

Jessica's Story

It was pouring down with rain. The wind was picking up tiny stones and hurling them.

Boom !

The thunder was getting louder and louder. 'Aaarh !' There it was again. 'Mother,' said Emma. 'I'm home. I've got nothing. No money. Some other kid was ill and protested to the grown-up that he needed it more than me. Sorry, mother, I really am.'

But mother was angry. 'Couldn't you have faked that you were ill ?, ' she said. 'Don't you think ?'

Emma sobbed. 'I'm sorry, mother,' she said again. 'Please, please can I have a slice of bread ?'

Her mother shook her head. 'Of course not, you little sneak. Do you think I have to be a servant for those wealthy people, just so that you can eat ? You need to work yourself, you silly little girl.'

'But mother, it was terrifying out there. A man was screaming in the dentist's.

'Nonsense. If you don't start earning some money, then I'll have a good reason for dumping you outside the orphanage.'

Emma stayed quiet after that.

Emma went to the next room. It was the size of a cupboard. Emma squeezed herself into the room, curled herself into a tight ball and cried herself to sleep.

She pulled her old leather shoes on and trudged out of the house. She looked ill; she had been coughing all the way down the path. An old lady took one look at her and said, 'Here you go child, buy yourself some bread. You look terribly weak.' And with that she was gone.

Emma kept asking for money on the street. When her hands were full she carefully took the money back to some sort of broken-down house.

One day she went to visit her mother. 'I've got brilliant news,' she said between coughs.

Her mother's face lit up as soon as she saw the money. 'You're not so useless, are you?', she said. 'Now let's see how much you've got. I can tell already that it's more than a month's worth of being a slave for those rich people.' Suddenly she grabbed the money and began to count it. 'It's mine,' she whispered. 'All mine! I brought you up! I should get it all!'

Emma was furious. 'But you said I got to work for myself.' But her mother wasn't listening. Maybe, thought Emma, if she was really really nice she might get to keep some of the money.

Emma went into the next room where her mother was still counting the money. To calm herself down, she went out for a walk. Standing on a street corner, she saw a boy and girl - they were probably siblings - who both had the measles. They were the only children not begging for food. She watched as a cheerful-looking man who had just come out of the dentist's paused beside the brother and sister and gave them some change from his pocket. Emma approached the man

and told him how kind he was. The dentist smiled and said thank you. He said he'd been getting them things for a week now. He paused, looking hrd at Emma. 'I think I know you mother,' he said. Then he frowned. 'She's not great, is she ?'

'She's a witch,' said Emma.

'Really ?, ' said the man.

Emma nodded. She felt bad saying it, but it was true.

The dentist reached into his pocket again. With his fit closed tight, he said, 'Here, have this. But don't tell your mother or she'll get it before you can say Henry VIII.

When the man was gone, Emma found a place to sit on the pavement. She brushed the rubbish away with her old broken shoe and sat down. She opened her hand. What she saw was a couple of coins. But what she knew it really was was kindness.

When she got home her mother wasn't there.

'Mother ?, ' she said.

When at last her mother appeared she was wearing a brand new turquoise dress and brand new dark blue shoes. 'Where's the money ?, ' she shouted.

'I don't have any,' said Emma.

'You liar !'

She checked Emma's pockts and found the coins the kind man had given her. 'Get out !,' she shouted. 'And don't come back ever !'

It was getting dark outside. Emma didn't know one kind man except the dentist. She ran to the clinic and waited until he came out.