



# Kate and Emma

*Monica Dickens*

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Monica Dickens' novel opens in a juvenile court in London. One of the young offenders is a 16-year-old girl, Kate, who is described as being in need of care and protection. In the court is a girl only slightly older, Emma, daughter of the magistrate. From her experience of going around with a social worker on his calls she knows that adolescents and, more important, small children are daily subjected to neglect and brutality and that "care and protection" cannot be prescribed like National Health aspirin.

She meets Kate again, by chance, in her Uncle's supermarket where she is learning the business from the bottom up. And between these two girls, from different backgrounds, with very different parents who have different personal problems, there springs up a friendship which is deep and, for a while at any rate, beyond misunderstanding.

Each girl has her way to make in life; each has her love, hate, despair, and hope; each the complications of parental control sapped by the inner knowledge of marriages that no longer work.

Great granddaughter to Charles Dickens, Monica (1915-1992) was born into an upper-middle-class family. Disillusioned with the world she was brought up in?she was expelled from St Paul's Girls School in London for throwing her school uniform over Hammersmith Bridge?Dickens then decided to go into service, despite coming from the privileged class; her experiences as a cook and general servant would form the nucleus of her first book, *One Pair of Hands*, in 1939. Dickens married an American Navy officer, Roy O. Stratton, and spent much of her adult life in Massachusetts and Washington, D.C., but the majority of writing continued to be set in Britain.

Her book of 1953, *No More Meadows*, reflected her work with the NSPCC and she later helped to found the American Samaritans in Massachusetts. Between 1970 and 1971 she wrote a series of children's books known as the Worlds' End series which dealt with rescuing animals, and to some extent children. After the death of her husband, in 1985, Dickens returned to England where she continued to write until her death, aged 77.

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