

**SOME SHORT
STORIES:
FIRST SERIES, 1906**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649707935

Some Short Stories: First Series, 1906 by Blanche Atkinson

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BLANCHE ATKINSON

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STORIES:
FIRST SERIES, 1906**

Some Short Stories by Blanche Atkinson

Author of
"The Web of Life," "A Common-place Girl,"
"A Real Princess," "Dick's Hero," etc.

First Series.

1906

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of the First Series.

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TOM'S HOLIDAY.

ONE sunshiny morning a little girl, dressed in white, and with golden curls falling to her waist, stood with her nose flattened against a toy-shop window, and laughed at the antics of a new mechanical doll. Suddenly the laugh was echoed from behind her. She turned, and there stood the dirtiest little boy she had ever seen in her life, grinning with delight at the same toy. She stood aside for him to see it more clearly, and he pulled the front-lock of his shaggy hair and said, "Thank'ee, miss," with a pretty twinkle in his brown eyes.

"What's your name?" said the friendly little girl.

"Tom."

"Nothing more? That's a very little name!"

"No, nuthin'. What's yourn?"

"Marguerite Alexandrina Mackenzie," she said, with a proud voice, which impressed Tom wonderfully. "But I am rich, and I suppose you are not. I have five shillings, and that is my nurse looking at bonnets in that shop. Have you a nurse, Tom?"

"Not as I knows of," said Tom, "and I don't want one."

"But she would keep you clean," Marguerite remonstrated, "like me."

Then Tom's eyes opened very wide.

"Why, *you* are all white all over, like them beautiful fairies I see'd once in a theayter. No one couldn't make me like that."

Marguerite began to think Tom a very nice boy, though he was so dirty. She liked him to say she was like a beautiful fairy.

"But, Tom," she said, "if you have no nurse, why didn't your mother wash you this morning?"

"I hain't got none."

"Oh, poor boy!" Marguerite said, sadly; but Tom only grinned, merrily.

"I don't mind," he said; "I'd as lief be without. Boys' mothers only whack 'em."

Marguerite was shocked. There was something wicked about this boy, surely, to speak so of mothers. After a moment's pause, she said gravely: "But even your father should not let you come down to breakfast like that," and she glanced at his bare, black feet, at his ragged clothes, and smutty face.

"I hain't got no father, and I hain't had no breakfast!" Tom answered, rather enjoying the evident dismay of the little white-robed maiden.

"Oh dear! oh dear! how dreadful for you!" she cried, and forgot all about the shop window and the performing doll, and fell to thinking what could be done for this poor boy. She had read in her story books of poor little boys who were bad and wretched until they chanced to meet a kind lady or gentleman to befriend them and make them good and happy. Now, she was not a kind lady or gentleman, but Uncle Topham had told her that morning that she was a good little girl, and had given her five shillings to spend. The two half-crowns were jingling in her pocket, and she had almost made up her mind to go into the shop and buy the performing doll when Tom's laugh had interrupted her. But now she did not care to buy the toy. She wondered what the two half-crowns could do for Tom.

"Tom," she said, presently, "are you telling me the truth? Have you really no father and mother, and have you had no breakfast?"

"I'll take my oath!" Tom said. "I lives with old

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Sally Flannigan in the court down yon', and not a bite have I had since yesterday. But never mind, miss. It's not so bad when you're used to it, and when the swells come down the street, and the bobby's out of sight, I'll soon beg a copper or two." He looked her full in the face, and his white teeth gleamed as he smiled cheerfully. But Marguerite was troubled, and took the two half-crowns out of her pocket, and looked thoughtfully into the shop window. She had been strictly taught the modern principles of charity, and was afraid that it would be wrong to give money to the strange little boy; and yet—

Suddenly her eyes fell on a printed paper in the shop window, which announced a cheap excursion into the country on the next day—fare, there and back, five shillings; and she remembered that she had heard her Aunt say that morning at breakfast, "How can we expect poor little town children to be good when they never breathe clean air and never see the country—nor the beautiful flowers and trees—nor anything which God made, as He made it! They have no chance!" Marguerite was such a little girl, and thought her Aunt so wise and good, that she did not for a moment doubt the truth of what she said. If Tom could go into the country even for one day, perhaps he would have a chance of being good.

"Tom, have you ever been in the country?" she said, eagerly.

"No; never."

"Would you like to go?"

"Yes! The country's got cows and pigs and birds and rabbits—all alive! and apples and plums on trees, and flowers all over, by the streets, where you can pluck 'em, and——"

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Marguerite did not wait to hear more, but ran into the shop, and came out in a moment with a ticket in her hand.

"There!" she cried, pushing it into his hand—"there's a ticket to take you to the country to-morrow. And you must be sure to go, because the country will make you good and happy—at least it will give you a chance."

Tom stood gaping at her, with eyes and mouth wide open.

"You must be at the station at half-past six; and Tom, I do hope you will wash your hands and face, and put on your best clothes. Will you?"

"My best clothes!" Tom echoed, with a grin.

"Yes; and be sure——" but her advice was cut short. Nurse, having finished her inspection of the bonnets, rushed at Miss Marguerite, scolded her sharply for speaking to a dirty boy in the street, and walked her away.

Tom watched until the little white figure with the shining curls was out of sight. Then he turned head over heels on the pavement; and then, seeing a jolly-faced old lady at a shop door, ran up to her and whined at her side until she gave him a penny, with which he darted away down a side street. In a few minutes he dived into a cellar, and came up again with a piece of bread and a trotter and he seemed very happy as he breakfasted leisurely. It was a hot morning, so it was pleasant to saunter on the shady side of the street, and he had a great deal to think about. In fact, his face became very grave, and once or twice he stopped at a shop window, and looked anxiously at the reflection of himself in the glass.

"No; they won't do for best, anyhow! and I'm

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afear'd I shan't be took to the country at all like this,"⁵ he said to himself, after the last view he had taken of his rags. By-and-by, his breakfast eaten, he set off quickly towards the river, and there, playing in the black mud which is left at low tide by the great black river of the great city where Tom lived, he found a party of boys. With them he held grave counsel. "Faix!" said Pat Molloy, when he had told his story, "and if it's me coat'll fit ye, ye're welcome. And it's a best coat for a prince, shure!"

"Tam," said Sandy, pulling his cap off his shock of red hair, "I'll lend you my cap if ye'll bring me a live bird from the country."

And so Tom was rigged out; and though Marguerite might not have admired the "best clothes," Tom and his companions were delighted with them. The cap slipped over his nose unless he kept his head very stiff, one boot buttoned and the other laced, and he had some trouble in keeping them on his feet. But it was a wonderful thing to have boots at all. Pat's coat, no doubt, had been handsome in its youth, but the black had faded to green, and there were fringes and tatters all round, and the fit—well, even the boys owned it was a thought too big. Still, if one's trousers are not above suspicion, that is almost a virtue in a coat, and when it was buttoned up it hid all Tom's rags and only showed its own.

When evening came on, Tom and his friends, who all lived in the same part of the town, went home. Children, I wonder if you ever saw such a home as little Tom's home. Out of a narrow, dirty street a passage led into a small, dirty court. Every house was miserable and squalid, with broken windows and filthy rags stuffed into the holes. There were broken