

THE TWO LINTIES

CLARE MALLORY

Margin Notes Books

Published by Margin Notes Books, 2012

First published by Oxford University Press, 1950

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A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-9564626-2-6

www.marginnotesbooks.com

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Published by Margin Notes Books

5 White Oak Square,

London Road

Swanley

Kent BR8 7AG

Printed in Great Britain by the MPG Books Group,

Bodmin and King's Lynn

To,

Dorothy Neal White,

*herself a contributor to children's pages in the days
before she became the distinguished author of
"About Books for Children."*

CHAPTER ONE

Just Lintie

Lintie's adventure began in the orphanage kitchen. Nobody seems to expect thrilling things to happen in kitchens, and yet, when you think of it, they are the places where turkeys are roasted, and apple jelly made, and birthday cakes iced and decorated with pink scrolls and silver balls; and that's all exciting, especially if it is Christmas time, or you are the one with the birthday.

But, to be truthful, nothing like this had ever happened in the orphanage kitchen. In December, when most people bought turkeys or geese or fowls for the great day, the butcher in the Crescent sent up a large shoulder of mutton as a present, and this was stuffed with breadcrumbs and onions till it became colonial goose—very good, too, but not nearly so interesting.

As for jams and jellies, the orphans had no idea of the fun there is in stirring big pans of fruit and sugar, or in watching bags of cooked apples dripping all the fragrant pink juice into basins. Their jam arrived in great crocks straight from the factory, because it was Mr. Slocombe's annual donation; he liked the delivery van to take it in one trip. He wasn't a mean man, and there was always plenty. But he did lack something, and that was imagination. The year he despatched all plum the orphans felt they never wanted to see a plum again; and the very next time it was quince, just as bad. I can tell you that if you have bread and jam and cocoa for tea every evening, the flavour of the jam is very important. Lintie could still remember the tremendous joy when once a jar of

raspberry was delivered by mistake, and the girls on table duty had half of it into the dishes before Miss Rolfe realised and confiscated the rest for Miss Herbert and herself. Still, everyone had had a taste. But red-letter days like that were far from frequent.

As for birthday cakes—well, Lintie had arrived at the orphanage when she was three months old, and was now over eleven, and she hadn't even seen one except in shops; the taste was beyond her imagination. Though, as a matter of fact, she had an unusual amount of that, and it ran in some strange directions which you are going to hear about.

She was tall for her age, and rather thin; but that was an advantage. The orphanage frocks were made long to allow for growth, and the tucks and wide seams were bulky; so that a plump person like Muriel Spragge seemed bigger than ever when she had a new dress. However, they hung well on Lintie's spare form. And the orphans were lucky over clothes. Mr. Ashley, the draper, was one of their trustees, and he liked to see children wearing pretty colours. So the bolts of material he presented each autumn and spring were really nice. And Miss Herbert and the older girls sewed well, if on utilitarian lines.

Lintie was wearing her best frock of two winters before, now let out to its fullest length and rather shabby. But it was a warm, cherry-coloured woollen, which suited her dark hair. She had long black plaits, tied with ribbons the same shade as the dress—thoughtfully added by the artistic Mr. Ashley. She looked very neat, but most of the outfit was concealed under a voluminous blue checked overall; for, though this was early spring, and a Saturday afternoon, and school holidays, she was engaged in cleaning the silver.

If you had glimpsed her sparkling blue eyes under

their lashes, you wouldn't have needed to ask why. People with eyes like that are pretty often kept in and deprived of treats, even on a sunny half-holiday. It was by no means the first time that twenty-nine orphans had gone for an outing with Miss Herbert, the Matron, or her depressed-looking assistant, Miss Rolfe, leaving Lintie Oliver, the thirtieth, at home alone with a holiday task.

Lintie's mischievous glance was wandering over the kitchen now, and she was recalling one or two incidents in which she had featured. There was the time she had been cocoa attendant, and the great chocolatey cauldron had reminded her of the geysers and boiling mud at Rotorua, in the North Island. She had beckoned Ruth Soper over to see, and they had both been so completely absorbed in the likeness that the cocoa rose up in a rich, brown wave, and overflowed before either thought of lowering the gas jet. Oh, dear, what a mess! And when Miss Herbert arrived, what an uproar!

"But we had it in Geography," Lintie had protested. "Miss Stevenson said they were one of New Zealand's scenic marvels, like the glaciers, and the lakes, and Milford Sound in this island! She said true New Zealanders should be proud of their country and its unique feathers!"

"Unique nuisance, that's what you are! Not a particle of sense, and so much explanation; wait till I meet that Miss Stevenson of yours! She won't be letting you off early for good conduct so much when I've had a word in her ear! Out of my way now!" Miss Herbert flapped the floorcloth, her face red with bending and indignation. "Goodness only knows what fancy ideas you'll be having next! Leading poor Ruth into trouble as well—you ought to be ashamed!"

That blew over, of course, and the next incident

involved the plump Muriel. She and Lintie had charge of puddings that week; it was summer, and they got up specially early to prepare them before school. Miss Herbert had given careful instructions about this recipe: the baking dish was to be lined with a biscuit mixture, the fruit to be stewed separately, and when the crust had cooled the two were to be combined; that would be done by Miss Herbert herself, later.

Muriel, as the older and more responsible, mixed the butter and sugar and flour, while Lintie peeled and stoned tired-looking peaches, and then set them on the range with a little water in the saucepan. Then she prowled around the kitchen, ending up at the table where the crust was being prepared.

"I say, it tastes all right! This ought to be better than that beastly old semolina!"

Muriel was thirteen, and a serious, conscientious person.

"You mustn't touch it, Lintie. And Miss Herbert will be angry if she hears you talking about the food."

"Oh, bother Bertie! She won't be down here at this hour, anyway—too busy seeing the babies are up. And you wouldn't be mean enough to tell on me, would you, Muriel? You're too sporting for that!"

Lintie could be very cajoling, and Muriel was fond of her. She yielded weakly to the tasting, and then rolled out her paste, her brown eyes soberly estimating the dimensions of the baking dish which was to hold it.

"Line the tin, greasing it lightly," she read from the cookery book. "Do it for me, will you, Lintie—there's a buttery paper here."

"I hate separator butter," said Lintie chattily. "It tastes too much like cows, don't you think?" She darted a glance at the absorbed Muriel, and when there was no

answer her eyes began to sparkle. She turned the dish upside down.

“It’s the inside you’re to grease,” Muriel corrected her.

Lintie’s blue gaze was wide and innocent.

“Oh, I don’t think so, Muriel. The recipe doesn’t say so, and don’t you remember Bertie talking? She wanted you to be most frightfully particular about the oven, and the crust was to fit over the dish just perfectly, and you weren’t to open the oven door more than once——”

Muriel nodded, perplexed. That was exactly what the Matron had told her the previous evening. Lintie had a splendid memory—everybody knew that. Why, she could recite poetry by the yard! Muriel, who was in the Second Form with her, though she was older, had a wholesome respect for the little girl who sat at the top of Miss Stevenson’s class. And years of painful experience had not completely taught her to avoid being involved in Lintie’s crimes.

Lintie was watching her speculatively. Muriel was a dear old donkey, very open to suggestion.

“And you can’t have forgotten her telling you to cover the outside? You’d better do it just as she said, Muriel. There’ll be no end of a row if you don’t.”

“Well——” Muriel weakened. “If you’re certain,” she finished doubtfully.

“Nobody can be certain about cooking, can they? But here, it’s on—a jolly good fit, too! The fire’s just right, so in with it! Let me have the trimmings, do! Wonder if I can sneak some jam for them?”

Muriel bore the inverted baking dish to the oven, her scruples overcome. She and Lintie were washing the bowls she had used when the Matron came in five minutes later.

“How long has it been in? I’ll just take a peep.”

Miss Herbert opened the door gently, but started back with a little shriek.

“Muriel Spragge! What on earth have you done? You silly girl, this pastry is coming to meet me!”

“Clever of it!” Lintie murmured, smothering a chuckle. Muriel, her heavy, good-natured face perturbed, went over to the range.

“I lined the outside, as—as you said, Miss Herbert.”

“The outside? Who told you such nonsense? Don’t you see how it’s spread on to the tray? This is ruined! You couldn’t have paid any attention to the orders I gave you! Who ever heard of lining baking tins on the outside? The very idea! You must have been dreaming! Clean it up at once, and then I’ll deal with you!”

Lintie was perfectly straightforward—at least, at this stage: it was before the adventure led her on the downward path. She had no intention of allowing Muriel to take the blame for her own mischievous suggestion. The next moment she had owned up, and the wrath was descending on her.

“Of all the naughty, inconsiderate, careless children, you’re the worst, Lintie Oliver! Never happy unless you’re up to some prank or other! After the good upbringing you’ve had here at St. Anne’s, every advantage and no trouble spared! You ought to show a little appreciation of all that’s been done for you, instead of ruining good food at the price it is! Scrub the tray, Muriel, and don’t throw away that top part of the crust—we may be able to use it. Attend to your work in future, and don’t listen to this foolish child; as for you, Lintie, you’ll march home directly school’s finished for the whole of the next fortnight, and mend stockings till tea-time. No, it doesn’t matter if you do miss the play practices. It serves you

right if they put you out of it altogether. It might teach you a much-needed lesson!”

They didn’t put her out, of course: she was the best at acting in the form. But after that she was kept on vegetables, and months of potato-peeling can become very monotonous. Usually the household duties rotated; the under tens didn’t have much variety, just dishes and table-setting and simple things like topping and tailing gooseberries, but the older girls cleaned and polished, mended, sewed, and prepared meals. There wasn’t much spare time for anyone, because they all attended school; they had to, until they were fifteen. After that some went to work, but others entered the secretarial college and learnt typing and shorthand—they could stay at St. Anne’s till they were seventeen. Lintie, who had yearnings for University, pondered her chances of it as she peeled endless potatoes; but optimist though she was by disposition she knew her hopes would almost certainly be disappointed. She never even mentioned them, because there was nobody to understand. The consoling thought was that she was not twelve, till Christmas, and if she was dux, surely she would be allowed to go on to the High School for the next three years?

She was not clever at housework, but several of the other girls were. St Anne’s within was spotlessly clean, though the furniture was shabby. Outside it was a grim old building, so close to the city industrial area that it seemed to share in the dust and dreariness of factory and foundry. There was a straggling lawn in front, bordered by disheartened primulas; and at the back ample space for wash-house and clothes lines and a vegetable garden. The other orphanage in Hillingdon was supported by a wealthy church, and was run on a cottage system, everything was modern and pretty. But St Anne’s was old

and poor. The thirty were well enough fed and dressed, but there was no money left over for renovations to the buildings or additional comforts, and certainly none for luxuries like the music lessons Ruth Soper longed for.

It did not occur to Lintie to envy children in ordinary homes, but she felt quite fiercely about the inmates of the other orphanage. Some of them were in her class at school, and Miss Herbert for one would have been astonished at the passionate loyalty of her naughtiest charge—who never let herself be beaten at anything by these detested rivals. Let them have pink bedspreads and curtains to match, and parties and film treats and regular pocket-money. They shouldn't have the satisfaction of being top of the form, or leader of the drill squad, or heroine of the Christmas play!

Still, they could easily get their own back by teasing Lintie and Muriel about the big square of brass affixed to the front gate of St. Anne's. It was unfortunately worded, and generations of orphans had had cause to regret the taste of their founder, and his disastrous vocabulary. For what the plate said was:

“ST. ANNE'S ORPHANAGE

This institution has been founded by the generous benefaction of the late NATHANIEL FULLER to provide asylum for the indigent daughters of deceased gentle-people.”

There was more besides, but this was much the worst—surely the unhappiest phrase ever perpetrated in metal and displayed for all the world to see!

School always provided someone to pretend to be mixed up between “deceased” and “diseased,” and the word “gentle” gave rise to endless jests, especially at hot-

tempered Lintie's expense. But above all, "asylum" had only one meaning for Form Two—a place for the insane; and the unofficial name of St. Anne's among the lively section of the class was "the loony bin." Lintie came home the worse for wear many a time after battles caused by this insult, and fell into fresh trouble on arrival because of her appearance and the state of her clothes. Muriel, a more equable soul, and Ruth, quiet and aloof, managed to be on good terms even with the inmates of the handsome Lundy Homes but they never succeeded in restraining Lintie. It was nothing to see her flame scarlet with the teasing, and charge into a throng of Lundyites, fists up and pigtails flying. She often won, too. The Olivers had good fighting blood.

It had not been rivalry that led to to-day's punishment, however. For one reason, these were the spring holidays, and there was nobody to provoke a squabble. Who would scrap with good old Muriel or gentle Ruth, or the big girls at the secretarial college, or the little ones? Lintie got on specially well with the little ones: they liked listening to her stories, and were so quiet when she put them to bed that even Miss Herbert admitted that the young monkey had some good in her, and Miss Rolfe nodded her melancholy assent.

No, that Saturday opened well. It was a busy morning for Lintie as well as the rest; tables to clear after breakfast, dormitories to mop and polish, linen to change, mending, tidying of drawers, hair-washing, supervision of the smallest—St. Anne's did not take babies now, but the four- and five-year-olds provided plenty of work. Then there were the potatoes as usual, and turnips, too—horrid big things, so hard to cut. Finally they all had to get ready for the afternoon outing, except the few who were on tables and dishes that day. The rest appeared at the meal

in their second-best blue frocks, hair tidy, finger nails clean; overalls covered the dresses for protection, but apart from that the orphans were in order for a prompt departure. Upstairs, coats and tams and gloves lay on the narrow iron beds. The little children walked slowly, and the Matron intended that they should get as much benefit as possible from the thin spring sunshine.

Nancy Hill and Beth Morrison had been the cooks, and the stew that opened the meal was good; but the steamed pudding that followed had been mixed with a heavy hand, or else allowed to go off the boil. Lintie tackled hers cheerfully, as usual, but found the going difficult. On a day like this, bright if not warm, one somehow tired of winter food and longed for fruit, and salads, and dainty attractive dishes. Muriel, on Lintie's right, was stolidly eating her way through; little Eva Barclay on the other side was indulging in the crime known as "picking."

"Eat it up, Eva," Miss Rolfe adjured her. "No nonsense, now, or you'll find yourself at home this afternoon! Lintie, aren't you ready for some more?"

It was then that Lintie had her inspiration. She said, "No, thank you!" with emphasis, and then leaned forward so that Ruth, seated opposite, could hear:

"This pudding is as hard as lead;
Another slice and I'll be dead!"

There was a shout of laughter; Phyllis Grieve had heard, and not much was required to amuse her. Ruth joined in, Nancy grinned ruefully—she was a decent sort—and Eva clamoured, "Say it again, Lintie! Please say it again!" And leaning over in her eagerness, she sent her cup of milk flying. The contents streamed over the cloth.

"Oh, golly, that's torn it! Fresh on for dinner, too!" Lintie gazed at the table in dismay.

Miss Rolfe rapped sternly.

“Who did that? Eva Barclay? I’ve warned you once already, you naughty girl. No outing for you to-day; and Muriel, put it in to soak afterwards.”

“It was my fault,” said Lintie automatically. She often said that these words should be inscribed on her tombstone, because they were seldom off her lips.

“I might have known,” retorted Miss Rolfe, pursing her mouth in imitation of the Matron. “Well, you heard what I said to Eva. Home you stay, and just to remind you that it means work to keep this house in order, you can clean the silver. No more pudding for you, either.”

“That’s one good thing,” Lintie muttered rebelliously, but Miss Rolfe pretended not to hear. She was not nearly such a firm disciplinarian as Miss Herbert, but sometimes she pounced like this and felt a glow of satisfaction from her severity—unaware that the orphans disliked her on account of these varying moods, while they respected the Matron’s fairness.

Lintie was glowing, too, but with temper. Even in school holidays there were very few treats, for Miss Herbert looked upon the three weeks’ break from lessons as an excellent opportunity for cleaning the house thoroughly, and for getting ahead with the summer sewing. The days ran to a routine, just as in term time. And this was the Saturday on which they were to go to the Public Gardens to look at the narcissi, and prunus, and early hyacinths—all the spring flowers Lintie particularly liked. It was mean!

And now, an hour later, she stared out of the kitchen window and saw only the flapping tablecloth, drying after Muriel’s efforts with it. And it was only half-past two, though, as she had flung herself into work with vigour; the knives, forks and teaspoons already lay in shining

rows in front of her. There were only a few in the box still to be done. Another fifteen minutes would see the task finished, and the girls would not be back till five. She had nothing to read, and was not allowed to go out by herself; long, dreary hours stretched ahead.

Her eyes turned from the window to the table at which she sat; it was covered with newspaper, to prevent polish or knife powder from making marks on the well-scrubbed wood.

And at that moment she saw it. The adventure had begun.