

After the departure the cripple hesitated only a moment before he tried to stand. His tiny fingers grasped for the bark of the strong oak. His feeble arms tried unsuccessfully to pull him up. He fell. Again he struggled for a firm hold. I hardly dared to breathe for fear of creating a motion that would cause him to fail a second time. After employing many wild gestures, each accompanied by an agonizing moan, he managed to pull himself up. Without warning, he violently turned toward the children and screamed, I can! I can! Yes I can! It was a pitiful sight. His cries echoed in my mind long after I watched him stumble away.

And so it happened that I was brought to the correct perception of human suffering and sorrow at a time of personal success and joy. Now, when I pass that oak, no matter how great the beauty of its motionless branches or how wonderful I feel, I see the dismal reflection of a tiny, crooked figure beside the huge trunk.

AFTERWARDS

A thousand trusting souls,
Bidding lasting farewells to loved ones.

A thousand angry cries,
Wailing, shrieking with lasting beats.

A thousand voices ringing,
Shouting, singing out war!

A thousand heavy footsteps,
Treading steadily on the beach.

A thousand silent bodies,
Lying quietly on the shores.

A small and quiet voice ringing out peace!
And peace shall be forever more!

MARGARET BEASLEY