

**DONNELL
ANNIE
HAMILTON**

THE VERY SMALL PERSON

Annie Donnell

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Annie Hamilton Donnell

The Very Small Person

Chapter I

Little Blue Overalls

Miss Salome's face was gently frowning as she wrote.

"Dear John," the letter began, – "It's all very well except one thing. I wonder you didn't think of that. *I'm* thinking of it most of the time, and it takes away so much of the pleasure of the rose-garden and the raspberry-bushes! Anne is in raptures over the raspberry-bushes.

"Yes, the raspberries and the roses are all right. And I like the stone-wall with the woodbine over it. (Good boy, you remembered that, didn't you?) And the apple-tree and the horse-chestnut and the elm – of course I like them.

"The house is just big enough and just small enough, and there's a trunk-closet, as I stipulated. And Anne's room has a 'southern exposure' – Anne's crazy spot is southern exposures. Mine's *it*. Dear, dear, John, how could you forget *it!* That everything else – closets and stone-walls and exposures – should be to my mind but *that!* Well, I am thinking of moving out, before I move in. But I haven't told Anne. Anne is the kind of person *not* to tell, until the last moment. It saves one's nerves – heigh-ho! I thought I was coming here to get away from nerves! I was so satisfied. I really meant to thank you, John, until I discovered – it. Oh yes, I know – Elizabeth is looking over your shoulder, and you two are saying something that is unfit for publication about old maids! My children, then thank the Lord you aren't either of you old maids. Make the most of it."

Miss Salome let her pen slip to the bare floor and gazed before her wistfully. The room was in the dreary early stages of unpacking, but it was not of that Miss Salome was thinking. Her eyes were gazing out of the window at a thin gray trail of smoke against the blue ground of the sky. She could see the little house, too, brown and tiny and a little battered. She could see the clothes-line, and count easily enough the pairs of little stockings on it. She caught up the pen again fiercely.

"There are eight," she wrote. "Allowing two legs to a child, doesn't that make *four?* John Dearborn, you have bought me a house next door to four children! I think I shall begin to put the books back to-night. As ill luck will have it, they are all unpacked.

"I have said nothing to Anne; Anne has said nothing to me. But we both know. She has counted the stockings too. We are both old maids. No, I have not *seen* them yet – anything but their stockings on the clothes-line. But the mother is not a washer-woman – there is no hope. I don't know how I know she isn't a washer-woman, but I do. It is impressed upon me. So there are four children, to say nothing of the Lord knows how many babies still in socks! I cannot forgive you, John."

Miss Salome had been abroad for many years. Stricken suddenly with homesickness, she and her ancient serving-woman, Anne, had fled across seas to their native land. Miss Salome had first commissioned John, long-suffering John, – adviser, business-manager, brother, – to find her a snug little home with specified adjuncts of trunk-closets, elm, apple, and horse-chestnut trees, woodbiney stone walls – and a "southern exposure" for Anne. John had done his best. But how could he have forgotten, and Elizabeth have forgotten, and Miss Salome herself have forgotten – it? Every one knew Miss Salome's distaste for little children. Anne's too, though Anne was more taciturn than her mistress.

"Hullo!"

Miss Salome started. In the doorway stood a very small person in blue jeans overalls.

"Hullo! I want your money or your life! I'm a 'wayman."

“A —*what?*” Miss Salome managed to ejaculate. The Little Blue Overalls advanced a few feet into the room.

“Robber, you know; – you know what robbers are, don’t you? I’m one. You needn’t call me a *highwayman*, I’m so – so low. Just ’wayman ’ll do. Why, gracious! you ain’t afraid, are you? You needn’t be, – I won’t hurt you!” and a sweet-toned, delighted little laugh echoed through the bare room. “You needn’t give me your money or your life. Never mind. I’ll ’scuse you.”

Miss Salome uttered no word at all. Of course this boy belonged in a pair of those stockings over there. It was no more than was to be expected.

“It’s me. I’m not a ’wayman any more, – just *me*. I heard you’d come, so I thought I’d come an’ see you. You glad? Why don’t you ask me will I take a seat?”

“Will I – will you take a seat?” repeated Miss Salome, as if she were saying a lesson. The Little Blue Overalls climbed into a chair.

“Looks pretty bad here, doesn’t it? I guess you forgot to sweep,” he said, assuming social curves in his plump little body. He had the air of having come to stay. Miss Salome’s lips, under orders to tighten, found themselves unexpectedly relaxing into a smile. The Little Blue Overalls was amusing.

“We’ve got a sofy, an’ a rockin’-chair. The sofy’s new, but Chessie’s broke a hole in it.”

“Are there four of you?” Miss Salome asked, abruptly. It was the Little Blue Overalls’ turn to start now.

“*Me?*– gracious! four o’ me? I guess you’re out o’ your head, aren’t – Oh, you mean *child’en!* Well, there’s five, ’thout countin’ the spandy new one – she’s too little to count.”

Five – six, with the spandy new one! Miss Salome’s gaze wandered from the piles of books on the floor to the empty packing-boxes, as if trying to find the shortest distance.

“There are only four pairs on the line,” she murmured, weakly, – “stockings,” she added. The Little Blue Overalls nodded comprehendingly.

“I don’t wear ’em summers, – I guess you didn’t notice I was in my bare feet, did you? Well, I am. It’s a savin’. The rest are nothing but girls – I’m all the boy we’ve got. Boys are tough. But I don’t s’pose you ever was one, so you don’t know?” There was an upward inflection to the voice of the Little Blue Overalls. An answer seemed expected.

“No – no, I never was one,” Miss Salome said, hastily. She could hear Anne’s plodding steps in the hall. It would be embarrassing to have Anne come in now. But the footsteps plodded by. After more conversation on a surprising number of topics, the Little Blue Overalls climbed out of the chair.

“I’ve had a ’joyable time, an’ I’ll be pleased to come again, thank you,” he said, with cheerful politeness. “I’m glad you’ve come, – I like you, but I hope you’ll sweep your floor.” He retreated a few steps, then faced about again and advanced into the enemy’s near neighborhood. He was holding out a very small, brown, unwashed hand. “I forgot ’bout shakin’ hands,” he smiled. “Le’s. I hope you like me, too, an’ I guess you do, don’t you? Everybody does. Nobody ever *didn’t* like me in my life, an’ I’m seven. Good-bye.”

Miss Salome heard him patter down the hall, and she half thought – she was not sure – that at the kitchen door he stopped. Half an hour afterwards she saw a very small person crossing the rose-garden. If there was something in his hands that he was eating, Miss Salome never asked Anne about it. It was not her way to ask Anne questions. It was not Anne’s way to ask her. The letter to John was finished, oddly enough, without further mention of – it. Miss Salome got the broom and swept the bare big room carefully. She hummed a little as she worked. Out in the kitchen Anne was humming too.

“It is a pleasant little place, especially the stone-wall and the woodbine,” Miss Salome was thinking; “I’m glad I specified woodbine and stone-walls. John would never have thought. So many other things are pleasant, too; but, dear, dear, it is very unfortunate about that one thing!” Still Miss Salome hummed, and after tea she got Anne to help her move out the empty packing-boxes.

The next day the Little Blue Overalls came again. This time he was a peddler, with horse-chestnut “apples” to sell, and rose-petal pies. He said they were bargains.

“You can truly eat the pies,” he remarked. “There’s a *little* sugar in ’em. I saved it off the top o’ *her* bun,” indicating Anne’s locality with a jerk of his little cropped head. So it was a fact, was it? He had been eating something when he crossed the rose-garden? Miss Salome wondered at Anne.

The next day, and the next, – every day the Little Blue Overalls came, always in a new character. Miss Salome found herself watching for him. She could catch the little blue glint of very small overalls as soon as they got to the far side of the rose-garden. But for Anne, at the end of the first week she would have gone out to meet him. Dear, dear, but for Miss Salome, Anne would have gone!

The Little Blue Overalls confided his troubles to Miss Salome. He told her how hard it was to be the only boy, – how impossible, of course, it was to play girly plays, and how he had longed to find a congenial spirit. Mysteriously enough, he appeared confident that he had found the congenial spirit at last. Miss Salome’s petticoats seemed no obstacle. He showed her his pocketful of treasures. He taught her to whittle, and how to bear it when she “bled.” He taught her to whistle – very softly, on account of Anne. (He taught Anne, too – softly, on account of Miss Salome.) He let her make sails for his boats, and sew on his buttons, – those that Anne didn’t sew on.

“Dear John,” wrote Miss Salome, “the raspberries are ripe. When you were a very small person – say seven – did you ever mash them between raspberry leaves, with ‘sugar in,’ and call them pies, – and eat them? They are really palatable. Of course it is a little risky on account of possible bugs. I don’t remember that you were a remarkable little boy. Were you? Did you ever play you were a highwayman, or an elephant, or anything of that sort? Queer I can’t remember.

“Anne is delighted with her southern exposure, but she has never said so. That is why I know she is. I am delighted with the roses and the closets and the horse-chestnut – especially the horst-chestnut. That is where we play – I mean it is most pleasant there, hot afternoons. Did you use to dote on horse-chestnuts? Queer boys should. But I rather like them myself, in a way, – out of the way! We have picked up a hundred and seventeen.” Miss Salome dropped into the plural number innocently, and Elizabeth laughed over John’s shoulder. Elizabeth did the reading between the lines. John was only a man.

One day Little Blue Overalls was late. He came from the direction of the stable that adjoined Miss Salome’s house. He was excited and breathless. A fur rug was draped around his shoulders and trailed uncomfortably behind him.

“Come on!” he cried, eagerly. “It’s a circus! I’m the grizzled bear. There’s a four-legged girl – Chessie, you know, with stockin’s on her hands, – and a Manx rooster (’thout any tail), and, oh, my! the *splendidest* livin’ skeleton you ever saw! I want you to be man’ger – come on! It’s easy enough. You poke us with a stick, an’ we perform. I dance, an’ the four-legged girl walks, an’ the rooster crows, an’ the skeleton skel – Oh, well, you needn’t poke the skeleton.”

The Little Blue Overalls paused for breath. Miss Salome laid aside her work. Where was Anne? – but the stable could be reached without passing the kitchen windows. Saturdays Anne was very busy, anyway.

“I’m ready,” laughed Miss Salome. She had never been a circus-manager, but she could learn. It was easier than whittling. Together they hurried away to the stable. At the door Miss Salome came to an abrupt stop. An astonished exclamation escaped her.

The living skeleton sat on an empty barrel, lean and grave and patient. The living skeleton also uttered an exclamation. She and the circus-manager gazed at each other in a remarkable way, as if under a spell.

“Come on!” shouted the grizzled bear.

After that, Miss Salome and Anne were not so reserved. What was the use? And it was much easier, after all, to be found out. Things ran along smoothly and pleasantly after that.

Late in the autumn, Elizabeth, looking over John's shoulder one day, laughed, then cried out, sharply. "Oh!" she said; "oh, I am sorry!" And John echoed her an instant later.

"Dear John," the letter said, "when you were little were you ever very sick, and did you *die*? Oh, I see, but don't laugh. I think I am a little out of my head to-day. One is when one is anxious. And Little Blue Overalls is very sick. I found Anne crying a little while ago, and just now she came in and found me. She didn't mind; I don't.

"He did not come yesterday or the day before. Yesterday I went to see why. Anne was just coming away from the door. 'He's sick,' she said, in her crisp, sharp way, – you know it, John, – but she was white in the face. The little mother came to the door. Queer I had never seen her before, – Little Blue Overalls has her blue eyes.

"There were two or three small persons clinging to her, and the very smallest one I ever saw was in her arms. She looked fright –" The letter broke off abruptly here. Another slip was enclosed that began as abruptly. "Anne says it is scarlet-fever. The doctor has been there just now. I am going to have him brought over here – you *know* I don't mean the doctor. And you would not smile, either of you – not Elizabeth, anyway, for she will think of her own babies –"

"Yes, yes," Elizabeth cried, "I am thinking!"

"– That is why he must not stay over there. There are so many babies. I am going over there now."

The letter that followed this one was a week delayed.

"Dear John," it said, – "you must be looking out for another place. If anything should – he is very sick, John! And I could not stay here without him. Nor Anne. John, would you ever think that Anne was born a nurse? Well, the Lord made her one. I have found it out. Not with a little dainty white cap on, and a nurse's apron, – not that kind, but with light, cool fingers and a great, tender heart. That is the Lord's kind, and it's Anne. She is taking beautiful care of our Little Blue Overalls. The little mother and I appreciate Anne. But he is very very sick, John.

"I could not stay here. Why, there isn't a spot that wouldn't remind me! There's a faint little path worn in the grass beside the stone-wall where he has been 'sentry.' There's a bare spot under the horse-chestnut where he played blacksmith and 'shoe-ed' the saw-horse. And he used to pounce out on me from behind the old elm and demand my money or my life, – he was a highwayman the first time I saw him. I've bought rose-pies and horse-chestnut apples of him on the front door-steps. We've played circus in the barn. We've been Indians and gypsies and Rough Riders all over the place. You must look round for another one, John. I can't stay here.

"Here's Anne. She says he is asleep now. Before he went he sent word to me that he was a wounded soldier, and he *wished* I'd make a red cross and sew it on Anne's sleeve. I must go and make it. Good-bye. The letter will not smell good because I shall fumigate it, on account of Elizabeth's babies. You need not be afraid."

There was no letter at all the next week, early or late, and they were afraid Little Blue Overalls was dead. Elizabeth hugged her babies close and cried softly over their little, bright heads. Then shortly afterwards the telegram came, and she laughed – and cried – over that. It was as welcome as it was guiltless of punctuation:

"Thank the Lord John Little Blue Overalls is going to get well."

Chapter II

The Boy

The trail of the Boy was always entirely distinct, but on this especial morning it lay over house, porch, barn – everything. The Mother followed it up, stooping to gather the miscellany of boyish belongings into her apron. She had a delightful scheme in her mind for clearing everything up. She wanted to see how it would seem, for once, not to have any litter of whittlings, of strings and marbles and tops! No litter of beloved birds' eggs, snake-skins, turtle-shells! No trail of the Boy anywhere.

It had taken the whole family to get the Boy off, but now he was gone. Even yet the haze of dust the stage-coach had stirred up from the dry roadway lingered like a faint blur on the landscape. It could not be ten minutes since they had bidden the Boy his first good-bye. The Mother smiled softly.

“But I did it!” she murmured. “Of course, – I *had* to. The idea of letting your Boy go off without kissing him good-bye! Mary,” she suddenly spoke aloud, addressing the Patient Aunt, who was following the trail too, picking up the siftings from the other's apron – “Mary, did you kiss him? There was really no need, you know, because you are not his mother. And it would have saved his feelings not to.”

The Patient Aunt laughed. She was very young and pretty, and the “patient” in her name had to do only with her manner of bearing the Boy.

“No, I didn't,” she said. “I didn't dare to, after I saw him wipe yours off!”

“*Mary!*”

“With the back of his hand. I am not near-sighted. Now *why* should a well-meaning little kiss distress a Boy like that? That's what I want to know.”

“It didn't once,” sighed the Mother, gently. “Not when he was a baby. I'm glad I got in a great many of them then, while I had a chance. It was the trousers that did it, Mary. From the minute he put on trousers he objected to being kissed. I put his kilts on again one day, and he let me kiss him.”

“But it was a bribe to get you to take them off,” laughed the Patient Aunt, wickedly. “I remember; – I was there. And you took them off to pay for that kiss. You can't deny it, Bess.”

“Yes, I took them off – and after that I kissed *them*. It was next best. Mary, does it seem very *awful* quiet here to you?”

“Awful. I never heard anything like it in my life. I'm going to let something drop and make a noise.” She dropped a tin trumpet, but it fell on the thick rug, and they scarcely heard it.

The front gate clicked softly, and the Father came striding up the walk, whistling exaggeratedly. He had ridden down to the corner with the Boy.

“Well, well, well,” he said; “now I shall go to work. I'm going up to my den, girls, and I don't want to be called away for anything or anybody lower than a President or the minister. This is my first good chance to work for ten years.”

Which showed how old the Boy was. He was rather young to go off alone on a journey, but a neighbor half a mile down the glary white road was going his way, and would take him in charge. The neighbor was lame, and the Boy thought he was going to take charge of the neighbor. It was as well. Nobody had undeceived him.

In a little over half an hour – three-quarters at most – the trail of the Boy was wiped out. Then the Patient Aunt and the Mother sat down peacefully and undisturbed to their sewing. Everything was very spruce and cleared up. The Mother was thinking of that, and of how very, very still it was. She wished the Patient Aunt would begin to sing, or a door would slam somewhere.

“Dear me!” she thought, with a tremulous little smile, “here I am wanting to hear a door slam already! Any one wouldn't think I'd had a special set of door nerves for years!” She started in to rock

briskly. There used to be a board that creaked by the west window. Why didn't it creak now? The Mother tried to make it.

"Mary," she cried, suddenly and sharply – "*Mary!*"

"Mercy! Well, what is it, my dear? Is the house afire, or anything?"

"Why don't you talk, and not sit there as still as a post? You haven't said a word for half an hour."

"Why, so I haven't, – or you either, for that matter. I thought we were sitting here enjoying the calm. Doesn't it look too lovely and fixed-up for anything, Bess? Seems like Sunday. *Don't* you wish somebody would call before we get stirred up again?"

"There's time enough. We sha'n't get stirred up again for a week," sighed the Mother. She seemed suddenly to remember, as a new thing, that weeks held seven days apiece; days, twenty-four hours. The little old table at school repeated itself to her mind. Then she remembered how the Boy said it. She saw him toeing the stripe in the carpet before her; she heard his high sweet sing-song:

"Sixty sec-unds make a min-it. Sixty min-its make a nour. Sixty hours make – no; I mean twenty-four hours – make a d-a-a-y."

That was the way the Boy said it – God bless the Boy! The Mother got up abruptly.

"I think I will go up and call on William," she said, unsteadily. The Patient Aunt nodded gravely. "But he doesn't like to be interrupted, you know," she reminded, thinking of the Boy's interruptions.

Up-stairs, the Father said "Come in," with remarkable alacrity. He looked up from his manuscripts and welcomed her. The sheets, tossed untidily about the table were mostly blank ones.

"Well, dear?" the little Mother said, with a question in her voice.

"Not at all; —*bad*," he answered, gloomily. "I haven't written a word yet, Bess. At this rate, how soon will my new book be out? It's so confoundedly still – "

"Yes, dear, I know," the Mother said, hastily. Then they both gazed out of the window, and saw the Boy's little, rough-coated, ugly dog moping under the Boy's best-beloved tree. The Boy had pleaded hard to be allowed to take the dog on the journey. They both remembered that now.

"He's lonesome," murmured the Mother, but she meant that they two were. And they had thought it would be such a rest and relief! But then, you remember, the Boy had never been away before, and he was only ten.

So one day and one more after it dragged by. Two from seven leaves five. The Mother secretly despaired. The second night, after the others were asleep, she stole around the house and strewed the Boy's things about in all the rooms; but she could not make them look at ease. Nevertheless, she let them lie, and, oddly enough, no one appeared to see them next morning. All the family made fine pretence of being cheerful, and spoke often of the quietude and peace – how restful it was; how they had known beforehand that it would be so, without the whooping, whistling, tramping, slamming Boy.

"So relieving to the nerves," the Patient Aunt said.

"So soothing," murmured the Mother, sadly.

"So confoundedly nice and still!" the Father muttered in his beard. "Haven't had such a chance to work for ten years." But he did not work. The third day he said he must take a little run to the city to – to see his publishers, you know. There were things that needed looking after; – if the Mother would toss a few things into his grip, he'd be off; – back in a few days, of course. And so he went. It was a relief to the Mother, and a still further one when, on the fourth day, the Patient Aunt went away on a little visit to – to some friends.

"I'm glad they're gone," nodded the little Mother, decisively, "for I couldn't have stood it another day —*not another day!* Now *I'm* going away myself. I suppose I should have gone anyway, but it's much pleasanter not to have them know. They would both of them have laughed. What do *they* know about being a Mother and having your little Boy away? Oh yes, they can laugh and be relieved – and rested – and soothed! It's mothers whose hearts break with lonesomeness – mothers and ugly little dogs." She took the moping little beast up in her lap and stroked his rough coat.

“You shall go too,” she whispered. “You can’t wait three days more, either, can you? It would have killed you, too, wouldn’t it? We are glad those other people went away, aren’t we? Now we’ll go to the Boy.”

Early the next morning they went. The Mother thought she had never been so happy before in her life, and the ugly little beast yelped with anticipative joy. In a little – a very little – while, now, they would hear the Boy shout – see him caper – feel his hard little palms on their faces. They would see the trail of the Boy over everything; not a make-believe, made-up trail, but the real, littered, *Boy* thing.

“I hope those other two people are enjoying their trips. *We* are, aren’t we?” cried the happy Mother, hugging the little ugly dog in her arms. “And they won’t know; – they can’t laugh at us. We’ll never let them know we couldn’t bear it another minute, will we? The Boy sha’n’t tell on us.”

The place where the Boy was visiting was quite a long way from the railroad station, but they trudged to it gayly, jubilantly. While yet a good way off they heard the Boy and came upon his trail. The little dog nearly went into fits with frantic joy at the cap he found in the path, but the Mother went straight on to meet the little shouting voice in her ears. Half-way to it she saw the Boy. But wait. Who was that with him? And that other one, laughing in his beard? If there had been time to be surprised – but she only brushed them both aside and caught up the Boy. The Boy – the Boy – the Boy again! She kissed him all over his freckled, round little face. She kissed his hair and his hands and his knees.

“Look out; he’s wiping them off!” laughed the Patient Aunt. “But you see he didn’t wipe mine off.”

“You didn’t kiss me. You darsn’t. You ain’t my mother,” panted the Boy, between the kisses. He could not keep up with them with the back of his brown little hand.

“But *I* am, dear. I’m your mother,” cooed the Mother, proud of herself.

After a while she let him go because she pitied him. Then she stood up, stern and straight, and demanded things of these other two.

“How came you here, Mary? I thought you were going on a visit. Is this the way you see your publishers, William?”

“I – I couldn’t wait,” murmured the Impatient Aunt. “I wanted to hear him shout. You know how that is, Bess.” But there was no apology in the Father’s tone. He put out his hand and caught the Boy as he darted past, and squared him about, with his sturdy little front to his mother. The Father was smiling in a tender way.

“He is my publisher,” he said. “I would rather he published my best works than any one else. He will pay the highest royalty.”

And the Mother, when she slipped across to them, kissed not the Boy alone, but them both.

The next day they took the Boy back in triumph, the three of them and the little dog, and after that there was litter and noise and joy as of old.

Chapter III

The Adopted

The Enemy's chin just reached comfortably to the top fence-rail, and there it rested, while above it peered a pair of round blue eyes. It is not usual for an enemy's eyes to be so round and blue, nor an enemy's chin to reach so short a distance from the ground.

"She's watching me," Margaret thought; "she wants to see if I've got far as she has. 'Fore I'd lean my chin on folks's gates and watch 'em!"

"She knows I'm here," reflected the Enemy, "just as well as anything. 'Fore I'd peek at people out o' the ends o' my eyes!"

Between the two, a little higher than their heads, tilted a motherly bird on a syringa twig.

"Ter-wit, ter-wee, – pit-ee, pit-ee!" she twittered under her breath. And it did seem a pity to be quarrellers on a day in May, with the apple buds turning as pink as pink!

"I sha'n't ever tell her any more secrets," Margaret mused, rather sadly, for there was that beautiful new one aching to be told.

"I sha'n't ever skip with her again," the Enemy's musings ran drearily, and the arm she had always put round Margaret when they skipped felt lonesome and – and empty. And there was that lovely new level place to skip in!

"Pit-ee! Pit-ee!" sang softly the motherly bird.

It had only been going on a week of seven days. It was exactly a week ago to-day it began, while they were making the birthday presents together, Margaret sitting in this very chair and Nell – the Enemy sitting on the toppest door-step. Who would have thought it was coming? There was nothing to warn – no thunder in the sky, no little mother-bird on the syringa bush. It just *came*– oh, hum!

"I'm ahead!" the Enemy had suddenly announced, waving her book-mark. She had got to the "h" in her Mother, and Margaret was only finishing *her* capital "M." They were both working "Honor thy Mother that thy days may be long," on strips of cardboard for their mothers' birthdays, which, oddly enough, came very close together. Of course that wasn't exactly the way it was in the Bible, but they had agreed it was better to leave "thy Father" out because it wasn't his birthday, and they had left out "the land which the Lord thy God giveth" because there wasn't room for it on the cardboard.

"I'm ahead!"

"That's because I'm doing mine the carefulest," Margaret had retorted, promptly. "There aren't near so many hunchy places in mine."

"Well, I don't care; my *mother's* the best-looking, if her book-mark isn't!" in triumph. "Her hair curls, and she doesn't have to wear glasses."

Margaret's wrath had flamed up hotly. Mother's eyes were so shiny and tender behind the glasses, and her smooth brown hair was so soft! The love in Margaret's soul arose and took up arms for Mother.

"I love mine the best, so there! – so there! —*so there!*" she cried. But side by side with the love in her soul was the secret consciousness of how very much the Enemy loved *her* mother, too. Now, sitting sewing all alone, with the Enemy on the other side of the fence, Margaret knew she had not spoken truly then, but the rankling taunt of the curls that Mother hadn't, and the glasses that she had, justified her to herself. She would never, never take it back, so there! – so there! —*so there!*

"She's only got to the end o' her 'days,' – I can see clear from here," soliloquized the Enemy, with awakening exultation. For the Enemy's "days" were "long," – she had finished her book-mark. The longing to shout it out – "I've got mine done!" – was so intense within her that her chin lost its balance on the fence-rail and she jarred down heavily on her heels. So close related are mind and matter.

Margaret resorted to philosophic contemplation to shut out the memory of the silent on-looker at the fence. She had swung about discourteously “back to” her. “I guess,” contemplated Margaret, “my days ’ll be long enough in the land! I guess so, for I honor my mother enough to live forever! That makes me think – I guess I better go in and kiss her good-night for to-night when she won’t be at home.”

It was mid-May and school was nearly over. The long summer vacation stretched endlessly, lonesomely, ahead of Margaret. Last summer it had been so different. A summer vacation with a friend right close to you all the time, skipping with you and keeping house with you and telling all her secrets to you, is about as far away as – as China is from an *Enemy* ’cross the fence! Oh, hum! some vacations are so splendid and some are so un-splendid!

It did not seem possible that anything drearier than this could happen. Margaret would not have dreamed it possible. But a little way farther down Lonesome Road waited something a great deal worse. It was waiting for Margaret behind the schoolhouse stone-wall. The very next day it jumped out upon her.

Usually at recess Nell – the Enemy – and Margaret had gone wandering away together with their arms around each other’s waist, as happy as anything. But for a week of recesses now they had gone wandering in opposite directions – the Enemy marching due east, Margaret due west. The stone-wall stretched away to the west. She had found a nice lonesome little place to huddle in, behind the wall, out of sight. It was just the place to be miserable in.

“I know something!” from one of a little group of gossipers on the outside of the wall. “She needn’t stick her chin out an’ not come an’ play with us. She’s *nothing but an adopted!*”

“Oh! – a what?” in awestruck chorus from the listeners. “Say it again, Rhody Sharp.”

“An adopted – that’s all she is. I guess nobody but an adopted need to go trampin’ past when we invite her to play with us! I guess we’re good as she is an’ better, too, so there!”

Margaret in her hidden nook heard with a cold terror creeping over her and settling around her heart. It was so close now that she breathed with difficulty. If – supposing they meant —

“Rhody Sharp, you’re fibbing! I don’t believe a single word you say!” sprang forth a champion valiantly. “She’s dreadfully fond of her mother – just *dreadfully!*”

“She doesn’t know it,” promptly returned Rhody Sharp, her voice stabbing poor Margaret’s ear like a sharp little sword. “They’re keeping it from her. My gran’mother doesn’t believe they’d ought to. She says – ”

But nobody cared what Rhody Sharp’s gran’mother said. A clatter of shocked little voices burst forth into excited, pitying discussion of the unfortunate who was nothing but an adopted. One of their own number! One they spelled with and multiplied with and said the capitals with every day! That they had invited to come and play with them – an’ she’d stuck her chin out!

“Why! Why, then she’s a – orphan!” one voice exclaimed. “Really an’ honest she is – an’ she doesn’t know it!”

“Oh my, isn’t it awful!” another voice. “Shouldn’t you think she’d hide her head – I mean, if she knew?”

It was already hidden. Deep down in the sweet, moist grass – a little heavy, uncrowned, terror-smitten head. The cruel voices kept on.

“It’s just like a disgrace, isn’t it? Shouldn’t you s’pose it would feel that way if ’twas you?”

“Think o’ kissin’ your mother good-night an’ it’s not bein’ your mother?”

“Say, Rhody Sharp – all o’ you – look here! Do you suppose that’s why her mother – I mean she that *isn’t*– dresses her in checked aperns? That’s what orphans – ”

The shorn head dug deeper. A soft groan escaped Margaret’s lips. This very minute, now while she crouched in the grass, – oh, if she put out her hands and felt she would feel the checks! She had been to an orph – to a place once with Moth – with *Her* and seen the aprons herself. They were all – all checked.

At home, folded in a beautiful pile, there were all the others. There was the pink-checked one and the brown-checked one and the prettiest one of all, the one with teeny little white checks marked off with buff. The one she should feel if she put out her hand was a blue-checked.

Margaret drove her hands deep into the matted grass; she would not put them out. It was – it was terrible! Now she understood it all. She remembered – things. They crowded – with capital T's, Things, – up to her and pointed their fingers at her, and smiled dreadful smiles at her, and whispered to one another about her. They sat down on her and jounced up and down, till she gasped for breath.

The teacher's bell rang crisply and the voices changed to scampering feet. But Margaret crouched on in the sweet, moist grass behind the wall. She stayed there a week – a month – a year, – or was it only till the night chill stole into her bones and she crept away home?

She and Nell – she and the Enemy – had been so proud to have aprons just alike and cut by the same dainty pattern. But now if she knew – if the Enemy knew! How ashamed it would make her to have on one like – like an adopted's! How she'd wish hers was stripes! Perhaps – oh, perhaps she would think it was fortunate that she *was* an enemy now.

But the worst Things that crowded up and scoffed and gibed were not Things that had to do with enemies. The worst-of-all Things had to do with a little, tender woman with glasses on – whose hair didn't curl. Those Things broke Margaret's heart.

“Now you know why She makes you make the bed over again when it's wrinkly,” gibed one Thing.

“And why she makes you mend the holes in your stockings,” another Thing.

“She doesn't make me do the biggest ones!” flashed Margaret, hotly, but she could not stem the tide of Things. It swirled in.

“Perhaps now you see why She makes you hem towels and wipe dishes – ”

“And won't let you eat two pieces of pie – ”

“Or one piece o' fruit-cake – ”

“Maybe you remember now the times she's said, ‘This is no little daughter of mine?’”

Margaret turned sharply. “That was only because I was naughty,” she pleaded, strickenly, but she knew in her soul it wasn't “only because.” She knew it was *because*. The terror within her was growing more terrible every moment.

Then came shame. Like the vilest of the evil Things it had been lurking in the background waiting its turn, – it was its turn now. Margaret stood quite still, *ashamed*. She could not name the strange feeling, for she had never been ashamed before, but she sat there a piteous little figure in the grip of it. It was awful to be only nine and feel like that! To shrink from going home past Mrs. Streeter's and the minister's and the Enemy's! – oh, most of all past the Enemy's! – for fear they'd look out of the window and say, “There goes an adopted!” Perhaps they'd point their fingers. – Margaret closed her eyes dizzily and saw Mrs. Streeter's plump one and the minister's lean one and the Enemy's short brown one, all pointing. She could feel something burning her on her forehead, – it was “Adopted,” branded there.

The Enemy was worst. Margaret crept under the fence just before she got to the Enemy's house and went a weary, roundabout way home. She could not bear to have this dearest Enemy see her in her disgrace.

Moth – She That had Been – would be wondering why Margaret was late. If she looked sober out of her eyes and said, “This can't be my little girl, can it?” then Margaret would *know for certain*

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