

THE DISTANT HILLS

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The Distant Hills by W. Adams

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W. ADAMS

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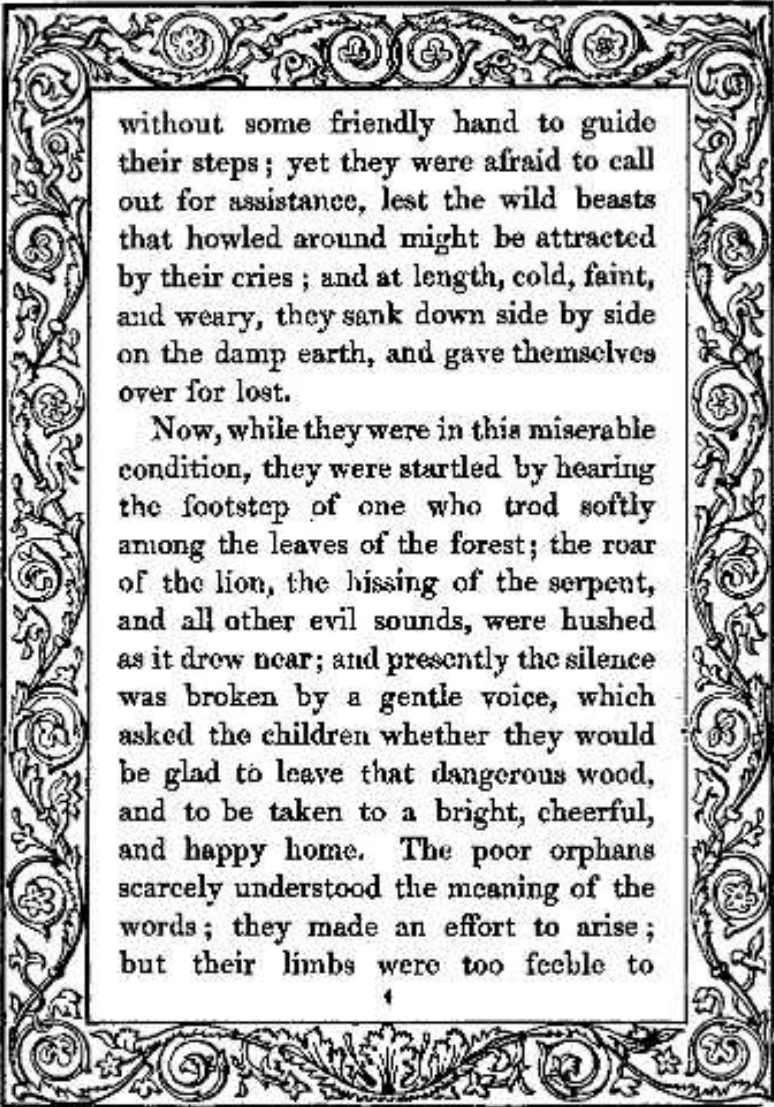


The Distant Hills.

CHAPTER I.

*Abide with me from morn till eve,
For without Thee I cannot live:
Abide with me when night is nigh,
For without Thee I dare not die.*

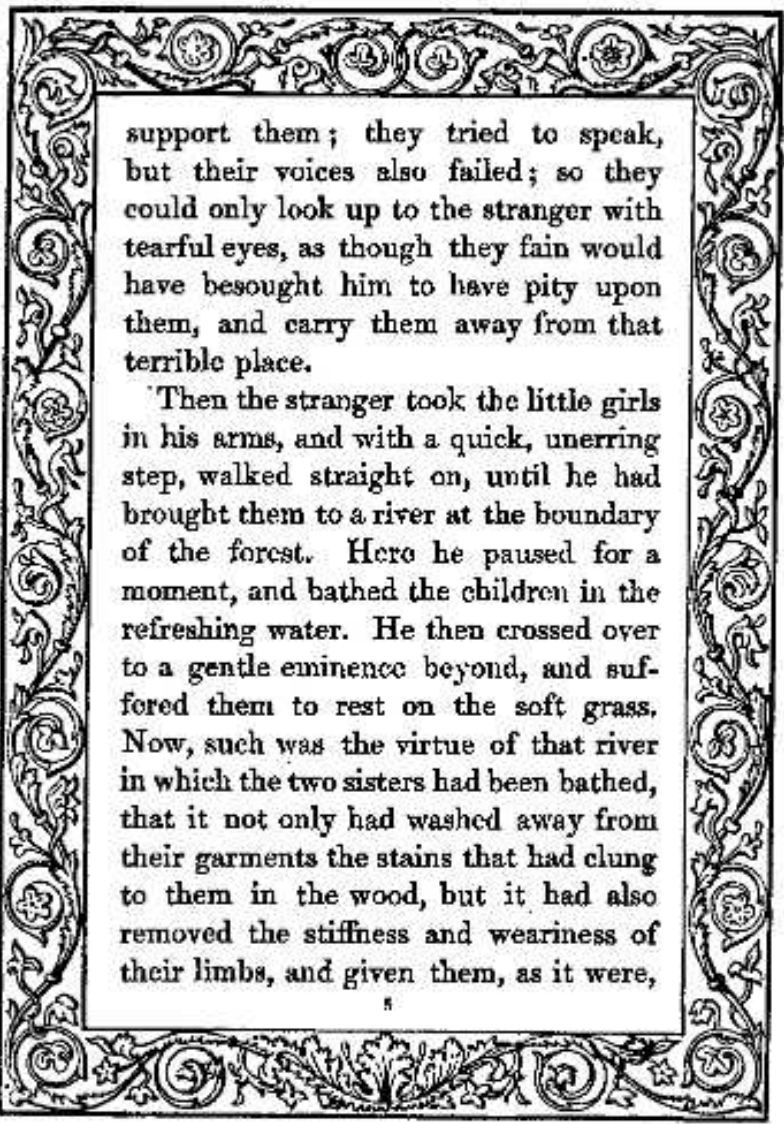
It was a dreary night, and the wind moaned among the trees of a vast and gloomy forest; dark wintry clouds were fitting across the sky; the moon and the stars gleamed forth at intervals, but their partial light was intercepted by the thick branches of the wood. Two poor orphans had been benighted there, and could find no track to lead them through its gloom. They felt that it was in vain for them to wander to and fro



without some friendly hand to guide their steps ; yet they were afraid to call out for assistance, lest the wild beasts that howled around might be attracted by their cries ; and at length, cold, faint, and weary, they sank down side by side on the damp earth, and gave themselves over for lost.

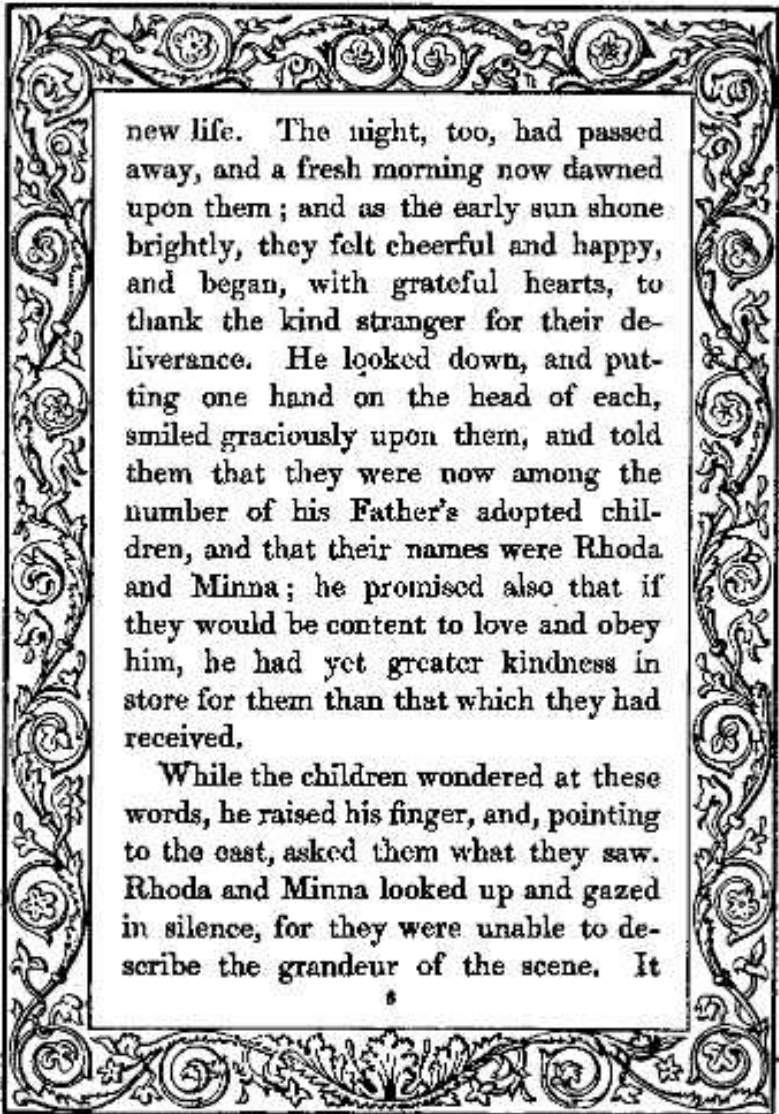
Now, while they were in this miserable condition, they were startled by hearing the footstep of one who trod softly among the leaves of the forest ; the roar of the lion, the hissing of the serpent, and all other evil sounds, were hushed as it drew near ; and presently the silence was broken by a gentle voice, which asked the children whether they would be glad to leave that dangerous wood, and to be taken to a bright, cheerful, and happy home. The poor orphans scarcely understood the meaning of the words ; they made an effort to arise ; but their limbs were too feeble to

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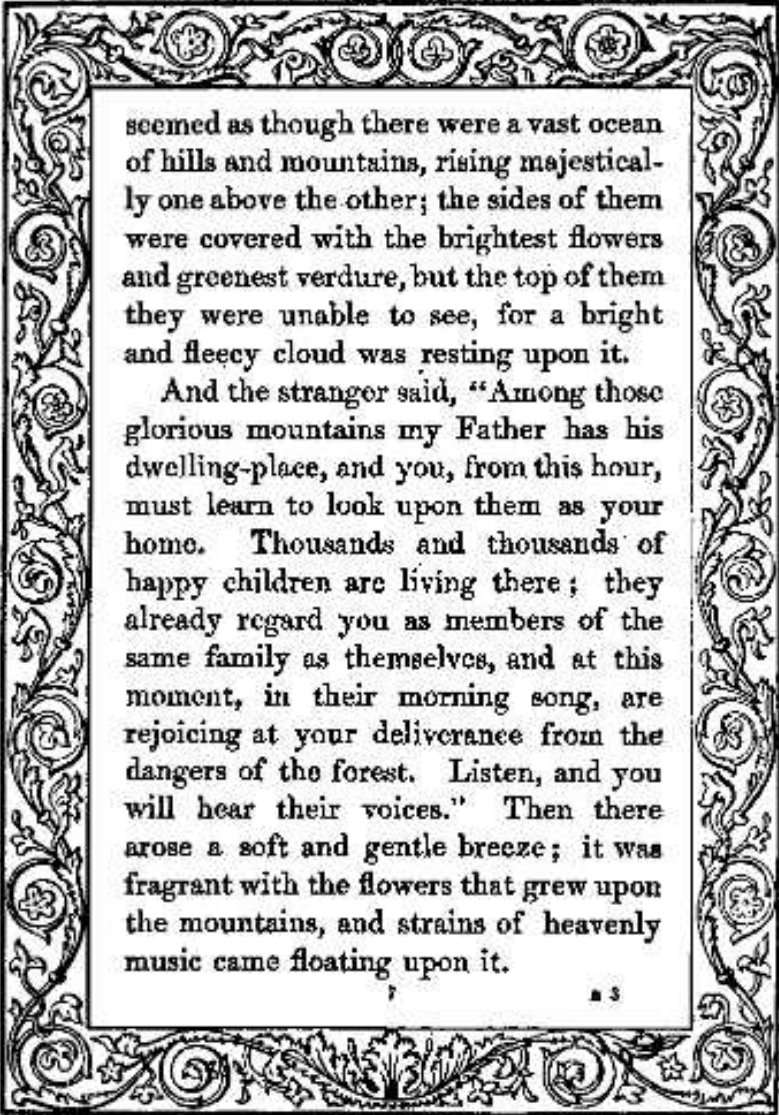
support them; they tried to speak, but their voices also failed; so they could only look up to the stranger with tearful eyes, as though they fain would have besought him to have pity upon them, and carry them away from that terrible place.

Then the stranger took the little girls in his arms, and with a quick, unerring step, walked straight on, until he had brought them to a river at the boundary of the forest. Here he paused for a moment, and bathed the children in the refreshing water. He then crossed over to a gentle eminence beyond, and suffered them to rest on the soft grass. Now, such was the virtue of that river in which the two sisters had been bathed, that it not only had washed away from their garments the stains that had clung to them in the wood, but it had also removed the stiffness and weariness of their limbs, and given them, as it were,



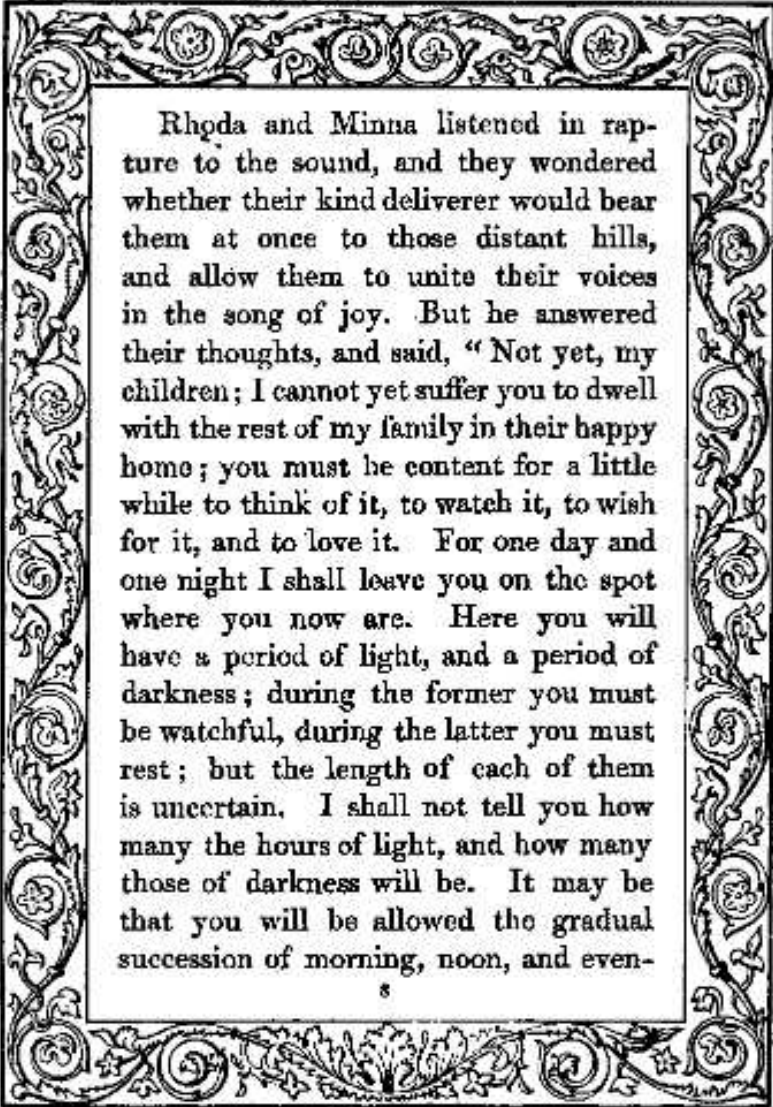
new life. The night, too, had passed away, and a fresh morning now dawned upon them; and as the early sun shone brightly, they felt cheerful and happy, and began, with grateful hearts, to thank the kind stranger for their deliverance. He looked down, and putting one hand on the head of each, smiled graciously upon them, and told them that they were now among the number of his Father's adopted children, and that their names were Rhoda and Minna; he promised also that if they would be content to love and obey him, he had yet greater kindness in store for them than that which they had received.

While the children wondered at these words, he raised his finger, and, pointing to the east, asked them what they saw. Rhoda and Minna looked up and gazed in silence, for they were unable to describe the grandeur of the scene. It



seemed as though there were a vast ocean of hills and mountains, rising majestically one above the other; the sides of them were covered with the brightest flowers and greenest verdure, but the top of them they were unable to see, for a bright and fleecy cloud was resting upon it.

And the stranger said, "Among those glorious mountains my Father has his dwelling-place, and you, from this hour, must learn to look upon them as your home. Thousands and thousands of happy children are living there; they already regard you as members of the same family as themselves, and at this moment, in their morning song, are rejoicing at your deliverance from the dangers of the forest. Listen, and you will hear their voices." Then there arose a soft and gentle breeze; it was fragrant with the flowers that grew upon the mountains, and strains of heavenly music came floating upon it.



Rhoda and Minna listened in rapture to the sound, and they wondered whether their kind deliverer would bear them at once to those distant hills, and allow them to unite their voices in the song of joy. But he answered their thoughts, and said, "Not yet, my children; I cannot yet suffer you to dwell with the rest of my family in their happy home; you must be content for a little while to think of it, to watch it, to wish for it, and to love it. For one day and one night I shall leave you on the spot where you now are. Here you will have a period of light, and a period of darkness; during the former you must be watchful, during the latter you must rest; but the length of each of them is uncertain. I shall not tell you how many the hours of light, and how many those of darkness will be. It may be that you will be allowed the gradual succession of morning, noon, and even-