

Teddy's adventure (Part 1), Sep 1923



TEDDY was lost. Daly's house was lost.

Daly's house was solemn and still and sad, as if Death had halted his pale horse at the gate, had come up the little path among the flowers, and summoned one of the children to follow him. Mother's face was pathetic in its anxiety, but she had not wept; Father's was stern-looking. The children crept about like little ghosts and wept until they had no tears left. Kate occupied herself cooking Teddy's favourite dainties for tea, in the hope that the wanderer would come in by then. Shamie went from one to another, his short, questioning bark saying quite plainly to each: "Where's Teddy?"

It was at dinnertime - midday dinner - that Teddy was missed. Father was angry that Teddy was late. For some months his punctuality had been something to marvel at, but to-day he had slipped back into the old offence.

"Teddy late? Up to his old tricks," Father said. "I'll teach that lad a lesson one of these days."

Dinner was well over, and Mother became alarmed. "Something has happened to him," she said, and her face was pale and drawn. "He's often been late, but never as late as this. He has always come in before we've finished."

Mick and Mack were dispatched to friends' places, where it seemed just possible Master Teddy might have stayed for dinner.

"But he never has stayed anywhere without permission; none of them ever have," Mother said, wistfully. "They always come home."

The afternoon dragged slowly, each hour as long as ten. Surely the clock had stopped. Mick and Mack stood close to it to listen.

"Tick tock, Teddy's lost. Tick tock. He's gone. Tick tock," said the old clock, and the two little boys went out again to call through the paddocks at the back of the house, "Tedd - y! Tedd - y!" Shamie went with them, and lifted up his voice and howled horribly.

Mary ran down to the church - he might be helping to "do" the altar with Mrs. Ryan –but he was not there. She went to Mrs. Sullivan's - he might be trying to out – Mack Mack.

Mother's mind ran on water-holes. "But there are no water-holes within miles," Father said.

"He may have gone out Doughboy Creek way, and the holes will be full after the heavy rains. Of course, I know he never did go so far alone, but - "

As dusk crept up Father's anger blazed. "I'll have to tell the police," he said, and took up his hat. Just then Mary came out of Teddy's room, her face as pale as Mother's.

"Mother, I - I - I think Teddy has - has - "

"Speak up, child," Father said, a trifle impatiently.

"I think Teddy has run away!"

Mother sank down on a hall chair, and Father asked quickly: "Why? Why do you think so?"

"I looked in his room, and some of his clothes are gone, and his brushes, and the brief bag you gave him, and his money box feels - "

Father took two strides to Teddy's door; Mother followed. She looked through Teddy's wardrobe, she felt the money box - so light, and with such a hollow rattle.

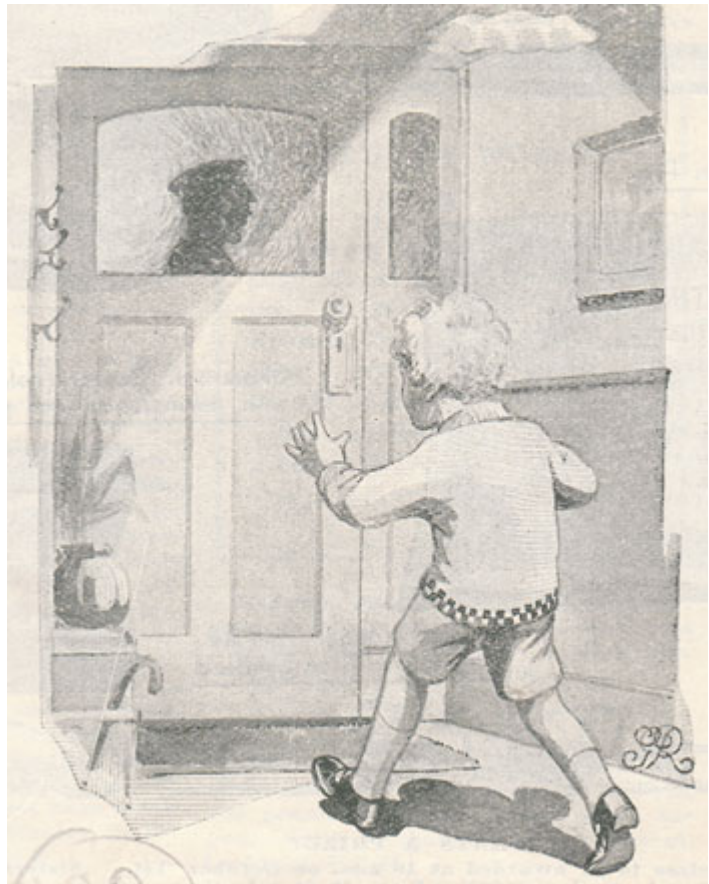
Mother and Mary listened miserably while Father breathed threats and denounced his son's ingratitude. The serpent's tooth would have been the mildest pin-prick to Father that afternoon. But Mother could think only of Teddy's safety and his speedy return.

"Oh, he's safe enough. He'll be found. Don't distress yourself about him. The police will locate him in a day or two."

In a day or two! Mother groaned. What might happen to her poor little boy in that time?

"How afraid he will be when night comes on! He hasn't thought of that."

"Serve him right. I hope he gets the fright he deserves, I didn't think he'd do such a thing: I can hardly believe it. I'd better go and get the police on his trail at once."



Mary hung her head and cried. It seemed such a terrible disgrace to have the police hunting Teddy. By telephone and telegraph a description of Teddy was broadcasted about the country, and his sorrowing family settled down to wait and hope and fear and pray. At short intervals Father rushed off to the police station to see if there was any clue.

After tea Baby Bet was put to bed, but the other children begged so hard to be let "stay up" that Mother could not refuse them. They were a comfort to her, too, for their cheery optimism was catching. Mack thought an angel might bring him home -unknown to Teddy, unseen by anyone, of course. Mick thought that it bushrangers were about, they'd be too slow to "nab" Teddo.

"He's as clever as anything. He'll get home alright, Mother." Now and then they knelt and prayed; now and then Sleep almost caught the children in his net.

They were kneeling saying the Rosary before the oratory in Mother's room when the clock struck a quarter to eleven.

"Nearly midnight," Mick whispered in an awed tone - he had never been "up" so late - but Mack nudged him into silence, and would not encourage talking at the Rosary. They prayed to Our Lady to keep their Teddy safe, to bring him home soon. When Mother commenced the decade contemplating the finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple, her voice took on a new note of hope, and the little voices answering echoed it.

Looking up into the tender face of the statue, Mother thought of the sweetness, the tenderness, that no artist could portray - the sweetness and tenderness of the face of the Mother of the Christ-Child. She found comfort in the thought that Our Lady knew the sorrow of having a lost Child, too. They had just finished that decade when the doorbell rang with an alarming peal.

Kate stood up, but Mick was before her.

"It's Teddy!" lie shouted. "I know it's Teddy. I knew Teddy couldn't get lost."

He ran to the door, but it wasn't Teddy. It was a telegraph boy.

Mother, Kate and the children had continued their prayers, and when Mick came in with the yellow envelope no one took any notice of him. He threw appealing glances at Mother, but she went on "giving out" the prayers, so Mick had to kneel down again. Mother went right on to the Litany: "Pray for us, pray for us," rang out hopefully.

A sigh of hope, of fear, went round the little circle as Mother opened the yellow envelope.

To be continued