

MAGIC LONDON

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

May they find a “Godmother” who will take them to all the places visited by Betty, so that, like her, they may discover they are really living in a Magic City.

I

Magic London

All her life up to the time she was eleven years old, Betty had heard about, but never seen, her godmother. The reason for this, was that until a year ago, Betty's home had been far away in the country, while Godmother Strangeways lived in London. Then, just when the child's father and mother moved to town, Godmother decided to travel abroad. So it happened that Betty had been more than a year in London before she met the old lady who afterwards made such a difference in her life.

She never forgot the first day she met her.

"Your godmother has come back," said her mother one morning at breakfast time, as with a curious smile she passed a letter to her husband.

"Has she? Oh, I do want to see her!" exclaimed Betty.

"Well, you will. She wants you to spend the day with her to-morrow."

"Aren't you and Dad coming too?"

"No, she wants you alone. She's sending her car to fetch you to-morrow at eleven o'clock. Your father and I will go to see her another time."

“I wish you were coming. I don’t know her, and I don’t want to be there all day alone with her,” grumbled Betty. “What will there be to do?”

“You’ll find she’ll provide plenty to do,” laughed her father. “Mind you don’t tell her though, how much you dislike London!” he added in his teasing voice.

“Why?” asked Betty.

“Because your godmother loves it. She’s a great authority on London. What she doesn’t know about it, isn’t worth knowing. It’s quite uncanny. I wish she’d write a book about it.”

“I can’t think how any one *can* love London,” Betty declared. “Such a horrid, big, ugly, *dull* place. I shall never, never like it!”

Godmother’s little car duly came round next morning, and after a drive, Betty found herself in a tiny room, in a tiny house, in a tiny street close to Westminster Abbey, seated opposite to a very handsome old lady.

“I’m sorry my godchild doesn’t like London,” this old lady remarked suddenly, in the midst of a conversation about something else.

Betty blushed and looked uncomfortable. She felt shy of her godmother who, as she had always heard, was very clever but “eccentric”—a word she thought meant different from other people.

“It’s all so confusing and noisy and there are such lots of ugly houses,” she began apologetically. “And I *do* miss the lovely country and our beautiful garden,” she added with tears in her voice.

“Of course you do,” said Godmother sympathetically. “But as it’s a pity to hate the place you have to live in, I’m going to make you think London the most fascinating town in the world.”

She spoke confidently, and just as confidently Betty said to herself, “You’ll never do *that*.”

“You think it’s ugly, don’t you?” Godmother inquired. “Well, so it is—in parts.”



SHE WAS BEGINNING TO THINK SHE LIKED HER GODMOTHER

“Oh, it’s not *all* ugly,” Betty hastened to allow. “This little street is awfully pretty—and so quiet. It’s like a street in a country town.

You can forget you're in London. It's a very old street, isn't it?" She was forgetting her shyness and beginning to think she liked her godmother. She certainly liked the look of her. Godmother Strangeways was dressed in a way which Betty described to herself as "nicely old-fashioned." She had snow-white curls fastened back behind her ears with tortoiseshell combs, and the ample-flowered silk dress she wore was, as her godchild decided, "just right" for the small white-panelled room with its old furniture and tall narrow cabinets filled with all sorts of curious things.

"Old?" repeated her godmother. "It's about two hundred years old, and that, as London goes now, *is* rather ancient. But it's new compared with the age of London itself. What is two hundred years compared with nearly two thousand?"

"Is London as old as *that*?"

"Where's your history? Didn't the Romans live here once upon a time?" asked Godmother Strangeways briskly.

"So they did," murmured Betty.

"Well, some of them settled in this island soon after the birth of Christ, and that *is* nearly two thousand years ago."

"But I didn't know they lived in *London*?"

Godmother laughed. "They *made* London, child. The first London. And just in the place where it now stands, at the mouth of the Thames."

"But was it called London then?"

"Something very like it. It's earliest name was *Llyn-din*, and the Romans called it *Londinium*. You see how easy it is to get *London*

out of that? They had another name for it as well—quite a different one.—They sometimes called it *Augusta*.”

Betty was silent for a minute, then after a quick glance at her godmother she said rather timidly, “Dad says what you know about London is quite *uncanny*. He says he wonders you don’t write a book about it. When you asked me to come to see you, he was very pleased because he said if any one could make me like London it was you. And of course as I have to live here I should *like* to like it!” She sighed rather hopelessly.

The old lady began to smile, and her smile was mysterious.

“Shall I tell you why I don’t write a book about London?” she said. “It’s because if I did, it *would* be considered uncanny, as Dad says.”

Betty began to look and feel excited.

“Oh, why? Do tell me why?”

“I’m not quite sure whether it would be of any use to tell you, but I shall know better in a few hours’ time, when I’ve seen a little more of you. I’m going to take you out for a drive now, before luncheon. The car is still at the door.”

Ten minutes later, Betty took her seat beside the old lady, and the car glided out of the quiet street into a busy thoroughfare. It was a lovely spring day, and she was glad to be out of doors in a part of London more or less new to her. She was also very curious about what Godmother had recently hinted, though she scarcely liked to question her on the subject.



They were passing Westminster Abbey now, and nodding toward it Godmother said:

“You don’t call *that* ugly?”

Before Betty could answer, they had reached the end of Westminster Bridge and turned on to the Embankment. Raised on the end parapet of the bridge, was a group of statues in which the chief figure was a woman in flowing robes furiously driving a strange-looking chariot.

“Do you know what that represents?” asked Godmother, when she saw Betty glance at the monument with interest. “It’s Queen Boadicea driving into battle. I only want you just to remember her name, because you may hear something about her later.”

Again Godmother’s voice was mysterious, and Betty glanced at her, with more curiosity than ever.

It was delightful to be driving by the side of the river with the spring sunlight sparkling on the water, but she wondered where they were going.

As though she guessed her thought, Godmother said presently, “We are going first to drive slowly over London Bridge.”

In a few minutes they were upon it, and the car was threading its way among the crowded traffic, between great vans and lorries and taxicabs and the carts and wagons of all sorts that rolled along with a ceaseless roar. Betty looked up and down the river lined with huge buildings, its surface covered with shipping of every kind, and it struck her that London was, after all, a wonderful city. At the other end of the bridge, Godmother gave Williams, the chauffeur, an order to return, and to stop as close as possible to *The Monument*, that enormously tall pedestal near the Bridge, which, as Betty’s father had told her, was put up in the reign of Charles II.

“Now I’m going to stay here comfortably in the car while you and Williams climb to the top of that column,” said Godmother, when the chauffeur had driven into a narrow side street. “Neither of you will mind the steps, but I certainly should.”

Betty was only too delighted at the prospect, and with Williams as escort, she mounted gaily higher and higher, till at last the final step was reached, and she stepped out on to the caged-in top of the pillar. What a marvellous view it was, of miles and miles of streets and houses and domes and spires, with the river running like a silver ribbon in the midst!

Williams also was impressed. “It’s a fine great city, miss!” he exclaimed.

“Well?” demanded Godmother, when presently they returned to the car. “What do you think of London in point of size?”

“It takes your breath away!” was Betty’s answer, as she settled herself comfortably for the homeward drive.

“It’s been lovely,” she declared, when they sat down to lunch in the quaint parlour below the sitting-room. “I do believe I’m going to like London after all, Godmother. It somehow seems quite different seeing it with you. I have such a funny feeling about it. Just as though it was a sort of *magic* place that might be awfully surprising.”

Godmother gave her a quick look, but said nothing except “I’m glad.”

After the meal, however, when they were once more in the white-panelled sitting-room which Betty already loved, she exclaimed all at once, “Now I’m going to tell you a secret.”

You may imagine how Betty pricked up her ears. But without giving her time to speak, the old lady went on, sinking her voice to a most thrilling whisper: "*I have a magic way of seeing London.* It's a special gift, and I'm not going to tell you how I discovered that I possess it. Very, very few people have the gift, but from certain signs I think *you* possess it too. Would you like to try?"

Betty's face was a study in perplexity.

"Yes—but how?" she stammered. "I don't understand...."

Instead of explaining, Godmother Strangeways got up, and opened the door of a cabinet that stood between two narrow square-paned windows, took something from a shelf and, returning, dropped it into her godchild's hand.

Betty gazed at the little object. "It's a ring," she began. "But a very old one, isn't it? It's so dark and stained."

"It's a very old one," said Godmother. "It's a ring once worn by a young Roman nobleman. Put it on to your third finger."

Betty obeyed. "Now say these words after me." She began to chant very slowly and distinctly certain words which, though she did not understand them, her godchild knew to be Latin.

Feeling as though she were in a dream, Betty began to repeat them after her, looking meanwhile at the clock on the mantelpiece which pointed to three o'clock.

Outside in the street, a boy was calling "*Evening Paper! Evening paper!*"

His voice was still ringing in her ears when the white-panelled room vanished, and she found herself standing in the sunshine on the bank of a river....

ROMAN LONDON

For a moment she felt frightened and lost, till she saw that Godmother stood beside her. "Where are we? What is this place?" she stammered.

"London."

Betty thought of the London through which she had driven this very day. She saw again the crowded streets, the streams of traffic, the long rows of shops, the huge buildings of all sorts; the churches, the banks, the railways. How could *this* be London?

She looked down at the long grass on which she was standing,—grass that sloped to a clear river. On the opposite bank she saw something rather like a castle or fortress, a large brick building with zigzag battlements and turrets. This castle was reached by a bridge made of broad beams resting on piles of wood driven into the water, and beyond and on either side of the fort she saw, dotted here and there, strange-looking houses, with orchards and gardens and fields all about them.

"We drove over London Bridge this morning, didn't we?" Godmother asked.

"Yes," murmured Betty, bewildered.

"Well. There it is!" Godmother pointed to the bridge with its wooden planks and roughly-made railings of wood. "The London you know to-day began just about where we are standing now,"

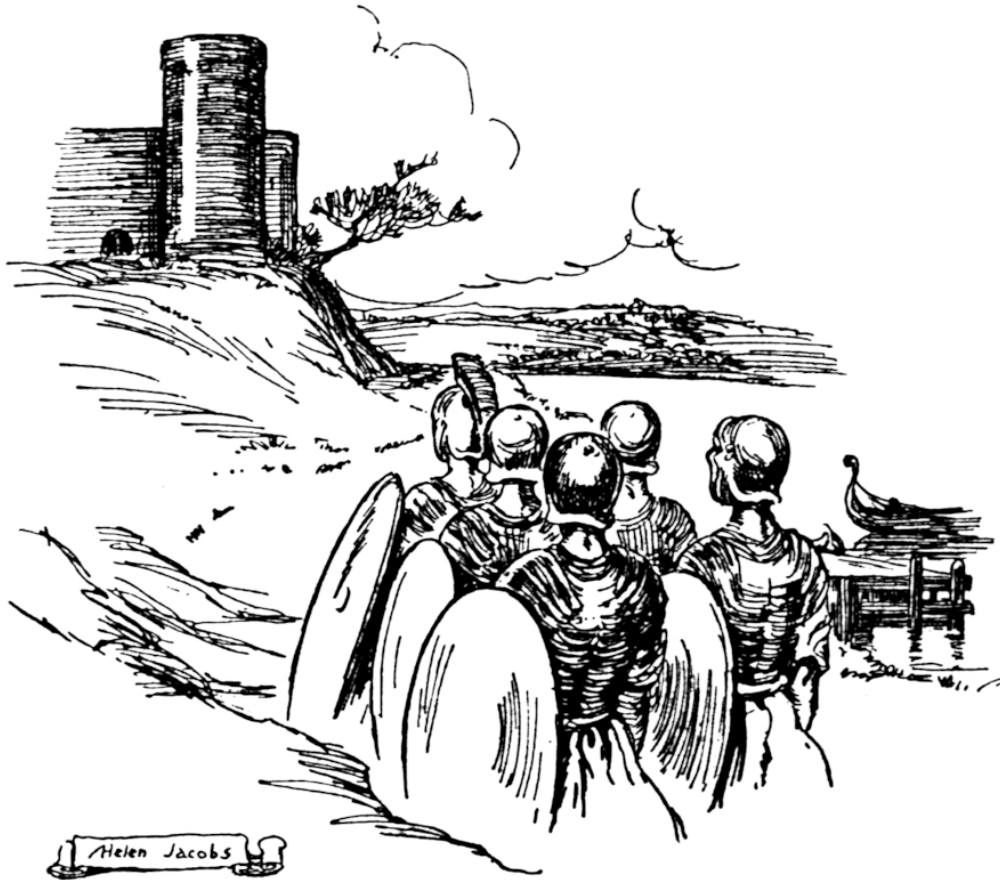
she went on, “and *there*”—again she pointed—“you see the first bridge that was ever built across the river.”

“Then we’re ever so far back in the Past?” asked Betty.

“We’ve gone back to a day four hundred years after the birth of Christ.”

Before she had time to realize the strangeness of this, Betty’s attention was attracted by the most curious-looking boat she had ever seen, coming round a bend of the river. It had a high curved prow, and it was crowded with men wearing helmets that flashed in the sun, short tunics to their knees, and plates of brass covering their legs. Two rows of long oars stretched on either side of the boat, and as it drew nearer Betty saw that, though it had a sail, the helmeted soldiers were rowing it, and thus making it move very fast.

“Oh, look! look!” she almost shouted. “Who are these men?”



“Roman soldiers, of course,” said Godmother. “Remember the date. It is 400 years after Christ, and our country (called *Britain* then) has been conquered by, and belongs to, Rome. Many Romans have been settled here now for as long as three hundred years. That building,” she pointed to the Castle, “is the fortress where the

Roman soldiers live. We shall see them disembark in a minute, and go into their barracks. This boat of theirs is called a *galley*, and it was in boats like it that the first Roman soldiers came sailing up this river Thames when they conquered the country.”

“Yes! yes! the boat is stopping! Now they’re going into the fortress!” exclaimed Betty excitedly, as with breathless interest she watched the soldiers being marched along the river bank by their officers.

“Can we go across the bridge?” she asked a moment later.

“Of course we can. No one sees us. No one hears us. We are invisible—for as long as we choose to be. Come, we’ll cross over to the fortress.”

Dancing with excitement, Betty followed her on to the bridge, over which, all the time she and Godmother had been standing on the bank, people had been crossing and recrossing. They were the strangest-looking folk imaginable, but so far she had been too confused and too interested in the soldiers to do more than glance at them.

“Let us stand here a moment, and watch,” Godmother suggested, drawing her back against the wooden parapet of the bridge.

“That’s a Roman nobleman,” she observed, as a fine-looking man passed, wearing a tunic, a white cloak wrapped round part of his body, the end flung over one shoulder, and sandals made of twisted leather. “That’s his villa over there.” She pointed to a house at some little distance set in the midst of blossoming fruit-trees.

“Here’s a British merchant coming!” she went on. “Look at his long furry trousers under the cloak, or *toga* as it is called, which he

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