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## SHORT STORY

# One Was Foolish

(Written for "The Listener" by GRACE M. PHIPPS)

THE two bungalows at the end of Elm Street were identical in size and appearance. The Thompsons and the Morrows had been neighbours almost all their married lives. But whereas the Thompson house and yard were always neat and clean, with everything put tidily away, the Morrow place had a lived-in look, which perhaps is just a polite way of saying it was untidy.

The back lawn nearly always had a clutter of something on it, sometimes a makeshift tent made of sacks, with which the boys played Indians, sometimes a collection of apple boxes and odds and ends of bottles and cardboard cartons, with which young Sally busily played at shop-keeping. There were always balls and rag, dolls and engines strewn about.

If there was one thing Mrs. Thompson couldn't stand, it was a mess. It got on her nerves. You could always train children to put things away. Look at her Dorothy, she thought, complacently. She never left things about or got dirty like those Morrow children, with the mud pies and such-like. And instead of reprimanding them, their mother would come out and admire their handiwork, leaving them dirty until it was time for their next meal. Then she would pop them in one of the wash-house tubs and swish soapy water over them. All that extra work!

At first, until Mrs. Thompson got used to the Morrows' slipshod ways, she was horrified when she saw Mrs. Morrow gaily taking the children for a picnic on a fine Monday morning. How did that woman ever get her work done, when everyone knew you had to keep to a schedule to keep pace with a house and three children? But if Mrs. Thompson remarked to Mrs. Morrow that she thought it queer to go picnicking on a Monday with the washing waiting to be done, Mrs. Morrow would just say blithely, "But I must take advantage of this lovely day. It might be dull tomorrow, I can do the washing then."

No method, Mrs. Thompson thought. The way some people live! Yet Mrs. Morrow always seemed to have a fresh clean frock to put on. She would try new ways with her hair and say, "How does this style suit me?" And there she would be, beaming over the fence at Mrs. Thompson, her bright curls done in a bunch on the top of her head. Such foolishness, thought Mrs. Thompson, who hadn't changed her hair style for 10 years.

Mr. Morrow was the same as his wife. Careless and irresponsible. The way he galloped around with those children of his just before their bedtime, making them shriek and get all excited!

WHEN the war came, Mr. Morrow and Mr. Thompson went overseas just about the same time, and on Mr. Morrow's final leave what did the Morrows do but gad about the countryside on their everlasting picnicking, when Mrs. Thompson knew quite well

there were dozens of small jobs wanting to be done about the place.

She said to Mrs. Morrow, "Why don't you get Mr. Morrow to fix the hinge on your front gate before he goes?" and Mrs. Morrow had replied airily, "Oh, I'm getting old Mr. Smith to do it after Tom goes. He's in need of odd jobs, and I don't want Tom's leave spent on dull things." Wasting money like that!

Mrs. Thompson wrote to her Herbert regularly twice a week, on Wednesday and Sunday nights. She found Mrs. Morrow early one morning, when she went in with a recipe she had promised her, writing away at full speed to her Tom, and the breakfast dishes not washed, nor the beds made. Mrs. Morrow made no excuses. Just said she



The way he galloped around with those children. . . .

felt like writing to Tom then, and if she tried to save up all that she wanted to say until to-night, she might forget. As if any person with any sense of method could ignore dirty dishes and unmade beds, and sit there writing away.

\* \* \*

TIME marched on, and butter rationing came in. Mrs. Thompson had 12 pounds stored away, and of course Mrs. Morrow was caught with just a pat on the dish. Well, serve her right. Mrs. Thompson wasn't going to give her any of hers if she couldn't think ahead like other sensible people. But Mrs. Morrow didn't seem to worry. "Why, two pounds a week for the four of us. I can easily squeeze enough out of that to make Tom a cake now and again."

Mrs. Thompson saw her one afternoon, spreading the children's tea on a cloth on a lawn. "Special sandwiches to-day," she called gaily to the children. She had cut the sandwiches with the biscuit cutter into fancy shapes. As the children delightedly consumed them, she whispered mischievously over the fence, "Made with good beef dripping for a change."

Quite often, Mrs. Morrow would relax into an old deck-chair, which she had parked under a tree near the dividing fence, and there she would sprawl, absorbed in a book.

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