

"Children," said mamma, after abating Bobboker's pretensions, until he was willing to begin with the soup, "you've only twelve minutes."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Fred, "and I wanted some more pudding. Bertha had two plates."

"You also might have had two, had you not dawdled so long over your meat, cutting it into peculiar shapes."

"Well, I've time enough for another piece."

"Not a moment; you've barely time to reach school."

"Well, can't I have it when I come home?"

"No—yes, if you start this instant."

Away went Fred; and Bertha, after trembling irresolutely for a moment, as to whether to go with Fred, or be left behind, the latter being inevitable if she finished her pudding, attempted to accomplish both desires by cramming the remaining pudding into her mouth. A fit of choking naturally ensued, and mamma patted the child between her shoulders, and Fred remained to see that his sister was properly restored; and when Bertha at last breathed freely, there were but five minutes of the noonday intermission remaining, and the school was six squares away.

"Mamma," suggested Fred, "don't you think we'd better stay at home this afternoon? If we—"

"No, my son," said mamma, decidedly, "I do not."

"We'll be marked late, if we go," said Fred, "and I don't think that's fair to me when I hadn't anything to do with choking Bertha."

"You needn't have remained," said mamma. "If you had not stopped to beg for more pudding, you might have been at school by this time."

"And Bertha might have died," said Fred, "and her only twin-brother away off at school. Oh, I think that would have been dreadful."

Mamma kissed Fred, but was none the less firm in her decision; so both children crawled out of the house, and strolled leisurely toward school, while mamma ate as if never before had she tasted a morsel of food. Fortunately Bobboker also was hungry, so hungry that he fed himself, and allowed mamma not only to dine, but to think peacefully for a few moments. Mamma needed time for thought almost as much as she needed food, for she had some dozens of things to be done, each one of which was as important as any other, and all needed attention at the earliest possible moment. The afternoon before her would be five hours long, which time, if unbroken by visitors, should suffice for the darning of the dozen or more pairs of small stockings that had been accumulating in her work-basket for a week or two. Deduct a quarter hour for the labor of getting Bobboker to bed for his afternoon nap, another quarter just before supper, in which to dress for the evening meal, a quarter for The Jeff's various demands, and still one more for any probable caller, and there would yet remain four good hours. She felt strong enough to attack any household duty, for she had really eaten a full meal, for the first time in—well, ages.

AFTERNOON.

The first quarter hour mamma had admitted she would lose was to be expended upon putting Bobboker to bed for his afternoon nap; and this was how it began:

"Beeboy, it's time for you to take your nap now," said mamma.

"Tisn't," said Bobboker, very promptly.

"Mustn't contradict," said mamma, kindly, but firmly.

"Isn't contodick," replied the juvenile; "is Bobboker."

"Which dolly will you take to bed with you?" asked mamma, imagining that the diplomatic method would be successful, because once or twice before it had sufficed.

"No dolly at-all-ey. Dollies is yadies, an' yadies don't go bedden daytimes."

"Oh you're mistaken, beeboy; a great many ladies take naps by daylight, and a great many more wish they could!" And mamma, sighing as she thought of the necessities of a member of the latter class, continued: "Mamma would take a nap this afternoon if she could."

"Den why *don't* you could?" asked Bobboker.

"You can come on one side of my beddy, an' Bobboker will hing you aheep."

"Mamma has too much work to do, beeboy; she can't go to sleep until long, long after dark. Mamma wishes it were dark now—and that dreadful German gone," she added in a low tone.

"Make b'ieve it's dok," suggested Bobboker, an' make b'ieve me's mamma; an' oo's Bobboker, an' me'll put oo a-beddy, an' hing oo aheep. Tum on—kay me."

"Oh, you must take me, if you're going to be mamma."

Bobboker looked mystified, but soon got his natural face back, and admitted the impossibility of carrying out his plan in all particulars by taking mamma's hand, and saying:

"Tum on; Bobboker will 'ead his 'ittie beebee to the beddy. Beebees must walkee."

So mamma put down a hand, and Bobboker put one up, and led his passive charge to the bed-chamber; then he climbed upon mamma's bed, and tugged at her hand, saying:

"Tum on."

Mamma dropped upon the bed and drew the edge of the coverings up over her boy.

"Tummer oo," commanded Bobboker.

"I cat," whined mamma, imitating her little boy's favourite expression.

Bobboker looked at her very sternly; he seemed to have a suspicion that the remark was not original, but as mamma complained that she was a poor, cold little baby, Bobboker disarranged the coverings at a great rate, crawling all over mamma as he did it, and planting elbows, hands, knees, heels and toes promiscuously about without regard to the purposes for which nature had designed the various portions of the maternal anatomy. Mamma endured a great deal with only inward remonstrance, but when the child, endeavoring to cover her feet, got one of his own feet in a position which raked both her eyes and nose, planted his knees firmly on her chest and one of his elbows on her stomach, she exclaimed:

"Oh, beeboy! you're hurting me most cruelly."

Bobboker stopped short, turned his head, and asked:

"Fot 'oo say?"

"You hurt me—dreadfully—oh!"

"Poo' mamma—poo' Bobboker, I mean," said the little fellow, turning on his hands and knees until his face was almost over mamma's, while he inflicted torments innumerable upon his victim. "Me kiss the p'ace an' make it well." So saying, he put a sympathetic face down to mamma's and kissed her, his weight being thrown more and more upon his elbows and mamma's breast as he did so. He kissed mamma's lips two or three times, completely stopping her breath and utterance as he did so; and then he laid one of his soft cheeks against one of hers; but the instant the blockade of the maternal lips was raised, a loud shriek fell upon the child's ears and caused him to give a convulsive