

## **Title**

"Chip." *St. Nicholas*, 1 October 1874, 689-92.

Chip led a very quiet life until the occurrences of the remarkable adventures which have made him famous. He was the third son of a Sand-Martin—one of that ancient family of Sand-Martins which has lived for generations in a hill overlooking the river Dee, in Cheshire. (An English family, of course.) Chip lived in a castle. Common birds build their houses of hay, or grass, or mud, and hang them on trees, of which they have but one year's lease. But the Sand-Martins all are of Norman blood, and dwell in castles hollowed out of the solid rock. The inside of Chip's family castle was quite half-a-foot wide, lined with soft material; and you entered it by a round, sloping hall, two feet long, tunneled out of the yellow sandstone. Chip and his brothers were told by their mother every day that there was nothing finer in the world than this approach; and when they stood in the door of it, and looked down at their possessions,—at the face of the rock, hung with weeds and moss, and the estuary below, sparkling in the sun, and the vast grey sea beyond that,—they felt like princes, indeed. They would have liked to fly about and travel over their kingdom, as princes ought to do, but were unable to do so on account of various robber bands of kestrels and sparrow-hawks that infested the country.

“Next year,” their father said, “when we return from the South, you will be large enough to take care of yourselves.”

Their father was late that fall in taking them to the South. (He had a summer estate in Algeria.) He was old and of a philosophic disposition: the young birds might peck and cackle as they chose, there he sat, day after day, calmly squatted at the door of his castle, his beak buried in his white barred breast, his eyes blinking in the sun.

“Don’t disturb him, children,” said their mother. “Old people’s thoughts are too high and far-reach-ing for little folks to understand.” Then she re-marked to him that “the snails were unusually tough in Cheshire this year,” offering him one.

“Pah!” He hopped away disgusted. “Is this the best you can do? Why, when I think of the fine fat slugs creeping about our summer garden— ah-h!” winking with delight. “We ’ll start to-morrow.”

Now, there were no trunks to pack, no tickets to buy, nothing to do but to dip their wings, in the river next morning and be off to Algeria.

But Chip was never to see Algeria.

That night he went out of the castle to look at their possessions by moonlight. It was disobeying his mother to go out of the castle by night. We have all often heard what instantly happens to boys or birds who disobey their mothers. A hawk swooped down out of a cloud and struck poor Chip in the back of the neck. He fell through the air, then into the water. When he came up, the hawk was gone. Chip fluttered up to shore. He was wounded and drenched; the salt water was in his eyes and throat; he could not utter a croak. He lay on the sand until daybreak. Then he saw his father and brothers, and his dear, fat, pudgy mother, flying wildly about, calling, in search of him. They flew within a yard of him; but he could not give one single chirp so that they might hear. All that day they searched, and then, colder and more feeble than before, he heard them talk-ing together. They were quite sure that he was drowned in the Dee; there was nothing left for them to do but to go and leave him, dead, behind. Chip could hardly bear to look at his mother when he heard this. His father looked as if he had grown into a grey old bird with the grief of that day, and even his two brothers sat dumb and had forgotten to squabble or to eat. But they would forget him presently, and chirp and flutter about again.

But he knew that his mother would never forget.

Late in the day, they all slowly rose from the tree where they were perched, and circling solemnly once or twice about their old home, in sign of fare-well, they flew in a straight line—four dark, swift, steady figures—direct to the South.

“Hoy, hoy! What is this?” cried a voice just above him.

It was a loud, hearty voice. A little girl picked him up and held him to her face. It was a hearty face, with honest blue eyes. And her hand was as warm and firm as his mother’s breast.

“‘Most dead! Tut, tut!”

She held him tight and ran with him. The next minute she plumped him down on a clean table in the middle of a warm kitchen.

“It ’s a martin—’most dead—fallen out of his hole! I found him just outside of my onion-patch. So he ’s mine!”

“Very well, Jane,” said her mother.

She began vigorously to tie up his broken leg with rags, and to feed him with egg and crumb.

Chip stood up on his well leg and looked about him, with one eye shut and his head cocked to one side. The kitchen was bright and warm; Jane's red-cheeked mother kneading the bread was a comfortable sight to see; eggs and crumb were better than worms. But to call his kingdom an onion-patch, and his castle a hole! What did she mean by that—hey? He swaggered up to her fiercely. "Poor little mite!" said Jane. "Its mother must have worried for it sorely to-day!"

She stroked him with her thick fingers. Chip hid his head under his wing at hearing his mother's name, and kept it there all day.

But, in a week, Chip never left Jane's side. Did others offer even to give him food, they were very sure to be pecked at by the bird and snubbed by the girl. She was a hot-tempered, affectionate little body; but apt to hold a tight grip on all her belongings. What was Jane's, was Jane's; and, in her opinion, nothing could match it in the world.

It was about this time that Jane's father took her into Chester. Although the town was only a dozen miles away, she never had been there; to tell the truth, she never had been a mile away from the farm-house and barn. No wonder she thought they were really the world, and all that lay outside was but an unpleasant sort of dream. When her father was out foddering the cattle that evening, she talked very fast, telling her mother all about her adventures; while Chip, perched on the ledge of the window where the sun still shone, listened without a chirp. Jane, while her father was leaving his potatoes at different shops, had had plenty of time to look about her; but nothing had pleased or amused her,—not even the cathedral nor the great wall about the town, nor the busy streets.

"It was all nothing but stones, stones. It seemed to me like a big jail," said she.

Her father came in just then.

“Jane was hard put to ’t to get her breath," he said, laughing. “She made an acquaintance while the cart stood in front of Osper’s shop that took the spirit out o’ her, I think.”

“Who was that, child?” cried her mother, anxiously. “I warned ye not to speak nor be spoken to.”

“ ’T was but a child like herself,” said the far—mer, seeing that Jane could say nothing. “She seemed to have no name but Chriss. One of that ragged crew that hang around the gin and grocer shops. When I saw her speakin’ to our Jane, I drove her away. She was a bad un, my girl.”

“Yes, that I ’m sure of,” interjected her mother, putting down a dish of smoking stew; for the farmer would have meat on his table once a day. He held a life-lease on his bit of land; no need for him to live on dry bread, with a bit of lard to grease it on a Sunday, as did many of the farm-laborers he knew.

Jane went to her place at the table in silence. Very likely her new friend was “a bad un,” but there was a dreadful hungry look in her face, that showed she never sat down to a supper like this—never tasted stew. Hungry as Jane was, this was the first idea that came to her. There were other things of which the girl could have known nothing; and Jane looked out quickly at the sun shining on the barn and quiet stubble-fields; the marshes beyond, and the tide rushing into the grey evening with a flash and sparkle on its farthest breakers.

“When she has nothing but stones about her, and grocer and gin shops, how can she help but be a bad un?” she thought.

But she said nothing. She always kept her mind to herself. Jolting home in the cart, she had planned to go back with her father next week, and carry vegetables, a chicken, one of Dame Trot’s kittens, a big geranium, sea-shells—anything which would give to the girl a hint of the

world outside of her jail. But these things were her mother's. "I've nothing of my own—nothing at all," she said to herself all the time of supper. She could not keep the hot tears out of her eyes. She had so wanted to give the girl pleasure!

"What have I of my own to give away," she said again, as the bird hopped on her shoulder and laid its bill against her cheek, "except Chip?"

"Chip!" She shook her head vehemently, and caught him in both her hands, hugging him closely.

But Jane went with her father the next week, and she carried Chip under her cloak. It was snowing lightly. He was not cold at all; but she stroked and held him tight to her warm stuff jacket, under which the little heart ached and throbbed as though some-body were dead. When they reached the gate in the great wall leading to the wretched quarter where Chriss lived, Jane saw a filthy petticoat and a black, uncombed head of hair at the door of Osper's shop, which she recognized. She put her hand on the reins, her chubby face pale and scared, but obstinate.

"Father, I brought Chip to give to that girl yonder. He's my own, father."

"Oh-o!" eyeing her keenly. "Whatever would you do that for, Jane? The girl's nothing to you."

"I thought I'd bring her something from home. She's never seen the hills nor the Dee, nor anything."

"Tut, tut! Can the martin tell her about them? But, there now! don't cry. Run and give her the bird, if you have a mind to do it. Here is Osper; I'll talk to him a bit."

Jane ran to the gate. Inside, a heavy, black cloud of smoke rolled over the low, gabled buildings. One or two dirty workmen were passing with loads on their shoulders. Chriss stopped and looked at her attentively, but did not smile.

“I brought him for you,” cried Jane, urging the bird into her hands. “It ’s the only thing that is all mine. You ’ll be good to him, wont you?”

“To give to *me*? ” bewildered.

“Yes. yes. His name is Chip. He ’ll hop on your shoulder when you call him. Oh, dear! Poor Chip!” her eyes full of tears, and putting out her fingers for a final stroke. “But you ’ll be good to him, I know.”

“Birds,” said Chriss, “sell for money in town. I ’m not to sell this one?”

“No, indeed, you ’re not,” angrily.

“Nor pawn him?”

“Pawn?” said Jane, puzzled. “If you do any-thing with him, I ’ll come straight back and take him home.”

Chriss laughed. “That ’s right. I ’ll tell Bob that, and then I can keep him.” She ran off without a word of thanks. But Jane was satisfied.

“I don't believe she ever laughed before in her life,” she said, as she hurried back to the cart.

“What is the matter, Bob?”

Chrissy did not often speak so gently to her brother, but his wild look frightened her.

“I have not heard a bird like that since we came to this accursed place. There were plenty of them at Gwynedd. Don't you remember, Chrissy?”

“No.” But the girl did what she never had done in her life before—took up her brother's hand and held it affectionately.

“They made their nests in the rock all along the coast. I used to take their eggs—hundreds of them; but not near home. Mother would n't have them troubled. She liked their twitter.”

The boy was not in the habit of talking. There was something in his rapid words now that seemed to Chrissy unreal and crazed. He sat down again by the box, however, and buried his face in his hands.

All night Chip woke to flutter and chirp.

In the morning, Chrissy was wakened by Bob standing over her, pale and haggard.

“Who brought that bird here?”



“A carter, from out on the Dee.”

“Where can I see him?”

“At Osper’s shop, this afternoon.”

To tell our story shortly, Bob was waiting for Jane’s father that day, and talked to him a long time. When the old man went home, he said:

“I ’ve hired a man, mother, and I ’m to pay him low wage on account of his being weakly—run down in the lead-works. He ’s to have Grummer’s cottage by the cliff.”

“Got a wife?”

“No, nothin’ but a sister. That ’s an old ac-~~q~~uaintance of yours, Jane. They ’re honest folks, I ’ll engage, though they ’re poor enough. The young man wants to save enough to go out to America.”

In a week’s time, Bob, with a decent suit of clothes, redder cheeks, and a light heart, was at work in Grummer’s cottage. Jane’s mother had taken Chriss into her kindly care; and Chip was inspecting the castle preparatory to fitting it up to receive his family when they returned from Algeria. We may be sure he would be plumed and waiting in the door of it to meet them. But Bob was never quite sure that he was a live bird.

“He saved me from a great misery,” he says. “It seems as if mother must have sent him.”

**Creator**

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