

SHORT STORY (Cont'd.)

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to-day. And she looked round the yard. He tried again. No, all the time, here, and he held his stomach with his two hands. Through her pre-occupation and her hurry and her disgust she tried to be kind. Well, you must go and lie down for a while, then you'll be all right; but tell me first where Fanny might be. Hurry—and her hand reached out for his shoulder. He couldn't bear it; he couldn't bear to be touched, then, and he moved away, and pointed quickly to the corner of the yard where the branches of a macrocarpa tree came down to the ground. It didn't matter. . . .

Miss Brown hurried towards the tree, and he followed her.

Under the tree Fanny sat back on her heels. She clasped the doll tightly, feeling its body firm and yet soft under her hands; she pressed its face to hers, and the cheeks felt smooth and cold against her hot ones; she kissed the red lips that were slightly parted. The curved arms with their chubby fingers fitted snugly round her neck, as if they clasped her too. She spoke softly to it. Lovely baby; lovely little baby; lovely little Jesus baby. The branches were swept aside, and Miss Brown was looking at her.

MISS BROWN snatched the doll quickly, and she looked at Fanny with her anger mounting. Wicked little girl, she said severely, wicked little thief; and Fanny stared back at her, not lowering her eyes as of course she should have done, not crying so that, showing repentance, she could be forgiven. Just impudent, and bold, and hard. Really deserving anything one could say to her, thought Miss Brown, and she hurried out quickly, quite upset, brushing past Tiki, away past the old woman and the flies. . . .

Fanny glared at Tiki who had given her away, and she thrust hard at him, so that he fell to the ground; he didn't get up, or look at her; he put his arm across his eyes, and she knew with contempt that he was crying. She hated him, because he didn't get up and chase her, round and round the yard, through the gorse, splashing in the stream; forgetting their quarrel, and catching tiny fish with the water slipping cool through their hands; climbing the trees; quarrelling again, and making it up again, half-a-dozen times through the hot days, as they used to do—she kicked him hard, twice, and ran out, across the yard, to creep into the gorse, and hide.

Miss Brown's head and shoulders glided rapidly above the gorse as she followed the track; she looked at her watch, and walked more slowly; it wasn't so late after all. There would be plenty of time. For a bath as well as everything else—and didn't she need it, after even being near that dirty place—how people could bear to live like that. With a sudden glow she remembered the holidays; the train journey; she loved the train. Her mind resumed the old familiar eager dreams which were never long out of it. She sat by the window, and put all her things neatly where they should be, and suddenly a tall handsome man was standing beside her. Is this seat taken? and with just the right amount of reserve she said, I don't think so; and with the right amount of deference he said, Do you mind, and

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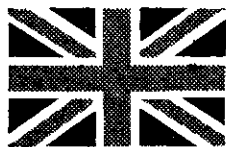
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