

The Mother Trap

By Mabel Dufford Pinkerton

IT was Cousin Steve's talk about traps that set Davie's heart all aglow with a new scheme for winning his heart's desire. The wisdom of Cousin Steve's eleven years was great indeed to Davie's four-and-a-half-year-old comprehension.

"You see," elucidated Steve, "when you want to trap anything—any bird or animal, you know—you take some of whatever he likes best, and put it near where he often passes by, where he will be sure to see it, and you have it fixed some way so that when he comes to take that nice bit of food he will get caught fast. When I caught those grouse that mother and I brought for the Christmas dinner, I scattered some corn around on the snow near where I had seen the grouse feeding before the snow came. Then I trampled a nice little path and scattered corn along that, and at the end of the path I put a box with a trap door. Inside the box on a board I put some more nice corn. When the grouse followed the little trail of corn and came to the box, and went inside and pecked at the corn on the board, that pulled the string which dropped the door—and there I had the grouse fast. Father—that's your Uncle Steve—showed me how."

The boys were in their favorite corner of the long living room, and Uncle Steve, strolling by just then, heard a part of his son's little lecture on traps. "Yes," he said, smiling, "you can catch most anything you want, if you set your trap in the right place, and use the right bait."

Davie, on his pillow that night, wide awake with excitement, studied how to trap what he wanted most, and caught his breath with the wonder of the thought. Aunt Annie heard that quick breath, and came in to see if all was well with this wee lonely nephew, for whom her heart never quite ceased aching. "Are you all right, Davie boy?" she called softly. But Davie was too intent upon his own great scheme even to hear the question. "Auntie," he asked, as he noticed her standing by his bedside, "what do mothers like best?"

"Their own little boys, I should think," answered Aunt Annie, with a bitterness that fortunately the little boy did not apprehend. "Why did you ask, Davie?"

But Davie, his one difficulty well on the way to solution, was already half way to the land of dreams.

It was a mother and a little sister that Davie planned to set a trap for. His waking schemes and his vague memories mingled in his dreams. Once more he returned with Daddy from a happy day at Aunt Annie's and Uncle Steve's, in the country, to his home, ran to find mother and baby sister, and found only a dreadful loneliness instead. Once more he came back to Daddy, and found him with his face all white and strange, reading a letter. Then the dream went swiftly and lightly, as dream memories will, over days that had been very long in the living—days when his dear home had strangely changed from light and happiness to a dreary place, where his adored Daddy strode from room to room, like the caged creatures in the parks. Listening in silence to his elders' talk, he gathered that his lovely mother had gone away, taking baby sister, and had left a letter telling daddy that it would be of no use for him to search for her; that Daddy somehow blamed himself for her going, and did search, everywhere; while everyone else blamed mother. There was Aunt Annie's pitying face about the house at first, then housekeepers, one after another, some who scolded, some who gave him a sort of kindness, but none to whom he could be persuaded to talk of the lost mother and sister. Not even to daddy could he ever speak of them. He could only hide his face against daddy's neck, and lie quivering in the circle of Daddy's arm, while daddy's voice told him that some day their dear ones would come home again. But he had heard Aunt Annie and Uncle Steve saying, "She never will come back—not after all these months." Memories of mother and sister blurred and blended with things he had been told, their images in his mind grew indistinct, until at last his longing little heart cried out for "a mother and a sister," instead of "my mother and my sister," as at first. Then, in his dream, his plan had come to success, and he was caught up, sobbing, in the arms of a mother whose face he did not see—and he awakened, to find Aunt

Annie's arms about him, and her voice asking what her precious baby was crying in his sleep about.

Morning came—"the day before Christmas"—and the house was bright with the outward symbols of a joy that was not. Only Davie, full of his great scheme, seemed so much less grave and silent than usual that his father, watching him, wondered, with mingled gladness and pain, whether the boy was forgetting. He ground his teeth together as he muttered for the thousandth time, "I must find them, before the boy forgets."

Davie knew well enough what little girls liked best—what to use for bait in his trap for a little sister. To be sure, he would have to go without his promised rare treat of just two small pieces of candy. "Two pieces are all a tiny laddie with a delicate stomach may have, even on the day before Christmas," Daddy had said. It takes mother love and mother wisdom to find the right food for a highstrung little boy to eat, and house-

keepers who buy good behavior with candy, sugar and cake, sometimes lay the foundation for much pain. And the longing for mother tenderness can make a wide-eyed, silent little lad of a rollicking baby. So it had been with Davie. His father's face quivered sometimes, at his son's wistful glances at forbidden foods, his quiet acquiescence in the strict rules that of late had been laid down for his daily food. "Daddy says it isn't good for me—it makes me cry in the night," was his reply when offered forbidden goodies. So the little heart, schooled to self-denial, found his desire for the unaccustomed sweets not too great to be overcome. He tucked them away behind the bronze clock on the mantel, standing on a chair to do so, to await the time he had chosen to set his trap.

He knew, too, just where to put the candy bait. Out by the side door, in his own favorite nook, where he stood to watch when the grocery boy and the fruit man and the vegetable man brought in their boxes and crates and baskets of wonderfully interesting things—that was the place. There was a path cut in the snow there now, and he knew the very place on the clean white shelf of snow

beside the door where he would lay the tempting bits of sweetness, and the very corner where he would stand to wait until the little sister should see the bait and walk along the white walled path. And then—then he would be the trap door, that would catch her and hold her fast, and carry her to daddy. His mind did not picture her as different from the toddling sister who had gone away, even though daddy had told him she would be much larger when she came home.

And for the mother-trap—he himself would have to be the bait for that, because Aunt Annie had said that mothers loved their own little boys better than anything. And he would have to be the trap door, too, and fly to her quickly, and hold her fast, and lead her to daddy.

Yes, this was the very place to make a trap for a mother and a baby sister, because there were always mothers and babies passing by, every afternoon, right where they could look down the path beside the house, and see the bits of candy and the little boy. Late in the afternoon he would set his trap, when the grocery boy and all the rest were through using the side door, and there would be no one in the kitchen to watch, and he would

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