched the prow, and then fell away.

The sun shone very brightly. The water was as blue as the sky, and so clear that the children could see down into its depths, where the fishes were darting about. There, too, the plants and trees that grow under the water were opening and closing their branches; and the leaves were moving about as those of land trees do when the wind is blowing.

For a little while the boat went straight away from land till they lost sight of the tall Willow tree which rose above the others. Then it seemed to come near to the shore again, and moved on, always so close that the children could see all that was there very plainly.

The shore was very varied; and each moment showed something new and beautiful -

Now it was a jutting rock all covered with trailing plants whose flowers almost touched the water.

Now it was a beach, where the white sand glittered and glistened in the light, and where the waves made a pleasant humming sound as they ran up the shore and down again - as if playing at "touch" with themselves.

Now dark trees with dense foliage overhung the water; but through their gloom shone bright patches far away as the sun streamed down, through some opening, into the glade.

Again there were places where grass as green as emerald sloped right down to the water's edge, and where the Cowslips and Buttercups that grew on the marge as they leant over almost kissed the little waves that rose to meet them.

Then there were places where great trees of Lilac made the air sweet for far around with the breath of their clusters of pink and white blossom, and where the laburnums seemed to shower endless streams of gold from the wealth of flowers which hung from their twisted green branches.

There were also great Palm-trees with their wide leaves making a cool shadow on the earth beneath. Great Cocoa-nut trees up whose stems troops of monkeys kept running to gather the cocoa-nuts which they pulled and threw down below. Aloes with great stalks laden with flowers of purple and gold - for this was the hundredth year when alone the Aloe blooms.

There were Poppies as large as trees; and Lilies whose flowers were bigger than tents.

The children liked all these places, but presently they come to a spot where there was a patch of emerald grass shaded over with giant trees. Around rose or hung or clustered every flower that grows. Tall Sugar-canes sprang from the edge of a tiny stream which ran over a bed of bright stones like jewels. Palms reared their lofty heads, and plants with great leaves rose and made shadows even in the shade. Close by was a crystal spring which bubbled into the tiny stream whence the Sugar-canes rose.

When they saw this place both the children cried out, "Oh, how beautiful! Let us stop here."

The boat seemed to understand their wishes, for without the helm even being touched, it turned and drifted in gently to the shore.

Sibold got out and lifted May to land. He intended to moor the boat; but the moment May got out all the sails folded themselves of their own accord, the anchor jumped overboard, and before it was possible to do anything the boat was anchored close to the shore.

Sibold and May took each other's hands, and they went round the place together, looking at everything.

Presently May said, in a whisper:

"Oh, Sibold, this place is so nice, I wonder if there is any Parsley here."

"Why do you want Parsley?" he asked.

"Because if there was a nice bed of Parsley we might be able to find a Baby - And oh, Sibold, I do so want a Baby."

"Very well then, let us look," said her brother. "There seems to be every kind of plant here; and if there is every kind of plant, you know there must be Parsley." For Sibold was very logical.

So the two children went all round the grassy dell searching; and presently, sure enough, under the spreading leaves of a Citron they found a great bed of Parsley - bigger Parsley than they had ever seen before.

Sibold was quite pleased with it, and said, "This is something like Parsley. Do you know, May, it always puzzled me how a Baby who is so much bigger than the Parsley can be hidden by it; and it must be hidden in it, for I often go out to look in the bed at home, and I never can find one, although nurse always finds one whenever she looks. But she does not look nearly often enough. I know if I was as lucky as she is, I would be always looking."

May found the longing to find a baby grow so strong upon her that she said again:

"Oh, Sibold, I do so long for a Baby; I hope we will find one."

As she spoke there was a queer kind of sound heard - a sort of very, very soft laugh - like a smile set to music.

May was surprised, and, for a moment, did not think of doing anything; she merely pointed, and said:

"Look, look!"

Sibold ran forward, and lifted up the leaf of an enormous Parsley plant; and there - oh, joy of joys! - was lying the dearest little Baby Boy that ever was seen.

May knelt down beside him, and lifted him up, and began to rock him, and sing "Hush a bye, baby," whilst Sibold looked on complacently. However, after a while he got impatient, and said:

"Look here, you know, I found that Baby; he belongs to me."

"Oh, please," said May, "I heard him first. He is mine."

"He is mine," said Sibold; "He is mine," said May; and both began to get a little angry.

Suddenly they heard a low groan - a sort of sound like as if a tune had a toothache. Both children looked down in alarm, and saw that the poor Baby was dead.

They were both horrorstruck, and began to cry; and both asked the other to forgive them, and promised that never, never again they would be angry. When they had done this, the Child opened its eyes, looked at them gravely, and said:

"Now never quarrel or be angry. If you get angry again, either of you, I shall be dead, aye, and buried too, before you can say 'trapsticks.'"

"Indeed, Ba," said May, "I shall never, never be angry again. At least, I shall try not to be."

Said Sibold:

"I assure you, sir, that under no provocation, resulting from whatever concatenation of circumstances, shall I be guilty of the malfaisance of anger."

"How pretty he speaks," said May; and the Baby nodded his head to him familiarly, as much as to say:

"All right, old man, we understand each other."

Then for a while they were all quite quiet. Presently the Baby turned its blue eyes up to May, and said:

"Please, little mother, will you sing to me?"

"What would you like, Ba?" said May.

"Oh, any little trifle; something pathetic," he answered.

"Any particular style?" asked May.

"No, thank you; anything that comes handy. I prefer something simple - some little elementary trifle, as, for instance, any little tune beginning with a chromatic scale in consecutive fifths and octaves, pianissimo - rallentando - excellerando - crescendo - up to an inharmonic change on the dominant of the diminished flat ninth."

"Oh, please, Ba," said May, very humbly, "I do not know anything about that yet. I am only in scales, and, if you please, I do not know what it is all about."

"Look, and you will see," said the Child, and he took a piece of stick and wrote some music on the sand.

"I do not know yet," said May.

Just then a small yellowish-brown animal appeared in the glade chasing a rat. When it came opposite them it suddenly went off like the sound of a pistol.

"Do you know now?" asked the Child.

"No, dear Ba, but it does not matter," she answered.

"Very well, dear," said the Child, kissing her, "anything you please, only let it come straight from your loving little heart;" and he kissed her again.

Then May sang something very sweet and pretty - so sweet and pretty that it made her cry, and Sibold also, and the Baby. She did not know the words, and she did not know the tune, and she had only a vague sort of idea what it was all about; but it was very, very pretty. All the time she was singing she kept nursing the baby, and he put his dear little fat arms round her neck, and loved her very much.

When she was done singing, the Child said:

"Chlap, Chlap, Chlap, M-chlap!"

"What does he mean?" she asked Sibold, in distress, for she saw that the Baby wanted something.

Just then a beautiful Cow put its head over the bushes, and said, "Moo-oo-oo." The Beautiful Child clapped his hands; so did May, who said:

"Oh, I know now. He wants to be fed."

The Cow walked in without being invited; and Sibold said:

"I suppose, May, I had better milk him."

"Please do, dear," said May; and she began cuddling the Baby again, and kissing, and nursing him, and telling him that he would soon be fed now.

Whilst she was thus engaged, she was sitting with her back to Sibold; but the Baby was looking on at the milking operation, with his blue eyes dancing with glee. All at once he began to laugh, so much that May looked round to see what he was laughing at. There was Sibold trying to milk the Cow by pulling its tail.

The Cow did not seem to mind him, but went on grazing.

"Chay, Lady," said Sibold. The Cow began to frisk about.

"Oh, I say," said Sibold, "do hurry up now, and give us some milk; the Ba wants some."

The Cow answered him:

"The dear Ba must not want for aught."

May thought it very strange that the Cow could talk; but as Sibold did not seem to think it strange, she held her tongue.

Sibold began to argue with the Cow: "But really now, Mister Cow, if he must not want for anything, why do you make him want?"

The Cow answered: "Don't blame me. It is your own fault. Try some other way;" and it began to laugh as hard as it could.

Its laugh was very funny, very loud at first, but gradually getting more and more like the Child's laugh, till May could not tell one from the other. Then the Cow stopped laughing, but the Child went on.

"What are you laughing at, Ba?" May asked, for she did not remember to know anything about milking, any more than Sibold. She thought this very funny, for she knew that she had often seen the cows milked at home.

The Baby spoke, "That is not the way to milk a cow."

Then Sibold began to work the Cow's tail up and down like the handle of a pump; but the Baby laughed more than ever.

All at once, without knowing how it came to pass, she felt herself pouring milk out of a watering-pot all over the Baby, who lay on the ground, with Sibold holding down its head. The Baby was crowing and laughing like mad; and when the watering-pot was all emptied, he said:

"Thank you both so much. I never enjoyed dinner so much in my life."

"This is a very queer dear Ba!" said May, in a whisper.

"Very," said Sibold.

Whilst they were talking there came a dreadful sound among the trees, very very far away at first, but getting nearer and nearer every moment. It was like cats who were trying to imitate thunder. The noise came booming through the trees.

"Meiau-u-boom-r-p-s-s-s. Yarkhow-iau-p-s-s."

May was very much frightened. So also was Sibold, but he would not say so; he felt that he had to protect his little Sister and the Baby, so he got between them and the place the sound came from. May hugged the Child close, and said to him, "Do not fear, dear Ba. We will not let it touch you."

"What is 'it?'" said the Baby.

"I do not know, Ba," she answered. "I wish I did. There it comes now;" for just at that moment a great angry Tiger bounded over the tops of the highest trees, and stood glaring at them out of its great green flaming eyes.

May looked on this terrible thing with her eyes distended with terror; but still she clasped the Baby closer and closer. She kept looking at the Tiger, and saw that he was eyeing not her nor Sibold, but the Baby. This made her more frightened than ever, and she clasped him closer. As she looked, however, she saw that the Tiger's eyes got less and less angry every moment, till at last they were as gentle and tame as those of her own favourite tabby.

Then the Tiger began to purr. The purring was like a cat's purr, but so loud that it sounded like drums. However, she did not mind it, for although loud it seemed as if it meant to be gentle and caressing. Then the Tiger came close, and crouched before the Wondrous Child, and licked his little fat hands with its great rough red tongue, but very gently. The Baby laughed, and patted the Tiger's great nose, and pulled the long bristling whiskers, and said:

"Gee, gee."

The Tiger went on behaving most funnily. It lay down on its back, and rolled over and over, and then stood up and purred louder than ever. Its great tail rose straight into the air, with the top moving about and knocking to and fro a great bunch of grapes that hung down from the tree above. It seemed overwhelmed with joy, and came and crouched again before the Child, and purred round him in the greatest state of happiness. Finally it lay down, smiling and purring, and watching over the Child as if on guard.

Presently there came from the distance another terrible Sound. It was like a great Giant hissing; and was louder than steam, and more multitudinous than a flock of geese. There was also the sound of breaking branches, of the crushing of the undergrowth; and there was a terrible dragging noise like nothing else they had ever heard.

Again Sibold stood out between the sound and May, who once more held the Baby to protect him from harm.

The Tiger rose and arched his back like an angry cat, and got ready to spring on whatsoever should come.

Then there appeared over the tops of the trees the head of an enormous Serpent, with small eyes that shone like sparks of fire, and two great open jaws. These jaws were so big that it really seemed as if the beast's whole head opened in two; and between them appeared a great forked tongue which seemed to spit venom. Behind this monstrous head appeared enormous coils of the Serpent's body moving endlessly. The Tiger growled as if about to spring; but suddenly the Serpent lowered its head submissively. It was gazing at the Wondrous Child; and May looking, also saw that the wee Baby was pointing down as if commanding the Serpent to his feet. Then the Tiger, with a low growl and afterwards a contented purr, went back to its place to watch and guard; the great Serpent came gently and coiled itself in the glade, and it also seemed as if keeping watch and guard over the Wondrous Child.

Again there came another terrible sound. This time it was in the air. Great wings seemed to flap louder than thunder; and from far away the air was darkened by a mighty Bird of Prey that made a shadow over the land with its outspread wings.

As the Bird of Prey swooped down, the Tiger rose again and arched his back as though about to spring to meet it, and the Serpent raised his mighty coils and opened his great jaws as if about to strike.

But when the Bird saw the Child it too became less fierce, and hung in mid air with its head drooped as though making submission. Presently the Serpent coiled itself and lay as before, the Tiger went back to watch and guard, and the Bird of Prey alit in the glade and watched and guarded too.

May and Sibold began to look with wonder on the Beautiful Boy, before whom these monsters made obeisance; but they could not see anything strange.

Again there was another terrible sound - this time out to sea - a rushing and swishing as if some giant thing was lashing the water.

Looking round, the children saw two monsters coming. These were a Shark and a Crocodile. They rose out of the sea and came up on land. The Shark was jumping along, with its tail beating about and its triple rows of great teeth grinding together. The Crocodile was crawling along with its big feet and short bent legs; and its terrible mouth was opening and shutting, snapping its big teeth together.

When these two got near, the Tiger and the Serpent and the Bird of Prey all rose to guard the Child; but when the new comers saw the Baby, they too made submission, and they also kept watch and guard - the Crocodile crawling on the beach, and the Shark moving up and down in the water - just like sentries.

Again May and Sibold looked at the Beautiful Child and wondered.

Once more there was a terrible noise, more awful than had yet been.

The earth seemed to shake, and a deep rumbling sound came from far below. Then, a little way off, a mountain suddenly rose; its top opened, and forth burst, with a sound louder than a storm, fire and smoke. Great volumes of black vapour rose and hung, a dark cloud, overhead. Red-hot stones of enormous size were shot aloft and fell again into the crater, and were lost. Down the sides of the mountain rolled torrents of burning lava, and springs of fiercely-boiling water burst forth on every side.

Sibold and May were more frightened than ever, and May clasped the dear Baby closer to her breast.

The thunder of the burning mountain grew louder and louder, the

fiery lava poured thick and fast, and from the crater rose the head of a fiery Dragon, with eyes like burning coals and teeth like tongues of flame.

Then the Tiger and the Serpent and the Bird of Prey, and the Crocodile and the Shark, all prepared to defend the Wondrous Child.

But when the fiery Dragon saw the Boy it, too, was quelled; and it crawled humbly out from the burning crater.

Then the fiery mountain sunk again into the earth, the burning lava disappeared; and the Dragon remained with the others to watch and guard.

Sibold and May were more amazed than ever, and looked at the Baby more curiously still. Suddenly May said to her brother:

"Sibold, I want to whisper you something."

Sibold bent his head, and she whispered very softly into his ear:

"I think the Ba is an Angel!"

Sibold looked at him in awe as he answered:

"I think so, too, dear. What are we to do?"

"I do not know," said May; "I hope he will not be angry with us for calling him 'Ba.'"

"I hope not," said Sibold.

May thought for a moment, and then her face lit up with a glad smile as she said:

"He will not be angry, Sibold. You know we entertained him unawares."

"Quite true," said Sibold.

Whilst they were talking, all sorts of animals and birds and fishes were coming into the glade, walking arm in arm, as well as they could - for none of them had arms. A Lion and a Lamb came first, and these two bowed to the Child, and then went and lay down together. Then came a Fox and a Goose; and then a Hawk and a Pigeon; and then a Wolf and another Lamb; then a Dog and a Cat; and then another Cat and a Mouse; and then another Fox and a Stork; and a Hare and a Tortoise; and a Pike and a Trout; and a Sparrow and a Worm; and many, many others, till all the glade was full of living things all at peace with one another.

They all sat round the glade in pairs, and they all looked at the Wondrous Child.

May whispered again to Sibold:

"I think if he is an Angel we ought to be very respectful to him."

Sibold nodded, showing that he agreed with her; so she cuddled up the Baby closer and said:

"Please, Mister Ba, do not they all look nice and pretty sitting around like that?"

The Beautiful Child smiled sweetly as he answered:

"Beautiful and sweet they look."

May said again:

"I wish they would always be like that, and never fight nor disagree at all, dear Ba. Oh! I beg your pardon. I mean, Mister Ba."

The Child asked her:

"Why do you beg my pardon?"

"Because I called you Ba, instead of Mister Ba."

The Boy asked again:

"Why should you call me Mister Ba?"

May did not like to say, "Because you are an Angel," as she would like to have said, so she cuddled the Child closer and whispered into his little pink ear:

"You know."

The Child put his little arms round her neck and kissed her, and said, very low and very sweetly, words that all her life long she never forgot:

"I do know. Be always loving and sweet, dear child, and even the Angels will know your thoughts and will listen to your words."

May felt very happy. She looked at Sibold, who bent over and kissed her, and called her "sweet little sister;" and all the animals in pairs, and all the terrible ones on guard, said all together like a cheer:

"Right!"

Then they stopped and made all together each of the noises in turn that any of them used to show they were happy. First they all purred, and then they all crowed, and then cackled, and squeaked, and flapped their wings and wagged their tails.

"Oh, how pretty!" said May again, "look, dear Ba!" She was just going to say Mister when the Child held up its finger, so she only said "Ba."

The Child smiled and said:

"Right, you must call me only Ba."

Again all the animals said together like a shout:

"Right, you must say only Ba," and then they all went through the same ways of showing their joy as before.

May said to the Child - and somehow her voice seemed very, very loud although she did not mean it, but only to whisper.

"Oh, dear Ba, I do so wish they would always continue happy and at peace like this. Is there no way of doing it?"

The Beautiful Child opened its mouth to speak, and all the living things put up their claws, or their wings, or their fins to their ears, to listen attentively.

He spoke, and his words seemed full of sound but very soft, like the echo of distant thunder coming over far waters on the wings of music.

"Know, dear children, and know ye all that list - there shall be peace on earth between all living things when the children of men are for one hour in perfect love and harmony with each other. Strive, oh! strive, each and all of you, that it may be so."

As he spoke there came over all a solemn hush, and they were very still.

Then the Wondrous Child seemed to float out of May's arms and to move down toward the sea. All the living things instantly hurried to make a great double line between which he passed.

May and Sibold followed him hand in hand. He waited for them at the marge of the sea and then kissed them both.

Whilst he was kissing them, the boat came close to shore; the anchor climbed on board; the white sails ran aloft, and a fresh breeze began to blow towards home.

The Wondrous Child moved on to the prow, and there rested. Sibold and May went on board, and took their old place; and after kissing their hands to all the living things - who

were by this time dancing all together in the glade - they kept their eyes fixed on the Beautiful Boy.

As they sat hand in hand, the boat moved along gently, but very swiftly. The shore, with its many beautiful places, seemed gliding into a dim mist as they swept along.

Presently they saw their own creek, and the great Willow towering over all the other trees on shore.

The boat came to land. The Wondrous Child, floating in the air, moved onward towards the Willow Bower.

Sibold and May followed.

He entered the Bower; they came close after.

As the leafy curtain fell behind them, the figure of the Wondrous Child got dimmer and dimmer; till at last, looking at them lovingly, and waving his tiny hands, as if blessing them, he seemed to melt away into the air.

Sibold and May sat for a long time, hand in hand, thinking. Then both feeling sleepy, they put their arms round each other, and lay down to rest.

In this position they again fell asleep, with the Poppies all around them.