

**TEN OF THEM: OR,
THE CHILDREN OF
DANEHURST**

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Ten of Them: Or, the Children of Danehurst by Mrs. M. R. Bray & A. H. Collins

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MRS. M. R. BRAY & A. H. COLLINS

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"OH, THOSE BOYS! THEY WILL BE THE DEATH OF ME!"



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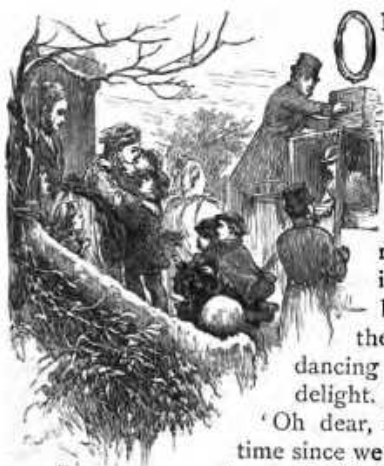
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CHAPTER I.

COMING HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS.



ONLY ten minutes more and they will be here ;' and Ethel, a bright-faced, merry little girl, eight years old, who had been watching the clock for the last five minutes without speaking, caught hold of her brother Arthur, and the two children began dancing round the room with delight.

'Oh dear, it does seem such a time since we saw them! What a party we shall be! Ten children in the house! We have never had such a Christmas before.'

'Mother, may we go in the porch and watch for them?' said Arthur, a rosy-cheeked boy of nine years old ; 'I do not think it is so very cold.'

'Cold! Why, my dear boy, I should think it was freezing. You must not think of it; I do not want to have you laid up with a cold in the Christmas holidays, but you may wait in the hall if you like.'

'All right, mother. Come along, Ethel, but we will just fetch the little ones down first. I promised to call them when it was time.'

A loud shout up the staircase was followed by the pattering of small feet, and presently down came four-year-old Teddy and little Mary, who was only two and a half, whilst nurse stood at the top of the stairs with baby in her arms, watching—for were not her own two boys, Master Walter and Master Eric, whom she had nursed as babies, coming home for the holidays to-night?

'Bless their hearts! we shall be kept alive this Christmas, and no mistake,' she said to herself. 'Our two young gentlemen coming, and Master Bertie and Miss Flora and Master Willie; a fine time the cousins will have all together; it's a wonder how master can stand all the noise.'

At this moment nurse's meditations were stopped by a great shout that rang all over the house. 'They are coming! they are coming!—quick, mother, quick!'

Mother, whose ears had caught the sound of the wheels even before her own noisy little ones, was already in the hall; and father came hurrying out of his own snug sitting-room—for were not the boys coming home? Another moment and the rumbling wheels are heard on the hard frosty ground, whilst almost before the carriage has stopped the door is flung open, and out

rush or tumble four boys of different sizes, and a little girl about Ethel's age.

We need hardly ask who got the first kiss, as Walter and Eric at the same moment made a rush for mother, who, if she did have her head nearly pulled off and her hair hopelessly rumped, did not mind it a bit—and, if the truth is to be told, I think she rather liked it. It was so nice to have her boys home again—Walter, who was twelve years old, and Eric, who was ten.

One good hug, and then she turned to the cousins—Bertie, who was the same age as Walter and at the same school, and Willie and Florence, who were Arthur's and Ethel's age, and who had been escorted to Danehurst by the four big boys.

'How about tea?' said father after a few minutes, during which the whole party had gathered round the great open fireplace in the hall, and were chattering as only nine children can chatter, all speaking at the same moment, and all talking about different things.

Nothing but the magical word tea could have caused a diversion. In an instant the hubbub ceased, and the five travellers remembered that it was six o'clock, and that they were all starving. Hats and coats were hurriedly pulled off in the hall; and the boys, with the younger ones clinging to them, and little Mary mounted on Walter's shoulder, turned into the schoolroom, where the tea was all ready: for Mrs. Parker, the cook, understood boys' appetites, and knew they would not want to wait a minute.

What a tea it was! and how good home bread, and home marmalade, and home eggs tasted!—surely there

never was such a tea before! Arthur and Ethel, who had waited for the boys, were quite as hungry as any of them, and very glad to sit down to tea; whilst Teddy and Mary ran from one to another, getting tastes from every one, till nurse came and called them both to bed.

By half-past seven Florence's eyes were beginning to look very sleepy, though she declared she was not a bit tired; but, all the same, she thought the little white bed by the side of Ethel's looked very comfortable, and five minutes after she laid her head on the pillow she was fast asleep, for she had had a long journey that day.

'And now, boys, what have you got to show me?' said father later in the evening, when dinner was over, and all the children in bed except the three eldest. He had already guessed why Walter was in such a state to know if the luggage had come, and why he had rushed up after tea in such a hurry to unpack his box, and had come down with a suspicious-looking white paper parcel in his hand.

Walter's cheeks flushed with pleasure as he hastily unfolded the paper, and showed the two beautiful books he had won as prizes at school. He felt well repaid then by his parents' looks of pleasure for all the hard work he had gone through to gain them.

'And Eric and Bertie?' said Mr. Maitland questioningly.

'Oh, I had no chance,' said Bertie, 'as I was at home half the time with hooping-cough.'

'And I had no chance either,' said Eric, with a roguish look on his merry face, 'for I had something—I forget