

Mathews Joanna Hooe

Jessie's Parrot



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I.

THE NEW SCHOLAR

"FANNY LEROY is going away from our school," said Carrie Ransom one morning to Belle Powers and two or three more of her young schoolmates.

"Oh, dear! I'm sorry," said Belle.

"So am I," said Dora Johnson. "Why is she going?"

"Has she finished her education, and is she never going to school any more?" asked Mabel Walton.

"Why, no," said Belle; "she's nothing but a little girl; and you don't finish your education till you're quite grown up and have long dresses."

"Why is she going away?" asked Lily. "I don't want her to go. I like Fanny."

"So do I. She's real nice," said Carrie; "but she is going, for all, 'cause her father and mother and all her family are going to Europe and she is going with them."

"I wish she wouldn't," said Belle; and one and another echoed their sorrow at the loss of their schoolmate.

Fanny had always been well liked in the school; but now that they were about to lose her the little girls found that they were even more fond of her than they had supposed, and many regrets were expressed when, a moment later, she came in accompanied by Gracie Howard.

Fanny herself was very melancholy and low, for this was to be the last day at school, as she informed the other children; the journey to Europe having been decided upon rather suddenly, and the departure was to take place within a few days. Nevertheless, although she was sorry to part with her teacher and classmates, and in mortal dread of the voyage, she felt herself rather of a heroine, and entitled to be made much of.

"We'll have an empty place in our school then," said Belle.

"No," said Fanny, "for my cousin Hattie is coming to take my place; it is all arranged, and Miss Ashton says she can come."

"Is she nice?" asked Lily.

"Well – yes," answered Fanny, half doubtfully.

"You don't seem to think she's so *very*," said Belle.

No, Fanny evidently had her own opinion on this subject; but as she was not a child who was ready to speak ill of the absent, she would not say more than she could help. But the interest and curiosity of her schoolmates were aroused, and they could not be satisfied without hearing more.

"I know Hattie," said Gracie Howard, who was more intimate with Fanny and her family than any of the other children, – "I know Hattie, and I like her. She thinks I am very nice. She told me so."

This was plainly the highest of recommendations in Gracie's eyes. Any one who admired her was sure of her favor; but this fact did not have quite as much weight with her companions as it did with herself, and they turned once more to Fanny.

"But tell us, Fanny," said Lily Norris, "why don't you like her so very much?"

Fanny looked, as she felt, uncomfortable at this close question.

"Why," she answered reluctantly, "I do like her; she's my cousin, you know, so I have to; but then – but then – I think I'll let you wait till she comes to find out the kind of girl she is. Maybe you'll like her very much. Gracie does."

Fanny had her own doubts whether Gracie or any of the others would always continue to like Hattie as well as they might do upon a first acquaintance; but she very properly and generously resolved not to tell tales and prejudice the minds of the other children against the new comer. Better to give Hattie all the chance she could and let it be her own fault if she were not popular with her classmates.

I cannot say that Fanny reasoned this out in just such words; but the kind thought was in her mind, and she resolved to hold her peace and say nothing unkind about her cousin. Would Hattie have done as much for her or for any one else? You shall judge for yourself by and by.

The parting with Fanny was rather a sad one, for the children were all fond of her, and she took it so very hardly herself, declaring that she never expected to see any one of them again. For Fanny, though a very good and amiable little girl, was one who was apt to "borrow trouble," as the saying is; that is, she was always worrying herself about misfortunes which would, could, or might happen to herself or her friends.

Therefore she now expressed her expectation of never seeing any of her young friends again, and when Lily very naturally inquired if the family meant to stay "for ever an' ever an' ever," said, "No, but people were very often drowned when they went to Europe in a steamer, and very likely she would be."

Nor was she to be persuaded to take a more cheerful view of the future, even when Dora Johnson suggested that many more people crossed the ocean and returned in safety than were lost upon it. She was determined to dwell upon the possibilities, and even probabilities of her being shipwrecked, and took leave of her schoolmates with a view to such a fate.

"Fanny did not act as if she thought we'd like her cousin Hattie very much, did she?" questioned Nellie Ransom as she walked homeward with Gracie Howard, Dora Johnson, and Laura Middleton.

"No, she did not," said Laura. "Fanny don't tell tales or say unkind things about people, but it was quite plain she does not think so very much of Hattie Leroy."

"I know the reason why," said Gracie.

"What is it?" asked Laura.

"Fanny said something very hateful about me," answered Gracie, "and Hattie told me of it; and just for that Fanny was mad at Hattie."

"Well, I should think Fanny might be mad," said Laura. "Hattie had no right to tell you if Fanny didn't mean her to, and I don't believe she did."

"No," said Gracie, "I don't suppose Fanny did want me to know it; but then she had no business to say it."

"Hattie had no business to repeat it," said Dora indignantly; "if she is that kind of a girl I don't wonder Fanny don't like her, and I wish she was not coming to our school."

"What did Fanny say?" asked Laura, who had her full share of curiosity.

"She said – she-er – she-er – I'm not going to tell you what she said," answered Gracie, who was really ashamed to confess what slight cause for offence Fanny had given, and that it was her own wounded self-love which made it appear so "hateful."

But although Gracie would not tell her schoolmates, I shall tell you, for I know all about it.

The mighty trouble was just this.

Hattie Leroy had but lately come to live in the city, and just when her parents were looking around for a good school to send her to, Fanny's papa and mamma made up their minds to take her abroad. This left her place vacant in Miss Ashton's class, and, as you have heard, it was at once secured for her little cousin.

Meanwhile Gracie and Hattie, who had met at Fanny's house, had struck up a violent *intimate friendship* and were now much together.

As may be supposed, Hattie was very curious respecting her future teacher and classmates, and asked both Fanny and Gracie many questions about them.

But, although the accounts given by the two children agreed in most points, yet, in some way, the story told by Gracie left a very different impression from that of Fanny. The latter thought her teacher and classmates very nearly, if not quite, perfect, and bestowed her praise freely and without stint. Well, and if you had heard Gracie's report you might have said that she did the same; but whenever Gracie said one good word for another she said a dozen for herself. One girl was a very bright scholar, but she stood second to Gracie; another was always punctual and steady, but Gracie had still a higher number of marks for these two virtues – or at least if she did not *have* them, she *deserved* them, and it was the fault of some one else that they had not fallen to her share. Nellie Ransom wrote such fine compositions; but then, they were by no means to be compared to Gracie's own, – oh, dear, no! So it was with each and every one; whatever merit any child in the class possessed, Gracie's went beyond it.

So at last Hattie quite naturally asked Fanny if Gracie were really the best child, the finest scholar, and the most admired and praised of all her classmates.

"Why, no," answered Fanny; "Gracie is a very good scholar, and 'most always knows her lessons perfectly; but Nellie is even better than she is, and has kept the head of the spelling and history classes ever so long. And she generally writes the best compositions; but Gracie don't think so, and always says Miss Ashton is unjust if she gives Nellie the highest marks. But Gracie *is* very smart, and can learn quicker than any of the rest of us; and she 'most always behaves well in school too."

"Better than any one else?" asked Hattie.

"No," said Fanny, rather indignantly; "there's lots of the children that are just as good as she is. She's not the best one in the school at all. She's good enough, but not so wonderful."

"She thinks she is," said Hattie.

"That's nothing," answered Fanny; "people's thinking they are a thing don't make them that thing, you know."

"Then you think Gracie is conceited and thinks a great deal of herself, do you?" asked Hattie.

"Why, yes," answered Fanny, though half reluctantly; "no one could help thinking that, you know."

Fanny expressed herself in this manner more as a way of *excusing* her own opinion of Gracie than as accusing her little playmate.

"Who do you think *is* the best child in all the school?" asked Hattie.

"Well," answered Fanny, after a moment's reflection, "I b'lieve Belle Powers is. At least I think it is the best in her to be as good as she is, for she has to try pretty hard sometimes."

"Why?" asked inquisitive Hattie again.

"Because she has no mother, and she has always been a good deal spoiled by her papa and her old nurse. But I never saw any child who wanted to be good more than Belle, and she tries very much; and we are all very fond of her, and Miss Ashton excuses her things sometimes because she is sorry for her."

"Don't that make you mad?" said Hattie.

"No," answered Fanny with much energy; "we'd be real mean if we were mad when Belle has no mother. No, indeed; no one could bear to have Belle scolded; we all love her too much."

Now this was seemingly a most innocent conversation; was it not? and one could hardly have supposed that it would have made trouble for poor Fanny as it did.

Gracie and Fanny lived within a few doors of one another, the latter a little nearer to Miss Ashton's house than the former; and Gracie was in the habit of stopping for Fanny on her way to school that they might walk there together.

But one morning a day or two after this, Fanny, standing by the window and watching for her young friend as usual, saw her go by with her maid without so much as turning her head or casting her eye up at the window where she must know Fanny awaited her.

"It is the queerest thing I ever knew," said Fanny to her father as she walked along by his side a few moments later; "it 'most seems as if Gracie was offended with me to do so; but then she can't be, for I have not done a thing to her. I shall ask her right away, as soon as I am at school."

But Fanny was only just in time to take off her hat and cloak and go to her seat before the bell rang, and so had no opportunity before school to inquire into the cause of Gracie's strange behavior.

There was no need of words, however, to show that Gracie was indeed offended with her, for averted looks and scornful tossings of the head showed that plainly enough. Poor Fanny was hurt and uncomfortable, and vainly tried to imagine what she could have done that offended Gracie so much.

She ran to her as soon as recess gave her liberty to speak.

"Why, Gracie! what is the matter?" she asked. "Why did you not stop for me this morning?"

"Cause I did not choose to," answered Gracie shortly.

"Are you mad with me?" asked Fanny, putting a very unnecessary question, for it was quite plain to all beholders that this was Gracie's state of mind.

"Yes, I am; and I have a good right to be too," answered Gracie, her eyes flashing at Fanny.

"What *have* I done?" asked the innocent Fanny.

"You need not pretend you don't know, Miss Hateful," replied Gracie, "nor pretend you haven't a guilty conscience. I've found you out! I'll never be friends with you again."

"You ought to tell Fanny what it is, and let her make it up," said Belle.

"She can't make it up. I've found her out before it was too late. She is a false, treacherous friend," said Gracie, waxing magnificent and severe in her reproaches, as she imagined.

Poor Fanny, a tender-hearted, sensitive little thing, was overwhelmed by these upbraidings, which she was not conscious of deserving; but neither her entreaties nor those of the other children could draw more than this from Gracie, who turned away from them with an air of great offence, and holding her head very high with insulted dignity.

"Augh!" said Lily Norris, who generally took up the cudgels in defence of any one whom she considered oppressed or injured, and who generally contrived to be quite as cutting and severe in her remarks as the offender had been; "you had better take care, Gracie; some day that nose of yours won't come down again, it is growing so used to sticking itself up at people. If when you're grown up people call you 'stuck-up-nose Miss Howard,' you won't feel very complimented; but you can just remember it is the consequence of your being such a proudy when you was young."

Gracie made no reply, except by raising both nose and head higher still, which expressive motion Lily answered by saying, —

"Oh, *don't* I feel like giving you a good slap!" with which she walked away, fearing perhaps that she might be too strongly tempted to put her desire into execution.

Fanny was a good deal distressed, and the other children all felt much sympathy for her, for, as you will doubtless do, they thought Gracie's behavior not only unkind but also unjust.

For, although such scenes as this were becoming quite too frequent in consequence of Gracie's ever increasing vanity and conceit, she generally was ready enough to proclaim the cause of offence; but now she was not only "hateful," as Lily called it, but "mysterious" also, and would give Fanny no opportunity of explaining the supposed grievance.

Fanny went home both unhappy and vexed, — Gracie still carrying matters with a high hand and refusing even to walk on the same side of the street with her — and finding her cousin there, as was quite natural, she told her of the trouble with Gracie.

Had Fanny not been too much disturbed to pay much attention to Hattie's manner, she might have seen that she looked uncomfortable when she told her story, fidgeting and coloring and having so little to say that Fanny thought her wanting in sympathy. But it was not until the next day that she discovered that Hattie was really the cause of the difficulty with Gracie. By that time she had heard that she was to sail for Europe in a few days, and this made her more unwilling than ever to be on bad terms with her young friend.

Meeting Gracie in the street, the poor little grieved heart overflowed, and rushing up to her, Fanny exclaimed, "Oh, Gracie! don't be cross with me any more, for I'm going to Europe, and I expect I'll be drowned in the steamer, and then you'll be sorry you did not make up with me."

This affecting prospect somewhat mollified Gracie's vexation; but still she answered in a tone of strong resentment, —

"Well, then; and why did you say hateful things about me to Hattie?"

"I didn't," said Fanny, who had so little intention of making unkind remarks about Gracie that she had really forgotten her conversation with Hattie. "I didn't. I never said a thing about you."

"Hattie said you did," answered Gracie; "she says you told her I thought myself very wonderful, but I was not; and that 'most all the girls were better scholars than me.'"

"I didn't," said Fanny indignantly.

"And she says," continued Gracie, "that you said 'cause I thought myself good did not make me good, and that Nellie wrote better compositions than I did. And she says" — this was plainly the first and worst count in Gracie's eyes — "she says you said no one could help knowing I was conceited and stuck up."

This last speech suddenly recalled to Fanny's mind what she *had* said, and she was dismayed; nor could she see how she was to explain it to Gracie.

She was fond of Gracie, who, when her self-conceit did not come in her way, was really a pleasant and lovable child; and, oh! how she did wish she had never allowed Hattie to lead her into that conversation about her schoolmates.

She colored violently and exclaimed, —

"Well, I did say that, but I did not say it in that way, Gracie. I don't quite know how it was, but it did not seem so bad as that when I said it. And Hattie asked me, so I couldn't help saying what I thought; but it wasn't of my own accord and — and — well, you know, Gracie, most all of us do think you think a good deal of yourself — but — oh, dear! it was too mean for Hattie to go and tell you; and somehow I suppose she's made you think it was worse than it was. 'Cause I didn't mean to say any thing hateful about you; but Hattie asked such a lot of questions, and I never thought she'd go and tell; and I'm going away, and I expect I'll never come back, and, oh, dear, it's too mean!"

All this Fanny poured forth in a very distressed and excited manner, finishing by a burst of tears.

Yes, it was indeed "too mean," and Gracie felt that Fanny had been shabbily treated. She had listened to Hattie's tell-tale report with a half-ashamed feeling, knowing that Fanny could never have thought that her words would be repeated; and, although anger and mortification had taken a strong hold upon her heart, she could not help seeing that Fanny had more cause of complaint than she had.

So she put her arm about Fanny's neck, and, with what she considered magnanimous forgiveness, told her not to cry any more and she would "stop being mad."

And when they talked the matter over and Fanny recalled what she *had* said, both of Gracie and of the other children in the class, it could not but be seen that Hattie had exaggerated as well as "told tales," so making mischief and bringing discord between the two little friends. And had Fanny been revengeful, or too proud to overlook Gracie's unkindness and beg her to tell her what had come between them the trouble might have been lasting, and they have parted for a long time with bitterness and resentment rankling in their breasts.

But now there was peace between them once more, though Gracie did still secretly feel some vexation at Fanny for even allowing that she could be wrong, and took great credit to herself for being so forgiving and generous.

And now you will not wonder that Fanny did not feel disposed to think Hattie "so very nice," although she, far more generous and charitable than her cousin, would not tell tales and prejudice the minds of her future schoolmates against her.

But Gracie hardly thought the less of Hattie for what she had learned of her; for she always liked any one who admired her, and this Hattie professed to do; perhaps she really did so, for, as I have said, Gracie was a pleasant child, and very clever in many things.

II. *AN EXCURSION*

"A LARGE omnibus stood before the door of Miss Ashton's house, and had been waiting there some minutes. This was on a street where a line of omnibuses ran, and every now and then some would-be passenger made for the door of this one, when the driver would turn and say something which plainly disappointed him of his ride, at least in this particular stage.

If such an individual chanced to glance up at the windows of Miss Ashton's house, he saw there a row of little faces in each of the parlor windows; and these same faces brimming over with smiles and dimples at the sight of his discomfiture, and the consciousness that this omnibus had been chartered for their especial pleasure and convenience, and that no mere passer-by had any right or title therein.

Some people smiled in return to the happy little group, and nodded good-naturedly, as if to say, —

"Oh, yes! it is all right, and we are glad you are going to enjoy yourselves, and hope you will have a very pleasant time;" but one or two looked cross, frowning and shaking their heads or shoulders in a displeased manner, and as if they had no sympathy with any simple pleasure or frolic.

Upon each and all of these did the little observers pass remarks, according to what they believed to be their deserts.

"Look at that man," said Belle Powers, "how very displeased he looks. Just as cross as any thing, because the driver wouldn't let him go in our stage."

"I don't believe he likes children," said Bessie Bradford.

"No," said her sister Maggie, "I think he cannot be one of the happy kind the Bible speaks about, that have their 'quivers full of them,' for which he is to be pitied, and we need not be very severe with him."

"But can't people like children and be glad they are going to have a nice time, even if they don't have any in their own homes?" asked Carrie Ransom.

"Yes, of course," said Maggie, always ready to find excuses for others; "but then probably that gentleman never had nice times himself when he was a child, and so he does not know how to appreciate them."

Maggie's long words and elegant sentences always settled any doubtful point, and the "cross gentleman," who still stood upon the sidewalk waiting for the next passing omnibus, was now regarded with eyes of sympathy and pity, which were quite lost upon him as he scolded and grumbled at the "fuss that was made nowadays about children's pleasures."

"Chartered for a troop of youngsters," he growled forth to another gentleman, who coming up also opened the door of the omnibus, and would have jumped in.

Upon which the new-comer drew back, looked up smilingly at the windows of the house, nodded and waved his hand, receiving in return blushes and smiles for himself, with an answering nod or two from some of the least shy of the group.

"He's glad," said Lily; "he is a nice gentleman, and I expect he has lots of little children who love him dearly, and that he tries to give them a good time."

"And so is made happy himself," said Maggie. "There comes Patrick with the shawls and wraps."

And now came Miss Ashton and a couple of lady friends, who had volunteered to go with her and help take care of the little party, bound for an excursion and ramble in the Central Park; and the signal being given for the merry group to take their places in the stage, forth they all fluttered,

like so many birds; and amid much laughing and chattering stowed themselves away in the roomy conveyance.

They were all seated, and Patrick, Mrs. Bradford's man, who had been *lent* for the occasion, was mounting to his seat beside the driver, when another gentleman, coming up with a quick step, pulled open the door of the omnibus, and popped in. He was plainly shortsighted, and did not see how matters stood until he was fairly inside and looking about for a seat.

Perhaps, indeed, his hearing taught him first, for he might almost have thought himself in a nest of sparrows with all that chirping and fluttering. A smothered laugh or two also broke forth as he entered, and he speedily saw that he had no right to a place there.

"Ah! private, I see. Beg your pardon, ladies," he said good-naturedly, and jumped out again, turning with a bow, and "I wish you a pleasant time." Then, as he caught sight of a roguish face and a pair of dancing eyes watching him with a look of recognition, he said, —

"Why, Lily, my dear! Glad to see you. Bound for a frolic? I hope you may enjoy yourself; and your schoolmates as well. A merry day to you, birdies." With which he banged the door and watched them off.

"Who's that gentleman, Lily?" asked more than one voice.

"He is Kitty Raymond's father. His name is Mr. Raymond," answered Lily.

"He is a nice, pleasant gentleman, is he not?" asked Bessie.

"Well, yes, he is very pleasant," said Lily, "but then he is an awful liar."

"Oh-h-h! ah! ah!" broke from one and another of the children at Lily's very plain speaking; and Miss Ashton said reprovingly, —

"Lily, my child! what a very improper expression for you to use, and of one so much older than yourself, too."

"I don't care," said Lily, "it is true, Miss Ashton. I know he tells the most dreadful untrue stories, and that does make him a liar, I know. If children say what is very untrue, people say it is a lie; and when grown-ups say what is not true to children I don't see why they are not liars all the same. And Mr. Raymond don't tell little stories what you would call *fibs*, either, but real big, true *lies*, what Tom calls whoppers. So, though he is pleasant and good-natured, I don't think he is so very nice; and I'm glad he is not my papa."

Miss Ashton hardly knew what to say, for if Lily's accusations were true, — and the child was not apt to accuse any one wrongfully, — her reasoning was quite just, and it was plainly to be seen that in some way her sense of right and truth had been grievously offended. But still she did not wish to have her speak in such an improper way, and she was about to say so again, when Lily broke forth once more with, —

"Miss Ashton, I'll tell you, and you can just judge for yourself. The other day I was spending the afternoon with Kitty, and her little brother wanted to go down stairs with us, and his papa did not want him to go; so he told him that the big black man in the closet in the hall would catch him and put him up the chimney. And it *was a lie*! I say it was a real, true lie," persisted Lily, who was apt to be emphatic in her choice of words, "for Mr. Raymond knew there was no black man there, and he just made it up."

"Was the little boy frightened?" asked Belle.

"Yes, as frightened as any thing, and he really believes there is a black man in that closet; and Willie Raymond, who is six years old, will not go past that closet without some big person. And I did feel not very brave myself when I went past it," confessed Lily, "for all I knew there was no black man there — and if there was, he wouldn't hurt me, the poor, old fellow — and knew it was just a — well, if Miss Ashton says so, I'll call it a *fib*, but I shall *think* it was a lie."

Miss Ashton and the other ladies could hardly help smiling at Lily's tone; and the former felt that the child was so far right that she could scarcely reprove her again for her indignant attack upon this too common form of deceit.

"And Mr. Raymond went and winked at me, just as if he thought *I* thought it was funny," pursued Lily; "but I thought it was only horrid, and I didn't smile a bit, but looked back at him very solemn. No, I don't like him, and I'm not going to."

"You don't like him because you can't respect him," said Bessie with solemn gravity.

"No, I just don't," answered Lily; "and I'm not going to go and have a respect for a person who tells – who says what is not true, not if they are as big and as old as a mountain."

Lily's resolution was received with general approval; but now, at her suggestion, the subject was changed. There was enough to talk about without taking any unpleasant thing; and how those little tongues did go!

It was a mild, lovely day in the early spring, uncommonly warm for the season, – just the day for an excursion. Modest crocuses, lovely hyacinths and gay tulips were in bloom; the willows were just clothing themselves in their first tender green, and every stream and spring rippled and sparkled and sang as if it were rejoicing in its new life and liberty.

The park was fairly alive with children, who, like our little party, seemed determined to enjoy this bright, spring day to the utmost; but perhaps none were so gleeful and merry as our young friends.

The windows of the omnibus were open, and the little girls had all scrambled upon their knees that they might the better see what was without; and many a grave countenance was won to smiles by the sight of the bright, joyous faces as they rolled past, and the merry peals of laughter which every now and then broke forth from the cumbrous vehicle. And they scattered not only smiles and bright looks wherever they went, but other good things also.

Mabel Walton, who considered it almost impossible to enjoy oneself without a quantity of candies and sugar-plums on hand, had been furnished by her over-indulgent mother with a large supply of these delicacies; nor were most of the others without their share; so that Miss Ashton looked with some dismay upon the treasures which were displayed by one and another, fearing that her little flock might surfeit themselves with too many sweets before the day was over.

However, her mind was soon relieved, at least in a measure. For Mabel having doled out a handful of sugar-plums to each of her companions, Bessie Bradford called out as the carriage rolled slowly up a hilly part of the road, —

"Oh! see that little girl; what a nice face she has. But she looks so pale and sorry. I wish I had some pennies for her; but I will give her some of my sugar-plums. Perhaps she don't have many."

Poor child! she looked as if she had not many loaves of bread, as she ran by the side of the omnibus, holding up her thin hand. A pale, sorrowful little face it was that looked up into those, so rosy and happy, above it; pinched, careworn, and old above its years, with that look so often seen in the faces of the children of the poor. Yet, in spite of her extreme poverty, she was not very ragged or very dirty; and as little Bessie had said, she had "a nice face," an open, straightforward look, a gentle expression, and a clear, honest eye.

As she saw Bessie's hand outstretched, her face brightened, and as the little girl dropped two or three sugar-plums, she stooped hastily to pick them up; but when she raised her head again, the old weary look had come back, deepened now by disappointment.

Just then the driver whipped up his horses and the omnibus rolled on faster, leaving the child looking sadly after it, and making no attempt to pick up the sugar-plums now thrown out freely by all the little girls.

"Why! she looks as if she didn't like sugar-plums," said Belle.

"Impossible!" said Maggie. "There never could be a person so wanting in sense as not to like sugar-plums."

"Maybe that man who lived in a tub did not," said Lily. "Maggie, I was very much interested in that man when you wrote to me about him, and I meant to ask you a little more about him, but I did not think he could be a *wise* man. What was his name?"

"Mr. Diogenes," said Maggie; "and the reason they called the old cross-patch a wise man was because wise men were very scarce in those days. They only had seven in all that country; but when you are as far as I am in Parley's History you will learn all about them."

"I wonder what did make that little girl look so sorry," said Bessie, unable to forget the look of disappointment so plainly visible on the child's face.

"I think, darling," said Miss Ashton, "that she expected pennies when she saw you were about to throw something out, and so was not satisfied with the candies. There was something interesting and sweet in her face."

"Here are some more poor children," said Bessie; "let's drop some sugar-plums to them and see if they care about them."

There could be no doubt as to the approbation of these new recipients of the bounty of our little friends. At first it was difficult to tell whether the pleasure was most enjoyed by those within the omnibus who scattered with liberal hand, or by the outsiders who gathered the harvest; but as the enthusiasm of these last drew new claimants, and all waxed more and more clamorous, it soon became an annoyance, and Miss Ashton was obliged to put a stop to the shower, which had already received a check, as some of the younger children were becoming frightened.

But Patrick and the driver were forced to threaten the obstreperous crowd, and even to call for the aid of a policeman before they could be scattered, so that this diversion did not end so agreeably.

There was one thing gained, however, in Miss Ashton's opinion; and this was that the greater part of the sugar-plums had been disposed of, without hurt to her young charge.

Not that she objected to sugar-plums altogether. Do not think, my little readers, that she was, as Maggie would have said, so "wanting in sense," as that; but she had been rather appalled by the sight of the numerous tempting looking parcels that were produced, to say nothing of Mabel's over-abundant supply.

Our gay party made the round of the park, stopping for a while at any place of interest, and now and then alighting if they were so inclined. They hung for some time about the paddock where the deer are kept, putting their little hands through the palings and trying to tempt the pretty, gentle creatures to come nearer. But the deer were not to be persuaded and although they watched the children with their mild, soft eyes in a very amiable manner, they held aloof and would not condescend to a closer acquaintance.

The swans were less timid, and, as the children flocked down to the border of the lake with their hands full of crackers and bread, came swimming up, arching their graceful necks, and looking eagerly for the bits with which they were speedily treated. It was enchanting to see them so friendly, and to have them feed from one's very hand.

The old gray arsenal, with its collection of wild animals, was not to be visited until after they had taken their lunch. As they passed the Casino on their way up through the park, Patrick had been left there to make all ready for them; and now they drove back and alighted. Pleasant and mild though the day was, the ground was still too cold and the air too fresh to permit of lunching out of doors; and, although the children entreated that they might be permitted to do so, Miss Ashton was too wise to yield.

The lunch was not quite ready when they reached the Casino, and the children were permitted to wander around and amuse themselves as they pleased for a few moments, provided they did not lose sight of the house, or go beyond call.

Bessie, Lily, and Belle had strolled a short distance away together, and had disappeared from the view of Maggie, Nellie, and Dora, who stood at the head of a short flight of stone steps leading up to the Casino. They had but gone around the other side of the hedge, however, and could not be far off.

Suddenly Lily and Belle came flying back with frightened faces, and rushed breathless and panting to where the other children stood.

Then Belle turned, and exclaimed, —

"Where's Bessie? Didn't Bessie come?"

No Bessie was to be seen, certainly; and Maggie, noticing the startled faces of the other children, took alarm at once for her little sister, and started forward, crying, —

"Where is she? What has happened? Where's my Bessie?"

Before Belle or Lily could speak, Hattie darted from behind the hedge, laughing and mischievous; and, pointing her finger at the crimson faces of the two little ones, cried triumphantly, —

"Oh! didn't I take you in? Didn't I give you a fright, though?"

"What is it? Where's Bessie?" said Maggie again.

Hattie sat down upon the lower step, and doubling herself over and rocking back and forth, said between paroxysms of laughter, —

"Oh, dear! Bessie is round there talking to the old fellow. She's all right. Didn't I play you two geese a nice trick, though? How you did run! I didn't think you could be so taken in. Oh, what fun!"

"What!" exclaimed Lily, indignation taking the place of her alarm, "were you tricking us? Didn't he try to take your hair? Hattie, Hattie! you mean, mean girl! And you told us a real wicked story, too. How dare you do it?" And Lily stamped her foot at Hattie, in a real passion at the trick which had been played upon her.

The effect was different upon Belle. She was a sensitive little thing, easily overcome by any undue excitement; and, throwing herself upon Maggie, she burst into a violent fit of sobbing and crying.

Miss Ashton and her friends heard and came to inquire into the trouble; and Hattie was now rather frightened herself as she saw the effect of her foolish deceit.

Lily indignantly told the story, which amounted to this. It was a well-known fact, and had unfortunately come to the ears of our little girls, that some man had lately attacked several children, and suddenly severed the hair from their heads, making off as fast as possible after he had done so. He did this for the sake of the hair, which he probably sold; but he was, of course, a bad man and a thief, and the children all felt much dread of him.

So when Hattie had come flying up to Bessie, Belle, and Lily, without any hat, and seemingly in a state of the wildest excitement, and had told them, with every appearance of truth and of being herself excessively frightened, that "that old man there" had snatched off her hat and tried to cut her hair, they had readily believed her — as an old man was really there — and had turned about and run away in great alarm. They had been terrified half out of their senses; and now here was Hattie confessing — yes, glorying, till Miss Ashton came — that she had "tricked" them, that she was "only in fun," it was all "a joke."

But her triumph was speedily brought to an end, when Miss Ashton saw Belle's state, and heard how it had been brought about. She sternly reprimanded Hattie, and bade her go into the house, and remain there.

But where was Bessie?

The other children declared that "an old man was really there;" and, in spite of Hattie's confession that she had only been joking, Maggie's mind was filled with visions of her little sister's sunny curls in the hands of a ruffian; and away she flew in search of her, quite regardless of any supposed risk to her own wealth of dark, waving ringlets.

III.

JESSIE AND HER GRANDFATHER

WHERE was Bessie?

When Lily and Belle turned to run from the figure which Hattie pointed out as that of the man who attacked her, she started with them, quite as much alarmed as the other two; and, if they thought about it at all, they imagined she was close behind them. But she had gone only a few steps when she heard a voice, a weak voice, calling after herself and her companions, and saying, —

"Don't be afraid, little girls; don't run away, little ladies. Couldn't ye stop a minute to help an old man?"

Something in the tones touched the tender little heart of Bessie; and she checked her steps, ready to start again, however, on the shortest notice, and looked back at the old man.

A very old man he seemed, and a very feeble old man, scarcely able, if he had the will, to run after active little girls, or to do them any harm. His hair was very white, and his face pinched and thin; but he looked kind and gentle, as Bessie saw, even from the distance at which she stood; and her fears died away as she looked at him.

The old man sat upon a bank; and Bessie stood hesitating and watching him, trying to make up her mind to go and ask if he was in trouble. She saw that he had dropped his stick, which had rolled away, and lay on the ground just beyond his reach.

"Would you do an old man a kindness, and give him his stick, little Miss?" he called to her, pointing at the same time to the cane. "Why did ye all run that way? I wouldn't hurt a hair of your heads, more than I would of my own Jessie's."

This reference to the "hair on their heads" was rather unfortunate, for it startled Bessie again, and brought back the cause for alarm. Was the old man really in trouble, and unable to reach his stick? she thought, or was this only a trap to catch her, and deprive her of her curls?

So she stood still, hesitating; and the old man, as if in despair of receiving any help from her, tried to raise himself a little, and stretched out his trembling hand towards the stick. But it was useless; it lay too far; he could not rise without its aid, and he sank back again, looking more helpless and feeble than before. This was too much for Bessie. She could not bear to see suffering and not try to relieve it; and it seemed to her that it would be cruel and wicked not to lend a helping hand to this poor old creature.

"Please, dear Father in heaven, not to let him hurt me," she whispered softly to herself; and then walked slowly towards the old man, her little heart beating painfully, it must be confessed, in spite of her petition, and the trust that it would be heard.

Keeping at as great a distance as it would allow, she stooped for the stick, and held it out at arm's length to the owner.

"Now may He that blesses the cup of cold water given in His name reward you," said the old man, as he took it from the timid little hand; "but why are you frightened at me, dear, and why did the other little ones run as if they were scared half out of their lives? When you passed all in the big stage, laughing and so gay, it put a warmth into my heart that hasn't been there for many a day, and I b'lieve it was your own loving, little face that smiled back at me as I waved my hat to you for a blessing on your joy. Why, I wouldn't hurt a living thing; least of all, little girls that always mind me of my Jessie. Though it's different enough that you are from her, my poor lamb," he added in a lower tone, which Bessie could not have heard had she not now drawn nearer to him.

For with the first words of the old man's speech, all fear had vanished from her mind. He had called down a blessing on her in a name which she knew and loved, and she could not be afraid of him longer. Besides, now that she looked at him more closely and with unprejudiced eyes, she recognized

him, and remembered how, as he said, when the stage had passed him with its merry load, he had taken off his hat and feebly cheered and waved to them as they went by.

"Don't you try to cut off little girls' hair?" she could not help asking, in spite of her new confidence.

"I?" answered the old man surprised; "and why would I do that? Ah! I see. Did you take me for *that* fellow? My little lady, they have him fast in jail, as he deserves; but how did you ever think I would do a thing like that?"

"A little girl said you tried to cut hers," answered the child.

"Then that little girl slandered an old man who had never harmed her," he said gravely. "I understand; she's frightened you for her own fun, or whatever it may be. Well, I'm up now," – he had slowly and painfully raised himself by the help of his cane, – "and I'd better be moving away, or the sight of me after that may spoil your pleasure. It was hard in her to turn you against one who would never have harmed you; but you're a sensible little lady, and a kind, and you'll never be the worse for doing a good turn to an old man."

"Don't go away," said Bessie, "the other children won't be afraid of you when I tell them Hattie – was – was – mistaken." Bessie feared that Hattie's tale was more than a mistake, but she would not accuse her until she was sure. "They won't want you to go away, poor, lame man."

"Jessie stays so long," he answered, looking about him helplessly. "She sat me here to rest a while, and I think she can't know how long she's been gone."

Before Bessie could speak again, around the hedge came Maggie, who stopped short in amazement at seeing her sister standing talking sociably to the dreaded old man. And with her curls all safe!

Maggie could hardly believe her own eyes. She went forward more slowly, till Bessie called to her, —

"O Maggie, dear! this old man wouldn't hurt us, or cut our hair for any thing. He likes little girls, and it made him feel badly because we ran away from him, and he is going away now 'cause he thinks we don't like him. Come and tell him not to."

Timid Maggie, feeling very doubtful, but determined to share her sister's risk, whatever that might be – she had almost forgotten that Hattie had confessed she only wanted to trick them all – drew still nearer, and taking Bessie's hand, gazed up at the old man with eyes in which pity and sympathy began to struggle with her former fear. He looked so poor and feeble and helpless, so little like doing harm to any one.

And now came Dora and Gracie, who had followed Maggie in search of Bessie; and as the little group gathered about the old man, Bessie said, —

"Where is your Jessie? Can we call her to you?"

"I can't tell, little Miss," he answered. "I've been sitting here more than an hour, I take it. Jessie was so eager about her parrot that she has maybe forgotten how long she's been away. Ah! there she comes now."

As he spoke, a child came running towards them, but seeing the group about her grandfather, paused in amazement at a short distance.

It was the very same little girl to whom they had thrown sugar-plums but an hour since, and who had looked so disappointed. The children recognized her immediately.

"Why! that's the little girl who was not pleased with our sugar-plums," said Bessie. "Is that your Jessie?"

The old man beckoned to her, and she came forward.

"This is my Jessie, Miss," he answered, "and a good girl she is too. I don't know what her old grandfather would do without her. She's given up the dearest thing she had for me, bless her!"

Jessie was now standing beside her grandfather, blushing and hanging her head at the notice thus drawn upon her.

"What was that?" asked Dora.

"Her parrot, Miss. A splendid parrot that her father, who's now dead and gone, brought her from beyond the seas. You'd think he was a human creature 'most, to hear him talk, and she loved him next to her old grandfather; but she parted with him for my sake."

"Didn't you like him?" asked Bessie.

"Yes, indeed, Miss. I was 'most as fond of the bird as she was herself; but it wasn't to be helped. You see I was sick so long, and the doctor bid me take a medicine that cost a deal of money, to drive the pain out of my bones; and how were we to get it when we'd not enough to buy bread from day to day, or to pay the rent that was due? So she sold her bird, for I can't do a hand's turn of work just yet."

"That was good of her," said Gracie; "did she get all the money she wanted for him?"

"More than we expected, Miss, for the man that keeps the house here," pointing to the Casino, "gave her ten dollars for him. And he lets her see him every day, and says when the summer is over she may have him back for eight dollars if she can raise it. For Poll draws people to the refreshment place, you see, with his funny ways, and his wonderful talk, and the keeper thinks he'll get two dollars worth out of him before the summer is over. But, Jessie 'll never raise all that money, though I have put by my pride, and let her ask charity here of the folks in the Park."

"And I don't feel that I ought to take it for that, either," said Jessie, as soon as the talkative old man paused for breath, and let her have a chance to speak, "'cause grandfather needs so many things, and the rent will be falling due before long again, so I must save up for straws and ribbon."

"For what?" asked Bessie, while at the same moment Dora said, —

"Why don't you find some work and earn money that way?"

"For straws and ribbon, Miss," said Jessie, answering Bessie's question first; then turning to Dora, she added, —

"I would work, Miss, and I do, when I have the things. I make little baskets and catchalls, and allumette holders of ribbon and straw and beads, and I sell them wherever I can; but the stock was all gone long ago, and I've no more to begin on."

"But," said Dora, "if people give you money, why don't you take that to buy your materials?"

Jessie shook her head sadly.

"It has taken every cent that's been given to me to buy just bread enough for me and grandfather to eat, Miss," she said; "there was nothing to spare for any thing else, and any way it is an uncertain thing, the selling of the baskets, till the weather is pleasant and warm, and people like to stop. Now, you see, is the time for me to be making them ready; but there's no use in thinking about it, and as for Poll," —

Jessie's sigh and filling eyes told of the despair with which she thought of the recovery of her pet.

"I have some money in my charity-box at home," said Maggie eagerly; "I'll give you some to buy straws and ribbon. I have no money with me, but Miss Ashton will lend me some for such a good purpose, I know, and I'll pay her as soon as we go home. I'll run and ask her."

But there was no need, for there was Miss Ashton come in search of her stray lambs, and in two minutes she had heard the story.

Heard it, but scarcely understood it, for that was difficult with one and another putting in a word, patching it out in various bits; to say nothing of the circumstance that our little girls themselves scarcely understood what they were talking about.

Jessie and her grandfather — who had nothing to say now that the lady had come, and who stood close to one another, the old man holding his hat in his hand and leaning on his stick — were somewhat confused themselves by the chatter and flutter of the eager little talkers; and when Miss Ashton turned to the latter and began to inquire into his story, his usual flow of words seemed to have failed him.

Miss Ashton spoke to Jessie.

"Grandfather was just telling the little ladies about my Polly, ma'am," she said modestly. "If they'd like to see him he's in the house there. And if you'd like to have him show off he'll talk better for me than for any one else, and I'll go and coax him."

"Oh! can we go and see him?" said Bessie; and Jessie once more saying, yes, and that she would go with them, the little girls ran off, while Miss Ashton remained to hear the old man's story.

It was a sad, but by no means an uncommon one. Jessie's mother had died when she was a baby. Her father, who was mate on a sailing-vessel, had been drowned at sea about two years ago. Until his death, his wages, together with what the old man made at stone-cutting, had supported them all in comfort. And even after that, the grandfather and the child had continued to keep along on what the former earned. Jessie, who was twelve years old, had been to school pretty steadily till a year ago, could "read and write and do up sums," and had also learned to sew.

But about that time the grandfather had taken a heavy cold, from being thoroughly wet with rain while at his work; and, neglecting to change his clothes, it had settled in all his joints, and a long and painful rheumatic illness followed. All the last summer he had lain bound hand and foot, the pretty trifles which Jessie had learned to make the sole support of the two. But with the winter the sale of her little wares had fallen off, poverty and suffering had increased upon them, and they had gone from bad to worse, till, as he had told the little girls, Jessie had been forced to sell her beloved parrot to keep a roof above their heads, and to buy the medicine so much needed for her grandfather. They had some help from the church at which they attended, but that was little. And now that it was warmer weather, and Jessie could begin to sell her wares, she had no money to buy materials, and he had consented that she should ask charity of passers-by, and so gain a few shillings to begin her trade.

They lived over there in a sad, tumble-down place, the old man said, "and he never thought to bring his Jessie to that; but the Lord had His own ways, and when He saw fit, He could take them out of this trouble."

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