

A Four-Footed Gentleman

by Mrs. Molesworth

Open the door, quick, Sybil. Don't you see my hands are full? What a stupid you are! Yes, that'll do. Now you can shut it after me."

And Archie came forward to the table where his aunt was sitting, a large tray spread over with specimens of seaweed that he had been drying and arranging, in his hands.

"Since when, have 'if you please' and 'thank you,' gone out of fashion, may I ask, Archie?" said his aunt.

The boy grew very red, but he laughed good-humouredly.

"I didn't mean to be rude," he said. "But Sybil doesn't mind. Do you, Sybil?"

"No," replied the little girl. "Archie isn't ever really unkind like some boys. Still I think it *is* nice when people thank you and speak politely to each other. But still, of course, Archie is only a boy."

"And can a boy not be a gentleman, do you think, Sybil? What do you say about it yourself, Archie?"

"Oh, I know I *should*," he replied rather shamefacedly, "but you see, Auntie, I forget, or else even if I don't forget, it doesn't seem worth while."

"Be true to your instincts, my boy. Civility and gentleness are *always* 'worth while.' Above all, from man to woman, or boy to girl. And gratitude even for the smallest service is always the sign of a fine nature. That reminds me—"

"Of what? Do tell us, Auntie;" said both children, pricking up their ears.

"Of a little adventure of mine the other day. It is nothing of a story, so don't expect one;" for the word "adventure" had evidently caught their attention. "But it was so pretty and touching, it struck me very much, and made me think how often we might, with benefit, take example by our humble brethren—even in *manners*, children."

"Do you mean poor people?" said Sybil doubtfully. "I know some are very good and nice—some *quite* poor children even. But a good many are very rough and rude, Auntie?"

"Yes, and there is much more excuse for them, of course, if they are so, for often they have not been taught better. But I was not thinking of people or children at all just then, Sybil. The little 'gentleman' whose manners I admired so much was a—" She stopped again and smiled, while Archie and Sybil looked up in perplexity.

"A *what*, Auntie?"

"A little *dog*, my dears!—Yes, you may well look surprised. Listen and I will tell you all about

it. I was going from my own house to a friend's a few days ago, walking leisurely, for I was in no hurry, and had not far to go. It was a quiet time of the day, and not many people were about. I had made my way across our own square and some short way down a street opening out of it when my attention was caught by the sight of a little dog wandering along in an uneasy, rather aimless manner. He was alone evidently, for there was no one in sight whom he could be following—an errand boy or two, a postman and I, were, I think, the only passers-by at the time. And he was far too aristocratic a little dog to have anything to do with butchers' or bakers' boys. He was very pretty and well cared for; his soft, flossy coat had evidently been recently washed and combed, and there was a general air of healthiness and prosperity about him, though he was neither over-fat nor pampered-looking. But just now he was clearly in trouble. He ran a few steps and then looked round him irresolutely; his bright eyes glanced all about him anxiously. I wondered what was the matter and stopped short half intending to pat him or speak to him, when suddenly, seeming to catch sight of me for the first time, he made the first advances by trotting up to me and sniffing me in an inquiring manner. He liked what he saw of me; for he gave a little quick friendly bark, and then, wagging his tail, looked up at me appealingly, ran on a few steps and then stopped short, looking back to see if I were following him, and when I did so, again he barked, again he ran on a few steps, and stood looking back wagging his tail. It was as plain as any spoken words; he was asking me to do him a service. And thus he led me down the street, round a corner, and a few steps along another row of houses, where he stopped in front of a door, looking and wagging his tail, without going on further. Nobody could have failed to understand him.

"Here is my home, kind lady. I have got shut out, please to ring the bell for me."

"I rang of course, and very quickly the door was opened, and in he rushed, and, satisfied that he was all right, I was turning away, when—this is the point of my story—I heard a bustle and fuss just inside the closing door, my friend's bark, rather vehement this time, a voice in remonstrance 'what *can* he want?' then the door opened and out he sprang again. He looked round eagerly, and as soon as he saw me stood still on the doorstep, gave a quick cheerful little bark, wagging his tail with the greatest energy the while, and with still another 'bow-wow,' turned round and ran in quietly. It was the plainest 'thank you ma'am for being so kind,' that ever was spoken in dog or any language. Now *don't* you call that behaving like a gentleman?"

"Yes indeed," said the children heartily, and Archie, whose trayful was ready for some other process by this time, turned to Sybil with deference.

"Please, Sybil, will you kindly open the door?"

She did so, and he disappeared, but in a moment his voice was again heard begging for re-admittance.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "I have come back again to say 'thank you.' If I *had* a tail to wag I could do so."

But though they got some fun out of it, I don't think Auntie's anecdote did Master Archie any harm.

The Bad Fairy

by Mrs. Molesworth

There is a bad fairy in this house. I don't care what you say. There *must* be. Here have I been hours hunting everywhere for my silver whistle. I *know* I had it yesterday evening, and I haven't been out since, and we can't play at our hunt in the wood without it. And they're all waiting for us. It's too bad—it *is*," and Leonard stamped about the room, flinging everything topsy-turvy in his vain search.

"And my umbrella, and my sleeve stud," said David, his two years older brother. "They have *completely* disappeared. Upon my word, Leonard, I think you're right, this house is bewitched."

"Master Leonard, please, here's your whistle. Cook found it just now lying beside the pump in the garden."

"There now—didn't I say so? It *must* be a bad fairy. Was I near the pump in the garden last night? How did the whistle get there, if it wasn't bewitched?" said Leonard, as he and David hurried off.

It was true he had not been near the pump, but he had left the whistle among some flowers on the nursery table, and "baby," as his six-years old sister was called, had thrown it into the basket with the remains of her nosegays. What more easy than for the heavy whistle to drop out of the lightly made open wicker work, as the nursemaid was carrying the withered flowers and leaves to throw away? David's umbrella, had he known it, was at that moment reposing in the pew-opener's care among various "lost and strayed" articles at church; and the sleeve stud was safely ensconced in a mouse-hole behind the chest of drawers on which it had been carelessly laid, to be flung off again in a frantic hunt for some fish hooks, whose disappearance no doubt Leonard explained in the same way.

It came to be rather a convenient idea. Not only losses, but breakages, tearings, all such annoyances were laid to the account of the bad fairy. And it was a very heavy account. Never had there been so many unlucky accidents as during these last few weeks spent by the boys and their sister with their mother, in a little country house, lessons being for the time put aside, nothing thought of but fun and frolic. Even old nurse, who usually took charge—too much charge—of the light-hearted careless boys, was away; there was no one to "worry" about putting things by tidily, wearing the proper clothes at the proper time, and so on. At least so it seemed for a while. But things grew worse and worse, the bad fairy more and more spiteful, till at last even their indulgent mother could take it all quietly no longer.

One evening, finding several of her own private possessions missing—scissors and pen-knife in particular—she came late into the boys room after they were asleep, there to look for them. But she almost forgot her errand in her horrified amazement at the disorder and confusion before her. What a difference from the neat room she used to peep into at night when nurse was at home—everything everywhere, *nothing* where it should be, almost a sort of ingenuity in the perfection of disorder.

"Really," thought the poor lady, "I could be tempted to believe in the spiteful fairy."

She set to work, and with a shaded candle, for the boys were fast asleep, cleared away some part of the confusion. But it was of course impossible to do it thoroughly. The next morning, without saying

anything, she returned to the charge, in the children's absence. By degrees order gained the day, and in the process many of the missing articles turned up, and were quietly restored to their places. Late that evening again came the motherly fairy. Things were not as bad as the night before—they could scarcely have been so, since the morning's tidying. But they were bad enough. All the boys had had in use during the day was "pitched about" as before—again must their mother work for nearly an hour to get the room quite to her mind. And this went on for several days.

During this time there began to be less talk of "the bad fairy," and more than once both David and Leonard expressed their surprise and pleasure at several things having, as they called it, "come back again;" in other words, having been found in their proper places. And at last on the discovery of a "completely lost" treasure—I think it was Leonard's pocket microscope—in a place where he "knew" he had looked in vain, he burst into his mother's room with sparkling eyes.

"Mamma," he exclaimed, "do you know this house really is bewitched? Fancy my having found my microscope just where I looked for it yesterday. And not only that, ever so many other things have turned up. And when we wake in the morning the room doesn't look a bit the same as it does at night. All our things are as neat as can be, and everything ready, however we pitch them about at night."

Mamma listened and said nothing.

"You don't believe me, I suppose," said Leonard.

"I quite believe that a tidy fairy would find plenty to do in your room, if such a being existed," she said.

"But all boys are untidy," said Leonard. "I don't think we're—well,"—for visions of really terrible chaos rose before his eyes as he spoke—"well, not *much* worse than others. But I know what I'll do," he added to himself. "I'll keep awake to-night and watch."

For a wonder he was able to keep his resolution. He was not *quite* asleep, though David had been snoring for some time, when he was roused by the door softly opening, and a figure with a shaded light, glided into the room. Leonard, though at first a very little frightened, kept his presence of mind, and neither called out nor started up, but lay still as if asleep. But soon, as he watched the figure moving about, rearranging the untidy heaps of clothes, picking up towels and handkerchiefs, putting boots and shoes neatly together in pairs—all so quickly and deftly, that it might indeed have been a fairy's work, a new feeling overcame him.

"Mamma," he cried—for mamma he soon saw it was—and his voice woke David too, "it is you then—you who are the good fairy! It is a shame for *you* to have such trouble for us. Oh, mamma, dear, I *am* ashamed," and out of bed sprang Leonard and David, and set to work with a will to help their mother, in what certainly should not have been left for her to do.

"We will never be so untidy again, mamma, *never*," said both boys.

"And it will save yourselves and other people a great deal of discomfort, of worse than discomfort, indeed," she replied.

"But, mamma, untidiness isn't such a *very* bad fault—not like telling falsehoods, or bullying, or anything like that?"

"It is a fault that *leads* to bad faults," said his mother gravely, "to waste of time and money—two of our 'talents'—to loss of temper, and undeserved blame of others, very often. It makes life ugly and ungraceful, and it puts the burden of our own duty on others. For *some one* must be tidy, or what would become of the world? And for my part I can never think but what untidiness in outside things too often ends in untidiness of mind and thought."

Sources:

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