

THE SHOWMAN'S HAT.

THESE were two little brothers who had no sister. Bob, the elder, was eight years old; but Hugh was only four. They had a cousin called Molly, about Bob's age, who came to stay with them.

"Is see tum?" asked Hugh the afternoon of her arrival. Bob had been up to the tool-house to fetch a hoe for his gardening, and was likely,

Hugh thought, to have seen the carriage he heard along the drive.

"I don't know," announced Bob, who had been to school for a year. "I wish she was a boy. Girls are stupid."

At that moment, out of the winding shrubbery stepped a curly-haired little maiden with large laughing eyes. "I like boys best, too," she said. "I wish I was a boy. But I can play boys' games: cricket, and hide and seek, and tennis, a little, 'cos they're all boys at home 'cept me, and they taught me, and I don't like dolls."

Molly spoke fast to cover her shyness, while Bob threw down his hoe and blushed very much, and Hugh listened with all his eyes.

But they were well-bred boys, and would not let their visitor stand there feeling herself unwelcome.

"I beg your pardon for saying that about girls," said Bob. "I daresay you will do almost as well as a boy. I can't play cricket *much*, myself," he added, modestly. "I suppose you like flowers," he said, "as you're a girl. This is rather a pretty one."



And he gathered a white narcissus. "At least mother's fond of it; it has such a beautiful smell, she thinks," and he held it shyly towards Molly.

"It's for you," interpreted Hugh. "I've dot a darden, too. I'll det you some Pollies;" and off he trotted on his little fat legs.

"Some *what*?" said Molly.

"Polyanthuses," explained Bob, rather proud of his superior knowledge. "It's like a girl's name, isn't it?"

"I wish there was a Molly flower," said Molly.

"Well, Molly and Polly *are* short for the same name, you know. Hallo, here's Hugh been plucking some for you."

"They're out of my own darden," said Hugh, thrusting into Molly's hand a bunch of soft-eyed brown and yellow flowers.

Hugh was full of unwonted excitement. "What sall we do netst?" he exclaimed. "Sall I det the bats and balls? Or do you like dressin' up?"

"Dressing up!" laughed Bob, rather contemptuously. "That's such a baby game!"

"Indeed it isn't," said Molly, eagerly. "I've seen quite grown-up people playing at it. We had charades at Christmas, and they all played at it. And I was one of the Babes in the Wood. And my brothers were the robins, all with red scarfs round their waists, what covered us up."

"And then we had real dead leaves to cover us with," continued Molly.

"The leaves would all be gone at Christmas," said the critical Bob.

"Not all," said Molly. "Some of the brown oak-leaves are often on the trees till the little new ones come the next year, papa says; and these were oak-leaves, real dead brown oak-leaves; and they had them on the dining-room floor, and covered us all up. But what I like best is to be a showman's wife, and have a caravan. Let's do that now; you can be the caravan, Bob. Have you a big hat anywhere, so that Hugh might be the showman?"

"Why must the showman have a hat?" said Bob. "And besides, father's would be too big for Hugh. I think *I'd* better be the showman, if he *must* have a top-hat."

"Oh, yes, the showman *must*," said Molly. "I saw a hat in the hall; whose is that?"

"Oh that must be Stephen's," replied Bob. "Stephen's one of the big boys from the gram-

mar-school, who comes to read with father. I'll go and fetch it," said Bob, running off as fast as he could.

Molly and Hugh ran after him. The hall-doors were open, and the study door was shut.

"Oh, Hugh, what have *you* come for?" said Bob, turning round angrily. "It doesn't take three people to find a hat."

"I don't think you'd better take it," said Molly. "It's my game, and it would be my fault. Mamma always tells us we oughtn't to borrow anybody's things without asking."

"I shall do as I like," said Bob, rather crossly. "You needn't play, Molly, if you don't want: we can do the show and the dressing-up without you." And then, remembering Molly was his guest, he began to be ashamed of his rudeness, and that made him crosser still.

"Don't be vexed, Bob," said Molly coaxingly. "I should really like to play, 'cos there'll be no showman's wife if I don't."

"Oh, there's such a beautiful garden bonnet up there; *just* what the showman's wife ought to have. And here's an umbrella. That's for you, Molly; girls always like umbrellas and things."

* * * *

A few minutes later a funny little procession wandered round the fish-pond in the lower garden. Molly, dressed up in bonnet and shawl, walked arm in arm with Hugh, who felt himself very tall and grown up indeed, under the big hat. By a long strap she led Bob on all fours, Bob having been turned into the "pretence caravan." He was harnessed in a dog-collar, which generally adorned the neck of Stephen's retriever, and which had been found this afternoon lying on the hall-table.

At this moment Stephen's voice was heard calling his dog by name.

"Leon, Leon! Down, sir! Down, sir! I can't imagine where your collar is, old boy. I left it safe enough on the hall-table. I can't have you running loose just this minute, old fellow."

"We must take back the collar," said Molly.

"You shouldn't talk like that, Molly, when you're the showman's wife," said Bob. "You should say—"

But at that moment Leon himself came tearing down upon the little party, and, bound-

ing towards Hugh to sniff at the baby figure under his master's hat, sent the hat flying over into the pond, where it was swimming about helplessly when Stephen himself came in sight.

For a moment, a single moment, Bob was too miserable to speak.

"It's my game," said Molly tremulously. "I wanted to play it. I didn't know your hat would get all spoiled like this," she added rather lamely. "But mamma told us not to take things without asking. I never shall again."

"Molly wanted to ask," interrupted Bob, "but I wouldn't let her."

"Well, it was a cool thing to do," said Stephen, "and not exactly what a gentleman would do, Master Bob. Fetch my hat, Leon."

Stephen, who was a young dandy, was naturally cross.

"Don't ty, Mrs. Showman," said Hugh. "I'll tate tare of you."

But at this moment Leon brought back the hat to his master, and a very draggled spoiled hat it was.

"I wish I'd never been a caravan!" said Bob. "So do I," said Stephen. "But I don't think you'll ever, any of you, do it again."

"We'll be caravans again," said Molly stoutly. "But we won't ever take people's things without asking."

The tears were still in her eyes, and I think Leon was sorry for her, for he thrust his wet old nose into her hand and tried to comfort her.

A NEW GAME FOR WINTER EVENINGS.

PICTORIAL CIRCLES, AND HOW TO PLAY THEM.

A NEW game is explained below, which can be played with equal pleasure both are twelve round pictures, with an extra one in the centre, making a baker's dozen of thirteen.



by little children and by big girls and boys. First of all, look at the little pictures. You will see there are twelve squares, and in those

Now I will tell you the names of the pictures, and explain the numbers which you will find beneath them. The first square contains the