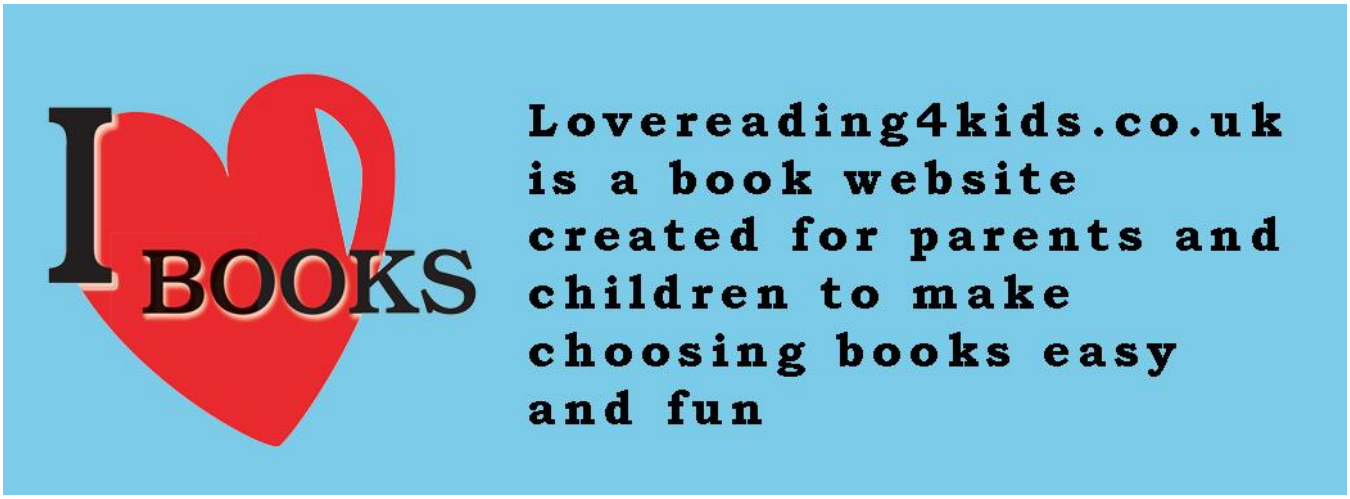

Opening extract from

Goodly and Grave in a Bad Case of Kidnap

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Published by

HarperCollins Children's Books

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Lovereading4kids.co.uk

First published in Great Britain by
HarperCollins Children's Books in 2017
HarperCollins Children's Books is a division of HarperCollinsPublishers Ltd,
HarperCollins Publishers
1 London Bridge Street
London SE1 9GF

The HarperCollins website address is:
www.harpercollins.co.uk

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ISBN 978–0–00–818353–0

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Typeset in Lido 12/18 pt
Printed and bound in England by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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THE PENNY Dreadful
ONE PENNY
Vol. 263

ANOTHER MISSING CHILD!

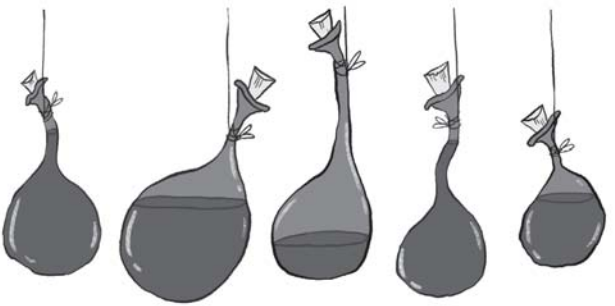
THE *PENNY* regrets to inform its readers that another child, Eddie Robinson, went missing several weeks ago. An artist's impression of the child is shown here and a full interview with the unfortunate parents can be found on page two.





ZOMBIES!

On page three, the respected scientist Sir Absalom Balderdash explains how the recent disappearances may be the work of flesh-eating zombies.



CHAPTER ONE

A GAME OF CARDS

Midnight in Mrs Milligan's Gambling Den.

Lord Grave puffed on his cigar, blowing smoke into Lucy Goodly's face. She coughed and spluttered and gave Lord Grave her filthiest stare. He'd be less full of himself once she'd relieved him of all the gold in his pockets.

"Finest cigars in the world," Lord Grave said, waving his about.

"You shouldn't smoke in front of me," Lucy said.

"It stunts the growth, you know."

A hush fell over Mrs Milligan's Gambling Den. Dice stopped rolling, roulette wheels stopped turning and everyone held their breath. Lord Grave was the most important customer who'd ever visited Mrs Milligan's. No one else dared complain about his smelly cigar. Lucy's parents, who were sitting at the poker table with Lucy and the eminent Lord, stiffened.

"Fair point," said Lord Grave and stubbed his cigar out on the coat tails of a passing waiter. The waiter bowed, thanked his Lordship and then ran for the kitchens where he sat in a pail of cold water to quench the smouldering embers.

Lord Grave turned back to the Goodlys. "So you've run out of money? No chance of another game?"

"I'm afraid not, your Lordship," said Mrs Goodly. She fiddled with the frayed edge of her shawl, which was more fray than shawl. Lucy's mother had a whole cupboard full of very fine shawls at home, but she always wore her frayed one on poker nights. Lucy herself wore a pair of her father's cut-down

breeches and a boy's jacket. And unlike most girls, who favoured curls and ringlets, Lucy liked to keep her straight, shiny black hair short. She found it far more practical.

"Nothing left at all to bet with? Come, now. You must at least have a house?"

"No, sir. We rent a couple of rooms from a Mr Grimes. We share them with three hundred cockroaches, a family of rats and eight slugs. We're very fortunate." Mrs Goodly smiled at Lord Grave in a pathetic way.

Lucy shivered at the idea of sharing a room with three hundred cockroaches, a family of rats and eight slugs. What her mother said wasn't a complete lie. They had once lived in a place like that. But, thanks to Lucy, not any more. Lucy thought of her large, light, clean bedroom in Leafy Ridge, the Goodlys' cottage deep in the country, hundreds of miles away from London and Mrs Milligan's Gambling Den. It was her favourite place in the world. But for the plan to work, the Goodlys had to pretend they still lived in squalor.

"But . . . I do have one thing," said Mrs Goodly,

her voice quivering. Her fingers trembled as she unpinned the brooch fastened lopsidedly to her ragged shawl. It was gold and round, with a red stone in the middle. She placed it on the green cloth of the poker table. Lord Grave picked it up and bit it.

"Real gold? Genuine ruby?"

"Yes, sir. From my dear departed mother, our little Lucy's grandmother."

Lucy put on her best wan smile and patted her mother's hand.

"But . . ." said Mrs Goodly, "Mr Goodly and I, we don't think we have the nerve for another game of poker, sir. Would you consider playing against Lucy instead?"

Lord Grave frowned, his bushy black eyebrows meeting in the middle. He studied Lucy for a few moments. Lucy sat quite still, letting Lord Grave take a good look at her. She knew what he was thinking. That a twelve-year-old girl couldn't possibly beat anyone at poker. But he was wrong. Because Lucy never, ever lost a poker game. Unless she lost on purpose.

"This child?" said Lord Grave eventually. "Not much of a challenge for me!"

"Oh, please, sir," said Mrs Goodly, tears shining in her eyes (beneath the poker table, Lucy was pinching her mother's leg hard in order to make her eyes water). "Otherwise we'll have to sleep in the gutter tonight!"

Lord Grave picked up the ruby brooch and turned it over in his fingers. He nodded. "Very well."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" chorused all three Goodlys.

"One moment." Lord Grave handed the ruby brooch back to Mrs Goodly. "I don't want to play for the brooch. I want to play for the girl."

Lucy's stomach dropped down to her toes. This wasn't how things usually proceeded.

"You want to play for *my daughter*?" said Mr Goodly, running his hand through his untidy dark hair.

"I need a new boot girl for Grave Hall. Little Lucy looks just the ticket. If you win, I'll give you that brooch's value four times over."

"We need time to decide," said Mrs Goodly,

suddenly sounding much less tearful.

"Don't take too long or I may change my mind," said Lord Grave. He got to his feet and strode over to the tiny bar tucked into a corner of the gambling den.

The three Goodlys looked at each other.

"We can't," said Mr Goodly.

"Of course not," Mrs Goodly agreed.

"You know I won't lose," whispered Lucy. "Just think. We'll make enough to live on for years!"

"But you do lose sometimes," said Mr Goodly. "We mustn't risk it!"

Lucy wanted to tell him that she only lost a game now and then so people wouldn't be too suspicious, including her parents. But she couldn't. So she shook her head and said, "Look at him. He's all fuddled with brandy. He's having another glass now." Lord Grave was leaning against the bar, drinking Mrs Milligan's most expensive brandy out of a glass practically the size of Lucy's head.

Mr Goodly took both of Lucy's hands in his. "Dear girl, are you sure?"

"Yes, Father. I won't lose!"

Excitement bubbled up in Lucy. Once she'd beaten Lord Grave, she could spend the rest of the summer paddling and fishing in the river near Leafy Ridge and forget about gambling altogether. And although her parents were hopeless in many ways, she loved them very much and enjoyed spending time with them at home. Her father would bake pies (Lucy picked the scorched pastry off before eating the filling). Her mother would get out her toolbox and crash and bang around inside Leafy Ridge, making improvements (Lucy would then quietly pay someone to improve the improvements). It would be the perfect summer!

Lord Grave staggered back to the table. All of Mrs Milligan's customers trailed after him, whispering behind their hands. Some of them had seen Lucy play poker before and were looking forward to watching her win against this stuck-up man.

"Well?" asked Lord Grave.

"We agree," said Lucy.

"Excellent." Lord Grave clicked his fingers. "A fresh deck of cards, if you please. In fact, let's play with two decks – makes for a more interesting game.

Five-card draw suit you, young lady?"

Lucy nodded.

Mrs Milligan herself pushed her way to the front of the crowd. She had two new packs of cards, which she showed to Lucy and Lord Grave so they could check the seals were intact. Then she shuffled the cards and began to deal.

Lucy's heart thumped with each card that Mrs Milligan flicked down on to the green cloth. *No need to be scared*, she told herself. She touched the right sleeve of her jacket. Tucked up inside was a blank card. The card that had changed her life and that sometimes, when she lay awake in the middle of the night, she feared was the work of the devil. The beautiful woman she'd stolen it from hadn't looked like the devil, though. Apart from the fiery eyes burning behind the veil of her hat.