

Harper's Bazar

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MRS.
HUMPHRY
WARD'S

*New Novel Begins
In This Number*

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*"This noise, you know," said Mr. Mortimer
Pegg, in his precise way, "is affecting
my wife's health deleteriously."*

A MERRY INTERLUDE

By MAZO DE LA ROCHE

Illustrated by Everett Shinn

*"This letter," writes Mazo de la
Roche to the Editor of Harper's
Bazar, "will dispel an illusion of
yours, which I hope is not too cherished
an one. Editors invariably
take me to be a man, but try not to
be vexed that the chronicler of
Angel, John and the Seraph is just
a young Canadian woman, with a
love for boys and dogs and books,
who has made her life a happy
one in spite of much adversity."*



MY brother and I were hanging over the gate that barred our way to the outer world, and singing, as loudly as we could, considering the pressure of the top bar on our young stomachs. We sang to keep warm, for our reefers were always handed to us on the first day of December, and though it was a raw afternoon in November, our governess, Mrs. Handsomebody, would have considered it a distinct breach of the discipline she so laboriously sought to maintain, to have unearthed them one day sooner from their camphor-scented retreat in the clothes-press.

It was the fifth, and Angel chanted in that flute-like treble of his that made passers-by turn and smile at him:

“Remember, remember the fifth of November,
Gunpowder, treason and plot—”

Then the Seraph added his little pipe:

“I see no weason why gunpowder tweason
Should ever be forgot.”

Then we shouted it all together.

Our neighbor, Mr. Mortimer Pegg, coming out of his home at that moment, drew up before us.

“This noise, you know,” he said, in his precise way, “is affecting my wife’s health deleteriously. She has gone to bed with a migraine.”

“Why don’t you put him out?” suggested the Seraph.

Mr. Pegg eyed him severely, yet I thought I perceived a twinkle in his eye.

“It’s Guy Fawkes day,” I explained.

“It is a mistake in these enlightened days to keep up such old animosities,” replied our neighbor. “For all you know, I might be his direct descendant. If you must celebrate his undoing, better take these three sixpences and make yourselves ill on lemon fizz or pink marshmallows or vile licorice cigars.”

He placed a coin in each outstretched hand, and, without waiting for thanks, strode briskly down the street. We gazed after him, knocked speechless by this great breaker of bounty that had rolled in upon the flat expanse of our afternoon. Mr. Pegg, in his shiny top-hat and neat Prince Albert, moved away in the muddy November sunlight as in a halo of

opulence. Never before had we appreciated the princely turn of his toes beneath their drab spats, the flash of his twirled walking-stick. We resolved to keep him in mind. He was a neighbor worth having. Angel even suggested certain time-honored ditties of boyhood, which, shouted in chorus, would be almost certain to have a disastrous effect on a female addicted to migraine.

A deputation, consisting of the Seraph, then waited on Mrs. Handsomebody, to explain that our neighbor, Mr. Pegg, having been charmed by our singing, had presented us each with a penny, with the earnest injunction that the coin be expended on currant buns at the grocer's. The Seraph came back triumphant with the necessary consent.

"We can go," he said, "but we're not to take a bite till we're back home. It's suppwising she'd let us do it."

"Not a bit," said Angel cynically, "she knows they'll spoil our appetite for tea."

The grocer was a fierce, red-bearded man who kept his wife in a little wooden stall, where she took in the constant flow of wealth extorted from his customers.

We had told the Seraph that she was thus confined by her gloomy spouse, in order that she might be fattened for slaughter, and his eyes were large with pity as he stood on tiptoe to hand our three sixpences through the little wicket. The grocer's wife leaned forward to look at him, her plump underlip, after two futile attempts to form a chin, subsiding into a large white neck.

The Seraph's look of pity deepened to horror. "Why, you must be almost weady," he gasped.

"Ready? Ready for what, my little love?"

"Stickin'—Oo, will it hurt vewy, vewy much?"

"Bless the darling child! What *does* he mean?"

"He's not very well," I explained. "I think he's delirious."



"Would you like one of Giftie's puppies for your very own to keep?" asked the lady.

"That's why we brought him here to get a cool drink," added Angel, hurriedly, and between us we led the recreant to the little table in the rear of the shop where the grocer had set out three glasses of ginger beer and a plate of mixed cakes.

Five minutes of unalloyed bliss followed, and we were just draining off the last dregs and cleaning up the crumbs, when a bullet-headed boy stuck his head in at the door.

"Dorg's 'ere again," he said, laconically. "Nosin' abaht in the gabbage 'eap."

"Tie a can on 'is tile," said the grocer.

The boy disappeared, and the three of us pushed back our chairs and followed in his wake, scenting adventure in the littered yard behind the shop with its strange odors of bygone fruit and greens.

The dog, a small, black, Scottish terrier, was dragging an end of Bologna sausage from the garbage heap. The bullet-headed boy with a wink at us selected an empty can from the heap, produced a piece of string from his pocket, and grasped the terrier by the collar. But only for a moment. With a rush of concentrated fury it flew at his legs, gave him a sharp snap, and darted back to its sausage, with a warning gleam of its eyes in our direction.

“Ow,” yelled the boy, doubling up, “’e’s bit me sumpfin’ cruel! You see if I daon’t brain ’im for that!”

He snatched up an axe and brandished it. The terrier dropped its sausage and showed its little pointed white teeth.

We three, with one impulse, flung ourselves between it and the boy.

“You dare touch that dog!” shouted Angel belligerently.

“Oo’s goin’ to stop me, Mister Nosey Parker?” sneered the boy, with a flourish of his axe.

“I am,” said Angel, “’cos it’s *my* dog, see?” He coolly turned his back on the boy and bent over the terrier, who came to him cautiously, sniffing his legs.

“Your dorg!” scoffed the boy. “W’y daon’t yer feed ’im then? ’E’s ’arf starved, ’e is. Yer ought to be ’ad up fer perwention of cruelty to hanimals. It’s a disgrace.”

“We’ve only owned him a little while,” explained Angel, “and he strayed away. He’ll be jolly glad to get home again—won’t you, Rover? Give us that bit of string and I’ll lead him.”

The boy, suddenly friendly, in one of the swiftly changing moods of boyhood, assisted in the tying of the string to the little dog’s collar, though he cast a longing look at its stout fringed tail that was so admirably built to further the riotous bouncings of an empty tin can.

We led him triumphantly through the shop into the street, and we trotted in silence for a space, staring in rapt admiration of the little black paws that padded along in such a business-like fashion beside us, the knowingly-pointed ears, and the stout tail carried at a jaunty angle above the sturdy hind quarters.

WHEN we reached our own quiet street we stopped. The Seraph looked in the bag of buns.

“May I give him mine?” he asked.

“Good boy,” said Angel, and the Seraph presented the little dog with the large currant bun. We were charmed indeed when he sat up for it in the most

approved trained-animal posture, with short forelegs crossed on his plump hairy breast. We had known and loved dogs in our own home, before our young mother had died, and our engineer father had gone to South America, leaving us in charge of his one-time governess, Mrs. Handsomebody. How often had we longed for the joyous companionship of our old four-footed friends, the comfort of a soft warm tongue on one's cheek, the sensitive muzzle pressed into one's palm, the look of loving confidence in the deep brown eyes!

But our governess hated dogs, and we were expressly forbidden so much as to pat the head of any stray canine that thrust an inquiring nose between the bars of her gate. Therefore, it was with sad foreboding that we watched the bun disappear. The Scotty held it between his forepaws and bit off decent mouthfuls, without sign of greed or haste. By his bearing and by his shining silver collar we knew that he was, or had been, someone's cherished pet.

The bun had cheered him wonderfully, for, as we moved homeward, he leaped playfully at his leash, and catching it in his teeth, worried it in an abandon of glee.

We made no plans. We had no hopes. We merely were drawn by habit and necessity to the place where, we knew, desperate trouble awaited us. At the gate we halted.

"We might take him into the yard to play for a little while," I said. "P'raps we could carry him up-stairs wrapped in my coat, and hide him under the bed. Maybe he'd get so awful good he'd live under the bed, and we could save our food for him, and get up nights to play with him."

As if to show his appreciation of the plan, the Scotty raised himself on his hind quarters, paddling the air with his fore paws in excited appeal, and giving vent to sharp, staccato barks.

The next instant the front door was thrown open, and Mary Ellen, her cap askew, dashed down the steps to meet us.

"Wheriver have ye been so long?" she ejaculated. "An' have ye been tould the news? 'Tis hersilf has taken a tumble, an' put her knee out, so the doctor says. I'd jist been clanin' up the panthry shelves, an' *she* got up on a chair to see whither I'd maybe missed the top one, an' I must have left a knob of soap on the chair, for the next thing I knew she was stretched on the flure, an' I had to fetch the doctor, an' he says she'll have to kape to her room for a fortnight or more, an' the Lord only knows how I'm ever to wait on her an' manage the three av ye, wid yer pranks an' all!"

The Seraph turned a somersault; then I turned a somersault; then Angel turned two; then the Scotty sat up, paddled the air with his forepaws, and sneezed twice.

Mary Ellen was genuinely shocked.

"I do belave," she said solemnly, "that you've stoned in your breasts instid av hearts—but you're jist like all men folk—if they think there's a good time in sthore for them, the women can suffer all they like, more shame to them." She was so worked up that she did not notice that the little dog had followed us into the house, until he was sitting up in the kitchen, his forepaws paddling the air, his tail thudding on the floor. Then she said, brimming over with admiration, though she tried to look severe:

"And if you think I'll have sthray dawgs in my kitchen, you're very much mistook . . . Aw, it's a darlin' wee thing, isn't it?" For the Scotty, seeing that she had seated herself, had jumped to her lap and now sat there, nose in air, looking superbly at home.

We closed about her, telling in chorus the story of the bullet-headed boy and the garbage heap, and enlarging dramatically on the episode of the tin can.

"And may we please keep him?" we entreated, "just for a few days till we find the owner of it? Mrs. Handsomebody will never know, for it can live in the coal cellar, 'cept when we take him for little walks on a string!"

"If you don't let me do this I'll never marry you, so there!" This from Angel.

"Have it your own way, thin," moaned Mary Ellen, capitulating, as usual, under the fire of Angel's pleading, "but moind, if she iver finds us out, it's mesilf will be walkin' the streets widout a character."

SO began a merry interlude in the drabness of the Handsomebody régime. Mrs. Handsomebody kept to her room for nearly three weeks, unable to put her foot to the floor. On the first evening, she called us to her bedside: and while we stood in a row, bewildered before the phenomenon of seeing her prostrate, she lectured us solemnly on the duties and responsibilities of our position, and implored us not to make the period of her enforced retirement a nightmare because of our pranks. We promised, marveling that bed-clothes could be kept so tidy, and fervently wishing she would display the knee that had been so severely "put out". It was a commonplace for Mrs. Handsomebody's temper to be thus afflicted; but her knee, never.

When we returned to the kitchen, we found Mary Ellen sitting in a pensive attitude. Her forefinger pressed against her knit brow, her stout ankles crossed.

"The little dawg has been tellin' me a secret," she volunteered in explanation, "a deep, dark secret. She's been tellin' me in a way of spakin' that she's a lady-dawg, God help her."

"But how did she tell you, Mary Ellen? Did she speak out loud?" We were breathless with excitement.

"She did not. I ast her, for I had me suspicion, if she was a lady-dawg, an' I sez—'If yez are, wag yer tail three times,' an' the words was scarce off me tongue, whin she wagged her tail three times."

It was a marvel.

"If you're a lady-dog, wag your tail three times," I ordered, squatting to peer into the sagacious brown eyes.

Three times the stocky tail thumped the floor.

Then Angel put the question, and was answered with equal promptitude.

It was the Seraph's turn. With an insinuating smile, he said: "If you are a gennelman dog, wag your tail fwee times."

But before there was time for so much as one wag, Mary Ellen caught the too-eager tail in a restraining grasp.

"Now have done wid yer nonsinse," she commanded. "Ye'll have the pore crature that worried it'll set up barkin', an' if the misthress did know there be's a dawg in the house, she'd just throw a fit an' die."

"Is it a vewy barkable dog?" queried the Seraph.

"All dogs is barkable," said Mary Ellen, "and what we'll have to do is to kape her as quiet as possible and pray that her owner'll come along this way, for turn her out I will not. It's easy seein' she's a pet be the ways of her."

"It says 'Giftie' on her collar," Angel announced, separating the short, shaggy coat to read. "That must be her name. Hello, Giftie! Sit up, Giftie!"

So Giftie she was, and, for a long three weeks, our joy and our delight.

WAS ever little body so full of spirit and the pride of life? The kitchen became her own domain where the three of us fought for the position of her most abject slave. Even Mary Ellen would scarcely work for watching her antics with an old stocking which she pretended was a rat. Once she caught a live mouse and set us all shouting. Mary Ellen, in her excitement, upset a gravy-boat of hot gravy, and the Seraph slipped and sat down in it, and Giftie, gamboling, mouse in mouth, ran through it and tracked it over the freshly scrubbed boards. If she had been a tigress with her prey she could not have been more ferocious with the mouse. She snarled at it; she worried it;

she threw it up in the air and caught it; she laid it on the scullery floor and rolled on it; and when, finally, it ceased to squirm beneath her, she lay quite still, gazing pensively up at us with liquid eyes, and only now and then twitching her hind quarters to remind her victim that she was still on the job.

One never-to-be-forgotten day she rollicked into the kitchen proudly carrying Mrs. Handsomebody's solemn black shoe, which had been standing with its mate beneath Mrs. Handsomebody's bed. Before our horrified eyes, she worried it till the shoe-laces cracked about her head; threw it up and caught it, as she had the mouse; then taking it to her own bed in the scullery, she laid it there and rolled on it.

When Mary Ellen had wrested the shoe from Giftie, she crept up-stairs, her heart in her mouth, and restored it to its place beneath the bed.

"It was a marvel," she said afterwards, "how the scallywag did what she did widout wakenin' *her*, for there was the mistress sleepin' on the broad of her back, and her two shoes, and her bed-socks scattered over the flure, and the pot of cold crame knocked off the chair at the head of her bed, and the half of it et. It's mesilf will dance for joy whin that little tormint gets took away."

Inquiries were made of all the errand boys, but not one had heard of a lost dog. We came to dread the sound of the doorbell lest it should herald some determined grown-up come to snatch our treasure from us. Mr. Watlin, a butcher young man, and Mary Ellen's favored "follower" of the moment, took a lively interest in the affair. He was of the opinion that if Mrs. Handsomebody once saw the dog nothing would induce her to send it away. And he brought offerings of raw meat in his pocket to make her plump and glossy. Giftie grew plumper and glossier every day.

THEN, when two weeks had passed, she achieved the crowning triumph of her stay with us. It was a heavy morning of dense November fog and the gas was still burning in the dining-room when we came down to breakfast. Mary Ellen did not bring us our porridge, as usual; neither did Giftie run in to greet us; so, after a moment's impatient wriggling in our chairs, we went to the kitchen to investigate. Giftie was nowhere in sight. Mary Ellen sat in an attitude of complete abandon by the dresser, her apron over her head, her arms hanging loosely at her sides. Was Giftie dead? Had her owner come to fetch her? What horror had overcast the sun? We deluged her with questions, pulling the apron off her head, and dragging her from the chair.

“Och, it’s a terror she is,” Mary Ellen said, at last. “Come wid me to the scullery an’ ye’ll see what she’s got in the bed wid her.”

There was not much light in the scullery so we could not at first distinguish what lay on the mat beside Giftie. It moved; it snuffled; no—*they* moved; *they* snuffled. There were three of them. All at once it burst upon us that they were puppies—her puppies—our puppies—one apiece! We flopped on the floor beside her. She darted from her bed—licked our hands—snapped at our ankles—ran back to them—and, finally, tremulous with excitement, allowed us to take them in our arms (the Seraph wrapped his in the skirt of his fresh holland smock) and sit blissfully in a row.

We stroked the soft licked fur of their glossy coats; we examined their tiny sharp black nails; their blindness only endeared them the more to us.

There we were found by Mr. Watlin.

“’Ere’s a picnic,” he said. “’Ere’s a bloomin’ picnic.” He caught up the nearest puppy, and turned it over in an experienced hand. “Tiles must be cut,” he added.

“Tails cut! Oh, no,” I expostulated. “Giftie’s tail isn’t cut. Please don’t!”

“All terriers should ’ave their tiles cut,” said Mr. Watlin, firmly. “If the mother dog’s tile isn’t cut, is that any reason w’y ’er hoffspring should be disfiggered in a like manner? Now’s the time.”

“But it’ll hurt,” pleaded the Seraph. “Do you do it wif a knife?”

“I *bites* ’em orf,” replied Mr. Watlin, laconically, “an’ it don’t ’urt a bit.

“In this world,” he went on, “a lot depends on the way you does a thing. F’rinstance, when I kill a lamb or a steer, do I kill ’im brutally? Not at all. I runs ’im up an’ down the slaughter yard to get ’is circulation up—I strokes ’im on the neck, an’ tells ’im wot a fine feller ’e is, till ’e’s in such good spirits that ’e tikes the killin’ as a joke. Just a part of the gime, as it were. Sime with these ’ere pups. They’d like ’aving their tiles bit orf by me.”

We looked at the puppies doubtfully. It was hard to believe that they would really like it, and we were relieved when Mary Ellen broke in—

“They will not be cut, nor bit, nor interferred wid in any way. If Giftie’s owner likes a long tail on her, he’d want a long tail on her puppies, wouldn’t he? That stands to reason, Mr. Watlin, don’t it? and the owner may walk in here any day.”

How we hated that nebulous owner! And now another cloud loomed on our horizon. Mrs. Handsomebody was getting better. She had sat up on a chair by the bedside; she had, with Mary Ellen’s help, walked across the room; she had, all alone, walked down the hallway; she had come to the head of the stairs. She was like the man in the ghost story, who, fresh from his

grave, called to his wife—snugly sleeping above—“Mary, I’m at the foot of the stairs . . . Mary, I’m half way up.” We, too, shuddered in anticipation. And Mary Ellen was almost as nervous as we, for hers was the responsibility.

The puppies were more entrancing every day. Tiny slips of dewy blue showed between their furry eyelids. They learned to walk, and roll over, and to right themselves after being turned over by their mother’s playful paws. We were squatting on the floor very busy with them, when Mary Ellen entered, round-eyed with fear.

“ ’Tis herself is in the dining-room,” she gasped.

“Not Mrs. Handsomebody?”

“Sorra a thing else. Put them pups in their basket and come out and shut the dure. Ye’d better go into the yard and be at some quiet game. Oh, Lord —” and she hurried back to her mistress.

This time we were safe, but there was to-morrow ahead, with certain discovery.

Mr. Watlin, propped in the open doorway, brought his ingenious mind to bear upon the problem.

“Now if Mrs. ’Andsomebody could be put under an obligation to that little dog, she’s probably tike it right into ’er ’eart and ’ome. If that little dog, f’rinstance, should save Mrs. ’Andsomebody from drowning—does she ever go in bathing?”

“*Likely, at her age, in December!*” sneered Mary Ellen. “Try again.”

“We might hold her under water in the bathtub till Giftie would fish her out,” suggested Angel.

It was a colorful spectacle to visualize, and we dallied with it a space before abandoning it as impracticable. It seemed too much to hope that Mrs. Handsomebody, the bathtub and Giftie could all be assembled at the critical moment.

BUT MR. WATLIN was not to be rebuffed.

“Then there’s burglars,” he went on. “Suppose Mrs. ’Andsomebody’s valuables were to be rescued from a burglar for ’er. She wouldn’t be able to do enough for a little dog that ’ad chased ’im out of this very scullery, f’rinstance.”

We were thrilled by hope. “But where is the burglar?”

“Well, I could prodooce the burglar, in a pinch. He’s reformed; but he’d undertake a little job like this if he know’d it was for pertic’lar friends of

mine, and not a bit of 'arm in it. Is it a go?"

Mystery brooded over the house of Handsomebody all that afternoon and evening. We were allowed to have no finger in this portentous pie.

Mr. Watlin, with some small assistance from Mary Ellen, engineered the thing himself. We were sent to bed at the usual hour, and played at burglars on, and under, the bed to while away the intervening hours.

It must have been almost midnight when our hearts were made to beat in our throats by such an uproar in the scullery as seemed to clear the darkness like a thunderbolt. Giftie appeared to be choking in her effort to unloose, all at once, a perfect torrent of ferocious barks. A window shook, glass broke, a shutter slammed. Then a moment of awful silence before she settled down to a methodical yapping. We heard Mary Ellen run down the stairs.

WE clambered out of bed, and tumbled into the hall. Mrs. Handsomebody was there before us, a gigantic shadow of her thrown on the walls by a candle she held unsteadily in her hand.

"Merciful Heaven!" she was saying under her breath. "What can have happened!" She motioned us to fall in behind her, and it was plain that, crippled as she was, she intended to interpose her body, in its flannel nightgown, between us and whatever danger lurked below. She made the descent clinging to the bannister, the three of us jostling each other in the rear, and, once, nearly precipitated on her back by a caper of Angel's on the edge of a step.

Mary Ellen met us in the dining-room, her face pale with excitement.

"It was a burglar in the scullery, ma'am," she burst out, never looking at us. "It's a mercy we wasn't all murdered in our beds this night—the windy's broke, and the shutter's pried loose, and a bag full av all the things off the sideboard is settin' on the flure. Sure, I heard the steps av him runnin' full lick down the lane—"

Mrs. Handsomebody looked at her bereft sideboard, and dropped into a chair with a gasp.

"Are you *sure* he's gone?"

"Yes'm. I stuck me head out the windy and seen him."

"You're a brave girl. Get me the bitters. Yes, and lock the door into the scullery—stay, what dog was it that barked?"

Mary Ellen hung her head. "The dawg the little boys have been keepin' this bit while. It does no harm at all."

Mrs. Handsomebody's face was a mask. She said composedly: "Well, get the bitters and then bring in the dog."

Mary Ellen did as she was bid.

Enter now Giftie, tail up, ears pricked, the picture of conscious well-doing. She went straight to Mrs. Handsomebody, sniffed her ankles, wagged her tail in appreciation of the odor of liniment that emanated from the injured lady, and finally sat up before her with an ingratiating paddling of the forepaws.

Mrs. Handsomebody regarded her somberly. "May I ask how long you have harbored this stray?"

"Just since the day ye fell, ma'am, and I was that upset that I was scarce in me right moind, and indade, it's herself has saved us from robbery and mebbe murther this night wid her barkin'."

Giftie, tired of sitting up without reward or encouragement, had trotted quietly out of the room. She now came back waddling with importance, with a pup in her mouth. She laid it at the feet of our governess as though to say—"There now, what do you make of that?"

"Horrors!" cried Mrs. Handsomebody, drawing back as though the puppy were a serpent.

With a joyful kick of the heels, Giftie was off again. In breathless silence we waited. The second puppy, sleepy and squirming, was laid beside its brother.

"I presume you have another?" said Mrs. Handsomebody in a controlled voice.

Giftie brought the other.

"Oh, Mrs. Handsomebody!" I implored, "Please, please, let us keep them! They're as good as gold, and they'd guard the house and everything—and maybe save you from drowning some time. Don't take them from us, please!" The Seraph, in sympathy, began to cry. Angel picked up his pup and held it against his breast.

"Silence, John!" rapped out Mrs. Handsomebody. "Mary Ellen, fetch the *Times*. And just look in the scullery to see that all is quiet there. Fetch the bag left by the robber."

Mrs. Handsomebody sipped her bitters while Mary Ellen did her behests. Each of us cuddled his own puppy; and Giftie began an energetic search for a flea.

HAD our hearts not been in the grip of apprehension we should have laughed at the figure cut by Mary Ellen, panting under the sack of plate. Mr. Watlin's burglar had done his job well, and Mrs. Handsomebody groaned when she saw her most cherished possessions tumbled in such a reckless fashion. But not a thing was missing, and when they had been replaced on the sideboard, she turned briskly to the *Times*. She ran a long white finger down the "lost" column.

"Ah, here we are—" she announced, complacently. "Pay attention, boys," and she read:

"Reward for information leading to the recovery of Scottish terrier, female, wearing silver collar engraved, Giftie, stolen or strayed from 5 Argyle Road, on November third. Any one detaining after this notice will be prosecuted."

"You see," exclaimed Mrs. Handsomebody, triumphantly, "you have made yourselves liable to a heavy fine, or even imprisonment, by detaining what is, I presume, a very valuable beast. Argyle Road—a very good locality—is not too great a distance for you to walk. In the morning, we shall return the dog and her—er—young, and I see nothing amiss in your accepting a suitable reward. Not a word now! No insubordination, mind. I won't have it. David, John, Alexander, listen—I am in no mood to be trifled with. Put down those squirming creatures and march to your bed!"

Giftie's hour had struck. It was no use rebelling. With bitter composure, we carried our beloved to the scullery, and laid them on the mat beside their mother. It was not until we were safe in bed that our pent up fury broke loose; and we pounded the pillows, and cursed the name of womankind.

Women! Tyrants! Mischievous busybodies!

"When I'm a man," said Angel, suddenly, "I'll marry a woman, and I'll beat her every day."

"Me too!" cried the Seraph, stoutly. "I'll maww two—fat ones—an' beat 'em bofe."

For myself, I was inclined for an unhampered bachelorhood, but it soothed my wounded spirit to picture these three hapless females in the grip of Angel and the Seraph, and the music of their outcries lulled me fast asleep.

We found next morning that Mrs. Handsomebody and Mary Ellen had never gone back to bed all night, but had kept watch in the dining-room till daylight, when Mary Ellen had been dispatched to find a policeman. He was in the kitchen now, a commanding figure, making notes in a little book; and seeming to derive great benefit from his conversation with Mary Ellen.

A NEW arrival also was a wheel-chair to convey Mrs. Handsomebody to 5 Argyle Road. Therefore, about ten o'clock, after the most exhausting preparations, we set out, a singular party; Mrs. Handsomebody enthroned in the chair, mistress of herself (and every one else), her black-gloved hands crossed on her lap: Mary Ellen, hot, straining over the wheel-chair lest her mistress get an unseemly bump at the crossing; Angel and I, bearing between us a covered hamper containing the three pups; while Giftie and the Seraph, in the abandon of youth and ignorance, sported on the outskirts of the group.

The way was long, and our arms ached with the weight of the hamper, when we stopped before the gate of Number 5 Argyle Road. It was an imposing house in its own grounds; large clipped trees stood about; and a bent old gardener was doing something to one of those, while a tall gray-haired woman in mannish tweeds superintended the work. A Scottish terrier, fit mate for Giftie, was digging furiously at the root of the tree. He discovered our presence first, and, before we had time to introduce ourselves, he and Giftie, with bristling backs, were jumping about one another in a sort of friendly hostility, and filling the air with barks of greeting. Giftie, then, darted to the hamper, sniffed it, ran back to the other Scotty, and bit him so that he yelped. All was confusion.

The tall lady came toward us smiling broadly. She exclaimed above the din: "How can I thank you? I see you have brought home our little wanderer—Giftie, how can you treat Colin so? Poor Colin—lift him up, Jarvis, she's going to bite him again—I suppose there are pups in the hamper. Let's see, boys."

We uncovered the hamper proudly. The three puppies lay curled like little sea anemones. Giftie tried to get in the hamper with them, but her mistress restrained her gently, while she lifted them out, one by one, and examined each critically, Mrs. Handsomebody watching her all the while with an expression of disapproval that bordered on disgust.

The tall lady, quite oblivious to all this, seated herself on the ground with the puppies on her lap, muttering ecstatically: "Perfect beauties—what luck! Giftie, you're a wonder!" Whereupon Giftie tried to kiss her on the ear. The bent old gardener brought Colin to us and made him shake hands, and we thought him very long-faced and dour after roguish Giftie.

PRESENTLY MRS. HANDSOMEBODY spoke in her most decisive tones:

"I fear I shall take a chill if I remain in this damp place. Come, boys. Mary Ellen, kindly reverse the chair."

The tall lady rose to her feet.

"Oh, please come in and have something hot, and tell me all about it. And there's the reward."

"I thank you," replied Mrs. Handsomebody, "I shall not venture to leave my chair. As for the dog, it came to us several weeks ago, when I was ill; hence the delay in returning it—and its young."

"Your grandchildren?" questioned the tall lady abruptly.

"My pupils, and, for the present, my wards," replied Mrs. Handsomebody frigidly.

"Wish I could steal them," said the lady. "If I'd dogs and boys too, I'd be happy. These are darlings." She turned to us then. "Boys, do you like Giftie very much?"

"Oh, we love her!" we chorused.

"Would you like one of her puppies for your very own to keep?"

Would we? We couldn't speak for longing.

Mrs. Handsomebody spoke for us.

"I allow no pets, canine or otherwise."

The tall lady scowled. "But these are valuable dogs."

"All dogs are alike to me. Canines."

The tall lady gave something between a snort and a sigh.

"Would you allow them to accept a sovereign apiece then?"

"That would be permissible."

"I shall be back directly," and with astonishing speed she ran to the house with Colin and Giftie barking on either side of her. It was but a moment till she returned and pressed a golden sovereign into each languid hand. The sight of so much bullion all at once braced us for the moment, and we forgot to be miserable. She came with us to the gate, asking a dozen questions about ourselves and our father and Giftie's stay with us. Giftie had to be restrained from following us, and with sinking hearts we kissed her on her little black nose and said good-by.

"Good-by!" called the tall lady, "come again—any time! Come and spend the day with us!"

Our governess called us peremptorily. She was half a block in advance.

WHEN we reached the chair, she said, in a conciliatory tone: "I shall arrange for you to have some unusual treat from your reward, some concerts, and lantern lectures suited to your years, and maybe, as the Christmas season approaches, even a pantomime. What do you say?"

I looked at the woman. Was she mad to imagine that such paltry, sickly treats could make up for the loss of three pups whose eyes were beginning to open? My own eyes smarted with tears. I looked at Mary Ellen. Two bright drops hung on her cheeks, as she labored behind the chair. I looked at Angel. He was balancing himself on the curb with an air of desperate indifference. I could hear the Seraph weeping as he brought up the rear.

I lingered behind to offer him a suck of a piece of licorice I had. Then I saw that he had stopped and was hunched above the grating of a sewer. I could but think that his spirits had reached such an ebb that nothing save the contemplation of the foulest depths might salve his misery. But I was mistaken! His hand moved above the grating. Something flashed. Then I swelled my chest with pride in him. Truly, the Seraph was a brother to be proud of—a fellow of sturdy passions, not to be trifled with!

He had chucked his sovereign down the sewer!

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Some illustrations were moved to facilitate page layout.

[The end of *A Merry Interlude* by Mazo de la Roche]