

A KIRKUS REVIEWS BEST CHILDREN'S BOOK SELECTION

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL DOLLS LIVE IN THE SHOP DOWNSTAIRS.

Nine-year-old Anna is stuck in the middle between her younger sister, Trudie, and her older sister, Sophie. She only feels special when she's downstairs, playing with the dolls in her family's doll repair shop. But when World War I threatens to put the shop out of business, Anna's family needs to find a way to survive—and Anna just may be the one to save the day.

★ “One part Rumer Godden’s *The Story of Holly and Ivy* and many parts Sydney Taylor’s *All-of-a-Kind Family* . . .

A standout family-and-doll story.”

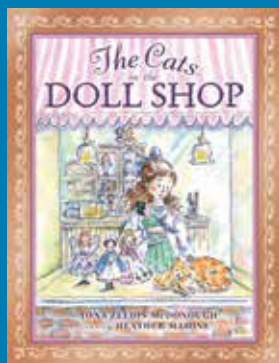
—Kirkus Reviews, starred review

“A cozy family story.”—BCCB

★ “Will become a classic.”

—Jewish Book World, starred review

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about Anna & the Dolls!



*Includes a
discussion guide!*



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MEET THE DOLLS

“Don’t push!” I tell my little sister, Trudie.

“I’m not pushing, Anna,” says Trudie. “You are!”

“If you two fight, Mama will make us go back upstairs,” says our big sister, Sophie. Sophie is eleven, but right now she is talking to us like she is a grown-up and we are just babies. Well, maybe she thinks Trudie is a baby, but *I’m* not, so I wish she would stop using that tone.

Sophie, Trudie, and I have spent most of the afternoon cleaning the doll repair shop our parents own and run. Now we are allowed to stay in the shop to play. But Sophie is right: if we quarrel, Mama will hear us and make us come upstairs. So I let Trudie go ahead, even if she does shove her way in front of me and step on my

foot besides. Trudie is only seven so I suppose I should be understanding.

I've always lived above the doll shop on Essex Street. Mama says that a long time ago, when Sophie was a baby, the three of them lived in a different apartment, on Ludlow Street. But to me, Ludlow Street doesn't count. It's Essex Street, and only Essex Street, that is home. Out in front there is a sign that reads:

BREITTMANN'S DOLL REPAIR

All Kinds of Dolls Lovingly Restored and Mended

Established 1904

Underneath the letters is a picture of a smiling doll. Mama painted it. She can paint a picture of anything. She is the one who paints the dolls' faces—the rosy cheeks, the red lips—so well that you'd never know they weren't brand new. I tell her I think she is a magician, but she only smiles and keeps her hand steady on the brush.

Trudie runs ahead of me and reaches for “her” doll, which is made of bisque and has thick, dark hair. The doll is not really hers, of course. All the dolls here are waiting to be fixed by Papa. But while they wait, he



lets us play with them. We each choose a single doll at a time—that's the rule—and we have to be careful when we play. The dolls are very fragile and easy to break. The only time a doll can leave the shop is with its owner. We are not owners. We have no bisque or china dolls that belong to just us. Bisque and china dolls are expensive. We used to have rag dolls that Mama made, but they have fallen apart from so much use, and she has not had a chance to make new ones. Papa says that if the shop does really, really well, one day he will buy each of us a doll of our own. But it seems to me that day is a long way off.

“Angelica Grace!” breathes Trudie when she sees her doll. Angelica Grace is a name Sophie came up with. She read it in a book and told it to Trudie. Sophie comes up with all the names for our dolls—she's good at that, but then, she is good at so many things.

Compared to some of the other dolls in the shop, Angelica Grace doesn't look too bad. Her navy pleated skirt and white sailor blouse are only a little wrinkled. Her hair is neat. She even has navy leather shoes and white ribbed stockings on her feet. But one of her blue

glass eyes is missing, and there is a big, dark hole where it once was. It makes her look kind of spooky.

Sophie's current doll—she calls her Victoria Marie—looks much worse. The toes of her bare feet are broken, and her blonde hair is always tangled, though Sophie tries to comb it. All of her clothes are missing. But she has the sweetest smile, and tiny holes in her earlobes where real earrings can fit.

The doll that is “mine” is Bernadette Louise. Her face, legs, and arms are made of shiny glazed porcelain. Her dark hair is painted on and decorated with beautiful painted blue flowers. Mama says they are morning glories. On one foot, she wears a black painted boot with a blue tassled garter; the other foot is missing. Her dark red and gold flowered skirt must have been nice once, but it is now torn and stained. Her right arm is badly cracked.



One day, I asked Papa why these three dolls were still in the shop. Usually he mends the dolls promptly and then sends them home again.

"Which dolls?" he asked, and I showed him the three dolls we thought of as "ours."

"I'm having trouble getting the right color eye for this doll," Papa said, pointing to Angelica Grace. "The blues I find are always wrong." He frowned slightly. "But I keep trying. One day, I'll find an eye that's a perfect match."

"And the others?"

"Well, the owners of this doll," he said, looking at Victoria Marie, "told me they were going on a long trip. No one will be able to pick the doll up for quite a while so there's no rush in fixing her." He smoothed the doll's tangled hair gently. "Now this doll," he said, picking up Bernadette Louise and looking into her face, "is very old—much older than the other two. Getting the right parts for her has been very difficult. They don't make legs or arms the way they used to; I keep hoping I'll find the perfect ones. But so far, I haven't."

Sometimes, Papa can fix a broken part with his file or one of his other tools. But when he can't fix a part, he has to get a new one. He orders them all the way from Germany, where most of the dolls are made. The doll parts arrive in huge boxes brought by the postman, Mr. Greevy.

Sophie, Trudie, and I are always thrilled when a box arrives, and if we are not in school, we stop whatever we are doing to help Papa open and sort through it. Inside, there are doll arms and legs of different sizes and shapes, all packed in straw and shredded paper. There are lots of wigs—blonde, brown, red, black; braids, buns, curls. Doll bodies are in the box, too, and sometimes clothes. Even though Mama could make or repair anything, a customer sometimes requests a special outfit. Once we found a doll-sized fancy gray silk ball gown and matching evening coat. Another time, there was a satin bridal dress with a train, veil, and the most adorable tiny white leather gloves.

But the very best things in the box are the glass eyes. Because they are so fragile, the eyes are packed first in tissue, then straw, and then finally in their own tiny boxes. Each glass eye is a hollow white ball with a different color in the center. Some are dark, inky blue, while others are sky blue, chocolate brown, amber, or green.

“I wish our dolls had a bed,” says Trudie now, the whine just beginning to creep into her voice. Sophie, who has found Victoria Marie and is busy trying to smooth

out her hair, ignores her. “We need a bed.” Now Trudie really is whining.

I want to shake her. But if I do, I will get in trouble with Mama. So instead, I say, “Guess what? We *have* a bed.”

“We do?” Trudie asks, eyes wide. Even Sophie looks interested. “Where is it?”

“Right here!” I say, and drag something out from behind the glass-topped counter.

“Oh!” breathes Trudie when she sees it. Of course, if you didn’t know, the thing I dragged out might not look much like a bed at all, and instead might seem to be an ordinary wooden box. In fact, it is a box, given to me by Mr. Bloom, who owns the grocery shop on the corner. The box originally held vegetables but now that it was empty, Mr. Bloom was happy to give it to me. Made of smooth golden wood, the box is deep and sturdy. As soon as I saw it, I knew it was a perfect place for three dolls to spend the night.

“That was a good idea, Anna,” Sophie says. I stand up a little straighter when she says that. Even though Sophie can annoy me by being so very perfect, her praise still matters. She doesn’t give me much of it, either.



“Go ahead, put her in,” urges Sophie, and Trudie places her doll in the bottom of the box. Sophie and I do the same. Then Trudie bursts out, “But we don’t have a blanket! How can they sleep without a blanket?”

“You don’t have to cry,” says Sophie. “I have a blanket.”

“Where? Where is it? I want to see!” says Trudie. I’m curious, too. What does Sophie have in mind?

“Here,” Sophie says, and she pulls something white and soft from the pocket of her apron.

“A pillow case!” says Trudie. “How perfect!” She gazes up adoringly at Sophie. “You always know how to fix things,” she adds. Somehow, this makes me feel cross. Trudie didn’t get all *that* excited over the bed that I found for us; it’s always Sophie this, Sophie that, Sophie, Sophie, Sophie.

“Where did you get it?” I ask.

“From Mama’s rag basket,” says Sophie.

Then she tucks the pillowcase up around the dolls’ chins.

“Will she mind?”

“No, silly! It’s a rag.” Sophie uses that superior, I’m-so-grown-up voice again.

“Can we leave them in the box all night?” asks Trudie, sounding worried.

“Yes,” says Sophie. “They’ll be safe. I promise.”

“Good night, Angelica Grace,” says Trudie. She leans over to kiss her doll, loudly, on the cheek.

“Good night,” says Sophie to her own doll as she and Trudie head for the stairs. “Are you coming?” she asks me. Even though she has put the light out, I can feel her looking at me.

“In a minute,” I tell her.

She doesn’t say anything else but just takes Trudie’s hand and goes upstairs.

I listen to their footsteps as they go, but I don’t follow them right away. I want to be alone down here for a little bit. Sometimes it’s hard being a middle sister, and I just need to be by myself. Sophie is smart and pretty and good at so many things; Trudie (her real name is Gertrude, though we never call her that) is little and cute and cries to get her way. I’m just the one sort of stuffed in between—at nine I’m not old enough to do some things, like light the kitchen stove, but too old to do others, like snuggle in Mama and Papa’s bed on a cold morning.

I can hear the sounds of my family moving around above me. In a minute, I know Mama will be calling me to come up. There is a narrow stairway leading up to our apartment, which has four small rooms. Mama does her best to keep our home cheerful and comfortable. “It may not be fancy,” she likes to say, “but it can still be fine.”

She painted our kitchen a color she calls Persian blue, and she grows red geraniums in wooden window boxes. She calls them her “windowsill garden.” In the center of the room is a big table where we eat, and after the dishes are cleared, we do our lessons. The parlor, which is pale peach, has a small settee and two armchairs. Mama keeps a standing lamp between the chairs, so that in the evenings, Papa can read his paper while she does her sewing. Mama and Papa’s bedroom is painted mint green. Mama crocheted a white coverlet for the bed, and she made lace trim for the muslin curtains that hang in the windows. The room Sophie, Trudie, and I share is pale pink. The color looks like the inside of a seashell. The apartment has only one sink, which is in the kitchen, and the bathtub is there, too, covered by a hinged white wooden top that



can be raised when the tub is in use and lowered when it isn't. Papa designed and made that. The toilet is out in the hall and we have to share it.

I like our apartment, even if it is kind of small. And I love the doll shop. Because I love it, I almost never mind helping with the weekly cleaning. Sophie, Trudie, and I take turns sweeping, wiping the counters and shelves, and polishing the big plate-glass window and the counter-top with a rag dipped in sudsy ammonia water. Then we each have our own special chore: Sophie organizes the doll parts, Trudie dusts the dolls with a big feather duster, and I am in charge of the birdcage. Papa has a canary for company while he works, and I am the one to keep the cage fresh and tidy. The canary is named Goldie, because of his color, and he sings all day long. At night, I usually put an old dish towel over the cage, but today I forgot. When I make my way over to the cage in the dark, I see Goldie hopping back and forth from one perch to another.

"Are you lonely down here by yourself?" I ask him. Goldie stops and cocks his little head, as if he is listening

to me. Then he starts hopping again. I pick up the dish towel and cover the cage. I look over at my doll, which is snuggled in the box ~~that is a~~ bed with the other dolls. “You can keep him company,” I tell Bernadette Louise. And somehow, I know she will.

