

**AN ENCHANTED
GARDEN:
FAIRY STORIES**

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An enchanted garden: fairy stories by Mrs. Molesworth

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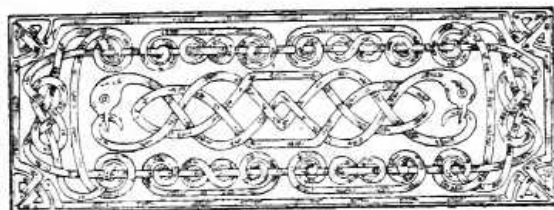
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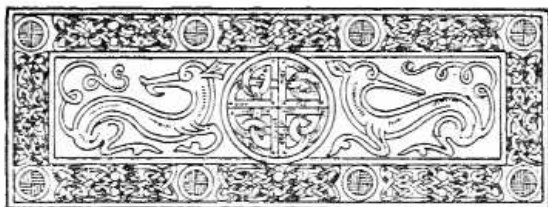
MRS. MOLESWORTH

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CHAPTER I

MADAM WREN

‘**N**O,’ said Alix, ‘that’s not a good plan at all. It’s perfectly stupid. If you’ve no better ideas than that, Rafe, we needn’t talk about it any more.’

Rafe looked and felt very snubbed indeed.

He was ten, she was nine. But she generally took the lead ; not always, as I daresay you will see when you hear more about them, but *generally*. They were a nice little pair, and they were constantly together, at lessons, at play,

at everything. This was a convenient arrangement, for they were a good deal younger than the other brothers and sisters of the family, and what Rafe would have been without Alix, or Alix without Rafe, it would be difficult to imagine. But there is not much use in thinking over about might-have-beens, or would-have-beens, unless to make us more thankful for what *is*. So it is enough to say that as things really were, they were very happy children.

Still they had their troubles, and it was one of these they were discussing this lovely spring morning, when they were sitting under their favourite tree—a magnificent ilex in the garden, at one corner of the great lawn which was one of the beauties of their home.

It was a lovely day, clear and bright and joyous, full of its own delights, and yet almost fuller of the summer ones to come! This is, I suppose, the real secret of the charm of spring-time—

the promise and hope it tells of. Everything seemed bursting with good news, the birds most of all perhaps, though the smiling faces of the early flowers, and the tender whispers of the gentle wind through the branches, were not behindhand. But the children's faces were clouded.

This was their trouble. They could not get any one to tell them any more stories! They had read all their books through, over and over again, and besides, books aren't *quite* as nice as 'told' stories. At least not when they have to be shared by two. Rafe and Alix had tried several plans—reading aloud did not answer *very* well, and looking over the pages was worse. They never managed to keep quite together, and then the one who got down to the last line first was sure to fidget or to try in some way to hurry up the other, which was apt to lead to unpleasant results. And besides this, at present there was no question of

story-books, for, as I said, the children had read all they possessed really *too* often.

Hitherto perhaps they had been a little spoilt about having stories told to them. Papa, who was an old soldier, had a good many tales of adventure; mamma had some lovely ones about 'when she was a little girl.' And the big brothers and sisters were very kind too, especially if Rafe or Alix, or both, as sometimes was the case, happened to be ill. But their stories were mostly out of books; now and then indeed they would unluckily turn out to be already known to the children, and though they did not altogether object to them on this account—I have noticed that children rather enjoy a book story retold by voice—it was not always so pleasant for Ena or Jean, or Eric when he was at home from college. For Rafe and Alix were so exceedingly particular.

'No,' one of them would say, just when Eric had got to the most thrilling

part of a robber story, 'the entrance to the inner cave was at the *left* side of the big one;' or if Jean was describing her heroine's dress, 'It wasn't green—I'm sure it was blue—blue with tiny rosebuds on,' so that sometimes Jean would reply, 'Really, children, if you interrupt so I can't go on,' or Eric would go off with a grunt and tell them to provide stories for themselves.

This had happened the evening before, and this it was which put the idea into Rafe's mind which Alix snubbed so.

'Suppose,' he said, 'that we make stories for each other—you for me, Alix, and I for you?'

It sounded rather nice, but it did not find favour in her eyes at all.

'I know exactly what they'd be,' she said; 'just mixings up of all our other ones. It might do to amuse stranger children with, perhaps—but not for us ourselves. I know all that's in your head, and you know what's in mine, far