

Mathews Joanna Hooe

Bessie at the Sea-Side



Joanna Mathews

Bessie at the Sea-Side

«Public Domain»

Mathews J.

Bessie at the Sea-Side / J. Mathews — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| I. | 5 |
| II. | 9 |
| III. | 13 |
| IV. | 17 |
| V. | 20 |
| VI. | 24 |
| Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. | 29 |

Bessie at the Sea-Side

I.

THE SEA-SHORE

THE hotel carriage rolled away from Mr. Bradford's door with papa and mamma, the two nurses and four little children inside, and such a lot of trunks and baskets on the top; all on their way to Quam Beach. Harry and Fred, the two elder boys, were to stay with grandmamma until their school was over; and then they also were to go to the sea-side.

The great coach carried them across the ferry, and then they all jumped out and took their seats in the cars. It was a long, long ride, and after they left the cars there were still three or four miles to go in the stage, so that it was quite dark night when they reached Mrs. Jones's house. Poor little sick Bessie was tired out, and even Maggie, who had enjoyed the journey very much, thought that she should be glad to go to bed as soon as she had had her supper. It was so dark that the children could not see the ocean, of which they had talked and thought so much; but they could hear the sound of the waves as they rolled up on the beach. There was a large hotel at Quam, but Mrs. Bradford did not choose to go there with her little children; and so she had hired all the rooms that Mrs. Jones could spare in her house. The rooms were neat and clean, but very plain, and not very large, and so different from those at home that Maggie thought she should not like them at all. In that which was to be the nursery was a large, four-post bedstead in which nurse and Franky were to sleep; and beside it stood an old-fashioned trundle-bed, which was for Maggie and Bessie. Bessie was only too glad to be put into it at once, but Maggie looked at it with great displeasure.

"I sha'n't sleep in that nasty bed," she said. "Bessie, don't do it."

"Indeed," said nurse, "it's a very nice bed; and if you are going to be a naughty child, better than you deserve. That's a great way you have of calling every thing that don't just suit you, 'nasty.' I'd like to know where you mean to sleep, if you don't sleep there."

"I'm going to ask mamma to make Mrs. Jones give us a better one," said Maggie; and away she ran to the other room where mamma was undressing the baby. "Mamma," she said, "won't you make Mrs. Jones give us a better bed? That's just a kind of make-believe bed that nurse pulled out of the big one, and I know I can't sleep a wink in it."

"I do not believe that Mrs. Jones has another one to give us, dear," said her mother. "I know it is not so pretty as your little bed at home, but I think you will find it very comfortable. When I was a little girl, I always slept in a trundle-bed, and I never rested better. If you do not sleep a wink, we will see what Mrs. Jones can do for us to-morrow; but for to-night I think you must be contented with that bed; and if my little girl is as tired as her mother, she will be glad to lie down anywhere."

Maggie had felt like fretting a little; but when she saw how pale and tired her dear mother looked, she thought she would not trouble her by being naughty, so she put up her face for another good-night kiss, and ran back to the nursery.

"O, Maggie," said Bessie, "this bed is yeal nice and comf'able; come and feel it." So Maggie popped in between the clean white sheets, and in two minutes she had forgotten all about the trundle-bed and everything else.

When Bessie woke up the next morning, she saw Maggie standing by the open window, in her night-gown, with no shoes or stockings on. "O, Maggie," she said, "mamma told us not to go bare-footed, and you are."

"I forgot," said Maggie; and she ran back to the bed and jumped in beside Bessie. "Bessie, there's such lots and lots of water out there! You never saw so much, not even in the reservoir at the Central Park."

"I guess it's the sea," said Bessie; "don't you know mamma said we would see water and water ever so far, and we couldn't see the end of it?"

"But I do see the end of it," said Maggie; "mamma was mistaken. I saw where the sky came down and stopped the sea; and, Bessie, I saw such a wonderful thing, – the sun came right up out of the water."

"O, Maggie, it couldn't; *you* was mistaken. If it went in the water it would be put out."

"I don't care," said Maggie, "it *was* the sun, and it is shining right there now. It isn't put out a bit. I woke up and I heard that noise mamma told us was the waves, and I wanted to see them, so I went to look, and over there in the sky was a beautiful red light; and in a minute I saw something bright coming out of the water away off; and it came higher and higher, and got so bright I could not look at it, and it was the sun, I know it was."

"But, Maggie, how didn't it get put out if it went in the water?"

"I don't know," said Maggie, "I'm going to ask papa."

Just then nurse and Jane came in with water for the children's bath, and before they were dressed, there was papa at the door asking if there were any little girls ready to go on the beach and find an appetite for breakfast. After that, nurse could scarcely dress them fast enough, and in a few moments they were ready to run down to the front porch where papa was waiting for them.

"O, papa, what a great, great water the sea is!" said Bessie.

"Yes, dear; and what a great and wise God must He be who made this wide sea and holds it in its place, and lets it come no farther than He wills."

"Papa," said Maggie, "I saw the wonderfulest thing this morning."

"The most wonderful," said her father.

"The most wonderful," repeated Maggie. "It was indeed, papa, and you need not think I was mistaken, for I am quite, quite sure I saw it."

"And what was this most wonderful thing you are so very sure you saw, Maggie?"

"It was the sun, papa, coming right up out of the water, and it was not put out a bit. It came up, up, away off there, where the sky touches the water. Mamma said we could not see the end of the ocean, but I see it quite well. Do not you see it, too, papa?"

"I see what appears to be the end of the ocean, but these great waters stretch away for many hundred miles farther. If you were to get on a ship and sail away as far as you can see from here, you would still see just as much water before you, and the sea and the sky would still appear to touch each other: and however far you went it would always be so, until you came where the land bounds the ocean on the other side. The place where the sky and water seem to meet, is called the horizon; and it is because they do seem to touch, that the sun appeared to you to come out of the water. It is rather a difficult thing for such little girls as you and Bessie to understand, but I will try to make it plain to you. You know that the earth is round, like a ball, do you not, Maggie?"

"Yes, papa."

"And I suppose that you think that the sun is moving when it seems to come up in the morning, and goes on and on, till it is quite over our heads, and then goes down on the other side of the sky until we can see it no more, do you not?"

"Yes, papa."

"But it is really the earth on which we live, and not the sun, which is moving. Once in twenty-four hours, which makes one day and one night, the earth turns entirely round, so that a part of the time one side is turned to the sun, and a part of the time the other side. See if you can find me a small, round stone, Maggie."

Maggie looked around till she found such a stone as her father wanted, and brought it to him. "Now," he said, "this stone shall be our earth, and this scratch the place where we live. We will take off Bessie's hat and have that for the sun. Now I will hold the mark which stands for our home, directly in front of our make-believe sun. If a bright light were coming from the sun and shining on our mark here, it would be the middle of the day or noon, while it would be dark on the other side. Then, as our earth moved slowly around in this way, and we turned from the sun it would become afternoon; and as we turned farther yet till we were quite away from the sun, it would be night. But we do not stay there in the dark, for we still go moving slowly round until our side of the earth comes towards the light again, and the darkness begins to pass away. The nearer we come to the sun the lighter it grows, until, if some little girl who lives on our scratch is up early enough and looks out at the horizon, or place where the earth and sky seem to meet, she sees the sun showing himself little by little; and it looks to her as if he were coming up out of the sea, while all the time the sun is standing still, and the earth on which we live is moving round so as to bring her once more opposite to him."

"And is it night on the other side of the world?" asked Maggie.

"Yes, there is no sun there now, and it is dark night for the little children who live there."

"And are they going to have their supper while we have our brexix?" asked Bessie.

"Just about so, I suppose," said papa.

"But, papa," said Maggie with very wide open eyes, "do you mean that the world is going to turn way over on the other side tonight?"

"Yes, dear."

"Then we will fall off," said Maggie.

"Did you fall off last night?" asked papa.

"No, sir."

"And you have been living for nearly seven years, and every day of your life the earth has turned around in the same way, and you have never yet fallen off, have you?"

"No, papa."

"Nor will you to-night, my little girl. The good and wise God who has made our earth to move in such a way as to give us both light and darkness as we need them, has also given to it a power to draw towards itself, all things that live or grow upon its surface. Do you know what surface means?"

"Yes, papa, – the top."

"Yes, or the outside. Suppose you were to fall off the top of the house, Maggie, where would you fall to?"

"Down in the street and be killed," said Maggie.

"Yes, down to the street or ground, and probably you would be killed. And it is because of this power which the earth has of drawing to itself all things that are upon it, that you would not fly off into the air and keep on falling, falling, for no one knows how many miles. It is too hard a thing for you to understand much about now, but when you are older you shall learn more. But we have had a long enough lesson for this morning. We will walk about a little, and see if we can find some shells before we go in to breakfast."

They found a good many shells: some little black ones which Maggie called curlecues, and some white on the outside and pink inside. Then there were a few which were fluted, which the children said were the prettiest of all. They thought the beach was the best playground they had ever seen, and they were about right. First, there was the strip of smooth, white sand, on which the waves were breaking into beautiful snowy foam, with such a pleasant sound; then came another space full of pebbles and stones and sea-weed, with a few shells and here and there a great rock; then more rocks and stones with a coarse kind of grass growing between them; and beyond these, a few rough fir trees which looked as if they found it hard work to grow there. Last of all was a long, sloping bank, on top of which stood Mr. Jones's house and two or three others; and farther down the shore, the great hotel. And the air was so fresh and cool, with such a pleasant smell of the salt water.

Maggie was full of fun and spirits, and raced about till her cheeks were as red as roses. There were several other people on the beach, and among them were some little boys and girls. Two or three of these, when they saw Maggie running about in such glee began to race with her, but the moment she noticed them she became shy and ran away from them to her father and Bessie who were walking quietly along.

"Papa," said Bessie "isn't it delicious?"

"Is not what delicious, my darling."

"I don't know," said Bessie. "*It*. I like Quam Beach, papa. I wish New York was just like this."

"It is this cool, fresh sea-breeze that you like so much, Bessie."

"And I like to see the water, papa, and to hear the nice noise it makes."

"Yes, it's so pleasant here," said Maggie. "Let's stay here always, papa, and never go home."

"What! and sleep in the trundle-bed all your lives?" said papa.

"Oh, no," said Maggie, "I hate that bed. I believe I *did* sleep a little bit last night, because I was so tired; but I know I can't sleep in it to-night."

"Well," said papa, "I think we will try it for a night or two longer."

And then they all went in to breakfast.

II. OLD FRIENDS AND NEW

AFTER breakfast they went out again. Mr. Bradford and his little girls were standing in the porch waiting for mamma who was going with them, when Mr. Jones came up from the shore. He had been fishing, and looked rather rough and dirty, but he had a pleasant, good-natured face.

"Mornin' sir," he said to Mr. Bradford; "folks pretty sappy?"

"Pretty well, thank you," said Mr. Bradford; "you have been out early this morning."

"Yes, I'm generally stirrin' round pretty early; been out since afore day-light. S'pose these are your little girls. How are you, Miss Bradford?" he said, holding out his hand.

But shy Maggie hung her head and drew a little away behind her father.

"Why, Maggie," said Mr. Bradford, "you are not polite; shake hands with Mr. Jones, my daughter."

"Not if she hain't a mind to," said Mr. Jones. "I see she's a bashful puss, but she'll feel better acquainted one of these days."

"Yes, she will;" said Bessie, "and then she won't be shy with you; but I'm not shy now, and I'll shake hands with you."

Mr. Jones took the tiny little hand she offered him with a smile.

"No, I see you ain't shy, and I don't want you to be; you, nor your sister neither. Goin' down to the shore, eh?"

"Yes, when mamma comes," said Bessie.

"Well, you see that big barn out there; when you come back you both come out there. You'll find me inside, and I'll show you something will soon cure all shyness; that is, if you like it as much as most young folks do."

"What is it?" asked Bessie.

"It's a scup."

"Will it bite?" said Bessie.

"Bite! Don't you know what a scup is?"

"She knows it by the name of a swing," said Mr. Bradford.

"Oh, yes! I know a swing; and I like it too. We'll come, Mr. Jones."

"Is it quite safe for them?" asked Mr. Bradford.

"Quite safe, sir. I put it up last Summer for some little people who were staying here; and Sam, he's my eldest son, he made a seat with back and arms, and a rung along the front to keep them in, – a fall on the barn floor wouldn't feel good, that's a fact; but it's as safe as strong ropes and good work can make it. I'll take care they don't get into no mischief with it; but come along with the little ones and see for yourself." And then with a nod to Maggie, who was peeping at him out of the corners of her eyes, Mr. Jones took up his basket of fish and walked away to the kitchen.

"Bessie," said Maggie, as they went down to the beach, "do you like that man?"

"Yes, I do," said Bessie; "don't you?"

"No, not much. But, Bessie, did you hear what he called me?"

"No," said Bessie, "I did not hear him call you anything."

"He called me Miss Bradford," said Maggie, holding up her head and looking very grand.

"Well," said Bessie, "I suppose he was mad because you wouldn't shake hands with him."

"No," said Maggie, "it was before that; he said, 'how do you do, Miss Bradford;' and, Bessie, I like to be called Miss Bradford; and I guess I'll like him because he did it, even if he *does* smell of fish. I think he only wanted to be *respectable* to me."

They found a good many people upon the beach now, and among them were some ladies and gentlemen whom Mr. and Mrs. Bradford knew, and while they stopped to speak to them, Maggie and Bessie wandered off a little way, picking up shells and sea-weed and putting them into a basket which their mother had given them.

Presently a boy and girl came up to them. They were the children of one of the ladies who was talking to Mrs. Bradford, and their mother had sent them to make acquaintance with Maggie and Bessie.

"What's your name," said the boy, coming right up to Maggie. Maggie looked at him without speaking, and, putting both hands behind her, began slowly backing away from him.

"I say," said the boy, "what's your name? My mother sent us to make friends with you; but we can't do it, if you won't tell us what your name is."

"Her name is Miss Bradford," said Bessie, who wanted to please her sister, and who herself thought it rather fine for Maggie to be called Miss Bradford.

"Oh! and you're another Miss Bradford, I suppose," said the boy, laughing.

"Why! so I am," said Bessie; "I didn't think about that before. Maggie we're two Miss Bradfords."

"Well, two Miss Bradfords, I hope we find you pretty well this morning. My name is Mr. Stone, and my sister's is Miss Stone."

"'Tain't," said the little girl, crossly, "it's nothing but Mary."

"Sure enough," said her brother; "she's just Miss Mary, quite contrary; whatever you say, she'll say just the other thing; that's her way."

"Now, Walter, you stop," said Mary in a whining, fretful voice.

"Now, Mamie, you stop," mimicked her brother.

"I think we won't be acquainted with you," said Bessie. "I am afraid you are not very good children."

"What makes you think so," asked Walter.

"Cause you quarrel," said Bessie; "good children don't quarrel, and Jesus won't love you if you do."

"What a funny little tot you are," said Walter. "I won't quarrel with you, but Mamie is so cross I can't help quarrelling with her. I like girls, and I want to play with you, and your sister, too, if she'll speak. I have a splendid wagon up at the hotel and I'll bring it and give you a first-rate ride if you like. Come, let us make friends, and tell me your first name, Miss Bradford, No. 2."

"It's Bessie, and my sister's is Maggie."

"And don't you and Maggie ever quarrel?"

"Why, no," said Maggie, coming out of her shy fit when she heard this, "Bessie is my own little sister."

"Well, and Mamie is my own sister, and you see we quarrel for all that. But never mind that now. I'll go for my wagon and give you a ride; will you like it?"

"I will," said Bessie.

In a few minutes Walter came back with his wagon. Maggie and Bessie thought he was quite right when he called it splendid. They told him it was the prettiest wagon they had ever seen. He said he would give Bessie the first ride, and he lifted her in and told Maggie and Mamie to push behind.

"I sha'n't," said Mamie; "I want a ride, too; there's plenty of room, Bessie's so little."

"No, it will make it too heavy," said Walter. "You shall ride when your turn comes."

Mamie began to cry, and Bessie said she would get out and let her ride first; but Walter said she should not.

"There comes Tom," said Mamie; "he'll help you pull."

The children looked around, and there was a boy rather larger than Walter coming towards them.

"Why, it's Tom Norris!" said Maggie; "do you know him?"

And sure enough it was their own Tom Norris, whom they loved so much. He ran up to them and kissed Maggie and Bessie, as if he were very glad to see them.

"Why, Tom," said Bessie, "I didn't know you came here."

"I came night before last, with father," said Tom. "We came to take rooms at the hotel, and I wanted to stay; so father left me with Mrs. Stone, and he has gone home for mother and Lily, and the whole lot and scot of them; they're all coming to-morrow."

"Oh! I am so glad," said Maggie.

"Tom! can't I ride?" asked Mamie.

"You must ask Walter," said Tom; "the wagon is his; what are you crying about, Mamie?"

Walter told what the trouble was.

"Come, now, Mamie, be good, and you shall ride with Bessie, and I will help Walter pull." Mamie was put into the seat by Bessie, and then Tom said they must find room for Maggie, too. So he made her sit on the bottom of the wagon, and off they started. Of course they were crowded, but the two children who were good-natured did not mind that at all, and would have been quite happy had it not been for Mamie. She fretted and complained so much that at last the boys were out of patience and took her out of the wagon.

"You see," said Walter, as the cross, selfish child went off screaming to her mother, "Mamie is the only girl, and the youngest, and she has been so spoiled there is no living with her."

They were all happier when she had gone, and had a nice long play together.

Tom Norris was twelve years old, but he did not think himself too large to play with or amuse such little girls as Maggie and Bessie, who were only seven and five; and as he was always kind and good to them, they loved him dearly. Grown people liked him too, and said he was a perfect little gentleman. But Tom was better than that, for he was a true Christian; and it was this which made him so kind and polite to every one.

When Mr. Bradford came to call his little girls to go home, he found them telling Tom and Walter about the swing which Mr. Jones had promised them, and he invited the boys to go with them and see it. So they all went back together.

When they reached home Mr. Bradford told them they might go on to the barn while he went into the house for a few minutes. The great barn-doors were open, and Mr. Jones and his son, Sam, were busy inside. Just outside the door sat Mrs. Jones with a pan full of currants in her lap which she was stringing. There was a sheep skin on the ground beside her, and on it sat her fat baby, Susie. Two kittens were playing on the grass a little way off, and Susie wanted to catch them. She would roll herself over on her hands and knees, and creep to the edge of her sheep skin, but just as she reached it her mother's hand would take her by the waist and lift her back to the place from which she started. Susie would sit still for a moment, as if she was very much astonished, and then try again, always to be pulled back to the old spot. But when she saw Maggie and Bessie she forgot the kittens and sat quite still with her thumb in her mouth staring at them with her great blue eyes.

"Mr. Jones," said Bessie, "these are our friends. One is an old friend, and his name is Tom; and one is a new friend, and his name is Walter. They have come to see that thing you don't call a swing."

"They're both welcome if they're friends of yours," said Mr. Jones. "I'll show you the scup in a few minutes, as soon as I finish this job I'm about."

"Mrs. Jones," said Bessie, "is that your baby?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Jones, "what do you think of her?"

"I think she is fat," answered Bessie. "May we help you do that, Mrs. Jones?"

"I'm afraid you'll stain your frocks, and what would your ma say then?"

"She'd say you oughtn't to let us do it."

"Just so," said Mrs. Jones. "No, I can't let you help me, but I'll tell you what I'll do. I am going to make pies out of these currants and I'll make you each a turnover; sha'n't you like that?"

"What is a turnover," asked Maggie.

"Don't you know what a turnover is? You wait and see; you'll like 'em when you find out. You can play with Susie if you've a mind to."

But Susie would not play, she only sat and stared at the children, and sucked her thumb. Pretty soon papa came, and when Mr. Jones was ready they all went into the barn.

The swing was fastened up to a hook in the wall, but Mr. Jones soon had it down; and Mr. Bradford tried it and found it quite safe and strong. The seat was large enough to hold both the little girls, if they sat pretty close, so they were both put into it, and papa gave them a fine swing. Then the boys took their turn; and Mr. Jones told them they might come and swing as often as they liked.

III. *THE LETTER*

YOU are not going to hear all that Maggie and Bessie did every day at the sea-shore, but only a few of the things that happened to them.

They liked Quam Beach more and more. Maggie did not mind the trundle-bed so very much after a night or two, though she never seemed to grow quite used to it; and Bessie, who had been weak and sick when they left home, became stronger, and was soon able to run about more with the other children.

After a few days they began to bathe in the sea. Maggie was afraid at first, and cried when she was carried into the water; but the second time she was braver, and she soon came to like it almost as well as Bessie, who never was ready to come out when it was thought she had been in long enough. She would beg her father or the bathing-woman to let her stay just one minute more; and she would laugh when the waves came dashing over her, so that sometimes the salt water would get into her little mouth. But she did not mind it, and begged for another and another wave, until papa would say that it was high time for her to come out. Mamma said she had never seen Bessie enjoy anything so much, and it made her feel very happy to see her little girl growing well and strong again.

Bessie loved the sea very much, and often when her sister and little companions were playing, she would sit quietly on some rock, looking away out over the wide, beautiful waters, or watching and listening to the waves as they came rolling up on the beach. People who were passing used to turn and look at her, and smile when they saw the sweet little face, which looked so grave and wise. But if any stranger asked her what she was thinking about, she would only say, "Thoughts, ma'am."

Maggie did not like to sit still as Bessie did. She was well and fat and rosy, and full of fun when she was with people she knew; and she liked to play better than to sit on the rocks and watch the water, but she seldom went far away from Bessie, and was always running to her with some pretty shell or sea-weed she had found. She and Bessie and Lily Norris would play in the sand and make little ponds or wells, and sand pies, or pop the air bags in the sea-weed; or have some other quiet play which did not tire Bessie. Very often Walter Stone and Tom Norris gave them a ride in the wagon; or Tom told them nice stories; and sometimes they all went out on the water in Mr. Jones's boat, or took a drive with papa and mamma. Before they had been at Quam Beach many days, they knew quite a number of the children who were staying there; and they liked almost all of them, except fretful Mamie Stone, who made herself so disagreeable that no one cared to play with her. In short, there were so many things to do, and so much to see, that the day was never long enough for them.

Then they made friends with Toby, Mr. Jones' great white dog. He was an ugly old fellow, and rather gruff and unsociable; but, like some people, he was in reality better than he appeared. He would never allow any grown person but his master to pet him; and if any one tried to pat him or make him play, he would walk away and seat himself at a distance, with an offended air which seemed to say, "What a very silly person you are; do you not know that I am too grave and wise a dog to be pleased with such nonsense!"

But he was not so with little children. Though he would not play, he let Susie and Franky pull his ears and tail, and roll and tumble over him as much as they liked without giving them one growl. Maggie and Bessie were rather afraid of him at first, but they soon found he was not as fierce as he looked, and after Mr. Jones had told them how he saved a little boy from drowning the last summer, they liked him better, and soon came to have no fear of him.

This boy had been one of those who were boarding in the house last year, and was a disobedient, mischievous child. One day he wanted to go down on the beach, but it was not convenient for any

one to go with him, and his mother told him he must wait. He watched till no one saw him, and then ran off followed by Toby, who seemed to know that he was in mischief.

When the child reached the beach, he pulled off his shoes and stockings and went to the water's edge where the waves could dash over his feet. He went a little farther and a little farther, till at last a wave came which was too strong for him. It threw him down and carried him out into deeper water, and in another minute he would have been beyond help had not Toby dashed in and seized hold of him. It was hard work for Toby, for he was not a water-dog; but he held the boy till a man, who had seen it all, came running to his help and pulled the boy out.

After this, Toby would never let the child go near the water all the time he staid at Quam Beach. If he tried to go, Toby would take hold of his clothes with his teeth, and no coaxings or scoldings would make him let go till the boy's face was turned the other way.

Toby was of great use to Mrs. Jones; she said that he was as good as a nurse. Every day she used to put Susie to sleep in a room at the head of the garret stairs. Then she would call the dog, and leave him to take care of the baby while she went about her work; and it seemed as if Toby knew the right hour for Susie's nap, for he was never out of the way at that time. He would lie and watch her till she woke up, and then go to the head of the stairs and bark till Mrs. Jones came. Then he knew that his duty was done, and he would walk gravely down stairs. Sometimes Mrs. Jones put Susie on the kitchen floor, and left Toby to look after her. He would let her crawl all round unless she went near the fire, or the open door or kitchen stairs, when he would take her by the waist and lift her back to the place where her mother had left her. Susie would scold him as well as she knew how, and pound him with her little fist; but he did not care one bit for that.

After a time Bessie grew quite fond of Toby. Maggie did not like him so much. She liked a dog who would romp and play with her, which Toby would never do. If his master or mistress did not want him, Toby was generally to be found lying on the porch or sitting on the edge of the bank above the beach, looking down on the people who were walking or driving there. Bessie would sit down beside him and pat his rough head, and talk to him in a sweet, coaxing voice, and he would blink his eyes at her and flap his heavy tail upon the ground in a way that he would do for no one else.

"Bessie," said Maggie, one day, as her sister sat patting the great dog, "what makes you like Toby so much; do you think he is pretty?"

"No," answered Bessie, "I don't think he is pretty, but I think he is very good and wise."

"But he is not so wise as Jemmy Bent's Shock," said Maggie; "he does not know any funny tricks."

Jemmy Bent was a poor lame boy, and Shock was his dog, – a little Scotch terrier with a black shaggy coat, and a pair of sharp, bright eyes peeping out from the long, wiry hair which hung about his face. He had been taught a great many tricks, and Maggie thought him a very wonderful dog, but Bessie had never seemed to take much of a fancy to him.

"But he is very useful," said Bessie, "and I don't think Shock is pretty either; I think he is very ugly, Maggie."

"So do I," said Maggie; "but then he looks so funny and smart: I think he looks a great deal nicer than Toby."

"I don't," said Bessie, "I don't like the look of Shock; the first time I saw him I didn't think he was a dog."

"What did you think he was?"

"I thought he was *a animal*," said Bessie, "and I was afraid of him."

"And are you afraid of him now?"

"No, not much; but I had rather he'd stay under the bed when I go to see Jemmy."

"I wouldn't," said Maggie, "and I can't like Toby so much as Shock. No, I can't, Toby, and you need not look at me so about it."

Maggie's opinion did not seem to make the least difference to Toby; he only yawned and blinked his eyes at her.

When Maggie and Bessie had been at Quam Beach about a week, they woke one morning to find it was raining hard, and Mr. Jones said he hoped it would keep on, for the rain was much needed. The little girls hoped it would not, for they did not like to stay in the house all day. About eleven o'clock they went to their mother and told her they had promised to write a letter to Grandpapa Duncan, and asked if they might do it now. Mamma was busy, and told them that she could not write it for them at that time.

"But, mamma," said Maggie, "we don't want you to write it for us; grandpapa will like it better if we do it all ourselves. I can print it, and Bessie will help me make it up."

So mamma gave them a sheet of paper and a pencil, and they went off in a corner to write their letter. They were very busy over it for a long while. When it was done they brought it to their mother to see if it was all right. There were a few mistakes in the spelling which Mrs. Bradford corrected; but it was very nicely printed for such a little girl as Maggie. This was the letter: —

"Dear Grandpapa Duncan, —

"Maggie and Bessie are making up this letter, but I am printing, because Bessie is too little. We hope you are well, and Bessie is better and I am very well, thank you, and every body. It rains, and we have nothing to do, and so we are writing you a letter. We like this place; it is nice. There is a great deal of sea here. There are two kittens here. Mrs. Jones made us a turnover. The old cat is very cross. Mrs. Jones put currants in it, and she put it in the oven and the juice boiled out and made it sticky, and it was good and we eat it all up. Dear grandpa, we hope you are well. This is from us, Maggie and Bessie. Good-by, dear grandpa. P. S. — We can't think of anything else to say. My hand is tired, too.

"Your beloved

"Maggie and Bessie.

"Another P. S. — God bless you."

Mamma said it was a very nice letter, and she folded it and put it in an envelope. Then she directed it to Mr. Duncan, and put a postage stamp on it, so that it was all ready to go with the rest of the letters when Mr. Jones went to the post-office in the evening.

But you must learn a little about the dear old gentleman to whom the children had been writing. His name was Duncan, and he lived at a beautiful place called Riverside, a short distance from New York. He was not really the children's grandfather, but his son, Mr. John Duncan, had married their Aunt Helen; and as they were as fond of him as he was of them, he had taught them to call him Grandpapa Duncan.

A little way from Riverside lived a poor widow named Bent. She had a son, who a year or two since had fallen from a wall and hurt his back, so that the doctor said he would never walk or stand again. Day after day he lay upon his bed, sometimes suffering very much, but always gentle, patient, and uncomplaining.

Jemmy was often alone, for hours at a time; for his mother had to work hard to get food and medicine for her sick boy; and his sister, Mary, carried radishes and cresses, and other green things to sell in the streets of the city. But Jemmy's Bible and Prayer-book were always at his side, and in these the poor helpless boy found comfort when he was tired and lonely.

To buy a wheel chair, in which Jemmy might be out of doors, and be rolled from place to place without trouble or pain to himself, was the one great wish of Mrs. Bent and Mary; and they were trying to put by money enough for this. But such a chair cost a great deal; and though they saved every penny they could, the money came very slowly, and it seemed as if it would be a long while before Jemmy had his chair.

Now Mrs. Bradford was one of Mary's customers; so it happened that the children had often seen her when she came with her basket of radishes. Bessie used to call her "yadishes," for she could not pronounce *r*: but neither she nor Maggie had ever heard of the poor lame boy, till one day when they were at Riverside. Playing in the garden, they saw Mary sitting outside the gate, counting over the money she had made by the sale of her radishes: and as they were talking to her, it came about that she told them of the sick brother lying on his bed, never able to go out and breathe the fresh air, or see the beautiful blue sky and green trees, in this lovely Summer weather; and how she and her mother were working and saving, that they might have enough to buy the easy chair.

Our little girls were very much interested, and went back to the house very eager and anxious to help buy the chair for Jemmy; and finding Grandpapa Duncan on the piazza, they told him the whole story. Now our Maggie and Bessie had each a very troublesome fault. Bessie had a quick temper, and was apt to fly into a passion; while Maggie was exceedingly careless and forgetful, sometimes disobeying her parents from sheer heedlessness, and a moment's want of thought. When Mr. Duncan heard about Jemmy Bent, he proposed a little plan to the children, that pleased them very much.

This was about a month before they were to leave the city for the sea-shore. Grandpapa Duncan promised that for each day, during the next three weeks, in which Bessie did not lose her temper and give way to one of her fits of passion, or in which Maggie did not fall into any great carelessness or disobedience, he would give twenty cents to each little girl. At the end of three weeks this would make eight dollars and forty cents. When they had earned this much he would add the rest of the money that was needed to buy the wheel chair, and they should have the pleasure of giving it to Jemmy themselves.

The children were delighted, and promised to try hard, and they did do their best. But it was hard work, for they were but little girls, – Bessie only five, Maggie not quite seven. Bessie had some hard battles with her temper. Maggie had to watch carefully that she was not tempted into forgetfulness and disobedience. And one day Maggie failed miserably, for she had trusted to her own strength, and not looked for help from above. But Grandpapa Duncan gave her another trial; and, as even such young children may do much toward conquering their faults if they try with all their hearts, the money was all earned, the chair bought, and Maggie and Bessie carried it to lame Jemmy. Then it would have been hard to tell who were the most pleased, the givers or the receivers.

Nor did Maggie and Bessie cease after this to struggle with their faults, for from this time there was a great improvement to be seen in both.

IV. *THE QUARREL*

MR. JONES had another errand to do when he went to the post-office, which was to go to the railway station for Harry and Fred, whose vacation had begun. Grandmamma and Aunt Annie came with them, but they went to the hotel, and Maggie and Bessie did not see them till the next morning. How glad the little girls were to have their brothers with them; and what a pleasure it was to take them round the next day and show them all that was to be seen!

"Maggie and Bessie," said Harry, "I saw a great friend of yours on Saturday; guess who it was."

"Grandpa Hall," said Maggie.

"No; guess again. We went out to Riverside to spend the day, and it was there we saw him."

"Oh, I know!" said Bessie, "it was lame Jemmy."

"Yes, it was lame Jemmy, and he was as chirp as a grasshopper. He was sitting up in his chair out under the trees; and you never saw a fellow so happy, for all he is lame. Why, if I was like him, and couldn't go about, I should be as cross as a bear."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't, Harry," said Bessie; "not if you knew it was God who made you lame."

"Oh, but I should, though; I'm not half as good as he is."

"But you could ask Jesus to make you good and patient like Jemmy, and then He would."

"Well," said Harry, "he's mighty good, anyhow; and Fred and I gave him a first-rate ride in his chair ever so far up the road. He liked it, I can tell you; and he asked such lots of questions about you two. And what do you think he is learning to do?"

"What?" asked both his little sisters.

"To knit stockings for the soldiers."

"What! a boy?" said Maggie.

"Yes; Aunt Helen sent some yarn to his mother to knit socks; and Jemmy wanted to learn so that he could do something for his country, if he was a lame boy, he said. Aunt Helen pays Mrs. Bent for those she makes, but Jemmy told her if he might use some of her yarn he would like to do it without pay, and she gave him leave; so his mother is teaching him, and you would think he is a girl to see how nicely he takes to it. He is not a bit ashamed of it either, if it is girl's work."

"And so he oughtn't," said Bessie. "Girl's work is very nice work."

"So it is, Queen Bess; and girls are very nice things when they are like our Midget and Bess."

"I don't think boys are half as nice as girls," said Maggie, "except you and Tom, Harry."

"And I," said Fred.

"Well, yes, Fred; when you don't tease I love you; but then you do tease, you know. But Mamie Stone is not nice if she is a girl; she is cross, and she did a shocking thing, Harry. She pinched Bessie's arm so it's all black and blue. But she was served right for it, 'cause I just gave her a good slap."

"But that was naughty in you," said Tom, who was standing by; "you should return good for evil."

"I sha'n't, if she evils my Bessie," said Maggie, stoutly. "If she hurts me I won't do anything to her, but if she hurts Bessie I will, and I don't believe it's any harm. I'm sure there's a verse in the Bible about it."

"About what, Maggie?"

"About, about, – why about my loving Bessie and not letting any one hurt her. I'll ask papa to find one for me. He can find a verse in the Bible about everything. Oh, now I remember one myself. It's – little children love each other."

"And so you should," said Tom; "and it is very sweet to see two little sisters always so kind and loving to each other as you and Bessie are. But, Maggie, that verse does not mean that you should

get into a quarrel with your other playmates for Bessie's sake; it means that you should love all little children. Of course you need not love Mamie as much as Bessie, but you ought to love her enough to make you kind to her. And there's another verse, – 'blessed are the peace-makers.' You were not a peace-maker when you slapped Mamie."

"I sha'n't be Mamie's peace-maker," said Maggie; "and, Tom, you ought to take my side and Bessie's; you are very unkind."

"Now don't be vexed, Midget," said Tom, sitting down on a large stone, and pulling Maggie on his knee. "I only want to show you that it did not make things any better for you to slap Mamie when she pinched Bessie. What happened next after you slapped her?"

"She slapped me," said Maggie; "and then I slapped her again, and Lily slapped her, too; it was just good enough for her."

"And what then?" asked Tom.

"Why Mamie screamed and ran and told her mother, and Mrs. Stone came and scolded us; and Jane showed her Bessie's arm, and she said she didn't believe Mamie meant to hurt Bessie."

"What a jolly row!" said Fred. "I wish I had been there to see."

"Nurse said she wished she had been there," said Maggie, "and she would have told Mrs. Stone –"

"Never mind that," said Tom; "there were quite enough in the quarrel without nurse. Now, Maggie, would it not have been far better if you had taken Bessie quietly away when Mamie hurt her?"

"No," said Maggie, "because then she wouldn't have been slapped, and she ought to be."

"Well, I think with you that Mamie was a very naughty girl, and deserved to be punished; but then it was not your place to do it."

"But her mother would not do it," said Maggie; "she is a weak, foolish woman, and is ruining that child."

The boys laughed, when Maggie said this with such a grand air.

"Who did you hear say that?" asked Harry.

"Papa," said Maggie, – "so it's true. I guess he didn't mean me to hear it, but I did."

"Oh, you little pitcher!" cried Harry; and Tom said, "Maggie dear, things may be quite right for your father to say, that would not be proper for us; because Mrs. Stone is a great deal older than we are; but since we all know that she does not take much pains to make Mamie a good and pleasant child, do you not think that this ought to make us more patient with her when she is fretful and quarrelsome?"

"No," said Maggie; "if her mother don't make her behave, some one else ought to. I will hurt her if she hurts Bessie."

"Maggie," said Tom, "when wicked men came to take Jesus Christ and carry him away to suffer a dreadful death on the cross, do you remember what one of the disciples did?"

"No; tell me," said Maggie.

"He drew his sword and cut off the ear of one of those wicked men; not because he was doing anything to him, but because he was ill-treating the dear Lord whom he loved."

"I'm glad of it," said Maggie; "it was just good enough for that bad man, and I love that disciple."

"But the Saviour was not glad," said Tom, "for he reprov'd the disciple, and told him to put up his sword; and he reached out his hand and healed the man's ear."

"That was because he was Jesus," said Maggie. "I couldn't be so good as Jesus."

"No, we cannot be as holy and good as Jesus, for he was without sin; but we can try to be like him, and then he will love us and be pleased with what he knows we wish to do. Maggie, the other day I heard you saying to your mother that pretty hymn, 'I am Jesus' Little Lamb;' now, if you are really one of Jesus' little lambs you will also be one of his blessed peace-makers. I think if you and Lily had not struck Mamie, she would have felt much more sorry and ashamed than she does now, when she thinks that you have hurt her as much as she hurt Bessie."

"Do you want me to be a peace-maker with Mamie, now?" asked Maggie.

"Yes, if you are not friends with her yet."

"Oh, no, we are not friends at all," said Maggie; "for she runs away every time she sees Lily or me; and we make faces at her."

"And do you like to have it so?"

"Yes," said Maggie slowly, "I think I do; I like to see her run."

"And do you think it is like Jesus' little lamb for you to feel so."

"No, I suppose not; I guess it's pretty naughty, and I won't make faces at her anymore. What shall I do to make friends, Tom?"

"Well," said Tom, "I cannot tell exactly; but suppose the next time that Mamie runs away from you, you call her to come and play with you; will not that show her that you wish to be at peace again?"

"Yes," said Maggie; "and if you think Jesus would want me to, I'll do it; but, Tom, we'll be very sorry if she comes. You don't know what an uncomfortable child she is to play with; she's as cross as – as cross as —*nine* sticks."

"Perhaps you'll find some other way," said Tom, who could not help smiling. "If we wish for a chance to do good to a person we can generally find one. But I must go, for there is father beckoning to me to come out in the boat with him. You will think of what I have said, will you not, Maggie?"

"Oh, yes I will, and I will do it too, Tom; and if Mamie pinches Bessie again, I won't slap her, but only give her a good push, and then we'll run away from her."

Tom did not think that this was exactly the way to make friends, but he had not time to say anything more, for his father was waiting.

V.

TOM'S SUNDAY-SCHOOL

"THERE'S Tom," said Maggie, on the next Sunday afternoon, as she looked out of the window; "he is talking to Mr. Jones, and now they are going to the barn. I wonder if he is going to swing on Sunday."

"Why, Maggie," said Bessie; "Tom wouldn't do such a thing."

"I thought maybe he forgot," said Maggie. "I forgot it was Sunday this morning, and I was just going to ask Mr. Jones to swing me. I wonder what they are doing. I can see in the door of the barn and they are busy with the hay. Come and look, Bessie."

Tom and Mr. Jones seemed to be very busy in the barn for a few minutes, but the little girls could not make out what they were doing. At last Tom came out and walked over to the house. Maggie and Bessie ran to meet him.

"Here you are," he said, "the very little people I wanted to see. I am going to have a Sunday-school class in the barn. Mr. Jones has given me leave, for I could find no place over at the hotel. We have been making seats in the hay. Will you come?"

"Oh, yes, indeed we will," said Maggie, clapping her hands.

Bessie shook her head sorrowfully. "Tom," she said, "mamma wont let me go to Sunday-school; she says I am too little."

"I think she will let you go to mine," said Tom; "we'll go and ask her."

They all went in together to the room where papa and mamma sat reading. "Mrs. Bradford," said Tom, when he had shaken hands with her, "I am going to hold a little Sunday-school class over in the barn; will you let Maggie and Bessie come?"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Bradford. "Who are you to have, Tom?"

"Only Lily, ma'am, and Mamie Stone, and a few more of the little ones from the hotel; they were running about and making a great noise in the hall and parlors, and I thought I could keep them quiet for a while if Mr. Jones would let me bring them over to his barn, and have a Sunday-school there. Walter is coming to help me."

"A good plan, too," said Mr. Bradford; "you are a kind boy to think of it, Tom."

"May I come?" asked Harry.

"And I, too?" said Fred.

"I don't know about you, Fred," said Tom; "I should like to have Harry, for neither Walter nor I can sing, and we want some one to set the tunes for the little ones. But I am afraid you will make mischief."

"Indeed I won't, Tom. Let me come and I will be as quiet as a mouse, and give you leave to turn me out if I do the first thing."

"Well, then, you may come, but I shall hold you to your word and send you away if you make the least disturbance. I don't mean this for play."

"Honor bright," said Fred.

They all went out and met Walter who was coming up the path with a troop of little ones after him. There were Lily and Eddie Norris, Gracie Howard, Mamie Stone, Julia and Charlie Bolton, and half a dozen more beside.

Tom marched them into the barn, where he and Mr. Jones had arranged the school-room.

And a fine school-room the children thought it; better than those in the city to which some of them went every Sunday. There were two long piles of hay with boards laid on top of them, – one covered with a buffalo robe, the other with a couple of sheep skins, making nice seats. In front of these was Tom's place, – an empty barrel turned upside-down for his desk, and Fred's velocipede

for his seat. The children did not in the least care that hay was strewn all over the floor, or that the old horse who was in the other part of the barn, would now and then put his nose through the little opening above his manger, and look in at them as if he wondered what they were about.

"Oh, isn't this splendid?" said Maggie. "It is better than our Infant school-room, in Dr. Hill's church."

"So it is," said Lily. "I wish we always went to Sunday-school here, and had Tom for our teacher."

Some of the little ones wanted to play, and began to throw hay at each other; but Tom put a stop to this; he had not brought them there to romp, he said, and those who wanted to be noisy must go away. Then he told them all to take their seats.

Maggie had already taken hers on the end of one of the hay benches, with Bessie next to her, and Lily on the other side of Bessie. Gracie Howard sat down by Lily, and Mamie Stone was going to take her place next, when Gracie said, "You sha'n't sit by me, Mamie."

"Nor by me," said Lily.

"Nor me, nor me," said two or three of the others.

Now Mamie saw how she had made the other children dislike her by her ill-humor and unkindness, and she did not find it at all pleasant to stand there and have them all saying they would not sit by her.

"I want to go home," she said, while her face grew very red, and she looked as if she were going to cry.

"Who is going to be kind, and sit by Mamie," asked Tom.

"I should think none of them who know how she can pinch," said Fred.

"Oh, we are going to forget all that," said Tom. "Come, children, make room for Mamie."

"This bench is full," said Lily, "she can't come here."

Mamie began to cry. "There is plenty of room on the other bench," said Tom; "sit there, Mamie."

"I don't want to," answered Mamie; "there's nothing but boys there, and I want to go home."

"Why," said Tom, "what a bad thing that would be, to begin our Sunday-school by having one of our little scholars go home because none of the rest will sit by her. That will never do."

All this time Maggie had sat quite still, looking at Mamie. She was thinking of what Tom had said to her, and of being Jesus' little lamb. Here was a chance to show Mamie that she was ready to be friends with her, but it was hard work. She did not at all like to go away from her little sister whom she loved so much, to sit by Mamie whom she did not love at all, and who had been so unkind to Bessie. She rose up slowly from her seat, with cheeks as red as Mamie's and said, —

"Tom, I'll go on the other seat and sit by Mamie."

"And just get pinched for it," said Lily: "stay with us, Maggie."

Mamie took her hand down from her face and looked at Maggie with great surprise.

"She wants some one to sit with her," said Maggie, "and I had better go."

"Maggie is doing as she would be done by," said Tom.

Then Maggie felt glad, for she knew she was doing right. "Come, Mamie," she said, and she took hold of Mamie's hand, and they sat down together on the other bench.

"You are a good girl, Midget," said Harry, "and it's more than you deserve, Miss Mamie."

"I don't care," said Mamie. "I love Maggie, and I don't love any of the rest of you, except only Tom."

Here Tom called his school to order and said there must be no more talking, for he was going to read, and all must be quiet. He went behind his barrel-desk, and opening his Bible, read to them about the Saviour blessing little children. Then they sang, "I want to be an Angel." Harry and Fred, with their beautiful clear voices, started the tune, and all the children joined in, for every one of them knew the pretty hymn.

Next, Tom read how Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in a rough stable and laid not in a pretty cradle such as their baby brothers and sisters slept in, but in a manger where the wise men of the east came and worshipped Him: and how after Joseph and Mary had been told by God to fly into the land of Egypt with the infant Saviour, the wicked king, Herod, killed all the dear little babies in the land, with the hope that Jesus might be among them. When he came to any thing which he thought the children would not understand, he stopped and explained it to them. "Now we will sing again," he said, when he had done reading, "and the girls shall choose the hymns. Maggie, dear, what shall we sing first?"

Maggie knew what she would like, but she was too shy to tell, and she looked at Tom without speaking. Tom thought he knew, and said, "I'll choose for you, then. We will sing, 'Jesus, little lamb;' whoever knows it, hold up their hand."

Half a dozen little hands went up, but Tom saw that all the children did not know it. "What shall we do?" he said. "Maggie would like that best, I think; but I suppose all want to sing, and some do not know the words."

"Never mind," said Gracie Howard, who was one of those who had not held up her hand, "if Maggie wants it we'll sing it, because she was so good and went and sat by Mamie. If we don't know the words we can holler out the tune all the louder."

Some of the children began to laugh when Gracie said this, but Tom said, "I have a better plan than that. I will say the first verse over three or four times, line by line, and you may repeat it after me; then we will sing it, and so go on with the next verse."

This was done. Tom said the lines slowly and distinctly, and those who did not know the hymn repeated them. While they were learning the first verse in this way, Mamie whispered to Maggie, "Maggie, I love you."

"Do you?" said Maggie, as if she could not quite believe it.

"Yes, because you are good; don't you love me. Maggie?"

"Well, no, not much," said Maggie, "but I'll try to."

"I wish you would," said Mamie; "and I won't snatch your things, nor slap you, nor do anything."

"I'll love you if you do a favor to me," said Maggie.

"Yes, I will, if it is not to give you my new crying baby."

"Oh, I don't want your crying baby, nor any of your toys," said Maggie. "I only want you to promise that you won't pinch my Bessie again. Why, Mamie, you ought to be more ashamed of yourself than any girl that ever lived; her arm is all black and blue yet."

"I didn't mean to hurt her so much," said Mamie, "and I was sorry when Bessie cried so; but then you slapped me, and Lily slapped me, and Jane scolded me, and so I didn't care, but was glad I did it; but I am sorry, now, and I'll never do it again."

"And I sha'n't slap you, if you do," said Maggie.

"What will you do, then?"

"I'll just take Bessie away, and leave you to your own 'flections."

"I don't know what that means," said Mamie.

"I don't, either," said Maggie; "but I heard papa say it, so I said it. I like to say words that big people say. Bessie won't say a word if she don't know what it means; but I'd just as lief. I guess it means conscience."

"Oh, I guess it does, too," said Mamie, "for Walter said he should think I'd have a troubled conscience for hurting Bessie so; but I didn't. And Tom talked to me too; but I didn't care a bit, till you came to sit by me, Maggie, and now I am sorry. Did you tell Tom about it?"

"I talked to him about it, but he knew before. Why, everybody knew, Mamie, because your mamma made such an awful fuss about those little slaps."

Now Maggie made a mistake in saying this; she did not mean it to vex Mamie, but it did.

"They were not little slaps," she said, "they were hard slaps, and they hurt; and you sha'n't say my mamma makes an awful fuss."

Before Maggie had time to answer, Tom called upon the children to sing, and Maggie joined in with her whole heart. The first verse was sung over twice; and by the time this was done, Mamie felt good-natured again, for she remembered how Maggie had come to sit with her when none of the other little girls would do so. She had been quite surprised when Maggie had offered to do it, and had thought that she could not have been so good.

"I'll never be cross with Maggie again," she said to herself.

When Tom began to teach the second verse she whispered, "Maggie, will you kiss me and make up?"

"Yes, by and by, when some of the other children are gone," said Maggie.

"Why won't you do it, now?"

"I don't like to do it before them; I'm afraid they'll think I want them to see."

When Tom thought the children all knew the hymn pretty well, they sang it over two or three times, and then he told them a story. After they had sung once more, he dismissed the school; for he did not want to keep them too long, lest the little ones should be tired. He invited all those who liked it, to come again the next Sunday afternoon, for Mr. Jones had said that they might have Sunday-school in the barn as often as they liked. Every one of the children said that they would come. When most of them had left the barn, Maggie said, "Now I will kiss you, Mamie."

"I want to kiss Bessie, too," said Mamie, as the little girl came running up to her sister; "will you kiss me, Bessie?"

"Oh, yes," said Bessie; and Mamie kissed both of her little playmates, and so there was peace between them once more.

VI. *THE POST-OFFICE*

ON Monday Mr. Bradford went up to New York to attend to some business. He was to come back on Wednesday afternoon; and on the morning of that day, grandmamma sent over to know if Mrs. Bradford would like to have her carriage, and drive to the railway station to meet him. Mamma said yes; and told Maggie and Bessie they might go with her. She offered to take Harry and Fred, too; but they wanted to go clam-fishing with Mr. Jones; so she took Franky and baby instead, and carried baby herself, telling nurse and Jane that they might have a holiday for the afternoon. The little girls were delighted at the thought of going to meet their dear father; for he had been gone three days, and they had missed him very much.

The first part of the ride was through the sand, where the wheels went in so deep that the horses had hard work to draw the carriage and went very slowly, but the children did not mind that at all. They liked to hear the sound of the wheels grating through the sand, and to watch how they took it up and threw it off again as they moved round and round. At last the carriage turned off to the right, and now the road was firmer and harder, and, after a time, ran through the woods. This was delightful, it was so cool and shady. Baby seemed to think this was a good place for a nap, for she began to shut her eyes and nod her little head about, till mamma laid her down in her lap, where she went fast asleep. James took Franky in front with him and let him hold the end of the reins, and Franky thought he was driving quite as much as the good-natured coachman, and kept calling out "Get up," and "Whoa," which the horses did not care for in the least.

There was a little stream which ran along by the side of the road, and at last bent itself right across it, so that the carriage had to go over a small bridge. Just beyond the bridge the stream widened into quite a large pool. James drove his horses into it, and stopped to let them take a drink.

It was a lovely, shady spot. The trees grew close around the pool and met overhead, and there were a number of small purple flowers growing all around. James tried to reach some of them with his whip, but they were too far away, so the children were disappointed. When the horses had stopped drinking, there was not a sound to be heard but the twittering of the birds in the branches, and the little ripple of the water as it flowed over the stones.

"Let's stay here a great while, mamma," said Bessie, "it is so pleasant."

"And what would papa do when he came and found no one waiting for him?" said Mrs. Bradford.

"Oh, yes! let us make haste then," said Bessie; "we mustn't make him disappointed for a million waters."

But mamma said there was time enough; so they staid a few moments longer, and then drove on. At last they passed from the beautiful green wood into a space where there was no shade. There were bushes and very small trees to be sure, but they were low and scrubby and grew close together in a kind of tangled thicket. These reached as far as they could see on either side, and came so near to the edge of the road, that once, when James had to make way for a heavy hay wagon, and drew in his horses to let it pass, Maggie stretched her hand out of the carriage and pulled some sprigs from one of the bushes.

"Mamma, do you know that funny old man?" asked Bessie, as the driver of the hay wagon nodded to her mother, and Mrs. Bradford smiled and nodded pleasantly in return.

"No, dear; but in these lonely country places it is the custom for people to nod when they pass each other."

"Why, we don't do that in New York," said Maggie.

"No, it would be too troublesome to speak to every one whom we met in the streets of a great city; and people there would think it very strange and impertinent if you bowed to them when you did not know them."

"Mamma," said Maggie, "I don't like the kind of country there is here, at all. What makes all these bushes grow here?"

Then mamma told how all this ground was once covered with just such beautiful woods as they had passed through, and how they were set on fire by the sparks from a train of cars, how the fire spread for miles and miles, and burned for many days; and the people could do nothing to stop it, until God sent a change of wind and a heavy rain which put it out. She told them how many poor people were burnt out of their houses, and how the little birds and squirrels and other animals were driven from their cosy homes in the woods, and many of them scorched to death by this terrible fire. Then for a long time the ground where these woods had grown was only covered with ashes and charred logs, till at last these tangled bushes had sprung up. Mamma said she supposed that by and by the people would cut down the underbrush, and then the young trees would have space to grow.

By the time she had finished her long story they reached the Station and found that they had a few moments to wait, for it was not yet quite time for the train.

There was a locomotive standing on the track, and when the horses saw it they began to prick up their ears and to dance a little; so James turned their heads and drove them up by the side of the depot, where they could not see it. On the other side of the road was a small, white building, and over the door was a sign with large black letters upon it.

"P-O-S-T, porst," spelled Maggie.

"Post," said mamma.

"Post, O double F."

"O-F, of," said mamma again.

"O-F, of, F-I-C-E; oh, it's the post-office. I wonder if there is a letter there for us from Grandpapa Duncan."

"Perhaps there may be," said Mrs. Bradford. "I told Mr. Jones we would inquire for the letters. James, will it do for you to leave the horses?"

"I think not, ma'am," said James. "They are a little onasy yet, and if she squeals they'll run."

"And I cannot go because of baby," said mamma; "we must wait till papa comes."

"I wish we could get our letter if it is there," said Maggie; "we could read it while we are waiting for papa."

"There's a nice civil man there, Mrs. Bradford," said James, "and if you didn't mind Miss Maggie going over, I could lift her out, and he'll wait on her as if it was yourself."

"Oh, James," said Maggie; "I couldn't do it, not for anything. I couldn't indeed, mamma."

"Well, dear, you need not, if you are afraid."

"But I would like to have our letter so much, mamma."

"So would I," said Bessie. "And when dear papa comes we will want to talk to him and not to yead our letter."

"Maybe it is not there," said Maggie.

"But we would like to know," said Bessie. "Could I go, mamma?"

"You are almost too little I think, dear."

"Well," said Maggie, slowly, "I guess I'll go. Mamma, will you look at me all the time?"

"Yes, dear, and there is nothing to hurt you. Just walk in at that door, and you will see a man there. Ask him if there are any letters to go to Mr. Jones's house."

"Yes, mamma, and be very sure you watch all the time."

James came down from his seat and lifted Maggie from the carriage. She walked very slowly across the road, every step or two looking back to see if her mother was watching her. Mrs. Bradford smiled and nodded to her, and at last Maggie went in at the door. But the moment she was inside,

her mother saw her turn round and fly out of the post-office as if she thought something terrible was after her. She tore back across the road and came up to the carriage looking very much frightened.

"Why, Maggie, what is it, dear?" asked her mother.

"Oh, mamma, there is a hole there, and a man put his face in it; please put me in the carriage, James."

"Oh, foolish little Maggie," said mamma; "that man was the post-master, and he came to the hole as you call it, to see what you wanted. If you had waited and told him, he would have looked to see if there were any letters for us."

"He had such queer spectacles on," said Maggie.

"I wish I could go," said Bessie; "I wouldn't be afraid of him. I do want to know if Grandpapa Duncan's letter is there."

"Then you may try," said her mother; "take her out, James."

So Bessie was lifted out of the carriage, and went across the road as Maggie had done. She walked into the post-office and saw the hole Maggie had spoken of, but no one was looking out of it. It was a square opening cut in a wooden partition which divided the post-office. On one side was the place where Bessie stood, and where people came to ask for their letters; on the other was the postmaster's room, where he kept the letters and papers till they were called for.

Bessie looked around and saw no one. She always moved very gently, and she had come in so quietly that the post-master had not heard her. There was a chair standing in front of "the hole." Bessie pushed it closer, and climbing upon it, put her little face through, and looked into the post-master's side of the room. He was sitting there reading. He was an ugly old man, and wore green goggles, which Maggie had called "such queer spectacles." But Bessie was not afraid of him.

"How do you do, Mr. Post Officer?" she said. "I came for our letter."

The post-master looked up. "Well, you're a big one to send after a letter," he said. "Who is it for?"

"For Maggie and me, and it is from Grandpapa Duncan; has it come?"

"Where are you from?" asked the post-master, laughing.

"From Mr. Jones's house. Oh, I forgot, mamma said I was to ask if any letters had come for Mr. Jones's house."

"Then I suppose you are Mr. Bradford's daughter?"

"Yes, I am," said Bessie.

"And are you the little girl who came in here just now, and ran right out again?"

"Oh, no, sir; that was Maggie. Poor Maggie is shy, and she said you looked out of a hole at her."

"And you looked in a hole at me, but I did not run away. If I was to run away you could not get your letter."

"Is it here, sir?" asked Bessie.

"Well, I reckon it may be," said the post-master; "what's your name?"

"My name is Bessie, and my sister's is Maggie."

"Here is one apiece then," said the post-master, taking up some letters. "Here is one for Miss Bessie Bradford; that's you, is it? and one for Miss Maggie Bradford, that's your sister, I reckon."

"What! one for myself, and one for Maggie's self," said Bessie. "Are they from Grandpapa Duncan?"

"I don't know," said the post-master. "You will have to open them to find that out."

"Oh, how nice; please let me have them, sir; I am very much obliged to you."

"Stop, stop," cried the post-master, as Bessie jumped down from the chair, and was running off with her prizes. "Here are some more papers and letters for your folks."

But Bessie did not hear him; she was already out of the door, running over to the carriage with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, holding up a letter in each hand. "Oh, Maggie, Maggie," she called, "that nice post-officer gave me two letters, one for you, and one for me; wasn't he kind?"

"I think it was a kind Grandpapa Duncan, who took the trouble to write two letters," said Mrs. Bradford.

"So it was," said Maggie. "Mamma, will you read them for us?"

"In a moment," said Mrs. Bradford; and then she turned to speak to the post-master, who had followed Bessie to the carriage with the papers and letters which she had been in too great a hurry to wait for. She thanked him, and he went back and stood at the door watching the eager little girls while their mother read to them. She opened Maggie's letter first. It said,

"My dear Little Maggie: —

"I cannot tell you how pleased I was to receive the very nice letter which you and Bessie sent me. I have put it in a safe place in my writing desk, and shall keep it as long as I live. As you wrote it together, perhaps you expected that I would make one answer do for both; but I thought you would be better pleased if I sent a letter for each one.

"I am glad to hear that you like Quam Beach so much; but you must not let it make you forget dear old Riverside. I am fond of the sea myself, and do not know but I may take a run down to see you some day this summer. Do you think you could give a welcome to the old man? and would Mrs. Jones make him such a famous turnover as she made for you?

"I went this morning to see your friend Jemmy, for I thought you would like to hear something about him. He was out in the little garden, on the shady side of the house, sitting in his chair with his books beside him, and a happier or more contented boy I never saw. He was alone, except for his dog and rabbits, for his mother was washing, and Mary was out. Mrs. Bent brought me a chair, and I sat and talked to Jemmy for some time. I asked him which of all his books he liked best. 'Oh, my Bible, sir,' he said. 'I think it is with the Bible and other books, just like it is with people, Mr. Duncan.' 'How so?' I asked. 'Why, sir,' he answered, 'when Mary and mother are away, the neighbors often come in to sit with me and talk a bit. They are very kind, and I like to have them tell me about things; but no matter how much they make me laugh or amuse me, 'tain't like mother's voice; and if I am sick, or tired, or uncomfortable, or even glad, there ain't nobody that seems to have just the right thing to say, so well as her. And it's just so with the Bible, I think; it always has just the very thing I want: whether it's comfort and help, or words to say how happy and thankful I feel. The other books I like just as I do the neighbors; but the Bible I love just as I do mother. I suppose the reason is that the Bible is God's own words, and he loved and pitied us so that he knew what we would want him to say, just as mother loves and pities me, and so knows what I like her to say.' Happy Jemmy! he knows how to love and value God's holy book, that most precious gift, in which all may find what their souls need. May my little Maggie learn its worth as the poor lame boy has done.

"I really think your chair has done Jemmy good. He looks brighter, and has a better color and appetite since he has been able to be out of doors so much. I do not suppose he will ever be able to walk again, but he does not fret about that, and is thankful for the blessings that are left to him. If you and Bessie could see how much he enjoys the chair, you would feel quite repaid for any pains you took to earn it for him. And now, my darling, I think I must put the rest of what I have to say, in your little sister's letter. Write to me soon again, and believe me

"Your loving grandpapa,

"Charles Duncan."

Just as mama was finishing this letter, the train came in sight, and she said she must leave Bessie's letter till they were at home. In a few minutes they saw their dear father coming towards them, and a man following with his bag and a great basket. Then papa was in the carriage, and such a hugging and kissing as he took and gave. Franky came inside that he might have his share, too; and baby woke up, good-natured as she always was, and smiled and crowed at her father till he said he really thought she knew him, and was glad to see him. Mamma was quite sure she did.

When they had all settled down once more, and papa had asked and answered a good many questions, he said, "Maggie and Bessie, I met a very curious old gentleman to-day; what strange question do you think he asked me?"

The children were sure they did not know.

"He asked me if there were any little girls down this way who wrote letters to old gentleman?"

Maggie and Bessie looked at each other, and Maggie shook her head very knowingly; but they waited to hear what papa would say next.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.