

THE GIRL WHO COULDN'T HOLD HER TONGUE.



ARJA
and
her
father
dwelt
at a
little town on the
Lena,* in a wooden hut built by
the man himself. The nature of

his occupation might be seen in the hunting weapons and spears for catching salmon, which hung on the walls. The hut was kept spotlessly clean by Marja, who was a bright, happy child, and but for one great fault would have been almost perfect.

One evening her father returned home earlier than usual, and wanted his supper at once. In answer to Marja's questions he told her he had set traps for ermine a long way off, according to a method he had learned from the Russians, and that he was going out at dawn to see if he had been successful, and if so it would bring them a lot of money.

As soon as he had finished supper he went to bed, and Marja slipped out to a neighbour's house where she was always welcome, and sat down by the fire.

"Father has gone to bed already," she began eagerly, "because he must get up at sunrise to look after some traps which he set to-day. I know just where they are; he told me they were out by the firs the other side of the marsh, a long way from the town."

Thus she chattered on uninterruptedly until bedtime came, when she said "Good-night," and went home across the street.

On the following day at noon her father returned in a very angry mood, not only had all his traps been stolen but the prizes they contained as well, which was betrayed by several spots of blood.

"Alas! child," he moaned, "we are unlucky in everything! Fortunately for me Omikoff has fallen ill while building his house; I will go to him to-morrow, and, perhaps, through him I may earn something." Marja nodded assent.

Unluckily she repeated Omikoff's illness to a young man who lived at the other end of the town as he paused for a minute to speak to her at her door. She also told him of her father's intention.

Next day her father returned early, and threw his cap angrily on the table.

"Everything is alike," he exclaimed;

"everywhere and always someone is before me; a new man was already at work when I arrived."

Marja was a little frightened, but did not like to believe that which darted through her mind.

Her father collected his powder and guns, and after a pause said—

"Marja, would you mind my leaving you for awhile? A Russian nobleman is here who requires a guide well-acquainted with the country between this and the Baikal Sea."

No, Marja had no objection to his departure, for would it not bring gain, but she must mend his dress before he started, so she ran quickly down the street to the fisherman's cottage, where she had left her work-bag, and found the family at dinner.

"My father is in luck's way," cried Marja as she was leaving the house, and she related rapidly where he was going, and with whom.

As soon as she had gone the fisherman stood up, and left the house.

The father departed with his little bundle, but Marja had scarcely set the little room in order when he was back again. He threw himself heavily on to a bench, and panted for breath.

"Again too late, Marja! these are hard times."

Marja bit her lips, and tears came into her eyes, but yet she could not give up chattering, and so it happened that want found its way into their little home.

One day as Marja sat alone spinning by the fire she suddenly heard shots fired, and peeping out of the door a bear trotted up to her and prayed to be let in, raising his fore paws beseechingly. The girl sprang back frightened into the house, the bear following her, and banged the door. "Help!" she shrieked, and turned to fly.

"Protect me," said the bear, at the same time barring the way. "Just see how they have hurt my coat and wounded my leg, and yet I never harmed them, nor will I hurt you."

Then Marja removed her hands from her face, which she had hidden in terror, and looked into the kind, sincere eyes of the wounded, trembling bear. Her fears vanished, she bade him lie down by the fire and carefully tended his wounds, while he grunted his gratitude.

"You must go before my father returns," said the girl.

"I understand," replied the bear; "bear's-skin, bear's-flesh, and bear's-grease are valuable in hard times, but even if I wished to do so I could not leave this town," indicating his wounded leg.

"I cannot answer for my father," said the girl.

"Then hide me," begged the bear, "if only for a few days."

After some thought Marja led the bear into the empty stall. Alas! the father's hope of possessing a strong reindeer to harness to his home-made sledge had never been fulfilled.

The bear spent a whole week in the stall, only coming out in the evening before the father's return to visit Marja and get food and a warm by the fire. At these times little Marja was a living note of interrogation, and she soon became acquainted with the joys and sorrows of bear-life and with all the travels and adventures of her special bear.

On the other hand the bear was trusted with all that was in the girl's heart, her household trials and with the mischief caused by her one great fault.

He regarded her kindly while her tongue went as fast as a humming-top, and then blinking his eyes he asked, "Will you, can you be silent, Marja, until I am well? If not you will lose your friend, for remember that bear's-skin and bear's-grease—"

"I know," interrupted Marja, "and that is why I dare not talk."

Indeed it cost many a hard battle not to speak to her father about her guest, and the wonderful things he had related to her of an island covered with ice palaces floating on the wide sea; she longed to inform her father that the ivory-bearing mammoth was not a giant mole which burrowed beneath the earth and caused the dreadful earthquakes, but was a creature who had lived for thousands of years on the shores of the river in immense forests. She often wanted to begin talking of all these things, but she bit her lip and forced the words back. She was more silent than she had ever been in her life, and her father became quite anxious, asking, "what has come to my little Marja? Has she lost her tongue?"

Still she kept silence, but she made up for it at night in her dreams when she ran from house to house relating marvellous things which no one believed; indeed, she often talked so loud in her sleep that her father was disturbed and begged her to do her talking in the day-time.

At last the bear was well and taking his last warm by the fire. Marja was grieved at the parting, yet she rejoiced at the prospect of her tongue being free at last.

"You leave us to-day, and to-morrow may I tell father all?"

The bear blinked at her a little reflectively and mockingly but still with hearty good-will, and instead of answering asked, "Would you like to be rich?"

"Oh, certainly!" she answered eagerly. "I have often told you what I would do if I had money."

"I can make you rich if you will obey me," the bear said earnestly, "and I will gladly do this for you, for I owe you much."

"Oh, go on," said Marja impatiently.

"You must on no account betray my sojourn here," said the bear, "and if you keep silence I will knock at the door in three days' time at this hour and guide you to where treasure may be picked up."

"I promise," exclaimed Marja excitedly; "in three days I shall expect you."

Her whole manner became so excited and expectant that her father more than once said, "what is it, child?"

"Nothing indeed, nothing," she answered, and as if to stamp this response as untrue she took up her dress daintily between her fingers and danced about the room.

"You wild thing!" said her father, "I cannot think what has come to you, silent all day, talking all night, and now dancing about as though you had lost your head!"

The three days had passed, and at the appointed hour the bear knocked. "Has your father gone to catch salmon?" he asked through the key-hole?"

"Certainly," said Marja as she opened the door.

"Bring a large sack with you," said the bear.

Marja nodded and brought out a very large one.

"Now sit on my back," was his next command, "for we have a long journey before us."

* A river in Siberia which empties itself into the Arctic Ocean.

Marja obeyed, and the bear bore her away as swiftly as the wind through forests, marshes and plains covered with thin grass; the full moon made the earth as light as day and covered the heavens with a silver sheen.

Suddenly Marja shrieked aloud, for on the banks of the Lena, whose slow-running and scarcely ice-free waters were shining a short distance in front of them, stood a monster animal quite five times as large as her friend the bear. From an unwieldy head hung a large trunk, but still longer were the mighty tusks which branched out on each side. All about him, and on his stiff hair which formed a kind of mane and covered his back and shoulders, played the moonlight in all kinds of glistening sparkles. The bear stood still and shook himself so violently, that in spite of her fright the girl was obliged to jump off. Trembling she held on to the bear and stared at the mammoth. "Don't you see anything?" she whispered. "Oh, let us fly before he sees us."

"That is a friend of mine," said the bear laughing.

"But not of mine," said Marja, "he will devour me and trample on me."

"That he cannot do," answered the bear, "just see how fast his legs are imprisoned in the frozen ground."

Marja silently nodded, and only followed the advancing bear because she was afraid of being alone.

"He is one of the mighty dead released by the sun from the ice this summer after thousands of years," said the bear; "just look at the face—" when Marja interrupted—

"Oh, it is a mammoth, but I am afraid it is ill-luck to meet such a monster."

"On the contrary," replied the bear, "for you it is good luck, since it pointed out to me the road to the great graveyard from whence you will get your treasure."

They had now reached the gigantic creature—just as thousands of years before it had found death sinking into the mud, it stood now the image of strength and power; the raised head bespoke fright and anguish, the large eyes looked wild as if they would start from their sockets with horror, the long dark hair was untouched!

Marja shuddered. "Come away, dear bear," she begged, "I am frightened. Nothing can surely have remained all that time except the sun, moon and stars! Does the earth put on a fresh ice girdle every year in order to cover up all things one after the other?"

"I don't know, Marja," he said shaking his head, "but her chambers are always getting bigger. It is time we got to work."

He trotted a little to one side and began to scratch violently at the ground with his fore-paws, and soon glistening ivory came to light.

Marja shouted aloud and wished to lift it, but she had not sufficient strength even to stir one of the five-foot long tusks of a contemporary of the mammoth which was still standing.

"Don't trouble," said the bear, "that is work for man and bears, and belongs to me."

"Oh, dear bear," laughed Marja, "it is worth fifty roubles, don't you think so?" and she danced round him while he dug deeper.

"More," he replied, "far more"; and began scratching another piece out.

"That will make five-and-twenty or thirty more?" she asked in delight. "Oh, how good you are! Come and dance with me, dear bear."

"Foolish child!" growled the bear. "Is that suitable on a burial ground? Where are your serious thoughts now, Marja?"

As he spoke he put a broken piece into her skirt which she was holding up, and went on digging, she all the time chatting and laughing. When after freeing a fresh prize

he sought a new place she ran beside him, and while he worked she lay down, digging her elbows into the ground and resting her head on her hands. Sometimes she looked at the moonlight or at the few floating clouds, and sometimes into the bear's kind eyes or at his busy paws.

And so it went on nearly half the night, when the bear began to collect and pack the masses of ivory. The large sack was brimful, yet the bear carried it in his mouth as though it were but a feather's weight. Once again Marja was seated on his back, and away they went, swiftly as they came, and reached her home safely before break of day.

The bear threw the sack down near the fire panting and blowing from the long run, while Marja ran to fetch him some food and fresh water. While he drank it, he said, "Child, if you keep silence, I will come back before the year is out, while your father is on his travels."

"Of course," said Marja quite decidedly, "but, dear bear, may I not tell father where the riches come from? That is hard."

"It may be hard, but it must be, at any rate for a time," growled the bear, "out of consideration for my old friend for whom I am afraid. When it is safe for you to speak I will let you know, and then you can show your father the way," whereupon the bear stretched out his right fore-paw to take leave.

"Ah, dear bear," Marja implored, "first unpack the sack and lay the ivory nicely over the floor so that father may be astonished when he comes in, and I may get the explanation over."

The bear agreed, emptied the sack, whose contents he seemed to increase as he touched them, and according to the directions of the happy Marja, he spread the whole of the empty floor with the ivory, until there remained not an inch uncovered. In Marja's eyes the dull yellowish white shimmer was as valuable as glittering gold. "Thanks, dear bear," she cried joyfully, "a wounded stranger whom I tended brought me the treasure—will that do?"

The bear nodded, returned Marja's warm pressure of the hand and trotted away.

When Marja found herself alone, she sat down near the fire, and folded her arms on her knees, picturing to herself her father's astonishment, and thinking over what she should tell him of the wounded stranger.

Her heart was full to overflowing. "Oh, if I could run to the fisherman's wife and tell her everything!" she sighed, but she did not run down the street, but waited as patiently as she could until the hour she expected her father. He came at last, bent and grave as he had been for a long time now. Marja flew to meet him and kissed him impetuously.

"What has happened?" he asked. "Are you still dumb? And are you adding kissing to dancing?"

She hung on to his arm, her eyes shining with delight. As he stepped into the room he let fall his weapons in sheer fright.

"What is it? What does it mean?" he asked, pale and trembling.

"We are rich, that's what it means," came joyfully from Marja's lips.

"If all this is ours, we are indeed rich," he said, as he cast a keen eye over the mass of ivory. "But, Marja, where did it come from?"

"It is a present from a stranger," replied the girl earnestly. "He came here one evening wounded, hungry and tired. I washed his wounds by the fire, gave him meat and drink, and prepared a place for him in the stall. Before he left he spread all this ivory over the floor and said it was mine."

She spoke shortly and decisively, but each word oppressed her like a restraining flood-gate behind which the foaming water struggled

to get free. "Oh, father, father!" she exclaimed, throwing her arms round him and kissing him.

Soon the whole village knew that Marja's father had become a rich man, but no one could guess how or through whom the wealth had come.

He now possessed two horses and a herd of reindeer; he sold fur-skins and journeyed with them as far as the Baikal Sea. He and his daughter actually drank China tea; and Marja was the proud possessor of a watch, which seemed to her like a living thing.

"What a pity it is," said some of the neighbours, "that Marja has become so proud and has given up her friendly gossips!"

"She is not at all proud," said the fisherman's wife, "she still has a smile for everyone, and her eyes speak kindness and good-will to all."

This was true; since Marja had had a secret to keep, her eyes laughed and her face shone like those of children who try not to betray birthday presents or surprises to their relations.

When at last the year was up and her father was absent from home, her friend the bear knocked one evening at the door.

"Oh, dear, dear bear," said Marja, as she beckoned him in, "how glad I am you have come! Ah, now I can talk. We have a clock and a shawl from China where the women have crippled feet and the emperor sits on a throne which shines all over with gold. Won't you have a cup of tea? It is so good, and after drinking it I always dream about our ride, and the banks of the Lena, and the island in the sea of ice, and that the earth is so old and like a big graveyard which devours all, and—"

"Marja," said the bear, "stop talking, for we must start."

"Oh no!" implored the girl. "Not yet. I would much rather stay at home, for then I would make you some good tea and sit here and talk the whole live-long night."

"As you please," the bear said putting aside the empty sack which Marja had put before him; "I only thought that two such sacks full would be better than one, and that a beautiful dress would go well with the silk shawl, and that it was time you should know exactly the road to the treasure, but it shall be as you like."

Marja controlled herself and helped herself and the bear to tea, after which she said, "Good, let us start, for of course I must learn the way before father attempts it."

So stepping into the street, Marja mounted her friend's back and away they went. Towards midnight they reached the grave of the buried treasure. The ancient of thousands of years still stood by the Lena, but he appeared larger than at their first visit for the summer sun had freed more of the ice about his legs and only his mighty feet remained imprisoned. Round about him, apparently followed by his wide-open eyes, the bear grubbed and collected until the sack was full. There was no moonlight, but the stars shone like lamps.

Seated once again on the bear's back she asked numberless questions; her eyes never closed in spite of the long ride and the late hour of the night; she wanted to talk of everything; a treat that had been so long denied her. Tenderly and gratefully she took leave of her bear when the hour came for his departure, for he had not only brought her riches but had given her material for thought and gossip.

"You must still keep silent, Marja," were his last words. "I will knock at your door once again at the end of the year, but if you break silence I shall never see you again."

"Good-bye, dear bear!" she answered.

..Yes indeed I will be silent if only that I may see you again."

The ivory lay spread out in a kind of pattern, having been so arranged by the bear. Marja's eyes feasted on the treasure while she sang,

"There were giants strong and tall
When the world was young, dear,
Now mankind is weak and small
For the world is old, dear.

Sunshine formed a belt of gold
When the world was young, dear,
Ice is now its girdle cold
For the world is old, dear.

Did it ever laugh with glee
When it once was young, dear?
Will it always silent be
Now that it is old, dear?"

Marja laughed at the little song she had composed, and a great longing came over her to sing it to the bear.

"Only a year," she comforted herself by saying, and ran into the street to see if her father were coming. But he did not return on that day according to promise nor on the next nor on the third.

Then, alas, Marja went over to the fisherman's cottage, for her heart was full to bursting and it must be relieved.

"My father has not yet returned," she began on the doorstep, "and I have prepared such a nice surprise for him."

"A surprise?" said husband and wife together.

"Yes," said Marja, "it is so big that I have only just room to sit by the fire."

"Is it as big as that?" asked the people opening out their arms.

"Yes, quite," she answered mischievously; "it looks like a second floor. There is a riddle for you to guess."

"We give it up," said the woman.

"And it is worth, maybe, a hundred times fifty roubles," continued Marja, carried away by the astonishment evoked by her words. "There is another riddle for you to guess."

But the people could not guess it.

Then Marja's love of talking ran away with her, and she said, "Come and look," and skipping in front of them she led the way into her hut.

The fisherfolk opened their mouths in amazement when they saw the ivory; the man examined every piece, and looked at it scrutinisingly.

"Where did it come from?" he asked, quite hoarse with covetousness and curiosity. "Let us have some benefit of it, Marja."

"Willingly," she said, glowing with excitement and pride. "Just sit down for a minute."

She prepared tea, for she was always hospitable, and at the same time she related her strange experience. The way had by this time been deeply impressed on her mind, and she described it minutely.

"Thanks," said the fisherman, hastily emptying his cup, and signifying to his wife to take leave.

Two days later the father returned. She embraced him boisterously, and pointed proudly to the floor.

"Child," he said anxiously, "has the stranger been here again; is he a magician?"

"No, father," she replied; "I did him good, so he has shown me where to find this ivory."

"Where can one find it in such quantities?" he asked at once.

She reddened. "I ought not to tell you, but I have already told the fisherfolk; you were so long in coming, and I was so lonely. Well, you shall know also," and she confided to him all she had gone through and seen.

Her father was very excited, and pushed his tea on one side, exclaiming, "Let us be off; I will harness the horses, and you get the sack."

It was summer, the hottest Siberia had ever known; the sun was scorching, and the journey which was made on the bear's back in one night there and back, now took several days.

Her father was depressed and melancholy the whole way, and took no notice of the girl's chatter. "If only you had not told the fisherfolk," he said every now and again.

At last they reached the spot, but it was no longer quiet and deserted; it swarmed with people, big and little, old and young. Tents had been put up, and barricades formed of waggons, while the ground was all dug up and hollowed, and from the banks of the Lena there arose a loud tumult. There on the water lay the ancient who had been the bear's and Marja's friend; the sun had melted the icy fetters off his feet, and he had fallen into the water, a hundred busy arms were now drawing him to land; his giant body showed no sign of decay; he was soon robbed of his brown fur. The creature's eyes were still staring heavenward, as if seeking help, the head not having been touched.

"Father," begged Marja with tears running down her cheeks, "may we not return home? Oh, why did the earth set it free after hiding it all these thousands of years? Oh, what a sad ending!"

"Why did Marja chatter, after keeping the secret for a whole year?" said her father, but he yielded to her request.

Without turning a sod and without trying to secure one piece of ivory, they got into the carriage and drove towards home. During

that long return-journey Marja did not speak a word, even the smile had vanished from her lips and the brightness from her eyes.

Her father, seeing that the sorrowful expression did not leave her face, felt sorry that he had reproached her, and tried to comfort her saying, "Marja, we are quite rich enough, and I owe it all to you. Do you know that during your silent year I quite longed for your chatter, which I value more than a sackful of ivory. I am glad that your tongue is once more free."

Then Marja had a good cry. Her father went on jestingly: "First of all you talked in your sleep, then you danced and kissed, and now how long is the crying going to last?"

Marja raised her head, and while she was seeking words to thank him for his kind forbearance, her father exclaimed, "What is the matter with the village? Look at the clouds of smoke pouring out of it!"

He whipped up his horses, who responded nobly and galloped on. A horrible smell of burning filled the air, while the wind drove towards them an ever-increasing quantity of smoke.

"We are too late," said her father quietly, when the carriage stopped in front of the charred remains of their pretty little home. Down the whole length of the street nothing was to be seen but glowing smoking ruins. The whole of the little town had fallen a prey to the flames while its inhabitants were digging for treasure in the ivory-fields. It was a sad spectacle. Two women left at home on account of their age and feebleness, while weeping bitterly, related how the fire had broken out in the house of the fisherfolk. This was confirmed later on. The couple had hastened away in their avaricious eagerness without waiting to make all safe.

Marja's father would not allow her even to get out of the carriage, but drove at once southward to Vitimsk. Here he sold his carriage and horses and built himself a little house, the wood for which was supplied by a neighbouring forest.

Now the battle with want had to begin all over again, yet something had been gained by their late experience, for the little housekeeper who looked after her father so diligently and lovingly had become quite discreet. Never a word passed her lips that she had cause to regret, and yet she had resumed the harmless merry chatter which her father loved so much.

In the quiet lonely hours Marja often thought of the bear and had a great longing to see him, but he never came again; and only in her dreams did she sometimes see him, and then she would fall on his neck and cry.

Alas; the earth had opened her mouth and her friend had been betrayed by men, and thus Marja the guilty one had been taught the great value of a still tongue

PRETTY MISS MINA.

By RUTH LAMB.

CHAPTER I.

ECCLESHILL RECTORY was over-peopled. Everybody said so except parson Barry himself. He would never allow that, amidst his crowd of children, there was one too many. On the contrary, though boys and girls, all told, numbered only one short of a dozen, nobody ever heard a complaining word from Mr. Barry when alluding to his olive branches.

It happened sometimes that well-meaning parishioners—maiden ladies as a rule—condoled with their pastor on his "heavy responsibilities," as they called his household flock.

"Happy is the man that hath his quiver full," would be the rector's reply in the blithest tone possible.

"But my dear Mr. Barry," said one speaker, "the Jewish quiver, it is said, only held five arrows, and you have eleven children."

"Then I ought to have more than a double share of happiness and to be thankful in proportion. Indeed I am, Miss Meek, for they are good children, as young folk go, and ours is a harmonious household. 'Better a little where love is—' You know the rest, Miss Meek. I assure you I never envy the rich or the childless."

"I am sure the rector was in earnest," said Miss Meek, when she repeated this conversation to Miss Strong, another maiden lady who was joint mistress with herself of a dainty cottage in Eccleshill parish. They were the closest of friends, by dint of unlikeness in all unimportant matters, though thoroughly at one in other respects. "Mr. Barry is always in earnest. Never more so than when talking of his children," replied Miss Strong.

"If he ever sighs about anything in connection with his family, I feel sure it is when he passes through the churchyard and casts