

## A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

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ILLUSTRATED BY EDMUND DULAC.

HE was not beautiful, the Cloth Puppy. Nor did he possess that horrid fascination belonging to a toy of extreme ugliness; he was merely plain. At first sight of him the Girl found him decidedly uninteresting. Perhaps when they gave him to her—it was on her sixth birthday—there was even a trifle of contempt in her round-eyed gaze as she took the proffered gift under her arm and bore him off solemnly nursery-wards. There on the nursery shelf he sat for almost a week, in all his newness of unspotted white calico and shining shoe-button eyes, a very lonely little toy indeed. And then one day the Girl met with a grief.

Her dearest possession, a really-truly live dog, died, and her big eyes were red with weeping as she followed her brother out into the back garden where the dead pet was to be buried. This brother of hers was the greatest hero in the world. He was eleven, and had real lessons, and was a person to be feared and admired always.

The presence of her brother, and the elaborate funeral ceremony he concocted in honour of her dead dog, perhaps consoled the Girl a little in her loss. Still, she was wide-eyed with grief as she knelt on the grass and watched the small coffin being lowered into the grave.

Suddenly the brother was struck with an idea. "I tell you what we'll do, Sis!" he exclaimed.

Sorrow made the child dull. "Yes?" she said indifferently.

"Yes!" he cried, "we'll bury the Cloth Puppy too. That's what they used to do over in the East. When a man died they used to bury his wife alive in the same grave with him."

The boy's eyes shone with enthusiasm.

"But," objected the Girl, "the Cloth Puppy wasn't his wife."

"Pooh! that doesn't matter. Just like a girl. Here, hand him over, Sis."

Obediently the child fetched from the nursery shelf her new toy, and then dully watched herself robbed in a moment of her two treasures, the real dog, taken by the doggie angels—so said Mamma—and the Cloth Puppy, that, only

now when she was about to lose him, she learned to value, sacrificed to the enthusiasm of her brother.

"I wish I had my Cloth Puppy back again," she said dolefully, as the last toy spadeful of earth fell on the grave.

"Nonsense! He must stay there, of course," said the autocrat brother.

But even the six-year-old worm will turn, though the tyrant is a worshipped brother.

That night she looked sadly at the vacant space on the nursery shelf where the Cloth Puppy had been wont to stand. In bed she cried for her dead-and-gone dog, that, every night till now, had slept on top of the tufted coverlet by her



*"Shivering in the summer evening, the Girl stood and watched her brother dig up the new grave."*

side. And then she thought of her other dog—the Cloth Puppy. If only he were there he could sleep by her side and ease her loneliness. Why had she let herself be robbed of him just when she needed him most? Why, indeed?

She raised a cry to heaven. "I want my Cloth Puppy! I want him! I want him!" she wailed.

The bare feet pattered over the floor to her brother's room across the corridor.

"I want my Cloth Puppy back! Come, dig him up!" she demanded; and, in the face of determination, eleven years yielded to six.

Hand in hand the two children stole down the stairs and tiptoed past the drawing-room, where the big folk were sitting, out into the back garden. Shivering in the summer evening, the Girl stood and watched her brother dig up the new grave.

"Here he is, Sis," said he, a little awed at such determination from his meek little sister.

With the Cloth Puppy—rather earthy, it's true, but safe again—clasped to her breast, the little girl crept up the stairs contented.

Next morning, when Nurse came to wake her, she found the child peacefully asleep, the Cloth Puppy still held tight in her little arms.

"Nurse," said she seriously, as she opened her eyes, "will you please see that the ruffles on my nightdress are done up soft? The little starchy prickles hurt my Cloth Puppy."

The nurse laughed, but the child got her way.

And so began the friendship of the Girl and the Cloth Puppy.

He never had any name but just that—the Cloth Puppy; though sometimes



*"Clasped to his little mistress's heart, his shoe-button eyes grew bright with the tears he could not shed."*

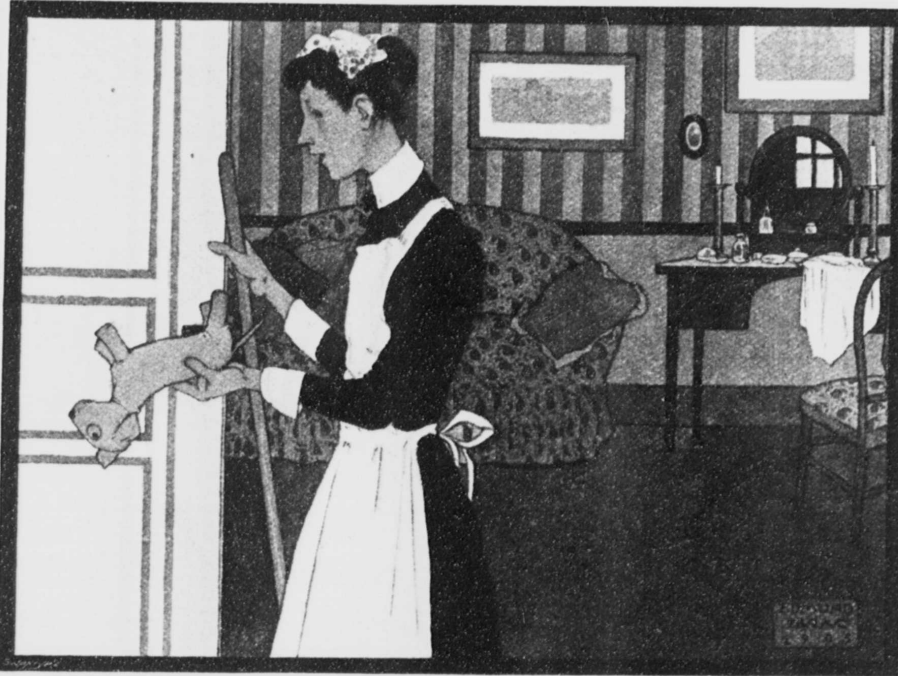
when they two were all alone the Girl called him "dearie," and then his little sawdust heart beat rapturously, and he struggled so hard, but always in vain, to wag his stiff cloth tail. It was then, when they were all alone together, usually at night, and when the Puppy nestled against the soft white ruffles, that the Girl told him things.

Only he knew the tears she shed because her straight black hair would never, never curl, and her face was white instead of rosy as other children's were, and her little legs were so thin her brother sometimes cruelly compared them to bean-poles. Clasped to his little mistress's heart, his shoe-button eyes grew bright with the tears he could not shed, and he snuggled even closer to her to try to show the sympathy he felt.

The Girl and he were inseparable always. In the daytime they worked and played together in the nursery and in the back garden all sorts of queer little

games. Sometimes they escaped the vigilant eye of Nurse and made their way softly down into the big empty drawing-room, forbidden ground, where tall, smooth-topped tables held all sorts of fascinating things, and the Cloth Puppy sank up to his knees in the deep pile of the soft Eastern rugs.

Sometimes they spent hours making up fairy stories together, as they sat on



*Here's the toy-dog the young mistress was so fond of. . . Where shall I put him?"*

the floor in front of the nursery fire or lay awake in bed. Then the Girl was a beautiful princess, with every charm except curling locks,—even in a half-awake dream, imagination could not bring about so great a thing as that. And the Puppy was a noble greyhound, or else a prancing steed with silver trappings.

At other times in their day-dreams the Girl was an unhappy neglected child, with a cruel step-mother and unkind step-sisters. And then the Cloth Puppy was, of course, her fairy god-mother, and at the end of the story the Girl always drove off in a grand satin-lined coach to marry a charming Prince; and—must it be confessed?—leaned her head out of the window to stick out her tongue scornfully at the wicked and envious relatives she left behind.

Playing and dreaming and sometimes working together, the Girl and the Cloth Puppy grew older, but stayed firm friends as ever they were. The Girl showed the passing years more plainly. Her wept-for hair at first was plaited and then done up in a knot on the top of her head, so that its straightness was no longer noticeable. Lengthening skirts, too, covered up the legs whose thinness had caused so many tears.

The Puppy grew older too. His cloth coat was dirtier, and one of his ears had lost its jaunty erectness, and the tail, whose unfeeling stiffness had been such a trial to him, now hung down limp and wagged itself—sometimes most inopportunistly—when one joggled him. But—he was a puppy still. Faithful and sympathetic as ever, he snuggled each night against the unstarched ruffles and listened to the whispered confidences that now took the place of the fairy stories. Did he under-

stand? The shoe-button eyes never blinked, and yet, who can say the sawdust heart beat as steadily as usual when, one night, the Girl caught him in her arms and, with a little cry, kissed his snub nose and murmured into the drooping ear that she was "the happiest girl in all the world"?

Soon the Cloth Puppy was a witness of such doings as few masculine eyes ever see: the trying on of delicate lacey garments and silky tea-gowns and of one white shining satin frock—the wedding-dress.

At last, one day, the wedding-dress was put on, and as he stood on one corner of the dressing-table the unwinking eyes of the Cloth Puppy took in admiringly every fold of shining satin and every line of his dear mistress's face.

Then came a voice from below. "Hurry, Sis. It's time to start!" and then the Girl snatched up the puppy and held him against the soft laces at her throat so that she could look down into the shoe-button eyes and kiss the snubby nose.

"I'm going away to leave you, dearie," she said. "Good-bye!" and, laying him back quickly on the dressing-table, she lifted up her soft draperies and hurried away.

The Cloth Puppy watched her go, and into his sawdust throat came a big lump. Perhaps, in her haste, the Girl set him too near the edge of the dressing-table. At any rate, overbalancing, he fell and rolled into a dark corner. And there he lay, all alone, until a maid, sweeping the room some days later, found him.

"Here's the toy-dog the young mistress was so fond of," said she. "Where shall I put him?"

"Away in the garret with her other toys," was the reply.

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The Girl is a woman now, with little girls of her own; and, now and then, her children visit her old home and climb the steep garret stairs to look at the toys "Mother used to play with when she was little."

"What funny old-fashioned playthings!" they say, gazing with childish scorn at the shelf-full of crippled dolls and worn-out toys.

"See that queer little cloth dog over in the corner there!"

And, after a contemptuous glance, they turn and make their way down the stairs again.

Sometimes at night the Cloth Puppy dreams that he is nestling into the ruffles of a soft white nightdress again, and then he wakes with a start to find himself leaning against a headless toy lamb, whose wool, in the moonlight that streams through the uncurtained garret window, shows grimy with dust.

