

# **THE CURIOUS FRIENDS**

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The curious friends by C. J. Delagreve

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**C. J. DELAGREVE**

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FRIENDS**



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BY

C. J. DELAGREVE



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TO  
MY FRIEND  
R. M. GRIBBLE

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# THE CURIOUS FRIENDS

## CHAPTER I

### COLIN'S HOME

COLIN GILSON lived in a big house in London. If you had looked out of his nursery window, you would have seen chimney-pots of all shapes and sizes stretching for miles right away to the river. Down below there ran a long street with dozens of little people looking not much larger than beetles, walking on the pavements, and with carts, motors, and carriages hurrying along the roadway.

Colin used to stand flattening his nose against the pane watching them for hours together, wondering who they all were and where they might be going. He was a lonely little boy. At the time of which I write he was almost eight years old, and could only just remember his mother, who died when he was three and little more than a baby. She had been such a nice mother. She would come into the nursery and sit playing with him on the floor, and it was she who taught him to make enormous castles out of bricks, ships that one pushed across the floor, besides houses made with cushions and chairs, and the nursery tablecloth for a roof. She had very good sense; she knew without being told that a zoo is incomplete if the animals cannot be fed, and that a house is of no use if there are no meals to put on the table; one can, of course, imagine food, but the real thing is much nicer. So Colin's mother would make a pilgrimage down to the dining-room sideboard and return with gingerbread nuts or a

handful of the little square cheese biscuits, and, if they were playing "house," with a table napkin to act as table-cloth.

Colin had a soft-hearted nurse in those days, a rosy-cheeked country girl called Mary, who did not mind in the least about the mess they made with their games, but used to say when Mrs. Gilson apologized for the trouble they gave her, "Why, bless you, ma'am, I don't mind picking up Master Colin's bits of bricks, and it's a pleasure to see him so happy as he is."

On Sunday afternoons Mary went out, and Colin's mother would play with him all the time, and then put him to bed. She used to let him stay in his bath with his floating animals much longer than Mary did, and let him splash till he wet the ceiling; then she would heat the towel, and for still another treat would put a drop or two of eau-de-Cologne on his pillow. When he was safely in bed and his hair brushed, she would sit down beside him and tell him a story. Of course they were only very simple stories, like the story of the wolf who said, "I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house in," to the little pigs; but then, as I told you, Colin was only three when his mother died.

He was getting just a very little spoilt at that time because he was the only child, and had got the idea into his head that if one only roared loud enough for anything one got it sooner or later. Mrs. Gilson died quite suddenly one day, of heart failure, when she was out riding, and so that night she did not come up to say good-night to him as she usually did on her way down to dinner. He was listening for the sound of her silk dress on the landing, and his eyes were so heavy that he knew he should have been asleep long ago. He heard Mary and the housemaid talking in whispers on the landing.

"Mary," he called out, "where's my mother?"

"Hasn't no one told him yet?" he heard the housemaid say, "not master?"

"Master's shut himself up down in the study; he's fair beside himself with it all."

"Mother, mother!" shouted Colin, "you *are* so long!"

"Go and tell him, Mary," said the housemaid; "we don't want him to shout the house down, and it sounds so queer-like to hear him calling with the missus lying dead."

Mary went in and told him that the missus was dead, but Colin didn't know what that meant; he thought that if he howled she would be sure to come. He screamed and cried till he fell asleep, and did the same for many nights. Sometimes he would shout out that he had hurt himself, because he remembered that if his hand were only ever so slightly scratched she would come and kiss him and bind it up properly with lint. As the days went on he gradually gave up screaming, as he found it was no use.

His father, a distinguished archæologist, had shut himself up very much since Colin's mother died, and lived the life of a recluse among his books and papers. He was told by a sister who came to see him that Colin had been spoilt, so he sent away the rosy Mary, and Nurse Flinders came in her place. She was a Scotch-woman, as stiff as a poker, with very rigid notions as to how children should be brought up and nurseries should be kept clean. The other servants were kept greatly in awe of her, and spoke of Miss Flinders with bated breath.

Colin was afraid of her too, she was so tall and thin that her head seemed almost to touch the ceiling, and she would look at him over the tops of her spectacles as if she knew already of the naughty things he would do to-morrow. When she took him into the Park in her trim blue uniform, little stiff bonnet, and crisply starched bonnet-strings, Colin always thought how like a policeman she looked; in which case he must be the prisoner, and wondered if she might perhaps be the sister of the tall policeman at the corner.