

the world isn't the fire lit he said sharply. you must have known i couldn't sit without a fire on a cold evening like this; and the wind sang dismally in the joints of the windows to emphasise the dreariness of the situation. it ain't nothing to do with me, answered the red armed, coal besmeared hoyden, looking up from her knees; it's the missus. 'he was put out with the coal bill last time, she says, 'and i ain't going to risk lighting up his fire with coal at sixpence a scuttle, and me not knowing whether hes coming back to night. well, you might see at any rate that the fire was properly laid, the architect said, as the lighting process gave evident indications of failing for the third time. i do my best, she said in a larmoyant tone, but i cant do everything, what with having to cook, and clean, and run up and down stairs with notes, and answer the bell every other minute to lords. has lord blandamer been here asked westray. yes, he came yesterday and twice to day to see you, she said, and then he left a note. there tis and she pointed to the end of the mantelpiece. westray looked round, and saw an envelope edged in black. he knew the strong, bold hand of the superscription well enough, and in his present mood it sent something like a thrill of horror through him. you needn't wait, he said quickly to the servant; it isn't your fault at all about the fire. im sure its going to burn now. the girl rose quickly to her feet, gave an astonished glance at the grate, which was once more enveloped in impotent idle, he may say to himself: now i might get well, but my little girl at home does not love me, for she would rather sit with her hands in her lap than sort herbs for her sick father. then nefert turned to a large group of the girls, who were sorting plants, and said: do you, children, know the origin of all these wholesome, healing herbs the good horus went out to fight against seth, the murderer of his father, and the horrible enemy wounded horus in the eye in the struggle; but the son of osiris conquered, for good always conquers evil. but when isis saw the bad wound, she pressed her sons head to her bosom, and her heart was as sad as that of any poor human mother that holds her suffering child in her arms. and she thought: how easy it is to give wounds, and how hard it is to heal them and so she wept; one tear after another fell on the earth, and wherever they wetted the ground there sprang up a kindly healing plant. isis is good cried a little girl opposite to her. mother says isis loves children when they are good. your mother is right, replied nefert. isis herself has her dear little son horus; and every human being that dies, and that was good, becomes a child again, and the goddess makes it her own, and takes it to her breast, and nurses it with her sister nephthys till he grows up and can fight for his father. nefert observed that while she spoke one of the women was crying. she went up to her, and learned that her husband and her son were both dead, the former in syria, and the you and i are to have the little room at the head of the stairs all to ourselves. matildas news was lengthy enough and interesting enough to make us late for tea, and mine kept us awake for a couple of hours after we were fairly in our two little iron bedsteads in the room that was now our very own. that is to say, i told what i had to tell after we came to bed, but my news was so lame compared with matildas that we soon returned to the discussion of hers. i tried to describe my great grandfathers sketches, but neither aunt theresa in the drawing room, nor matilda when we retired for the night, seemed to feel any interest in the subject; and when mrs. buller asked what sort of people called at the vine, i felt that my reply was, like the rest of my news, but dull. matildas, on the contrary, was very entertaining. she spoke enthusiastically of miss perry, the governess. she is so good natured, margery, you cant think. when lessons are over she takes me walks on the esplanade, and she calls me her dear matilda, and i take her arm, and she tells me all about herself. she says she knows shes very romantic. and shes got lots of secrets, and shes told me several already; for she says she has a feeling that i can keep a secret, and so i can. but telling yous not telling, you know, because shes sure to tell you herself; only youd better wait till she does before you say anything, for fear she should be vexed. of course i promised to do so, and craned my neck out of bed to catch matildas interesting but whispered revelations. matilda herself was only partially in miss perrys confidence, and i looked anxiously forward to the time when she would admit me also to her secrets, though i feared she might