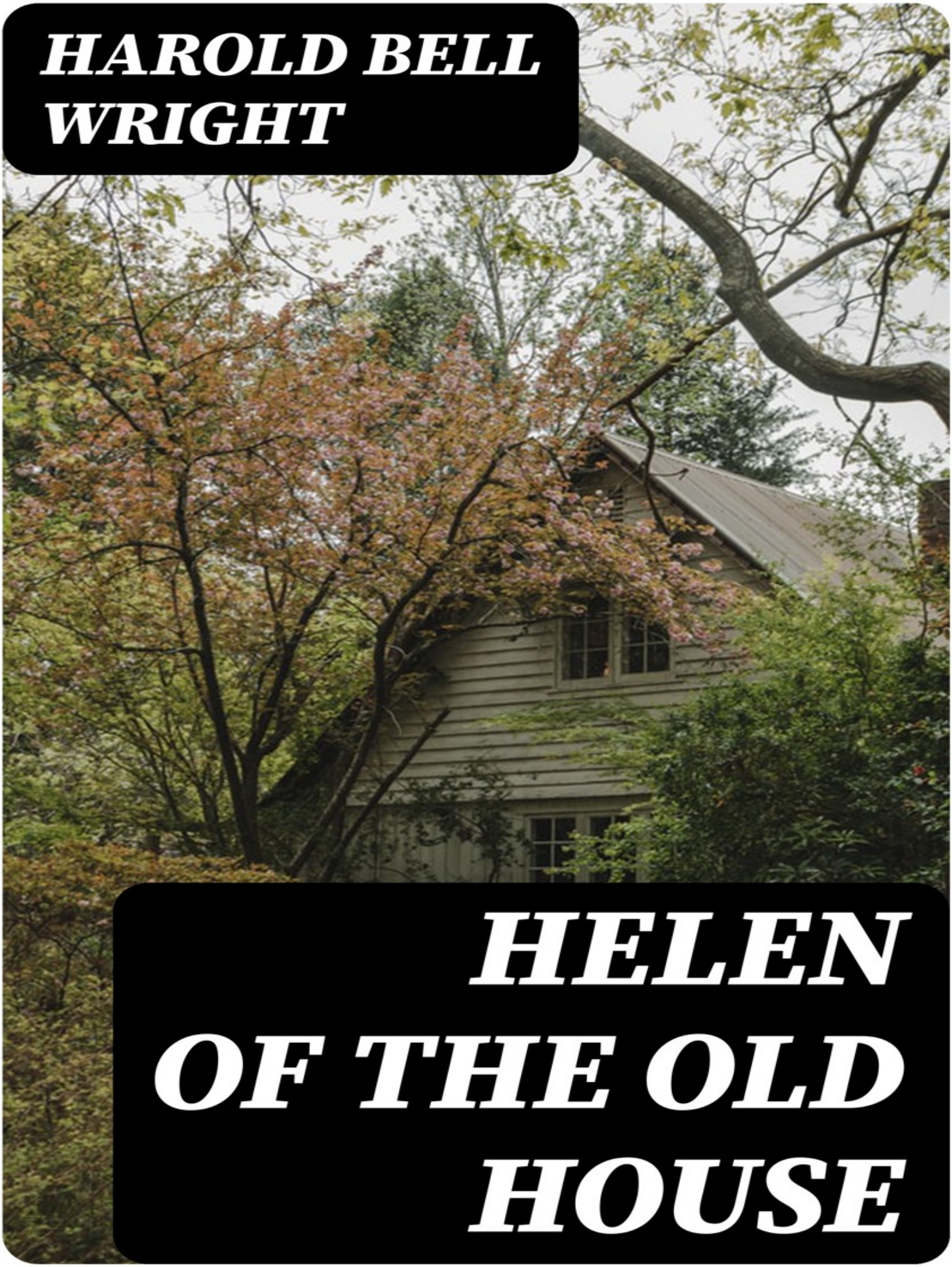
HAROLD BELL WRIGHT



HELEN OF THE OLD HOUSE

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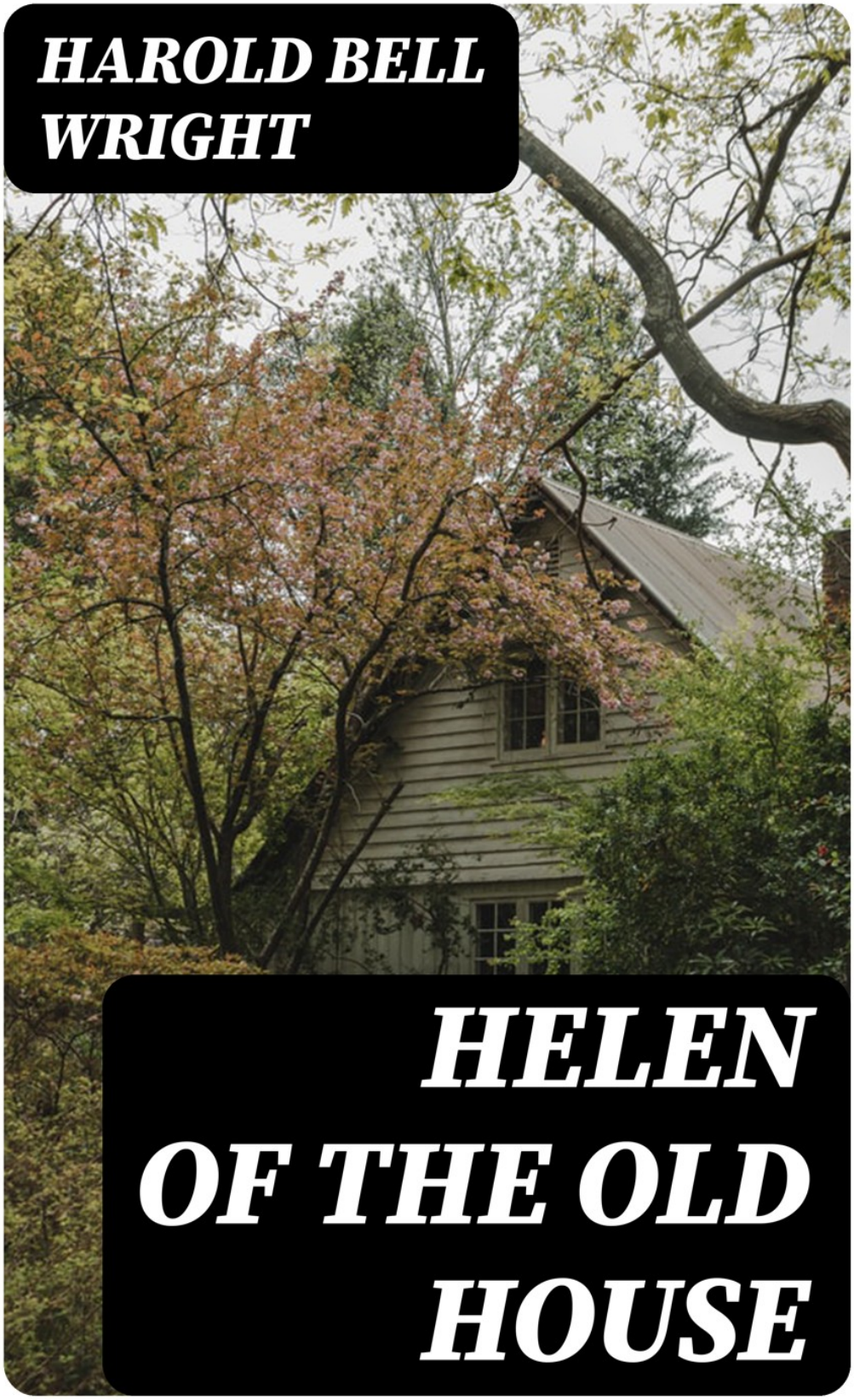

HELEN OF THE OLD HOUSE

Harold Bell Wright

Helen of the Old House

EAN 8596547024194

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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XXX. "JEST LIKE THE INTERPRETER SAID"

BOOK I

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THE INTERPRETER

"*Take up our quarrel with the foe:*
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields."

CHAPTER I

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THE HUT ON THE CLIFF

No well informed resident of Millsburgh, when referring to the principal industry of his little manufacturing city, ever says "the mills"—it is always "the Mill."

The reason for this common habit of mind is that one mill so overshadows all others, and so dominates the industrial and civic life of this community, that in the people's thought it stands for all.

The philosopher who keeps the cigar stand on the corner of Congress Street and Ward Avenue explained it very clearly when he answered an inquiring stranger, "You just can't think Millsburgh without thinkin' mills; an' you can't think mills without thinkin' *the* Mill."

As he turned from the cash register to throw his customer's change on the scratched top of the glass show case, the philosopher added with a grin that was a curious blend of admiration, contempt and envy, "An' you just can't think the Mill without thinkin' Adam Ward."

That grin was another distinguishing mark of the well informed resident of Millsburgh. Always, in those days, when the citizens mentioned the owner of the Mill, their faces took

on that curious half-laughing expression of mingled admiration, contempt and envy.

But it has come to pass that in these days when the people speak of
Adam Ward they do not smile. When they speak of Adam Ward's daughter,
Helen, they smile, indeed, but with quite a different meaning.

The history of Millsburgh is not essentially different from that of a thousand other cities of its class.

Born of the natural resources of the hills and forests, the first rude mill was located on that wide sweeping bend of the river. About this industrial beginning a settlement gathered. As the farm lands of the valley were developed, the railroad came, bringing more mills. And so the town grew up around its smoky heart.

It was in those earlier days that Adam Ward, a workman then, patented and introduced the new process. It was the new process, together with its owner's native genius for "getting on," that, in time, made Adam the owner of the Mill. And, finally, it was this combination of Adam and the new process that gave this one mill dominion over all others.

As the Mill increased in size, importance and power, and the town grew into the city, Adam Ward's material possessions were multiplied many times.

Then came the year of this story.

It was midsummer. The green, wooded hills that form the southern boundary of the valley seemed to be painted on shimmering gauze. The grainfields on the lowlands across the river were shining gold. But the slate-colored dust from

the unpaved streets of that section of Millsburgh known locally as the "Flats" covered the wretched houses, the dilapidated fences, the hovels and shanties, and everything animate or inanimate with a thick coating of dingy gray powder. Shut in as it is between a long curving line of cliffs on the south and a row of tall buildings on the river bank, the place was untouched by the refreshing breeze that stirred the trees on the hillside above. The hot, dust-filled atmosphere was vibrant with the dull, droning voice of the Mill. From the forest of tall stacks the smoke went up in slow, twisting columns to stain the clean blue sky with a heavy cloud of dirty brown.

The deep-toned whistle of the Mill had barely called the workmen from their dinner pails and baskets when two children came along the road that for some distance follows close to the base of that high wall of cliffs. By their ragged, nondescript clothing which, to say the least, was scant enough to afford them comfort and freedom of limb, and by the dirt, that covered them from the crowns of their bare, unkempt heads to the bottoms of their bare, unwashed feet, it was easy to identify the children as belonging to that untidy community.

One was a sturdy boy of eight or nine neglected years. On his rather heavy, freckled face and in his sharp blue eyes there was, already, a look of hardness that is not good to see in the countenance of a child. The other, his sister, was two years younger—a thin wisp of a girl, with tiny stooping shoulders, as though, even in her babyhood, she had found a burden too heavy. With her tired little face and grave, questioning eyes she looked at the world as if she were

wondering, wistfully, why it should bother to be so unkind to such a helpless mite of humanity.

As they came down the worn road, side by side they chose with experienced care those wheel ruts where the black dust lay thickest and, in solemn earnestness, plowed the hot tracks with their bare feet, as if their one mission in life were to add the largest possible cloud of powdered dirt to the already murky atmosphere of the vicinity.

Suddenly they stood still.

For a long, silent moment they gazed at a rickety old wooden stairway that, at this point in the unbroken line of cliffs, climbs zigzag up the face of the rock-buttressed wall. Then, as if moved by a common impulse, they faced each other. The quick fire of adventure kindled in the eyes of the boy as he met the girl's look of understanding.

"Let's go up—stump yer," he said, with a daredevil grin.

"Huh, yer wouldn't dast."

Womanlike, she was hoping that he would "dast" and, with the true instinct of her sex, she chose unerringly the one way to bring about the realization of her hope.

Her companion met the challenge like a man. With a swaggering show of courage, he went to the stairway and climbed boldly up—six full steps. Then he paused and looked down, "I don't dast, don't I?"

From the lower step she spurred his faltering spirit, "Dare yer—dare yer—dare yer."

He came reluctantly down two steps, "Will yer go up if I do?"

She nodded, "Uh-huh—but yer gotter go first."

He looked doubtfully up at the edge of the cliff so far above them.

"Shucks," he said, with conviction, "ain't nobody up there 'cept old
Interpreter, an' that dummy, Billy Rand. I know 'cause Skinny Davis an'
Chuck Wilson, they told me. They was up—old Interpreter, he can't do
nothin' to nobody—he ain't got no legs."

Gravely she considered with him the possible dangers of the proposed adventure. "Billy Rand has got legs."

"He can't hear nothin', though—can't talk neither," said the leader of the expedition. "An' besides maybe he ain't there—we might catch him out. What d'yer say? Will we chance it?"

She looked up doubtfully toward the unknown land above. "I dunno, will we?"

"Skinny an' Chuck, they said the Interpreter give 'em cookies—an' told 'em stories too."

"Cookies, Gee! Go ahead—I'm a-comin'."

That tiny house high on the cliff at the head of the old, zigzag stairway, up which the children now climbed with many doubtful stops and questioning fears, is a landmark of interest not only to Millsburgh but to the country people for miles around.

Perched on the perilous brink of that curving wall of rocks, with its low, irregular, patched and weather-beaten roof, and its rough-boarded and storm-beaten walls half hidden in a tangle of vines and bushes, the little hut looks, from a distance, as though it might once have been the

strange habitation of some gigantic winged creature of prehistoric ages. The place may be reached from a seldom-used road that leads along the steep hillside, a quarter of a mile back from the edge of the precipice, but the principal connecting link between the queer habitation and the world is that flight of rickety wooden steps.

Taking advantage of an irregularity in the line of cliffs, the upper landing of the stairway is placed at the side of the hut. In the rear, a small garden is protected from the uncultivated life of the hillside by a fence of close-set pickets. Across the front of the curious structure, well out on the projecting point of rocks, and reached only through the interior, a wide, strongly railed porch overhangs the sheer wall like a balcony.

With fast-beating hearts, the two small adventurers gained the top of the stairway. Cautiously they looked about —listening, conferring in whispers, ready for instant, headlong retreat.

The tall grasses and flowering weeds on the hillside nodded sleepily in the sunlight. A bird perched on a near-by bush watched them with bright eyes for a moment, then fearlessly sought the shade of the vines that screened the side of the hut. Save the distant, droning, moaning voice of the Mill, there was no sound.

Calling up the last reserves of their courage, the children crept softly along the board walk that connects the landing of the stairway with the rude dwelling. Once again they paused to look and listen. Then, timidly, they took the last cautious steps and stood in the open doorway. With big, wondering eyes they stared into the room.

It was a rather large room, with a low-beamed ceiling of unfinished pine boards and gray, rough-plastered walls, and wide windows. A green-shaded student lamp with a pile of magazines and papers on the table caught their curious eyes, and they gazed in awe at the long shelves of books against the wall. Opposite the entrance where they stood they saw a strongly made workbench. And beneath this bench and piled in that corner of the room were baskets—dozens of them—of several shapes and sizes; while brackets and shelves above were filled with the materials of which the baskets were woven. There was very little furniture. The floors were bare, the windows without hangings. It was all so different from anything that these children of the Flats had ever seen that they felt their adventure assuming proportions.

For what seemed a long time, the boy and the girl stood there, hesitating, on the threshold, expecting something—anything—to happen. Then the lad ventured a bold step or two into the room. His sister followed timidly.

They were facing hungrily toward an open door that led, evidently, to the kitchen, when a deep voice from somewhere behind them said, "How do you do?"

Startled nearly out of their small wits, the adventurers whirled to escape, but the voice halted them with, "Don't go. You came to see me, didn't you?"

The voice, though so deep and strong, was unmistakably kind and gentle—quite the gentlest voice, in fact, that these children had ever heard.

Hesitatingly, they went again into the room, and now, turning their backs upon the culinary end of the apartment,

they saw, through the doorway opening on to the balcony porch, a man seated in a wheel chair. In his lap he held a half-finished basket.

For a little while the man regarded them with grave, smiling eyes as though, understanding their fears, he would give them time to gain courage. Then he said, gently, "Won't you come out here on the porch and visit with me?"

The boy and the girl exchanged questioning looks.

"Come on," said the man, encouragingly.

Perhaps the sight of that wheel chair recalled to the boy's mind the reports of his friends, Skinny and Chuck. Perhaps it was something in the man himself that appealed to the unerring instincts of the child. The doubt and hesitation in the urchin's freckled face suddenly gave way to a look of reckless daring and he marched forward with the swaggering air of an infant bravado. Shyly the little girl followed.

Invariably one's first impression of that man in the wheel chair was a thought of the tremendous physical strength and vitality that must once have been his. But the great trunk, with its mighty shoulders and massive arms, that in the years past had marked him in the multitude, was little more than a framework now. His head with its silvery white hair and beard—save that in his countenance there was a look of more venerable age—reminded one of the sculptor Rodin. These details of the man's physical appearance held one's thoughts but for a moment. One look into the calm depths of those dark eyes that were filled with such an indescribable mingling of pathetic courage, of patient fortitude, and of sorrowful authority, and one so instantly

felt the dominant spiritual and mental personality of this man that all else about him was forgotten.

Squaring himself before his host, the boy said, aggressively, "I know who *yer* are. Yer are the Interpreter. I know 'cause yer ain't got no legs."

"Yes," returned the old basket maker, still smiling, "I am the Interpreter. At least," he continued, "that is what the people call me." Then, as he regarded the general appearance of the children, and noted particularly the tired face and pathetic eyes of the little girl, his smile was lost in a look of brooding sorrow and his deep voice was sad and gentle, as he added, "But some things I find very hard to interpret."

The girl, with a shy smile, went a little nearer.

The boy, with his eyes fixed upon the covering that in spite of the heat of the day hid the man in the wheel chair from his waist down, said with the cruel insistency of childhood, "Ain't yer got no legs—honest, now, ain't yer?"

The Interpreter laughed understandingly. Placing the unfinished basket on a low table that held his tools and the material for his work within reach of his hand, he threw aside the light shawl. "See!" he said.

For a moment the children gazed, breathlessly, at those shrunken and twisted limbs that resembled the limbs of a strong man no more than the empty, flapping sleeves of a scarecrow resemble the arms of a living human body.

"They are legs all right," said the Interpreter, still smiling, "but they're not much good, are they? Do you think you could beat me in a race?"

"Gee!" exclaimed the boy.

Two bright tears rolled down the thin, dirty cheeks of the little girl's tired face, and she turned to look away over the dirty Flats, the smoke-grimed mills, and the golden fields of grain in the sunshiny valley, to something that she seemed to see in the far distant sky.

With a quick movement the Interpreter again hid his useless limbs.

"And now don't you think you might tell me about yourselves? What is your name, my boy?"

"I'm Bobby Whaley," answered the lad. "She's my sister, Maggie."

"Oh, yes," said the Interpreter. "Your father is Sam Whaley. He works in the Mill."

"Uh-huh, some of the time he works—when there ain't no strikes ner nothin'."

The Interpreter, with his eyes on that dark cloud that hung above the forest of grim stacks, appeared to attach rather more importance to Bobby's reply than the lad's simple words would justify.

Then, looking gravely at Sam Whaley's son, he said, "And you will work in the Mill, too, I suppose, when you grow up?"

"I dunno," returned the boy. "I ain't much stuck on work. An' dad, he says it don't git yer nothin', nohow."

"I see," mused the Interpreter, and he seemed to see much more than lay on the surface of the child's characteristic expression.

The little girl was still gazing wistfully at the faraway line of hills.

As if struck by a sudden thought, the Interpreter asked, "Your father is working now, though, isn't he?"

"Uh-huh, just now he is."

"I suppose then you are not hungry."

At this wee Maggie turned quickly from contemplating the distant horizon to consider the possible meaning in the man's remark.

For a moment the children looked at each other. Then, as a grin of anticipation spread itself over his freckled face, the boy exclaimed, "Hungry! Gosh! Mister Interpreter, we're allus hungry!"

For the first time the little girl spoke, in a thin, piping voice,

"Skinny an' Chuck, they said yer give 'em cookies. Didn't they, Bobby?"

"Uh-huh," agreed Bobby, hopefully.

The man in the wheel chair laughed. "If you go into the house and look in the bottom part of that cupboard near the kitchen door you will find a big jar and—"

But Bobby and Maggie had disappeared.

The children had found the jar in the cupboard and, with their hands and their mouths filled with cookies, were gazing at each other in unbelieving wonder when the sound of a step on the bare floor of the kitchen startled them. One look through the open doorway and they fled with headlong haste back to the porch, where they unhesitatingly sought refuge behind their friend ha the wheel chair.

The object of their fears appeared a short moment behind them.

"Oh," said the Interpreter, reaching out to draw little Maggie within the protecting circle of his arm, "it is Billy Rand. You don't need to fear Billy."

The man who stood looking kindly down upon them was fully as tall and heavy as the Interpreter had been in those years before the accident that condemned him to his chair. But Billy Rand lacked the commanding presence that had once so distinguished his older friend and guardian. His age was somewhere between twenty and thirty; but his face was still the face of an overgrown and rather slow-witted child.

Raising his hands, Billy Rand talked to the Interpreter in the sign language of the deaf and dumb. The Interpreter replied in the same manner and, with a smiling nod to the children, Billy returned to the garden in the rear of the house.

Tiny Maggie's eyes were big with wonder.

"Gee!" breathed Bobby. "He sure enough can't talk, can he?"

"No," returned the Interpreter. "Poor Billy has never spoken a word."

"Gee!" said Bobby again. "An' can't he hear nothin,' neither?"

"No, Bobby, he has never heard a sound."

Too awe-stricken even to repeat his favorite exclamation, the boy munched his cooky in silence, while Maggie, enjoying her share of the old basket maker's hospitality, snuggled a little closer to the wheel of the big chair.

"Billy Rand, you see," explained the Interpreter, "is my legs."

Bobby laughed. "Funny legs, I'd say."

"Yes," agreed the Interpreter, "but very good legs just the same. Billy runs all sorts of errands for me—goes to town to sell our baskets and to bring home our groceries, helps

about the house and does many things that I can't do. He is hoeing the garden this afternoon. He comes in every once in a while to ask if I want anything. He sleeps in a little room next to mine and sometimes in the night, when I am not resting well, I hear him come to my bedside to see if I am all right."

"An' yer keep him an' take care of him?" asked Bobby.

"Yes," returned the Interpreter, "I take care of Billy and Billy takes care of me. He has fine legs but not much of a—but cannot speak or hear. I can talk and hear and think but have no legs. So with my reasonably good head and his very good legs we make a fairly good man, you see."

Bobby laughed aloud and even wee Maggie chuckled at the Interpreter's quaint explanation of himself and Billy Rand.

"Funny kind of a man," said Bobby.

"Yes," agreed the Interpreter, "but most of us men are funny in one way or another—aren't we, Maggie?" He looked down into the upturned face of that tiny wisp of humanity at his side.

Maggie smiled gravely in answer.

Very confident now in his superiority over the Interpreter, whose deaf and dumb legs were safely out of sight in the garden back of the house, Bobby finished the last of his cookies, and began to explore. Accompanying his investigations with a running fire of questions, he fingered the unfinished basket and the tools and material on the table, examined the wheel chair, and went from end to end of the balcony porch. Hanging over the railing, he looked down from every possible angle upon the rocks, the

stairway and the dusty road below. Exhausting, at last, the possibilities of the immediate vicinity, he turned his inquiring gaze upon the more distant landscape.

"Gee! Yer can see a lot from here, can't yer?"

"Yes," returned the Interpreter, gravely, "you can certainly see a lot. And do you know, Bobby, it is strange, but what you see depends almost wholly on what you are?"

The boy turned his freckled face toward the Interpreter. "Huh?"

"I mean," explained the Interpreter, "that different people see different things. Some who come to visit me can see nothing but the Mill over there; some see only the Flats down below; others see the stores and offices; others look at nothing but the different houses on the hillsides; still others can see nothing but the farms. It is funny, but that's the way it is with people, Bobby."

"Aw—what are yer givin' us?" returned Bobby, and, with an unmistakably superior air, he faced again toward the scene before them. "I can see the whole darned thing—I can."

The Interpreter laughed. "And that," he said, "is exactly what every one says, Bobby. But, after all, they don't see the whole darned thing—they only think they do."

"Huh," retorted the boy, scornfully, "I guess I can see the Mill, can't I?—over there by the river—with the smoke a-rollin' out of her chimneys? Listen, I can hear her, too."

Faintly, on a passing breath of air, came the heavy droning, moaning voice of the Mill.

"Yes," agreed the Interpreter, with an odd note in his deep, kindly voice, "I can nearly always hear it. I was sure

you would see the Mill."

"An' look-ee, look-ee," shouted the boy, forgetting, in his quick excitement, to maintain this superior air, "look-ee, Mag! Come here, quick." With energetic gestures he beckoned his sister to his side. "Look-ee, right over there by that bunch of dust, see? It's our house—where we live. That there's Tony's old place on the corner. An' there's the lot where us kids plays ball. Gee, yer could almost see mom if she'd only come outside to talk to Missus Grafton er somethin'!"

From his wheel chair the Interpreter watched the children at the porch railing. "Of course you would see your home," he said, gravely. "The Mill first, and then the place where you live. Nearly every one sees those things first. Now tell what else you see."

"I see, I see—" The boy hesitated. There was so much to be seen from the Interpreter's balcony porch.

The little girl's thin voice piped up with shrill eagerness, "Look at the pretty yeller fields an' the green trees away over there across the river, Bobby. Gee, but wouldn't yer just love to be over there an'—an'—roll 'round in the grass, an' pick flowers, an' everything?"

"Huh," retorted Bobby. "Look-ee, that there's McIver's factory up the river there. It's 'most as big as the Mill. An' see all the stores an' barber shops an' things downtown—an' look-ee, there's the courthouse where the jail is an'—"

Maggie chimed in with, "An' all the steeples of the churches—an' everythin'."

"An' right down there," continued the boy, pointing more toward the east where, at the edge of the Flats, the ground

begins to rise toward the higher slope of the hills, "in that there bunch of trees is where Pete Martin lives, an' Mary an' Captain Charlie. Look-ee, Mag, yer can see the little white house a-showin' through the green leaves."

"You know the Martins, do you?" asked the Interpreter.

"You bet we do," returned Bobby, without taking his gaze from the scene before him, while Maggie confirmed her brother's words by turning to look shyly at her new-found friend. "Pete and Charlie they work in the Mill. Charlie he was a captain in the war. He's one of the head guys in our union now. Mary she used to give us stuff to eat when dad was a-strikin' the last time."

"An' look-ee," continued the boy, "right there next to the Martins' yer can see the old house where Adam Ward used to live before the Mill made him rich an' he moved to his big place up on the hill. I know 'cause I heard dad an' another man talkin' 'bout it onct. Ain't nobody lives in the old house now. She's all tumbled down with windows broke an' everything. I wonder—" He paused to search the hillside to the east. "Yep," he shouted, pointing, "there she is—there's the castle—there's where old Adam an' his folks lives now. Some place to live I'd say. Gee, but wouldn't I like to put a chunk o' danermite er somethin' under there! I'd blow the whole darned thing into nothin' at all an that old devil Adam with it. I'd—"

Little Maggie caught her warlike brother's arm. "But, Bobby—Bobby, yer wouldn't dast to do that, yer know yer wouldn't!"

"Huh," returned the boy, scornfully. "I'd show yer if I had a chanct."

"But, Bobby, yer'd maybe kill the beautiful princess lady if yer was to blow up the castle an' every-thin'."

"Aw shucks," returned the boy, shaking off his sister's hand with manly impatience. "Couldn't I wait 'til she was away somewheres else 'fore I touched it off? An', anyway, what if yer wonderful princess lady *was* to git hurt, I guess she's one of 'em, ain't she?"

Poor Maggie, almost in tears, was considering this doubtful reassurance when Bobby suddenly pointed again toward that pretentious estate on the hillside, and cried in quick excitement: "Look-ee, Mag, there's a autermobile a-comin' out from the castle, right now—see? She's a-goin' down the hill toward town. Who'll yer bet it is? Old Adam Ward his-self, heh?"

Little Maggie's face brightened joyously. "Maybe it's the princess lady, Bobby."

"And who is this that you call the princess lady, Maggie?" asked the
Interpreter.

Bobby answered for his sister. "Aw, she means old Adam's daughter.
She's allus a-callin' her that an' a-makin' up stories about her."

"Oh, so you know Miss Helen Ward, too, do you?" The Interpreter was surprised.

The boy turned his back on the landscape as though it held nothing more of interest to him. "Naw, we've just seen her, that's all."

Stealing timidly back to the side of the wheel chair, the little girl looked wistfully up into the Interpreter's face. "Do

yer—do yer know the princess lady what lives in the castle?" she asked.

The old basket maker, smiling down at her, answered, "Yes, dear, I have known your princess lady ever since she was a tiny baby—much smaller than you. And did you know, Maggie, that she was born in the old house down there, next door to Charlie and Mary Martin?"

"An'—an' did she live there when she was—when she was as big as me?"

Bobby interrupted with an important "Huh, I know her brother John is a boss in the Mill. He was in the war, too, with Captain Charlie. Did he live in the old house when he was a kid?"

"Yes."

"An'—an' when the princess lady was little like me, an' lived in the old house, did yer play with her?" asked Maggie.

The Interpreter laughed softly. "Yes, indeed, often. You see I worked in the Mill, too, in those days, Maggie, with her father and Peter Martin and—"

"That was when yer had yer real, sure-nuff legs, wasn't it?" the boy interrupted.

"Yes, Bobby. And every Sunday, almost, I used to be at the old house where the little princess lady lived, or at the Martin home next door, and Helen and John and Charlie and Mary and I would always have such good times together."

Little Maggie's face shone with appreciative interest. "An' did yer tell them fairy stories sometimes?"

"Sometimes."

The little girl sighed and tried to get still closer to the man in the wheel chair. "I like fairies, don't yer?"

"Indeed, I do," he answered heartily.

"Skinny and Chuck, they said yer tol' *them* stories, too."

The Interpreter laughed quietly. "I expect perhaps I did."

"I don't suppose yer know any fairy stories right now, do yer?"

"Let me see," said the Interpreter, seeming to think very hard. "Why, yes, I believe I do know one. It starts out like this: Once upon a time there was a most beautiful princess, just like your princess lady, who lived in a most wonderful palace. Isn't that the way for a fairy story to begin?"

"Uh-huh, that's the way. An' then what happened?"

With a great show of indifference the boy drew near and stretched himself on the floor on the other side of the old basket maker's chair.

"Well, this beautiful princess in the story, perhaps because she was so beautiful herself, loved more than anything else in all the world to have lots and lots of jewels. You know what jewels are, don't you?"

"Uh-huh, the princess lady she has 'em—heaps of 'em. I seen her onct close, when she was a-gettin' into her autermobile, in front of one of them big stores."

"Well," continued the story-teller, "it was strange, but with all her diamonds and pearls and rubies and things there was *one* jewel that the princess did *not* have. And, of course, she wanted that one particular gem more than all the others. That is the way it almost always is, you know."

"Huh," grunted Bobby.

"What was that there jewel she wanted?" asked Maggie.

"It was called the jewel of happiness," answered the Interpreter, "because whoever possessed it was sure to be

always as happy as happy could be. And so, you see, because she did not have that particular jewel the princess did not have as good times as such a beautiful princess, living in such a wonderful palace, with so many lovely things, really ought to have.

"But because this princess' heart was kind, a fairy appeared to her one night, and told her that if she would go down to the shore of the great sea that was not far from the castle, and look carefully among the rocks and in the sand and dirt, she would find the jewel of happiness. Then the fairy disappeared—poof! just like that."

Little Maggie squirmed with thrills of delight. "Some story, I'd say.
An' then what happened?"

"Why, of course, the very next day the princess went to walk on the seashore, just as the fairy had told her. And, sure enough, among the rocks and in the sand and dirt, she found hundreds and hundreds of bright, shiny jewels. And she picked them up, and picked them up, and picked them up, until she just couldn't carry another one. Then she began to throw away the smaller ones that she had picked up at first, and to hunt for larger ones to take instead. And then, all at once, right there beside her, was a poor, ragged and crooked old woman, and the old woman was picking up the ugly, dirt-colored pebbles that the princess would not touch.

"'What are you doing, mother?' asked the beautiful princess, whose heart was kind.

"And the crooked old woman answered, 'I am gathering jewels of happiness on the shore of the sea of life.'

"'But those ugly, dirty pebbles are not jewels, mother,' said the lady. 'See, these are the jewels of happiness.' And she showed the poor, ignorant old woman the bright, shiny stones that she had gathered.

"And the crooked old crone looked at the princess and laughed—a curious, creepy, crawly, crooked laugh.

"Then the old woman offered to the princess one of the ugly, dirt-colored pebbles that she had gathered. 'Take this, my dear,' she croaked, 'and wear it, and you shall see that I am right—that this is the jewel of happiness.'

"Now the beautiful princess did not want to wear that ugly, dirt-colored stone—no princess would, you know. But, nevertheless, because her heart was kind and she saw that the poor, crooked old woman would feel very bad if her gift was not accepted, she took the dull, common pebble and put it with the bright, shiny jewels that she had gathered.

"And that very night the fairy appeared to the princess again.

"'Did you do as I told you?' the fairy asked. 'Did you look for the jewel of happiness on the shore of the sea of life?'

"'Oh, yes,' cried the princess. 'And see what a world of lovely ones I found!'

"The fairy looked at all the pretty, shiny stones that the princess had gathered. 'And what is this?' the fairy asked, pointing to the ugly, dirt-colored pebble.

"'Oh, that,' replied the princess, hanging her head in embarrassment,—'that is nothing but a worthless pebble. A poor old woman gave it to me to wear because she thinks it is beautiful.'

"'But you will not wear the ugly thing, will you?' asked the fairy. 'Think how every one would point at you, and laugh, and call you strange and foolish.'

"'I know,' answered the princess, sadly, 'but I must wear it because I promised, and because if I did not and the poor old lady should see me without it, she would be so very, very unhappy.'

"And, would you believe it, no sooner had the beautiful princess said those words than the fairy disappeared—poof! just like that! And right there, on the identical spot where she had been, was that old ragged and crooked woman.

"'Oh!' cried the princess.

"And the old woman laughed her curious, creepy, crawly, crooked laugh. 'Don't be afraid, my dear,' she said, 'you shall have your jewel of happiness. But look!' She pointed a long, skinny, crooked finger at the shiny jewels on the table and there, right before the princess' eyes, they were all at once nothing but lumps of worthless dirt.

"'Oh!' screamed the princess again. 'All my lovely jewels of happiness!'

"'But look,' said the old woman again, and once more pointed with her skinny finger. And would you believe it, the princess saw that ugly, dirt-colored pebble turn into the most wonderfully splendid jewel that ever was—the true jewel of happiness.

"And so," concluded the Interpreter, "the beautiful princess whose heart was kind lived happy ever after."

Little Maggie clapped her thin hands with delight.

"Gee," said Bobby, "wish I knowed where that there place was. I'd get me enough of them there jewel things to swap

for a autermobile an' a—an' a flyin' machine."

"If you keep your eyes open, Bobby," answered the old basket maker, "you will find the place all right. Only," he added, looking away toward the big house on the hill, "you must be very careful not to make the mistake that the princess lady is making—I mean," he corrected himself with a smile, "you must be careful not to pick up only the bright and shiny pebbles as the princess in the story did."

"Huh—I guess I'd know better'n that," retorted the boy. "Come on, Mag, we gotter go."

"You will come to see me again, won't you?" asked the Interpreter, as the children stood on the threshold. "You have legs, you know, that can easily bring you."

"Yer bet we'll come," said Bobby, "won't we, Mag?"

The little girl, looking back at the man in the wheel chair, smiled.

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For some time after the children had gone the Interpreter sat very still. His dark eyes were fixed upon the Mill with its tall, grim stacks and the columns of smoke that twisted upward to form that overshadowing cloud. The voices of the children, as they started down the stairway to the dusty road and to their wretched home in the Flats, came to him muffled and indistinct from under the cliff.

Perhaps the man in the wheel chair was thinking of the days when Maggie's princess lady was a little girl and lived in the old house next door to Mary and Charlie Martin. Perhaps his mind still dwelt on the fairy story and the princess who found her jewel of happiness. It may have been that he was listening to the droning, moaning voice of