

The Giant Hands or, The Reward of Industry

Alfred Crowquill

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[Illustration: THE POOR HOME.]

Alfred Crowquill's Fairy Tales.

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GIANT HANDS:

OR,

THE REWARD OF INDUSTRY.

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THE GIANT HANDS.

Poor lit-tle Wil-lie re-turn-ed from the for-est la-den with as much wood as his fee-ble strength could bear. He was hun-gry and wea-ry, and had a great sor-row at his heart, for he had lost his fa-ther in the ear-ly spring, leav-ing his mo-ther to toil for a scant live-li-hood to sup-port her-self and him.

He threw the wood up-on the cin-ders on the hearth, and quick-ly rais-ed a cheer-ful blaze, at which he warm-ed his na-ked, swol-len feet, as he watch-ed the smoke ma-king its fan-tas-tic ed-dies up the wide chim-ney, and a-midst the raf-ters of the low roof. He heav-ed a deep sigh; for he saw no pot up-on the fire, which ought to have been bub-bling up with their fru-gal din-ner: but, a-las! they had none.

"This must not be any long-er," thought he, "for I am get-ting ve-ry big and strong, and have a pair of hands that ought not to be i-dle. As my poor mo-ther gets weak-er, I should work for her; and as I grow in-to a man, she should not work any more, but sit by the fire and get the din-ner rea-dy, which I shall then be a-ble to la-bour for."

[Illustration: MEETING THE HANDS.]

Wil-lie was of an in-dus-tri-ous mind, and did not love to sit i-dle when e-ven his ti-ny strength might be used to some end.

So he sat and lis-ten-ed for the foot-step of his poor mo-ther, who, he knew, would come home, wea-ri-ed with la-bour, to share her scan-ty crust with her boy.

He had not to wait long be-fore the latch lift-ed, and his mo-ther en-ter-ed. She kiss-ed him, and threw her-self in-to a chair, with the tears of fa-tigue and ex-haus-tion in her eyes.

He em-bra-ced her, and whis-per-ed in-to her ear his firm resolve to start out in-to the world, and seek for la-bour, that he might no long-er be a bur-then to her. Her heart sank at the i-dea; but she saw no o-ther means to save them from star-va-tion, as her fail-ing strength gave warn-ing of the in-e-vi-ta-ble e-vil.

The morn-ing a-rose bright and cheer-ful. The old lock-er was o-pen-ed, and his on-ly shoes, trea-sur-ed for high-days and ho-li-days, were ta-ken out and brush-ed up, as was al-so his best suit, which was in-deed ve-ry lit-tle bet-ter than the care-ful-ly mend-ed suit of his e-ve-ry-day wear. He, how-e-ver, thought him-self ve-ry fine, and felt that his ap-pear-ance would act as a re-com-men-da-tion in his fa-vour.

They sat down to break-fast: it was a ve-ry tear-ful one, and, with a strange feel-ing, they a-void-ed each o-ther's looks, hop-ing to hide their tears one from the o-ther.

Oh! it want-ed a great re-so-lu-tion for poor Wil-lie to say, "Well! dear mo-ther, I must be start-ing;" but he did do it at last, al-though it was af-ter ma-ny strug-gles to keep down the beat-ings of his heart.

[Illustration: THE FIRST ASSISTANCE.]

His mo-ther heard him with a be-wil-der-ed look, as if she heard the pro-po-sal for the first time; and her grief burst forth with un-con-trol-la-ble vi-o-lence as she threw her arms round his neck with an a-go-ny on-ly known to a fond mo-ther.

He tried to com-fort her, and to smile through his tears, as he put on his hat with a re-so-lute thump, seiz-ed up-on his stick and wal-let, and lift-ed the latch of the door that was to o-pen for his bold en-trance in-to the world, so full of pro-mise to him.

Again they lin-ger-ed in their lit-tle gar-den, where e-ve-ry flow-er seem-ed an old friend to be part-ed with: a-gain the tears and the em-bra-ces. At last the lit-tle gate was swung wide o-pen, and Wil-lie step-ped bold-ly forth. His mo-ther co-ver-ed her face and wept. He turn-ed to-wards her with ir-re-so-lu-tion: he felt how dif-fi-cult it was to leave one so dear and af-fec-tion-ate; but his du-ty was sim-ple, and he would do it: with one more "good bye," he was gone on his way weep-ing.

The lark rose in the morn-ing sky, and sang her joy-ous song. The sweet, bal-my air of ear-ly day cool-ed his throb-bing brow, and his tears gra-du-al-ly ceas-ed to flow; but his lit-tle breast heav-ed now and then with sobs as the storm of grief sub-si-ded. His foot-steps grew quick-er the far-ther he left his home be-hind; for be-fore him lay the land of pro-mise, and his lit-tle brain was full of dreams of suc-cess, and the con-se-quent joy that would be at his heart when he re-trod those ve-ry fields on his re-turn, la-den with rich-es to throw in-to his mo-ther's lap.

[Illustration: THE LITTLE TENT.]

As these thoughts rush-ed through his mind, they gave him much com-fort; and he even hummed an air as he trot-ted on, to show his man-li-ness and cou-rage.

Pre-sen-tly, as he pass-ed through a val-ley which was la-den with the sweets of wild flow-ers that bloom-ed on ei-ther side, a cu-ri-ous and al-most trans-pa-rent flee-cy cloud ap-pear-ed a-cross his path, from which a-rose two e-nor-mous hands. He start-ed, and well he might, for he saw no-bo-dy be-long-ing to them: no, there they were, on-ly hands. There was no fear of them, for they were spread o-pen up-on the grass be-fore him with-out the slight-est ex-pres-sion of threat-en-ing in them.

As he stood ga-zing with won-der up-on them, a voice, which ap-pear-ed to pr-oceed from the cloud, said,--

"Wil-lie, be not a-fraid: I know the praise-wor-thy er-rand that you are on, and I come to be-friend you. Per-se-vere in your de-sire to be in-dus-tri-ous, and I will be e-ver rea-dy to as-sist you. I shall be in-vi-si-ble to all eyes but yours, and will work when the need ap-pears. Come on, then, and fear not; the road to suc-cess is o-pen to you, as it al-ways is to in-dus-tri-ous re-so-lu-tion."

"Thank you, good hands," said Wil-lie; "I am sure you mean me good, for I am too lit-tle for you to wish to harm." The arms va-nish-ed, and Wil-lie pro-ceed-ed on his way.

He felt so re-as-su-red by this ex-tra-or-di-na-ry ad-ven-ture, which pro-mi-sed so well for his fu-ture suc-cess, that he leap-ed and dan-ced a-long his path with ex-cite-ment and de-light: he look-ed for-ward to no ob-sta-ble to stop him in his ca-reer, and he pur-su-ed his way re-joic-ing.

[Illustration: THE OGRESS'S CASTLE.]

How-e-ver, as the day grew on, he slack-en-ed his pace, for the un-ac-cus-tom-ed fa-tigue be-gan to tell up-on his frame; so at last he threw him-self up-on the grass, and look-ed up-wards to the blue sky, and watch-ed the flee-cy clouds pur-sue each o-ther a-cross the bound-less ex-panse of the hea-vens. As he lay, half dream-ing, he thought he heard some-thing like the roll-ing of thun-der: he lis-ten-ed with great-er at-ten-tion, un-til he was as-sur-ed there was some cause in his close vi-ci-ni-ty for the un-u-su-al and cu-ri-ous sounds. He a-rose, and pro-ceed-ed to-wards the di-rec-tion of the sounds, which grew loud-er and loud-er as he ad-van-ced; when, com-ing to the edge of a pre-ci-pice, he be-held a grand and aw-ful rush of foam-ing wa-ters, which threw them-selves head-long down the riv-en rocks with a deaf-en-ing roar and tu-mult.

He look-ed from right to left, and his way seem-ed bar-red by this tre-men-dous ob-sta-ble. His heart fail-ed him as he saw how im-pos-si-ble it was for him to pro-ceed: in-deed, as he sat him-self down on the edge of the ca-ta-ract, he could not help weep-ing at his un-ex-pect-ed di-lem-ma.

He had not been ma-ny mi-nutes in-dul-ging in his grief, when he felt him-self gent-ly lift-ed from the ground by a gi-gan-tic hand, which pass-ed him high a-bove the threat-en-ing wa-ters, and pla-ced him in safe-ty on the op-po-site bank. As the hand put him on his feet, it be-came in-dis-tinct; but be-fore it had quite van-ish-ed, Wil-lie took off his hat, and, bow-ing, said,--"Thank you kind-ly, good hand; you have kept your promise well."

[Illustration: THE OGRESS'S CASTLE.]

Cer-tain now that the fai-ry hands were not a dream, which he had real-ly be-gun to think them, his cou-rage rose with the con-vic-tion of the pro-tec-tion which sur-round-ed him from their great pow-er and good-will to-wards him.

He soon came to a dense wood, where the gi-gan-tic trees, with gnarl-ed and twist-ed trunks, wound their e-nor-mous limbs a-round each o-ther in the most fan-tas-tic forms, and the tan-gled un-der-wood twi-ned like snakes a-cross the path, as if to for-bid any ven-tu-rous foot from en-ter-ing into the dark green depths. He, how-e-ver, look-ed up-on all such ob-sta-cles as no-thing in com-pa-ri-son with the last which he had been en-a-bled to sur-mount with the as-sist-ance of the hands. So he plun-ged on, strik-ing right and left, to clear his way, with his good stick. As he was lay-ing a-bout with a right good will, he was brought to a stand-still by a fe-ro-ci-ous growl. He turn-ed his eyes a-round, and be-held, much to his dis-may, a fierce wolf pre-par-ing to spring up-on him. He shrank down with ter-ror as he look-ed up-on the white teeth and fi-e-ry eyes of the sa-vage brute, and gave him-self up for lost, when, to his joy, one of the great hands e-mer-ged from a-midst the thick fo-li-age of a tree, and pla-ced it-self be-tween him and his en-e-my; at the same time the o-ther hand seiz-ed the wolf, and crush-ed it in its grasp.

Wil-lie fell on his knees, and re-turn-ed thanks for his de-li-ver-ance; then, look-ing round for the hands, he found they had va-nish-ed.

[Illustration: THE KITCHEN OF THE OGRESS.]

Wea-ri-ed with his jourNEY, he sat down un-der a tree, de-ter-min-ed to rest for the night; and pull-ing out his wal-let, pre-par-ed to re-fresh him-self with part of its con-tents, for he had scarce-ly eat-en any all day, so com-plete-ly had he been ta-ken up by the won-der-ful ap-pear-ance of the good hands.

Af-ter fi-nish-ing his meal, which he did with ex-ceed-ing rel-ish, he be-gan to turn o-ver in his mind how he was to make up his bed in his ve-ry large bed-cham-ber, for it ap-pear-ed as if he had got the great fo-rest all to him-self. When he had col-lect-ed a suf-fi-ci-en-cy of dri-ed leaves to-ge-ther to make his rest-ing place soft-er, he pre-par-ed to lie down, when, to his as-to-nish-ment and de-light, he be-held the gi-gan-tic hands spread them-selves over him, with the fin-gers en-twin-ed, ma-king for him the most per-fect lit-tle tent in the world. How his heart bound-ed with gra-ti-tude to-wards the good fai-ry hands, as he felt how safe-ly he might in-dulge in his slum-bers be-neath such pro-tec-tion!

"Thank you a-gain, good hands," said he, "for your kind care of me; but be-fore I say my pray-ers, can-not you, since you are so pow-er-ful, tell me some-thing of my dear mo-ther--whe-ther she is more con-so-led, and whe-ther she has food to eat?"

"Good Wil-lie," re-plied a voice, "your mo-ther knows that you will be pro-tec-ted, as all good chil-dren are; and she has food, for she is in-dus-tri-ous; her hands were giv-en to her from my king-dom, in which no i-dle hands are ever made, as you shall know from me here-af-ter. Sleep, then, in peace, that you may rise pre-pa-red for la-bour on the com-ing morn." So Wil-lie slept.

[Illustration: THE DEATH OF THE OGRESS.]

Wil-lie was ear-ly a-foot; for the day, ac-cord-ing to the hands, was to be a day of la-bour, with its fruits. He soon left the wood be-hind him, and saw a large cas-tle before him.

"Here, sure-ly, is some-thing to be done," thought he; so he leapt up the steps, and tri-ed to raise the knock-er, but it was too hea-vy for his pu-ny strength. In an in-s-tant the hands ap-pear-ed, and knock-ed such a dou-ble knock, that it e-cho-ed like thun-der through the val-ley, and you might have heard it rum-bling a-way on the dis-tant moun-tains.

The door o-pen-ed with a sud-den jerk, and the mis-tress of the man-sion ap-pear-ed. The mo-ment Wil-lie saw her, he back-ed down the steps, for she was an o-gress, and as ug-ly as o-gress-es ge-ne-ral-ly are. She gla-red up-on the lit-tle-man who she sup-po-sed had giv-en that great knock, with sur-prise and as-to-nish-ment; and then, in a voice like a ve-ry hoarse ra-ven, she cri-ed--

"How dar-ed you to knock like that at my door, you lit-tle var-let? You have put me all in a twit-ter."

Wil-lie trem-bling-ly took off his hat, and re-pli-ed in an hum-ble voice, "If you please, prin-cess, I wish-ed to know whe-ther you want-ed a ser-vant to as-sist in your mag-ni-fi-cent cas-tle."

"A ser-vant, brat!" said she; "what can you do?"

"Any-thing to please your high-ness, for I want to work."

"Oh, oh! do you? Then, come in, for my ser-vants have all left me be-cause I don't put my work out," said she.

[Illustration: THE RESCUE.]

With that, Wil-lie en-ter-ed, and soon found that he had plen-ty to do; for his first job was to get the o-gress's din-ner ready, who, in truth, had no de-li-cate ap-pe-tite, for the pro-vi-si-on con-sist-ed of fish, fowl, beef, soup, mut-ton, and ham-pers of ve-ge-ta-bles.

He sigh-ed as he look-ed up-on such a-bun-dance, which would have di-ned sump-tu-ous-ly his own na-tive vil-lage. A-gain he sigh-ed: as he did so, the gi-ant hands ap-pear-ed. If you could on-ly have seen them truss this, skew-er that, boil the o-ther, turn out the sau-ces, pick the pic-kles, cut the bread, and put the dish-es to the fire, you would have been as-to-nish-ed, Wil-lie all the time do-ing all he knew to aid in the work.

The o-gress di-ned, and smi-led up-on her trea-sure of a ser-vant.

Self-in-dul-gent people are al-ways un-grate-ful; and so the o-gress pro-ved, for she was con-ti-nu-al-ly de-si-ring more and more at the hands of poor Wil-lie, un-til he had no rest: and, one day, when she had been more im-po-sing than u-su-al, he turn-ed round, and told her that she left him hard-ly time to sleep, and that her ap-pe-tite was fright-ful.

Could you have seen her face, you would have been as fright-en-ed as Wil-lie was.

"Lit-tle wretch!" scream-ed she, "I have half a mind to snap you up as I would the wing of a chick-en: and, re-mem-ber from this mo-ment, if my din-ner is short of what I de-sire, I will eat you to make up for what you have o-mit-ted."

"Then I shall leave you," said Wil-lie.

[Illustration: THE REAPING.]

Rage made the face of the o-gress glow like a fur-nace, as she made a pounce at poor Wil-lie for his ill-ad-vis-ed speech; and she would have caught him in her gripe, had he not dod-ded round a large bun-dle of ve-ge-ta-bles which luck-i-ly lay on the floor. Round and round she went af-ter him, un-til he felt that he must be caught; when a ve-ry large hand grasp-ed her round the waist, and hur-ri-ed her, yell-ing, out of the kit-chen; Wil-lie fol-low-ing, re-turn-ing thanks for his de-li-ver-ance. They came to a large win-dow which o-pen-ed to the sea: the hand thrust the o-gress out, and held her ex-ten-ded over the roll-ing waves.

"Mercy! mercy!" groan-ed, the o-gress, as she gaz-ed upon the aw-ful depth be-neath her.

The hand gra-du-al-ly re-lax-ed its hold; and the o-gress, with one des-pair-ing cry, whirl-ed o-ver and o-ver, and fell with such a plump in-to the sea, that the spray flew o-ver the high-est tow-er, and the fish-es swam a-way in ter-ror. She went down, down, down: but never came up, up, up.

Wil-lie ran out of the front door; and when he got to the mar-gin of the sea, he turn-ed his eye to the waves, ex-pect-ing every mo-ment to see the head of the dread-ful o-gress pop up a-gain; but it did not. He saw the good hands fol-low-ing him: they plun-ged into the sea close at his feet; he jump-ed in-to the palm of one, and seat-ed himself. Be-tween the fin-ger and thumb of each hand was one of his cook-ing forks, stuck through two of the o-gress's ve-ry best hand-ker-chiefs, which made ve-ry ad-mi-ra-ble sails, catch-ing the wind, and waft-ing him a-long o-ver the sea as well as the fi-nest ship e-ver built.

[Illustration: THE PLOUGHING.]

As the moon rose, it found him safe-ly land-ed and snug under the roof of a good farm-er who had pro-mi-sed him work--ay, e-ven as much as he could do: but the farm-er did not know the trea-sure he pos-sess-ed, for the next morn-ing lit-tle Wil-lie was work-ing in his shirt-sleeves in the corn-field reap-ing and shear-ing as much as two men, and stout ones too, could do in a long day. But there, un-der the shel-ter of the high corn, were the friend-ly hands work-ing mi-ra-cles; ga-ther-ing up the corn, and put-ting it in-to sheaves in a man-ner that could not be e-qual-led by mor-tal hands.

Wil-lie whistl-ed, and cut a-way, not-with-stand-ing the burn-ing heat of the sun: his sic-kle glis-ten-ed, and the corn fell in such long sweeps that I do be-lieve it was as ma-gi-cal as the hands them-selves.

The long-est day will, how-e-ver, have an end: but when Wil-lie's first

day wa-ned, the farm-er was struck with as-to-nish-ment at be-hold-ing the gold-en rows of hea-vy corn, stand-ing for his ad-mi-ra-tion in the well ti-ed sheaves. He look-ed from the lit-tle man to the fruits of his la-bour, and pro-mi-sed to him-self to do his best to se-cure so va-lu-a-ble a ser-vant.

"Oh, oh!" said the farm-er, "if he can reap so well, per-haps he can plough:" so ac-cord-ing-ly the next morn-ing found lit-tle Wil-lie as a plough-man. But how could he know how to do it? any one would say. Why, the hands guid-ed the plough; and the lands were plough-ed in fur-rows as straight as the flight of an ar-row sped by the strong-est arm.

[Illustration: THE BRIDGE.]

The farm-er watch-ed from his win-dow, but the hands were in-vi-si-ble to his eyes: he saw the plough cut its way un-err-ing-ly in-to the bo-som of the earth, in a man-ner that sur-pri-sed e-ven his ex-pe-ri-ence, and he a-gain bless-ed his good for-tune that had giv-en him such a won-der-ful lit-tle la-bour-er.

Wil-lie sat at the board of the good farm-er, who thought he could not make too much of him, for he was grate-ful to the in-dus-tri-ous youth, who seem-ed to take plea-sure in work-ing for the in-ter-est of his mas-ter. Time roll-ed on, and Wil-lie be-came quite head man, for it was found that he could be en-trust-ed with any-thing. One day, when he was out on the moun-tains, where he had gone to ga-ther the flocks for the shear-ing, heavy storms came on, and the floods de-lu-ged the val-ley, sweep-ing the flocks and the herds a-way in their head-long course. Wil-lie wise-ly kept his charge upon the moun-tain's side un-til the wa-ters had in some de-gree sub-si-ded; but he was a-larm-ed when he de-scend-ed in-to the val-leys to find that, in ma-ny pla-ces, the wa-ter was im-pass-a-ble to his charge. As he stood in deep thought, the gi-ant hands spread them-selves over the tur-bid wa-ters, form-ing the most per-fect bridge im-a-gin-a-ble. He drove the sheep a-cross with-out fear, and reach-ed his mas-ter's house in safe-ty, much to the joy of all, who had giv-en him up for lost.

[Illustration: THE ESCAPE FROM THE FIRE.]

As Wil-lie lay down that night, full of gra-ti-tude for his great good for-tune, and think-ing of his home, to which he knew he should so soon re-turn to take hap-pi-ness to his fond mo-ther, he was sud-den-ly a-rous-ed by screams of ter-ror and cries of a-larm. He jump-ed from his bed, and put-ting on his clothes, rush-ed in-to the farm-yard, where, to his hor-ror, he be-held his good mas-ter wring-ing his hands, and a-ban-don-ed to grief; for the flames were fast de-vour-ing his peace-ful house, and, worse than all, they had reach-ed the cham-ber of his fa-vour-ite daugh-ter, whom he had in vain at-tempt-ed to res-cue, for no lad-der could reach her win-dow, and the stair-case had long been burnt. Wil-lie look-ed on in des-pair, for he could de-vise no means to save the poor child; when sud-den-ly the gi-ant hands ap-pear-ed, and plac-ing them-selves a-against the side of the house, form-ed a lad-der, up which Wil-lie sprang with-out the least he-si-ta-tion. In a few mo-ments he gain-ed the suf-fo-cat-ing cham-ber of the girl, and fold-ing her in his arms, rush-ed down the friend-ly hands, and pla-ced her, unharmed, in the em-brace of her des-pair-ing fa-ther.

A hea-vi-ly la-den wag-gon creaks along the wind-ing road, co-ver-ed with a tilt as white as snow; but what has it in-side? You can peep and see: beau-ti-ful ta-bles and chairs, and sides of ba-con, and geese and chick-ens, and fair round chees-es, and rolls of gold-en but-ter, with white eggs peep-ing through the bars of their wick-er pris-on. Where is the wag-gon go-ing? To mar-ket, per-haps: ask the youth who is trudg-ing by its side, with a smil-ing, hap-py face, rud-dy with health and the warm tinge of the sun.

[Illustration: THE TRIUMPHANT RETURN.]

Why, I de-clare that it is Wil-lie, grown quite stout and strong! Where is he go-ing with that well-stored wag-gon, which real-ly has no hor-ses to draw it, and yet it goes for-ward at a pret-ty pace? Why, I do be-lieve that the gi-ant hands are drag-ging it along!

It is Wil-lie, in-deed; and, joy-ous mo-ment! he is go-ing home. In his pock-et he has much bright sil-ver, the pro-duce of his la-bour: the con-tents of the wag-gon shows the farm-er's gra-ti-tude to Wil-lie for his promp-ti-tude, en-er-gy, and in-dus-try; and, more than all, for his risk-ing his life to save that of his dar-ling child.

At last the cot-tage path is reach-ed. His mo-ther is stand-ing at the gate: Wil-lie shouts; such a heart-y shout! His mo-ther looks up-on him, but can-not speak: he is soon in her arms.

That night they sat late be-side their blaz-ing hearth: a-midst the smoke might now be seen a large well-filled pot bub-bling with some-thing more than wa-ter in it.

How much Wil-lie had to tell his mo-ther of his la-bour, and what he ow-ed to the won-der-ful gi-ant hands, pre-serv-ing him through all dan-gers, and e-ver yield-ing him as-sist-ance!

Wil-lie's mo-ther smi-led up-on him, as he con-clu-ded his nar-ra-tive, with a kiss.

"Dear child," said she, "you have been in-deed for-tu-nate; but you were de-serv-ing. That which ap-pears to you as a mi-ra-cle is none. Those gi-ant hands have been known to ma-ny: their pow-er is e-nor-mous; they al-ways as-sist the will-ing and the good; the re-ward they be-stow is cer-tain; they are the pow-er-ful _hands of In-dus-try._

THE END.

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16. Cinderella; or, the Three Sisters.
17. The Three Bears.
18. Beauty and the Beast.
19. Aladdin; or, the Wonderful Lamp.
20. The Babes in the Wood.
21. Jack the Giant Killer.
22. The Dog's Dinner Party.
23. Puss in Boots.
24. Hop o' my Thumb.
25. The Butterfly's Ball.
26. Little Red Riding Hood.
27. The Little Dog Trusty (By Maria Edgeworth).
28. The Cherry Orchard.
29. Dick Whittington and his Cat.
30. The History of Our Pets.
31. Punch and Judy.
32. The History of John Gilpin.
33. The History of Blue Beard.
34. Old Mother Hubbard.
35. Little Totty.
36. Cock Robin. (Death and Burial of)
37. Sinbad the Sailor. (The History of)
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39. The House that Jack Built.

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