Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Helping you choose books for children

0-5 5-7 7-9 9-12 12+

Opening extract from

Lizzie Dripping

Written by

Helen Cresswell

Illustrated by

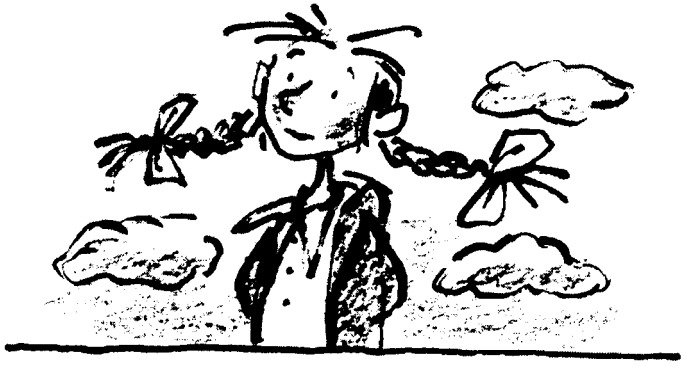
Tony Ross

Published by

Oxford

All text is copyright of the author and illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.



Lizzie Dripping and the Orphans

Once upon a time—and I mean last week, or last year—there was a girl called Lizzie Dripping. There is a girl called Lizzie Dripping in most villages round these parts. It isn't meant unkindly, it's really quite affectionate. It fits the kind of girl who is dreamy and daring at the same time, and who turns things upside down and inside out wherever she goes and whatever she does.

This is how *our* Lizzie Dripping was. She walked about with her head in the clouds and was

always trying to make life more exciting, more full of shivers and panics and laughter than it is if you leave it to itself. It often looked as if she was telling what most people would call fibs. She wasn't, of course. She was just making things up as she went along—and that is quite a different thing.

Lizzie's real name was Penelope Arbuckle, but no one ever called her that. There was her father, Albert Arbuckle, whose real trade was that of a blacksmith but who worked as a plumber most of the time because there were more burst pipes to be mended than horses to be shod these days. There was her mother, Patty, who had her feet as firmly planted on the ground as Lizzie had her head stuck in the air, so that it was a wonder that the two of them ever met. And then there was the baby, Toby, who at the time we are talking about was little more than a gurgle—and a yell.

'My little fat lamb', Patty called him—and fat he certainly was.

One autumn evening the Arbuckles were sitting round the living-room fire after supper. Patty was patching a pair of trousers, and Lizzie was reading a comic on the sofa next to Albert, who was behind his newspaper. There came a knock on the door.

'Come in!' cried Patty, without getting up. The back door opened straight into the little room. First a face peered round, then the rest of the visitor followed.

'Blodwen!' cried Patty. 'You come right in and shut the door. Move off, Lizzie, and make room for your Aunt Blod.'

Blodwen was not Lizzie's aunt at all, not strictly speaking. She was just one of Patty's oldest friends, and had wormed her way into the family, so Lizzie thought, by false pretences.

'Nippy out, it is,' she announced, plumping herself on the end of the sofa nearest the fire. 'Frost next thing, I shouldn't wonder. Burst pipes, Albert!'—giving him a nudge.

'Early yet for that, Blodwen,' he replied. 'Too much wind about. Don't reckon on much in the way of burst pipes while Christmas.'

'Leeks going all right, are they?' she enquired.

'Insofar as I can tell, Blodwen, while I dig 'em up.'

'Grows a lovely leek, Patty, don't he? Best leek grower in Little Hemlock, that's what I always tell people. Cup of tea going, is there?' She knew the family well enough to ask a question like this when it was quite obvious that there was *not* a cup of tea going.

'Soon can be, Blod,' replied Patty, getting up.

She put the kettle to boil on the hob, then sat down again.

'Drat!' she cried. 'Whatever's that?'

'That' was Toby yelling.

'Drat that child!' she cried. 'It's as if he *knowed* every time I put the kettle on. I've only to sit down and rest my legs over a cup of tea, and he sets up as if bottom had dropped out of his cot. Nip up, Lizzie, there's a good girl, and turn him over.'

I'll turn him over, Lizzie thought. Blodwen ain't come here for a cup o' tea, she's come to *tell* something, and I want to hear it told.

She raced up the narrow stairs and had no sooner reached the top than Toby's yelling stopped as abruptly as it had started.

Well if *that* ain't just like him, and all, she thought. Drat you, Toby Arbuckle, for a blessed nuisance.

Back in the living-room she was just in time to hear Blodwen say, ' . . . for the orphans, bless their little hearts.'

'What orphans?' demanded Lizzie.

'All orphans,' Blodwen said. 'All the poor little children without so much as either a mother or father as *you're* lucky to have, Lizzie Dripping.'

'Your aunt was telling us about the Bring and Buy there's to be,' explained Patty, busying

herself with cups and saucers. 'You'll have a slice of seed cake, won't you, Blodwen? Bring and Buy in Chapel Hall in aid of the orphans, she says.'

'Bring and Buy,' Blodwen nodded. 'November seventh, Chapel Hall at six-thirty. Usual stalls, you know, plenty of cakes and knitting. Only thing is, it's *toys* we want most of, see. Toys.'

'Hurray!' cried Lizzie. 'I'm saving up, then!'

'Toys to *give*, it is, Lizzie,' said Blodwen severely. 'Surprised at you, I am. All them toys you've got, and a mam and dad the best in the world. That's what we thought, Patty, see. All the children to give their toys to show thankful how lucky they are. Saddest thing in the world it is, to be an orphan.'

'Bless their hearts,' Patty added.

'How do you know?' asked Lizzie. 'You've never been one.'

'You shush up!' said Patty sharply. 'Speaking to your aunt like that. And you go up to your room this very minute. You just sit up there and *think* of how it feels to have no mother and father and all on your own in the world. *You'd* not get far on your own, my girl!'

Lizzie got up sulkily and went to the door.

'And you have a good sort through your things!' called Patty after her. 'Or I'll do it for you! All that stuff you've got, and grudging them to an orphan! I'm ashamed of you!'

Lizzie stamped up the stairs, though the nearer she got to the top the softer she stamped. She was mad and sorry now, but if Toby woke, she'd be madder and sorrier.

In her room there was a nearly finished jigsaw on her chest of drawers, and she stood and slotted a few pieces in while she calmed down.

Orphans don't have people *nagging* at 'em morning to night, she thought. Nag nag nag. And I *haven't* got a lot of stuff, either. Becky Farmer's got *twice* what I've got. *And* Dawn Walker. And as for that Michael Davey! Brand-new bike he had for his birthday, *and* a cricket bat, *and* roller skates. Spoilt to death, he is. *I'm* not spoilt.

She slotted in the last piece of sky.

Wish I was.

The jigsaw was finished except for the three missing pieces. It was cold up there in her room.

Better just pretend to sort through, she thought. Then I can go down. Just my luck to miss seed cake!

She knelt on the cold linoleum and dragged a big box from under the bed, noisily, to make sure they heard downstairs. She picked out a glove puppet of a bear and waggled it on her hand.

'Not parting with *that*.' She put a frog puppet on the other hand and wagged it at the bear. '*Nor* that.'

With a deep sigh she took them off.

'Now what . . . ? Paints . . . ? No. Farmyard . . . ? No. Half missing, any road. What's this? Clean forgot I had it.'

And so on, right to the bottom of the box. It was an interesting half-hour, because Lizzie really had forgotten what she had—she even found the missing pieces to the jigsaw. Then she stowed everything back again into the box and pushed it under the bed.

'I can't spare 'em,' she muttered to herself. 'I might *need* them one day. Better get down there, or seed cake'll've all gone.'

Had she known it—it already had. And it was lucky that Lizzie had not heard the conversation that was taking place downstairs while she was up above.

'She's a long time up there, our Lizzie,' said Patty. 'Sounds like she is having a sort through—and none too soon, either. The stuff she's got up there you wouldn't believe. Enough to keep a dozen orphans happy.'

'You come down too hard on 'er you do, Patty,' said Albert, coming out again from behind his paper. 'She's a good lass, at bottom, and'd give her last penny, if need be.'

'Got to train 'em though, haven't you?' said Blodwen (who having no children of her own



was not biased on the subject). 'Got to make 'em *realize*?'

'A good heart don't come by training, Blodwen,' said Albert. 'And that's what our Lizzie's got—a good heart. Worth a deal of training, is that.'

'I'm not denying, Albert, I'm not *denying*!' Her mouth was full of seed cake. 'Lovely cake this, Patty. Melts in your mouth that you hardly know you've had it.'

'Have another lump, duck.' Patty offered the plate.

'Some left for Lizzie, is there?' said Albert, but too late. And Lizzie came in just in time to see the

last piece being whisked off the plate by Blodwen's sharp Welsh fingers.

'Tempting me, is it, Patty Arbuckle!' she cried archly. 'And me on a diet, and all!'

Last piece, thought Lizzie. Trust her. First diet *I've* ever heard of wi' half a seed cake in it.

'Oh! Back, are you?' Blodwen's voice was sharp even through the cake.

'Is there any more cake, Mum?' asked Lizzie. 'I'm hungry.'

'Hungry now, is it?' cried Blodwen. 'And what about the poor little orphans, I should like to know? Had a good think about them, I hope, and the terrible lives they lead?'

'Thinking don't stop me getting hungry,' said Lizzie. 'Is there any, Mum?'

'You sit and wait,' Patty told her. 'Had a good clear-out, did you? Where's the stuff for the Bring and Buy?'

'I'm still deciding,' said Lizzie. 'I ain't got to decide tonight, have I?'

Blodwen was shaking her head. 'Pity is she never had a brother or sister, Patty. Trouble with an only child, that is. Selfish. Not used to sharing, see.'

'I have then!' cried Lizzie. 'I've got Toby!'

'Not a *proper* brother, though, is he? Only a *baby*.'

'Might be now, Blodwen,' said Albert, 'but he'll grow, if you give 'im time. And I shouldn't say our Lizzie's been spoilt. She's a good lass she is.'

'I'm not denying, Albert, I'm not *denying*! All I say is that for an only child it's difficult, see. Very difficult.' She paused, and popped the last bite of seed cake delicately into her mouth. 'One of seven, I was!'

And I bet the other six never saw much seed cake! Lizzie had to think the thought, because she dared not say it. After that nobody said anything more about the toys, almost as if they found Lizzie's behaviour so shocking that it was hardly even to be spoken about. She was glad when it was bedtime.

It seemed to Lizzie as she hurriedly undressed and slipped into bed, that it had been a dreadful evening, and that no orphan on earth could possibly have had a worse one.

But the strange thing was that once Lizzie was lying in bed, and beginning to feel pleasantly warm and drowsy, she began to think, for the first time, about the orphans. Lizzie always did a great deal of her dreaming and thinking in bed, just before she fell asleep, and tonight, try as she might to push the thought away, she simply could not help thinking about what it would really be like to be an orphan.

All on your own in the world, she thought,

remembering Patty's words. The wind was moaning in the near-leafless boughs of the giant beeches away down below, and she pulled the bedclothes higher over her ears.

The picture of an orphan that began to form in her mind was of a little barefoot girl, dressed only in rags, wandering lost out there in the wind and cold. An owl hooted down below and Lizzie gave a little shiver. A moment later there came an answering call. And to Lizzie, who had lain and listened to the owls hooting a hundred times before, their calls tonight seemed unbearably sad and lonely.

'Who . . . whooooooo?'

As if they were asking the same question as the little ragged girl who ran here and there outside in the darkness, knocking vainly on doors, looking for her lost father and mother. And as she watched the girl, gradually she began to see not only the streaming rags and the bare legs and feet, but the *face*.

Slowly it changed from a pale blur into a face, and it was a face that she recognized, and all at once Lizzie realized that it was *herself*, her very own face. And she could see tears running down, and at the same time felt warm trickles run from her own eyes and on to the pillow where they straightaway grew cold.

'Poor little orphan,' she cried softly. '*Poor* little thing,' and as she cried she was crying for herself, running barefoot out there in the dark and seeing the curtains of the windows all drawn tight and no one to see or take pity on her.

Again the owl hooted.

Lizzie pushed back the covers and snapped on the light, blinking and brushing her eyes on the back of her hand.

'I'll give you some toys!' she cried to herself. 'Wait—*I'll* give you some!'

She ran over the cold lino to the cupboard where she kept her best toys, the ones she really loved, the ones she had never even looked at when she had come up earlier that night. Swiftly she sorted among them, picking things out—one here, one there. She took out the monkey with the tattered fur that Albert had won for her at the Goose Fair five years ago. She picked out the one-eared rabbit called Loppy, the tiny Japanese doll, and the beautiful tin teapot with painted sunflowers. She put them in a pile on top of the cupboard, turned off the light and got back into bed.

Before long the picture of the orphan began to float up again, but this time, as the picture began to grow clearer, she could see that the girl was standing with the toys held tightly in her arms,

and was smiling over them straight into Lizzie's eyes. Lizzie smiled back, and fell asleep.

In the morning when she awoke, the first thing she saw was the pile of toys. Then she remembered the ragged orphan who had run barefoot in the night through her dreams. Now, in the light of day, the orphan seemed very unreal and far away, and she felt a pang as she remembered how she had promised her toys—given them, as good as.

'Have to stick to it now, Lizzie,' she said to herself. 'Can't back down now.'

When she got up she sadly put the toys together into a brown paper carrier and put it back into the cupboard. She tried not to think about it during the days that followed, and most of the time, succeeded.

The day came for the Bring and Buy. Patty was up early as she always was on such occasions. She was baking nearly all day, because her drop scones and bakewell tarts were famous, and always sold out first, even at two pence each. She was still baking in the afternoon when Lizzie came in from a skipping session in the yard.

'Mmm! Smells nice, Mum!'

'Now you needn't start that, Lizzie,' said Patty.

'I know what you're after, right enough. For the orphans, these cakes, not great girls like you that's eat, eat, eating from morning till night, and never satisfied, seemingly.'

'I know, Mum. What I meant was—lucky orphans. You're best cook in Little Hemlock, Mum—even Becky Farmer says that.'

'Hmmm.' Patty was pleased, despite herself. 'Well, that's as maybe. I know I've always to be up at crack of dawn baking if ever there's a Bring and Buy in this here village. You got them toys ready, Lizzie, for when your Aunt Blodwen comes?'

'Here, Mum.' Lizzie showed her the bag standing by her chair. She could see Midge's head sticking out from the top.

'There's a good girl,' said Patty. 'I knew you would, when you'd time to think about it. And you've that much stuff—*I* never had that much stuff when I was your age.'

'Mum . . . Why do I have to call her *Auntie* Blodwen? She i'n't my real aunt at all, is she?'

'That's a nice thing to come up with, for goodness' sake!' cried Patty. 'Called her Auntie ever since you was old enough to talk, and now—'

A knock came at the door. It was the one Lizzie had been dreading all day.

'Come in!' cried Patty.

As if we don't know who *that* is, thought Lizzie.

'Mmmm!' cried Blodwen. 'Lovely smell! Halfway up the street I smelt it! Try one, can I?' and had whisked up a bakewell and bitten into it before Lizzie had so much as opened her mouth to say: 'For the orphans, them! Two pence each to you!' under her breath.

Blodwen nodded at Lizzie, who scowled back.

Just look at her! Lizzie thought. Easy to get *other* people giving things for orphans. An orphan could've done with that tart—'n so could I, for that matter!

'Got your toys sorted, have you?' asked Blodwen thickly, through a mouthful of crumbs.

Without answering, Lizzie picked up the bag of toys and passed them over.

'There's a good girl!' cried Blodwen. 'Isn't she, Patty? See what you've given, shall we?'

'Let them alone! Let my things alone, old busybody! It's the orphans they're for, and none of your business!' But she said the words silently.

She watched Blodwen's fingers prying into the bag. The monkey came out first, bald patches, dangling tail and all.

'Oh, Midge!' cried Lizzie silently. 'Goodbye, Midge!'

'Ooooh!' Blodwen's exclamation sounded surprised and disappointed at once.

'Whatever . . . ? Oooooh . . . ! No ear to it, this rabbit hasn't. Bit scratched, isn't it?' This, picking up the beautiful sunflower teapot. 'It's not your *rubbish* you're giving, I hope, after all that was said?'

'What?' Patty looked up. 'Midge? Giving him, are you? Never thought to see the day we'd see back of *him*. *And* that mangy old rabbit. Good riddance.'

She sounded pleased. At that moment, Lizzie did not know which one of them she hated most.

'Not a *jumble* sale, this,' said Blodwen, offended now. '*Nice* toys it was we were after—money we're trying to raise, for all them little orphans, bless their hearts! Hardly two pence each these'll fetch, I should doubt. However!'

She picked up the bag and went to the door, 'See you later, then!' and was gone.

Lizzie stared after her, aghast. 'Mum!' she cried. 'They're going to sell them! She said they're going to *sell them*!'

Patty looked up, startled.

'Whatever else, Lizzie Dripping? Not that there'll be more than ten pence for that lot. Could've given *one* decent thing, Lizzie.'

Lizzie hardly heard. 'But they're for the

orphans! I gave 'em for the orphans! I wanted 'em to have *my* toys!'

'*Money's* for orphans,' said Patty. 'Toys are to be sold for money to give to the orphans. Same thing, isn't it? I don't know what you're going on about, Lizzie, really I don't. Now come along, there's a good girl, and get these counted into half-dozens. You'll get bags from the pantry.'

Dazed, Lizzie did as she was told. And all the time she was thinking, Gone! Gone for ever now, Midge and Loppy and my beautiful teapot! And to *sell* them. Heaven knows who'll get 'em!

It was almost too much to bear. And worst of all was the picture that Lizzie had of the orphan, running through the darkness with her arms outstretched for the promised toys that would never be hers now. Never . . .

Patty told Albert all about it when he came home.

'Proper upset she was,' she said. 'Crying, you could see that. And I must say I never thought to see the day when she'd part wi' that monkey—*or* that rabbit.'

'Fond on 'em,' agreed Albert, spearing a sausage and balancing baked beans over it. 'Won that monkey for 'er meself at the Goose Fair, as I

remember, on a coconut shy. See her face now I can, when I give it her. Lit up like a Christmas tree it did.'

'Oh, go on, Albert Arbuckle,' said Patty. 'Great soft thing. Getting a big girl now, Lizzie is, and time she parted with all that baby stuff.'

'Dunno about *baby* stuff,' said Albert. 'Fond of 'em, that's the point. Like me and my leeks.'

'I can see you sending *them* to a Bring and Buy,' Patty told him tartly. 'You wouldn't send 'em to save your own grandmother, let alone orphans.'

'Now that ain't true, Patty,' said Albert. 'I'm reet fond o' my leeks, and I don't deny it. But it don't say as I wouldn't part wi' 'em, if needs be necessary. And my grandmother, Patty, is dead, as you'll remember, and not to be spoken light of.'

'Now, 'twas only a manner o' speaking, Albert, you know that.'

'All I say is,' said Albert, 'that lass's given things she were reet fond of, and credit to her. Might have looked nowt much to us, like, but they meant a lot to our Lizzie, and no mistake about it. Where is she, then? Gone over to t' Chapel Hall, has she?'

'Aye. Went to get there when it opened. Come back wi' a load of rubbish as usual, I don't doubt.'

'Now there you go again, Patty, love,' said

Albert. 'Might *seem* rubbish, to you and me, but it's summat she wants. I mind when I was a lad, there was this here teddy bear—Piggle, I used to call 'im, or Poggle—aye, that's it—Poggle!'

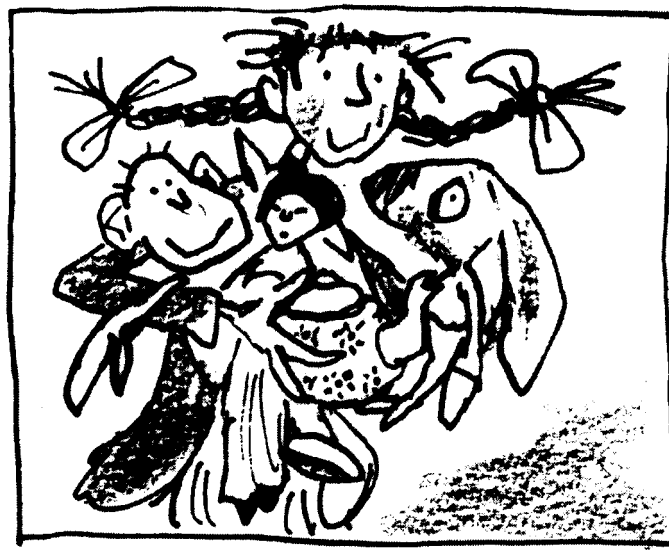
'You!' cried Patty, laughing. 'A teddy bear? *Poggle?*'

'Aye,' replied Albert, with dignity, 'and no reason why not, for aught I can see. And this here teddy, I'd as soon be parted from 'im as from me own mother. I kept that creature till his stuffing dropped out, and his hair dropped and he'd only one eye—aye, I mind that—give him a kind of rascal look, did that. Aye . . . '

'Great soft thing you are, Albert Arbuckle,' said Patty. 'You wi' your teddies. I half begin to see where our Lizzie gets it from. Now if I leave the pudding in the oven, Albert love, help yourself, will you? It's gone half past six now, and I shall miss all t'bargains.'

She took off the pinafore that was protecting her new brown crimplene dress and patted her hair in front of the half-silvered mirror over the mantelshelf.

Then the door flew open. There stood Lizzie Dripping, her thin face pink and shining, beaming, over an armful of toys. A bald monkey, a one-eared rabbit, a Japanese doll, and a tin teapot with sunflowers on it.



'Look! Mum! Dad! I bought 'em all back! I bought 'em back, all of 'em! And only two pence each, just like Aunt Blodwen said! They're all mine again—and orphans have't money and all!'

Albert and Patty, struck dumb, stared at her. And if *they* had seen the orphan of Lizzie's dreams, they would have recognized her now, standing here in front of them, come in from out the cold . . .

That night, Lizzie took the toys and put them back in the bag where she had been saving them. She climbed into bed, put out the light, and shut

her eyes. And almost at once she began to see the orphan girl, running again in her tattered rags.

'I've still got 'em,' whispered Lizzie. 'And I'll save 'em for you! Don't worry—I'll save 'em!'

And the orphan girl smiled, and Lizzie smiled back, and fell asleep.



Lizzie Dripping and the Witch

That day, Lizzie did not feel like walking back with the others after school. Becky Farmer called to her, but Lizzie pretended not to hear.

Wants to play hospitals, she thought. Sick of that game, I am. Only just got those spots washed off me she did with her felt tips *last* time.

So she hung round, waiting to be the last to go, and thinking that perhaps she could walk along with Miss Platt.

'What is it, Lizzie?' asked Miss Platt, appearing behind her. 'Have you forgotten something?'

'I was wondering if I could wait and walk along with you. I could show you that marrow I was telling you about—in Mr Briggs's garden. Honest, Miss Platt, it's the biggest I ever saw. I keep wondering if it's going to end up biggest there's ever been in the *world*. Going to put it in church for Harvest Festival, he says, but rate it's going he won't get it in through't *door*!'

Miss Platt laughed, but not in the way some people might have laughed. A *proper* laugh, she had.

'Why, thank you,' she said. 'I'd love to see it, Lizzie, and you shall show it to me. But I have your books to mark before I go home. And I think Becky's waiting for you. I should go and play with her, outside, while the weather holds.'

'Don't feel like it,' said Lizzie. 'Don't always feel like playing, you know.'

'I know,' said Miss Platt. 'It's nice to be alone sometimes.'

'Oh, I'm not *alone*!' cried Lizzie. 'Least, I—oh, I dunno! Bye, Miss Platt!'

Becky Farmer beckoned to her as she went out through the school gate, but Lizzie shook her head and went in the other direction.

Go home and get an apple or summat, she

thought, and that book on giants, then I'll go to the Pingle, and sit and read under't beeches.

Patty was in the kitchen ironing.

'You, is it, Lizzie?' she said. 'Nice day, was it?'

She said the same thing every day, and Lizzie often had the feeling that she never listened to the answer.

'Smashing,' she said. 'We did collage things, with leaves and nuts and that. Look!'

She held it up. It was all brown and gold and tattered—just *like* autumn, which was what it was supposed to be.

'Hmmm. Very nice. But don't leave it down here, Lizzie. It'll get sat on.'

Lizzie held it up again. 'Look, Dad!'

'That's real good, our Lizzie,' said Albert, putting down his newspaper. 'You've made a real pretty picture of it. Hang it on the wall, shall you?'

'Not in here, Albert, if you please,' said Patty. 'Clutter enough, without leaves on walls.'

'Put it in your room, love, that's best,' said Albert. 'Look nice, that will.'

'Till leaves start dropping off,' said Patty tartly. The steam flew up out of the iron in clouds. 'Till't leaves start dropping off and all over't floor for me to sweep up. Now nip up to't shop, Lizzie, will you, and fetch some butter.'