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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A BIG TEMPTATION ***



A Big Temptation.



"What are you doing with that baby?"

A Big Temptation

By

L. T. Meade,

And Other Stories

by

M. B. Manwell and Maggie Browne

Illustrated by

Arthur A. Dixon

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A Big Temptation

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By

L. T. Meade.

Netty stood on the doorstep of a rickety old house and nursed the baby. She was ten years old and had the perfectly white face of a child who had never felt any fresher air than that which blows in a London court.

It is true that the year before she had gone with her brother Ben into the country. The Ladies' Committee of the Holiday Fund had arranged the matter, and Netty and Ben had gone away. They had spent a whole delicious fortnight in a place where trees waved, and the air blew fresh, and there were lots of wildflowers to pick; and she had run about under the trees, and slept at night in the tiniest little room in the world, and in the cleanest bed, and had awakened each morning to hear the doves cooing and the birds singing, and she had thought then that no happiness could be greater than hers.

This had happened a year ago, and since then a new baby had arrived, and the baby was rather sickly, and whenever Netty was not at school she was lugging the baby about or trying to rock him to sleep. She was baby's nurse, and she was not at all sorry, for she loved the baby and the occupation gave her time to dream.

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Netty had big dark-blue eyes, which showed bigger and darker than ever in the midst of her white little face. She could talk to the baby about the country. How often she had told him the story of that brief fortnight!

"And you know, baby, there were real flowers growing; we picked them, Ben and I, and we rolled about in the grass; yes, we did. You needn't believe it unless you like, baby, but we did. Oh! it was fine. I had no headaches there, and I could eat almost anything, and if you never heard doves cooing, why, you never heard what's really pretty. But never mind: your time will come—not yet awhile, but some day."

On this particular July afternoon the sun was so hot and the air so close that even Netty could not find it in her heart to be cheerful.

"Oh, dear!" she said, with a deep sigh, "I do wish it were my turn for the country this year. I would take you with me—yes, I would, baby. I wouldn't mind a bit lugging you about, though you are getting heavy. I wish it were my luck to be going this year, but there isn't a chance."

She had scarcely uttered the last words before Ben's face was seen peeping at her from behind a corner.

Ben was a year older than his sister; he had long trousers very much patched about the knees, and a shock head of rough red hair. Next to baby, Netty loved him best in the world. He beckoned to her now, looking very knowing.

"I say, come here—here's a lark," he said; "come round the corner and I'll show you something."

Netty jumped up and, staggering under the weight of the heavy baby, approached the spot where Ben was waiting for her.

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"Such a lark!" he continued; "you never heard tell anything like it. I say, Netty, what do you say

to the seaside for a whole day, you and me together? We can go, yes, we can. To-morrow's the day; I have the tickets. What do you say?"

"Say?" cried Netty; "why, of course I say go; but it isn't true—it can't be true."

"Yes, it is," answered Ben. "I was standing by the scholars at the school-house as they was coming out, and they were all getting their tickets for the seaside treat, and I dashed in behind another boy, and a teacher came round giving out the tickets and I grabbed two. He said to me: 'Are you a Sunday scholar?' and I said: 'Yes, I am,' and there was a big crowd and no one listened. I got two tickets, one for you and one for me, and we'll go to-morrow. It's to a place called Southend. There's a special train for us, and we'll take our chance. Oh, isn't it fun? We'll see the waves and we'll feel the breezes and we'll bathe. My word! I don't know whether I'm standing on my head or my heels."

"Do show me the tickets, Ben," said Netty.

Ben thrust his hand into his trousers pocket and presently brought out two little pieces of cardboard on which the magical words were written which would take him and his sister to the school feast.

"There," he said; "it's all right—as right as can be."

"But that isn't your name, Ben; it's Tom Minchin, Tom Minchin and a number."

"Well, and I'll be Tom Minchin for to-morrow," said Ben; "and you'll be his sister Susy Minchin. We'll drop our own names for the day."

"But what about the real Tom and Susy Minchin? Won't they come and find out everything, and won't they be disappointed?" said Netty, who had a strong sense of justice in her little nature.

"Let them be: it's our turn for a bit of fun. Perhaps they won't come, as they weren't there to-day. Anyhow, we'll risk it. I'm going, but you needn't be Susy Minchin unless you like."

"Oh, I'll be Susy," answered Netty, after a moment's anxious reflection; "but we must take baby. What's to be done with baby? Mother said I was to take charge of him all to-morrow, as she's going out charing. I can't leave baby—that I can't, Ben."

"If you take the baby we'll be found out," said Ben.

"Well, I must risk it," said Netty; "I can't help it. You can go as Tom Minchin, Ben, and if they turn me back on account of the baby—why, they must, that's all."

"They won't let baby come, so you had best leave him at home. There's old Mrs. Court can look after him," said Ben, indicating an old woman who sometimes took care of babies for twopence a day.

"I never thought of Mrs. Court," said Netty, in a reflective voice; "but where's the use? I haven't the twopence."

"I believe I could manage that," said Ben; "it's worth a good try, isn't it?"

"Well, let us run and ask her," said Netty; "it would be a great pity if I didn't get off with the rest of you. Do let me look at the tickets once more, Ben."

Ben condescended to give Netty one more peep.

"Don't you forget when they're calling out our names that you are Susy Minchin," he said; "and now if I can get twopence Mrs. Court will look after baby."

Netty kissed the baby on its little mouth.

"I'd take you if I could, baby," she said; "but oh, the sea! the sea! I just do pine for it. I'll bring you back lots of shells, baby, that I will, and you won't mind old Mrs. Court for once, and I'll have such tales to tell you when I come back."

So Netty went to find old Mrs. Court, and between them they arranged for the baby's comfort on the following day and Mrs. Court was to have her twopence in the evening.

But the best-made plans do not always come to pass, for Netty that evening received a lecture from her Mother on the subject of Mrs. Court.



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"What is this I hear?" cried the good woman; "that you mean to give baby to the care of that old woman! Not a bit of it! I wouldn't allow the baby to be seen in her rooms for all you could give me. What do you want to get rid of the baby for? And what are you trying to hide from me, Netty?"

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"It's nothing really, Mother; it's just that Ben and I are going to walk to Battersea Park, and we've a penny apiece to buy buns. You won't stop us going, Mother?"

"Now aren't you an unnatural girl!" cried Mrs. Floss. "Why shouldn't you take the poor baby with you? Wouldn't he like a sight of the park and the green trees as well as you? If you take the baby with you, I'll give you each another penny, and an extra one for the baby, and you can all have a good time; now what do you say?"

"I suppose I must do it, Mother," answered Netty; "and you're very kind," she hastened to add.

Mrs. Floss was far too busy to spend any more time talking to Netty. She regarded the affair as absolutely settled, and went downstairs to tell Mrs. Court that she was not to have the pleasure of looking after the baby the following day.

The next morning broke gloriously fine. Even as early as six o'clock it was intensely hot in the attic where Netty slept. She had laid out all her best things the night before—her blue cotton frock, carefully washed and mangled, her cape to match, her sailor hat, somewhat ragged round the brim, but not very dirty; even her cotton gloves. These last she regarded as great treasures, and imagined that they would give a distinctly genteel air to her appearance.

As there was no possible way out of it, she must take the baby, too, and she must just trust to luck to pulling the thing through. She knew enough about tramways and omnibuses and railway carriages to be aware that a baby in arms costs nothing, and she did not mind little Dan's weight—she was accustomed to it; and she would like very much, as far as she herself was concerned, to take him to the seaside.

Accordingly, the baby was also got early out of his wooden cot, and dressed in his very best clothes. The baby's best frock was made of Turkey-red cotton, very faded, and he had a small worn-out fifth-hand sun-bonnet tied under his chin, and his little legs were bare, but that did not matter—it was, indeed, rather an advantage this hot weather.

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Ben frowned very much when he saw the baby.

"Now, what do you mean by this?" he cried; "how can you be Susy Minchin dragging that big baby about with you? You give it to Mrs. Court."

"No, no," pleaded poor Netty; "Mother said I wasn't to leave baby with Mrs. Court; we must bring Dan with us. There, Ben, you won't say no."

Ben looked decidedly cross, but Netty had a very coaxing way with her.

"Come along then," he said roughly; but there was a tenderness in that rough tone, and Netty knew that her cause was won. It never occurred to Ben to offer to carry the baby for Netty, but he made up his mind that he must smuggle it through somehow.

The pair reached the great station in good time, and were joined by a lot of other children, and several teachers and Sunday-school superintendents of all sorts, and also several clergymen.

Ben and Netty soon mingled with the crowd and were marched in orderly array past a gentleman who looked at each ticket and took down each name as they went by. When it came to Ben's turn he called out manfully: "Tom Minchin," nudging Netty at the same time.

"Susy Minchin," she said. But here the little party were called to halt.

"Susy Minchin, what are you doing with that baby?" said Mr. Stokes, the curate.

Poor little Netty, *alias* Susy, found herself turning red and then pale.

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"Please, sir," she said, dropping a curtsy that she was accustomed to make to her Board-school teacher, "please, I couldn't come without Dan."

"But I didn't know that Mrs. Minchin had a young baby," said the curate, who was very young and fair-haired himself, and looked much puzzled what to do.

"It would kill me to go back now, sir," said Netty, and there was such a passion of entreaty in her soft eyes and such a tremble round her pale lips that the young curate looked at a pretty girl who was standing near, and the pretty girl said:

"Oh! poor little dear, she shan't be disappointed. I would rather take the baby myself."

"But it's against the rules," said the curate, "and others may take advantage of it."

"You shan't be prevented from going, little Susy Minchin," said the girl, now coming forward. "Give me the baby until you are all well started; then you shall have it back again."

No sooner said than done—little Daniel was quickly transferred to the arms of the fair-haired and very beautiful young lady, and Netty, *alias* Susy, marched on in triumph.

"That was well done; I call that young lady a brick," whispered Netty to Ben, but Ben replied:

"Be quiet, and come along."

They reached the great train and were huddled into their compartments, and then slowly but surely it got up steam and moved out of the station, and then, gathering speed, flew past the ugly houses, past the rows of hot and dingy streets, into the pure, fresh lovely country.

Netty caught her breath in her rapture, her eyes shone with pure happiness, but in the midst of all her rejoicings a sudden memory of little Dan came to distress her.

"I have brought his bottle with me," she said, tapping her pocket, "and he'll be hungry by now. I wish the lady would give him back." [Pg 13]

"You stay quiet," said Ben, nudging her; "where's the use of bothering?"

The train flew through the country faster and faster, the air blew more and more fresh against Netty's cheeks. She began to sniff. Could that delicious smell be the smell of the sea, the great, rolling blue sea which she had never seen, but which she had so often dreamed about?



There was another little white-faced girl who sat near Netty, and Netty asked her if she thought they were getting near the sea. She had a sharp face and had been to the sea before, and she rather despised Netty for her ignorance. Poor Netty was about to sink back into her seat with a feeling of disappointment when a grave-looking lady who had the charge of the compartment said, in a quiet voice:

"We cannot reach the sea for a long time yet, little girl, but I see you are much pleased and very much interested in everything; would you like to come and sit near me?"

All too willingly Netty changed her seat, and presently she and the kind lady entered into a vigorous conversation. Netty confessed how anxious she was about the baby. She tapped the bottle in her pocket and described how she had made the necessary food with milk and water and a pinch of sugar. [Pg 14]

"Dan will be fretting for his lunch by now," she said; "I do wish I could get hold of him."

"We shall be stopping at a big station in two or three minutes now," said the lady, whose name was Mrs. Holmes, "and I will get out and find Miss Pryce, who, I think from your description, must be the lady who has charge of the little one. I will bring him back to you then. But what a very audacious little girl you are to think that a baby would be allowed to come to the Sunday treat."

"I could not have come without him," replied Netty.

"What is your name?" asked Mrs. Holmes.

Poor Netty was on the point of saying Netty Floss, but at that moment she caught Ben's eye and his warning glance saved her from making a startling revelation.

"Susy Minchin," she answered.

"Minchin! I know the Minchins well. How is your Mother? I have not seen her for some time."

"Very well, indeed," answered Netty, flushing brightly. Her heart beat with a sudden feeling of alarm. This was quite terrible news. The kind lady knew her supposed Mother, Mrs. Minchin. Netty had not the faintest idea what Mrs. Minchin was like; she did not know how many there were in family, but a dreadful memory now darted through her brain—the curate had said that he did not believe that the Minchins had a young baby.

Suppose this lady who knew Mrs. Minchin so well should remember that fact, then what should she do?

The train stopped, Mrs. Holmes got out, and presently returned with the baby.

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"By the way," she said, as she placed the child in Netty's arms, "is this your little brother?"

"No, ma'am, my little cousin," answered Netty, whose distress had rendered her wonderfully sharp and indifferent to the many lies she was telling. "He's my little cousin, ma'am, but I love him as if he were my own brother."

"So I can see, and he seems a dear little fellow, but what pale cheeks! Do you give the poor baby enough to eat?"

The baby was smiling in that inconsequent and yet fascinating way which babies of a certain age adopt.

His lips were forming into pretty three-corners, and his eyes were blinking, and when he saw the bottle which Netty drew out of her pocket he stretched out his little arms with delight and cooed with satisfaction.

Soon several of the other children clustered round little Dan and began to fuss about him, and when they thrust sweets into his mouth he thought the fun excellent and crowed and laughed and flung his arms in the air.

"The sea will do him a sight of good, the darling," said Netty, kissing him with rapture.

Soon afterwards they reached Southend, and then the real pleasure of the day began. Never as long as she lived could Netty forget that exciting and wonderful day—the happiness of running along those sands, of picking up those shells for herself, of sitting with Dan in her arms and letting the soft sea breezes blow over her face; then, as the waves came nearer and nearer, the darting away with little screams of frightened rapture. Oh! there never in all the world could be a second day like this! Then, too, the baby himself entered into the fun, and the best of the whole thing was that before the day was over the baby, the only baby in the whole party, began to assume the airs of a master, for all the children noticed him, and the ladies noticed him, and even the curates and the rector noticed him, and they all said: "What a pale-faced and yet what a sweet baby he is!"

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And several offered to carry him, until Netty felt that he was quite a diadem in her crown, and a most honourable and distinguished appendage.

"See," she whispered to Ben, in the height of her joy, "did you ever see anything like the fuss they're making over our Dan? Wasn't I right to bring him?"

"Oh! don't bother," cried Ben; "I'm going to play with some boys at the other side of the beach, and won't be back for a couple of hours."

Plenty of food was given to the happy children, and they returned home dead-tired, some of them half-asleep, but all with dreams of bliss which would remain in their hearts for many a long day.

Perhaps of all the children who went to that school feast there was no happier than Netty. She forgot her own wrong-doing in thinking of the delightful scenes she had so lately witnessed, and fell asleep that night holding the baby in her arms in a state of absolute bliss; but alas! clouds were already coming over her sky.

Early in the morning she awoke to find that Dan was hot and restless. Dan, although he had enjoyed himself vastly the day before, had not been treated judiciously. The many sweet-meats that the children had insisted on giving him had upset his baby digestion. He awoke peevish, heavy-eyed, and highly feverish. Netty, who idolised him, went straight to her Mother to ask her opinion with regard to him.

"He's not well," said Netty; "he's not well a bit. I had best go at once and see the doctor, or take him round to the sixpenny dispensary."

Mrs. Floss turned towards the bed where the baby lay, pulled down the clothes, and looked at him.

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There never in all the world could be a second day like this!

"There's nothing the matter with the child," she said. "Don't you get fussing with your silly ways; the child's all right." [Pg 18]

"He's not, Mother. I am sure he ought to have medicine of some sort."

"There, there, don't be silly," said the woman. "I am going out for a day's charing, and have no time to be bothered. Look after Dan and do your duty. I expect he took a chill yesterday when you took him to Battersea Park; so now you must stay at home and nurse him back to health."

Poor little Netty smiled rather faintly.

"You're looking dead-beat yourself," said the woman. "I can't make out what's come to all of you. There's Ben hadn't any appetite for his good plain breakfast. Now, you go and look after baby; I'm glad it's Saturday: you needn't be at school."

The day was hot, even hotter than the previous one. Mrs. Floss started off on her charing expedition, and Netty sat on the doorstep with the sick baby. Dan grew worse each moment. He could scarcely open his languid eyes, his little face was deadly pale, and at times a shudder ran through his frame.

Mrs. Court came and looked at him ominously. "You'd better have left him with me," she said. "He's eaten something that has disagreed with him, and now he'll have convulsions and die."

"Oh! don't say such cruel things," cried poor Netty.

Mrs. Court hobbled back to her room, and Netty sat on with an awestruck look on her face. Presently she stooped down and kissed the baby on his brow. He was stirring restlessly. Netty felt that she loved him better even than Ben, better than anything else in the world.

"Don't you go, and die, baby," she said, in a low whisper. And now the baby, just as if he heard the words and understood them, opened his sweet blue eyes, and looked her full in the face, and then he gave a faint smile and shut his eyes again, and she heard him breathing quickly, and the next moment a spasm crossed his little face. [Pg 19]

Netty could stand it no longer.

"I must take him to someone; but I haven't a penny in the world. Oh! what shall I do? I know: I'll go to Mrs. Holmes, that kind lady; she'll tell me what to do for Dan. She may punish me, she may do what she likes, for I'll tell her the whole gospel truth, if only she'll save Dan."

Netty staggered to her feet; there was resolution on her little face.

Mrs. Holmes had taken a fancy to the child who loved the baby so well, and on parting the night before she had said to her:

"I have just moved into a new house, Susy Minchin, and as perhaps you do not know of the change, will you tell your Mother this is my new address," and then she repeated it slowly twice to the child: "5, George-street, Bloomsbury. Now, you will remember that, little girl, won't you? and when I want your Mother to come to do a day's charing I will let her know."



Netty had scarcely listened at the time. What did it matter to her? for she was not Susy Minchin: she was Netty Floss.

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But now like a ray of sunshine the memory of this address crossed her mind.

George-street, Bloomsbury, was a long way off, but Netty was a brave walker. It took two hours, carrying that heavy baby, to get there, and as she walked the baby's face frightened her more and more, but with the aid of several friendly policemen she did get at last to George-street. She walked up the steps of the tall house and sounded the knocker, and waited with great anxiety until the door was opened. It was opened, not by a servant, who in all probability would have sent Netty away, but by no less a person than Mrs. Holmes herself.

"Why, Susy!" cried the lady, starting back; "who would suppose that I should see you here, and the dear baby too? What is the matter?"

"Oh! let me in," panted poor Netty; "do, please, and I ain't Susy—I'm Netty, and this ain't my little cousin—he's my own brother, and he's bad, very bad. Oh, ma'am, I'm such a miserable girl!"

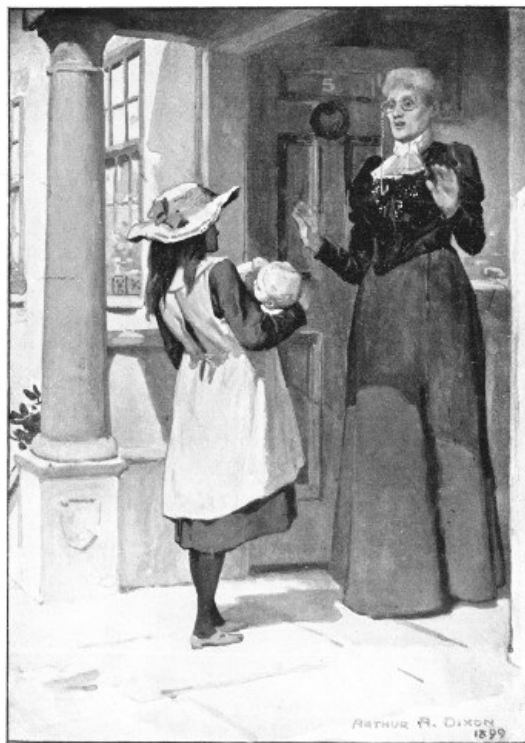
In great astonishment Mrs. Holmes did allow the little girl to come into the house. She took her into a small room and looked at once at the baby. One glance showed her that he was very ill indeed.

"My dear child," she said, "what a good thing you came when you did. In an hour's time the poor baby might have died."

Mrs. Holmes rang the bell briskly.

"Bring a hot bath here and some mustard immediately," she said to the servant; "and be quick, please, and then go round to Dr. Ross at the corner and say that Mrs. Holmes wants to see him at once."

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"Why, Susy! what is the matter?"

All these things were done. The baby was taken out of Netty's arms, undressed, and put into the bath. The doctor called, felt his little swollen gums, and said they were really at the root of the mischief. He lanced them and the baby got immediate relief. In less than an hour he was lying in a soft sleep in Netty's arms.

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"He will do now," said Dr. Ross; "but if matters had been postponed I would not have given much chance of his life."

"And now, Susy, what is it?" said Mrs. Holmes, looking for the first time attentively at the child. "Don't cry, my dear, the little fellow will live; but what was that you said to me about *not* being Susy?"

"Oh! I must tell you," cried Netty; "I know you'll turn me out, but it doesn't matter now, for you have saved baby's life."

And then she did tell her story; with sobs, bitter sobs, she told it, and somehow Mrs. Holmes had never felt nearer crying in her life than as she listened.

At last the poor little accusing voice was silent, and Netty looked up with swollen eyes of misery to receive her sentence.

"You did very wrong, of course, Netty," said Mrs. Holmes; "and I shall be obliged to tell my Vicar, for we must enquire immediately where Tom and Susy Minchin really were. But, my dear child, I am not going to be very angry with you. I think when Daniel suffered so much this morning you received your punishment, and I am not going to give you another. I mean to forgive you, and to try to give you a chance in life."

"Oh, you're an angel," said poor Netty; "will you be my friend even though I have done this?"

"You must promise never to do anything of the kind again."

"Do you think I would want to?" said Netty; "and will you please forgive Ben too, ma'am; he isn't bad really, but we did so *pine* to look at the sea. We had never seen it, and it was *such a big temptation*."

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"I quite understand," said Mrs. Holmes, and she stooped and kissed Netty. "I will come round this evening to your house in order to see your Mother," she said. "I am going to be your friend in the future."

Mrs. Holmes was as good as her word. The baby quickly got well again, Netty and Ben were forgiven, and were made *bonâ-fide* scholars at the Sunday-school. When the school feast came round the following year they were able to go to the feast, and as a matter of course had tickets; but a greater treat was in store, for there was a special ticket sent by the Ladies' Committee to no less a person than Dan himself. He was the only baby allowed to come, and he had his own ticket.

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The Other Carews.

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By

M. B. Manwell.

"Don't you *wish* that the other Carews could come to our birthday party?" wistfully said Clary, the only girl among Doctor John Carew's "seven little pickles," as he called them.

"They would come like a shot if Uncle George would allow them, I know," observed Mark, the second Carew boy, with the red hair that was always so handy to fire off a joke about.

"Hum! perhaps so. The weather's getting coldish, and they'd be glad to come, if it was only to warm themselves a bit!" Oliver's eyes rolled significantly at Mark's head, the owner of which, with an angry whoop, made a dive at the speaker. There was an uproar in the play-room on the spot. Five Carew boys, pursued by the furious Mark, leaped, laughing and shouting, over chairs and stools, and even across the table.

"Wait till I catch one of you, that's all!" panted Mark, stumbling over a stool which Chris mischievously pushed in his way.

"Wait, sir! Oh, certainly, sir!" teasingly said Chris, bowing almost in two while Mark ruefully rubbed his shins.

"Oh, boys, don't quarrel! Let us sit quiet and talk about the other Carews!" Clary plaintively pleaded. "Don't you think we could somehow get them to my birthday party?"

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The little sister was tucked away in the old rocking-chair in a corner, safely out of the way of the line of march of her wild brothers. She was a frail, small mortal, with long, smooth, yellow hair and anxious blue eyes, just the apple of everybody's eye in the Tile House.

"Father and Uncle George have never spoken to one another for three whole years. Everybody in Allonby Edge knows that, and so do you, Clary! Is it likely that the other Carews would be allowed to come to your birthday party—is it now, I ask?" Oliver, the eldest, put his hands in his pockets, and stood with his back to the empty fireplace, secretly flattering himself that even Father could not strike a more manly attitude.

It was Saturday—a pouring wet Saturday—and the boys were house-prisoners. They had struggled through every indoor game they knew, starting with a pillow-fight before the beds were made, to the tearful wrath of old Euphemia, who kept Dr. John Carew's house because the sweet-faced Mother, whom the children adored so, was ill and frail most of her days.

When in the pillow-fray a bolster burst and the feathers thickly snowed the staircase and hall, Euphemia's wrath boiled over, and the boys, with Clary also, were sternly hustled upstairs to the play-room, there to be locked in until the dinner-bell should release them. Peace at any price Euphemia was determined to have.

"You don't think they can get into mischief locked in—there's the window, you know, Euphemia," nervously said Mother. It was one of the poor lady's particularly bad days, and she was shut up in her own room.

"No, mem, there's no fear. Not even such wild little reskels as ours would climb out o' that high window, an' there ain't no other outlet save it be the chimney. Not that I'd be surprised to see 'em one after another creep out o' the chimney-pot black as black!" Euphemia, with her head in

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the air, walked off muttering.

However, as the morning wore on and a wondrous quiet reigned at the top of the house, where the boys were engaged in painting fearsome animals and golliwogs on the jambs of the mantelpiece, Euphemia relented.

"Mary Jane," said she to the good-tempered, red-elbowed help in the kitchen, "you take up this plate o' gingerbread to the children. Pretty dears, they must be nigh starving!" And a goodly heap of gingerbread chunks travelled upstairs to the play-room, the door of which was unlocked.

It was over this welcome interruption that a wonderful new game was hatched.

"Clary, tell us about the mountain railway," said Oliver, seating himself on the edge of the table to munch contentedly.

His little sister had spent the previous winter with her ailing Mother in the Alps, at an hotel built on purpose for sick folk as high up in the air as was possible. And the boys were never tired of listening to her descriptions of the life so far up in the clouds and snows that the sun was nearly always shining hotly.

"I shouldn't mind being sick myself if it was only just to wear those funny snow-boots and walk over the hard snow up and down the mountain-sides," said Mark, reaching out for another piece of gingerbread.

"Oh, I'd like the tobogganing—the 'lugging,' Clary calls it. Fancy spinning down in the moonlight!" cried one of the smaller boys, Johnny.

"No! Give me the riskiest of all—that queer railway up and down the great mountain. Tell us about it again, Clary," urged Oliver.

"That's called the funicular!" Very proud of being able to say the long word, Clary propped up her every-day doll beside her in the rocking-chair and, folding her mites of hands, proceeded to explain.

"It's quite a little young railway, y' know. It's only to take people up to the hotel on top of the Mont, where Mother and I lived last winter." Then she told the boys how the little train toiled up the sheer face of a great mountain to the clouds. And it had to descend, also, which was worse far. Clary shuddered and hid her blue eyes as she described that coming down, while the eyes of the boys fairly bolted over the mere thought of a journey so full of risks and perils.

"It must have been prime!" calmly observed Chris, always to the front if danger were in the air. "What did you think about, Clary, when the funicular came jolting down the steps hewn out for it in the steep mountain? What did it feel like? Come now, tell us," persisted Chris curiously.

"I fink it was like stepping out of a high window into the dark night," explained the little maid. "I didn't like it, an' I pulled the wire to shut my dolly's eyes, case she saw and it f'itened her, y' know!" The first thought of mother Clary had been for her waxen baby.

"Well, let's play at the funicular," suggested Oliver, when the gingerbread plate was cleared.

"Hooray! Down the banisters?" Mark was on fire in a moment. So were the other boys, and there was a stampede for the staircase.

"You can come, too, Clary!" shouted her brothers, and, bustling out of the rocking-chair, the little mother carefully carried her baby treasure, wrapped in a tiny shawl, for the perilous journey down the mountain-side.

The Tile House was of considerable size: it and the White House where Doctor George Carew lived were the only two large dwellings in the village of Allonby Edge. But of the two the Tile House was the higher, having an extra storey. The staircase was, consequently, a pretty long one, with only one landing at the upper floor, which led up to the play attic and servants' rooms.

"Couldn't have a better railway than this!" said Oliver, his head on one side as he regarded the length of banister.

Presently, the boys were tasting the fearful joy of precipitating themselves down the slippery route, which they grandly called the funicular.

The journeys were accompanied by a good deal of uproar, but the green baize swing-door shut off the sound from the ears of Euphemia and Mary Jane in the kitchen.

So the noisy crew had it all their own way.

Oliver was the driver of the train, and Mark the guard, the rest being passengers, and the traffic up and down to the hotel on the high Alps was something extraordinary.

"It's the going up that's the horrid difficulty!" panted Johnny, whose legs were rather short to interlace in the banister rails and thus heave himself upwards as the other boys did.



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"Difficulties were made on purpose to be overcome," loftily said Mark, "and mountain railways are full of them. Now then, Clary," he shouted upstairs, "why don't you be a passenger? Aren't you getting tired of living up in the mountain hotel? Don't you want to come home and see your family?"

"Yeth, I do want to come home," piped a small voice from far away up under the roof. "So does my Hilda Rose," and Clary's little fair head peered over the top banister.

"Come along then!" recklessly shouted the boys. "Can't you get aboard the funicular yourself and start your journey?"

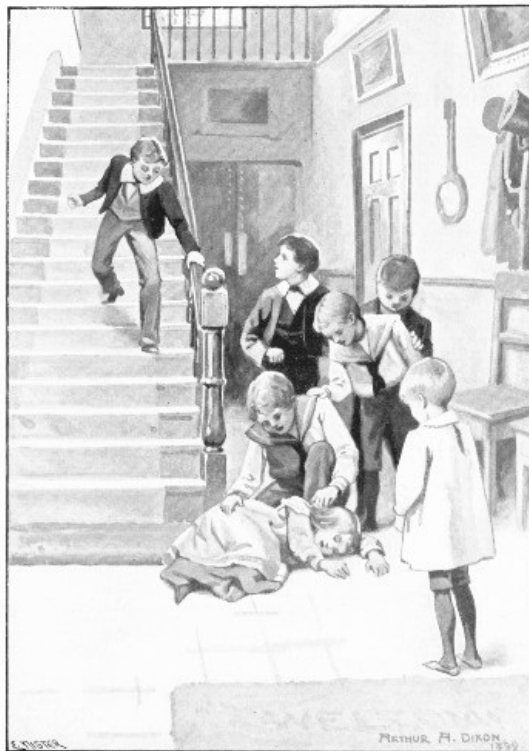
"What sillies girls are; just like women, always expecting somebody to hand them in and hand them out!" grumbled Mark, who, being the guard, felt bound to go up and start the lady passenger.

"Now then, ma'am," he said briskly, "you and your little girl had better get in. Train's going to start when I wave this green flag!"

"Oh, please hold my Hilda Rose until I get my seat," nervously said the passenger. "Oh! Mark—I mean Mr. Guard, do you think that Hilda Rose and me can go down wifout falling?"

"Why, of course!" scornfully answered the guard. "Haven't you been on a funicular before—the real thing? What's the use of bragging about the dangers you've been through if you can't face them a second time? Now, then, are you ready, ma'am?"

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Oliver was stooping over the senseless little figure.

"Oh, no; not yet! Oh, but we sitted the other way in the real railway!" tearfully remonstrated the passenger, who had been settled by the guard on the banister face downwards.

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"Can't help that, ma'am. It's the way we run trains. We gen'lly do things different from the foreigners. Now then, I'll tie your little girl on your back with her sash-ends, and, if you hold on tight, you will both get to the bottom all right!"

And she might have got to her destination in safety had the passenger been a boy accustomed to banister sliding instead of a weak, fragile little girl.

"Ready below there?" shouted down the guard. "There, ma'am, I've telegraphed down that you're coming!"

Mark's hand let go the wildly clinging passenger. A green flag was waved. A shrill whistling rang through the house.

The funicular was off!

Then came faint, muffled cries of terror: a swish through the air as the two passengers came sliding down: a louder shriek: and, lastly, a thud on the hall floor that made the hearts of the waiting group of boys stand quite still for a second or two.

At their feet was a huddled heap of blue frock and white pinafore, over which trailed a wisp of long fair hair. The heap was perfectly still, perfectly silent.

"Is she—is she—?" Mark's tongue clove to the roof of his mouth and refused to finish the

question when, tearing down the staircase, he reached the hall, his face livid under the red hair. Oliver was stooping over the senseless little figure, touching with frightened fingers now the little face, then the still small hands.

"Fetch Euphemia, quick!" the boy said hoarsely.

Like an arrow Johnny fled through the green baize door, and then, with an alarmed cry, old Euphemia ran into the hall.

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"Oh, my pretty, my pretty!" Trembling like a leaf and ghastly white, the old woman crouched down to gently feel each little limb. And as she did so the boys covered their eyes to hide the sight.

"Did anyone of ye push her down? How was it, tell me true?"

"No, no; oh! nobody pushed her! She fell all the way down the banisters!" several of the boys spoke together.

"We were playing at the funicular, and she lost her balance!" The last words were sobbed out by Mark.

"Playing at the—what?" gasped Euphemia, in horror. "Boy!"—she clutched Oliver's shoulder—"flee to the White House and fetch Doctor George. Say it's life or death. The master's away for a long round on the hills at the farms. Tell them that. Go!"

"But, Euphemia—Uncle George would refuse to come inside our door!" stammered Oliver.

"Do as I bid ye, boy, and quick! Say to Dr. George these words from old Euphemia: 'The Lord do unto you and yours as ye do unto us in this sore need!' He will heed that message, if he's got a heart, not a stone, in him!"

With a shuddering groan, Oliver ran out into the pelting rain, bare-headed, on to the other end of Allonby Edge, where stood the White House with the red lamp, the home of the other Doctor Carew, the brother who had not spoken to Oliver's Father for three years.

As he raced along, with a heart beating in terror at what he had left behind on the hall-floor, there flitted through the boy's brain the old wondering curiosity as to what made the doctor-brothers such bitter enemies.

In the dining-room of the White House a group of children were staring idly out of the window, watching the village ducks, the only creatures really enjoying the deluge of rain on that wet Saturday.

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The table was spread for early dinner, and the appetising sniffs stealing up from the kitchen reminded the other Carews that they were hungry.

"Oh, do look!" Gwen nudged Tony excitedly. "There's a boy with nothing on his head tearing along in the rain! He will fall over those wobbling ducks if he doesn't look out!"

"I do believe he is making for our house!" slowly said Tony, as he stared out eagerly.

"There's somebody taken suddenly ill, that's it! He's coming for Pater!" observed Traffy, a bright little urchin who had just stepped out of petticoats into a sailor suit and Latin.

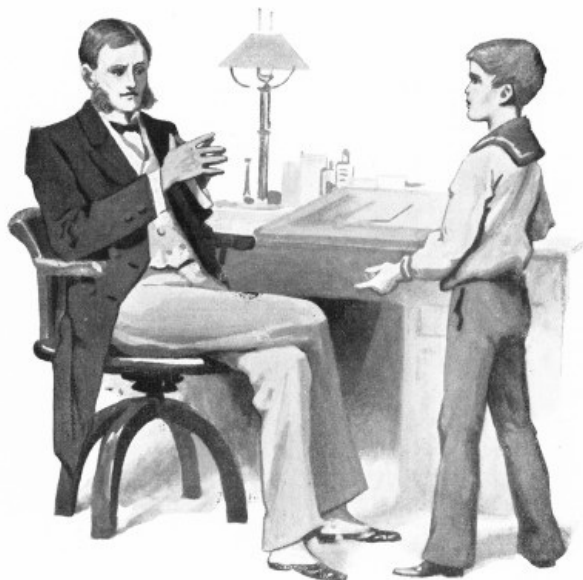
"Oh, oh! it's one of the Carew boys from Tile House, and he is coming in here!" Trissy, the youngest, whispered, in an awestruck voice, and she shrank back from the window. The four Carews of the White House had brooded to the full as much as the young folk of the Tile House over the estrangement between their Fathers, though they had never dared to ask their parents any questions about the matter.

All the children knew this much, that old Grandpapa had been Doctor Mark Carew of Allonby Edge, and when he died his two sons succeeded to his practice as partners. In time the young doctors married, and the elder children remembered dimly that the Tile House and the White House had been like one home with two roofs.

Then came the mysterious quarrel that froze up that "good and joyful thing, dwelling together in unity." It was all so sad and heart-breaking that nobody ever ventured to question the two brothers thus living apart in enmity. The more you love anyone, the more terrible a thing it is to quarrel with that person.

So the breach had gone on widening with the years, and the little Carews had grown out of all knowledge of each other, especially as they bicycled every day to different schools in the county town. It was only in church indeed that they kept up any sort of acquaintance with each other's looks.

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"Yes, it's one of the other Carews," Tony said gravely. "And Father's in the surgery: he drove up five minutes ago. What can be the matter? That boy is tearing at the surgery bell. Listen!"

With their hearts in their mouths the Carews tip-toed along the passage leading to the surgery-door, which was shut fast. There seemed to be a dreadful silence in the house. Mother was upstairs with the fretful baby of the family, and there was nobody to run to.

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Behind the close-shut surgery-door a strange scene was going on. Sitting well back in his consulting-chair, his hands spread out, finger to finger, thumb to thumb, Doctor George was gazing sternly in silence at an eager little speaker.

"Oh, do come; do, Uncle George! Our Clary is killed, and Father's away on his rounds among the hill-farms!"

Oliver's teeth chattered in his head, and his little knees knocked together as he stood with the rain-drops falling from his bare head on to his little shoulders.

"Did your Mother send you here for me?" Doctor George asked harshly.

"No; oh, no! We dared not tell Mother! Clary fell from the top of the Tile House to the hall floor, and she's all white and still. And Euphemia lifted her arm, and it fell double!"

Dr. George suddenly sat up straight.

"Is it broken or is it a sprain?" he asked peremptorily.

"I—I don't know. I think she's killed!" answered the boy brokenly.

Oliver was nearly fainting from sheer fright, as Dr. George could see for himself.

"Come along, boy," he said sharply, and he gathered together two or three necessaries from the surgery-table while he spoke.

Presently two figures plunged out into the pouring rain.

"Father's gone with the other Carew! What can be the matter? Perhaps Uncle John's killed, and they're going to make it up!" whispered the girls.

"You are sillies!" scornfully said Tony. "How can people make it up if they're dead?"

Ah, how, Tony? The time for that has gone by, indeed, boy!

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Of the two figures that fled through the rain, the doctor reached the Tile House first. In a trice he pushed aside Euphemia and he was kneeling beside the motionless little figure; and, presently, when he had gently probed the little form and lifted one limb after another, he groaned under his breath. This little, tender, fair-headed thing, with the face that reminded him so startlingly of his dead Mother, was sorely injured; perhaps fatally so. As yet, he knew not.

Without a word, he cautiously lifted the unconscious Clary in his strong arms, and signed to Euphemia to lead the way.

Then the door of the room he entered with his burden was shut, and the Carew boys huddled close together, a miserable group. What if they had killed the little, tender sisterling who was their queen and idol?

And Mother upstairs in her sick-room knew nothing as yet, while Father, away on his long hill-round, was equally ignorant. It seemed to make things so much more terrible to the little boys that they alone should know.

"Come away, beside the fire, dearies." Mary Jane beckoned them into the kitchen, and the wretched boys crept round the ruddy blaze, which seemed, somehow, like a friend, and they

stretched out their cold hands to its warmth as they waited, too frightened to wonder aloud what was being done in that room where Euphemia and Uncle George were shut up with Clary.

When Mother's bell rang their hearts jumped into their mouths.

"No! none of you boys are going up!" said Mary Jane firmly. "Euphemia, she said as 'twas as much as my place was worth if I let the mistress know o' this before the doctor comes home. So I'll carry up her dinner-tray and keep my tongue atween my teeth, and you boys must bide quiet as quiet till we see!"

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The boys shivered as Mary Jane, lifting up the tray, significantly nodded.

It was quite an hour after. Mary Jane, loyal to the core, had kept her ailing mistress in perfect ignorance of the terrible calamity, and the little boys still crowded round the kitchen fire waiting.

Suddenly every head was raised. "That's Peter's trot; don't you hear? Father's coming home!"

Each of the boys stood up. Who was to go out to meet the gig and tell the dreadful news to Doctor John?

"Perhaps I ought to do it!" said Mark, in a strangled voice. "I started the train, y' know! So I'll take all the blame on myself!"

Somehow the other boys thought poor Mark, for all his shock of red hair, looked exactly like one of the brave knights of old setting forth to battle. Old Peter, the doctor's horse, eager for his stable comforts and shelter, brought the gig round in fine style, and Doctor John alighted quickly, with the upward glance at Mother's window which he never forgot.

"Why, sonny," he began cheerily, then halted as, with a tweak at his Father's sleeve, Mark beckoned him indoors. "Is there anything the matter with Mother? Quick; speak, boy!" The doctor's voice was sharp with fear. But Mark could not speak, and Doctor John, with a heart of lead, followed the boy into the house.

"In there, Father! It's Clary, and it's all my fault!" Mark's voice had come back, but it was a mere whisper, and he pointed to the close-shut door.

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Doctor John was on his knees beside the bed

Turning the door-handle quickly, Doctor John nearly fell backwards. Over the bed, on which lay a little figure, bent the brother to whom he had not spoken for three years, with his ear laid close to the little heart, listening to its fluttering beats, and one hand raised warningly at the sound of the opening door. The next moment the wonder-shock had passed. Without a word Doctor John was on his knees beside the bed, and Doctor George, glancing up, saw that it was Clary's Father who had entered. Then he stood up straight, and would have retreated hastily, but his forefinger was tight in the clutch of a weak, small hand. Doctor George was chained to the spot; he dared not move.

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"She opened her eyes once, and gripped my finger like that!" he whispered awkwardly.

The Father did not speak, nor even look away from the white, still face. But, stretching across the bed, he laid a detaining hand on his brother's coat-sleeve.

It was quite late in the afternoon when the two doctors came out into the hall. The boys crept to the half-open kitchen door to listen eagerly.

"Thank God, and thank you, George, she will live!"

It was a strained harsh voice, but it was Father's, and the boys all pressed forward.

Then they hastily retreated, for, while the two doctors stood side by side, Father's head was bent on Uncle George's shoulder and their hands were clasped hard.

"They must be making it up!" whispered Oliver to his awestruck brothers.

And it was so. The breach of years was healed in a single afternoon. The brothers were once again friends. Whatever their quarrel had been—and neither the children of the Tile House nor the other Carews ever knew what it was about—it fled away like a morning mist in the face of a great peril, for death had come very close to little Clary that rainy Saturday.

It was many weeks before she left her bed, but when her own birthday came round Father carried her, covered with shawls, in to tea, and Clary could not believe her blue eyes.

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On the table was a huge frosted white cake, with flags flying and "CLARE" in great letters upon it, while Mother, who had grown pounds better lately, smiled behind the army of cups and saucers.

But wonder of wonders, round and round the table, the guests were all Carews!

"A motley crew' we are!" cheerfully announced Doctor George, and all the children radiantly clapped their hands at his joke. Even the White House baby, which had been carried to the feast, gurgled and crowed loudly on its Mother's lap.

And when they all pressed forward with their birthday gifts and to wish Clary many happy returns of the day, Mark, his ears as red as his hair, whispered under his breath: "I was just awf'ly sorry, Clary! An' I'll never, never forget that little girls and women are different from us rough boys!"

And Mark never will; nor will any of the Carew boys.



Kurus: The King of the Cannibal Islands.

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By

Maggie Browne.

It certainly was the very ugliest doll you ever saw. It hadn't a bit of wax about it. It was a rag doll, a brown rag doll with black woolly hair, beads for eyes, and—horror of horrors—a ring through its nose! Then its clothes—no pretty pink frock and clean pinafore, no clothes to take off and on—it had only a black fur rug round its waist.

Mollie was nearly in tears as she stared at it, and Geoffrey's cheeks were very red.

It had come in a most promising cardboard box, wrapped up in the cleanest of tissue-paper; and when Mollie opened the parcel she had felt sure that the doll would have pink cheeks, blue eyes, and lovely golden hair—and then to find such a thing!

"It is too bad of Uncle Percy," said Mollie; "it is almost unkind."

"I think it is more 'curous' than pretty," said Geoffrey solemnly; "I should call it 'Kurus.'" He had

been trying for several minutes to think of something to say to comfort Mollie.

"But I wanted to call it Evelina," said Molly; "I can't call that thing Evelina. Why, I can't even show it to Bessie."

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Geoffrey began to dig the hole.

Now, Bessie was the little girl next door, Mollie's own well-beloved playmate.

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"I don't think I should show it to anyone," said Geoffrey, and then he began to think.

Mollie was thinking too.

"Mary Selina Trewin," said Geoffrey solemnly.

Mollie jumped. When her Mother called her Mary Selina she knew something serious was coming.

"Mary Selina Trewin," said Geoffrey, "who has seen that doll?—Nobody. Who saw the postman bring it?—Nobody. Who knows it is here?—Nobody."

"What are you talking about?" said Mollie, much puzzled.

"Mary Selina Trewin," said Geoffrey, "who shall see it? Who shall know it is here?—Why, nobody. We will get rid of that doll; we will hide it." And then he whispered mysteriously: "We will bury it this very minute. Come along." And Mollie went, just pushing the doll into the box with all the papers, and hiding it under her pinafore.

They reached the garden without being seen, and Geoffrey began to dig the hole.

"It must be deep as deep as deep," said Mollie.

"Deeper than that," said Geoffrey.

But it is not easy to dig with a stick, and the hole was anything but deep when Nurse's voice was heard calling: "Miss Mollie! Master Geoffrey!"

"What shall we do?" said Geoffrey.

"Put it in quickly, cover it up, and we'll make the hole deeper after tea," said Mollie.

So the box and doll were popped in the hole and covered up, and Mollie and Geoffrey ran in to Nurse. Nurse wanted to make them tidy for tea. Never had the two children stood so quietly to have their faces washed and their hair brushed.

At tea-time they talked so little that Mother began to suspect that something was wrong.

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"I wonder the doll doesn't come from Uncle Percy, Mollie," she said. "I expect he is searching for the very prettiest of all the dollies."

Molly nearly choked over her bread-and-butter; but Geoffrey said never a word.

He was staring out of the window, staring at Snap, who was tearing up and down the lawn, carrying something brown in his mouth.

"What has Snap found?" said Mother. "Is it a rabbit? Really I must ask Jane to——"

"I'll go, Mother," said Geoffrey, and he was down from his chair without waiting for Mother to say "Yes" or "No."

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried Mollie. "Look at Snap!"

"What can it be?" said Mother. "Ah! Geoffrey has caught him. Now we shall see what it was."

But Geoffrey came back into the room with the reddest of cheeks and the emptiest of hands.

"What had the dog got, Geoffrey?" asked Mother. "Mollie, what is the matter?"

Certainly Mollie's conduct was peculiar. She was making signs to Geoffrey, pointing out of the window, opening her mouth, and shaking her head.

"T-t-t—" stammered Mollie, and then there was a knock at the front door.

"Who can that be?" said Mother.

A voice was heard in the hall, a voice they all knew.

"Uncle Percy himself," cried Mother; "then, Mollie, he must have brought your doll."

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Uncle Percy came into the room and was welcomed warmly by Mother, but very quietly by the children. As soon as they could they slipped out of the room and made their way into the garden. "We shall have to tell now," said Mollie. "Where did you put it?"

"I threw it behind the laurel-bush," said Geoffrey. "I suppose I had better get it."

He ran to the laurel-bush and Mollie followed.

"Mary Selina Trewin," said Geoffrey, "it isn't there." And though they searched and hunted they couldn't find any trace of the ugly doll.

"Oh, dear," said Mollie, "what are we to do?"

This time she began to cry really.

"Well, you are a queer girl," said Geoffrey; "you nearly cried when it came, and now you really cry when it is gone."

"But what will Uncle Percy say?" said Mollie.

"Well, the only thing to do," said Geoffrey, "is to tell Mother all about it."

"Oh, Geoffrey," said Mollie, "we may find it."

But Geoffrey was quite decided. "Snap must have eaten the old thing up. Come along."

The children found their Mother and Uncle Percy sitting by the fire talking busily. What they were saying neither Mollie nor Geoffrey heard; they were too busy to listen, for on the table lay an open cardboard box, and in the box lay a lovely doll—blue eyes, pink cheeks, golden hair, dressed in the prettiest of dresses and cleanest of pinafores.

"Oh!" said Mollie.

"Oh!" said Geoffrey.

"There you are, young people," said Uncle Percy. "Yes, Mollie, that is the doll I promised you. Do

you think you will like it?"

"But the other?" said Geoffrey.

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"Oh, you heard what we were saying, did you, young man?" said Uncle Percy. "Well, I'm sorry I sent the wrong parcel, but Mother will send it back as soon as——"

"But she can't send it back," said Mollie.

"Snap has eaten it," said Geoffrey.



"What?" cried Uncle Percy.

And then, of course, out came the whole story. They were scolded, they were punished, they were comforted and kissed, and Mollie went to bed that night hugging Evelina, the rosy-cheeked beauty, very tightly.

And the other! Uncle Percy said it didn't matter; he had only bought it to play a joke on someone. Mother and Mollie and Geoffrey and Jane and everybody hunted everywhere for it, but they didn't find it. A few days later a letter came from Bessie asking "Geoffrey and Mollie to come to tea with the King of the Cannibal Islands."

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"The gardener found him in the garden," said Bessie, as Geoffrey and Mollie stared at Bessie's new doll. "Someone must have thrown him away, for he was ragged and torn; but Mother mended him, and, though he's queer, I like him the best of all my dolls."

"He is curious," said Geoffrey.

"I think I will call him Kurus, the King of the Cannibal Islands," said Bessie.

Mollie and Geoffrey were not very cheerful that afternoon, but Bessie did not notice it; she was so pleased with Kurus.

As the two children went home they felt very solemn and sad.

"It was it," said Mollie.

"Of course," said Geoffrey. "Snap, you know."

"What shall we do?" said Mollie.

"Tell Mother," said Geoffrey; "she'll help."

And Mother did help. She talked to Uncle Percy and to the children; but nobody said a word to Bessie, and, though she still has Kurus and is very fond of him, she does not know all the queer things that happened to him.

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