

The Best Children In The World

BY LADY BELL

CHARACTERS.

MRS. MONTGOMERY.

HARRY.

PHŒBE.

THE BEST CHILDREN IN THE WORLD.

MRS. MONTGOMERY.--(*With her bonnet on, putting on her gloves, etc. HARRY and PHŒBE playing on the floor.*) Good-bye, my children, I shall be back soon. (*HARRY and PHŒBE get up.*)

HARRY.--Where are you going, Mammy?

MRS. M.--Only to pay two visits.

PHŒBE.--How long will that take?

MRS. M.--About three-quarters of an hour, if the people are at home.

P.--You would be very sorry if they weren't at home, wouldn't you?

MRS. M.--Oh, of course.

H.--What stupid questions Phœbe asks, doesn't she!

MRS. M.--Well, never mind, everybody is stupid sometimes. What are you going to do while I am away?

H.--We are going to play, I suppose.

MRS. M.--Hadn't you better go to the nursery then?

H.--Oh no, Mammy! it's so babyish to stay in the nursery! It's much nicer to stay in the drawing-room by ourselves, as if we were you and Pappy.

MRS. M.--Only Pappy and I don't get into mischief when we are left in the drawing-room.

H.--We won't either. You tell us what we mustn't do in here, and we will be the best children in the world.

MRS. M.--Well, now, let me see: you are not to have a pillow fight with the sofa cushions.

H.--Of course not.

P.--What an idea!

MRS. M.--You are not to play with my reels of cotton, or to throw them about.

P.--Certainly not.

MRS. M.--You are not to build houses with the books, or to drop them on the ground.

H.--No, we won't.

MRS. M.--And, above all, you are not to touch that box.

H.--Why mustn't we touch that box?

MRS. M.--Never you mind that.

H.--Oh Mammy! is it a great secret?

MRS. M.--Perhaps it is. Now, mind you remember all I've told you.

H.--Of course we will. Good-bye, dear Mammy. (*They kiss.*)

MRS. M.--Good-bye.

P.--Look at us out of the window. (*They go and stand at the window and wave their handkerchiefs.*)

H.--(*Turning from the window.*) Now, what shall we do?

P.--I think it's rather dull staying in the drawing-room. Let's go into the nursery.

H.--No, that's so babyish--you talk as if we were little children. Let us stay here, and do exactly what Pappy and Mammy do.

P.--Very well--I'll sit here and work, and you sit in that chair with your legs crossed, and read the newspaper to me.

HARRY *sits and crosses his legs, takes a newspaper.*

P.--I wish I had some work to do. I wonder if I may do some of Mammy's?

H.--I should think so. She didn't say anything about her work, she only said you weren't to play with the reels of cotton, you know.

P.--Well, of course, I shan't do that. (*Takes a piece of embroidery.*) Oh dear, I've unthreaded the needle! I shall never be able to work with this thick thread, I must get a finer reel. (*Gets out two or three reels which she puts in her lap. Tries to thread the needle.*)

H.--Now, I'll tell you what, I'll read out loud just as Pappy does. (*Begins to read.*) "The threatening aspect of the political outlook has undergone no recent modification--" what on earth does that mean?

P.--I don't know in the least what modification means.

H.--It isn't modification, you stupid! mod-*i-fi*-cation.

P.--Well, what's the difference?

H.--How should I know?

P.--Then you are as stupid as I am.

H.--No, I am not. Boys are never as stupid as girls. But I'll look it out in the dictionary.

(Puts a sofa cushion on a chair and stands on it to get down the dictionary. Jumps down and knocks down chair, and falls down with books.)

P.--Great clumsy creature you are!

H.--You are not to call me names.

(Throws the sofa cushion at her.)

P.--Naughty boy!

(Jumps up, reels fall off her lap, and picks up the cushion. He tries to drag it away from her. While struggling, they knock over the box their mother told them not to touch. It drops. It is full of sugar plums. They are all spilt on the ground.)

H.--Now look what you've done!

P.--Sugar plums!

H.--That's the box Mammy told us not to touch.

P.--We must pick them up as quickly as possible, and put them in again.

(They begin putting them in again.)

H.--I wonder whether they are really sugar plums?

P.--I'll tell you what. Let's lick the outside of one and see if it's sweet.

H.--*(Licks it.)* Yes, they are sugar plums.

P.--(*Licking one.*) Are you quite sure?

H.--Yes, I think so. I'll just lick it again to be quite certain. Oh yes, they are sugar plums, there's not a doubt. (*They put them into the box.*)

P.--I think it's rather horrid to put them back into the box again after we have licked them.

H.--I think it is. Let us take out the ones we licked, and eat them. That will be cleaner, won't it?

P.--But they are all mixed! I don't know which they are now!

H.--Oh, you are a stupid girl! Well, we must eat all that are in the box, there is no help for it.

P.--I really think that would be the safest plan.

(*Their mother comes in while they are sitting on the floor eating the sugar plums.*)

MRS. M.--I've come back for my card-case which I have forgotten. Why, what have you been doing? Oh, Harry! Oh, Phœbe! I thought you were going to be so good!

P.--So we were! We were trying to be very, very good.

H.--Awfully good.

MRS. M.--Good, indeed! I told you not to play with my work-basket, or the books, or the sofa cushions, or that box, and you have disobeyed me in everything! My reels are on the floor, my books on the floor, the sofa cushion on the floor, the box that I particularly asked you not to touch upset and emptied! I must say I think you have been very naughty.

H.--Dear Mammy, I am so sorry! We really didn't mean to play with any of the things. We were going to be like you and Pappy. So I began to read the paper to Phœbe.

P.--While I did your work.

MRS. M.--(*Horried.*) My work!

H.--And, then, because I didn't understand what we were reading about, I got a dictionary to look out the words, and I dropped it, and Phœbe said I was clumsy.

P.--So then he threw a sofa cushion at me.

H.--Only because she called me names, you know. It wasn't a pillow fight in the least.

P.--And I jumped up, and the reels rolled off my lap, and I tried to take the cushion away from him, and somehow we knocked over the box.

H.--But we didn't mean to in the very least. It was quite by accident.

MRS. M.--Then, how did those sugar plums get into your mouths? That was by accident too I suppose.

H.--No, that was because we thought it was so dirty to put back the sugar plums we had licked.

P.--We just licked them to make sure they were sugar plums.

MRS. M.--I see. Well, those sugar plums were for you. Your uncle sent them, and I was going to give them to you this evening, but now I shall throw them away instead.

H.--Throw them away! Oh, Mammy, what a pity!

MRS. M.--Yes, it is a pity I can't trust two children of six and seven years old in a room by themselves. Come, let me see you safely in the nursery before I go out again.

P.--It *is* a pity, just when we were trying to be the best children in the world! (*They go out.*)