

The Little Nuisance.

(By Harriet Winton Davis, in Chicago 'Standard'.)

The day was warm and Robert Reed leaned his head against the casing of the open window, while he closed his eyes and tried to think of a subject for an essay. He thought of the Chinese question, then he wondered if he could handle 'International Arbitration.' Robert kept up pretty well with the questions of the day, but he knew his limitations. 'Our Relations to the Philippines' had an alluring sound, and somehow it seemed as if there was a better chance there. He thought of such withering things he could say to that Atkinson set. How he would demolish their arguments. He had taken such a deep interest in the question, and had heard his father discuss it so often that he really felt quite master of the subject.

Just as he had written with a flourish, 'The duty we owe to the Philippines,' his mother came in from the kitchen, softly singing to the child asleep in her arms. She laid her in the cradle and carefully arranged the mosquito netting. Then she turned to Robert. 'I thought Bessie would be back by this time. You'll have to keep a little watch of the baby, Robert, while I run down to the village. I think she'll sleep till I get back, but if she should wake up, you can give her her medicine.'

'All right, mother; how much?' said Robert, trying to keep his mental grip of a knock-down opening sentence.

'Oh, about a teaspoonful—it's perfectly harmless. Put it in a little water, and she'll like it. The bottle is on the kitchen clock shelf.'

The house all to himself, how fast the ideas came, and the sentences fairly flowed from his pencil. He was quite elated as he covered page after page. Suddenly he heard a small protest from the corner.

Tiptoeing across the room, he began gently rocking the cradle, while he tried to hum the baby back to sleep, as he had heard his mother do, but it was no use. The wide open blue eyes were staring into his, while the dimpled fists fought the netting with a dogged determination. Robert loved his little sister with all his boyish heart, but somehow that feeling wasn't uppermost just then.

'What on earth made you wake up so soon you consummate little nuisance? You don't sleep as long as it takes mother to get you to sleep,' and he scowled at her till the baby mouth went up in such grieved fashion that his heart relented.

'I guess I'd better write about the duty I owe the baby,' he said, as he gently lifted her from the cradle. 'You're a pretty nice kid, after all—but I don't see how I'm going to write if I hold you.'

The tiny hands, grasping the paper and his hair alternately, were so persistent that he soon laid his paper on the table. 'Gracious,' he said, 'I forgot your medicine, young one.' He put her back in her little nest, where she quickly set up a shrill scream.

'Now, "set where you're sot," till I get it, and don't howl so. I should think mother'd go crazy. I wonder if I ever acted like that. Can't you hush up?' And Robert hurriedly prepared the medicine, while the shrieks grew louder and more piercing. 'I'll put on mother's apron,' he thought, 'or she'll send it all over my Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes.'

The baby stopped her cries and obediently opened her mouth at sight of the spoon. 'That's it, Miss Reed; now you're acting like a lady.' Robert hunted up the woolly lamb and smiled at the ecstatic look which over-

spread the little face as the infantile hands reached for the favorite plaything. Then he turned to his writing again, but he had hardly traced a sentence before he threw it aside and springing from his seat rushed into the kitchen. 'Did she say on the shelf or the table?' he thought, and then it all came to him. Instead of the bottle on the clock shelf, he had taken the one from the table, and that was marked 'Laudanum.'

Robert might live to an advanced age, but it is doubtful if he ever would pass through more poignant anguish than filled his soul at that moment. He had poisoned his little sister. Could she be saved? What could he do? A dozen thoughts rushed through his mind with lightning speed. He knew that his mother had somewhere a book that would meet just such cases as this, but in the state of mind he was in he could not have told whether it was likely to be in the summer kitchen or the best bedroom. No, he must run for help—but where? The nearest neighbor he knew was away. Besides, he must trust that precious life only to skilled hands. He lifted the baby from the cradle, and dashing through the kitchen, caught his mother's sunbonnet from a nail, and holding it lightly over the flaxen head, tore down the dusty road, his small burden, too astonished to even gurgle, pressed close to him. He felt that if she should die he wanted to die himself. 'A nuisance!' How the hateful word came back to him, and he groaned aloud.

He passed a farm waggon in his headlong flight, and the occupants stared in open-mouthed wonder—but little he cared for the strange spectacle he presented. As he neared his goal, he caught sight of his mother and Bessie coming down a cross street, and beckoning madly to them, he flew on. He was the fastest runner in school, and had beaten in many a hard won race, but he broke his own record, as, breathless and bare-headed, with apron-strings flying, he dashed into the village drug-store.

'Laudanum!' he gasped, as he almost threw the child into the lap of Dr. Harper, who sat by the open door.

'Hey—hi—what's this?' the old man said, mechanically grasping the kicking bundle.

'I've poisoned her; it's laudanum,' poor Robert managed to whisper, almost in a collapse.

'Why, you young fiend!' the doctor said, as he looked at him over his spectacles. 'Here, hold it a minute,' and he hurried behind the counter. A moment later, as he was trying to force open the unwilling mouth, Mrs. Reed and Bessie ran into the store.

'What is it? Oh, Robert, what is it?' his mother gasped.

'I gave her laudanum instead of the medicine, and she's going to die,' and Robert buried his face in his hands.

Mrs. Reed's very lips were white with terror, but her practical nature asserted itself.

'Robert, look up here, and tell me exactly what you did. How could you have given her laudanum? There wasn't a drop in the house.'

Robert looked up with a momentary gleam of hope, which died away, as he said with dull despair, 'Yes, there was; it said laudanum on the bottle and the cross-bones and everything. It was right on the kitchen table, and I forgot you said the shelf.'

Bessie who had been crying silently as she clung to her mother, looked up at this, while a radiance broke through her tears. 'Oh, Robert, that wasn't laudanum, it was liquorice water. I had it for my dolly's medicine, and I found the bottle on the ash-heap.'

The doctor suspended operations, and a

grin overspread his face as he handed the baby over to her mother.

'Here, Mrs. Reed, you take her now. I guess she'll pull through. She seems to be out of danger.'

[For the 'Messenger'

Greatness.

It may not be for us to climb
The mount of fame;
Nor in a nation's annals 'grave
A lasting name.
Not ours to sway the world with power
Of mind or will,
Nor delve in mysteries profound
With wondrous skill.

In lowliest paths of life, obscure
Our lot may be;
Yet ours may be an honored name
Throughout eternity.
In deeds of loving kindness we
Our names may write
On hearts of fellow-travellers
Through life's chill night.

The mystery of perfect peace
We may unfold,
Of service sweet, of blessed hope,
Of joy untold.
Eager to serve in smallest ways
That Name elate,
In humblest tasks of daily life
We may be truly great.

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