



"The share cook who came bursting into the drawing room roaring, 'I'm poisoned, I'm POISONED'"

cried too, and said who would feed us now? We felt like Russians ourselves then. They must often have been very good to us.

Once when Mother was out for the day, a cowman went mad and began running round with an axe. This was the best time we had. Missie made us come inside, and she and Nurse pulled down the blinds. We were told to lie on the floor when he came round the house calling out, but we wriggled, and peeped round the edges of the blinds. He chopped at the clothes' props with the axe, and then he went away down to the cowshed. We had to stand up to see, but we could hear the shouts, and it all looked funny and small, like dolls' house play. We saw the Manager, very red, walking along swishing a stockwhip. We saw him wave it at the man, and then drop it and take something out of his pocket. Missie said this was a Pistol. He pointed it, and the man went to chop a cow, and suddenly another man jumped up and hit him flat. Then we couldn't see him any more for all the men sitting on him. We felt this was a real adventure, only they didn't believe us at school, so it wasn't much good. Mother said that perhaps Missie should not have pulled down the blinds, as it might have attracted his attention more. This was the only occasion where I remember Missie making a mistake. She must have been twenty-two or three at the time.

Mother made a mistake herself when she sent us running to fetch a woolly cap for Jimmy Tye when they took him to hospital. It never came home, and neither did poor Jimmy. When he got there, they went to wash his back. And Jimmy said to them, "If you wash my back I will die." And die he did, that very night. Mother put the cap on his bald head as he lay in the back of the mailcar, and Jimmy kissed her, and called her "a dear brave girl," which we thought silly. Our father was the

brave one, away fighting Germans and Turks, and, as we told her, anyone could see that Mother wasn't a girl. Micky Dripping called Mother "Girl-dear" too, just as he did with us. He had beautiful manners, and always skimmed the flies off his horehound beer before giving us a drink. We liked James Adolphus Griffin, who danced round the kitchen when the fly-papers stuck to his head, and we liked John-Henry who was put in prison. John-Henry used to buy a lot of coats when he went for his holiday. Then when he needed some money he would sell one. In the end he stole some of the coats before he sold them. My father said that John-Henry "became confused over problems of currency."

I was older when we had Sam and Mrs. Sam. Sam was stout and tall and very red in the face, he used to shake a lot because he had shell-shock; he had shell-shock very much worse when he was drunk. I remember Mrs. Sam much more vaguely. During the hot weather they moved out of their room into a tent in the back yard where the clothes line was; we were not allowed to go into it, and I can't remember that we ever did. It was round the room that they moved out of that we had the fun. First there was a story that boxes and boxes of eggs and bottled fruit were left under the bed.

This interested us deeply. Next a man burst in to say that a lady was having a baby in his car at the top gate. Mother was away, and I grabbed the chance of helping with the preparations in the room. I even swept under the bed, but though there was a funny smell there were no particular boxes. I looked in the cupboards too.



They came in with the Lady's Friend, and the Baby, and the Lady herself, flat on a mattress with Sam as one of the corner carriers. Sam was very red, and began to shake in an ominous way. The Lady's Friend tried to give me the Baby to hold, but I wasn't having any of that, so I was given Sam's corner. I remember how my nails slipped and gritted and how I suddenly was sure that God would blast me with a bolt if I let the mattress go. Once they were safe inside I didn't go in again because of the Baby, but I liked to listen by the door. They sounded just like the fowls cheeping when they settle on their perches for the night. Sometimes the Friend would come out without the Baby, then I could stay in the kitchen and study her. Once she taught me a useful thing. She was telling me something when she stopped

and said "Pardon." I waited a bit, and after a time she said severely, "When someone says Pardon you should say Granted."

Later we had Charlie for the groom, and for a long time after. A gentle, nervy little man who adored the horses, and was a good friend to everybody. He would lead out a great ramping sixteen hands grey, and give you the reins, saying "Now Miss, you'll promise to treat him just like Dresden China won't you now." He and the stallion used to talk to one another, and Charlie took him for a walk every Sunday afternoon. Show Day was the Day for Charlie, he was usually unconscious by nightfall, but he had seen his darlings in their Prize Ribbons before that. The last cook I remember before I grew up had scarlet fever; they took her away, and her husband was very sad. The Inspector came and told him to seal up their room with gummed paper, and a big pink candle had to be put inside. Then it was to be left, and we could watch through the window while the bugs died. When we helped him open it up we had to be very careful, but when we did go in it seemed much the same. Missie said that the Inspector should have told him to light the candle. And there was one who stayed for ages, till after I was married. She was nice, except for her Tempers. She made us the same pudding every Sunday for years and years. She called it Surprise Pudding.

This was mostly before and during the First World War. Times have changed on the station, and it isn't at all like that now. I don't really know if it was like that then, but it seemed so. Anyway, we enjoyed ourselves.

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