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Opening extract from

Lotta Make A Mess

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One day soon after her fifth birthday, Lotta woke up in the morning feeling cross from the very start. She'd had a dream that upset her, and she thought that what people dreamt must be real, silly little Lotta. And that was why she was cross.

'They hit my Teddy!' she screamed when Mummy came in to see why she was sitting in bed howling at eight o'clock in the morning.

'Who did?' Mummy asked.

'Joe and Mary-Lou,' screamed Lotta.

'Poor Lotta, you've just been dreaming,' said Mummy. 'Joe and Mary-Lou have gone to school. They haven't had time to do anything to Teddy.'

'They did it anyway, even though they didn't have time,' Lotta screamed, cuddling her poor Teddy.



Lotta's Teddy was a fat little pig her Mummy had made out of pink cloth and given her for her third birthday. Teddy had been clean and pink and beautiful then, but now he was dirty and in fact looked more like a real piglet. But Lotta thought he was a

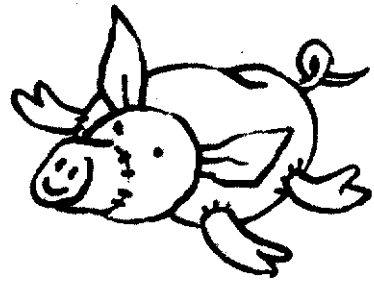
bear and that was why he was called Teddy, even though Joe said, 'Huh, that's not a bear, it's a pig.'

'Don't be so stupid,' said Lotta, 'of course it's a bear!'

'If you say so,' said Joe. 'But I'd like to know whether you think it's a polar bear or an ordinary brown bear.'

'I think it's a piggybear,' said Lotta, 'so you've got to as well!'

Lotta loved her piggybear. He slept in her bed at night and she talked to him a lot when Joe and Mary-Lou couldn't hear her. But now Teddy was lying on the pillow feeling sorry for himself because Joe and Mary-Lou had hit him, Lotta thought. She cried and stroked Teddy and said, 'Poor Teddy, I'm going to give Joe and Mary-Lou such a slap, I am really!'



Joe and Mary-Lou and Lotta and Mummy and Daddy lived in a yellow-painted house on Trouble-maker Street, as Daddy called it. Every morning Joe and Mary-Lou went to school and Daddy went to the office. It was only Mummy and Lotta who stayed at home in the house.

'How lucky I am to have my little Lotta,' Mummy used to say. 'Otherwise I'd be on my own all day long.'

'Yes, you are lucky to have me,' Lotta used to reply. 'I'd feel very sorry for you if you didn't.'

But she didn't say that now, not this morning when she was so cross. She didn't say anything, she just sat there pouting and looking angry. When it was time to get dressed, Mummy brought her the white jumper that Grandma had knitted for her.

'Not that,' said Lotta. 'It tickles and scratches.'

'Of course it doesn't,' said Mummy. 'Feel how soft and smooth it is.'

'No, it tickles and scratches,' said Lotta without even feeling it. 'I want my vivid dress.'

She had a pale blue velvet dress which was kept for best. Lotta called it her 'vivid dress'. And she wanted it now, though it was only Thursday, just an ordinary Thursday.

'You can wear your velvet dress on Sunday,' said Mummy. 'Today you're wearing this jumper.'

'I'd rather not wear anything,' said Lotta.

'All right, do that, then,' said Mummy, and went back down to the kitchen.

Lotta stayed where she was, sitting in the bedroom, angry and undressed; well, not completely naked, of course. She had a little vest and a pair of pants on and her socks and shoes.

'No other clothes at all,' said Lotta to Teddy—he was the only person she had to talk to.

'Lotta, are you coming down to drink your chocolate?' Mummy called from the bottom of the stairs.

'Not likely,' Lotta muttered under her breath, still sitting there.

'Answer me, Lotta,' Mummy shouted. 'Do you want your hot chocolate or not?'

Lotta felt quite pleased. Mummy could go on wondering whether Lotta wanted her chocolate. Lotta had no intention of answering, and it gave her a lovely feeling inside not to answer when Mummy called.

But she was hungry and really wanted her chocolate, so when she had waited long enough, she picked up Teddy and went down the stairs, going very slowly, stopping on every stair. She didn't want Mummy to be sure whether she was coming to drink her chocolate or not.

'I'll see how I feel,' said Lotta to Teddy.

And so she made her way to the kitchen.

'Well, here you are at last,' said Mummy.

Lotta stood in the doorway pouting, so that

Mummy would know she still hadn't stopped being cross.

Mummy and Lotta usually had breakfast together in the kitchen. It was always so nice there. It was now too. The sun was shining in through the window and on the table was Lotta's own blue cup full of hot chocolate with a cheese sandwich beside it. Lotta usually talked all the time during the day, but now she didn't say anything. Mummy sat there reading the paper and didn't say anything either.

In the end Lotta said, 'I might as well drink some chocolate then, if I must.'

'No, you don't have to at all,' said Mummy. 'And anyway, you must get dressed first.'

Lotta was already angry of course, but now she was absolutely furious. How stupid Mummy was. She had nothing to wear, only a horrible jumper that tickled and scratched, and now nothing to eat either. Oh, how stupid Mummy was!



'You're so stupid!' Lotta screamed, stamping her foot.

'Now then, Lotta,' said Mummy, 'that's enough. Go up to your room and stay there till you're good.'

Lotta gave a howl that could be heard right over

at Mrs Berg's house next door. She went out of the kitchen door and up the stairs and into the children's bedroom screaming all the way, and Mrs Berg next door shook her head and said, 'Poor little Lotta must have a very bad tummy ache!'

But Lotta didn't have a tummy ache at all, she was just in a rage. And at the height of her rage she caught sight of the white jumper. It was lying on a chair looking even more scratchy than ever. Lotta let out another howl and threw the jumper to the floor. But then she fell silent. Because there on the floor right beside the jumper was a pair of scissors that Lotta used for cutting out paper dolls. Lotta picked up the scissors and silently cut a big hole in the jumper.

'It serves you right,' she said. 'Because you tickle and scratch.'

She put her hand through the hole. Oh dear, it certainly was big, and how awful it looked to



see a whole hand sticking out where there shouldn't be one. Lotta suddenly felt rather frightened.

'I'll say it was a dog that bit a hole in it,' she said to Teddy. She held up the jumper in front of her and gazed at it for a long time. Then she took the scissors and cut off one arm. 'I'll say he chewed it to shreds,' she said. She held it up again and took

another long look at it. Then she picked up the scissors and cut off the other arm too.



'I've never seen a dog like it,' she said.

But then she started to feel really scared.

She bundled the jumper up into a ball and stuffed it in the wastepaper basket. She didn't want to see it any more. At that very same moment her mother called up from downstairs, 'Lotta, are you being good yet?'

Lotta cried quietly to herself and said, 'No, not at all.'

She clasped Teddy in her arms and held him tight.

'Though it serves them right,' said Lotta, 'if everyone's so horrid to me.'

That wasn't true, and Lotta knew it, but if

you cut a jumper to pieces, you need something or someone to blame.

'Yes, *everyone* is horrid to me,' Lotta said to Teddy. 'That's the only reason I cut things to pieces.'

She looked over at the wastepaper basket where the jumper was.

'But anyway, it *was* a dog,' she said.



Lotta leaves home