

"Why not?" Dave's indignation at this statement made him shout. "Why can't oy, same as another boy?"

"Because you're Gwanny Mawwowbone, all ve time. You tarn't *help* it." Dolly's solemn nods, and a pathos that seemed to grieve over the inevitable, left Dave speechless, struggling in vain against the identity he had so rashly undertaken to assume.

Susan Burr missed a great deal of this, and marked what she heard but little. She only knew that the children were happy, and that their happiness must end. Even her own grief—for think what old Maisie's death meant to her!—was hushed at the thought of how these babies could be told, could have their first great grief hurst upon them. She felt sick, and only knew that she herself could not speak the word.

Aunt M'riar stole up after her stealthily—not Uncle Mo; his weight on the old stairs would have made a noise. They stood side by side on the landing, just catching sight of the little poppet in the armchair, all unkempt gold and blue eyes, quite content with her personation of the beloved old presence it would never know again. Aunt M'riar could just follow Susan Burr's stifled whisper:—"She's being old Mrs. Picture, in her chair."

It was confirmed by Dave's speech from the window, unseen. "You *ain't* old Mrs. Picture. When Mrs. Picture comes, oy shall tell her you said you was her, and then you'll see what Mrs. Picture'll say!" He spoke with a deep earnestness—a champion of Truth against an insidious and ungrounded fiction, that pretence was reality.

Then Dolly's voice, immovable in conviction, sweet and clear in correction of mere error:—"I *is* Mrs. Spicture, and when she comes she'll *say* I was Mrs. Spicture. She'll set in her chair wiv scushions, and *say* I was Mrs. Spicture."

The two listeners without did not wait to hear Dave's indignant rejoinder. They could not bear the tranquil ignorance of the children, and their unconsciousness of the black cloud closing in on them. They turned and went noiselessly down the stairs, choking back the grief they dared not grant indulgence to, by so much as a word or sound. The chronic discussion that they had left behind went on—on—always the same controversy, as it seemed; the same placid assurance of Dolly, the same indignant protest of Dave.

At the stairfoot, Uncle Mo, silent, looking enquiry, mistrusting speech. Aunt M'riar used a touch on his arm, and a nod towards