



The MAGIC CITY, New Edition: With Original Illustrations

Edith Nesbit, E. Nesbit

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Philip Haldane and his sister lived in a little red-roofed house in a little red-roofed town. They had a little garden and a little balcony, and a little stable with a little pony in it—and a little cart for the pony to draw; a little canary hung in a little cage in the little bow-window, and the neat little servant kept everything as bright and clean as a little new pin. Philip had no one but his sister, and she had no one but Philip. Their parents were dead, and Helen, who was twenty years older than Philip and was really his half-sister, was all the mother he had ever known. And he had never envied other boys their mothers, because Helen was so kind and clever and dear. She gave up almost all her time to him; she taught him all the lessons he learned; she played with him, inventing the most wonderful new games and adventures. So that every morning when Philip woke he knew that he was waking to a new day of joyous and interesting happenings. And this went on till Philip was ten years old, and he had no least shadow of a doubt that it would go on for ever. The beginning of the change came one day when he and Helen had gone for a picnic to the wood where the waterfall was, and as they were driving back behind the stout old pony, who was so good and quiet that Philip was allowed to drive it. They were coming up the last lane before the turning where their house was, and Helen said: 'To-morrow we'll weed the aster bed and have tea in the garden.' 'Jolly,' said Philip, and they turned the corner and came in sight of their white little garden gate. And a man was coming out of it—a man who was not one of the friends they both knew. He turned and came to meet them. Helen put her hand on the reins—a thing which she had always taught Philip was never done—and the pony stopped. The man, who was, as Philip put it to himself, 'tall and tweedy,' came across in front of the pony's nose and stood close by the wheel on the side where Helen sat. She shook hands with him, and said, 'How do you do?' in quite the usual way. But after that they whispered. Whispered! And Philip knew how rude it is to whisper, because Helen had often told him this. He heard one or two words, 'at last,' and 'over now,' and 'this evening, then.' After that Helen said, 'This is my brother Philip,' and the man shook hands with him—across Helen, another thing which Philip knew was not manners, and said, 'I hope we shall be the best of friends.' Pip said, 'How do you do?' because that is the polite thing to say. But inside himself he said, 'I don't want to be friends with you.' Then the man took off his hat and walked away, and Philip and his sister went home. She seemed different, somehow, and he was sent to bed a little earlier than usual, but he could not go to sleep for a long time, because he heard the front-door bell ring and afterwards a man's voice and Helen's going on and on in the little drawing-room under the room which was his bedroom. He went to sleep at last, and when he woke up in the morning it was raining, and the sky was grey and miserable. He lost his collar-stud, he tore one of his stockings as he pulled it on, he pinched his finger in the door, and he dropped his tooth-mug, with water in it too, and the mug was broken and the water went into his boots. There are mornings, you know, when things happen like that. This was one of them. Then he went down to breakfast, which tasted not quite so nice as usual. He was late, of course. The bacon fat was growing grey with waiting for him, as Helen said, in the cheerful voice that had always said all the things he liked best to hear. But Philip didn't smile. It did not seem the sort of morning for smiling, and the grey rain beat against the window. After breakfast Helen said, 'Tea in the garden is indefinitely postponed, and it's too wet for lessons.'

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