

[illegible]



tredition was established in 2006 by Sandra Latusseck and Soenke Schulz. Based in Hamburg, Germany, tredition offers publishing solutions to authors and publishing houses, combined with worldwide distribution of printed and digital book content. tredition is uniquely positioned to enable authors and publishing houses to create books on their own terms and without conventional manufacturing risks.

For more information please visit: www.tredition.com

TREDITION CLASSICS

This book is part of the TREDITION CLASSICS series. The creators of this series are united by passion for literature and driven by the intention of making all public domain books available in printed format again - worldwide. Most TREDITION CLASSICS titles have been out of print and off the bookstore shelves for decades. At tredition we believe that a great book never goes out of style and that its value is eternal. Several mostly non-profit literature projects provide content to tredition. To support their good work, tredition donates a portion of the proceeds from each sold copy. As a reader of a TREDITION CLASSICS book, you support our mission to save many of the amazing works of world literature from oblivion. See all available books at www.tredition.com.



Project Gutenberg

The content for this book has been graciously provided by Project Gutenberg. Project Gutenberg is a non-profit organization founded by Michael Hart in 1971 at the University of Illinois. The mission of Project Gutenberg is simple: To encourage the creation and distribution of eBooks. Project Gutenberg is the first and largest collection of public domain eBooks.

Kitty Trenire

Mabel Quiller-Couch

Imprint

This book is part of TREDITION CLASSICS

Author: Mabel Quiller-Couch

Cover design: Buchgut, Berlin – Germany

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg - Germany

ISBN: 978-3-8424-7472-7

www.tredition.com

www.tredition.de

Copyright:

The content of this book is sourced from the public domain.

The intention of the TREDITION CLASSICS series is to make world literature in the public domain available in printed format. Literary enthusiasts and organizations, such as Project Gutenberg, worldwide have scanned and digitally edited the original texts. tredition has subsequently formatted and redesigned the content into a modern reading layout. Therefore, we cannot guarantee the exact reproduction of the original format of a particular historic edition. Please also note that no modifications have been made to the spelling, therefore it may differ from the orthography used today.

CONTENTS.

- I. Fate and a Rusty Nail.
- II. The News, and how they received it.
- III. A Drive and a Slice of Cake.
- IV. Storms at Home and Abroad
- V. In Wenmere Woods.
- VI. Tea at the Farm.
- VII. The "Rover" takes them Home.
- VIII. A Bad Beginning.
- IX. The Coming of Anna.
- X. Lessons, Alarms, and Warnings.
- XI. Poor Kitty!
- XII. Those Dreadful Stockings.
- XIII. An Exciting Night.
- XIV. Mokus and Carrots
- XV. Missing!
- XVI. Banished.
- XVII. "Good in Everything".
- XVIII. Threatening Clouds.
- XIX. Betty's Escapade.
- XX. Kitty's Hands are Full.
- XXI. The Last.

CHAPTER I.

FATE AND A RUSTY NAIL.

On such an afternoon, when all the rest of the world lay in the fierce glare of the scorching sun, who could blame the children for choosing to perch themselves on the old garden wall, where it was so cool, and shady, and enticing? And who, as Kitty often asked tragically in the days and weeks that followed, could have known that by doing so "they were altering their fates for ever"?

The four of them talked a great deal in those days of their "fates;" it sounded so mysterious and grand, and so interesting too, for, of course, no one could know what lay in store for them all, and the most wonderful and surprising events might happen. They did happen to some people, and why not to them?

"I am quite sure something will happen to me some day," said Betty, with a very wise and serious look.

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Dan with mock seriousness, "if something did."

"I mean something wonderful, of course," added Betty. "Don't," with a superior air, "be silly, Dan. Things must happen to somebody, or there would never be any."

Later that same day they realized for the first time that small events could be interesting and important too, and that while they were thinking of their "fates" as something to be spun and woven in the mysterious future, the shuttle was already flying fast.

As I said before, the old wall was particularly cool and tempting-looking that sunny afternoon, for the high, untrimmed laurel hedge on the other side of the path behind them threw a deep broad shadow over the flat top of it, and shade was what one appreciated most on that hot day. All the ground in Gorlay sloped, for Gorlay was built on two hills, while the gardens of all the houses on either side

sloped either up or down another and a steeper hill. Dr. Trenire's house was on the left-hand side of the street, as one walked up it, and it was the steep slope up of the garden behind it that made the old wall so fascinating.

To reach the garden from the house one had to pass through a cobbled yard, with the back wing of the house and a stable on one side of it, and a coach-house and another stable on the other. The garden and the garden wall were at the end. From the yard the wall ran up to a good height—to the children it seemed immense, as high as the tower of Babel, though were they to go back now and look at it I dare say they would find it quite insignificant, for walls have a curious way of decreasing an inch or two with every year one grows older.

To the children, though, its two chief charms were that it had a broad flat top on which one could sit and dangle one's legs over the abyss below, and that from the garden it was so low that by just walking over a flower-bed one could step right on to it, while from that eminence one could command a view of the back door, the side door, the stables, and all that went on in the yard. So that, in addition to being cool and shady, it really was a most attractive and alluring spot.

A vine with a wealth of pretty leaves and long graceful tendrils covered the front of the stable and side of the house, and some years there would be a few bunches of little green grapes hanging amongst the leaves. Through the open stable window, festooned by the vine, dear old Prue, Dr. Trenire's well-beloved and faithful mare, would thrust out her head and gaze dreamily at the life in the yard, or at nothing; and the children, if they were about, would rub her nose and fondle her lovingly, and bring her handfuls of grass, or carrots, or sugar. Sometimes, too, "Pinkie," the yellow cat, would seat herself on the narrow sill of the stable window, close to Prue's cheek, until, finding the air too chilly, or the children too noisy, or sleep overcoming her, she would go inside and curl herself up on Prue's back for a nap.

To-day, though, neither Prue nor Pinkie were to be seen. Apparently they were both indulging in an afternoon nap in the shady

stable, for it really was a very hot day, and the sun fell full on the vine and the stable window.

Unfortunately it fell on the door too, and showed up a most inviting and enticing-looking spot where the sun had once raised a blister on the paint.

Every one will admit that there is a wonderful fascination about a nice soft paint-blister, and busy fingers had quickly peeled this one off, with the result that to-day there was a spot which made as good a target as any one could possibly desire, and just within range of their perch on the wall. There was also, unfortunately, quite close at hand a supply of perfect ammunition in the shape of a heap of small stones and rubbish which they had swept together a few days before when seized by a sudden mania for tidying up the garden. Of course, had they been really good children, they would have finished their job by shovelling up the heap and carrying it away; but they grew very tired, and the work was hard, and they felt they really had done a great deal for one day. So the heap was left in the path until, on this hot afternoon, they found a new and not at all tiring way of disposing of most of it.

They kept up such a sharp fire, and made such a noise, that presently Jabez, the coachman and general factotum, was dancing with rage in the yard below – rage at the noise they were making and the litter he foresaw he would have to sweep up before "the master" saw the place, and added rage at the calm unconcern with which they ignored his commands.

The children, though really very much attached to Jabez, unfortunately felt no fear of him, and above all things they loved to tease him. They would not willingly have hurt him on any account whatever, but, as they said afterwards, when he deliberately placed himself between them and their target, and dared them to throw another stone, why of course he had to put up with what he got; and what he got most particularly was a nasty blow on the forehead from a piece of old wood that Dan threw at him.

Dan, as he explained at the time, really selected the wood out of pure humanity, because he thought it would be softer than a stone if it should happen to strike any one; and, as he argued emphatically, "it was ridiculous to think he could have known that Jabez was

going to duck his silly head at the very wrong moment, and it was even more ridiculous of Jabez to accuse him of knowing that there was a large rusty nail in the wood, for Jabez knew as well as possible that he, Dan, would have been only too jolly glad to have had the nail, for he was collecting old iron as hard as he could, intending to sell it the very next time the 'old-iron' man came round."

Instead of which it was taken by Jabez, along with his bleeding head, straight into the presence of Dr. Trenire, who happened at the moment to be sitting in his study, trying to get a little sorely-needed rest. The doctor had been out all the previous night at a most trying case, and body and brain were weary, his nerves all on edge, his patience nearly exhausted, and he had no time or inclination for unpleasant interruptions and unnecessary worries. Altogether there could not have been a much more unpropitious moment for any one to have gone to him than that which Jabez chose.

As a rule Dr. Trenire was only too gentle and kind and patient with his four motherless children; but to-day, when they slowly, and at a discreet distance, followed Jabez into the study, Kitty felt a sudden conviction that things were not going to be quite as simply and easily got over as usual. She saw a look cross her father's face such as she had never seen on it before, and for the first time in her careless, happy-go-lucky life realized with keen compunction what a sad, tired, patient face it was, and suddenly she found herself wanting to do things for him to try to cheer and help him, and wished most heartily that they had done anything but bring fresh worry and unpleasantness to him.

But before he inquired into the particulars of the squabble, Dr. Trenire attended to the wound. It was only a surface one, but the skin was torn rather badly, and Jabez was bleeding a good deal, and groaning with all his might.

"Get me some hot water."

Only too glad to be able to do anything to help, Kitty ran off; but to run for hot water was one thing, to get it was quite another. The fire was out, the kitchen was littered with dishes and pots and pans, and Fanny the cook, with a dirty apron on and no cap, was fast asleep in her chair by the window, just as though she had not a care or a duty in the world. The squalor and muddle of the whole place

could not fail to strike any one, even casual Kitty; and to her it brought a deeper feeling, one of trouble and remorse, for, in response to her own pleading, her father had made her his house-keeper—and this was how she had fulfilled her duties! In fact, she had given herself no duties; she had shirked them. She had left everything to the servants, and as long as she had been free and untroubled, and meals of a kind had been served at more or less regular intervals, had bothered no further.

"Fanny!" she called sharply, "do wake up! Why haven't you got a fire, and a kettle boiling?"

Fanny awoke with a start, which in itself is enough to make a person cross; and to have been caught asleep, with her work not done, made her crosser. "I don't want a great fire burning on a hot afternoon like this," she answered sharply. "You wouldn't like it yourself if you had to sit by it, Miss Kitty; and if it's your tea you'm wanting, well, it isn't tea-time yet. When 'tis, you will find 'tis ready."

"Um—m!" said Kitty loftily, in a tone that expressed most emphatic doubt of Fanny's statement.

"What is it you're routing about in the cupboards for, miss? I don't like to have folks coming into my kitchen, turning everything over and rummaging round. I shan't know where to find a thing when I wants to. What is it you'm looking for?"

"The methyated spirit and the little stove," said Kitty. "I *must* have some hot water, Fanny, and quickly. Father wants some. There has been an accident."

Fanny changed her tone, and her expression grew a little milder.

"We haven't got a leak, miss. We ran out of it a week ago. I told Emily to tell you—but there, I might as well talk to the wind as talk to her—"

"Oh dear," interrupted Kitty, "whatever shall I do? Jabez is bleeding so he will bleed to death—"

"Jabez! Oh my! Whatever has happened, Miss Kitty?" Suddenly Fanny's whole manner changed to one of anxious eagerness and deep concern. "Is it—is it dangerous, miss? How did it happen?"

What's he done?" Fanny had been so sound asleep that she had not noticed the noise in the yard, or the little procession pass the kitchen window on its way to the study.

"I don't think it is very bad," said Kitty. "Dan threw a piece of wood, and it—it hit Jabez on the forehead, and—and oh, Fanny, what will father think? I believe he is angry with us already, and you know he was out all night and is very tired, and he will be more angry if there's no hot water or anything he wants, and I—I did so want to help him."

Fanny, who appeared more concerned about Jabez than about her master, was, with a lavish use of sticks, kindling a big blaze under a small kettle, and soon had water ready as hot as it was needed. Kitty, greatly relieved, ran back with it to her father.

"I suppose, as usual, there was none," he said gravely, "though I have said until I am tired that in a doctor's house there should always be a supply;" and Kitty could find nothing to say.

Jabez by this time was seated in a chair, facing the light. He was looking very pale and subdued. The thought of having his wound washed and dressed upset him far more than did the wound itself. Betty and Anthony were sitting on two of the stiffest and most uncomfortable-looking chairs in the room, with very grave expressions on their pale but not too clean faces. Dan was standing by the window looking intensely nervous and uncomfortable. He glanced frequently from Jabez to his father, and back again, and Kitty could see he was longing to say something, but did not know how to. She was very sorry that it had been Dan who had dealt the fatal blow. She almost wished that it had been she herself who had done it, for their father was never quite so severe with her or Betty as with the boys.

With the feeling still on her that trouble was coming, she tried to make herself as useful as possible; but as she knew little or nothing as to where anything was kept, she was more of a hindrance than a help, and her hopes were blighted by her father's order to them all to leave the room.

"I will see you presently," he said sternly. "I will either come to you or send for you when I am ready;" and, feeling very crushed,

they made their way to the old nursery, now called "the school-room," and there waited with curiously mingled feelings for what was to happen next. They did not expect it to be anything *very* serious; but they hated to vex their father, and they felt that now they really had vexed him.

Oh how slowly the minutes passed, and what a lot of them there were! It seemed to them that time enough had elapsed in which to have set every limb that Jabez possessed, and to hear the recital of every wrong he had ever received at their hands; and by the time they heard their father's footstep coming their hopes and fears had gone up and down again many times, and they had pictured themselves sentenced to every possible and impossible punishment that their minds could imagine.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEWS, AND HOW THEY RECEIVED IT.

When the door opened and Dr. Trenire came in with the heavy tread of a very weary man, and the face of a very worried one, another and a larger wave of shame and remorse rushed over them all.

Dan stepped forward at once to put his feelings into words. "I am fearfully sorry, father," he said impetuously. "I—I was a brute to throw the things at Jabez; but I—I never meant to hurt him. Is it very bad?"

"It is not a serious wound by any means," said the doctor slowly; "but, of course, the wood was old and dirty, and the nail rusty, and there is always danger of blood-poisoning."

"Oh, I hadn't thought of that," said Dan, looking alarmed.

"No, that is just it," sighed the doctor; "you don't think. No one in the house thinks, it seems to me. I suppose, though, it isn't your fault; you have no one to teach you," and he sighed a heavy, harassed sigh.

The children's mother had died nearly five years earlier, when Kitty was nine, and Anthony but a year old. For a time a housekeeper had been employed to manage both children and servants; but so uncomfortable had been her rule, so un-homelike the house, so curbed and dreary the children's lives, that when Kitty reached the mature age of thirteen her father, only too glad to banish the stranger from their midst, had given in to her pleading, and with high hopes of a home which would be happy and homelike once more, allowed her to become housekeeper and mistress of the house.

Unfortunately, though, Kitty had had no training. Her mother had been an excellent manager; but Kitty was only a little thing when she lost her, and her life had mostly been spent, happily enough, in nursery and schoolroom. Mrs. Trenire's wish had been that her children should have a happy childhood, so all family trou-

bles, all anxieties, domestic worries and details, were kept from them, and the result was that, beyond the nursery and schoolroom life, they knew nothing. Kitty had not the least idea how rooms were cleaned, or meals provided, or anything. Then had come the housekeeper, who for other reasons had kept the children to their own quarters. She resented any interference or questioning, and objected to any trouble they might give her, but as long as they amused themselves and kept out of her way, they were free to do pretty much as they wished.

Under the circumstances it was not greatly to be wondered at that when Kitty took up the reins of management, life at Dr. Trenire's was not well-ordered and free from muddle, and that the doctor himself looked worried, and sad, and careworn.

The pity of it was that Kitty did not try to learn even the very simplest things in housekeeping, and in that lay the root of the trouble and the cause of all that followed. Though when four wild young spirits, that have been bottled up and corked down for years, suddenly find themselves free and able to do what they like when they like, without having to render an account to any one, it would be rather wonderful if they did settle down and become quite staid and steady all at once.

Kitty it was, though, who was most at fault. She had begged to be allowed to manage the house, and, having got her wish, she just seized the advantages and revelled in the freedom, but ignored the responsibilities; and no one was more acutely aware of this fact than was Kitty herself during the next half-hour, when their father talked so gravely to them all in the schoolroom.

"I have been thinking a great deal," he said, as he dropped wearily into the roomy old chair by the fireplace—the chair where their mother used to sit and tell them stories, and hear them say their prayers before they went to bed. "I have thought over the whole situation, as well as my tired brain will let me, and I have come to the conclusion that for all our sakes I must get some one to come and look after us."

"O father!" gasped Kitty in utter dismay. She had never thought that anything as dreadful as this could happen.

"Evidently the management of the house and all of us is beyond Kitty," went on Dr. Trenire; "and that is not to be wondered at. We are a large family on the whole, and a doctor's house is not an ordinary one, and it is not surprising that everything should have got into a state of muddle and confusion."

Kitty felt, but could not say, that she had never really tried to manage it; that as long as things had gone on without any open fiasco, and they had been able to enjoy themselves, and the servants had not been bad-tempered, she had been quite content. She could not make that confession now, and if she had it would not have done any good.

"The house *must* be orderly and well managed, the meals properly arranged and served, and the servants kept in order, and I should be very culpable if I did not see that it was so," went on her father slowly. "So, after much thought and hesitation, for I am very reluctant to admit even a comparative stranger into our midst again, I feel that the only thing to be done is to write to your dear mother's cousin, Mrs. Pike, and ask her to come and make her home with us. She once offered to, and I think now, if she is still willing, it will be well to accept her kind offer."

A stifled cry of dismay broke from the four shocked listeners—a cry they could not repress. "Aunt Pike!" Aunt Pike, of all people, to come to live with them! Oh, it was too dreadful! It could not be—they could never bear it! She had stayed with them once for a fortnight, and it might have been a year from the impression it had left on their memories. When she had left they had had a thanksgiving service in the nursery, and Betty—solemn Betty—had prayed aloud, "From Aunt Pike, pestilence, and famine, please deliver us."

And now this dreaded aunt was to be asked to come again—not for a fortnight only, but for many fortnights; and not as a guest, but as head and mistress of them all, to manage them, to order them about, to make them do as she chose. Oh, it was overwhelming, appalling, too appalling to be true!

"But there is Anna!" gasped Kitty.

"I know," said Dr. Trenire, who really felt nearly as bad about it as did his children. "Anna will live here too, probably. Of course we could not expect her mother to leave her."

This was the hardest blow, the final drop of bitterness their cup could hold, the last straw on four overburthened camels.

"But we all hate Anna," said Betty with slow, deliberate emphasis; "and we shall hate her more if she is here always, wanting to play with us, and go about with us, and — and —"

"Betty, those remarks are unworthy of you," said her father gravely.

"But they are quite true, daddy," said Tony solemnly, "and we've got to speak the truth and shame the devil. Jabez told us so."

Dr. Trenire did not feel able or inclined to argue the point then. Betty drew nearer to him and leaned against his shoulder. "Daddy," she said in her grave, confiding way, "you won't like it either, a bit. When Anna was here before you often used to say, 'Oh, that child!' and you looked quite glad, as glad as we did, when she went away. I am sure you will be sorry if she comes, nearly as sorry as we shall be, only you will be able to go your rounds and get away from them every day; but we," pathetically, "can't do that."

Again Dr. Trenire was silent. He sometimes wished his younger daughter's memory was less acute, and her love of reasoning less strong. No one spoke, and until some one did, remarks would go on dropping from Betty's lips. It was a way she had. She had never been known to cease talking without being forcibly made to do so. "It does seem dreadful," she went on thoughtfully, "that just because Jabez got his head hit we must have Aunt Pike and Anna here for ever and ever, and be made very unhappy. I am sure Jabez would rather have us punished in some other way. Shall I ask him what he would like done to us instead?" she finished up eagerly.

"I don't want to punish you," said Dr. Trenire. "Don't run away with the idea, children, that I am doing it for that purpose. It is that I think it will be the best plan for all of us—for our comfort and happiness, and your future good. I can't have you all growing up like savages, untrained, uneducated, uncared for. What would you all say to me when you grew up?" looking round at them with a smile.

"I would say, 'Thank you,'" said Betty gravely.

"I'd rather be a savage than anything," said Tony eagerly.

Kitty and Dan were silent. Dan was old enough to realize something of what his father meant; Kitty was altogether too upset to answer. She was thinking that it was she who had brought all this on them; that she might have saved them from it. The others blamed Jabez and his tale-bearing; but Kitty in her heart of hearts felt that Jabez with his cut forehead and his tale of woe was but a last link in the long chain which she had forged—a chain which was to grapple to them Aunt Pike and the unwelcome Anna. At the same time the injury to Jabez was a last link, without which the chain might never have been completed.

It was completed though, for that their father's mind was made up, his decision final, they recognized only too clearly, and the glorious summer day turned suddenly to blackest, dreariest night for all of them.

By-and-by, though, after their father had left them, and they had talked things over amongst themselves, some of Kitty's remorse gave way to a rebellion against fate. "How could they have known," she demanded tragically, "that by just sitting on the garden wall that afternoon they were changing and spoiling their lives for ever, and giving Aunt Pike the chance she had been longing for, the chance of coming there to 'boss' them? How was one to know what one might do and what one mightn't? What was the use of trying? There was no going against 'fate'! If it was their fate to have everything spoilt by her, she would have come even if Jabez had never been hurt at all, and everything had been quite right and perfect."

"I shall never sit on that old wall again without expecting something to happen," said Betty in solemn tones.

"And you will never be disappointed after *she* comes," Dan foreboded gloomily, "so it is just as well to be prepared." At which they all groaned in miserable chorus.

By-and-by they straggled downstairs again and out into the yard. The house was really unbearably hot, and seemed too small to allow their minds to grasp all they had to grasp. They had a sort of gloomy longing, too, to revisit the spot where so much had hap-

pened, to go over the familiar ground and see if the bright outer world looked different at all; there surely must be some sign of the tragedy that had befallen them.

In the outer world things had changed very much. The sun had disappeared, and the sky was heavy and overcast with threatenings of the storm that had been brewing all the day; the old wall looked gray, and sad, and uninviting.

"Just as though it knew," thought Kitty.

In the yard Prue was standing somewhat dejectedly, evidently waiting to be harnessed; Jabez was creeping about, getting out the carriage in preparation for a journey. He looked quite imposing with his bandaged head, and he was taking himself very seriously. He glanced furtively at the children, and bore himself with an air of patient but superior resignation. In his heart he was really vexed with himself for having complained of them, though he felt it would not do to let them know it.

Betty, Dan, and Tony felt so bitterly the ill turn he had done them that they walked through the yard and up into the garden without a word or a glance—a cut on the forehead seemed so trifling compared with what they had to bear. Jabez, who had expected anger or teasing on their parts, felt this coldness greatly; he was not used to that kind of treatment, and it hurt him. Kitty, though, was so struck by the sight of his preparations that for the moment she forgot him and his injuries.

"Father hasn't to go out again to-night, has he, Jabez?" she asked anxiously, staying behind while the others strolled on.

"Yes, miss, he hev. He've got to go to Welland to once. They've just sent in."

"Are you going too?" looking at his bandaged head.

"No, miss," with a resigned air. "Master says I'm to go 'ome and 'ave a good night's rest—that is if so be as I can get to sleep."

"But who is going to drive father?" interrupted Kitty.

"Master said as 'ow he'd drive hisself."