

THE CHILDREN

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Hugh usually was doing something for wee Helen, doing it with perspiring and sighful awkwardness and for scant thanks — or for none.

Helen usually was playing by herself, and pretending, as now, to be sharing the sport of some playfellow, perfectly tangible to her, but invisible, non-existent to the boys — a form of persistent "make believe" which greatly amused Hugh and as greatly irritated Stephen.

"Don't pretend like that; it's a simpleton way of going on," the older boy called to her now, without moving his head or his eyes.

"It's nothing of the kind," the girl replied scornfully. "You're blind, that's what's the matter — blinder'n a bat, both of you." And she continued to laugh and chat with her "make-believe" playmates.

An elfin child herself, the children of her own delicate myth did seem the more suitable fellows for her dainty frolic than either queer Stephen or stolid, clumsy Hugh.

The little girl was very pretty, a queenly little head heavy with vivid waves of gold-red hair, curved red lips eloquent of the history of centuries of womanhood, wide blue eyes, and the prettiest hands and arms that even feminine babyhood (and English babyhood, Celtic-dashed at that) had ever yet achieved; every pink-tipped finger a miracle, and each soft, beautifully molded elbow, dimpled and dented with witching chinks that simply clamored for kisses — and often got them; a sunny, docile child, yielding but unafraid, quiet and reserved, but hiding under its rose and snow robe of provocatively pretty flesh, a will that never swerved: the strongest will at Deep Dale — and that