

# **LIFE AND DEATH OF HARRIETT FREAN**

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Life and death of Harriett Freat by May Sinclair

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**MAY SINCLAIR**

**LIFE AND DEATH OF  
HARRIETT FREAN**



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## I

“PUSSYCAT, Pussycat, where have you been?”

“I’ve been to London, to see the Queen.”

“Pussycat, Pussycat, what did you there?”

“I caught a little mouse under the chair.””

Her mother said it three times. And each time the Baby Harriett laughed. The sound of her laugh was so funny that she laughed again at that; she kept on laughing, with shriller and shriller squeals.

‘I wonder why she thinks it’s funny,’ her mother said.

Her father considered it. ‘I don’t know. The cat perhaps. The cat and the Queen. But no; that isn’t funny.’



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'She sees something in it we don't see, bless her,' said her mother.

Each kissed her in turn, and the Baby Harriett stopped laughing suddenly.

'Mamma, *did* Pussycat see the Queen?'

'No,' said Mamma. 'Just when the Queen was passing the little mouse came out of its hole and ran under the chair. That's what Pussycat saw.'

Every evening before bedtime she said the same rhyme, and Harriett asked the same question.

When Nurse had gone she would lie still in her cot, waiting. The door would open, the big pointed shadow would move over the ceiling, the lattice shadow of the fireguard would fade and go away,

### *Life and Death of Harriett Freen*

and Mamma would come in carrying the lighted candle. Her face shone white between her long, hanging curls. She would stoop over the cot and lift Harriett up, and her face would be hidden in curls. That was the kiss-me-to-sleep kiss. And when she had gone Harriett lay still again, waiting. Presently Papa would come in, large and dark in the firelight. He stooped and she leapt up into his arms. That was the kiss-me-awake kiss; it was their secret.

Then they played. Papa was the Pussy-cat and she was the little mouse in her hole under the bedclothes. They played till Papa said, 'No more!' and tucked the blankets tight in.

'Now you're kissing like Mamma——'

Hours afterwards they would come again

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together and stoop over the cot and she wouldn't see them; they would kiss her with soft, light kisses, and she wouldn't know.

She thought: 'To-night I'll stay awake and see them.' But she never did. Only once she dreamed that she heard footsteps and saw the lighted candle, going out of the room; going, going away.

The blue egg stood on the marble top of the cabinet where you could see it from everywhere; it was supported by a gold waistband, by gold hoops and gold legs, and it wore a gold ball with a frill round it like a crown. You would never have guessed what was inside it. You touched a spring in its waistband and it flew open, and then it was a workbox.