RICHARD JEFFERIES

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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SAINT GUIDO

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St. Guido ran out at the garden gate into a sandy lane, and down the lane till he came to a grassy bank. He caught hold of the bunches of grass and so pulled himself up. There was a footpath on the top which went straight in between fir-trees, and as he ran along they stood on each side of him like green walls. They were very near together, and even at the top the space between them was so narrow that the sky seemed to come down, and the clouds to be sailing but just over them, as if they would catch and tear in the fir-trees. The path was so little used that it had grown green, and as he ran he knocked dead branches out of his way. Just as he was getting tired of running he reached the end of the path, and came out into a wheat-field. The wheat did not grow very closely, and the spaces were filled with azure corn-flowers. St. Guido thought he was safe away now, so he stopped to look.

Those thoughts and feelings which are not sharply defined but have a haze of distance and beauty about them are always the dearest. His name was not really Guido, but those who loved him had called him so in order to try and express their hearts about him. For they thought if a great painter could be a little boy, then he would be something like this one. They were not very learned in the history of painters: they had heard of Raphael, but Raphael was too elevated, too much of the sky, and of Titian, but Titian was fond of feminine loveliness, and in the end somebody said Guido was a dreamy name, as if it belonged to one who was

full of faith. Those golden curls shaking about his head as he ran and filling the air with radiance round his brow, looked like a Nimbus or circlet of glory. So they called him St. Guido, and a very, very wild saint he was.

St. Guido stopped in the cornfield, and looked all round. There were the fir-trees behind him—a thick wall of green—hedges on the right and the left, and the wheat sloped down towards an ash-copse in the hollow. No one was in the field, only the fir-trees, the green hedges, the yellow wheat, and the sun overhead, Guido kept quite still, because he expected that in a minute the magic would begin, and something would speak to him. His cheeks which had been flushed with running grew less hot, but I cannot tell you the exact colour they were, for his skin was so white and clear, it would not tan under the sun, yet being always out of doors it had taken the faintest tint of golden brown mixed with rosiness. His blue eyes which had been wide open, as they always were when full of mischief, became softer, and his long eyelashes drooped over them. But as the magic did not begin, Guido walked on slowly into the wheat, which rose nearly to his head, though it was not yet so tall as it would be before the reapers came. He did not break any of the stalks, or bend them down and step on them; he passed between them, and they yielded on either side. The wheat-ears were pale gold, having only just left off their green, and they surrounded him on all sides as if he were bathing.

A butterfly painted a velvety red with white spots came floating along the surface of the corn, and played round his cap, which was a little higher, and was so tinted by the sun that the butterfly was inclined to settle on it. Guido put up

his hand to catch the butterfly, forgetting his secret in his desire to touch it. The butterfly was too quick—with a snap of his wings disdainfully mocking the idea of catching him, away he went. Guido nearly stepped on a humble-bee—buzz-zz!—the bee was so alarmed he actually crept up Guido's knickers to the knee, and even then knocked himself against a wheat-ear when he started to fly. Guido kept quite still while the humble-bee was on his knee, knowing that he should not be stung if he did not move. He knew, too, that humble-bees have stings though people often say they have not, and the reason people think they do not possess them is because humble-bees are so good-natured and never sting unless they are very much provoked.

Next he picked a corn buttercup; the flowers were much smaller than the great buttercups which grew in the meadows, and these were not golden but coloured like brass. His foot caught in a creeper, and he nearly tumbled—it was a bine of bindweed which went twisting round and round two stalks of wheat in a spiral, binding them together as if some one had wound string about them. There was one ear of wheat which had black specks on it, and another which had so much black that the grains seemed changed and gone leaving nothing but blackness. He touched it and it stained his hands like a dark powder, and then he saw that it was not perfectly black as charcoal is, it was a little red. Something was burning up the corn there just as if fire had been set to the ears. Guido went on and found another place where there was hardly any wheat at all, and those stalks that grew were so short they only came above his

knee. The wheat-ears were thin and small, and looked as if there was nothing but chaff. But this place being open was full of flowers, such lovely azure cornflowers which the people call bluebottles.

Guido took two; they were curious flowers with knobs surrounded with little blue flowers like a lady's bonnet. They were a beautiful blue, not like any other blue, not like the violets in the garden, or the sky over the trees, or the geranium in the grass, or the bird's-eyes by the path. He loved them and held them tight in his hand, and went on, leaving the red pimpernel wide open to the dry air behind him, but the May-weed was everywhere. The May-weed had white flowers like a moon-daisy, but not so large, and leaves like moss. He could not walk without stepping on these mossy tufts, though he did not want to hurt them. So he stooped and stroked the moss-like leaves and said, "I do not want to hurt you, but you grow so thick I cannot help it." In a minute afterwards as he was walking he heard a quick rush, and saw the wheat-ears sway this way and that as if a puff of wind had struck them.

Guido stood still and his eyes opened very wide, he had forgotten to cut a stick to fight with: he watched the wheat-ears sway, and could see them move for some distance, and he did not know what it was. Perhaps it was a wild boar or a yellow lion, or some creature no one had ever seen; he would not go back, but he wished he had cut a nice stick. Just then a swallow swooped down and came flying over the wheat so close that Guido almost felt the flutter of his wings, and as he passed he whispered to Guido that it was only a hare. "Then why did he run away?" said Guido; "I

should not have hurt him." But the swallow had gone up high into the sky again, and did not hear him. All the time Guido was descending the slope, for little feet always go down the hill as water does, and when he looked back he found that he had left the fir-trees so far behind he was in the middle of the field. If any one had looked they could hardly have seen him, and if he had taken his cap off they could not have done so because the yellow curls would be so much the same colour as the yellow corn. He stooped to see how nicely he could hide himself, then he knelt, and in a minute sat down, so that the wheat rose up high above him.

Another humble-bee went over along the tips of the wheat—burr-rr—as he passed; then a scarlet fly, and next a bright yellow wasp who was telling a friend flying behind him that he knew where there was such a capital piece of wood to bite up into tiny pieces and make into paper for the nest in the thatch, but his friend wanted to go to the house because there was a pear quite ripe there on the wall. Next came a moth, and after the moth a golden fly, and three gnats, and a mouse ran along the dry ground with a curious sniffling rustle close to Guido. A shrill cry came down out of the air, and looking up he saw two swifts turning circles, and as they passed each other they shrieked—their voices were so shrill they shrieked. They were only saying that in a month their little swifts in the slates would be able to fly. While he sat so quiet on the ground and hidden by the wheat, he heard a cuckoo such a long way off it sounded like a watch when it is covered up. "Cuckoo" did not come full and distinct—it was such a tiny little "cuckoo" caught in

the hollow of Guido's ear. The cuckoo must have been a mile away.

Suddenly he thought something went over, and yet he did not see it—perhaps it was the shadow—and he looked up and saw a large bird not very far up, not farther than he could fling, or shoot his arrows, and the bird was fluttering his wings, but did not move away farther, as if he had been tied in the air. Guido knew it was a hawk, and the hawk was staying there to see if there was a mouse or a little bird in the wheat. After a minute the hawk stopped fluttering and lifted his wings together as a butterfly does when he shuts his, and down the hawk came, straight into the corn. "Go away!" shouted Guido jumping up, and flinging his cap, and the hawk, dreadfully frightened and terribly cross, checked himself and rose again with an angry rush. So the mouse escaped, but Guido could not find his cap for some time. Then he went on, and still the ground sloping sent him down the hill till he came close to the copse.

Some sparrows came out from the copse, and he stopped and saw one of them perch on a stalk of wheat, with one foot above the other sideways, so that he could pick at the ear and get the corn. Guido watched the sparrow clear the ear, then he moved, and the sparrows flew back to the copse, where they chattered at him for disturbing them. There was a ditch between the corn and the copse, and a streamlet; he picked up a stone and threw it in, and the splash frightened a rabbit, who slipped over the bank and into a hole. The boughs of an oak reached out across to the corn, and made so pleasant a shade that Guido, who was very hot from walking in the sun, sat down on the bank of

the streamlet with his feet dangling over it, and watched the floating grass sway slowly as the water ran. Gently he leaned back till his back rested on the sloping ground—he raised one knee, and left the other foot over the verge where the tip of the tallest rushes touched it. Before he had been there a minute he remembered the secret which a fern had taught him.

First, if he wanted to know anything, or to hear a story, or what the grass was saying, or the oak-leaves singing, he must be careful not to interfere as he had done just now with the butterfly by trying to catch him. Fortunately, that butterfly was a nice butterfly, and very kindhearted, but sometimes, if you interfered with one thing, it would tell another thing, and they would all know in a moment, and stop talking, and never say a word. Once, while they were all talking pleasantly, Guido caught a fly in his hand, he felt his hand tickle as the fly stepped on it, and he shut up his little fist so quickly he caught the fly in the hollow between the palm and his fingers. The fly went buzz, and rushed to get out, but Guido laughed, so the fly buzzed again, and just told the grass, and the grass told the bushes, and everything knew in a moment, and Guido never heard another word all that day. Yet sometimes now they all knew something about him, they would go on talking. You see, they all rather petted and spoiled him. Next, if Guido did not hear them conversing, the fern said he must touch a little piece of grass and put it against his cheek, or a leaf, and kiss it, and say, "Leaf, leaf, tell them I am here."

Now, while he was lying down, and the tip of the rushes touched his foot, he remembered this, so he moved the rush

with his foot and said, "Rush, rush, tell them I am here." Immediately there came a little wind, and the wheat swung to and fro, the oak-leaves rustled, the rushes bowed, and the shadows slipped forwards and back again. Then it was still, and the nearest wheat-ear to Guido nodded his head, and said in a very low tone, "Guido, dear, just this minute I do not feel very happy, although the sunshine is so warm, because I have been thinking, for we have been in one or other of these fields of your papa's a thousand years this very year. Every year we have been sown, and weeded, and reaped, and garnered. Every year the sun has ripened us and the rain made us grow; every year for a thousand years."

"What did you see all that time?" said Guido.

"The swallows came," said the Wheat, "and flew over us, and sang a little sweet song, and then they went up into the chimneys and built their nests."

"At my house?" said Guido.

"Oh, no, dear, the house I was then thinking of is gone, like a leaf withered and lost. But we have not forgotten any of the songs they sang us, nor have the swallows that you see to-day—one of them spoke to you just now—forgotten what we said to their ancestors. Then the blackbirds came out in us and ate the creeping creatures, so that they should not hurt us, and went up into the oaks and whistled such beautiful sweet low whistles. Not in those oaks, dear, where the blackbirds whistle to-day; even the very oaks have gone, though they were so strong that one of them defied the lightning, and lived years and years after it struck him. One of the very oldest of the old oaks in the copse, dear, is

his grandchild. If you go into the copse you will find an oak which has only one branch; he is so old, he has only that branch left. He sprang up from an acorn dropped from an oak that grew from an acorn dropped from the oak the lightning struck. So that is three oak lives, Guido dear, back to the time I was thinking of just now. And that oak under whose shadow you are now lying is the fourth of them, and he is quite young, though he is so big.

"A jay sowed the acorn from which he grew up; the jay was in the oak with one branch, and some one frightened him, and as he flew he dropped the acorn which he had in his bill just there, and now you are lying in the shadow of the tree. So you see, it is a very long time ago, when the blackbirds came and whistled up in those oaks I was thinking of, and that was why I was not very happy."

"But you have heard the blackbirds whistling ever since?" said Guido; "and there was such a big black one up in our cherry tree this morning, and I shot my arrow at him and very nearly hit him. Besides, there is a blackbird whistling now—you listen. There, he's somewhere in the copse. Why can't you listen to him, and be happy now?"

"I will be happy, dear, as you are here, but still it is a long, long time, and then I think, after I am dead, and there is more wheat in my place, the blackbirds will go on whistling for another thousand years after me. For of course I did not hear them all that time ago myself, dear, but the wheat which was before me heard them and told me. They told me, too, and I know it is true, that the cuckoo came and called all day till the moon shone at night, and began again in the morning before the dew had sparkled in the sunrise.

The dew dries very soon on wheat, Guido dear, because wheat is so dry; first the sunrise makes the tips of the wheat ever so faintly rosy, then it grows yellow, then as the heat increases it becomes white at noon, and golden in the afternoon, and white again under the moonlight. Besides which wide shadows come over from the clouds, and a wind always follows the shadow and waves us, and every time we sway to and fro that alters our colour. A rough wind gives us one tint, and heavy rain another, and we look different on a cloudy day to what we do on a sunny one. All these colours changed on us when the blackbird was whistling in the oak the lightning struck, the fourth one backwards from me; and it makes me sad to think that after four more oaks have gone, the same colours will come on the wheat that will grow then. It is thinking about those past colours, and songs, and leaves, and of the colours and the sunshine, and the songs, and the leaves that will come in the future that makes to-day so much. It makes to-day a thousand years long backwards, and a thousand years long forwards, and makes the sun so warm, and the air so sweet, and the butterflies so lovely, and the hum of the bees, and everything so delicious. We cannot have enough of it."

"No, that we cannot," said Guido. "Go on, you talk so nice and low. I feel sleepy and jolly. Talk away, old Wheat."

"Let me see," said the Wheat. "Once on a time while the men were knocking us out of the ear on a floor with flails, which are sticks with little hinges—"

"As if I did not know what a flail was!" said Guido. "I hit old John with the flail, and Ma gave him a shilling not to be cross."

"While they were knocking us with the hard sticks," the Wheat went on, "we heard them talking about a king who was shot with an arrow like yours in the forest—it slipped from a tree, and went into him instead of into the deer. And long before that the men came up the river—the stream in the ditch there runs into the river—in rowing ships—how you would like one to play in, Guido! For they were not like the ships now which are machines, they were rowing ships—men's ships—and came right up into the land ever so far, all along the river up to the place where the stream in the ditch runs in; just where your papa took you in the punt, and you got the waterlilies, the white ones."

"And wetted my sleeve right up my arm—oh, I know! I can row you, old Wheat; I can row as well as my papa can."

"But since the rowing ships came, the ploughs have turned up this ground a thousand times," said the Wheat; "and each time the furrows smelt sweeter, and this year they smelt sweetest of all. The horses have such glossy coats, and such fine manes, and they are so strong and beautiful. They drew the ploughs along and made the ground give up its sweetness and savour, and while they were doing it, the spiders in the copse spun their silk along from the ashpoles, and the mist in the morning weighed down their threads. It was so delicious to come out of the clods as we pushed our green leaves up and felt the rain, and the wind, and the warm sun. Then a little bird came in the copse and called, 'Sip-sip, sip, sip, sip,' such a sweet low song, and the larks ran along the ground in between us, and there were bluebells in the copse, and anemones; till by-and-by the sun made us yellow, and the blue flowers that

you have in your hand came out. I cannot tell you how many there have been of these flowers since the oak was struck by the lightning, in all the thousand years there must have been altogether—I cannot tell you how many."

"Why didn't I pick them all?" said Guido.

"Do you know," said the Wheat, "we have thought so much more, and felt so much more, since your people took us, and ploughed for us, and sowed us, and reaped us. We are not like the same wheat we used to be before your people touched us, when we grew wild, and there were huge great things in the woods and marshes which I will not tell you about lest you should be frightened. Since we have felt your hands, and you have touched us, we have felt so much more. Perhaps that was why I was not very happy till you came, for I was thinking quite as much about your people as about us, and how all the flowers of all those thousand years, and all the songs, and the sunny days were gone, and all the people were gone too, who had heard the blackbirds whistle in the oak the lightning struck. And those that are alive now—there will be cuckoos calling, and the eggs in the thrushes' nests, and blackbirds whistling, and blue cornflowers, a thousand years after every one of them is gone.

"So that is why it is so sweet this minute, and why I want you, and your people, dear, to be happy now and to have all these things, and to agree so as not to be so anxious and careworn, but to come out with us, or sit by us, and listen to the blackbirds, and hear the wind rustle us, and be happy. Oh, I wish I could make them happy, and do away with all their care and anxiety, and give you all heaps and heaps of

flowers! Don't go away, darling, do you lie still, and I will talk and sing to you, and you can pick some more flowers when you get up. There is a beautiful shadow there, and I heard the streamlet say that he would sing a little to you; he is not very big, he cannot sing very loud. By-and-by, I know, the sun will make us as dry as dry, and darker, and then the reapers will come while the spiders are spinning their silk again—this time it will come floating in the blue air, for the air seems blue if you look up.

"It is a great joy to your people, dear, when the reaping time arrives: the harvest is a great joy to you when the thistledown comes rolling along in the wind. So that I shall be happy even when the reapers cut me down, because I know it is for you, and your people, my love. The strong men will come to us gladly, and the women, and the little children will sit in the shade and gather great white trumpets of convolvulus, and come to tell their mothers how they saw the young partridges in the next field. But there is one thing we do not like, and that is, all the labour and the misery. Why cannot your people have us without so much labour, and why are so many of you unhappy? Why cannot they be all happy with us as you are, dear? For hundreds and hundreds of years now the wheat every year has been sorrowful for your people, and I think we get more sorrowful every year about it, because as I was telling you just now the flowers go, and the swallows go, the old, old oaks go, and that oak will go, under the shade of which you are lying, Guido; and if your people do not gather the flowers now, and watch the swallows, and listen to the blackbirds whistling, as you are listening now while I talk, then Guido,

my love, they will never pick any flowers, nor hear any birds' songs. They think they will, they think that when they have toiled, and worked a long time, almost all their lives, then they will come to the flowers, and the birds, and be joyful in the sunshine. But no, it will not be so, for then they will be old themselves, and their ears dull, and their eyes dim, so that the birds will sound a great distance off, and the flowers will not seem bright.

"Of course, we know that the greatest part of your people cannot help themselves, and must labour on like the reapers till their ears are full of the dust of age. That only makes us more sorrowful, and anxious that things should be different. I do not suppose we should think about them had we not been in man's hand so long that now we have got to feel with man. Every year makes it more pitiful because then there are more flowers gone, and added to the vast numbers of those gone before, and never gathered or looked at, though they could have given so much pleasure. And all the work and labour, and thinking, and reading and learning that your people do ends in nothing—not even one flower. We cannot understand why it should be so. There are thousands of wheat-ears in this field, more than you would know how to write down with your pencil, though you have learned your tables, sir. Yet all of us thinking, and talking, cannot understand why it is when we consider how clever your people are, and how they bring ploughs, and steam-engines, and put up wires along the roads to tell you things when you are miles away, and sometimes we are sown where we can hear the hum, hum, all day of the children learning in the school. The butterflies flutter over us, and

the sun shines, and the doves are very, very happy at their nest, but the children go on hum, hum inside this house, and learn, learn. So we suppose you must be very clever, and yet you cannot manage this. All your work is wasted, and you labour in vain—you dare not leave it a minute.

"If you left it a minute it would all be gone; it does not mount up and make a store, so that all of you could sit by it and be happy. Directly you leave off you are hungry, and thirsty, and miserable like the beggars that tramp along the dusty road here. All the thousand years of labour since this field was first ploughed have not stored up anything for you. It would not matter about the work so much if you were only happy; the bees work every year, but they are happy; the doves build a nest every year, but they are very, very happy. We think it must be because you do not come out to us and be with us, and think more as we do. It is not because your people have not got plenty to eat and drink—you have as much as the bees. Why just look at us! Look at the wheat that grows all over the world; all the figures that were ever written in pencil could not tell how much, it is such an immense quantity. Yet your people starve and die of hunger every now and then, and we have seen the wretched beggars tramping along the road. We have known of times when there was a great pile of us, almost a hill piled up, it was not in this country, it was in another warmer country, and yet no one dared to touch it—they died at the bottom of the hill of wheat. The earth is full of skeletons of people who have died of hunger. They are dying now this minute in your big cities, with nothing but stones all round them, stone walls and stone streets; not jolly stones like

those you threw in the water, dear—hard, unkind stones that make them cold and let them die, while we are growing here, millions of us, in the sunshine with the butterflies floating over us. This makes us unhappy; I was very unhappy this morning till you came running over and played with us.

"It is not because there is not enough: it is because your people are so short-sighted, so jealous and selfish, and so curiously infatuated with things that are not so good as your old toys which you have flung away and forgotten. And you teach the children hum, hum, all day to care about such silly things, and to work for them and to look to them as the object of their lives. It is because you do not share us among you without price or difference; because you do not share the great earth among you fairly, without spite and jealousy and avarice; because you will not agree; you silly, foolish people to let all the flowers wither for a thousand years while you keep each other at a distance, instead of agreeing and sharing them! Is there something in you—as there is poison in the nightshade, you know it, dear, your papa told you not to touch it—is there a sort of poison in your people that works them up into a hatred of one another? Why, then, do you not agree and have all things, all the great earth can give you, just as we have the sunshine and the rain? How happy your people could be if they would only agree! But you go on teaching even the little children to follow the same silly objects, hum, hum, hum, all the day, and they will grow up to hate each other, and to try which can get the most round things—you have one in your pocket."

"Sixpence," said Guido. "It's quite a new one."

"And other things quite as silly," the Wheat continued. "All the time the flowers are flowering, but they will go, even the oaks will go. We think the reason you do not all have plenty, and why you do not do only just a little work, and why you die of hunger if you leave off, and why so many of you are unhappy in body and mind, and all the misery is because you have not got a spirit like the wheat, like us; you will not agree, and you will not share, and you will hate each other, and you will be so avaricious, and you will *not* touch the flowers, or go into the sunshine (you would rather half of you died among the hard stones first), and you will teach your children hum, hum, to follow in some foolish course that has caused you all this unhappiness a thousand years, and you will *not* have a spirit like us, and feel like us. Till you have a spirit like us, and feel like us, you will never, never be happy. Lie still, dear; the shadow of the oak is broad and will not move from you for a long time yet."

"But perhaps Paul will come up to my house, and Percy and Morna."

"Look up in the oak very quietly, don't move, just open your eyes and look," said the Wheat, who was very cunning. Guido looked and saw a lovely little bird climbing up a branch. It was chequered, black and white, like a very small magpie, only without such a long tail, and it had a spot of red about its neck. It was a pied woodpecker, not the large green woodpecker, but another kind. Guido saw it go round the branch, and then some way up, and round again till it came to a place that pleased it, and then the woodpecker struck the bark with its bill, tap-tap. The sound was quite

loud, ever so much more noise than such a tiny bill seemed able to make. Tap-tap! If Guido had not been still so that the bird had come close he would never have found it among the leaves. Tap-tap! After it had picked out all the insects there, the woodpecker flew away over the ashpoles of the copse.

"I should just like to stroke him," said Guido. "If I climbed up into the oak perhaps he would come again, and I could catch him."

"No," said the Wheat, "he only comes once a day,"

"Then tell me stories," said Guido, imperiously.

"I will if I can," said the Wheat. "Once upon a time, when the oak the lightning struck was still living, and when the wheat was green in this very field, a man came staggering out of the wood, and walked out into it. He had an iron helmet on, and he was wounded, and his blood stained the green wheat red as he walked. He tried to get to the streamlet, which was wider then, Guido dear, to drink, for he knew it was there, but he could not reach it. He fell down and died in the green wheat, dear, for he was very much hurt with a sharp spear, but more so with hunger and thirst."

"I am so sorry," said Guido; "and now I look at you, why you are all thirsty and dry, you nice old Wheat, and the ground is as dry as dry under you; I will get you something to drink."

And down he scrambled into the ditch, setting his foot firm on a root, for though he was so young, he knew how to get down to the water without wetting his feet, or falling in, and how to climb up a tree, and everything jolly. Guido

dipped his hand in the streamlet, and flung the water over the wheat, five or six good sprinklings till the drops hung on the wheat-ears. Then he said, "Now you are better."

"Yes, dear, thank you, my love," said the Wheat, who was very pleased, though of course the water was not enough to wet its roots. Still it was pleasant, like a very little shower. Guido lay down on his chest this time, with his elbows on the ground, propping his head up, and as he now faced the wheat he could see in between the stalks.

"Lie still," said the Wheat, "the corncrake is not very far off, he has come up here since your papa told the mowers to mow the meadow, and very likely if you stay quiet you will see him. If you do not understand all I say, never mind, dear; the sunshine is warm, but not too warm in the shade, and we all love you, and want you to be as happy as ever you can be."

"It is jolly to be quite hidden like this," said Guido. "No one could find me; if Paul were to look all day he would never find me; even Papa could not find me. Now go on and tell me stories."

"Ever so many times, when the oak the lightning struck was young," said the Wheat, "great stags used to come out of the wood and feed on the green wheat; it was early in the morning when they came. Such great stags, and so proud, and yet so timid, the least thing made them go bound, bound, bound."

"Oh, I know!" said Guido; "I saw some jump over the fence in the forest—I am going there again soon. If I take my bow I will shoot one!"

"But there are no deer here now," said the Wheat; "they have been gone a long, long time; though I think your papa has one of their antlers,"

"Now, how did you know that?" said Guido; "you have never been to our house, and you cannot see in from here because the fir copse is in the way; how do you find out these things?"

"Oh!" said the Wheat, laughing, "we have lots of ways of finding out things. Don't you remember the swallow that swooped down and told you not to be frightened at the hare? The swallow has his nest at your house, and he often flies by your windows and looks in, and he told me. The birds tell us lots of things, and all about what is over the sea."

"But that is not a story," said Guido.

"Once upon a time," said the Wheat, "when the oak the lightning struck was alive, your papa's papa's papa, ever so much farther back than that, had all the fields round here, all that you can see from Acre Hill. And do you know it happened that in time every one of them was lost or sold, and your family, Guido dear, were homeless—no house, no garden or orchard, and no dogs or guns, or anything jolly. One day the papa that was then came along the road with *his* little Guido, and they were beggars, dear, and had no place to sleep, and they slept all night in the wheat in this very field close to where the hawthorn bush grows now—where you picked the May flowers, you know, my love. They slept there all the summer night, and the fern owls flew to and fro, and the bats and crickets chirped, and the stars shone faintly, as if they were made pale by the heat. The

poor papa never had a house, but that little Guido lived to grow up a great man, and he worked so hard, and he was so clever, and every one loved him, which was the best of all things. He bought this very field and then another, and another, and got such a lot of the old fields back again, and the goldfinches sang for joy, and so did the larks and the thrushes, because they said what a kind man he was. Then his son got some more of them, till at last your papa bought ever so many more. But we often talk about the little boy who slept in the wheat in this field, which was his father's father's field. If only the wheat then could have helped him, and been kind to him, you may be sure it would. We love you so much we like to see the very crumbs left by the men who do the hoeing when they eat their crusts; we wish they could have more to eat, but we like to see their crumbs, which you know are made of wheat, so that we have done them some good at least."

"That's not a story," said Guido.

"There's a gold coin here somewhere," said the Wheat, "such a pretty one, it would make a capital button for your jacket, dear, or for your mamma; that is all any sort of money is good for; I wish all the coins were made into buttons for little Guido."

"Where is it?" said Guido.

"I can't exactly tell where it is," said the Wheat. "It was very near me once, and I thought the next thunder's rain would wash it down into the streamlet—it has been here ever so long, it came here first just after the oak the lightning split died. And it has been rolled about by the ploughs ever since, and no one has ever seen it; I thought it

must go into the ditch at last, but when the men came to hoe one of them knocked it back, and then another kicked it along—it was covered with earth—and then, one day, a rook came and split the clod open with his bill, and pushed the pieces first one side and then the other, and the coin went one way, but I did not see; I must ask a humble-bee, or a mouse, or a mole, or some one who knows more about it. It is very thin, so that if the rook's bill had struck it, his strong bill would have made a dint in it, and there is, I think, a ship marked on it."

"Oh, I must have it! A ship! Ask a humble-bee directly; be quick!"

Bang! There was a loud report, a gun had gone off in the copse.

"That's my papa," shouted Guido. "I'm sure that was my papa's gun!" Up he jumped, and getting down the ditch, stepped across the water, and, seizing a hazel-bough to help himself, climbed up the bank. At the top he slipped through the fence by the oak and so into the copse. He was in such a hurry he did not mind the thistles or the boughs that whipped him as they sprang back, he scrambled through, meeting the vapour of the gunpowder and the smell of sulphur. In a minute he found a green path, and in the path was his papa, who had just shot a cruel crow. The crow had been eating the birds' eggs, and picking the little birds to pieces.

GOLDEN-BROWN

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