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READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The index finger of Sallie Hicks

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Sallie Hicks was a little girl who was usually well-behaved, but she had one bad habit, caused by the index finger of her right hand. Sallie's right index finger would get into things it shouldn't, and this caused a lot of trouble for Sallie's mother. And Sallie's punishments were usually caused by that unruly right index finger...

One day, Sallie's mother put a bowl of hot jam on the kitchen table to cool. She told Sallie it was hot and she must not touch it. But as soon as her mother left the kitchen and the cook looked the other way, Sallie Hicks forgot her mother's warning and the naughty right index finger went straight into the hot jam.

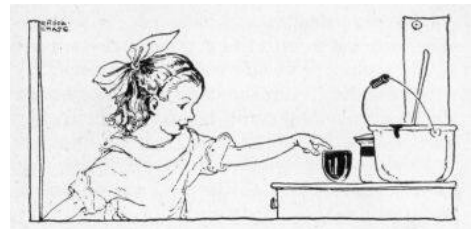
Oh, how Sallie screamed in pain! And she completely forgot to put the finger in her mouth to taste the jam, her finger burned so badly. Thick, big tears ran down Sallie's pretty pink cheeks, and her mother and grandmother, and also the cook, came running to see what was wrong. The little index finger told the story itself and had to be wrapped in a soft piece of cloth with cooling ointment.

"I've told you that you would burn that finger one day," said her mother, "and now that you didn't listen to me, you must sit in the big chair in the hall until lunchtime and not talk to anyone. I want you to think about that naughty finger."

Sallie's grandmother walked past her in the hallway, leaned over and kissed her. "I'm sorry that Grandmother's little girl was so naughty and got punished," she said. "But good little girls listen to their mothers and don't get burned fingers."

Sallie saw her grandmother go upstairs and then looked at the picture of her great-grandmother on the wall.

"I wonder if Grandmother Great ever had to punish her granddaughter," thought Sallie. "I wonder if grandmothers were always very good little girls?"



Sallie also looked at her Grandfather Great and wondered how it was that, although they were the father and mother of her own dear grandmother, they had beautiful black hair, smooth and shiny, while her grandmother and grandfather had white hair. Sallie looked at the index finger that was completely

wrapped in cloth, and she imagined how terrible it would be if her finger stayed that way even as she grew. Then she looked at Grandmother Great again and her eyes seemed to look straight at that little burnt index finger.

Sallie hid her right hand behind her, but Grandmother Great's eyes still looked straight at her. Sallie blinked her eyes and looked again, because she thought Grandmother Great was smiling at her. Sallie looked closely at the picture and Grandmother Great seemed to nod her head at Sallie.

"Did your little girl ever do anything naughty?" asked Sallie. Grandmother Great smiled. "I had a few little girls, but they were all good little girls," said Grandmother Great.

"Always?" asked Sallie.

"Yes, I can't remember them ever doing anything naughty," said Grandmother Great. "But you know, dear, it's been a long time. I had my little girls a long time ago."

"Maybe you forget when it's been so long," said Sallie. "Did your little girls never put their index finger in something to taste it?"

"Oh dear, yes! I remember now that your grandmother once put her index finger, the right index finger it was too, in the wringer wheel to see what would happen," said Grandmother Great.

"Did she cry?" asked Sallie.

"Oh dear, yes, the poor little girl. She cried very hard. I was so scared that I cried too. Her finger never grew back quite right because of it," said Grandmother Great with a sigh.

"Do mothers cry when little girls burn themselves by sticking their fingers in things they shouldn't?" asked Sallie.



"Of course they do, my dear. Mothers often cry for their little girls when they are naughty," said Grandmother Great.

"I don't want mother to cry," said Sallie.

"Of course you don't," said Grandmother Great. "So you won't stick your finger in anything again, will you?" Before Sallie could promise Grandmother Great that she would be a good girl, she heard someone calling out, "Sallie, Sallie, come on, we're having lunch." Sallie opened her eyes, realizing she had been sleeping and dreaming, and there stood her mother in the doorway.

"Mother, do mothers forget how naughty their little girls were as they grow up?" asked Sallie.

"I think so," said her mother. "I hope you'll be good before you grow up, and that I'll forget how naughty you were this morning."

"Grandmother Great told me that mothers forget that their little girls were ever naughty as they grow up," said Sallie.

"You mean your grandmother told you, not Grandmother Great," said Sallie's mother. "You never met Grandmother Great, my dear."

"Well, she just told me," said Sallie, "and she said that grandmother once stuck her finger in the wringer of the washing machine and cried because Grandmother, who was her little girl at the time, cried and got hurt."

"What is the child talking about?" said Sallie's mother.

"She was sleeping and dreaming," said Sallie's grandmother, as she took Sallie in her arms. "I showed her my finger where it hurt when I was a little girl and told her to watch her finger, or she might hurt herself terribly, like I did."

"Did you think the picture of Grandmother Great was talking to you?" she asked Sallie.

"She really did," said Sallie, "and she said that mothers always cry when their little girls are naughty. Oh, dear mother, I don't want to make you cry, and I won't stick my finger in anything anymore, I promise. I'll never do it again!" sobbed Sallie.

"She's only half awake," said her grandmother. Then Sallie's mother took her in her arms and kissed her. Sallie kept her promise, but she often dreamed that Grandmother Great was talking to her. Her right index finger no longer caused her any trouble. Sallie Hicks still often looks at the pictures of Grandfather and Grandmother Great in the hallway. But Grandmother Great has not spoken to her since that day. But Sallie Hicks smiles at her and sometimes her eyes seem to smile back, and Sallie wonders if it really happens or not.

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