

Quite By Ourselves.

BY LADY BELL

CHARACTERS:

MRS. VERNON.

JANET.

RALPH.

MRS. VERNON.--(*Alone at writing table.*) What a long time it is since the children have been into the room! It must be nearly five minutes! They don't seem to be having as many "good ideas" to-day as they generally do. So I may as well do my accounts. (*Begins to add up.*) Ah! there they come.

Enter RALPH and JANET, hurriedly.

JANET.--Mammy! Mammy!

RALPH.--We have such a good idea.

MOTHER.--(I thought so!) What is it?

J.--We're going to surprise you very much.

M.--Are you? How delightful!

R.--We're going to invite you to a tea party of our very own!

J.--We are going to get it ready and arrange it quite by ourselves!

R.--Isn't that a lovely idea?

M.--It is, indeed.

J.--And the surprise is going to be that you are going to receive an invitation from us, just like the real invitations you get from your friends.

M.--I see!

R.--But the thing that will surprise you most will be that we are going to do it ourselves, won't it?

M.--(*Smiling.*) Yes, I must say that will be the most surprising thing of all.

R.--Then, first, here's the invitation.

M.--Oh, this is most exciting. (*Reads.*) "Ralph and Janet request the pleasure of your company at their very own tea-party on Wednesday afternoon."

R.--Isn't that a surprise for you, Mammy?

M.--It is, indeed, most astonishing. Now I must answer this, I suppose?

J.--Of course you must, just as if you were writing to strangers, you must end it "your loving Mrs. Vernon," or something stiff of that sort.

R.--Of course you mustn't put "your affectionate Mother," as you do when you really write to us, you know.

M.--Not for worlds! Now, then, I had better write the letter, and then do my accounts, while you get the tea ready.

R.--Oh, yes, that will be delightful.

(*Goes to writing-table. RALPH and JANET discuss in a low voice, looking round them helplessly.*)

R.--(*Aside to JANET.*) We had better ask Mammy, I think.

J.--Much better.

R.--(*Aloud.*) Mammy, there is just one thing we want to ask you.

M.--Yes? What is it?

J.--Where do you think we had better have tea?

M.--Wherever you like. What do you say to the dining-room?

R.--The dining-room is so common.

M.--You may have it in here if you like.

J.--Oh, that would be the very thing!

R.--What table shall we have it on?

M.--(*Looking round.*) Let me see--would that one do?

R.--Oh, beautifully. Thank you so much, Mammy.

(*They pull out the table and open it, while the mother writes.*)

J.--Now, what next?

R.--The cloth, of course.

J.--I wonder where we can get one.

R.--Mammy!

M.--Well?

R.--What about a table-cloth?

M.--Hadn't you better ask Susan for one of the dining-room ones?

R.--Susan is always cross when we ask her for that kind of thing, she seems to think we make jam and cocoa stains on the table-cloths.

M.--Dear me, I wonder what can make her think that?

R.--I think it must be because Janet always spills the jam at breakfast.

J.--You needn't talk, for once you dropped a whole cutlet on to your knicker-bockers.

R.--But as we are not going to have cutlets, you needn't talk about it now.

M.--I don't think people ought to quarrel when they're giving a tea-party.

R.--No, we'll quarrel after tea, we're too busy now.

J.--Much!

R.--Well, what about the table-cloth, then?

M.--If you don't want to ask Susan I might lend you that embroidered five o'clock tea-cloth which I bought at the bazaar the other day.

R.--Oh, that would be the very thing! May we have it?

M.--Yes, if you like, it is in that drawer.

R.--Which drawer?

M.--The bottom one.

(RALPH opens the top one. JANET and he look in and look wonderingly at each other, and then shake their heads.)

R.--Mammy, we can't find it.

M.--Are you quite sure you are looking in the right drawer?

R.--Quite. You said the top drawer, didn't you?

M.--No. I said the bottom drawer.

R.--Oh, I thought you said the top drawer. *(They look in. To JANET.)* I wonder where it can be! *(After a moment.)* Mammy, I am so very sorry--we can't find it.

M.--(*Gets up.*) How very odd. I saw it there yesterday. Why, there it is just at the top, you little noodles!

R.--Oh, so it is, I hadn't seen it.

J.--Nor had I.

R.--Thank you so much, Mammy. (*She goes back to her writing. To JANET.*) Now, we must have our own cups and saucers out of the toy cupboard.

(*They open the toy cupboard, and they both sit down on the ground. JANET takes out a trumpet and RALPH a drum. They blow the trumpet and beat the drum.*)

M.--(*Looking round.*) My dear children, is that how you are laying the table?

R.--Oh, Mammy, I am so sorry! I forgot we were getting out our cups and saucers. (*RALPH takes out cups and saucers and gives them to JANET.*) Here they are, three cups and three saucers.

J.--Now I'm Susan!

(*JANET arranges the cups and saucers close together at one side of the table.*)

R.--You stupid girl, that is not how they ought to be arranged. Susan always put them quite apart from each other, and the tea-pot at one end of the table like this.

J.--Do let me have the tea-pot in front of me.

R.--Certainly not, it must be in front of me.

J.--Mammy, don't you think I ought to have the tea-pot in front of me? because I am a girl.

R.--No, I'll have it in front of me, because I am a boy.

M.--Suppose you put it in the middle of the table where you can both reach it. I shall sit at the side like a guest, and you can take turns.

R.--That will be delightful. We will put the tea-pot here, then.

J.--Where is the tea-pot?

R.--That's true, yes, we haven't got one of our own. Mammy, what tea-pot are we to have?

M.--Won't you have the one we always have at tea?

R.--No, it's too common. It won't seem like our own tea-party, then.

J.--I suppose we mightn't have one of the beautiful little tea-pots out of the china cupboard, just for once?

M.--Just for once, you may, if you take care of it.

(RALPH goes out L. Then comes back.)

R.--I am afraid I am not tall enough to reach the cupboard.

J.--You don't think, I suppose, you could come into the next room and get it for us?

M.--*(Getting up.)* I daresay I might.

J.--You see it is not our fault if we are not as tall as you, is it?

M.--Not quite, I daresay.

(She goes out. They watch her through the door.)

R.--Isn't Mammy tall when she stands on a foot-stool!

J.--I mean to be just the same size as Mammy is when I grow up.

R.--That's just like a girl, to say that sort of stupid thing. You don't know in the least how tall you will be when you grow up.

J.--Well, if girls are stupid, they are not so rude as boys.

R.--Girls are rude sometimes. It was very rude of you to talk about my dropping the cutlet into my lap.

M.--(MOTHER *coming in with two tea-pots.*) You don't mean to say you are still discussing that cutlet! Now, which of the tea-pots is it to be?

R.--Oh, Mammy, I have such a good idea! Let's have them both, one at each end, and then we can both pour out tea.

M.--Very well.

(They put tea-pots on table. They walk round the table looking at them. The MOTHER goes on writing.)

R.--Oh, this is capital. Now, we must get the things to eat. We shall want milk and sugar.

J.--And bread and butter and biscuits.

R.--And jam and cakes, perhaps--because, as it is our own tea-party, it ought to be a grand one.

J.--Of course.

R.--I've got some sugar that I put in my pocket this morning for the raven.

(Feels in his pocket, and brings out string, knife, etc., finally four lumps of sugar, one at a time.)

J.--Four lumps, will that be enough?

R.--I wonder how many Mammy will want. Mammy, do you like your tea very, very sweet?

M.--No, I don't like sugar in it at all.

R.--Oh, that's capital. Now, Janet, we can have two lumps each, one in each cup of tea. You can't have more. It's horrid to be greedy, you know.

J.--(*With a sigh.*) Well, I suppose that will have to do.

R.--Now, there's the milk, we'll ask the cook for that.

J.--And we shall want some spoons and knives.

R.--Susan will get out those.

J.--I should like to have some toast, too.

R.--We'll ask nurse to make that, they make such nice toast in the nursery.

J.--And then the biscuits.

R.--And the jam. We must ask Mammy what we may have. Mammy!

M.--What is it now?

R.--We may have some biscuits and some cakes, as well as bread and butter, mayn't we?

M.--Oh yes, you may look in the dining-room cupboard for what you want, if you don't take too much.

R.--Oh, how delightful! Come, Janet.

M.--(*Alone.*) Perhaps in the meantime I shall be able to add up my accounts!

(*Writes intently. After a minute the children burst in again, carrying spoons, and knives, and plates.*)

R.--Oh, Mammy, there are such a lot of things in the dining-room cupboard, we don't know which to choose.

J.--I wish you would come and help us.

R.--I suppose you're too busy, aren't you?

M.--Oh, I daresay I can manage it. (*Gets up.*)

R.--(*Who is laying the table.*) You know really, Mammy, the best thing would be that you should look into the dining-room cupboard, while Janet and I finish the table; we are so very busy, you see.

M.--(*Smiling.*) I will go and look in the cupboard and see what I can find. (*Exit MOTHER.*)

R.--Now, this is getting on splendidly, isn't it Janet? Let me see, have we remembered everything?

J.--I think so. The cook is making the tea and getting the milk.

R.--Susan is cutting the bread and butter.

J.--Nurse is making the toast.

R.--Mammy is choosing the cakes and the jam. I must say I do feel proud of doing it all by ourselves, without giving anybody extra trouble.

J.--Yes, it makes me feel as if we were such good children.

R.--So it does me.

J.--I should like to feel like this every day.

R.--Oh, I think one would soon get tired of it, you know. Oh, here comes Mammy! (*They both run up to her as she comes in.*) Well, Mammy, well?

M.--Well, you had better go into the dining-room and see if you approve of my choice.

R.--Oh, thank you. Now we must have some plates to put the cakes upon.

J.--Mammy, may we just for once have those beautiful little plates out of the china cupboard?

M.--Just for once then, if you take good care of them.

R.--Then, Mammy, I think you had better get them out for fear we should break them.

M.--Very well, let's go and get them.

(She gives a hand to each.)

J.--Oh, are you not pleased with us for arranging our tea-party all by ourselves! *(They go out.)*

CURTAIN.