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Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Kipling Doyle Willis
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Leslie Dumas Flaubert Turgenev Balzac Willis
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Whittman
Darwin Thoreau Twain
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen
London Descartes Cervantes Burton Harte
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The Brownies and Other Tales

Juliana Horatia Gatty Ewing

Imprint

This book is part of TREDITION CLASSICS

Author: Juliana Horatia Gatty Ewing
Cover design: Buchgut, Berlin - Germany

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg - Germany
ISBN: 978-3-8424-8026-1

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THE BROWNIES

A little girl sat sewing and crying on a garden seat. She had fair floating hair, which the breeze blew into her eyes, and between the cloud of hair, and the mist of tears, she could not see her work very clearly. She neither tied up her locks, nor dried her eyes, however; for when one is miserable, one may as well be completely so.

"What is the matter?" said the Doctor, who was a friend of the Rector's, and came into the garden whenever he pleased.

The Doctor was a tall stout man, with hair as black as crow's feathers on the top, and grey underneath, and a bushy beard. When young, he had been slim and handsome, with wonderful eyes, which were wonderful still; but that was many years past. He had a great love for children, and this one was a particular friend of his.

"What is the matter?" said he.

"I'm in a row," murmured the young lady through her veil; and the needle went in damp, and came out with a jerk, which is apt to result in what ladies called "puckering."

"You are like London in a yellow fog," said the Doctor, throwing himself on to the grass, "and it is very depressing to my feelings. What is the row about, and how came you to get into it?"

"We're all in it," was the reply; and apparently the fog was thickening, for the voice grew less and less distinct — "the boys and everybody. It's all about forgetting, and not putting away, and leaving about, and borrowing, and breaking, and that sort of thing. I've had Father's new pocket-handkerchiefs to hem, and I've been out climbing with the boys, and kept forgetting and forgetting, and Mother says I always forget; and I can't help it. I forget to tidy his newspapers for him, and I forget to feed Puss, and I forgot these; besides, they're a great bore, and Mother gave them to Nurse to do, and this one was lost, and we found it this morning tossing about in the toy-cupboard."

"It looks as if it had been taking violent exercise," said the Doctor. "But what have the boys to do with it?"

"Why, then there was a regular turn out of the toys," she explained, "and they're all in a regular mess. You know, we always go on till the last minute, and then things get crammed in anyhow. Mary and I did tidy them once or twice; but the boys never put anything away, you know, so what's the good?"

"What, indeed!" said the Doctor. "And so you have complained of them?"

"Oh! no!" answered she. "We don't get them into rows, unless they are very provoking; but some of the things were theirs, so everybody was sent for, and I was sent out to finish this, and they are all tidying. I don't know when it will be done, for I have all this side to hem; and the soldiers' box is broken, and Noah is lost out of the Noah's Ark, and so is one of the elephants and a guinea-pig, and so is the rocking-horse's nose; and nobody knows what has become of Rutlandshire and the Wash, but they're so small, I don't wonder; only North America and Europe are gone too."

The Doctor started up in affected horror. "Europe gone, did you say? Bless me! what will become of us!"

"Don't!" said the young lady, kicking petulantly with her dangling feet, and trying not to laugh. "You know I mean the puzzles; and if they were yours, you wouldn't like it."

"I don't half like it as it is," said the Doctor. "I am seriously alarmed. An earthquake is one thing; you have a good shaking, and settle down again. But Europe gone—lost—Why, here comes Deordie, I declare, looking much more cheerful than we do; let us humbly hope that Europe has been found. At present I feel like Aladdin when his palace had been transported by the magician; I don't know where I am."

"You're here, Doctor; aren't you?" asked the slow curly-wigged brother, squatting himself on the grass.

"Is Europe found?" said the Doctor tragically.

"Yes," laughed Deordie. "I found it."

"You will be a great man," said the Doctor. "And—it is only common charity to ask—how about North America?"

"Found too," said Deordie. "But the Wash is completely lost."

"And my six shirts in it!" said the Doctor. "I sent them last Saturday as ever was. What a world we live in! Any more news? Poor Tiny here has been crying her eyes out."

"I'm so sorry, Tiny," said the brother. "But don't bother about it. It's all square now, and we're going to have a new shelf put up."

"Have you found everything?" asked Tiny.

"Well, not the Wash, you know. And the elephant and the guinea-pig are gone for good; so the other elephant and the other guinea-pig must walk together as a pair now. Noah was among the soldiers, and we have put the cavalry into a night-light box. Europe and North America were behind the book-case; and, would you believe it? the rocking-horse's nose has turned up in the nursery oven."

"I can't believe it," said the Doctor. "The rocking-horse's nose couldn't turn up, it was the purest Grecian, modelled from the Elgin marbles. Perhaps it was the heat that did it, though. However, you seem to have got through your troubles very well, Master Deordie. I wish poor Tiny were at the end of her task."

"So do I," said Deordie ruefully. "But I tell you what I've been thinking, Doctor. Nurse is always nagging at us, and we're always in rows of one sort or another, for doing this, and not doing that, and leaving our things about. But, you know, it's a horrid shame, for there are plenty of servants, and I don't see why we should be always bothering to do little things, and —"

"Oh! come to the point, please," said the Doctor; "you do go round the square so, in telling your stories, Deordie. What have you been thinking of?"

"Well," said Deordie, who was as good-tempered as he was slow, "the other day Nurse shut me up in the back nursery for borrowing her scissors and losing them; but I'd got 'Grimm' inside one of my knickerbockers, so when she locked the door, I sat down to read. And I read the story of the Shoemaker and the little Elves who came and did his work for him before he got up; and I thought it would be so jolly if we had some little Elves to do things instead of us."

"That's what Tommy Trout said," observed the Doctor.

"Who's Tommy Trout?" asked Deordie.

"Don't you know, Deor?" said Tiny. "It's the good boy who pulled the cat out of the what's-his-name.

'Who pulled her out?
Little Tommy Trout.'

Is it the same Tommy Trout, Doctor? I never heard anything else about him except his pulling the cat out; and I can't think how he did that."

"Let down the bucket for her, of course," said the Doctor. "But listen to me. If you will get that handkerchief done, and take it to your mother with a kiss, and not keep me waiting, I'll have you all to tea, and tell you the story of Tommy Trout."

"This very night?" shouted Deordie.

"This very night."

"Every one of us?" inquired the young gentleman with rapturous incredulity.

"Every one of you. — Now, Tiny, how about that work?"

"It's just done," said Tiny. — "Oh! Deordie, climb up behind, and hold back my hair, there's a darling, while I fasten off. Oh! Deor, you're pulling my hair out. Don't."

"I want to make a pig-tail," said Deor.

"You can't," said Tiny, with feminine contempt. "You can't plait. What's the good of asking boys to do anything? There! it's done at last. Now go and ask Mother if we may go. — Will you let me come, Doctor," she inquired, "if I do as you said?"

"To be sure I will," he answered. "Let me look at you. Your eyes are swollen with crying. How can you be such a silly little goose?"

"Did you never cry?" asked Tiny.

"When I was your age? Well, perhaps so."

"You've never cried since, surely," said Tiny.

The Doctor absolutely blushed.

"What do you think?" said he.

"Oh, of course not," she answered. "You've nothing to cry about. You're grown up, and you live all alone in a beautiful house, and you do as you like, and never get into rows, or have anybody but yourself to think about; and no nasty pocket-handkerchiefs to hem."

"Very nice; eh, Deordie?" said the Doctor.

"Awfully jolly," said Deordie.

"Nothing else to wish for, eh?"

"I should keep harriers, and not a poodle, if I were a man," said Deordie; "but I suppose you could, if you wanted to."

"Nothing to cry about, at any rate?"

"I should think not!" said Deordie. — "There's Mother, though; let's go and ask her about the tea," and off they ran.

The Doctor stretched his six feet of length upon the sward, dropped his grey head on a little heap of newly-mown grass, and looked up into the sky.

"Awfully jolly — no nasty pocket-handkerchiefs to hem," said he, laughing to himself. "Nothing else to wish for; nothing to cry about."

Nevertheless, he lay still, staring at the sky, till the smile died away, and tears came into his eyes. Fortunately, no one was there to see.

What could this "awfully jolly" Doctor be thinking of to make him cry? He was thinking of a grave-stone in the churchyard close by, and of a story connected with this grave-stone which was known to everybody in the place who was old enough to remember it. This story has nothing to do with the present story, so it ought not to be told.

And yet it has to do with the Doctor, and is very short, so it shall be put in, after all.

THE STORY OF A GRAVE-STONE.

One early spring morning, about twenty years before, a man going to his work at sunrise through the churchyard, stopped by a flat stone which he had lately helped to lay down. The day before, a

name had been cut on it, which he stayed to read; and below the name some one had scrawled a few words in pencil, which he read also—*Pitifully behold the sorrows of our hearts*. On the stone lay a pencil, and a few feet from it lay the Doctor, face downwards, as he had lain all night, with the hoar frost on his black hair.

Ah! these grave-stones (they were ugly things in those days; not the light, hopeful, pretty crosses we set up now), how they seem remorselessly to imprison and keep our dear dead friends away from us! And yet they do not lie with a feather's weight upon the souls that are gone, while GOD only knows how heavily they press upon the souls that are left behind. Did the spirit whose body was with the dead, stand that morning by the body whose spirit was with the dead, and pity him? Let us only talk about what we know.

After this it was said that the Doctor had got a fever, and was dying, but he got better of it; and then that he was out of his mind, but he got better of that, and came out looking much as usual, except that his hair never seemed quite so black again, as if a little of that night's hoar frost still remained. And no further misfortune happened to him that I ever heard of; and as time went on he grew a beard, and got stout, and kept a German poodle, and gave tea-parties to other people's children. As to the grave-stone story, whatever it was to him at the end of twenty years, it was a great convenience to his friends; for when he said anything they didn't agree with, or did anything they couldn't understand, or didn't say or do what was expected of him, what could be easier or more conclusive than to shake one's head and say,

"The fact is, our Doctor has been a little odd, *ever since*—!"

THE DOCTOR'S TEA-PARTY.

There is one great advantage attendant upon invitations to tea with a doctor. No objections can be raised on the score of health. It is obvious that it must be fine enough to go out when the Doctor asks you, and that his tea-cakes may be eaten with perfect impunity.

Those tea-cakes were always good; to-night they were utterly delicious; there was a perfect *abandon* of currants, and the amount of citron peel was enervating to behold. Then the housekeeper waited in awful splendour, and yet the Doctor's authority over her seemed

as absolute as if he were an Eastern despot. Deordie must be excused for believing in the charms of living alone. It certainly has its advantages. The limited sphere of duty conduces to discipline in the household, demand does not exceed supply in the article of waiting, and there is not that general scrimmage of conflicting interests which besets a large family in the most favoured circumstances. The housekeeper waits in black silk, and looks as if she had no meaner occupation than to sit in a rocking-chair, and dream of damson cheese.

Rustling, hospitable, and subservient, this one retired at last, and —

"Now," said the Doctor, "for the verandah; and to look at the moon."

The company adjourned with a rush, the rear being brought up by the poodle, who seemed quite used to the proceedings; and there under the verandah, framed with passion-flowers and geraniums, the Doctor had gathered mats, rugs, cushions, and arm-chairs, for the party; while far up in the sky, a yellow-faced harvest moon looked down in awful benignity.

"Now!" said the Doctor. "Take your seats. Ladies first, and gentlemen afterwards. Mary and Tiny, race for the American rocking-chair. Well done! Of course it will hold both. Now, boys, shake down. No one is to sit on the stone, or put his feet on the grass: and when you're ready, I'll begin."

"We're ready," said the girls.

The boys shook down in a few minutes more, and the Doctor began the story of

"THE BROWNIES."

"Bairns are a burden," said the Tailor to himself as he sat at work. He lived in a village on some of the glorious moors of the north of England; and by bairns he meant children, as every Northman knows.

"Bairns are a burden," and he sighed.

"Bairns are a blessing," said the old lady in the window. "It is the family motto. The Trouts have had large families and good luck for generations; that is, till your grandfather's time. He had one only son. I married him. He was a good husband, but he had been a spoilt child. He had always been used to be waited upon, and he couldn't fash to look after the farm when it was his own. We had six children. They are all dead but you, who were the youngest. You were bound to a tailor. When the farm came into your hands, your wife died, and you have never looked up since. The land is sold now, but not the house. No! no! you're right enough there; but you've had your troubles, son Thomas, and the lads *are* idle!"

It was the Tailor's mother who spoke. She was a very old woman, and helpless. She was not quite so bright in her intellect as she had been, and got muddled over things that had lately happened; but she had a clear memory for what was long past, and was very pertinacious in her opinions. She knew the private history of almost every family in the place, and who of the Trouts were buried under which old stones in the churchyard; and had more tales of ghosts, doubles, warnings, fairies, witches, hobgoblins, and such like, than even her grandchildren had ever come to the end of. Her hands trembled with age, and she regretted this for nothing more than for the danger it brought her into of spilling the salt. She was past housework, but all day she sat knitting hearth-rugs out of the bits and scraps of cloth that were shred in the tailoring. How far she believed in the wonderful tales she told, and the odd little charms she practised, no one exactly knew; but the older she grew, the stranger were the things she remembered, and the more testy she was if any one doubted their truth. "Bairns are a blessing!" said she. "It is the family motto."

"*Are they?*" said the Tailor emphatically.

He had a high respect for his mother, and did not like to contradict her, but he held his own opinion, based upon personal experience; and not being a metaphysician, did not understand that it is safer to found opinions on principles than on experience, since experience may alter, but principles cannot.

"Look at Tommy," he broke out suddenly. "That boy does nothing but whittle sticks from morning till night. I have almost to lug him out of bed o' mornings. If I send him an errand, he loiters; I'd better have gone myself. If I set him to do anything, I have to tell him everything; I could sooner do it myself. And if he does work, it's done so unwillingly, with such a poor grace; better, far better, to do it myself. What housework do the boys ever do but looking after the baby? And this afternoon she was asleep in the cradle, and off they went, and when she awoke, *I* must leave my work to take her. *I* gave her her supper, and put her to bed. And what with what they want and I have to get, and what they take out to play with and lose, and what they bring in to play with and leave about, bairns give some trouble, Mother, and I've not an easy life of it. The pay is poor enough when one can get the work, and the work is hard enough when one has a clear day to do it in; but housekeeping and bairn-minding don't leave a man much time for his trade. No! no! Ma'am, the luck of the Trouts is gone, and 'Bairns are a burden,' is the motto now. Though they are one's own," he muttered to himself, "and not bad ones, and I did hope once would have been a blessing."

"There's Johnnie," murmured the old lady, dreamily. "He has a face like an apple."

"And is about as useful," said the Tailor. "He might have been different, but his brother leads him by the nose."

His brother led him in as the Tailor spoke, not literally by his snub, though, but by the hand. They were a handsome pair, this lazy couple. Johnnie especially had the largest and roundest of foreheads, the reddest of cheeks, the brightest of eyes, the quaintest and most twitchy of chins, and looked altogether like a gutta-percha cherub in a chronic state of longitudinal squeeze. They were locked

together by two grubby paws, and had each an armful of moss, which they deposited on the floor as they came in.

"I've swept this floor once to-day," said the father, "and I'm not going to do it again. Put that rubbish outside." "Move it, Johnnie!" said his brother, seating himself on a stool, and taking out his knife and a piece of wood, at which he cut and sliced; while the apple-cheeked Johnnie stumbled and stamped over the moss, and scraped it out on the doorstep, leaving long trails of earth behind him, and then sat down also.

"And those chips the same," added the Tailor; "I will *not* clear up the litter you lads make."

"Pick 'em up, Johnnie," said Thomas Trout, junior, with an exasperated sigh; and the apple tumbled up, rolled after the flying chips, and tumbled down again.

"Is there any supper, Father?" asked Tommy.

"No, there is not, Sir, unless you know how to get it," said the Tailor; and taking his pipe, he went out of the house.

"Is there really nothing to eat, Granny?" asked the boy.

"No, my bairn, only some bread for breakfast to-morrow."

"What makes Father so cross, Granny?"

"He's wearied, and you don't help him, my dear."

"What could I do, Grandmother?"

"Many little things, if you tried," said the old lady. "He spent half-an-hour to-day, while you were on the moor, getting turf for the fire, and you could have got it just as well, and he been at his work."

"He never told me," said Tommy.

"You might help me a bit just now, if you would, my laddie," said the old lady coaxingly; "these bits of cloth want tearing into lengths, and if you get 'em ready, I can go on knitting. There'll be some food when this mat is done and sold."

"I'll try," said Tommy, lounging up with desperate resignation. "Hold my knife, Johnnie. Father's been cross, and everything has

been miserable, ever since the farm was sold. I wish I were a big man, and could make a fortune. — Will that do, Granny?"

The old lady put down her knitting and looked. "My dear, that's too short. Bless me! I gave the lad a piece to measure by."

"I thought it was the same length. Oh, dear! I am so tired;" and he propped himself against the old lady's chair.

"My dear! don't lean so; you'll tippie me over!" she shrieked.

"I beg your pardon, Grandmother. Will *that* do?"

"It's that much too long."

"Tear that bit off. Now it's all right."

"But, my dear, that wastes it. Now that bit is of no use. There goes my knitting, you awkward lad!"

"Johnnie, pick it up! — Oh! Grandmother, I *am* so hungry." The boy's eyes filled with tears, and the old lady was melted in an instant.

"What can I do for you, my poor bairns?" said she. "There, never mind the scraps, Tommy."

"Tell us a tale, Granny. If you told us a new one, I shouldn't keep thinking of that bread in the cupboard. — Come, Johnnie, and sit against me. Now then!"

"I doubt if there's one of my old-world cracks I haven't told you," said the old lady, "unless it's a queer ghost story was told me years ago of that house in the hollow with the blocked-up windows."

"Oh! not ghosts!" Tommy broke in; "we've had so many. I know it was a rattling, or a scratching, or a knocking, or a figure in white; and if it turns out a tombstone or a white petticoat, I hate it."

"It was nothing of the sort as a tombstone," said the old lady with dignity. "It's a good half-mile from the churchyard. And as to white petticoats, there wasn't a female in the house; he wouldn't have one; and his victuals came in by the pantry window. But never mind! Though it's as true as a sermon."

Johnnie lifted his head from his brother's knee.

"Let Granny tell what she likes, Tommy. It's a new ghost, and I should like to know who he was, and why his victuals came in by the window."

"I don't like a story about victuals," sulked Tommy. "It makes me think of the bread. O Granny dear! do tell us a fairy story. You never will tell us about the Fairies, and I know you know."

"Hush! hush!" said the old lady. "There's Miss Surbiton's Love-letter, and her Dreadful End."

"I know Miss Surbiton, Granny. I think she was a goose. Why don't you tell us about the Fairies?"

"Hush! hush! my dear. There's the Clerk and the Corpse-candles."

"I know the Corpse-candles, Granny. Besides, they make Johnnie dream, and he wakes me to keep him company. *Why* won't you tell us about the Fairies?"

"My dear, they don't like it," said the old lady.

"O Granny dear, why don't they? Do tell! I shouldn't think of the bread a bit, if you told us about the Fairies. I know nothing about them."

"He lived in this house long enough," said the old lady. "But it's not lucky to name him."

"O Granny, we are so hungry and miserable, what can it matter?"

"Well, that's true enough," she sighed. "Trout's luck is gone; it went with the Brownie, I believe."

"Was that *he*, Granny?"

"Yes, my dear, he lived with the Trouts for several generations."

"What was he like, Granny?"

"Like a little man, they say, my dear."

"What did he do?"

"He came in before the family were up, and swept up the hearth, and lighted the fire, and set out the breakfast, and tidied the room, and did all sorts of house-work. But he never would be seen, and

was off before they could catch him. But they could hear him laughing and playing about the house sometimes."

"What a darling! Did they give him any wages, Granny?"

"No! my dear. He did it for love. They set a pancheon of clear water for him over night, and now and then a bowl of bread-and-milk, or cream. He liked that, for he was very dainty. Sometimes he left a bit of money in the water. Sometimes he weeded the garden, or threshed the corn. He saved endless trouble, both to men and maids."

"O Granny! why did he go?"

"The maids caught sight of him one night, my dear, and his coat was so ragged, that they got a new suit, and a linen shirt for him, and laid them by the bread-and-milk bowl. But when Brownie saw the things, he put them on, and dancing round the kitchen, sang,

'What have we here? Hemten hamten!
Here will I never more tread nor stampen,'

and so danced through the door, and never came back again."

"O Grandmother! But why not? Didn't he like the new clothes?"

"The Old Owl knows, my dear; I don't."

"Who's the Old Owl, Granny?"

"I don't exactly know, my dear. It's what my mother used to say when we asked anything that puzzled her. It was said that the Old Owl was Nanny Besom (a witch, my dear!), who took the shape of a bird, but couldn't change her voice, and that's why the owl sits silent all day for fear she should betray herself by speaking, and has no singing voice like other birds. Many people used to go and consult the Old Owl at moon-rise, in my young days."

"Did you ever go, Granny?"

"Once, very nearly, my dear."

"Oh! tell us, Granny dear. — There are no Corpse-candles, Johnnie; it's only moonlight," he added consolingly, as Johnnie crept closer to his knee, and pricked his little red ears.