

# **BROTHERS AND SISTERS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649405572

Brothers and Sisters by Marianne Farningham

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**MARIANNE FARNINGHAM**

**BROTHERS  
AND SISTERS**



# Brothers and Sisters.

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BY

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London :

J. CLARKE & CO., 13, FLEET STREET.  
HODDER & STOUGHTON, 27, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1873.

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# BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### SNAPDRAGON.

It was a beautiful morning. No one need have wished for a better, even at Christmas time. The ponds were frozen over, and the ice upon them was firm and strong. The trees looked almost as pretty as when they were covered with spring blossoms, for the snow had sprinkled them on the evening before, and now the sun, shining upon them, made the snow-crystals and icicles like diamonds. For, although it was December, the skies were blue, and the sun shone most pleasantly.

And Christmas-day had really come!

Hugh Clarence could scarcely believe it. He had been looking forward to it, and counting the days that lay between, so long, that now it seemed as if it could not be true.

But, as he lay in his warm, comfortable bed, watching the light that grew brighter every minute, he was soon convinced that this really was the important day.

"I am at home from school," he thought to himself, "and two days ago I helped cook stir the puddings, and chop the mincemeat, and last



night I half awoke to hear music and singing, and of course that meant wails and carols, so Christmas has come certainly ; and I wish everybody a merry Christmas and a happy New Year."

No one could thank Hugh for his wish, although he uttered it aloud, for he was lying alone in his own little room. He lay half an hour longer, thinking. Hugh did most of his thinking at that time in the morning. He was twelve years old, and a very active boy, not much given to reflection at other times. But in the quiet of the morning he thought of his own conduct on the day before, thought of his studies, and successes or failures in them, thought of his parents and brothers and sisters ; but most of all he thought of the future, and what grand things he would do in it.

But this morning one thought kept coming most curiously across all the others, and it was this : "I wonder if anything is the matter with Lettice."

Hugh Clarence was the oldest son in the family, but his sister Lettice was five years older than he. There were, besides these two, three other boys and two girls, Grace, next in age to Hugh, then Frank, Edward, Alfred, and Daisy.

When Hugh had lain awake some time, he heard a very gentle tapping at his door. "Who is there ?" he inquired, promptly.

"It is I, Grace. Are not you ready to get up, Hugh ? It is Christmas-day !"

"I know it is. Yes, I will get up directly."

In a very few minutes he was in the passage, where Grace was awaiting him.

"Let us go downstairs and see what we can find, Hugh."

They went together, and what they saw delighted them very greatly. The house seemed full of preparations for Christmas. The walls were decorated with holly, ivy, and mistletoe, and in one room there was a splendid Christmas-tree ready to be lighted in the evening. You see the Clarence children had much to make them happy.

Before long the household had been aroused by the bells, and all gathered in the breakfast-room, wishing each other a merry Christmas.

"Grace," whispered Hugh, as he took his seat beside his sister, "is anything the matter with Lettice?"

"No, I think not," said Grace. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I am afraid there is. She does not look quite like herself."

"Nonsense."

And, indeed, Hugh began to think it was a foolish idea which had entered his head, for in a very few minutes Lettice had taken her seat, and was the merriest of the group, with the colour flushing her face, as it always did when she was excited, and her eyes as bright as ever.

"What a happy day we are going to have!" said little Daisy, who, because she was the youngest, was the pet of them all.

"I hope we are," said Hugh. "Will Daisy come and see us skate upon the pond?"

"But we are all going to church," said Grace. "It is beautifully decorated, and a new anthem is to be sung. I shall go and hear it. Who will come with me?"

"But it is not Sunday, you know," said Edward; "we can skate first."

"So we can," said Hugh, "and that is what we will do."

In a very few minutes afterward the children were all on or about the pond, screaming with delight.

It is not necessary to tell you all they did, nor how they spent the day. If you will remember the happiest Christmas-day you have ever spent, you will be able to guess how the time passed with these brothers and sisters.

But when the evening came an incident occurred which spoiled the day.

Everything had passed off well and merrily until that time. There had been quite as much feasting as was good for the children, and plenty of games both indoors and out. As soon as it was really dark, the grand event of the evening took place, which was the lighting of the Christmas-tree, and the distribution of the prizes upon it. Even then no complaints were made, although it is very possible that all the children were not quite satisfied. It is a very difficult thing to please everybody, and Mr. and Mrs. Clarence could not always do that with their own children, although they tried. But if any disappointment was felt nothing was said about it.

Later in the evening they had snapdragon. Of course all the children pressed around eagerly enough, and by accident Hugh trod on Frank's toes. It is not pleasant to have one's toes trodden upon, of course, but it is not a thing to make a great fuss about. Frank might have removed his foot, and borne the pain patiently for a minute or two, when all would have been over; but instead of that he pushed Hugh roughly on one side,