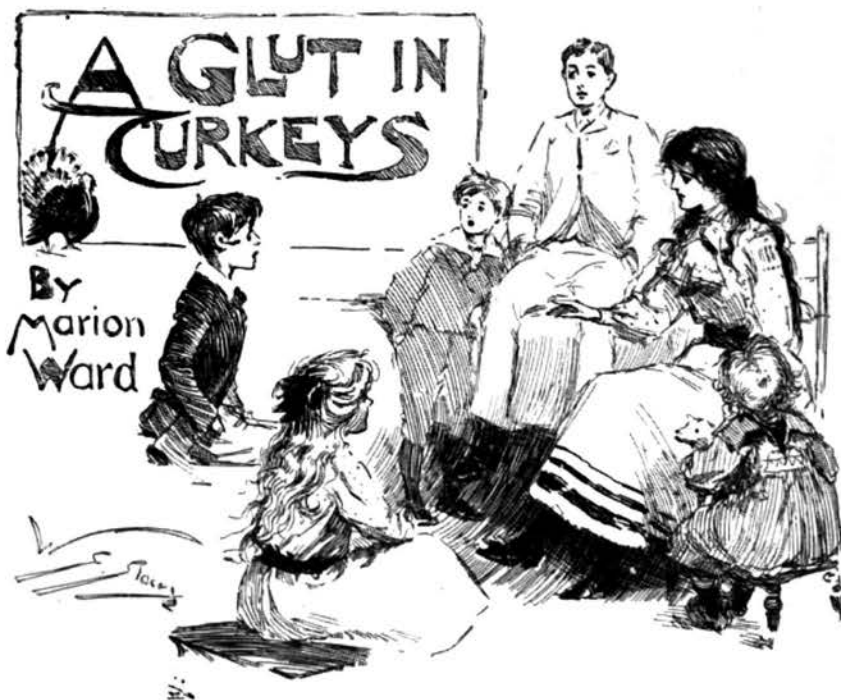


of ideal infant splendour and rank. Lady Jane Grey, however, in silver-grey cotton, and cotton-backed black velvet, may be made to look as demure as a Puritan Maiden, both of which I commend to the notice of those who contemplate taking part in a juvenile

calico ball, together with Mother Hubbard, in her pointed hat; or a Witch, not so very unlike, having cats and serpents cut out in black cotton, and stitched or pasted on to the scarlet cap. There are so many suitable characters, the only difficulty is which to select.



**I**t seems to be the fashion nowadays for quite young girls to write stories all about themselves and their thoughts and escapades, and get them published, even when they are most ordinary and uninteresting—excepting to themselves, of course; so I don't see why I should not tell about our Turkey Christmas, or, as Ronald calls it, our Glut in Turkeys, which really was very funny, and tragic as well. It happened last Christmas. I was quite a child—only fifteen. Father had not patented his wonderful discovery then, and made a whole fortune just by—but I forgot; that is another story, as Mr. Kipling would say. We really were horribly poor. Father was abroad on business, and had been unexpectedly delayed, so that he could not possibly get home till after Christmas, and quite suddenly mother had almost come to the end of her ready money.

Mother never kept things from us, so we children knew just how bad things were. There were five of us: myself (Nora) the eldest, then Jack, then Dulcie, then Nicholas, and lastly Noel, who was just a baby of three. And besides us there was Ronald from next door, who was sixteen and very

big, and always called himself the head of the family.

So just before Christmas I called a council. First I called down the telephone for Ronald (we made that telephone between the nursery and Ronald's own private sitting-room ourselves, and it had a tremendous bell, an old dinner-bell, so that he could hear plainly if he happened to be in any different part of the house). And when he came I summoned the rest of the family, and solemnly proposed that, owing to the financial resources of the family being pretty well bankrupt, we should one and all cheerfully consent to forego our usual Christmas presents this year.

Ronald seconded the motion, but some of the others looked doubtful. Dulcie consented instantly, and amended further that we should each put our own private little hoards into a general box and give it to mother to add to the housekeeping-money. Dulcie always was a sweet little saint.

But Jack jibbed at that.

"Hang it all!" he said. "I'll go without my present, though I did want that 'Animals in Motion' desperately. But I jolly well can't give up my money as well. Why, I've been saving for months to buy a pair of skates!"

I put the motion to private vote and decided against it. I had just ten shillings of my own: exactly half enough for that dear little bamboo bookcase I had been saving up for for such a long time. No; I certainly did not want to add my small savings to the family fund.

So I repealed that suggestion and, repeating my former proposition, it was carried unanimously. The fear of the greater had minimized the less. (I got that sentence out of a book.) So we wrote out a declaration, setting forth our determination, and each signed it (Noel could just make his letters, so he put O L, which was the nearest he could get to his name), and I carried the paper to mother.

Mother just looked at it, and then she put her arms round me and hugged me. "You originated it, of course?" she said.

Then I felt mean. So I told her how much nobler Dulcie had been.

"I wonder what a mother feels like who cannot be proud of her children?" was all she said.

Mother never says much; it's not her way, but I saw the tears in her eyes as she kissed me. So that was settled.

And she said nothing would induce her to take our private stores, if we begged her on bended knees; so that was settled too.

"But," said mother, "a turkey we must and shall have."

"Do you think we can afford it?" I asked, gravely.

Mother just laughed at me, with a determined gleam in her pretty eyes. "We're going to have one," she said, very firmly.

When mother looks and speaks like that there is no more to be said. And it was really a great relief to me. Christmas with no presents would be bad enough, but Christmas without *turkey!* Talk about "Hamlet" without the Prince! Besides, the children would have been so desperately disappointed. So mother bought the turkey. We all went with her to help her choose a fine fat one, and Noel cried because we would not let her get a horrid, dark-looking one with yellowish marks on it. He cried all the way home for his "pitty feckled birdie," till Ronald took away his sword and helmet, and told him he was dismissed from the army for babyishness. And then he stopped, and smiled dreadfully with his poor little mouth all turned down at the corners, and the sobs still hiccupping between his words, and called us all to witness he was "laughing." So Ronald gave him back his sword and

apologized gravely for his mistake. Noel worships Ronald; he can always make him do anything, even in his worst moods.

So we chose the turkey—a great, fat, white one, and carried it home in triumph. The shopman actually wanted to send it. As if we would have thought of letting him do such a thing! We took it in turns to carry the basket, and Ronald insisted on sharing my turn—to make longer for the little ones, he said; but I knew quite well it was really because he thought it too heavy for me. Ronald is like that.

And then, two days before Christmas, the tragedy happened.

We were sitting in the play-room in the evening, and I was writing a note to Ronald to send by the despatch (we made that ourselves, too; an awfully useful arrangement, composed of two strong pieces of elastic passed through the telephone tube, one end of each nailed respectively to the walls of the play-room and Ronald's room, and at the other end a loop, and attached to the loop a ball of twine. Do you see? That loop was kept fastened to a nail in the farther room, the elastic pulled very tense and taut; then, when either side wanted to communicate with the other, all you had to do was to unloop your end, tie the note—or sweets, or anything you liked small enough—to it, and let it shoot through the tube to the farther room. Then you pulled the loop back by the twine, ready for the next message) telling him to be ready early next morning—Christmas Eve—to come and do some private shopping with me, when suddenly Ellen, our maid-of-all-work, came rushing in like a maniac.

"Oh, mum!—oh, *mum!*" she shrieked. "The turkey!" And flopping into a chair she flung her apron over her head and burst into stormy sobs. And between her sobs the awful truth came out. The turkey was stolen!

I felt stunned. It was too terrible to believe. And then was such a pandemonium that we could hardly hear ourselves speak. Ellen was sobbing and explaining incoherently; Dulcie was patting her shoulder, and begging her not to cry; Jack and I were asking questions; and Noel and Nickey, disturbed in the middle of an exciting game of soldiers, had gleefully hailed Ellen as the foe, and were assaulting her vigorously, and with triumphant shouts, with their wooden swords.

But at last it was all out. Ellen had had the turkey up in the kitchen to prepare for roasting, and had gone out of the room



"ELLEN, OUR MAID-OF-ALL-WORK, CAME RUSHING IN LIKE A MANIAC."

for a few moments, leaving the window open and the turkey on the table just inside.

She was just in time to see the turkey's tail disappear as she came back, and, although she flew frantically out of the side door and into the street, not a sign of the thief was there to be seen. And that was all.

Mother was very gentle to her; she said it was not her fault, and, of course, she would be more careful in future. But when Ellen had sniffed herself remorsefully out of the room she looked at us very gravely.

I saw what she meant.

"Well, there's the pie," I said, with a big breath.

The others all stood quite still, looking at us with curious expressions.

Jack pressed his lips tight together and looked up at the ceiling.

"There's the pie," he echoed, firmly.

Mother's eyes grew very soft and sweet.

Nickey opened his mouth. "No turkey?" he roared.

"There's the pie—a lovely great pie, and the pudding; think of that lovely brown pudding, with its holly, and blue flames," said Dulcie, hurriedly.

Nickey's mouth was still open. He is a fat little boy, and rather greedy.

"But—no—TURKEY!" he wailed. He flung himself at mother. "You'll get another, mums, won't you? 'Twon't be a Christmas at all without a turkey!"

Mother stroked his head. "I'm afraid we can't afford it, dear," she said, sadly.

"Not a *little* one?" begged Nickey.

"Pig!" said Jack and I together, disgustedly.

"Pigs yourselves," retorted Nickey, fiercely.

"We're content with pie," taunted Jack.

"Hush, children; quarrelling won't mend matters. Nickey's content with pie, too, I know, isn't he?"

Nickey struggled hard. "Y-yes," he said, at last, in a very forlorn little voice.

"That's mother's brave boy," said mother, cheerfully, and Nickey brightened up.

But although we all pretended so hard not to care, we did, dreadfully. No presents and no turkey! It was terrible. It could not be—in fact, it *should* not be. I quite jumped with the sudden thought that had come into my mind. That precious ten shillings! To eat half my longed-for bookcase in a day! It seemed too awful: my eyes quite smarted at the thought. But then I thought of the glorious surprise it would be and the difference it would make.

In the middle of my reflections I looked up and found Jack's eyes fixed sombrely on my face, and he looked away so guiltily when he met my eyes that I felt sure he must have been reading my thoughts. Before I went to bed I had made up my mind.

I did not send that note to Ronald, after all. My private shopping was to be *strictly* private.

I had expected to find it very difficult to get out alone ; but, to my relief, next morning mother was busy in the kitchen, with Noel hindering her ; Jack had gone off somewhere by himself ; Dulcie looked very uncomfortable, and said if I didn't mind she wanted to stay and practise ; and Nickey was busy counting his farthings, and told me to go away and not bother. So I went.

I shut my eyes tight when I passed the shop with that dear little bamboo bookcase ; but once the money was gone, and I held the firm, heavy turkey in my arms I felt absolutely hilarious.

It would be *such* a surprise. Ellen was to be sworn over to secrecy, and to cook it while we were all at church on the next day. And the thought of the family's faces when it came smoking on, in its brown savouriness, made me stand and laugh aloud in the middle of the street.

After all, what was a future bookcase in comparison to such a present surprise ?

I went home at such a rate that I collided violently into Jack, who was just coming round the corner. He was hiding something under his overcoat, and went scarlet and seemed very confused.

I held my turkey down at my side as best I could, and tried to think of a way to get into the pantry without his seeing me.

As we stood waiting to be let in, to my surprise Dulcie appeared at the gate. She went as red as a rose when she saw us, and half paused, as if she would run away. "You did not practise long !" I could not help calling out.

She blushed still deeper. "No ; I—I thought of something I wanted out."

She dawdled about outside the gate till the door was opened, and then she followed us slowly in.

I waited for Jack to go upstairs, so that I could slip down into the pantry, but he stood aside politely, waiting for me to go up, so I had to, holding my bulky parcel carefully in front of me.

Half-way up I paused and looked over.

Jack was still standing there, apparently waiting for Dulcie, and Dulcie was standing in the hall, staring absorbedly at the pictures. A horrible, horrible suspicion formed dimly at the back of my mind. I stood quite still, breathless and waiting.

As I stood there Ronald's knock sounded at the door.

Dulcie opened it slowly.

There stood Ronald, and, all undisguised, there dangled from his hand a colossal fat turkey !

"I say," he cried, "mater's compliments, and could Mrs. Kingsley charitably make use of this beggar ? We've had *three* sent us to-day."

I sat down limply on the stairs. There was a dreadful pause. Then Dulcie, looking past his head, said, in a silly little voice, "Postman !" and pointed outside.

"Kingsley ?" said the postman, briefly, and plumped a large hamper down inside the hall.

I groaned aloud.

Through the crevices of that detestable hamper

unmistakable feathers protruded.

Ronald looked up and quite jumped when he met my tragic face looking at him through the balustrade. Then he looked back at the others bewilderedly.

Mother came out of the kitchen just as Nickey came flying up the front steps.

His cheeks were scarlet and his eyes snapped excitedly. He waved a brown parcel aloft. "Who's a pig now ? It's only a half, but I only had a hundred and ten farthings, and he said that would only buy just half a little one, but you may eat it all.



"I FELT ABSOLUTELY HILARIOUS."



“‘KINGSLEY?’ SAID THE POSTMAN.”

*I don't want it!*” and tearing off the wrappings he proudly disclosed half a small and emaciated ready-cooked turkey.

Mother stared. “Dearie!”

“All my own farthings—every one,” and he laughed boisterously and stamped about to pretend there wasn't any lump in his throat. Jack and Dulcie looked up at me. We all knew now. I felt quite dazed and giddy. I came slowly downstairs, and Jack and Dulcie came to meet me.

Simultaneously we unwrapped our parcels. Then I sat down in the hall and laughed hysterically till the tears rolled down my face.

For a second mother stared dumfounded, then with a little cry she fled down to the pantry, and returned holding aloft a dish on which reposed a noble turkey.

“I went out before breakfast!” she cried, and, sitting down on the floor beside me, she mingled her tears with mine.

I don't think I have ever laughed so much in all my life as I did that Christmas Eve.

Of course, Ronald had to be told all from the beginning, and there we all sat in that hall round our six and a half turkeys and laughed till we were weak.

“My bookcase!” I gurgled.

“My skates!” roared Jack.

“My muff!” chortled Dulcie.

“My farthings!” spluttered Nickey.

And “My precious reserve-fund!” wept mother.

I don't believe anyone, since the world began, laughed so much over a tragedy before.

And I suppose that's about all. We lived on turkey till we hated the very mention of it, and even then we were obliged to give two

away to deserving poor people. I need not say that the two we so disposed of were Ronald's and the one that came in the hamper from old Uncle Malcolm. They were by far the two biggest and fattest, but we would each have eaten every morsel ourselves rather than give away a drumstick even of our precious bookcase, skates, muff, farthings, or reserve-fund.

But to this day you have only to mention the word “turkey” to set the whole family helplessly laughing. The memory of our six-and-a-half-fold surprise is too much for any of us.

