

Mathews Joanna Hooe

Daisy's Work. The Third Commandment



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Joanna H. (Joanna Hooe) Mathews

Daisy's Work / The Third Commandment

I.

THE LITTLE FLOWER-GIRL

THERE stood our Daisy. What a Daisy it was too; what a fair, sweet floweret; pure and innocent-looking as the blossoms over which she bent. There she stood beside her basket of flowers, a little spot of brightness and beauty amidst all the dust and heat and turmoil of the noisy street, on that warm summer afternoon.

It was a street which ran beside a great railroad depot. Porters, carmen, and hackmen were calling, shouting, and swearing; passengers were hurrying by to catch the trains which were starting every few minutes; carriages driving up with their loads of ladies and children; and farther down the street were great trucks laden with freight, and express-wagons filled with baggage, which the railroad porters were unloading with a great amount of noise and crash; and amongst it all was Daisy, standing opposite the door of the ladies' entrance.

But not one of all those passers-by knew that she was a "Daisy," or that those were her namesakes which she held so lovingly in her little hands. Now and then one stopped to buy one of the five or ten cent bouquets, so tastefully arranged, which lay in her basket; and almost all who did so had a kind word to give the child; for there was something in her look and air which pleaded for tenderness and sympathy. It did not seem that this was her proper place; for even in her homely dress she looked so dainty and delicate, and moved and spoke so like a little lady, that it was easy to see that she had been accustomed to a different kind of life. But all who noticed her, or stopped to buy her flowers, were in such haste that none had time for more than a passing interest in the child, and contented themselves with wondering and pitying.

Down the street came a lady with a little girl, the latter skipping and jumping as she held her mother's hand. No wonder the little one was happy, and as full of play and merry pranks as any kitten; for she had been spending such a pleasant day with mamma in the city, and was now going back with "such lots to tell about and heaps of pretty things" to her own lovely country home.

"Oh, see, mamma!" she said, as her eye fell upon the other child, "see those pretty flowers that dear little girl is selling. She is just about as large as Lola Swan, and *don't* she look nice and sweet. Won't you buy some flowers from her, mamma?"

"You have plenty of flowers at home, dear Lily, and we have about as much as we can carry now," answered her mother.

"Oh, dear mamma, but those little brenkays" (bouquets, Lily meant) "would take up such a tiny mite of room, and I want you to buy some for kindness to the little girl. She looks so sorry out of her eyes, mamma."

Moved by the pleadings of her little daughter, Mrs. Ward turned toward the flower-girl, whom in her hurry she had nearly passed without a look, and asked the price of her bouquets.

"What a pretty pot of daisies! Can't I have that, mamma?" asked Lily.

But at this the flower-girl drew back and put one hand over the pot of daisies she held in the other, as if she feared it was to be taken from her by force.

"I'll ask papa to carry them for me, mamma," said Lily.

"Ho! ho!" said a cheery voice behind her, "so you think papa has nothing better to do than turn expressman and carry all your traps, do you? I wonder how many bundles are already waiting in the

depot for me to put safely in the cars;" and turning about Lily saw her father, who had overtaken his wife and little girl.

"Oh! lots and lots!" said Lily, jumping about with new glee as she saw him. "We bought something for everybody, papa; and I bought a present for your birthday to-morrow; but it is a secret. Mamma is going to fill it with ink and I'll put it on your writing-table 'fore you come down in the morning; but you won't ask what it is, will you?"

"Not on any account," said Mr. Ward. "But you must make haste and buy your flowers, or we shall not find good seats in the cars. So you want these daisies, do you? How much are they, my child?" But again the flower-girl drew back.

"I couldn't sell them, sir," she said; "at least not now, not if, –"

"Oh! they are for some favorite customer, hey? You see, Lily, you can't have them. Well, pick out your bouquets; we'll hang them about our necks if we can't carry them any other way," said Mr. Ward. "This is the little girl I told you about, my dear," turning to his wife, who had been looking at the sweet, sad face of the young flower vender.

"What is your name, my child?" asked the lady.

"My name is – they call me Margaret," said the child, with hesitation in her voice and manner, and a sudden flush breaking over her face.

"There," said Mr. Ward, when, having paid for the flowers which Lily had chosen, he hurried his wife and daughter away; "there, my dear, I did not say too much about that child, did I?"

"Why no," said Mrs. Ward, looking back to the small figure beside its basket of flowers, "there is certainly something very interesting about her. Her speech and manner, as well as her looks, are strangely refined and lady-like for one in her position. I wish we had time to talk more to her."

The flower-girl looked after them and sighed, – a long, weary sigh, as she watched the frolicsome Lily.

"Most all little girls have their fathers and mothers," she said softly to herself; "but I don't have either. I wonder why God did take both of mine away; if He didn't know how lonesome I would be, or why He didn't take me too. I don't see what good I can be to Him all alone by myself, except Betty and Jack. But then He knows, and maybe He only wants me to be patient till He's ready to take me."

But the wistful eyes brightened again, as, having watched Lily and her friends disappear within the door of the depot, she turned them the other way to see if new customers were coming.

"There he comes," she said, as her eye fell upon a tall, broad-shouldered gentleman coming down the street, "soldier" written in every line and motion of his figure, from the erect, stately head, down to the ringing, military tread of his firm foot.

"Good afternoon, little woman," he said, returning with a pleasant smile her welcoming look; "is my wife's bouquet all ready?"

Taking from the corner of her basket a bouquet somewhat larger than the rest, and of rather choicer flowers, she held it up to him.

"Thank you, sir," she said, as she received the price; and then, with rising color, added, "would it be too much trouble to carry this to the lady?"

"Too much trouble? No! How much is it?" he said, putting his hand again into his pocket.

"Oh! sir, I didn't mean that. I didn't want to sell it, but to give it to you, if you would take it to the lady you buy flowers for every day. I want to send it to her because you are so kind to me, and because – because you put me in mind of – of somebody."

"That is it, is it?" said the gentleman. "Well, I can't refuse such a pretty gift, so prettily offered. And who do I put you in mind of, pray?"

"Of my papa, sir. You do look like him."

"Humph!" said the gentleman, not much pleased at the idea that he was like the father of this little poor child, above her station though she looked. "And these are daisies, hey? My wife will like them."

"General, do you mean to miss the train?" said an acquaintance, as he passed.

"Not with my own consent, certainly," said the gentleman. "I shall thank you for the lady to-morrow, my little girl."

But as he turned to go, his foot slipped upon a piece of orange-peel, thrown down by some careless person, and he had nearly fallen. He would have been down altogether but for his little companion; but as he involuntarily put out his hand, she caught it; and that support, frail and slight as it was, was sufficient to steady him.

Kind of heart, noble and generous though he was, the soldier was hasty-tempered and quick, and an oath – a fearful oath – burst from his lips.

"Ah, you were my good angel. You have saved me from a bad fall," he said almost in the same breath, but in a very different tone and manner, as he turned to the child.

His good angel! Ah, yes! More than he knew, his good angel. Those little hands should from this time hold him from falling into the sin of which he had just been guilty.

Years ago General Forster would have been shocked at the thought of letting such words escape his lips, though even then he was none too reverent or careful in speaking of sacred persons or things; but in the bustle and excitement of war he had, alas! like many another brave man, allowed himself to fall into the habit of taking God's holy name in vain. But careless though he might be before men in moments of forgetfulness, or when his hasty temper got the better of him, he seldom or never suffered himself to use such words before women or children; why, you shall learn.

"Why, have I hurt you?" he asked, seeing with surprise her startled and troubled face.

"No, sir, oh! no," she answered, catching her breath, "but, but" —

"Well, but what?"

"But I am so sorry," and that she was so was proved, as she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

"Sorry for what?" he asked.

She gave him no answer, but shrank a little away.

"Sorry for what?" he repeated, as if determined to know; and the tone of command, which seemed to say he was used to instant obedience, forced her to speak, whether she would or no.

"Sorry for those words you said, sir," she sobbed.

"Those words? What words?" But his question answered itself as it was spoken; for his wicked words, which but for this would have been forgotten the next instant, came back to him, and he stood rebuked before this poor little flower-girl. He repented already; but repented only because he had distressed this simple child, in whom he took so much interest, not yet because he had grieved and offended the Holy One whose name he had profaned.

Still he was vexed too.

"Why, you don't mean to say," he said rather impatiently, "that you never hear such words as those, standing here as you do, half the day, with those rough men and boys about you?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" she said, plaintively. "I do hear such words, often, often. I try not to; but I can't help it, you see; and it makes me so sorry. But I thought those poor men and boys could not know how to read, and had never been taught better, or perhaps they did not know what God had said in His commandments. But I did not think gentlemen said such things; and I liked you *so* much."

And did she like him less now? He, the *gentleman*, the rich man, felt that he could not wish to lose the respect and liking of this little child whom he thought so far beneath him, and he was ashamed and sorry. He knew that it was not impertinence, but only her innocent simplicity and truthfulness, which had caused her to say what she did. But to know that he was in the wrong and to acknowledge it, were one and the same thing with this true-hearted man.

"You are right, Margaret," he said, forgetting how fast the moments were flying. "*Gentlemen* should not say such things, especially before ladies and children. It is bad manners; but I forgot myself just then."

She took her hands from her face and looked up at him. There was an unspoken question in the clear, earnest eyes, and it was plain that she was not yet satisfied.

"Well," he said smiling at her, "what troubles you still? Let me have it all."

"I was only thinking what difference could it make, sir."

"What difference could what make?"

"Whether it was ladies and children who heard it, sir," she answered timidly. "God hears it all the same, doesn't He? And it can't make any difference to Him who else hears it."

She looked up as she spoke at the blue sky overhead, and the look and the words brought to him a sudden sense of God's constant presence and nearness. He had known it well enough before, – that the Almighty Eye saw him always; that the Almighty Ear heard him always; but he had never felt it as he did now. The gentle, timid reproof had gone far deeper than the little giver had intended, and her hearer felt ashamed that he had confessed to her that he would pay a respect to a woman or child which he did not feel it needful to pay to his Maker. He could make her no answer.

"*You* behind time, General?" said the voice of another friend as he hurried past; and the scream of the warning whistle told the gentleman that he had no time to lose.

"I'll see you to-morrow. Good-by, my child. God bless you," he said hurriedly, and rushed away.

But just in time; he was the last passenger, and stepped upon the platform of a car as the train was put in motion. The jar threw him once more a little off his balance, and he caught by the rail to save himself, while again hasty, profane words rose to his lips.

But they did not pass them. What though no human ear should hear; "God heard them all the same," and they were checked before even the summer wind could catch them; and in their place the angels carried up the heart-breathed prayer, "God keep me from them in time to come."

His next neighbor in the cars thought General Forster remarkably silent and unsociable that afternoon. He would not talk, but buried himself behind his newspaper. If the neighbor had looked closer he would have seen that the General's eyes were fixed, not on the paper held before his face, but on the little pot of daisies which rested on his knee. And over the delicate pink and white blossoms was breathed a vow, – a vow registered in heaven and faithfully kept on earth.

II.

A CLUSTER OF DAISIES

"WHAT are you thinking of, Frank?" said Mrs. Forster, looking at her husband as he stood leaning against the casing of the window, gazing thoughtfully out at the lovely garden beyond.

"Of a bad habit of mine," he answered.

"You have none; at least none that I cannot put up with," she said playfully.

"That's not the question, dear Gertrude," he returned gravely. "It is whether my Maker can put up with it, and I believe that He cannot, since he has said He 'will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.'"

Mrs. Forster colored as she bent her head over the sleeping baby on her lap.

"You did not know, perhaps," her husband said, after a minute's silence, "that I was ever guilty of this – sin?"

"I did know it, Frank; at least I have heard you now and then, when you were speaking to your dogs and horses, or even when you were a little impatient with the men. But you did not mean me to hear such words; and I noticed you never used them in my presence."

"No," he said a little sadly: "I would not speak in my wife's presence words which were not fit for her to hear; but I forgot an ear still purer, which I was insulting and defying. That is the second thrust I have had to-day, Gertrude, which has made me feel that I have treated the Almighty with less of reverence and respect than I would show to some of my fellow-creatures. Let me tell you of the innocent lesson I received from the little flower-girl, who sent the daisies to you."

And sitting down beside her, he told her of the teaching which had come to him from the little wayside blossom; to whose lonely, thirsting heart his few kind words and smiles had been as drops of dew from heaven.

But even while they talked of her and her pretty lady-like ways and sayings, which seemed so far above her station, they did not know she was a "Daisy," and that those were her namesakes over which Mrs. Forster bent, dropping happy tears and kisses on them, mingled with many a blessing on the little giver.

Plucking one of the flowers from the stem, she opened her baby's tiny hand and placed it within it. The fairy fingers closed around it, clasping it tight, while the unconscious little one slept on.

"Her name is Gertrude, but we'll call her Daisy, Frank, as soon as she is old enough to be called any thing but baby," said the young mother, "and her pretty pet name may serve as a reminder of this day's lesson, if ever it should be forgotten."

"You think I may need it," said her husband, smiling. "I trust not; for the sin, to say nothing of the vulgarity, of taking God's name in vain, has been set forth so plainly by my innocent little teacher, that I must have a short memory, indeed, if I failed to remember her lesson. She thought *gentlemen* must know better."

"But, dear," said the lady, "you said you would inquire about this child, and see if we could not be of some use to her."

"So I did," he answered; "and so I will, and should have done long since; but day after day I have let business or pleasure keep me till I had but just time to catch the train, and none to bestow on the poor little creature who seems to have been so grateful for the few kind words I have given her. You think I am rather fanciful about this child, I know, Gertrude; but I am convinced that some of her few years must have been spent among different people than those by whom she is now surrounded. Nor am I the only one of her customers who has noticed the grace of her speech and manners, so uncommon in a child of her class. Ward, and others beside, have seen it; but like myself have never made it their business to see after her. However, to-morrow afternoon, I shall make it a point to be

at the depot in time to have a talk with her. I wonder if the woman who keeps the fruit-stall at the corner, and whose child I believe she is, would give her up and let her go to school."

He was as good as his word; and more than an hour earlier than usual, our little flower-girl saw "her gentleman" coming down the street towards the depot. It was an eager, wistful little face, with some questioning fear in it, that she raised to him, for she was anxious lest she should have offended her kind friend, as she had learned to think him, by her plain speech of the day before.

She had scarcely meant to speak so plainly; the words had seemed to escape her without her intending it, and, it was true, had been drawn forth by the gentleman's own questions; but when she remembered them afterwards she feared that he would think her rude and disrespectful.

She need not have been afraid. His eye and voice were even kinder than usual as he came near to her, and he laid his hand gently on her head, saying, —

"Well, my little woman! and how does the world go with you to-day? The lady told me to thank you very much for the daisies."

The young face brightened.

"Did she like them, sir?"

"Very much indeed, — all the more because she has a little one at home whom she is going to call 'Daisy' after your pretty flowers."

"Is she your little girl, sir?"

"Yes, she is a mite of a Daisy, but a very precious one," he answered; then looking into the flushed face, with its soft, shining eyes and parted lips, he added, "You are a Daisy yourself."

The flowers she held dropped at her feet unheeded as she clasped both hands upon her breast, and with quick-coming breath and filling eyes, asked eagerly, "How *did* you know it, sir? how did you know it?"

"Know what, my child? What troubles you?"

"How did you know I was Daisy?" she almost gasped.

"I did not know it," he answered in surprise. "Is your name Daisy? I thought it was Margaret."

"They call me Margaret, sir, — Betty and Jack; but Daisy is my *own, own* name, that papa and mamma called me," she answered, recovering herself a little.

"And where are your papa and mamma?" he asked. "I thought the woman who keeps the fruit-stall at the corner was your mother."

"Oh, no, sir!" she said. "She is only Betty. She is very good to me, but she is not mamma. Mamma was a lady," she added, with simple, childish dignity, which told that she was a lady herself.

"But *where* are your father and mother?" he repeated, with fresh interest in the child.

"Mamma is drowned, sir; and we could never find papa," she answered, with such pathos in her tones.

"Come into the depot with me," said General Forster: "I want to talk to you."

She obeyed, and, taking up her basket, followed him into the waiting-room, where, heedless of the many curious eyes around, he made her sit down beside him, and drew from her her sad, simple story: — how long, long ago she had lived with papa and mamma and her little brother and baby sister in their own lovely home, far away from here; where it was, she did not know, but in quite a different place from the great bustling city which she had never seen till she came here with Betty and Jack; how she had left home with mamma and the baby on a great ship, where to go she could not remember; how Betty was on board, and mamma had been kind to her; how a dreadful storm had come and there was great confusion and terror; and then it seemed as if she went to sleep for a long, long time, and knew nothing more till she found herself living with Betty and Jack in their poor home far up in the city.

They had been very good to her, nursing and caring for her during the many months she had been weak and ailing; and now that she was stronger and better, she tried to help them all she could, keeping the two small rooms tidy, while Betty was away attending to her stall; and in the afternoon

selling the flowers which Jack raised in his little garden, and she arranged in tasteful bouquets. And, lastly, she told how from the very first time she had seen General Forster, she thought he "looked so like papa" that she felt as if she must love him, and was so happy when he stopped to buy flowers of her and spoke kindly to her.

The story was told with a straightforward and simple pathos, which went right to the listener's heart, and left him no doubt of its truth. But the child could tell nothing of her own name or her parents', save that she was always called "Daisy" at home, and that she had never since heard the familiar name until to-day, when she thought this stranger had given it to her. Betty and Jack always called her "Margaret;" and Betty thought she knew mamma's name, but she did not. But she loved daisies dearly for the sake of their name, which had been her own; and she had raised and tended with loving care the little plant she had given to "my gentleman" as a token of gratitude for his kindness, and because he was "so like papa."

Having learned all that he could from the child herself, the gentleman went to the fruit-woman on the corner.

"So," he said, "the little girl whom you call Margaret is not your own daughter?"

"Indade, no, sir," answered Betty; "niver a daughter of me own have I barrin' Jack, and he's not me own at all, but jist me sister's son what died, lavin' him a babby on me hands. More betoken that it's not a little lady like her that the likes of me would be raisin', unless she'd none of her own to do it."

"Will you tell me how that came about?"

Betty told the story in her turn, in as plain and simple a manner as the child's, though in language far different.

Her husband had been steward on a sailing vessel running between New Orleans and New York; and about three years ago, she, being sick and ordered change of air, had been allowed to go with him for the voyage. But it made her worse instead of better; and on the return trip she would have died, Betty declared, if it had not been for the kindness and tender nursing of a lady, "Margaret's" mother. This lady – "her name had been Saacyfut, she believed, but maybe she disremembered intirely, for Margaret said it was not" – was on her way to New York with her little girl who was sick, a baby, and a French nurse; but her home was neither there nor in New Orleans, – at least so the child afterwards said.

Her own account of the storm was the same as the child's; but while the recollection of the little one could go no further, Betty remembered only too well the horrors of that day.

When it was found that the ship must sink, and that all on board must leave her, there had been, as the little girl said, great confusion. How it was, Betty could not exactly tell; she had been placed in one boat, the French nurse, with the child in her arms, beside her; and the lady was about to follow with the infant, when a spar fell, striking the Frenchwoman on the head and killing her instantly, knocking overboard one of the three sailors who were in the boat, – while at the same time the boat was parted from the ship and at the mercy of the raging waves. In vain did the two sailors who were left try to regain the ship: they were swept further and further away, and soon lost sight of the vessel. They drifted about all night, and the next morning were taken up by a fishing-smack which brought them to New York.

Fright and exposure and other hardships, while they seemed to have cured Betty, were too much for the poor little girl, and a long and terrible illness followed: after which she lay for months, too weak to move or speak, and appearing to have lost all memory and sense. And when at last she grew better and stronger, and reason and recollection came back, she could not tell the name of her parents or her home.

"Margaret Saacyfut," Betty persisted in saying the French nurse had called her little charge, "Mamsell Margaret," "and if the lady's name wasn't Saacyfut it was mightily nigh to it."

"Marguerite" had been the French woman's name for "Daisy: " that the General saw plainly enough, but he could make nothing of the surname.

"But did you not seek for the child's friends, Betty?" he asked.

"Deed did I, sir," she answered. "Didn't I even advertise her, an' how she was to be heerd of, but all to no good. An' I writ to New Orleans to them what owned the ship, but they were that oncivil they niver answered, not they. An' it took a hape of money, sir, to be payin' the paper, an' me such hard work to get along, an' Margaret on me hands, an' I had to be done with it. For ye see me man was gone wid the ship, an' niver heerd of along wid the rest to this day; an' I had to use up the bit he'd put by in the savin's bank till the child was mendin' enough for me to lave her wid Jack."

"It was a very generous thing for you to burden yourself with the care of her," said General Forster.

"Burden is it, sir? Niver a burden was she, the swate lamb, not even when the sense had left her. An' that was what the neighbors was always a sayin', and why didn't I put her in the hospital. An' why would I do that after the mother of her savin' me from a buryin' in the say, which I niver could abide. For sure if it hadn't been for the lady I'd 'a died on the ould ship, and they'd 'a chucked me overboard widout sayin' by your lave; and sure I'd niver have got over such a buryin' as that all the days of me life. And would I be turnin' out her child afther that? An' isn't she payin' me for it now, an' 'arnin' her livin,' an' mine too? She an' Jack tends the bit of a garden, an' arternoons she comes down an' sells her flowers, an' where'd be the heart to refuse her wid her pretty ways and nice manners; a lady every inch of her, like her mother before her."

And thrusting her head out from her stall, Betty gazed down the street with admiring affection on her young *protégée*.

"Och! but she's the jewel of a child," she went on; "and it is surprisin' how me and Jack is improved and become ginteel all along of her. Ye see, sir, I did use to say a hape of words that maybe wer'n't jist so; not that I meant 'em for swearin', but it was jist a way of spakin'. But after Margaret began to mend and get about, ye would have thought she was kilt intirely if I let one out of me mouth. So seein' how it hurted her, I jist minded what I was about, an' Jack the same, for he was a boy that swore awful, poor fellow; he'd been left to himself, and how was he to know better? At first him and me minded our tongues, for that the child shouldn't be hurted; but by and by didn't she make it plain to us that it was the great Lord himself what we was offendin', and knowin' she'd been tached better nor me, I jist heeded her. And now, sir, them words that I never thought no harm of and used to come so aisy, I jist leave them out of me spache widout troublin'; and a deal better it sounds, and widout doubt more plasin' to Him that's above. And Jack the same mostly, though he does let one slip now and agin. So ye see, sir, it's not a burden she is at all, at all, but jist a little bit of light and comfort to the house that houlds her."

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