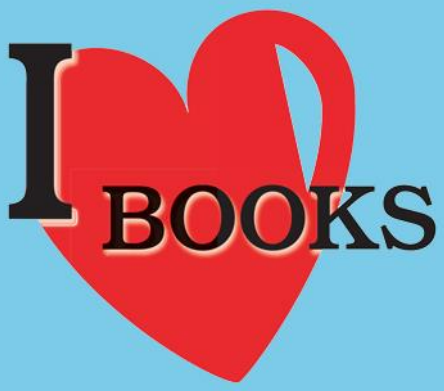

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This is a picture of a boy called Freddie Mole. He lived quite a few years ago. At the time of this story, he was about

ten – or maybe a bit younger or even a bit older. That doesn't matter too much. The important thing was that Freddie Mole was a kind boy who everybody liked. Nobody had a bad word to say about him, and there were plenty of people who were happy to call him their friend.

Freddie lived with his father, Ted Mole, and with his twin brother and sister, Ned and Bella, who were much younger than Freddie. He helped his father and his grandmother to look after the twins because their mother, Flora Mole, had gone off to sea to earn money for the family. She was one of those people who work on great ocean liners,

making up the bunks and cleaning the cabins of the passengers. She wore a white uniform for this, and she worked very hard. She was often away for month after month – sometimes for as long as a year. When she came back she was always very tired from all her hard work and would sleep for a whole day and a whole night before her strength returned. Only then was she able to smile again. "Oh, my darlings," she would say, "it's so good to be home again."

"Where is Ma today?" Freddie sometimes asked his father, and Ted would point to the map of the world he kept on the kitchen wall. This would have a pin in

it, usually in the middle of a lot of blue, which showed the position of the ship she was working on.

"She's off the coast of South America," Ted Mole might say. Or, "I think she's just about to reach Australia."

"I wish she didn't have to be away so much," said Freddie, rather sadly. "I can't wait for her to come home."

But he knew he would have to wait – and so did his father. Ted Mole put his arm about his son. "I know what you mean, Freddie," he said. "It's very hard, but I'm afraid we have no choice. I can't earn enough money doing my job and so Ma has to take the only job she

can find – which is on those ships. I'm sorry about that, but that's the way things are."

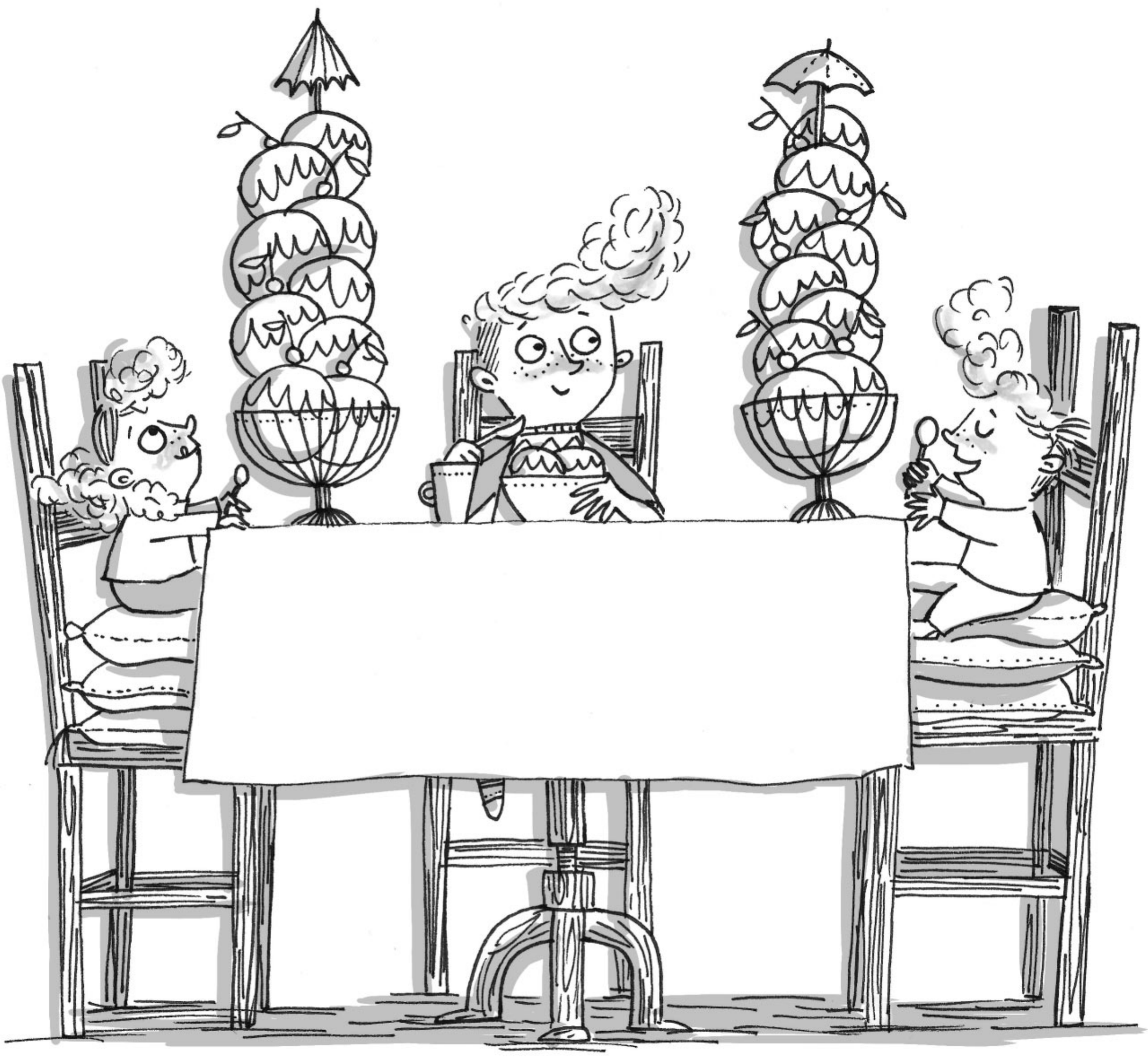
He was right, of course. Although Ted Mole worked very hard in his job as a washing machine repairman, he did not earn a great deal of money. This was because there were times when he did not have enough work, but it was also because his customers were

often short of money and could not pay very much for their washing machines to be repaired.

Mrs Mole sent back money from the ports her ships called in at, but most of what she sent went on food. The twins were hearty eaters because they were growing so quickly, and Ted Mole found that the grocery bills grew larger day by day. Then there was the cost of buying clothes for the family. Freddie did not have many new clothes, but the twins grew out of things so quickly that it seemed that Ted had to buy new clothes for them almost every month.

"I don't want them to stay the same size forever," he complained. "But I do wish they wouldn't grow quite so fast."

It would have been easier for Ted Mole if he had only had to look after his own small family, but he had other people



who relied on him too. His brother, Stanley Mole, had hurt his leg badly in an accident, and was unable to work as a result. He had six children to support, so Ted Mole had to give him money to make sure that nobody went hungry in that family. As a result, at the end of the month there was hardly ever any money left – just a couple of coins, and that would never buy very much: a few potatoes, perhaps, or half a loaf of bread.

"I wish we weren't quite so poor," said Freddie to his father. "I wish that I could earn some money to help you."

Ted Mole shook his head. "That's kind

of you," he said. "But you have to go to school and learn. That way you'll be able to get a good job one day. Think how you can help us all then."

Freddie knew that his father was right, but he still wished that he could do something. He dreamed of ways of making some money. Perhaps he would invent something that everybody needed. Perhaps he would stumble across a nugget of gold in the stream that ran near his house. He had read about a man who had found a diamond when he was digging in the sand. At first he thought it was just any old rock, but when he washed it and it began to sparkle he knew that it was

something very valuable. The man who found that diamond had been very poor – but no longer. That showed it could happen.

But we know, don't we, that things like that happen to other people. They never happen to us.

"Has anybody ever found a diamond near where we live?" asked Freddie.

His father shook his head. "No," he said. "Never."

"Or dug up any gold?"

Again Ted Mole shook his head. "Not here," he said. "There are places where you can find gold, but they're far away, I think. Australia, maybe."