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Opening extract from

Stuart Little

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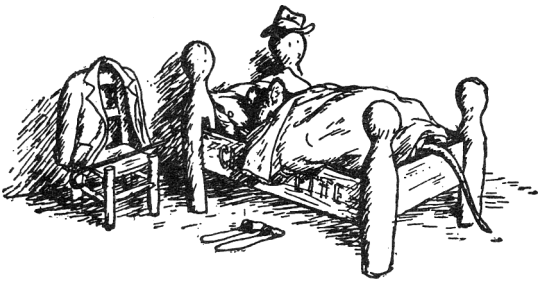
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1. In the Drain

WHEN Mrs Frederick C. Little's second son arrived, everybody noticed that he was not much bigger than a mouse. The truth of the matter was, the baby looked very much like a mouse in every way. He was only about two inches high; and he had a mouse's sharp nose, a mouse's tail, a mouse's whiskers, and the pleasant, shy manner of a mouse. Before he was many days old he was not only looking like a mouse but acting like one, too – wearing a grey hat and carrying a small cane. Mr and Mrs Little named him Stuart, and Mr Little

made him a tiny bed out of four clothespins and a cigarette box.

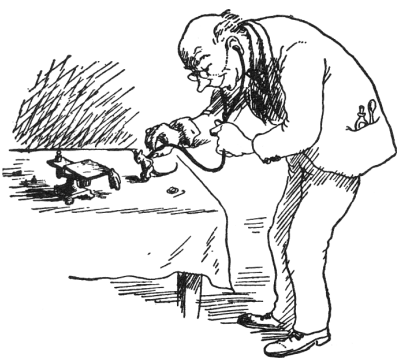


Unlike most babies, Stuart could walk as soon as he was born. When he was a week old he could climb lamps by shinnying up the cord. Mrs Little saw right away that the infant clothes she had provided were unsuitable, and she set to work and made him a fine little blue worsted suit with patch pockets in which he could keep his handkerchief, his money, and his keys. Every morning, before Stuart dressed, Mrs Little went into his room and weighed him on a small scale which was really meant for weighing letters. At birth Stuart could have been sent by first class mail for three cents, but his parents preferred to

keep him rather than send him away; and when, at the age of a month, he had gained only a third of an ounce, his mother was so worried she sent for the doctor.

The doctor was delighted with Stuart and said that it was very unusual for an American family to have a mouse. He took Stuart's temperature and found that it was 98.6, which is normal for a mouse. He also examined Stuart's chest and heart and looked into his ears solemnly with a flashlight. (Not every doctor can look into a mouse's ear without laughing.) Everything seemed to be all right, and Mrs Little was pleased to get such a good report.

'Feed him up!' said the doctor cheerfully, as he left.



The home of the Little family was

a pleasant place near a park in New York City. In the mornings the sun streamed in through the east windows, and all the Littles were up early as a general rule. Stuart was a great help to his parents, and to his older brother George, because of his small size and because he could do things that a mouse can do and was agreeable about doing them. One day when Mrs Little was washing out the bathtub after Mr Little had taken a bath, she lost a ring off her finger and was horrified to discover that it had fallen down the drain.

'What had I better do?' she cried, trying to keep the tears back.

'If I were you,' said George, 'I should bend a hairpin in the shape of a fishhook and tie it on to a piece of string and try to fish the ring out with it.' So Mrs Little found a piece of string and a hairpin, and for about a half-hour she fished for the ring; but it was dark down the drain and the hook always seemed

to catch on something before she could get it down to where the ring was.

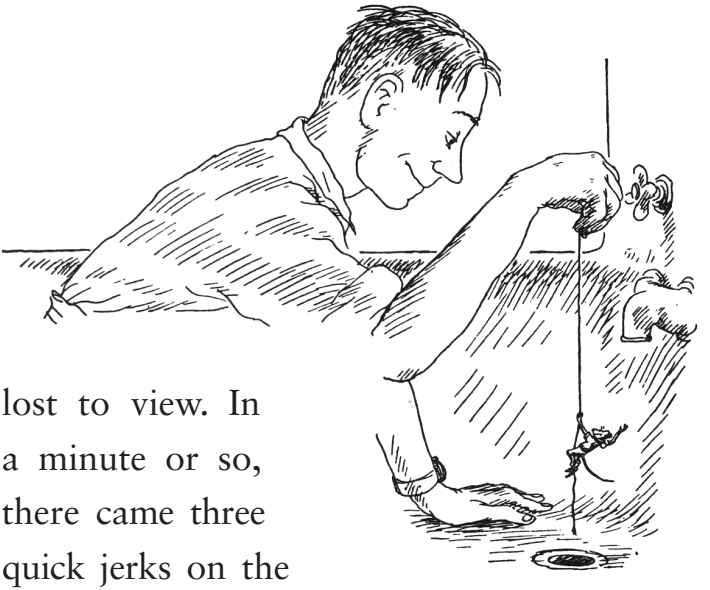
'What luck?' inquired Mr Little, coming into the bathroom.

'No luck at all,' said Mrs Little. 'The ring is so far down I can't fish it up.'

'Why don't we send Stuart down after it?' suggested Mr Little. 'How about it, Stuart, would you like to try?'

'Yes, I would,' Stuart replied, 'but I think I'd better get into my old pants. I imagine it's wet down there.'

'It's all of that,' said George, who was a trifle annoyed that his hook idea hadn't worked. So Stuart slipped into his old pants and prepared to go down the drain after the ring. He decided to carry the string along with him, leaving one end in charge of his father. 'When I jerk three times on the string, pull me up,' he said. And while Mr Little knelt in the tub, Stuart slid easily down the drain and was



lost to view. In a minute or so, there came three quick jerks on the string, and Mr Little carefully hauled it up. There, at the end, was Stuart, with the ring safely around his neck.

'Oh, my brave little son,' said Mrs Little proudly, as she kissed Stuart and thanked him.

'How was it down there?' asked Mr Little, who was always curious to know about places he had never been to.

'It was all right,' said Stuart.

But the truth was the drain had made him very slimy, and it was necessary for him to take a bath and sprinkle himself with a bit of his mother's violet water before he felt himself again. Everybody in the family thought he had been awfully good about the whole thing.

