

"Yes, I do." And she opened it, and there was her little dead child. (Great sensation.) Yes! and then the little girl's mother fetched a policeman, and the old gipsy was put into the burning fire." Sensation cut short by Fred. "Just served her right," he said. "Now it is Ethel's turn."

"I only know the three little bears," said Ethel sheepishly.

"Oh, bother! and we've all heard it so often. Well, hurry up!"

When Ethel came to the little bear's porridge, "And Golden-hair tasted and tasted till she had eaten it all up," Dora interrupted:

"Oh, wait a minute, please, Ethel. That makes me think of some more ending to my story. When the gipsy got to the burning fire, snakes came and ate her all up; only they didn't finish, because they have got to go on doing it for ever and ever. The Bible says so. Go on, Ethel."

And Ethel went on till she came to: "And while they were gone for the chopper to chop off her head, Golden-hair jumped out of the window. Then when they came back and found she had gone, they were so angry that they all spit at her."

"All what?" asked Claude, with a horrified expression.

"Spit at her."

"Then it's a nasty dirty ending, and I don't like it. You needn't have let them spit at her."

"How could I help it, you silly boy? That's what they did, I tell you."

"They could have thrown their brushes and combs and things at her, couldn't they?"

"No, they couldn't, because they would have had to go down and pick them all up; and bears hate going up and down stairs."

"Well, I don't believe it, because they *love* climbing poles."

"I don't like that ending either," said Laura loftily.

Ethel worshipped Laura, and began to look miserable. "I'm sorry you don't like it," the poor child said mournfully. "But, you see, it's a learnt story: I didn't make it up myself. So they had to spit at her, just as much as she had to eat up all the porridge, and break the little bear's chair."

"Well, never mind, it's my turn now," broke in Fred, "and I am going to make up as I go and say what I like. Don't you stop me, Dora, or I shall forget where I am, you know."

"You can't forget what you don't know, you know," said Laura.

"Oh, shut up, Laura. You're so jolly clever." Laura turned her eyes thoughtfully to the

glowing fire. "Learnted," she mused aloud. "Thrown."

"Freddy dear, I'm longing to hear your beautiful story," whispered Dora. "I know it is going to be beautiful, because your cheeks are getting so pinky, and you are frowning so; and you keep on gasping zactly like baby does when nurse puts her rankerchief to her little nose, and says: 'Blow, baby, blow,' and baby doesn't know how."

They all laughed, which made Dora sorry, for Fred frowned harder than ever, and at her, and drew his arm away from her head. The fat boy's dimples were a joy to behold just then: he sat silently in his corner, refusing to take a turn, but I'm sure he knew more about all that the others said than they did themselves.

This was Freddy's story:—

"Once upon a time there was a donkey; it lived all alone, and was dreadfully lonely." (Pause.)

"Our donkey?" asked little Ruth.

"Hush-sh!" went Dora.

"Sometimes it cried at the top of its voice, and then made a dreadful noise."

Another long pause. Ethel giggled. Dora held up a warning finger, and looked agonisingly at Fred.

"I can't help it, Dora," he said protestingly. "I can't tell any more. I'm crammed full of a story that I don't know a word of. It *is* so uncomfortable. Baby does feel something like it, I suppose, when she tries to blow her nose."

"If you sit quite still a minute, and don't try it will come by itself," Dora assured him. "If you try too hard, it sticks fast and won't come for anything. Besides, Freddy," and she wheedled up to him, "you said you would, so you *must* somehow."

"Well, does it matter if it is about our donkey? I wanted to pretend that it wasn't, but somehow I can't."

"Why no, that makes it all the better. We can ask him about it afterwards."

"All right! then I'll try. He was bellowing this morning, and Tyler said he would give him beans." (Pause.)

"Our donkey likes potatoes best, and grass out of other people's fields; he pretends that it's nicer than ours; but my dad says it's all bunkum, and zactly the same," broke in Tom breathlessly.

"Look here, young Tom, if you're going to take my turn, you can't," said Freddy crossly.

"You wasn't sayin' nothin'," sulked Tom.

"Tyler said he would give him beans," prompted Dora.

"Yes."

"I know," cried Fred, off on trail of thought

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