

THE : MILK-CART : BOY.

By EDITH M. CARMAN.

DOSSIE was a thin slip of a girl, with a small, brown, sensitive face, brown, tangled hair and dreamy, dark eyes. To her wonder-loving, fanciful little nature, life on the bush station, "Toi-Toi," was strangely unsatisfying. At thirteen she had outgrown the eagerness which took her small sister and brother every morning to the road-fence, to watch the milk-carts rattle past on their way to the creamery.

It was the only diversion, the only unalloyed pleasure that the long days held for the two wee mites, and every morning they rode proudly down from the milk-stand to the big gate that opened on to the road, Bran proudly grasping the reins, and Cherry the whip, which was too heavy for her chubby hands to wield.

And the gracious, wonderful person who allowed this delightful thing (with Dad's permission, of course) was the "Milk-cart Boy."

He was a personage in himself, this milk-cart boy, who called himself Ted Brown. His figure was so well shaped, his hair so sunny, his honest gray eyes and his smile so winning, his grammar so irreproachable. Even Dad said that "the boy had seen, and was made for, better things." Mother understood, and Dossie, but to Cherry and little Brandon to be a milk-cart boy appeared the consummation of bliss.

It was Dossie who firmly believed that the milk-cart boy was not Ted Brown, in spite of all he might say, Dossie alone who knew that the boy's life held a sorrow and a great regret.

That was because on Christmas Day, when she had slipped away from all the merry-making to dream of Christmas fairies in a dear little dell she knew of, she found a gray-clad figure stretched upon the moss. It was the milk-cart boy, and for a moment Dossie felt aggrieved.

It was so particularly her own, this little nook where the sunshine came in patches through gaps in the green canopy of eaves above, where a crystal-clear creek rippled along between its fern-clad banks, and the waving punga ferns and trails of wild clematis hung over and shaded the cool, clear water that the bush-birds loved to drink.

And this boy, stretched beneath the big rata, was an intruder in this fairylike spot.

And yet he looked so sad—so very sad that Dossie's tender little heart was touched. Down she slid on to the moss beside him, heedless of her fragile laces and ribbons.

"Poor boy!" she said, pityingly; "won't you tell me what is wrong?"

The boy lifted his head hastily. Her approach over the yielding grass had been so noiseless that he was not aware of her presence till she spoke. But—her appeal? She was small for her age, and he—well, he was seventeen, and at that age, a girl four years his junior seemed an almost impossible confidant. But there was nobody else—and he felt instinctively that, with Doris Kenyon, child as she was, a promise was a thing to be kept, not broken.

"Won't you tell me what it is?" Dossie repeated, wistfully. "Is it because you are someone else, and not Ted Brown at all?"