

The roof was a conundrum, but even that was solved, and, "if we *were* wrecked on a desert island we might be glad of such a shelter," was the general opinion. While Minnie rested in the shade of her architectural achievement Hilda and Lina were sent off to gather raspberries in cabbage leaves "for the feast of inauguration."

A little wind arose while they were so occupied. They heard a little crash from the direction of the hut, and turning, saw a heap of agitated branches and twigs, two struggling arms and legs and eventually a head, as Minnie emerged from the ruins, unhurt, but dishevelled and undaunted.

"We'll do it better next time!" was the first thing she said.

Passed along the way the Sheer's wonderful factotum—let us call him "Bob," I am not sure of his name!—an awe-inspiring being, in that he had but one thumb, the other having been bitten off by a horse.

He would show the stump with pride, give gruesome details of the accident and wind up by saying, "and with *one* thumb, Miss, I can do more work, than the other fellows with two!"

And he *could*. He was a marvel!

Scarcely had he understood the catastrophe, than he was ready, aye ready, to help, and, better still, to advise for future occasions.

He showed us how to set about making a "good strong frame."

"The principal thing, Missy," he remarked, as with Herculean force and facility he hammered down the vertical stakes that had taken us an hour to fix very insecurely.

Then to watch him unwind yards of twine from his pocket and fix the horizontals for the roof that actually allowed for a slant, to carry off the rain.

"And there goes the luncheon bell, Missies! Run off and don't bother. I'll fix it!"

And he *did*!—nobly.

Next morning the beautiful little hut stood firmly planted ready for shipwrecked sailor or plucky pioneer.

"And with *one* thumb, Missies!"

We contributed by filling draughty crevices with grass and moss, decorating the walls with flowers, stamping down the floor and providing seats: Flower pots, turned upside down, were useful for this, and a big packing case made a lovely table.

I wish space permitted me to enlarge upon the grand games we played in *our own house*, to which doll's teacups and books and dolls could be carried, and in which feasts of fruit were allowed, for there was no restriction on this delicacy, only "Pick the ripe ones and don't waste!"

Travelling in the Isle of Wight and staying at Cowes with an unforgettable landlady, must have occurred shortly after our last visit to the Sheers.

Our father, whose business at this time obliged him to come and go like a bird of passage, was a very good chess-player and Minnie had his interest in the royal game.

The Cowes landlady was also a good chess-woman, so Minnie enjoyed daily tournaments with her.

Minnie liked to play with "all the pieces" when opposed to more experienced players, "even if I am beaten."

"No, *don't* give me your queen!" she would exclaim, although defeat was certain. "I like to play the *real* game!"

(It is characteristic of Minnie, that all through life, she liked to play the *Real Game* and no advantage given.)

I wish I could remember the name of the Cowes landlady! May she rest in peace.

She was an ideal.

Not only did she *allow* aquariums, she encouraged them, roviding extra basins and advice.

Minnie was happy, bringing in anemones, live shells and every small fish—once a largish one that a fisherman slipped into her pail with a friendly smile for the handsome eager child. This was indeed a treasure!

For a day the captured creatures would live in a large basin of fresh seawater, among living seaweed, and Minnie would hang over them breathlessly, watching the anemones expand, accept food and engulf it—enjoying the wonder and the colour and the strange life of it all—while the landlady at her side was as much a child as she in her sympathy and pleasure.

But there was one edict that might not change.

Always in the evening they were put back into the sea. "Else they will pine and die."

Then came the joy of paddling and fishing for new beauties.

There were tears when Cowes was left, and yet remained a beautiful memory for more than half a century.

A long stay in Lyndhurst followed with rambles and drives in the forest.

And once Minnie, Lina, the maid and little Florence, who had arrived from the water-lily lake five years after Lina went for a walk in the great forest—*New Forest*, that was so *very old*! Minnie knew all about that!

And somehow the maid, who was quite young, strayed off the track.

At first it was beautiful!

The thickets of bracken were like forests in a forest, and the fern moss beside the streams made fairy gardens.

Then it began to rain and "Let us go home!" was the general vote.

But Eliza sat down on the stump of an ancient oak and began to cry. "I don't know which way it is!" she wailed, "and I can't walk a step further, carrying this heavy child!"

Then, in spite of rain, in spite of an empty void, clamouring for tea, which was long overdue, Minnie rose to the occasion, and became the heroine of a real adventure.

She it was who remembered the "Swiss Family Robinson" and cheered us all with extracts from the chronicles of their remarkable experiences.

"And we," she remarked, "will always have plenty of beech-nuts and acorns to eat! They hadn't. Then there is plenty of water to drink, and we will find a hollow tree to live in!"

The prospect of a diet of beech-nuts and acorns only increased Eliza's woe, to which was added the anxious question: "What will Missus say!"

But Minnie was undaunted. She led the expedition almost joyfully, quoting strophes from her favourite poets, such as: "And how can man die better than facing fearful odds, eh?" which made Eliza even more desperate, especially as a herd of vicious-looking New Forest pigs bristled by at this moment.

Always vitally interested in the unusual, Minnie was almost disappointed when a hearty-looking forester came sauntering towards them, "though he might have been a robber, like Robin Hood."

He assured Eliza that they were quite near home, and led them to the broad and work-a-day highway in about five minutes. "And keep on that track for half an hour and you'll be in Lyndhurst, but," he continued, "people lost have been known to go round and round for hours, without finding their way out!"

So it *was* a real adventure after all!

Minnie was satisfied—and rather glad of dry clothes and an especially good tea with jam and fancy biscuits. And Mamma was so pleased to have them all home again, that she forgave Eliza on the spot.

(To be continued.)

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