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A MIND *in* SHADOW

By TESSIDA SWINGES

I CAN'T keep it any longer, doctor. I must tell. It's too much for a boy to keep to himself.

I can't tell my mother 'cause it's so terrible and I haven't any dad any more and you know me since I'm born.

I—I—oh, doctor, please come nearer; I don't want to say it out loud, I guess I—I'm a murderer! Yes, don't be frightened, but I killed my—my baby brother! I killed Freddy not once, but—twice! So you see I'm—what I said and I'm only fifteen years old.

No, no, doctor, I'm not feverish any more. I know what I'm talking about. I'm almost well; you said so yourself.

It's five weeks, isn't it, that I've had this brain fever? I guess, doctor, it's because I had this all on my mind; and telling it will help me, truly and honest. Just let me hold your hand and tell you, and please, listen and listen hard 'cause I'm going to tell you just how everything happened.

You know how I loved my little brother, and he was crazy about me. I honestly liked to take him out in his carriage and show him off to the other kids on the block 'cause Freddy was the cutest and smartest and brightest—say, doctor, you ought to know; you helped when he was born—wasn't he a wonderful kid? Oh, doctor, I didn't mean any harm! You know that, and I guess He—He up there knows, too.

Where was I? Oh, yes. Well, I used to take him in his carriage up that little hill; then I'd run down ahead and be ready to catch him with

my arms open like this—see—and Freddy'd clap his hands and make such cute, funny little noises 'cause he was having such a bully time. He'd kick his fat legs like he always wanted some more of that game, and his blue eyes'd be big and happy and shining and then—please hold my hand tight, now comes the hard part to tell.

Well, one day the carriage came down the hill and there—was a stone—and I didn't see it—and the carriage bumped up sharp and—and Freddy fell out—sideways.

Oh, doctor, you don't know how scared I was—scared so stiff I couldn't move for maybe two hours—only I suppose it wasn't so long anyhow, but honestly it seemed so 'cause I just couldn't make my legs go and I got most awful cold and I could only look at baby on the ground.

At last I saw Freddy's arm move; then the ice in my legs melted like, and I could go to little Freddy and pick him up, but his eyes were closed just like he was asleep and I waited for him to wake up. Well, he did wake up. Oh, yes, he woke up, and I thought everything was all right.

Next day I licked a guy who did that carriage-catching stunt with his baby sister and I told him he might kill her. You see, doctor, some of us kids don't think until something happens, and that was me too.

No, doctor, that isn't all. I was just thinking. Now, please, will you listen some more?

Well, when I came home from school next day Freddy didn't smile at me and stretch out his arms. He

didn't make those cunning little noises like goo-goo. He—he didn't know me. Mamma said he didn't seem to be sick. She couldn't make it out and she got awful worried 'cause, you see, he didn't even know mamma.

We waited another day and watched and then she sent for you.

YOU remember you examined him and you felt him all over and you kept shaking your head. Then you felt his head all over again and you looked sad and asked if he'd had a fall.

Oh, doctor, I was terribly scared. I was hiding on the stairs and shaking something awful—no, please, doctor, I won't work myself into a fever again. It does me good to tell it—honest it does; if you'll only let me get it all off my mind and please listen. Yes, I'll take it easy.

Let me see, what was I saying? Oh, yes, mamma told you how careful and trustworthy I was and that nothing could happen to baby in my care.

That made me feel worse yet and I started to tell and cried out only it was a funny thing that no sound came from my throat 'cause it felt so tight like I'd swallowed something too big and it stuck there.

Well, I couldn't eat any more and I couldn't play and I couldn't study and felt awful sick and mise'ble. I hardly talked any more. All I could do was just watch Freddy and wait for him to notice things, but his blue eyes were always like—like a candle was blown out behind them.

You was coming all the time and looked awful sad and sorry and shook your head a lot and talked more about Freddy's head and one day you put your hand on my mother's shoulder and said something low about being afraid for baby's mind. You remember how excited mamma got and she looked terrible white and yelled out:

"It can't be! I won't believe it!

God couldn't let the bright little spirit of this child be killed!"

That's what mamma said. I remember it, you see, 'cause the way she said it made me get cold all over and I shivered 'specially about the killing 'cause—'cause, you see, I k—killed Freddy's b—b—bright little spirit and you know how I lo—loved him.

No, I'm not crying, only it's awful sad for Freddy and p—poor little mamma and me, too. Yes, I'll take the medicine now, doctor . . . Ugh! Now, can I go on? No, it won't hurt me.

What was I saying? Let me think a minute.

Oh, yes, I heard a neighbor say to another lady: "Isn't it awful for that bright child to be an idiot?"

They said he should have been killed outright rather than be an idiot and they said it was God's blessing my mother had me to comfort her.

When I heard that I locked myself into my room and I told God I wasn't a blessing. I was a murderer of a bright little spirit and that He ought to let me die 'cause I was wicked. I got thinking and thinking terrible things until my head ached something awful and I guess I was very weak from not eating and next thing I knew you was saying I had diphtheria.

The worst of it was I couldn't have Freddy with me any more. I couldn't kiss him good night. You wouldn't even let me see him 'cause you said my sickness was very catching and if Freddy got my breath he'd die.

Then I thought maybe now I'd soon be dead, like I told God I ought to be for punishment, and I wanted to help myself die so I didn't take the medicine and didn't mind you and so I got worse—you remember? Well, that's why.

You see, doctor, I thought then mamma'd feel so bad about Freddy when I told her about the fall it was better I should help myself to die, don't you see?

WHERE was I again? Do you remember, doctor? Oh, yes. Well, once I woke up and mamma was kneeling by my bed, and I guess she was praying, 'cause she said:

"Oh, dear God, have mercy! Spare this one of sound mind. Don't take this one, not this one, not this one!" She kept saying that over and over, like she wanted the other one taken.

Well, doctor, I had to do a whole lot more thinking after that until my head ached, but I was too tired out to talk anyway, only sometimes when I came back from far away-like I knew I must try to get better 'cause mamma wanted it.

But I heard things. I heard nurse say one day that it would be a blessing if the other child—Freddy, you know—could die on a bed of sickness instead of me.

You said to her something about that you wished you could be brave enough to let the other child catch it and die on a bed of sickness and put it out of its misery, but you shook your head sorry-like and said that not many men were brave enough for that.

Ouch, doctor, you're pressing my hand too hard now and please, don't look so angry. Was it wrong for me to listen that time? You see I couldn't help listening. Don't you want me to tell this part? I'm only telling you—All right.

After that I guess I was feverish a whole lot 'cause I had terrible dreams about putting Freddy out of his misery; and even when I could think, it was always that if I killed Freddy's bright little spirit maybe I should be that person brave enough to put him out of his misery and maybe then I'd be forgiven and everybody'd know that it was 'cause I loved mamma and Freddy so much. I did an awful lot of thinking about the blessing if he could die on a bed of sickness and about my catching disease, and little by little I had it all thought out.

Yes, doctor, I know you said I was in high fever, but I tell you all the same I thought it out just as plain as plain can be. Now, please wait, doctor, there's more coming. I'm feeling all right—truly I am, just feel my pulse. See! Oh, all right, I'll rest a minute . . . Now can I go on?

One night mamma took nurse's place, and 'cause I guess she was so tired worrying about everything, she fell tight asleep. So no one was watching and something in my head kep' saying, 'Now is the time, be brave; put him out of his misery;' so I got up and went to Freddy's room. I told him to forgive me but it would be better for him to die on a bed of sickness and I was going to help him do it 'cause I was brave.

I put my arms around him and held him tight and kissed him and kissed him on the mouth and breathed my catching sickness into his face so he could catch it quick and then I said good-bye and put him back in his crib. I was awful weak and I guess I almost fainted and I dropped him back on the bed so hard that I'm afraid I bumped him too hard, but I guess it didn't matter 'cause I'd fixed it so he'd be out of his misery soon anyhow.

Oh, look, doctor—you dropped a tear on my hand. Are you feeling so sorry? Please hold my hand yet a while. It makes it easier for me.

Well, next day I heard he caught it and no one knew how he got it and then I don't remember much 'cause everything was sort of confused in my head. Only once I remember hearing some one say it was a miracle and a blessing so I guess he—he died soon 'cause you see I gave him the blessing and then I don't remember anything until I woke up here and you said I had brain fever and now you know why.

All the same I wish I was dead 'cause now I'm not feverish and I can see I was wicked and not brave and

I'm a murderer and all because I wanted to play a nice game with Freddy in the carriage.

Yes, I'm listening to you, doctor. I'm paying attention. What, doctor? I told you in my fever that I let him fall, and you knew before that? You guessed it by my actions? But then why are you proud that I told you everything? Oh, I see. Yes, doctor, I'll rest until you come back with the medicine.

You back already? Listen, someone's knocking. There's my mamma coming. And—and doctor, am I feverish? Listen, I think I hear Freddy—Freddy! What's the mat-

ter? Oh, look, look, there's Freddy! Then he didn't die; he didn't catch it! And he knows me! Look, doctor—mamma, he knows me! Listen, he's making those cute funny noises. Goo, goo, Freddy! He knows me; he knows everything again! Maybe I'm dreaming. Are you sure he's all right? . . . How? . . . I did it when I bumped him back into his bed? I can't understand. What bone, doctor? Oh, never mind, I don't understand all those big doctor words anyhow and I don't care. Freddy's got his bright little spirit again and everything's all right.

I guess I'm some happy guy right now.