

GEORGE BAKER

SUMMER DAYS

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IT was the fifteenth day of June, and the last day of school. Alice Grey had just said her last good-byes to the other girls, and was starting on her homeward way when she heard a voice behind her.

“Alice, Alice, wait a minute.”

Alice turned around and saw Susy Lee running towards her.

“Let’s go on together,” said Susy, overtaking her friend. “There is no use in walking alone when one can have company.”

“No, indeed,” said Alice, laughing, “particularly when the company has a good big sun umbrella, and the one has none. Here, let me take your arm, and creep under your shade, that’s a love.”

“Isn’t it hot?” exclaimed Susy, when they were both comfortably settled under the shade of the umbrella. “See, there isn’t a breath of wind.”

“Hot isn’t the word for it,” said Alice; “why, it is simply scorching. I am so glad we are through with school, for it is really dreadful to study in this weather. I am crazy to get off to the country, aren’t you?”

“Yes, indeed, I am,” said Susy. “I just *love* the country; don’t you? When I get on my blue flannel sailor suit and my big shade hat, and know that I can get just as mussy as I please, I am too happy for anything. Where are you going this summer?”

“Oh, we are going to Sandy Shore; we go there every summer. Papa has a cottage there.”

“Sandy Shore!” exclaimed Susy. “Why, how perfectly delightful. I am going there, too. Papa has rented a house for the summer, and we are to start off in about a week.”

The children were of course overjoyed to find that they were to be companions for the summer, and had a great deal to talk about. And so busy were they that Alice’s house was in sight long before the important event had been thoroughly discussed.

When they reached Mr. Grey’s it was nearly time for luncheon, however, so Alice and Susy kissed each other good-bye, and separated, each to confide to her mother the pleasant prospects for the summer.

Alice found the house in rather a confused state. Trunks were in every room; carpets were being taken up; and everything denoted that a change of some sort was about to take place.

Alice flew up the stairs, and, rushing into her mamma’s room, she found her father and mother talking together very earnestly about something.

“Why, mamma,” she exclaimed, “what is the matter? Are we going to the country earlier than usual?”

“Yes, Alice,” said Mrs. Grey, “we are going to the country day after to-morrow. Now that your school is ended there is no need of our staying longer in town, and I am impatient enough to get away from this heat. I don’t suppose you are sorry, are you?” she added, laughing.

“Not very,” said Alice. “I am nearly roasted with this heat, and, mamma, just think, isn’t it too lovely? Susy Lee is going to Sandy Shore for the summer. Her papa has rented a cottage there.”

“Why, that must be the cottage next to us. I heard Mr. Morton had rented it but I did not know to whom. I am so glad. How delightful it will be for you.”

“But now you must run, my dear, for I am so busy that if I stop to talk to you I shall never finish what I have to do. I wish you would go up in the nursery, and see if the children are all right. Maria is so busy helping me that she has no time to look after them.”

Alice went up stairs, resolving that she would take care of the children all the afternoon. “I cannot pack the trunks,” she said,

“but I can help by giving the others time to do it.”

She found beside her little sister Janet and brother Harry, Pauline and Charley Roberts there. The children had found a box of paints, and had been amusing themselves by making pictures of each other. They were in a great state of merriment over their last performance when Alice opened the door and walked in.

“Why don’t you paint something really nice?” said she. “I have some pictures in my room, and you can draw any one which you will select. Now, wait a minute till I bring you some.”

So Alice went to her room, and soon returned with some pictures. The children gathered around, and, after some hesitation, they selected a picture of a man skating.

“Let’s choose this,” said Charley Roberts; “It is such a hot day that a winter scene is refreshing. Doesn’t it feel delightful to breathe that cold air, and to see all that ice and snow?”

Alice laughed at this flight of imagination, and seating herself upon the floor she began to look over her sketch-book, while the children amused themselves by drawing.

The hours flew quickly past, and Alice took such good care of the children that her mamma was able to get everything ready for their departure in time. The eventful day arrived, and at six o’clock the children were up. The train left so early that it was necessary to make a very early start.

Breakfast was hurriedly eaten, and then the small bags and parcels which had not been already sent were gathered together, and out went the happy party to the carriage which was waiting for them at the door.

Oh, how delightful it was to be leaving the hot city with all its noise and dust, and how sorry Alice felt for all the people she met who were obliged to remain behind. Although the morning was cool, the day which followed was sure to be warm and uncomfortable.

The ride in the cars was long and dusty, to be sure, but who cared for that when there was something so delightful to look forward to at the end?

And it did not seem so very long after all, for there was so much to talk about, and there were so many plans to make for the summer, that before they knew it the conductor called out “Sandy Shore,” and they were at their summer home.

There was the old stage waiting at the station. In a few minutes all were comfortably seated, and off they went.

Oh, what rejoicings there were to be at home again, for the children always persisted in calling their country place home, and their house in the city as a sort of place where they must work and improve as much as possible.

The children ran about from room to room to see if there were any changes, but first of all they had to pay a visit to the stable, where they found Wrinkles, the old mastiff, basking in the sun, little dreaming that his friends were so near. When he heard their voices and saw them before him, his joy knew no bounds. He jumped up, and nearly overturned them in his joy at seeing them again.

Then, when he was convinced of their presence, he would not let them out of his sight, but followed them about everywhere. Everything had to be inspected; every room in the house had to be gone into; every corner of the stable must be looked at; and the dear old hay loft, where so many happy hours had been passed, could certainly not be neglected. And what should they find up there but Mistress Tab, with five of the prettiest kittens you ever saw. And what did they all do but march down stairs after the children, and walk into the house to show themselves to Mrs. Grey.

Then the boats had to be examined to see whether they leaked after the long winter drying. They were discovered to be in good condition, and while Wrinkles ran along the banks the children roved about, having such a delightful time that they could scarcely believe it could be so late when supper was announced.

The days went on happily till the time arrived when Susy Lee was expected. Then of course Alice was doubly happy. Although she was not one of those silly girls who cannot find pleasure in the society of her younger brothers and sisters, she was of course delighted to have a girl of her own age to play with. So on the day that Susy came she was, of course, quite excited. She and Janet and Harry went about collecting flowers, so that the house might look bright and pleasant when the family should arrive.

So Susy came, and then began the good times in earnest. The children took long walks in the woods and lanes, with Wrinkles for a guide and protector, and many were the curiosities they brought back from their rambles.

One day as they were walking along over a road which they had never taken before, Susy suddenly exclaimed:

“See, there is a little house. I am so glad, for I am dreadfully thirsty. I didn’t say anything about it before, for it was of no use when there was no water near by, but now I can get a drink. Come.”

So the children ran on till they came to the hut, and knocking at the back door they waited quietly for it to be opened.

But no answer came to their rapping, so Susy lifted the latch and peeped cautiously in. She started back in a minute, however, exclaiming:

“Alice, there is a little girl in there sitting on the floor and crying like everything. What shall I do? Would you go in or would you go away?”

Alice hesitated a minute, and then she said, softly:

“Let us go in by all means. The poor child may be in trouble, and, if so, we may be able to help her.”

So the children opened the door, and Alice walked quietly towards the girl. At first she was so absorbed by her grief that she did not hear any footsteps, but suddenly, being conscious that some one else was in the room, she started to her feet, and, drying her eyes upon the corner of her apron, she exclaimed:

“Oh! I beg your pardon, miss; I did not hear any one. Can I do anything for you?”

“We came in search of a drink of water,” said Alice, “and seeing you in trouble we came in, hoping we should be able to do something to help you.”

“How kind you are,” said Sarah, for that was her name. “Indeed I am in sore need of help, but I do not see how I can get it.”

“What is it that troubles you,” said Susy.

“Why, you see,” said Sarah, “mother and I live here by ourselves since father died, which is going on five years now. Well, what with his long sickness and being out of work, we got into debt. After he died mother and I, we worked awful hard. We paid up a little each year until we got even again. But it wore poor mother out, for she did the bulk of everything, and now she has an awful cough, and is so bad she has to stay in bed nearly all day. All our money is gone now, and I can’t get food for her, and how can she get strong again without it? I could earn something if I could get out, but I can’t leave her; and my clothes are so ragged that I can’t bear to be seen. I thought I would cook a couple of potatoes, but I just took out the basket and found that there were only these bad ones left. I never lost my courage before,” she added, “for when we could work together we were bright and cheerful, but it is clean gone now.” And though the poor child tried to smile she failed, and, bursting into tears, she cried as if her heart would break.

“Sarah,” called a feeble voice from a little room near by, “Sarah, whom are you talking to?”

“Yes, mother,” said Sarah; “I’ll come in in one minute.”

So she took down a tumbler from a shelf, and after giving Alice and Susy some water she went into her mother’s room.

While she was gone Alice and Susy looked at each other for a few minutes in silence, then Alice spoke.

“Susy,” she said, “we must do something at once; it is too dreadful to think of.”

When Sarah came back Susy said to her:

“Cannot the neighbors do anything for you?”

“We have not any near neighbors,” said Sarah; “and besides they do not know anything about us. Mother and I only moved here a little while ago, and we don’t like people to know of our troubles.”

“Well,” said Alice, “there is one thing very certain, you must go home with me and get a basket of provisions. After you have had something to eat we can decide what to do.”

“Oh, thank you so much,” said Sarah, gratefully; “but – but – ”

“But what?”

“I don’t see how I can leave mother alone. She has to be looked after all the time, and yet, oh, I should be so glad to see her eat a good meal.”

“I will stay with your mother,” said Susy, “and will take good care of her, too; so run along.”

Sarah put on her hat, and, walking along by Alice’s side, she told her about her past life. Her father had been a ship-carpenter. While health and strength lasted he had plenty to do, but when troubles came people became tired of helping them. Money was borrowed, and bills had to be run up, and at last came his death and the expenses consequent upon it.

Since then they had been trying in every way to pay their debts, and had gone on very well. Their house was larger than they needed, and they had at last resolved to move to an adjoining village, and into a smaller house. They knew that at Sandy Shore there were many families spending the summer, and Mrs. Thompson hoped to get washing or sewing.

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