

One

THE WRONG DOOR

Read Aloud

AT: as we read,
underline details
that show how P+D
meet, first impressions

THIS IS A STORY ABOUT SOMETHING that happened long ago when your grandfather was a child. It is a very important story because it shows how all the comings and goings between our own world and the land of Narnia first began.

In those days Mr. Sherlock Holmes was still living in Baker Street and the Bastables were looking for treasure in the Lewisham Road. In those days, if you were a boy you had to wear a stiff Eton collar every day, and schools were usually nastier than now. But meals were nicer; and as for sweets, I won't tell you how cheap and good they were, because it would only make your mouth water in vain. And in those days there lived in London a girl called Polly Plummer.

She lived in one of a long row of houses which were all joined together. One morning she was out in the back garden when a boy scrambled up from the garden next door and put his face over the wall. Polly was very surprised because up till now

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there had never been any children in that house, but only Mr. Ketterley and Miss Ketterley, a brother and sister, old bachelor and old maid, living together. So she looked up, full of curiosity. The face of the strange boy was very grubby. It could hardly have been grubbier if he had first rubbed his hands in the earth, and then had a good cry, and then dried his face with his hands. As a matter of fact, this was very nearly what he had been doing.

"Hullo," said Polly.

"Hullo," said the boy. "What's your name?"

"Polly," said Polly. "What's yours?"

"Digory," said the boy.

"I say, what a funny name!" said Polly.

"It isn't half so funny as Polly," said Digory.

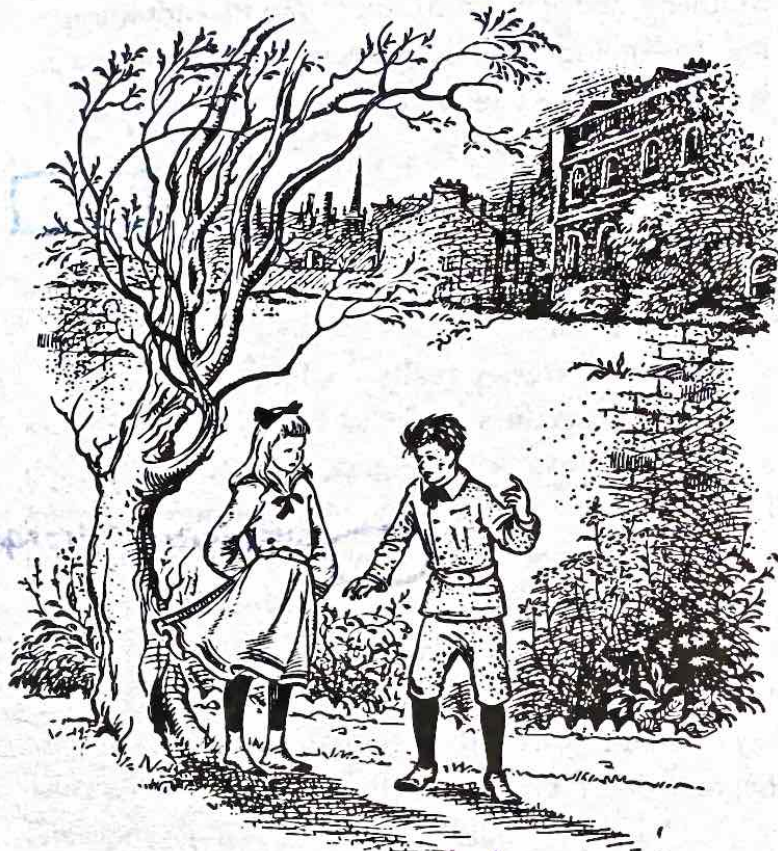
"Yes it is," said Polly.

"No, it isn't," said Digory.

"At any rate I *do* wash my face," said Polly, "which is what you need to do; especially after—" and then she stopped. She had been going to say "After you've been blubbing," but she thought that wouldn't be polite.

"All right, I have then," said Digory in a much louder voice, like a boy who was so miserable that he didn't care who knew he had been crying. "And so would you," he went on, "if you'd lived all your life in the country and had a pony, and a river at the bottom of the garden, and then been brought

very unhappy or distressed



to live in a beastly Hole like this."

"London isn't a Hole," said Polly indignantly. But the boy was too wound up to take any notice of her, and he went on—

"And if your father was away in India—and you had to come and live with an Aunt and an Uncle who's mad (who would like that?)—and if the

insane / mentally ill (not angry)

reason was that they were looking after your Mother—and if your Mother was ill and was going to going to die." Then his face went the wrong sort of shape as it does if you're trying to keep back your tears.

"I didn't know. I'm sorry," said Polly humbly.

And then, because she hardly knew what to say, and also to turn Digory's mind to cheerful subjects, she asked:

"Is Mr. Ketterley really mad?"

"Well either he's mad," said Digory, "or there's some other mystery. He has a study on the top floor and Aunt Letty says I must never go up there. Well, that looks fishy to begin with. And then there's another thing. Whenever he tries to say anything to me at meal times—he never even tries to talk to *her*—she always shuts him up. She says, 'Don't worry the boy, Andrew' or 'I'm sure Digory doesn't want to hear about *that*' or else 'Now, Digory, wouldn't you like to go out and play in the garden?'"

① "What sort of things does he try to say?"

"I don't know. He never gets far enough. But there's more than that. One night—it was last night in fact—as I was going past the foot of the attic-stairs on my way to bed (and I don't much care for going past them either) I'm sure I heard a yell."

"Perhaps he keeps a mad wife shut up there."

③ "Yes, I've thought of that."

"Or perhaps he's a coiner"

"Or he might have been a pirate, like the man at the beginning of *Treasure Island*, and be always hiding from his old shipmates."/>

④ "How exciting!" said Polly. "I never knew your house was so interesting."/>

"You may think it interesting," said Digory. "But you wouldn't like it if you had to sleep there. How would you like to lie awake listening for Uncle Andrew's step to come creeping along the passage to your room? And he has such awful eyes."

That was how Polly and Digory got to know one another: and as it was just the beginning of the summer holidays and neither of them was going to the sea that year, they met nearly every day.

RA Their adventures began chiefly because it was one of the wettest and coldest summers there had been for years. That drove them to do indoor things: you might say, indoor exploration. It is wonderful how much exploring you can do with a stump of candle in a big house, or in a row of houses. Polly had discovered long ago that if you opened a certain little door in the box-room attic of her house you would find the cistern and a dark place behind it which you could get into by a little careful climbing. The dark place was like a long tunnel with brick wall on one side and sloping roof on the other. In the roof there were little chunks of

someone fantasy who makes a lot of fake money

RA

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water tank

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AT: intrusive narration

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light between the slates. There was no floor in this tunnel: you had to step from rafter to rafter, and between them there was only plaster. If you stepped on this you would find yourself falling through the ceiling of the room below. Polly had used the bit of the tunnel just beside the cistern as a smugglers' cave. She had brought up bits of old packing cases and the seats of broken kitchen chairs, and things of that sort, and spread them across from rafter to rafter so as to make a bit of floor. Here she kept a cash-box containing various treasures, and a story she was writing and usually a few apples. She had often drunk a quiet bottle of ginger-beer in there: the old bottles made it look more like a smugglers' cave.

1 Digory quite liked the cave (she wouldn't let

him see the story) but he was more interested in exploring.

"Look here," he said. "How long does this tunnel go on for? I mean, does it stop where your house ends?"

8 "No," said Polly. "The walls don't go out to the roof. It goes on. I don't know how far."

"Then we could get the length of the whole row of houses."

9 "So we could," said Polly. "And oh, I say!" "What?"

"We could get *into* the other houses."

"Yes, and get taken up for burglars! No thanks."

RA "Don't be so jolly very clever. I was thinking of the house beyond yours."

"What about it?"

"Why, it's the empty one. Daddy says it's always been empty ever since we came here."

"I suppose we ought to have a look at it then," said Digory. He was a good deal more excited than you'd have thought from the way he spoke. For of course he was thinking, just as you would have been, of all the reasons why the house might have been empty so long. So was Polly. Neither of them said the word "haunted." And both felt that once the thing had been suggested, it would be

feeble not to do it. weak

"Shall we go and try it now?" said Digory.

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what do they decide to do?

get the

how

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Why do the children explore inside where do they go?