

TRADING HIS MOTHER

BY ANNE WARNER

Author of "Seeing France with Uncle John"



REX and his mother lived together in a large house covered with ivy. The curate said that one end of the house was Early-English and that the other was distinctly James the First, a statement which Rex regarded as more than silly, since it was all alike of stone, and anyone could see the stone whenever and wherever the wind blew the ivy aside. There was a tower at one end, and the curate said that the foundation of this tower was undoubtedly Norman. Rex coaxed Magda to take him down the dark way to see what the curate meant by "undoubtedly Norman," and a lizard ran out, and Magda dropped the candle, and screamed, and it was all dark and trying and awful. Rex never pardoned the curate for having been the one who had led him to embark in an enterprise that had terminated in tears and cries for Clemens to bring a light "Wight off! wight off!" From that hour he transferred his partiality to Colonel Arkwright, who came out from the city twice a week in a "puff-puff," and always let the man who wore the leather eye-glasses take Rex and Magda to ride while he sat on the terrace and talked to Rex's mother. Rex was fond of riding in the "puff-puff," and after a while the colonel developed other charms which made him glad that he had given him the *pas* over the curate. These charms consisted in wonderful toys, invariably hidden in the box under the back seat and invariably meant for Rex. There are certainly very few men with such a delicate intuition as to the pressing need of new toys as this friend of Rex's mother possessed, and it was only after several weeks of mechanical mon-

keys, tin regiments, and puzzle-games that Rex's mother's son first discovered a wonder that the intuition was not omniscient.

"I should surely sink he would bwing me a pony," he told Magda one morning, and then, as Magda continued tatting and unresponsive, he waited until he saw his mother, and then voiced his surprise to her.

She was dressing, and Nina was doing her hair, and a beautiful gown of muslin ruffles and pink-rose embroidery lay spread out on the bed.

"Come here on my lap," said Rex's mother, to Nina's great distress, and she kissed him and hid her face in his tumble of curls, to Nina's utter despair. "You are too little for a pony," she said after a minute or so. "Ponies come when men are five years old."

"But I'm four," said Rex, "and four is dess back of five."

"Yes," said his mother, and then the "puff-puff" was heard in the avenue, and she put him from her quickly, and snatched up her rings from the dressing-table, and held her head straight for Nina, and was quite changed in all ways.

Rex stood and watched the muslin ruffles slipped into place and the black velvet tied round her little waist, and then, when she was done, he put his hand in hers, and they went down the stairs and out on the terrace together. The colonel was waiting there, and he smiled, as he always did, and came, and stooped, and shook hands with Rex, and then took Rex's mother's hand and raised it to his lips; and Rex's mother's cheeks grew quite pink, and she said nothing; and Rex, standing by and watching, felt sure that the colonel took a long time to ac-

comply with a very small thing, and as soon as he was through, he went up to his mother, stood on tiptoe, pulled her down to his level and gave the big man with the brown mustache an object-lesson in how much better and more satisfactorily it may be done.

The mother laughed, and a curl which the caress had dislodged blew across her eyes as she did so. She put her pretty hands up to the curl, and started to tuck it back among the other curls; and, as she did so, she looked at the visitor and said: "He loves me so—don't you?" to Rex.

Rex felt that this was no moment to prevaricate.

"Well, I would wuhver have a pony," he said frankly.

At that the colonel began to laugh and his mother began to laugh, and after a minute he thought he must be in a good joke, even if he did n't just grasp it, and so he laughed, too.

"Would you trade your mama for a pony?" the colonel asked him, picking him up and setting him on the edge of the great marble vase that held the flowers when they had dinner-parties on the terrace. "Do you mean what you say?"

"I want a pony worse of all," Rex confessed.

"And we have worried," said the colonel to the mother, "we have tormented our brains and vexed our souls, over a problem of such simple solving!" And then he put the small boy down again and told him to go and see if there was a package from London in the motor. Rex departed in haste, rejoicing over the certainty of the present and the possibility of the future. He found a long box in the motor, and inside the box was a tower and twelve mice. When the mice were set on the top of the tower, they ran all the way down to the bottom through a little circular passage and then pitched into numbered holes. It was a game, and a very thrilling one, and Magda and the man in the leather spectacles (which he took off occasionally) chose mice, and played it with zest for fifteen minutes.

Afterward they took a ride down the avenue and past the lodge and round by Dougan's farm, and, when they came back, Rex went to bid his mother good-night. And although the wind had died

away, it had been so tempestuous first as to loosen three of her curls and drive her and her visitor into the library, where she was sitting in the corner of the big seat, and the colonel was standing in an aimless and unsettled manner, doing nothing in particular, by the window.

Rex climbed upon the seat and kissed his mother heartily. He threw back his head afterward and eyed the colonel proudly, because he felt somehow that he had been at a disadvantage there. And then he went to bed, and ever so much later the "puff-puff" woke him as it "puff-puffed" back to London.

All that week the house was very quiet, and on Friday his mama and Nina went up to town and stayed two days. Then they came back, and Rex's aunt and his great-uncle and some others came, too, and the next day his grandmama and her maid and her doctor and her funny, fuzzy black dog came, too, and the next day a great many more came, too, and the house was full of flowers, and the bishop was there to luncheon, and the curate. Only the curate looked so badly that Rex wondered if he had been looking for something Norman and found a lizard.

The next morning Rex was awakened by music, and somewhere there was the most wonderful song being sung by voices that sounded just like birds. He went to the window to listen, and Magda was there listening, too. She was standing behind the curtains, because she was in her night-gown and the voices were filling the air—the air that was soft and pink because the sun was not yet risen, and the day was not yet old enough to be sure how he would like her and treat her.

"Where is zat moosic?" Rex asked Magda.

"They are on the Tower," said Magda, whispering—"they are singing because it is the story that they shall sing on the tower whenever there is a bride in the house."

"And is there a bwide in our house?" Rex asked, whispering also.

"Yes," Magda told him, and kissed him.

After a little the song stopped, and they went back to bed, and slept later than usual—at least, Rex did. The

next time that he awoke, his mother was kissing him. She had her big blue-velvet coat thrown around her, and underneath she was all white, with little, pale-green ribbons tying little knots of lace. She had on white slippers that had buckles with green stones in them, and her hair was wonderfully lovely.

She kissed Rex over and over, and put a big, lovely picture of herself in a frame made of white daisies and blue forget-me-nots on the chimney-piece. But she said hardly a word.

After she went away Magda brought out a white suit with a white belt and a big gold belt-buckle, and told him to be a good boy, for they were all going to church. It was not Sunday, but they were all going to church just the same, she explained, and then when he was dressed, his grandmama came in and looked him all over through her lorgnette, and made him feel really very uncomfortable.

There was a great deal of noise in the court and up and down the avenue, and Magda told him he could go out on the balcony and look over, but, for the love of Heaven, not to lean against anything in that suit. His grandmama was quite nervous, and told Magda that she would do better to hold him than to risk anything, so Magda went out after him and held him.

There were ever so many carriages below, and his aunt in a black-lace dress, and all the other people in all sorts of dresses were down there, laughing and talking, and then getting in and driving away. All of a sudden Magda put him down, took his hand, and told him to hurry, and they almost ran through all the halls and out of the big door; and there was his grandmama and her doctor in a carriage waiting for him and Magda to go to church with them.

So they drove away down the avenue, and past the lodge, and between the hedges that smelt so sweet because the may was all in bloom, and then they came to the church, which was gray and covered with ivy, like their own house at home. There was a great crowd around the church, and they all bowed and curtsied and hummed and buzzed when Rex's grandmama and her doctor and her grandson and Magda got out of the car-

riage and went in under the little stone-roofed porch.

The church was quite different from usual and most beautifully trimmed with flowers, and every seat was full, and the organ was playing softly. Rex's grandmother took the arm of a gentleman who had come in another carriage, and the doctor took Rex's hand, and they went to their own pew, with the carved door and the velvet cushions. Rex curled up in the corner and listened to the organ and smelled the flowers, and then suddenly he saw his grandmama begin to fan herself very fast, and the doctor took the fan and fanned her instead, and the organ swelled louder, and Rex suddenly saw that something very lovely indeed in a white-lace dress and a large hat with a pale-green plume was almost in front of him, and that the bishop and the curate (the curate looking as if a whole cellar of lizards were after him) and the colonel were all there, too, standing close together.

Then for a little while it was really church and every one but Rex's grandmama said their prayers, and the voices sang, and the organ played.

When the prayers were done, and the bishop had said a little more, the beautiful creature with the pale-green plume turned around and Rex saw that it was his mother. She looked up at him and his grandmama and smiled sweetly. And then she put her hand upon the colonel's arm, seeming to prefer him to the bishop or the curate, and walked down the aisle with him.

Rex's grandmama rose at once, and the doctor rose, too. Rex rose also, and the gentleman who had led his grandmama in stood there at the pew door ready to lead her out. No one else moved in their seats, and Rex could see all their faces smiling at him as he passed along between them.

When he came to the outside world he was quite startled and bewildered.

The bishop and the curate were both there, although how they had gotten there he could not see, and the crowd was ever so much bigger. They were very quiet, though, and he was not surprised at that, because his mother was standing before them looking so like an angel come straight out of a happy

heaven down to a happy earth, that it was enough to make any one stare only to look at her eyes and lips.

They all seemed waiting for him, and his mother bent, putting her hand up to steady her great hat as she did so, and kissed him. Just as she straightened up again he saw, with a gasp, something that he had not noticed before.

Perhaps it was because the carriage with the bouquets in the lamp-sockets and the great white rosettes by the horses' ears had overshadowed it completely; perhaps it was because the bishop and the curate and the colonel and the doctor had been standing between it and him; perhaps it was because he, like the crowd, had been blinded to all else by the sight of the mother's joy and starry loveliness: but, at any rate, he saw now.

Before the carriage-step, taking precedence over that big carriage with its white bouquets and rosettes, were a pony and a cart—a black pony in a white leather harness, and a red-straw cart with small lamps and with a robe folded on the seat! A man was at the pony's head, and Magda was standing behind the cart.

Rex was speechless.

The colonel took his hand and led him up close to the wondrous equipage.

"Rex," he said, "you remember telling me the other day that you would rather have a pony than your mother? I really think that you will regret trading her outright at that figure, but I am willing to pay a pony for a fortnight of her society. Shall we call it a bargain?"

"Oh, yes," said Rex, and took possession that instant. His mother and the bishop were smiling very much indeed, and the crowd were cheering under their breaths. Magda took the place beside him, and the man who had been guarding the pony's head gave him the reins and shook out the robe over their knees.

Then the people began to cheer loudly, and then the pony began to walk and then to trot, and Rex, turning his head for one beatific backward glance, saw the carriage moving up to the step, the people pouring out of the church, his grandmama fanning violently, and his mother, with one hand on the colonel's arm, waving the other at him.

"Where shall we go?" he said to Magda, when the turn had hidden all from them.

"Let us go to my mother's" suggested Magda.

So they drove there, and Magda's mother was overjoyed to see them. If she had been expecting them she could not have been gladder or more ready. There were buns and milk on the table, and a new calf and four kittens (just pleasantly playful) to be looked at after the luncheon.

Later they had a very nice dinner, and just as they were finishing, James came driving in and left some of the kind of cake that Rex had always been forbidden to eat, a piece for each member of the family and a piece for the pony. Magda went down to the gate to talk with James for a moment, and when she came back after many, many moments, she found a small boy sound asleep. He slept nearly the whole afternoon, and when he woke, there were more buns and more milk, and then they drove back home.

All the company was gone except Rex's grandmama, and she was in bed and was to have her dinner in her own room. The house was odd and still and very different. Rex went all over it, and wondered at the flowers, which were everywhere. Then he passed his mother's room; and the door was open, so he went in. It was all very odd and still, too, and his picture in the gold frame was gone. He remembered then that he had traded her for the pony, and an odd lump came up in his throat. It was a long while before he remembered that the colonel had said that it was only for a "forty"; he wondered what a "forty" was.

Just then Magda came in. She had been hunting for him everywhere, she said. He went for his bath and to be put to bed.

"What is a forty?" he asked, as he climbed in among his pillows half an hour later.

"You can count up to ten," said Magda; "Well, four tens are forty."

He laid down to think it over, and the greatness of the proposition wearied him quickly to sleep.

The next morning the consolation of



Drawn by Paul Julien Meylan. Half-tone plate engraved by C. W. Chadwick

“‘SHE IS N'T YOUR MUVVER,’ HE SAID, IN DESPERATE PLEADING”

the pony was again on hand. Rex went to the stable, and looked at it, and hugged its nose, and smoothed its mane. After all, a pony was not a bad substitute for a mother. He drove out with Magda again, and the triumph of the feat so elated him that when he came home and found his grandmother drying her eyes over a telegram from his mother in Paris, he pitied her contemptuously for her weakness. The fuzzy dog was sniffing his bare legs in an unpleasantly familiar way just then, so he left his grandmother and went back to the pony.

The next day his grandmother was in bed all day, and life was all pony and no family affection, whatever.

The next day grandmother, maid, fuzzy dog, and doctor all departed together, and the curate came over with his little black trunk and settled himself in the room in the Early-English tower.

Rex was very depressed. He was courageous, but the lump in his throat was becoming a permanent fixture of nights. The pony looked so little and fat and sleepy always, and that white, slender mother with the starry eyes stood out in his dreams like a vision the reality of which seemed too good ever to have been true.

The curate was learning to play the flute. He played the flute in a most dismal and wailing manner, and although Rex was young, he had ears and, worse still, nerves. The days passed heavily by—days and days and days. Four tens make forty. Oh, what an awful sum!

Finally one morning Magda said, as she brushed out his curls with more than her usual vigor:

"To think that it's only a fortnight to-day!"

"A fortnight?" Rex asked. "What's that?"

"Two weeks," said Magda, "it's two weeks to-day since your mama went away. You are going to have a present to-day."

Rex looked unhappy.

"I don't want a present," he said; "I want my mama."

At the words, the big tears welled up in his eyes and rolled down his cheeks.

Magda snatched him up and hugged and kissed him.

"You darling!" she said. "I hear the wheels now!"

It was quite true. There were wheels sweeping up the avenue. Rex burst out of Magda's arms and ran as fast as he could through the gallery, down the staircase, and out on the gravel. The carriage was just stopping, and his mother was leaning forward and looking out of the window. She had on a tiny blue hat and a blue veil, and she was putting the veil up, even as she looked out, quite as if she were making ready to be kissed again after her long absence from such pleasure.

The colonel alighted first, and the instant after Rex was hanging about his mother's neck.

And then without a word he broke from her, and ran for dear life off around the corner by the sun-dial.

The mother looked a bit startled, and then she laughed and went into the house, and the colonel followed her.

It was quite fifteen minutes before Rex returned.

He came into the morning-room then, and saw his mother sitting there, still with her little blue hat on. She was drinking coffee and eating toast and strawberries. The colonel was sitting beside her, instead of where his place was laid opposite, and in his hand was a great package of unopened letters.

"I want you," said Rex, going straight up to him and seizing his hand—"I want you."

"It runs in the family, you see," Rex's mother cried, laughing; "it descends from generation to generation."

The colonel took Rex's little hand gently into his.

"What is it that you want with me, my boy?" he asked.

"I want you to come wiv me—wight now this minute," said Rex.

The colonel rose; the mother rose, too. Rex led his captive out upon the terrace; the mother followed. All three went to the rail of the balustrade together.

"There," said Rex, pointing.

Below was the pony, led by James.

"Yes," said the colonel; "I see."

"You can have him back," said Rex, his cheeks brightly scarlet, "I want you to have him back,—an' I'll take my muvver back, too."

His eyes were fairly blazing with terrible anxiety and longing as he looked up into the face above him.

"She is n't your muvver," he said, in desperate pleading; "She 's my muvver, an' I want her back."

The colonel was silent.

"People can't have but one muvver," said the boy. "When a man takes a muvver from somebody, a pony don't help somebody. A pony is n't ever there when it 's dark. Please take the pony, and let me have my muvver."

The mother came step by step closer until her hand was on Rex's curls and her head was very near the colonel's bosom.

"Rex," said the colonel in a very curiously low voice, "don't you like having me about—as a—as a friend? Have n't I always behaved well and lent you my motor whenever you cared to use it?"

"Yes," said Rex, and his countenance expressed a painful conflict; "I do sink you are nice."

"Then suppose," said the colonel, "that I wanted to stay and live here—"

"Oh," said the boy sharply, swallowing a sob.

The colonel looked earnestly at him.

"I 'll be very good, Rex," he said appealingly; "there must be some one here to take care of you all. I won't ask to have your mother for my mother; in fact, I have a mother of my own whom I love very dearly and whom—as a mother—I really prefer to yours. Won't you allow the pony to stay in the stable as yours, and allow me to stay in the house as—as your mother's?"

Rex looked up at his mother.

"Do you want him?" he asked her.

She nodded, smiling. Rex considered.

"If we did n't have him to take care of us would we have to have Mr. Beck, maybe?" he asked at last.

Mr. Beck was the curate.

"Certainly," said the colonel; "it has always been a choice between Mr. Beck or myself. Which do you choose?"

"I choose you," said Rex.

There was a minute of silence. The colonel looked at Rex's mother and Rex's mother smiled; then the colonel looked at Rex and Rex smiled too.

And then the latter turned and walked to the end of the terrace.

"James," he called loudly and clearly, "you may take the pony back to the stables. I have shanged my mind."



BY THE GENTLE INSISTENCE OF ZUBI

BY ELIZABETH HYER NEFF

Author of "The Nerve of Barney the Nautical"

WITH PICTURES BY H. S. POTTER



HENRY RANSOME'S mild blue eyes were full of troubled perplexity; he laid down his scissors with a gesture of despair. His wife, standing in the middle of the living-room in a most unusual costume, was showing signs of impatience.

"I declar' to goodness, Cynthy, I don't know what kin be the matter of that waist. I cut it jest by the pattern, and I 've basted it over three times."

"Well, I kin tell you it don't fit no ways I kin turn." She tried to look at her back in the little old looking-glass over the Bible-stand.

"No; I kin see that fer myself. It 's too bulgy in the back. Women's dresses had n't ought to be so bulgy in the back as what that is. Now, if it was a shirt or a pair o' pants, I could fit it easy 's fallin' off a log; but I never made any kind of women's clo'es before, and hardly ever seen any to take notice of. But