OVER THE BROW OF THE HILL: A STORY
BY MARIE LOUISE GOETCHIUS

There was the big white bed, and on it lay the tired little child, who had been tired for a very long while. Sitting beside the child there was the Mother.

The twilight hour spilled shadow pools over the big pink room. Light from the fading rose sun, drifted petal by petal in through the shaded window and fell upon the un-played-with toys in the corner.

The old clock ticked and stopped to listen and ticked and stopped to listen.

The child’s hair lay tangled upon the pillow. It seemed to be trying to crawl away in thin, curved golden strands from the white blue-veined little forehead.

The Mother held the child’s small elusive hand and the Mother’s eyes were black with unshed pain. But the child’s eyes were wide and wondering and the child asked questions in a whisper voice that barely stirred the words.

“Mother, shall I stay here long?”
“No, my Little.”
“When can I play again, Mother?”
“Soon, my Little.”
“But I don’t want to play now. When shall I want to play?”
“Soon, my Little.”
“Mother, why do you look so sad?”
“Mother’s not—sad, child.”
“You come and lie down and I’ll sit there. Oh, I can’t raise my head, Mother. It’s a mean feeling. Please take it away—I’m frightened.”
“It won’t be long, child dear. The feeling will soon steal away.”
“Why, Mother, you’re crying—I’m frightened.”
“There’s nothing to be frightened of, love child.”
“Yes, there is. It’s all so strange. It isn’t as if it were just bedtime. It always seems bedtime now. Give me my doll. She might lie here with me.”

The Mother brought the doll—the child cuddled it close to her.
“Mother, it’s cold.”

The Mother drew a pink comforter over the white bed. The child began picking at its tufts.

And the Mother’s heart wept—“Dear God—any hour now. How can I keep her from knowing and being afraid?”
“Mother, something queer’s happening. You always tell me everything. Why can’t I sleep tonight?”
And the Mother’s heart wept—“How can I keep my lamb from being afraid—at the last?”

“You always used to explain things to me in stories, Mother. Put me to sleep with a wonderful story. Make me feel warm with a story, and take away the dark ‘fraid feeling.”

“If I can lead her gently to the Sleep, she will never have known fear,” cried the anguished heart of the Mother. “If I should see fear in my darling’s eyes—it would haunt my own death. She must smile, and let go of my hand smiling. Of me—nothing now.”

So she sat on the lonely edge of the twilight, and it was as if the big soft bed were a white ocean, rocking her Only One, her frail child away from her—on into a Blue Beyond—while her voice from the Beaches, as the child sailed palely out of reach, became fainter to hear and fainter to hear—telling the Wonderful Story.

“There was once”—she began—“a dear baby girl, who lived in a very beautiful garden, and all the flowers that grew about her—

“What kind of flowers, Mother?”

“Roses and mignonette and jonquils and violets, and every other kind of flower which smells sweet, my Little. And all the birds who sang in the trees—

“What kind of birds, Mother?”

“Thrushes and nightingales, dear. And the blue sky, and the brook that laughed and tossed its silver hair—all these things loved my Little—loved the baby girl. Nothing but the beautiful was known to her.”

“Did she have dolls and candy and a mother—Mother?”

“Yes, dear, she had dolls and candy and a—mother. There was the Spirit of the Garden too. This Spirit showed the baby girl how to play, and kept her from harm.”

“What did the Spirit look like, Mother?”

“It looked like early morning and spring and it had little children’s eyes and wings as white as apple blossoms, and it spoke like the voice of water before it reaches the sea—and it had the heart of all things untouched.”

“I don’t understand, Mother, but I like the Spirit.”

“The garden was shut away from the world by a big thick wall of pearl. The child ran and sang and played with balls that flashed like rainbows in the sun. Sometimes, too, she went wading in the brook.”

“Oh, I’d like to go, Mother.”

“She went wading, and chased tiny silver fish that she never quite caught. Then she would sleep under the trees, and the happy sun would climb down through the leaves and kiss her.”
"Where was the mother?"
"The mother was sitting by, in the shadows, dear—watching her baby girl——"
"Go on, Mother."
"But the baby girl could not stay in the garden forever——"
"Why couldn't she, Mother?—Oh, you hurt my hand—you are holding it so tightly, so tightly."
"No, my Little, I am not hurting you. Because the child grew tired of the garden—she had played with everything there. She pressed her eager little face now against the white bars of the garden gate, and she looked and looked at the country beyond—until the Spirit knew that the child must pass through the garden gate. Then the mother wept, for she had been in the country beyond, and had seen many dangers and terrible things there. She wept so hard at the thought of the child meeting these dangers, that the Spirit took great pity on her——"
"What kind of dangers, Mother?"
"Storms and blackness and rain that breaks delicate things, and hands that wring desolately, and voices that cry, and eyes that weep, dear."
"I’d hate the black, Mother."
"So the Spirit took pity on the wisdom in the mother, which dreaded the passing of her child beyond the gates—and It said to her as she stood loving her child—‘There is another way. There is a road that leads off over the brow of the hill, but you can only walk half that road now with the child. Later you may meet her by going the other way. But this road is so white that only tiny light feet may touch it—the feet which leave no print. Yours would darken this road, for you have wandered much and dipped your feet in the shadows which stain.’ The mother could not decide at once, so the Spirit decided for her. The child should go by the white road. ‘You may guide her’—It said to the mother—‘to the brow of the hill, since you love her so much—but over the brow of the hill, the child shall go alone and she will find such a beautiful land there, that she will always be happy, and she will never know such sorrow as you——’"
"Mother, why can’t anyone go over the brow of the hill?"
"Because,—oh my baby child, my little child—it is only a road for tiny light feet. See, we are going to walk together just so far. Then—for you have been very good, and you may go over this road—you shall follow it to its promise."
"I’m cold, Mother. It blurs my throat when I talk. Can you hear me? Are you going away? You look far away. Touch me."
OVER THE BROW OF THE HILL

"Be still, my Little—we are walking down the white road."

"I felt something hot and wet fall on my hand—what was it, Mother?"

"It was a kiss, dear baby. See how clear and smooth the road is. The light shines through white rose bushes, and the air is very soft."

"But over the brow of the hill, Mother—can’t you come—can’t you, just this once?"

"No, my Little. You will find—let me see what you will find—a palace of white—"

"Sea-shells, Mother."

"Of white sea-shells, on the border of an ocean that rocks my baby to sleep—and there will be lots of other little boys and girls there to keep her company. She will find them waiting for her. That’s right,—smile, my Little. You will love them dearly—You can speak of the garden to them—You see Mother told you that it was beautiful. But you will think of her, sometimes—she will come sailing to you over the Ocean, very soon—and my Little—Have we reached the brow of the hill?—My child—my child—the story is not finished—Wait until I finish it—"

The soul of the Mother uncovered its face and looked once at the vanishing soul of the child, over the brow of the hill—then it fell to its knees and mourned, and the air about it shivered with pain. For the Mother stood alone—and the story was not finished.

FOR many days and nights, the Mother knelt where the child had left her—the unfinished story trembling in her grieving heart. It was her dear secret—this unfinished story—and she hugged it close to her, for she felt strangely afraid to finish it by herself.

As time passed, many little friend children came to her, who called her sweet names, but never the sweetest of all. Still they stood at her knee as she told them stories—not the wonderful story—and their faces were like torches which lit her lonely dreams back over the white road to the garden. There lay echoes and bird songs which spoke of the little one who had gone—there lay the hush of the silent playtime of tiny light feet.

Yet she loved these other children. She saw many of them pressing their faces against the garden gate, and she knew then that the Spirit was going to send them out among the dangers. So she tried to help them arm themselves against these dangers, and she became much loved and revered for her gentle wisdom. Often she wondered if Peace of a mystic kind did not after all wait for her at the end of the wonderful story—and pondering over this she grew very wistful.
TO THE CHILD

At last, one night, she fell asleep and dreamed:
She stood on the place where the child had left her—when suddenly back over the brow of the hill came the child. Only now in its eyes shone a wisdom greater than any the Mother had ever known. The child’s arms were outstretched. It went straight to the Mother and took her hand.

“Come”—it said—“it is time to finish the story.”

“But there is only one way of finishing the story”—said the Mother, “and that I may not do. I can’t follow you, my Little, over the brow of the hill. My feet are not tiny and light enough. I should leave sad dark prints to disfigure the beauty of the way. I must go by the Ocean which washes and washes out dyed shadows.”

“No, no, little Mother. You shall finish the wonderful story this way. For don’t you see that you have waited for me here so beautifully and bent over so many other little children, even when you were most lonely, that you have become as one of them. Come. You will find it all as you thought, only more beautiful.”

The Mother humbly took the little child’s hand—and together they traveled over the brow of the hill, to the end of the story.

TO THE CHILD

For you are the seedlings sprung and grown,
For you are the cattle reared and fed,
By you will the fruit of our lives be known,
And a higher path where our ways have led:

For you are a man and a woman one,
In you are their joys and their sorrows met,
For you, on a pathway tried by none,
Is a passing up from their vain regret:

For you have the countless aeons past
Developed their best of flesh and mind,
And heaped together a treasure vast,
And borne a Soul that your life must find.

Marguerite Ogden Bigelow.