

DINGUS.

I

Dingus was such an ugly, grave-faced, old sort of boy that the lady clerks called him "Mister" at first, and asked a favor of him only when they wanted something down from the highest shelf. Then it was "Mr. Marks, can't you get me those blankets, please?" And Dingus would come, swing himself up "hand over hand" as they said, and spring down again with the blankets on his back, dumping them gravely on the counter, bowing nervously, but always politely, and fairly scampering back to arrange over again for the tenth time that day, perhaps, his "Elegant assortment of Rings, Bracelets and all kinds of fine Jewelry."

Mr. Stoker had given him a trial as a cash-boy, but though he could play leap-frog over the stools almost as fast as the other boys could run, he was not to be relied upon to bring back the right change or package; and half the time he was off down to the center stand gloating over the jewelry cases. So, to give him another chance, they put him there. He seemed thoroughly satisfied then, and Mr. Stoker said he was glad to find someone at last who could keep that stock looking bright and new, even if he was smaller than a clerk really ought to be and was always getting his bills wrong.

One thing, though, Dingus liked even better than fussing with his jewelry. When they were very busy at the wrapping stand, they'd send for him. Then all his agility came into play. He had a trick of jumping up to catch the string in his teeth, an antic that made Miss Jones send down the wrong change more than once. Someone had to stand by him always, though, to put things in the right bundles, and send the bundles to the right places. Once he sent Mrs. Dr. Arnot's twenty-five yards of white brocaded satin to old Mrs. Haggerty. They called him to the office the next day to scold him, and he looked sheepish and scared, scratching his ear in that grave, nervous way of his, and went frisking down the stairs to his glittering beauties again.

It was Mike, the lanky, red-headed delivery boy who had first called him "Dingus" to his face, though "the scribbler," one of the office clerks, was responsible for the name. And because it fit so well we all took it up, and Dingus grew used to it and didn't care. But there was war between him and Mike. Because Dingus took great pride in keeping his glass cases shining like mirrors, Mike made it a point to stop there and somehow get the dust from his coat on the counters and make long greasy paths across the glass with his grimy fingers.

We never saw Dingus really laugh until one day when he and Mike had a little tiff, and Mike went off swearing to the back of the store, nursing a red spot on his cheek. Dingus went behind his counters, hugged himself up on his stool and laughed silently and intensely, his queer old face gathering into clumps of wrinkles. But soon he looked as grave as ever over the case, as he handed a blue-set breast pin to a young woman with green feathers in her hat.

The "scribbler" said then that he was going to buy a little red cap and jacket for that boy, and a toy gun, and send him off to join the circus.

II.

The next morning, just as I was dusting my desk, Uncle Bob the "chore man" or "slave" as the "scribbler" called him, came slowly panting up the stairs. In his usual slow and awkward fashion, he untied his bright blue scarf and hung it carefully on the hook that we had left for it always during the last three winters. For we knew his little Annie made it for him just before she died. Then as he stretched his old seamy hands over the radiator, he said, in his slow way: "Guess them youngsters is goin' to have war again, Miss. Leastways that Mike, he's got it in for Willie Marks" — "Heard 'em talkin' last night when I was gettin' ready to sweep. They've all swore to be mean to Willie Marks as they was to Tommie Jordan. But that little feller, what's his name? with the yeller hair — he stood up for Willie Marks like a good