

'Oh the darlings. I can see them,' laughed Maata. 'So serious, you know.' She shook her skirts, crept over to Mrs Close, and sat leaning against her, her bright hair between the older woman's knees. 'Tell me about when they were little' she coaxed. 'Anything.' 'Oh do mother. About the time they had their photo taken and Philip lost the hairpin out of his [?] curl and cried so awfully' Maisie pleaded, standing a row of four fat soldiers in the second fire bar.

Mrs Close put her darning on the table, settled herself and rested her hands on Maata's hair. The tired dragged look left her face, it sweetened and grew happy. 'Well that's all there is of that story' she said 'except that being twins and feeling everything together, you know, Hal started crying too and they made such a dreadful noise that people stopped in the street and looked in at the shop. Oh, I did feel ashamed. And the photographer—a fine fellow he was with a game leg—unfortunately said 'Well, Mrs Close, at any rate your children know how to attract the public' and I wouldn't have thought twice about the remark if I hadn't taken them to a phrenologist the week before who told me crowds and crowds of people all listening to them. . . .' 'Just what they will do, of course' interrupted Maisie. 'And my boys being very famous. Well, thought I, as I tied the string of Hal's white muslin hat—the one you had afterwards, Maisie, with the lace frill—they've begun early enough, and a little too early for me.'

'Do you mean old Wigglesworth the photographer' asked Mr Close, not pausing in his work, speaking slowly and half to the rhythm of his work. 'He went—bust, he did—the same year and set fire to his own shop to get the insurance money, so they say. Had a fine bass voice and sang 'Vittoria' in the Town Hall at a charity concert.' 'That's the man—his wife was a flashy woman, she ruined him. I never saw another woman wear the clothes she put on her back on Sundays.'

A voice from the door—Phil had slipped quietly in and stood against the lintel, hands in his pockets, looking at them with laughter. 'Oh I remember her, mother—Hal and I used to shout at her. Compliments of the season. Where did you get that hat!' 'Pure little wretches', said the Mother. 'Come to the fire and warm your hands, dear—where have you been?' 'Up in my room' said Phil. 'Maisie—give me one. I came down to steal Maata. It's such a beautiful night. Don't you want to go for a walk, dearest?' 'No', said Mrs Close, answering for her. 'She's not to be disturbed, she's just got comfy. You go and talk to your brother, my son.' She was eager with recollection, she had her little audience about her, sympathizing—she did not want them to get up and leave her with the old man and that sock to be darned by gaslight. She was tired with a dragging tiredness of middle age, and the feeling of Maata pressed up so closely seemed to relieve some pain—no definite pain, just