

## Just William by Richmal Crompton

It was a half-holiday and William was in his bedroom making careful preparations for the afternoon. On the mantelpiece stood in readiness half a cake (the result of a successful raid on the larder) and a bottle of liquorice water. This beverage was made by shaking up a piece of liquorice in water. It was much patronised by the band of Outlaws to which William belonged and which met secretly every half-holiday in a disused barn about a quarter of a mile from William's house.

So far the Outlaws had limited their activities to wrestling matches, adventure seeking and culinary operations. The week before, they had cooked two sausages which William had taken from the larder on Cook's night out and had conveyed to the barn beneath his shirt and next to his skin. Perhaps "cooked" is too euphemistic a term. To be quite accurate, they had held the sausages over a smoking fire till completely blackened, and then consumed the charred remains with the utmost relish.

William put the bottle of liquorice water in one pocket and the half-cake in another and was preparing to leave the house in his usual stealthy fashion – through the bathroom window, down the scullery roof, and down the water pipe hand over hand to the back garden. Even when unencumbered by the presence of a purloined half-cake, William infinitely preferred this mode of exit to the simpler one of walking out of the front door. As he came out on to the landing, however, he heard the sound of the opening and shutting of the hall door and of exuberant greetings in the hall.

"Oh! I'm so glad you've come, dear. And is this the baby! The *duck*! Well den, how's 'oo, den? Go-o-oo."

This was William's mother.

"Oh, crumbs!" said William and retreated hastily. He sat down on his bed to wait till the coast was clear.

