

discovered Madge pointing to a big box of chocolates, with a glass top and a big rose pasted in the middle. "Please give me that, Mister Bates, quick. Uncle Frank's waiting!"

He glanced at the fat little fist and concluded that the little maid had been sent on a pleasant errand. He came round to the front of the counter and took the desired box from the glass case. "Yes, my dearie. Anything else today?" Mr. Bates was so very pleasant.

"Oh, yes, please. That pink and white cake wiv a silver birdie, and that likkle pig wiv a green tail, and this likkle tart all creamy, and —" Madge was breathless.

"Didn't mother give you a basket, my dear?"

"Oh, I forgot the basket," she replied, "but I can carry them in my pinny. I'll take the likkle pig first, and then I'll come for the cake, but I can carry the little tart now, too," she added, eyeing the latter wistfully, as she stretched out both hands towards the treasures. The penny dropped with a rattle on to the counter.

"Where are your other pennies, my dear?" asked Mr. Bates, rather anxiously. Madge gazed at him wide-eyed. What did Mr. Bates mean by other pennies?

"I want to change my penny into the likkle pig, and the cake, and the —" she began to explain hurriedly.

"But, my dear," Mister Bates interrupted very gravely, looking over the top of his spectacles, for a penny you can have the little pig, or the tart, or the lamb, but this nice big box of chocolates, and that big cake, each cost twenty-five pennies."

Madge still gazed upwards at the treasurers. Tears of doubt and trouble were gathering in her blue eyes. What it meant to cost twenty-five pennies she did not know, but she felt that things were going wrong somehow. "Now, which shall it be—the pig or the tart, or the —" Mister Bates was now smiling.

"I want the likkle pig wiv the green tail," she sobbed.

"Here you are, then, my dear. Taste and see how nice it is."

A moment later Uncle Frank, watching from his window, saw a distressed-looking little figure standing with her back to the pastry-cook's window. One little hand held a corner of her "pinny" to her eyes, while the other held a little brown pig to her mouth.

Uncle Frank saw that all had not gone well with Madge. He stood waiting, half-guessing that the little eyes had been bigger than her pocket. The brown pig having disappeared after leaving many dark traces of occupation on Madge's face and pinafore, the little maid came slowly toward home. More slowly still she mounted the staircase to the play-room, where Uncle Frank stood on the hearthrug. "Oh, Uncle Frank!" she wailed, despairingly, as she ran to his outstretched arms.

"What is it, Madge?" he asked tenderly. "Tell me all about it."

But she only sobbed the more. Uncle Frank looked at her pinafore, and then wiped the chocolate remains from about her trembling mouth. "Mr. Bates did change your penny for you then?"

She sobbed a faint "Yes."

"What did he change it into?"

Her tears ceased a moment while a gust of anger swept over her. "A nasty—likkle—brown pig, wiv a horrid green tail!" she announced wrathfully.

If it was nasty, why didn't you choose something else?" asked Uncle Frank, sympathetically.

"I did choose somefink else," she panted between sobs. "I choose a little tart wiv cream on, and a big box of chocks with a boo'ful flower, and a big pink and white cake wiv a likkle silver birdie, and Mister Bates wanted my basket, and he was cross, and—and—'cos I hadn't got a basket, and—and—'cos I hadn't got twenty-five pennies, and—and—" Madge could tell no more, but Uncle Frank understood.

"And so he wouldn't change your penny into all those good things? Well, I think we must go and talk to Mr. Bates about it, but we ought to have a basket, I think."

In a few minutes Mister Bates looked up again from his newspaper to see a tall man, who smiled amusedly at him, accompanied by the small customer. "We have brought our basket this time, Mr. Bates, and we want you to fill it. We have brought some bigger pennies, too," added Uncle Frank. "Now, then, Madge, which was it? A cake, a little tart—"

"And that sugar lamb, and that box with the flower on it, and"—she paused thoughtfully—"and—and annuver likkle brown pig," she added, firmly.

Uncle Frank burst out laughing. "You little minx!" he said, as he took a coin from his pocket. It was a ten-cent piece. Madge's face clouded at the sight of it. She pressed close to her uncle, standing on tip toe as she whispered tragically, "That's a littler penny than mine, Uncle Frank!"

"Well, watch Mr. Bates change it into lots of big ones," replied Uncle Frank in a comforting way, while some large silver coins were placed on the counter.

And all the way home Madge pondered over the mystery, deciding she would choose the littlest of all in future.



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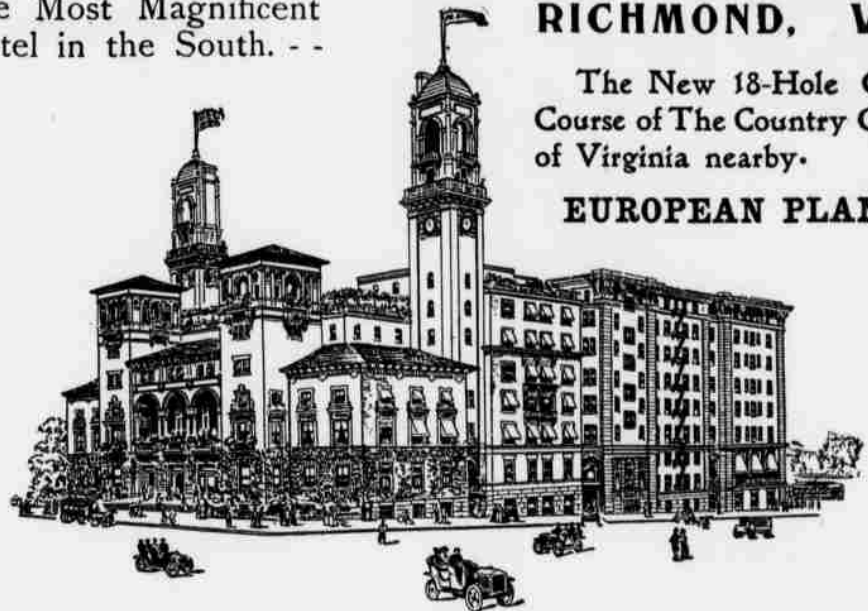
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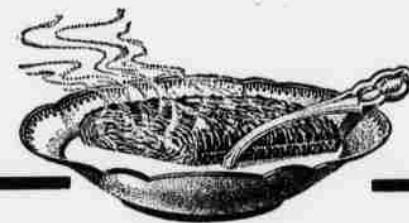
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