

Scott

### Crackers & Milk

I wasn't lost in the woods or stranded on a desert island. I wasn't in a strange city with no funds. But I was in the friendly home of my Uncle Charles and Aunt Gert the night I practically starved to death.

*Child?* I had arrived fresh from the country at an unfortunate hour--too late for dinner and too early for supper. My 3-hour train trip had given me a healthy appetite, so I was looking forward to supper with pleasant anticipation, to put it mildly. Aunt Gert was employed, though, and had to leave the house before suppertime to report for work. I was to have supper, so I thought, with my Uncle when he got home from the office. So I amused myself by reading and watching for Uncle Charles' arrival.

He came when my hunger had reached the point of a really excellent appetite. After greeting me cordially, he went to the kitchen and soon I heard the pleasant sound of dishes and silverware being placed on the table. Timidly I waited for Uncle to call me to supper. But no invitation came. Instead, I heard only the continued, subdued rattle and clank of dishes, the unmistakable sound of a meal being eaten. Gradually I realized that he wasn't going to call me. He thought I had already eaten supper! Thinking I might be mistaken, I waited a little longer. I was suddenly startled by his voice and almost got to my feet. But he only said, "It's getting colder out." This didn't interest me at all,

but I agreed that it certainly was.

My thoughts jumped back and forth. I knew I should tell him I had not eaten, but I didn't know how to introduce the subject. As the minutes passed, it became more and more difficult to do so. Then I thought, "Maybe I can wait until he goes out to pick up Aunt Gert." I was afraid of my Uncle's sarcastic wit if I confessed my stupidity. I decided to go hungry rather than tell him of my predicament.

Uncle finished his meal and washed his dishes. Every rattle of dish and clank of silverware sent fresh hunger pains through my stomach. I was glad when he put the last dish away and came into the living room. He tried to entertain me by talking about the lives of famous people. He was an avid reader of biographies. But I could not pretend interest--not under the circumstances. Finding me a dull audience, he buried his nose in his biography and silence descended. I tried to read, too. It isn't strange that I never could remember what book I had in my hand.

I began to count the hours and minutes until Uncle would leave the house. I made plans as to how I would snatch something to eat before he and Aunt Gert came back. Surely he would go soon! But he was ~~he was~~ very much absorbed in his book and made no move to leave until shortly before 11.00 p.m.

Finally, when my head had grown very light and my stomach was a tight ball, Uncle announced he was going. As he prepared to leave, my eyes followed him about the room. He put on his suit coat and carefully adjusted his necktie. He

put on his hat with such deliberate movements that I almost screamed. After giving his appearance a final checking in the mirror over the mantel, he opened the door and said, "We'll be right back." Then the door closed behind him, his footsteps receded, the car door slammed and the motor roared. That was enough!

I made a dash for the kitchen. With trembling hands I took a bottle of milk from the refrigerator and filled a glass. Lifting it to my mouth with one hand and reaching for crackers with the other, I consumed as much as I dared in five minutes. Since I didn't know how soon my Uncle and Aunt would return, I hurried to wash the glass and brush up the crumbs. When they came back 20 minutes later, I was again sitting in the living room, this time remembering the astonishing discovery I had made. But I could never tell my Uncle Charles and Aunt Gert how wonderful was the flavor of plain, ordinary soda crackers and cold, sweet milk.

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