His mind wandered irresistibly to thoughts of Molly Coddle. Was Molly Coddle dead, too? He would soon see.

"Mamma."

"Yes, my dearest."

"The bed hurts."

"My poor baby."

"Won't you rock me—just this once?"

Molly Coddle was everlastingly squelched.

His mother made a cooing sound, the way a cat does when she comes back to her basket of kittens, and cuddled him in her arms. She put him inside the blue wrapper and tucked the ends around his feet. He lay in a warm, dark nest. It was soft and lacy. When he put up his hand there was a locket to play with. And all the time he was rocked. It was lovely. He was happy.

Was he happy? Surely; yet why did tears slip from his eyes and wet his cheek? Why did he feel as if he had been spanked—and had not done anything at all?

"Mamma."

"Yes, sonny."

"I am glad I came back."

"From where, dear?"

"I don't know—but haven't I been away?"

"Once I was afraid so, my darling."

"Well, I'm glad I came back."

"And I, my own."

"Mamma."

"Yes, baby."

"Tell me a story."

"Once upon a time—" she began, and stopped.

"That's the way. Go on."

"Once upon a time –" again she stopped.

He waited, wondering. The lips that were pressed regretfully against his curly head were barren of tales and helplessly ignorant of their sweet witchery.

How dim the light was! How cool the stillness! And the house—he never dreamed a house could be so silent.

And at night one seems to be truly, truly one's self—not the self that other people want one to be—as in the daytime. One dares say anything.

"Mamma."

"Yes, Rex."

"You are crying."

"Yes, my baby."

"Why?"

"Because I cannot tell my little sick boy a story."

She kissed him, actually *kissed* without stopping to consider that she might give him germs of some sort, diphtheria, maybe, or that lovely long word that makes one think of potatoes—tuberculosis.

The kiss put miraculous strength into his weak arms, and he flung them tightly around her neck and clung there. He was not afraid of germs. He liked them. He liked his mother, too—now. She had turned into the kind that other boys have—the kind that tags around after one, and tickles one in the ribs, and picks things up—the proper sort.

"Never mind about that story, mamma; never mind. I'd like——"

"What, dear?"

"Something to eat."

Eating between meals was usually never to be mentioned, never to be thought of. The middle of the night was, from its very nature, between meals. Rex knew it, but he took chances that this third bugaboo was weeping over the tomb of Molly Coddle and therefore inoperative so far as he was concerned. He was right.

"You are hungry? Oh, Rex, I am so glad."

She really said it. She seemed actually excited over it. She put him gently back into his bed, and then she flew into the next room and awakened the nurse. Together they set to work and prepared him something. He got it. It was hot—rather thin, perhaps, but fairly comforting.

"Mamma, I want to go to sleep."

"Good-night, precious."

"But, mamma——"

"Yes, boy."

"The bed hurts."

"Then come to mother's arms, Rexie."

She took him—she did. To and fro, in a drowsy nest, he was rocked into Sleepytown. The rapture of it was almost enough to keep him awake. But it did not.

When morning came he was in his bed, and the nurse alone was on guard.

"Where is my mamma?"

"Sleeping."

"Sleeping? The sun is shining."

"But she is tired. She held you until daybreak."

"*Break?* I always wonder *what* it breaks."

"The darkness!" said the nurse, smiling. "Look!"

She raised the curtain. For the first time in many days he saw the outside world. It was too glaring to look at for long. The trees were so green that they hurt his eyes. The leaves flashed like the sun. The green seemed to flame and burn. Had the trees always been so blazing and beautiful? If so, why had he wished for anything more exciting than just to be allowed to go out and get closer to the glory? The nurse drew down the curtain.

"Here is your breakfast," she said. "You have solid food this morning, you see. You are much better. You will soon be well."

The dab of milk toast looked anything but solid—positively airy—to one who could have made away with a saddle of mutton.

"How nice that was," he sighed, finishing it. The word "nice" annoyed him. It was so short. Being the pith of the sentence, it ought to be longer.

"Please get me my dictionary."

That much the nurse did; but she was adamant about letting him look into it. She compromised by reading him a few things that he felt the need of. What he wanted worse than the dictionary was that new mother of his. He longed and ached for some comfort.

"Where is my mamma?" was his constant question. He had bethought himself of several thousand indulgences which he intended to hint for.

Finally she appeared. One would never guess she had been up all night, so trim and fresh was she, so snug as to belt and so high as to collar.

"Oh, mamma," he cried, rapturously holding out his arms, "I have had a squeamish breakfast, and I think I'd like some squeamish pie for dinner."

"Squeamish?" said Mrs. Pettison, hurling a haughty look at the nurse.

"Squeamish?" said the nurse, casting an appealing look at Rex.

"It is in the dictionary," he answered. "You read it yourself. It says, squeamish means particular, nice. That's what the milk toast was. That's what I'd like the pie to be."

"Little boys should use words that they understand," advised his mother, quite in the old way. "And you will catch cold if you hold out your arms. Put them under the quilt."

"But I'd like you to rock me."

"Rock?" queried the mother with eyebrows drawn very high. "A big boy like you does not require rocking. It would be ridiculous."

"It wasn't ridiculous last night, was it?" asked Rex. He really wanted to know.

His mother austerely laid her finger across her lips.

"Hush," she said, "even a sick little boy must not be impertinent to his mother."

Impertinent! Rex's chin quivered. He wildly cast about for something to say.

The glass of water at his hand gave him an idea.

"I—I—want a drink," he murmured. Heavy tears were in his eyes, but the disappointment in his heart was heavier still. "I want a drink! I want a drink!"

"Well, why don't you take it?" asked his mother, in tones of critical exasperation.

With utter despair he brought the glass to his lips and took a gulp. The water was harder to swallow than marbles. His task done, he turned his face to the wall and lay silent. He—miserable he—was better; and, horror of horrors, he would soon be *well*.

MATERNAL MORTALITY PROBLEM

(Continued from page 28)

"scaring" the mothers-to-be, and thus making matters worse, rather than better. Of course, there should be no wanton scaremongering; but "What is wrong with the truth?" Surely it is high time that our excessive maternal mortality should be recognised, admitted and dealt with outright, rather than that the truth should continue to be hidden from those mainly concerned, and that the mothers should be left to die needlessly, as heretofore, in a fool's paradise. The policy of the ostrich is no use here! We may rest assured that one beneficent result of the present discussion and publicity, followed by much earnest thought and concerted action, will be to make maternity much safer for mother and child than ever before during our time in New Zealand.

Let us all decide to play our individual parts honestly, wholeheartedly, and to the best of our abilities, and let us all pull together in the spirit of the motto of the Plunket Society:—

"For the sake of Women and Children, for the advancement of the Dominion, and for the honour of the Empire."