"Here's another comin' along!" the watchers on the wall shouted, with kicks of glee. The Sunny Boy, frantic with longing, ran to a gap at the road side, which he had often wanted to explore. He could get through it now, and inside the hedge that divided off the railway bank, and scramble down the slope to the line. There! he was closer to the fun than any of them!

He looked up at the others, and laughed—then glanced back along the line. A train was just coming round the next bend. The Sunny Boy started off, to dash in before it, under the bridge.

As he did so, "The Lord between us and harm! what's the poor laneen at, at all, at all!" exclaimed a thin, shaky voice. It was an old woman who was speaking. Sitting close by the bridge, she was comforting herself with a "draw" of a pipe.

She got up as quickly as she could, and hurried after the Sunny Boy, crossing herself as she did so, and letting go a bundle she carried on her back, to move the quicker. She was very lame, but she made such good play with her crutch that she had time to seize the child by his "lap" and hustle him along, and fling herself with him, panting, on to the grassy bank at the other side of the bride, before the train, rushing after them, could overtake them. The wind it made blew off the Sunny Boy's hat, and whirled it along, and crushed it into nothing under the wheels, in no time.

The old woman was trembling, partly because she had had to hurry so much, but more because she understood quite well the danger of what she had done, and without anyone to look on, or talk about it, that she knew of. And somehow it is easier to be heroic when you have someone to witness and sing your deeds. Nobody saw Catty; except the Sunny Boy, and the children looking down from the bridge, and they were quite unaware of anything splendid in what Catty had done. Indeed, if she had been killed then and there, it would have mattered very little to anyone—even to herself. She was so old, that the people said sometimes that "Catty the Crutch had a right to get up upon some hill, the way Death wouldn't be forgetting her altogether!" So old, that she lived almost altogether in the Land of Looking Back. And among the shades that peopled that dim world for her, a little child would flit, just out of reach; but she always hoped to overtake him. And that was why she hurried so after Jack into the archway of the bridge, and why her grasp now tightened on him.

"Let me alo-o-a-n!" cried the Sunny Boy, struggling to get back to that wonderful bridge. What he wanted was, to find out if there would be room for him between the wall and a passing train; with a cheerful disregard of the possible consequences. But he was unable to explain his views—a common disability among children, and one which often causes them to be quite wrongly judged.

"What at all is to be done wid ye!" said Catty the Crutch, recovering her breath, and coming back temporarily to the present; "is it to get kilt ye want?".

"I want to go home," declared the Sunny Boy, with a sudden change of front.

"Home? In troth ye do! and I wish to God I was shut of ye! An' no one wid ye, only yer-self, in this dangerous place! Where do ye live? or who has the mindin' of ye, at all, at all?"

But the Sunny Boy could only reply that he lived in "de nursery," and lots of trees outside it, and his father was Daddy, and his mother was Sweetheart Roon, and he was the Sunny Boy; information too vague to be profitable, even to minds more alert than Catty the Crutch owned.

"Would ye find your own way home?" she demanded. The Sunny Boy was puzzled. The place looked very strange from the unaccustomed level of the railway. Besides, he had never before seen it from the other side of the bridge.

"There's nothin' for it only to take him wid me," said the old woman to herself—"if only he'll agree to come p'aceable. Will ye come, 'avic,' and we'll go and get a sugar-stick?"

The Sunny Boy agreed, and they moved off together.

And now, the image of her little, long-lost child came back at the touch of Jack's hand, soft and warm, and small, and slipped so confidingly into hers. Catty the Crutch clasped it close.

"I'll not let him go, this offer!" she said to herself. "sure I always knew in me own mind it wasn't dead on me he was, at all, at all! But I'll want to hould me hoult on him, or he'll be off ag'in, like a red shank! What odds about the bundle? An' can't I get it, an' I comin' back? Troth, I disremember rightly what was in it; and terrible weighty it was gettin', this while back—"

Catty's equanimity was enviable; thus indifferently could she contemplate the abandonment of all her earthly goods.

She and the Sunny Boy soon reached the point she aimed at—a disused signal-box, in which she had sometimes taken shelter for the night. She pushed in the door, and showed him some sacks and straw in a corner.

"Lie there now, and rest yourself, 'acushla,'" she said.

"Where de sugar-stick?" demanded the Sunny Boy.

"Sugar-stick? God help us! Well sure, I'll go look for it, and you stay here."

She went out, vaguely anxious to get him what he wanted. She pulled the door to, behind her, and smiled complacently. The latch was too high for Jack to reach.

"No one could think what rampageous work he'd be gettin' on wid while I'll be away!" she thought; "but he'll not l'ave that in a hurry."

So Catty the Crutch limped away; and maybe she never remembered any more about that small prisoner and the sugar-stick. She often said, "I do be forgettin' a power of things, those times!" Or may be she wandered to where there's no turning back; and there at last, we may hope, did overtake the shadow-child. But when such as Catty sink beneath the stream of life, there is scarcely a ripple to mark the event. No one wanted her here now.

At all events, the Sunny Boy had time to get tired of the novelty of that queer little house, and then to grow hungry, and then to begin to cry with pure loneliness, when—

When, what should happen, but the door to be pushed open; and when the Sunny Boy looked up frightened and sobbing, there stood, not that queer old woman with the frilly cap, and the crutch, but his very own Sweetheart Roon!

For, during her miserable flight back, after a fruitless search upon the strand, Jack's mother had thought of the railway. And was there ever music, she thought, so welcome, as the wailing of the Sunny Boy, varied by sudden passionate shouts for "Mother!" that greeted her from the signal-box.

"What's de matter, Sweetheart?" said the Sunny Boy, with a final satisfying sob. And, indeed, it was a strange thing to see his mother, white and breathless, sinking down to clutch him in her arms, with blessed tears at last falling.

She said nothing; she could not. She lifted him in her arms, and he cuddled his round her neck, and so they set off home. But before she had got very far with her recovered treasure, here was Larry coming along the railway.

"Glory be to God, but it's yourself has him found!" said Larry. "An' wasn't I full sure it was kilt he the thrain he was; see here now;" and he held up the remains of the Sunny Boy's hat.

"Will I carry him for ye, ma'am?"

"No, no! I'll keep him!"

"And then," Larry went on, "and I lamentin' him, who should I see, cocked up on the wall above, as bould as brass, only me own little chap—and I bethought me to go up and give him a few skelps. For the same gosson can't be kept off o' that wall; cries a sackful, if he's not let to go, and has his mother heart-scalded about the same thing. But I'll have to chastise her, to keep him 'ithin; putting notions of wildness into Masther Jack's head, too, along wid-all."

"What call have ye to be there at all?" says I to him, "and Masther Jack, that's worth a cart-load of ye, afther getting' run over wid the thrain!" says I, "and kilt, God help us," says I."

"'Sure it's not kilt at all he is,' says the young fellah, 'only galloped off wid himself a-through the tunnel' "—here the Sunny Boy felt his mother shudder and hug him tighter than before—"'and Catty the Crutch after him, fightin' him to keep out of it, and was just in time afore the thrain kem up; and then h-away wid him and her!' And I was just on me way to see could I see any tokens of them! see here!" as they came to the arch of the bridge—"here's what happened—she threwn away her bundle—look at her ould rags scattered hither and over—"

"An' who'd believe it, now?" Larry often demanded, when relating how he found Master Jack; "only I'm tellin' it to ye meself—ay, an' seen it, too; the Misthress, that let on never to care one thrauneen up to that, no, but appeared really quite hardened in herself—well, she laid eyes on them ould polthogues of Catty's; well, me dear! down wid her on her two knees, to gather them up. A clane ould skirt there was, and a pair of shoes for Sundah, and a Prayer Book, lettin' on she could read, no less! an' a weeny little red frock, about the fit of Master Jack. And the Misthress gother then up, now, as tindher as young goslin's just out o' the shell, and she cryin' like the rain—and bid me to take Master Jack be the hand, the way she could carry away ould Catty's rubbitch herself. And has it all laid by safe, and the polis noticed, and everyone, to have an eye out for Catty the Crutch. But sight nor light of her we never seen from that good day to this. Very quare and contrhary in herself, that ould one was gettin', this len'th o' time past."

The cook and parlour-maid were on the watch for the rescue-party, and rushed out to welcome them.

"And weren't you terrible frightened,