

The solidly boarded dividing fence was at least twelve feet high.

Mrs. Hamlin choked. 'I don't know. He has ruined the pansies. They look as if a steam roller had gone over them. I can't wait to get away from this awful street!'

Mrs. Billy tossed her small curly head, but did not reply. The two ascended the stairs to the airy front chamber, which overlooked the shady street.

'I hope,' said Mrs. Hamlin, with a sigh, 'I may be given strength and wisdom enough to bring little Edwin up well. I hope we shall find him quiet and gentlemanly, and considerate of other people's feelings and property.'

Little Edwin was six years old.

Presently there sounded on the street below the excited whoops and joyful yells of the five Carter children on one side and the three Hones on the other. A stiff breeze was blowing up the street, and soon outside the second storey window floated home-made kites of all shapes and in all stages of dilapidation.

'Oh! oh!' cried Mrs. Hamlin, with her head out of the window. 'They've upset the jar of roses I put on the lower step; and there stands Mrs. Carter just beaming at them, and never noticing my roses. How can anyone be so thoughtless? If only I could move to-morrow——' Here her voice was lost in the joyful shouts from below.

That night Mrs. Billy told Billy that she was growing nervous. 'Somehow, when I'm with Mrs. Hamlin I hear the children's noises so much more plainly than I do anywhere else, and seeing her jump and start and fuss at them makes me jumpy too.'

'Then,' said Billy earnestly, 'for the love of goodness stay away from Mrs. Hamlin!'

Mrs. Billy stayed away for two days. Then Mrs. Hamlin called to relate two items of overwhelming importance. Edwin was due to arrive that evening at 60 Stuyvesant place, and the house had a prospective purchaser.

'It's a man by the name of Sherry,' said Mrs. Hamlin. 'He has a two weeks' option on it, and we're looking for an apartment. I want to take Edwin off the streets, so that he won't be killed or mangled by carts—and roller skates.'

The evening was hot and sultry. Stuyvesant place, leaving its windows open to catch any belated breeze that might blow, was sitting out on its doorsteps or in its tiny plots of grass; its eyes were turned expectantly toward Number 60. That is, the older members of the community sat in the manner described. The younger members were massed in front of Number 60, waiting to look Edwin over. He finally arrived in a closed taxicab, and was hastily conveyed in the arms of his uncle through the waiting ranks.

Billy, sitting on his own steps with Mrs. Billy, grinned broadly. His comments were tinged by a recollection of Mr. Hamlin's opinion of the street. 'That was done with neatness and despatch,' said Billy. 'The child is now beyond the contaminating influence of the Carters and Hones. His feet have not touched the pavement that theirs have trod. Wonder if they have a glass case for him yet?'

Fifteen minutes later Billy amended his last remark vigorously. 'Cats and dogs! Talk about a noise! I wish the glass case were here—and he inside it! Wh-e-w!'

The noise came from Number 60, and caused the inhabitants of the little street to hold their breaths. Finally Mrs. Hone and Mrs. Carter hastened down to the Billy Keenans.

'Isn't that racket awful?' said the mother of the riotous Carter five. 'I can endure any amount of happy noise, but it makes me wild to hear a child cry like that.'

'Of course neither of the Hamlins know anything about caring for such a baby,' said the mother of the three mischievous Hones, 'but we hesitate to go and offer our services because they—well, they're so unlike the rest of the street—not neighborly; and lately she has been positively snippy. But she comes to see you,

and we thought we'd ask your advice. Would it do for us to offer——'

'Oh, yes!' interrupted Mrs. Billy eagerly. 'Do go before that child splits his throat!'

'And our ears!' added Billy.

Mrs. Hone and Mrs. Carter hastened up the steps of Number 60, and disappeared. Presently the windows of Number 60 banged shut, and muffled the noise within. Soon Mrs. Carter appeared on the top step, and calling the smallest Hone and the two youngest Carters, drove them into Number 60. Then quiet reigned.

An hour later the two good Samaritans came down the street again to report progress to the neighborhood.

'There's nothing like children to comfort children,' Mrs. Carter explained. 'We left Edwin playing with ours. He seems more used to being with children than with grown people.'

'The Hone and Carter hoodlums to the rescue!' exclaimed Billy, after the mothers had gone. 'Will the Hamlins survive?'

The next afternoon, when Billy reached home, Mrs. Billy met him. 'Billy, guess what's going on in the Hamlin house?'

'I hope that the little chap isn't going on as he did last night!'

Mrs. Billy chuckled. 'No, but Mrs. Hamlin is so afraid he will that she had the Carter and Hone children there all day. She's clinging to 'em as a drowning man clings to a straw. They are swarming all over her basement and back yard and front steps. Oh, the racket they are making! And I noticed that Edwin is the loudest one among them. But I think he is a lovable little fellow, and I can see that Mrs. Hamlin thinks so too.'

The option on the Hamlin property was five days old before Mrs. Billy again saw Mrs. Hamlin. Edwin's foster mother was standing in her front doorway. A smile hovered about her lips and softened her eyes. She was watching a street parade by the neighboring children; Edwin was in the heart of the parade. A Carter grasped one hand, a Hone the other, and both a Hone and a Carter had affixed themselves firmly to the rear of his blouse. They occupied the middle of the highway. A milkman's cart approached, and, with the others, the diminutive Edwin lifted his voice in frantic commands to the driver to get out of the way. In her doorway Mrs. Hamlin fluttered nervously, and called:

'Why, Edwin darling! Is that the proper way to speak to the man?'

Edwin, not hearing, continued in his own form of aggressive address, and the parade, unhampered by further obstructions, swept noisily down the street. When the option was a week old Billy came home from his office laughing. 'It's rich to hear old Hamlin,' he declared. 'He's got little Edwin's points down super-fine. It's really all he wants to talk about.' I dropped into his office to tell him that I had heard of a good apartment at a bargain price, and he kept me there for an hour, telling me about the boy. You'd think Edwin was the only child ever born.'

Mrs. Billy laughed. 'Mrs. Hamlin shares his opinion, Billy. You see, they've discovered that Edwin is a very unusual child! Mrs. Hamlin admitted to-day that he was noisy, but said there was so much more character in his noise than in most children's that she hesitated to check him!'

When the option was ten days old Billy again walked up from the office with Mr. Hamlin, who carried under his arm an awkward package. Mr. Hamlin refused to divulge what the contents of the package were; but as they turned a corner Billy accidentally knocked against him, and the bundle went to the pavement, the string broke, and out flew a pair of roller skates. Mr. Hamlin, smiling broadly, picked them up.

'Boys will be boys,' he said cheerfully, 'and nothing would do but Edwin must have roller skates. Now I'll have a dickens of a time teaching him how to use them!'

The 'dickens of a time' began that very evening, when Edwin and his teacher occupied a large area of

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