

MR. DARLING*(Witheringly)*

A little less noise there.

(Goaded by an auspiciously crooked smile on MRS. DARLING's face)

I warn you of this, Mother, that unless this tie goes around my neck we don't go out to dinner tonight, and if I don't go out to dinner to-night I never go to the office again, and if I don't go to the office again you and I starve, and our children will be thrown into the streets.

*(The CHILDREN blanch as they grasp the gravity of the situation)***MRS. DARLING**

Let me try, father dear.

*(In a terrible silence their progeny cluster round them. Will she succeed? Their fate depends on it. She fails — no, she succeeds. In another moment they are wildly gay, romping round the room on each other's shoulders. Father is even a better horse than Mother. He sings "We're all right for another day!" as MICHAEL rides on his back. MICHAEL is dropped upon his bed, WENDY retires to prepare for hers, JOHN runs from NANA, who has reappeared with the bath towel)***JOHN***(Rebellious)*

I won't take a bath! Nana, I won't take a bath!

MR. DARLING*(In the grand manner)*

Go and be bathed at once, sir.

(With bent head JOHN follows NANA into the bathroom)

Come here, Michael — no more nonsense.

*(Unfortunately NANA has collided with his trousers — the first pair he has ever had with braid on them)***MR. DARLING**

Oh, Mother, look here! Hair all over my trousers!!

(To NANA)

Clumsy! Clumsy!

*(NANA goes, a drooping figure)***MRS. DARLING**

I'll brush you off, Father dear.

MR. DARLING

Thank you. You know, Mother, sometimes I think it's a mistake to have a dog for a nurse.

MRS. DARLING

Why George, Nana is a treasure.

MR. DARLING

No doubt; but at times I have an uneasy feeling that she looks upon the children as her puppies.

MRS. DARLING

George, we must keep Nana. I will tell you why.

(Her seriousness impresses him)

My dear, when I came into this room to-night I saw a face at the window.

MR. DARLING

(Incredulous)

A face at the window, two floors up?

MRS. DARLING

It was the face of a little boy; he was trying to get in.

MR. DARLING

Impossible.

MRS. DARLING

George, this is not the first time I have seen that boy.

MR. DARLING

(Beginning to think that this may be a man's job)

O-ho!

MRS. DARLING

(Making sure that MICHAEL does not hear)

The first time was a week ago — I remember, for it was Nana's night out.

[MUSIC #3: THE BOY AT THE WINDOW]

I had been sitting there by the fire when suddenly I felt a draught, as if the window were open. I looked round and I saw that boy — in the room. I screamed. Just then Nana came back and sprang at him at once. The boy leapt for the window. Nana closed it quickly, but it was too late to catch him.

MR. DARLING

(Who knows he would not have been too late)

I thought so!

MRS. DARLING

But wait. The boy escaped, but his shadow hadn't time to get out. I hid it! I rolled it up and here it is!

(SHE produces it from a drawer. THEY unroll and examine the flimsy thing, which is not more material than a puff of smoke, and if let go would probably float into the ceiling without discolouring it. Yet it has human shape. As THEY nod their heads over it they present the most satisfying picture on earth, two happy parents conspiring cosily by the fire for the good of their children)

MR. DARLING

A-ha! Well, I don't think it's anyone we know, though he does look a scoundrel!

MRS. DARLING

You know, I think he comes back trying to get his shadow.

MR. DARLING

(Meaning that the miscreant has now a father to deal with)

I dare say.

(The shadow is rolled up and replaced in the drawer)

MRS. DARLING

But wait — I haven't told you all. The boy was not quite alone. He was accompanied by — I don't know how to describe it — by a ball of light no bigger than my fist, that darted about the room like a living thing!

MR. DARLING

(Though open-minded)

That is very unusual!

MRS. DARLING

(Sliding her hand into his)

George, what can all this mean?

MR. DARLING

(Ever ready)

What indeed!

(This intimate scene is broken by the return of NANA with a large spoon in her mouth)

MRS. DARLING

Oh, what have we there, Nana? Oh — the medicine spoon, of course.

MICHAEL

(Promptly)

Won't take it — oh no — boo-oo-oo!

MR. DARLING

(Recalling his youth)

Now then, Michael, be a man.

MICHAEL

Won't, won't!

MRS. DARLING

I'll give you a lovely stick of candy to take after it.

(SHE leaves the room, though her husband calls after her)

MR. DARLING

Mother, don't pamper him. Michael — Michael, when I was your age, I used to take my medicine without a murmur. Used to say "Thank you, kind parents, for giving me medicine to make me well."

(WENDY hears this and believes)

And as an example to you, Michael, I would take my medicine now now — only I've lost the bottle.

WENDY

(Always glad to be of service)

I know where it is, Father. I'll bring it!

(SHE is gone before HE can stop her. HE turns for help to

JOHN, *who has come from the bathroom drying his hair*)

MR. DARLING

Wendy! John! It's that horrid stuff. The sticky sweet kind.

JOHN

(Who is perhaps still playing at parents)

It will soon be over, Father.

(A spasm of ill-will to JOHN cuts through MR. DARLING, and is gone. WENDY returns panting)

WENDY

I've been as quick as I could.

MR. DARLING

(With a sarcasm that is completely thrown away on her)

Oh yes, you have been wonderfully quick, precious quick!

(HE is now at the foot of MICHAEL's bed; NANA is by its side, holding the spoon insinuatingly in her mouth.)

WENDY

(Proudly, as she pours out MR. DARLING's medicine)

Michael, you will see how Father takes it.

MR. DARLING

(Hedging)

Michael first.

MICHAEL

(Full of unworthy suspicions)

Father first.

MR. DARLING

It will make me sick, you know.

WENDY

(Disturbed)

I thought you took it quite easily, Father.

MR. DARLING

That's not the point; the point is that there is much more in my glass than there is in Michael's spoon and it isn't fair.

JOHN

Come on, Father!

MR. DARLING

A little less noise there.

MICHAEL

(Coldly)

Father, I'm waiting.

MR. DARLING

You're waiting! What about me — I'm waiting.

MICHAEL

Father's a scare-dy cat.

MR. DARLING

Father's not a scare-dy cat.

(They are now glaring at each other)

MICHAEL

Well, then, take it.

MR. DARLING

Well, then, you take it.

WENDY

(Butting in again)

Why not both take it at the same time?

MR. DARLING

(Haughtily)

Certainly. Ready, Michael? One — two — you know, Michael, I don't think you're going to take yours after all!

MICHAEL

I am. I am.

WENDY

(As nothing has happened)

One — two — three.

(MICHAEL partakes, but MR. DARLING resorts to hanky-panky)

JOHN

Father hasn't taken his!

(MICHAEL howls)

MR. DARLING

Shhh!

MICHAEL

Boo-oo-oo!

WENDY

(Inexpressibly pained)

Oh father!

MR. DARLING

(Who has been hiding the glass behind him)

What do you mean by "Oh Father"? Stop that row, Michael. I meant to take it but I — missed it.

(NANA shakes her head sadly over him, and goes into the bathroom. THEY are all looking as if they did not admire him, and nothing so dashes a temperamental man)

MR. DARLING

Come on, to bed, the lot of you. Michael, John, Wendy.