I



The Meadow

Flowers have faded,
Butterfly wings are weary,
And far off is the chanting of the eternal sea.



In a little brown shingled cottage on one of the foothills of Mount Varcrobis, there lived with her father and mother, Mr and Mrs Eigleen, a little girl named Eepersip. She was rather lonely. She kept advising Mr and Mrs Eigleen to make a beautiful garden, where flowers would bloom year after year, and to which birds and butterflies would come back again and again. Accordingly all three set to work with a will, and in a few years they had made the most beautiful garden that was ever seen. Around its borders bloomed apple trees, pear trees and peach trees, and inside them bloomed azaleas, rhododendrons, magnolias, lilacs, honeysuckle and fire blossoms. Next came the ground flowers. There were seven kinds of roses, and there was a whole corner devoted to early spring flowers: crocuses, daffodils, squills and narcissi. Another corner was carpeted with tender anemones, all snow-white. In the centre

of the garden there was a circular bed filled with iris of all kinds and colours. Clematis and morning glory vines climbed over the wooden benches, and near the centre was a tall arch with ramblers climbing all over it. Another bed was thickly clustered with great purple violets. The paths through the garden had gracefully bending ferns on each side.

For the first few months Eepersip was delighted with her flowers, and the butterflies and birds pleased her even more. But she was not a child who could be contented easily and pretty soon she began to feel lonely again. One July day a fresh idea came into her head. She packed some sandwiches and some crackers in a small lunch basket. Without telling a soul, the next morning before dawn she slipped out of bed, dressed and picked up her basket; then stole out of the cottage and away. She went east from her home on



a shady path through beautiful woodlands, with here and there a grove of great massive pines. And as she walked she sang merrily.

After quite a while she stepped out of the woodlands on to a large lawn. Close to the path there was a pool with some tiny goldfishes swimming about in it. Then she knew that she was nearing a house, and instead of pacing slowly along the path she began to run; for she was afraid that someone would see her and send her back home. But after a few minutes she grew tired and settled down to a reasonable pace. And as she slowed down she came into an enormous field of rhododendrons, lavender, white and brilliant red. Oh, what a gorgeous place that was! As Eepersip walked along, an oriole sang from a bush; she peeped into a humming bird's nest with two tiny white eggs in it; she startled a vireo from its nest in a low clump of grass, and, peeping into it, found three baby birds. The farther she went the more her heart began to leap within her for joy of the life she was finding for herself. Her loneliness decreased, and she was as free and happy as the birds or butterflies.

Soon the red and lavender rhododendrons dropped out, leaving only the white; then the white ones too lessened in thickness until there were none left. All this while she had been slowly climbing Mount Varcrobis itself. At last she came into a small open glade, still walking east from the cottage – which she was not thinking about just then, so happy was she at the thought of the new, interesting life she had found. This glade was near the top of the mountain, only one high peak towering above it. Across it ran a little brook, tinkling through the ferns and bracken.

She paused on the path suddenly, then drew back, for a doe and her daisied fawn were grazing close by. Eepersip took from her basket a lump of sugar and held it out to the beautiful creatures. Very hesitatingly, the doe moved forward, followed by her fawn, and at last took the lump of sugar from Eepersip's fingers.

Eepersip had not expected this. On the contrary, she had thought that they would be startled and would bound away out of sight in the woods. She gazed silently at the doe, who had begun to



graze again without a sign of fear. Could it be a dream? she thought. Eepersip had experienced the delightful sensation of the doe's slightly rough tongue around her fingers; and suddenly she felt as if she could never leave them – as if she must stay always and play with the woods. Already she had become acquainted with a doe and a fawn, and they were not afraid of her! She sat down on the grass and the fawn lay beside her. She cuddled it close in her arms.

Then it grew dark. The sun was sinking, and at last it went behind a thin, filmy cloud, producing wonderful colours, red, gold, silver

and purple. Like fire it glowed and quivered, and through it all could be seen the ball of the sun, growing clearer as it sank, and growing larger too. And as Eepersip sprang to her feet and watched it glow and quiver, she saw, a way off, an enormous range of mountains; and where the mountains left off there was the edge of the ocean, with the light of the dying day reflected in it, in purples, reds and yellows.

And then, being very tired, she lay down on the grass beside the two deer; and in a few seconds she was sound asleep.



The next morning Eepersip was surprised to find herself lying there on the grass between the doe and her fawn; she had forgotten about running away. The first thing she thought of was her breakfast; for, not having had anything to eat the day before except a few handfuls of delicious red berries which she had found growing on a

thick vine, she was very hungry. Not a sandwich in her basket had she touched; she had been so fascinated with her adventure that she had not thought of them. But now she ate three whole ones, ever and again breaking off bits and feeding them to the deer.

When she had finished, she set off in a great hurry to explore her surroundings. First she walked down in the direction of the beautiful sunset she had seen, a little off the direction of the path by which she had ascended, and came to a great rocky precipice, the side of the mountain. She looked down and far off she saw a shining river winding about in the valley below, sometimes twisting back upon itself, then straightening out again. But it made her giddy to look too long, and she turned and started back to where she had slept. The doe and her fawn were grazing quietly when Eepersip returned. She threw herself on her back and gazed at the clear blue sky. In it swallows with their snowy breasts were circling, and when the sun shone full on them their white wings glimmered like the ice on a





winter's day. A great desire came over Eepersip. She wanted to fly and swoop through the air like the swallows. She thought to herself that they had always been her favourite birds. She had always marvelled at their flight, as now they twisted in giant corkscrews and now swerved so as to turn almost completely over.

A butterfly flew over her head – a little yellow butterfly who danced and glimmered before her. Her brown eyes sparkled with delight. A cricket hopped and twittered; a bird burst into song. Almost without knowing what she did, Eepersip leaped into the air and began to dance, with the swallows circling above her head and the leaves fluttering about her. Then suddenly she sat down, breathless. She began stripping off her shoes and stockings. Her feet were tender and every stick she stepped on hurt; but she was determined to get her feet toughened so as to go barefoot all the time.

Now, directly east of this fairy glade there was a steep slope which ascended to the very summit of Mount Varcrobis, called Eiki-ennern

Peak. Eepersip had a fascinated eye for this slope and longed to see what was at the top of it, but she would not leave the deer just yet, and also she was determined not to put on her shoes and stockings again. So she decided to stay in the soft grass until her feet were toughened; and she thought that then she could go up that wonderful peak over which the sun rose in clouds of glory every morning.

Before Eepersip had danced long she walked down towards the great precipice again, with her shoes and stockings under her arms. The instant she got there a madness came upon her, and *whizz!* two shoes and two stockings were flying through the air at a tremendous rate. They landed in the trees far below, while Eepersip, glad to get rid of them, coolly returned to the glade, thinking that her feet were already tougher than before because of that bold act. When she got back she decided to rest a while, then walk in the opposite direction and see what was at the northern end of the glade. So when she got rested she started off that way, with the doe and the fawn trotting

beside her. At last she came to the slope of the mountain on that side. But this, instead of being a sheer precipice, was a gradually falling grassy bank, down which they went. The doe and the fawn followed some distance; then they turned back, letting Eepersip go on alone. But when she got part way to the bottom she began to see houses, and so, deciding that that wasn't the side for her, she ran back as fast as she could.



Meanwhile Mr and Mrs Eigleen were wondering in vain where their poor child had gone. At first they hadn't thought much about her, for she had been lost in the woods several times before and had always found her way home safely. But when it came to being gone two or three days, why, they were not sure that they were awake! The child must be starving, and who knew what a tender morsel to some prowling animal she might be by this time? So they began to grieve

greatly over their loss, for they dearly loved Eepersip.

Before they had missed her very long, a poor old woman and her husband had climbed that part of Mount Varcrobis. Nobody in the village down below cared much for Mr and Mrs Ikkisfield, as they were called, and they had decided to go elsewhere and see if they could find some friends. The Eigleens took pity on them, and at last persuaded them to live in the brown cottage in the woods, and to let the Eigleens themselves go to the house of friends of theirs, the Wraspanes. It was the Wraspanes' rhododendron field that Eepersip had thought so beautiful.

The Eigleens, being exceedingly kind people, gladly gave up their cottage and their beautiful garden to Mr and Mrs Ikkisfield. Indeed, these things were no joy to them, now that they had lost Eepersip, for whose sake they had made the garden. The old couple were delighted, and, thanking the Eigleens very kindly, they moved in that same evening, the Eigleens leaving some of their belongings with them.



Eepersip stayed for many days with the doe and her fawn, and then, her feet having become tough, she crossed the brooklet and went on up Eiki-ennern Peak. Near the top, in a small sheltered place, she found a dear little pool surrounded with moss and ferns, amongst which some iris bloomed. It had a sandy bottom, over which swam tiny silver minnows. When they turned over and the sun shone on their bellies, Eepersip saw a streak of silver. At last, when she got to the top, she saw that on one side it was a vast daisied slope, down, down; and on another it was wooded to the foot. From where she stood, range after range spread out before her, lake after lake beneath her, with the crimson of the now-setting sun gloriously reflected in them. It was like fairyland. And when Eepersip turned southward, she beheld the almighty ocean, with the exquisite sunset colours reflected in it as in



the lakes. That night she slept on a soft bed of moss in a hollow down near the pool.

The next morning, after she had made a good breakfast on the juicy root of a plant which she found, she lay down by the pool and gazed at the sky, the way she had done on the second day of her wildness. And as she lay there it grew so

quiet that a chipmunk stole out of a tiny hole that he had dug between the roots of a tree. He came to her, sniffed at a cracker she was munching, and tickled her cheek with his nose; whereupon she cautiously put out her hand with a piece of the cracker on it. The chipmunk was frightened and ran away. But the piece of cracker looked very tempting, and before long he lost his fear and ventured close again. Step by step he crept along, until, with a frightened squeal, he seized the piece and disappeared. Eepersip waited, laughing. In a few minutes he came back again, and this time he took the piece that she held out to him, running only a few steps. The third time he took it calmly and deliberately and ate it without running at all, evidently convinced that Eepersip was a friend. And the fourth time he was even more bold, going so far as to sit on her stomach while



he ate. But by that time, between them, they had licked the platter clean – the cracker was gone.

'Just like the doe and her fawn,' Eepersip thought. How fearless he was, the fuzzy brown little creature! It seemed to happy Eepersip that all the wild was ready to make friends, as if nothing were afraid of her. She felt more than ever that she could never leave these entrancing forests. She could never, never go back, she mused. How wonderful it was to lie there watching the things that were happening, and actually to have one of the inhabitants of these woods – a timid one that was usually afraid – come up to her and eat from her hand! This adventure had certainly tightened in her heart the desire to stay always and become acquainted with more and more creatures – with the swallows she loved so well and with the little fairy butterflies.

Whenever she went down to the sheltered spot by the pool, she saw so many beautiful things here and there that she never knew what to do in her delight. Iris blossomed in gold and blue; butterflies danced overhead like yellow rose

petals flying in the breeze. Once, running over to the pool, she found a tiny beach, about fifteen inches long and half a foot wide – no more than a handful of sand completely hidden in a forest of ferns. Across it ran the chipmunk's footprints, and the marks of his wee claws could be plainly seen in the damp sand. That little beach was the earth's dear treasure, so it seemed to Eepersip, alone in that wild place. In the fields all around, thousands of buttercups blossomed, and great beds of daisies whitened the earth's brown surface.

In one place, among dark ferns, grew columbine, gay little gypsies curtseying in the breeze. Their colours spoke to her of dawn, gold sunset and white clouds, snowbanks fringed with icicles, night sky entwined with moonbeams, black clouds and radiant sun, or orange, yellow and scarlet leaves – autumn leaves. She gathered some and made a rainbow wreath of blossoms; and curling about her hair, they danced again.

Beneath the branches of a white pine grew blushing lady's slippers, which Eepersip had never seen before. 'Dawn comes to earth

sometimes,' she thought, 'bringing her flower clouds and clasping them with pearl seeds.'

Eepersip was anxious to know what was on the southern slope of this highest peak of Mount Varcrobis. So one day along she went, happily singing, until she came to it. Then she was surprised to find that this slope, instead of being a rocky precipice as the one had been at the foot of Eiki-ennern Peak, went down steeply for a little way and then broadened out into an enormous field, on the farther side of which was a herd of deer. Away, away, Eepersip could just see to the edge of this plain-like field. With a shout, down she dashed; and, dancing as she had never danced before, she sang like a nightingale for joy of her discovery. And yet, she thought to herself, what if it should be a dream? She was quite sure that it was not, though, for she had felt decidedly awake when she started off. But, because she had started before anyone else was up or even awake, she thought that she might be asleep herself. Anyhow, if it was a dream, it was a lovely one, and she need not worry.

