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Now ponder well you parents dear
These words which I do write.
A doleful ' story you shall hear
In time brought forth to light.
A gentleman of good account
In Norfolk "lived of late.
Whose fame and credit did surmount
Most men of his estate.
So sick he was and like to die,
No help he then could have.
His wife by him a-sick did lie.
They both possessed one grave.

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No love between these two was lost,
Each was to other kind.
In love they lived, in love they died,
And left two babes behind.
The one a fine and pretty boy,
Not passing five years old,
The other a girl more young than he,
And cast in beauteous mould.
The father left his little son,
As plainly doth appear,
When he to perfect age should come,
Five thousand pounds a year.

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And to his little daughter Jane,
Six thousand pounds in gold,
For to be paid on marriage day,
Which might not be controlled.
But if these children chanced to die,
Ere "they to age should come,
Their uncle should possess their wealth ,
For so the will did run.
With this bespoke the Father dear:
"O brother kind" quoth he,
"You are the man must bring my babes
To wealth or misery."

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"If you do keep them carefully
Then God will you reward;
If otherwise you seem to deal,
God will your deeds regard."
With this bespoke the mother dear,
"O brother kind" said she,
"Be good unto my boy and girl,

No friend else have I here.

“To you and God I do commend
My children night and day,
For little while be sure we have
Within this world to stay.

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“You must be father, mother both
And uncle all in one.
God knows what will become of them
When we are dead and gone.”

These speeches then the uncle spake
To the sick couple there,
“The keeping of your children dear ,
Sweet sister never fear.”

“God never prosper me or mine,
Or anything else I have,
If I do wrong your children dear,
When you’re laid in the grave.”

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With lips as cold as any clay,
She kissed her children small,
“God bless you both, my children dear.”
With that the tears did fall.

The parents being dead and gone,
The children home he takes.
He brings them home unto his house,
And much of them he makes.

He had not kept those pretty babes
A twelve month and a day,
When for their wealth he did advise
To take them both away.

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He bargained with two ruffians rude,
Who were of furious mode,
That they should take these children young,
And slay them in the wood.

He told his wife and all he had,
He did those children send
To be brought up in fair London,
By one who was his friend.

Away they went those pretty babes,
Rejoicing at the tide,
And smiling with a merry mind
They on coach horse should ride.

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They prated and prattled pleaeantly,
As they rode on their way

To them, that should their butcher be,
Or work their lives' decay.

So that the pretty speech they had,
Made murderers' hearts relent,
And they that took the deed to do,
Full sore then did repent.

Yet one of them, more hard of heart,
Did vow to do his charge,
Because the wretch that hired him,
Had paid him very large.

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The other would not agree thereto,
So here they fell to strife.
With one another they did fight
About the children's life.

But he that was of mildest mood
Did slay the other there,
Within an unfrequented wood,
Where babes do quake with fear,

He took the children by the hand,
While tears stood in their eyes,
And bade them come and go with him,
And see they did not cry.

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Full two long miles he led them thus,
When they for bread complained.
"Stay here" quoth he " I'll bring you bread
When I do come again."

Then hand in hand these pretty babes
Went wandering up and down ,
But never more they saw the man
Approaching from the town.

Their little lips with blackberries ,
Were all besmeared ' and dyed;
And when they saw the darksome night,
They sat them down and cried.

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Thus wandared these two pretty babes
Till death did end their grief.
In one another's arms they died
As babes wanting relief.

No burial these two pretty babes
Of arty man received,
Till Robin Red-breast painfully
Did cover them with leaves.

And now the heavy wrath of God
Upon the uncle fell.

The fearful fiends did haunt his house ,
His conscience felt an hell.

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His barns were fired , his goods consumed,
His lands were barren made,
His cattle died within his fields,
And nothing with him stayed;

And in a voyage to Portugal,
Two of his sons did die,
And to conclude, himself was brought
Unto much misery.

He pawned and mortgaged all his lands,
Ere seven years came about,
And now at length this wicked act,
By this means did come out.

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The fellow that did take in hand
These children for to kill,
Was for a robbery judged to die,
As was God's blessed will.

Who did confess the very truth,
That here lies in express,
The uncle died where he for debt
Did in the prison rest.

Now ye, who be executors made,
Or overseers eke",
Of children that be fatherless,
Or infants mild and meek—

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Take you example by this thing,
And yield to each his right.
Lest God by such like misery,
Your wicked deeds requite.

Finis



Notes

- i. **Doleful**: archaic term for *very sad*.
- ii. **Norfolk**: *is a low-lying county in the East of England*
- iii. **Ere**: *meaning before*
- iv. **Prate**: *foolishly or tediously about something*
- v. **Besmeare**: *smear or cover with a greasy or sticky substance*
- vi. **eke**: archaic term for *also*.