**Edmund Pickles**

The strangest thing happened last night. It was early in the evening and I was on my way to bed. As I walked through the nursery, I glanced at the rows of pictures on the wall – children’s portraits from a past, almost forgotten century.

Just as I was about to leave, my eye was caught by a portrait of a small boy. Peering closer, I noticed his name - Edmund Pickles. It was almost as if he was looking back at me, a mischievous smile hovering somewhere around his lips. He was definitely smiling at me, his bright blue eyes twinkling with the promise of misbehaviour! Then, right before my very eyes, he raised his eyebrows in an unspoken question, smiled again and then climbed out of the gilded frame which held him. Presently, he spoke.

“Good evening to you ma’am! Pickles is the name! Edmund Pickles! And, as my mam often says, “Pickles by name, Pickles by nature!” She says that ‘cos I like to make mischief!” And with that, he was off! Scurrying across the slippery floor like a tiny, excited puppy.

I followed him down the creaky old stairs and into the kitchen, clean and shiny. I then watched in amazement as he ran ‘round like a whirlwind, opening cupboards, pulling out drawers, dipping his finger into jam jars, mustard jars, pickle jars and tasting anything he took a fancy to.

“Stop!” I cried. “You mustn’t! You can’t!” But my cries went unheard...

After a while, Edmund grew bored of wreaking havoc in the kitchen and skipped across to the parlour. He eyed the plump, stuffed cushions, then, without warning, proceeded to shake one vigorously until... fluffy white feathers exploded into the air and floated down as if in slow motion. Edmund giggled – a delicious giggle that I could not help but catch. Giggling together, louder and louder, we scuttled from the room.

As we skidded across the hall floor, still gasping and giggling, Edmund caught sight of the morning light trickling in from the window. His smile disappeared. “Quick!” he exclaimed. “Morning is almost here!” Quick as lightning, he flew up the stairs and into the nursery. Before I had reached the door, he had disappeared. Looking round in confusion, I saw from the corner of my eye the gilded frame. In it was Edmund, still smiling, his eyes still twinkling. But he was still. Very, very still.