

Mathews Joanna Hooe

Bessie among the Mountains



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I.

UP THE MOUNTAIN

UP, up! What a height it was, and how the horses toiled as they drew the heavy wagons up the mountain side. Whenever they came to a very steep place, the boys and all the gentlemen, except Colonel Rush, would jump out and walk, so as to lighten the load. Aunt Annie and Aunt Bessie, who was really Aunt Bessie now, for she was Uncle Ruthven's wife, also tried this; but they soon tired, and were glad to take their seats in the wagon again.

Maggie thought she must take her turn too, and asked papa to lift her out. Papa consented, warning her, however, that she would find it harder work than she imagined to clamber up these steep ascents on her own two small feet. But Maggie thought she would like to be "a relief to the horses," so papa took her out.

Then Bessie's sweet little voice piped up from the snug corner, where she sat nestled between Colonel Rush and his wife.

"Mamma, bettn't I walk a little too, on 'count of the poor horses?"

At which Mr. Porter who walked beside the wagon, holding the reins, and now and then chirruping to the willing creatures who needed no whip or harsh command, turned his head towards the tiny figure with a merry twinkle in his eye.

"I think not, darling," said mamma; "by the time we are at the Lake House you will be more than tired enough with this long day's journey."

"I do not wish to walk, mamma," said Bessie, "only for the horses."

"The horses don't make much account of your weight, I reckon," said Mr. Porter, good-naturedly, "and though this seems mighty hard work to you, they are used to it, and don't mind it so much. Besides, they know that every pitch takes them nearer to their stable, where they'll have a good rest and a feed of oats. They'd rather go up than down any day."

"How do they know it?" asked Bessie, who had already made friends with Mr. Porter.

"Well," said Mr. Porter, taking off his hat and fanning himself with it, "I can't just say how; certain it is they do know it."

"Maybe it's their instinct," said Bessie.

"That's about it," he answered, with a smile.

"These are fine teams of yours, Mr. Porter," said Colonel Rush.

"You may say that, sir," answered the old man, looking with pride at the noble beasts, "and this is the best of the lot. These are Vermont horses, sure-footed as goats, as they need to be on these mountain roads; strong as elephants, and wiser than many a creature that goes on two feet. Why, I could tell you stories of this fellow," and he nodded towards the horse nearest him, "that maybe you'll find it hard to believe. I named him 'Solomon,' thinking it suitable; but the boys they shortened it to 'Sol,' and that's what he goes by. I tell you, he knows a thing or two, that horse."

Mr. Porter paused for breath, and Bessie, after waiting a moment or two in hopes of the stories of old Sol, said, —

"We'll believe you, Mr. Porter, if you tell us those stories."

"So I will," he answered, "but not now. It takes the breath out of a man trudging up these hills, and I can't tell you long stories now. But you come into the kitchen some evening, and I'll tell you a bushel full."

Maggie had found that "trudging up the hills" took the breath out of a little girl, and papa's words soon proved themselves true; but she plodded along perseveringly, flushed and panting, holding to papa's hand, and happy in her belief that she was sparing the horses by her own exertions.

And now they came to a level spot where all might rest. A beautiful resting place it was, a perfect bower of the wild clematis, rock ivy and briar rose, the latter now in full flower. The long, slender sprays flung themselves from tree to tree, or ran climbing over the rocks, while the delicate pink blossoms hung, many of them, within the children's reach. Uncle Ruthven's warning checked Maggie's too eager fingers until he could cut them carefully with his knife, and place them in her hands stripped of their sharp little thorns. Maggie thanked him for his thoughtful kindness when she saw the misfortune which had happened to Hafed; for the little Persian, always anxious to please his "Missys," had grasped too heedlessly the tempting branches, and was now wringing his fingers as he danced about, half laughing, half crying, and saying, —

"Prettys no good, no good."

Maggie and Bessie were quite distressed for him, until his master, having taken out the thorns, bade him wash his bleeding fingers in the brook which ran by the roadside. Bessie had been taken from the wagon that she might rest herself by running about a little after her long ride, and now she and Maggie, as well as Hafed, forgot pricks and scratches in the pleasure of watching the brook, and feeling its cool, clear waters trickle through their fingers. What a noisy, merry, frolicsome stream this was, gurgling and splashing, rushing and tumbling in its rocky bed; now leaping gracefully in a miniature waterfall over some narrow ledge, now rippling and singing about the roots of the trees and over the pebbles that lay in its course, now flashing in the sunlight, and now hiding in a crevice of the rocks as if it were playing at Bopeep.

"What a fuss it makes about nothing," said Harry, as he dipped his fingers into the water, and carried some of the clear, sparkling drops to his lips, "One would think it was doing a wonderful lot of work."

"So it does," said Maggie, following her brother's example.

"What work does it do?" asked Harry, always ready to listen to any of Maggie's new ideas.

"Sometimes it gives a thirsty boy a drink, and he is very ungrateful, and says it makes a fuss about nothing," said Maggie, mischievously.

Harry playfully sprinkled her with the drops which hung from his fingers. "And what else?"

"It waters the flowers and mosses and trees," said Maggie; "and the birds and squirrels can come and take a drink too, if they like."

"And it makes a pretty waterfall for us to see, and a nice, pleasant noise for us to listen to," said Bessie.

"All that is no better than play," said Harry.

"And it helps to make the sea," said Bessie. "Mamma said so."

"Ho!" said Fred; "much this little brook does towards filling the sea, Queen Bess."

"But *it helps*, and does all it can, Fred."

"Yes," said Maggie; "one little brook runs on until it finds another little brook, and then they join, and run on together, and then they meet another and another till they all make a small river, and that joins other little rivers and brooks, till there is a very large one like that we sailed on this morning, and that runs into the great, great sea that we used to see at Quam Beach last summer."

"Hallo, Midge!" said Fred; "where did you find out so much?"

"It's not my own finding out," said Maggie; "the other day my geography lesson was about rivers, and mamma told me all that, and Bessie heard too; so when we first saw this brook farther down the mountain, we remembered what mamma said, and Aunt May said a very nice thing."

"What was it?" asked Harry.

"She said little children might be like the brooks and springs. Not one could do a great deal by himself, but every little helped in the work God gave his creatures to do for him, just as every brook

helped to fill the great sea to which it ran; and if we were good and sweet, it made everything bright and pleasant about us, just like a clear and running stream. But cross and naughty children were like the muddy brooks and dull pools, which no one could drink, or make of any use. I hope I won't be like an ugly, muddy pool that does no good to any one, but just stands still, and looks disagreeable all the day long, and has toads and things in it."

The boys laughed at the ending of Maggie's speech, so like herself, and Uncle Ruthven as he dipped a drinking cup into the flashing stream, said, —

"I do not think we need fear that, little Maggie."

"No," said Harry; "there is rather too much sunshine and sparkle about Maggie to think that she would become a stagnant pool, full of ugly tempers and hateful faults, like 'toads and things.'"

"Yes," laughed Fred, "and she could not stand still with nothing to do; could you, Midget Fidget?"

Maggie was in too sunny a humor to be teased by anything Fred could say, though she did not like the name he called her, and she answered with good temper, —

"No, indeed, I could not, Fred; but if I am naughty I suppose I do not run just the way I ought to, and perhaps I grow a little muddy sometimes."

"It don't last long then, I'll say that for you," answered Fred, touched by his little sister's sweet-tempered honesty.

"No, it does not," said Bessie, who had been listening to the last few sentences with a sober face, "and my own little brook Maggie is the best and brightest brook of all the family. No, thank you, Uncle Ruthven," as her uncle offered her a drink from his cup; "the water tastes better this way;" and she dipped her tiny hand again in the stream.

"But it would take you till sundown to satisfy your thirst out of that make-believe hand, Princess," said Mr. Stanton, "and Mr. Porter is ready for a fresh start."

So Bessie took a drink from her uncle's cup, and the other children were glad to do the same, since they were now forced to leave this pleasant spot.

Mamma said she thought Maggie had walked far enough, so she once more took her seat in the wagon, and as Mr. Porter said they had passed the steepest part of the ascent, the gentlemen and boys all did the same. The scene did not grow less beautiful as they went on upward. They could see to a great distance, and the view was very lovely. Behind and below them lay hills and forests, with here and there a break or clearing where some cozy home farm nestled, with the smoke from its chimney curling lazily up into the quiet summer air. Still farther down, the valleys with their glistening ponds and streams, and the villages clustering here and there, their houses and churches looking from this height almost as small as toys; while far in the distance, flashing in the sunlight, rolled the noble river up whose waters they had come that morning.

Around them and above them lay great swells of land, over which they had yet to pass, rising one above another till they were crowned with the lofty summit of the mountain. Here stood out sharply against the sky a gray, bare mass of rock, with a tuft of pine-trees growing on the very top. By some people this was called "The Point," by others, "The Chief's Head," because they fancied it looked like an Indian's head wearing a plume of feathers. It could be seen for many miles, and long before our party began to ascend the mountain, Mr. Bradford had pointed it out to the children. The boys at once imagined they saw the Indian's head plainly. Maggie sometimes thought she did, sometimes thought she did not, and was very eager about it; but now as the road took a sudden bend, bringing the great rock into nearer view, she declared the likeness was to be seen distinctly, nose, mouth, chin and all.

Bessie could not see any resemblance, and since Maggie could, was rather distressed; but mamma and the Colonel consoled her by saying that they, like herself, could see nothing but a huge, gray stone, crowned by a few lonely-looking trees.

"There's more fancy than anything else about it, I believe myself," said Mr. Porter; "if it was not for the old story probably no one would see any resemblance."

"What story?" asked Harry, eagerly.

"Why," answered Mr. Porter, "it is said that a tribe of Indians once lived among these valleys and mountains, whose chief died. He left twin sons, both famous warriors, and it was doubtful which would be chosen by the tribe to be their chief or king in the father's place. One of the brothers was very anxious for this honor. He was a proud and selfish man, who seemed to care for no one in the world but his beautiful young wife, whom he dearly loved. His brother was more of a favorite with the people, and he feared that their choice would fall upon him, so he determined to kill him that he might be out of his way.

"The brother was fond of climbing to the mountain top, and sitting there to look out over the broad lands which had belonged to his fathers for so many years. One night when the wicked chief was returning from the hunt, he saw, as he thought, in the dim moonlight, his brother sitting in his usual place. This was very near the edge of the rock, where a slight push might throw him over, and it came into the bad man's heart to climb up softly behind him, and, with a sudden shove, to send him down upon the rocks below. He gave himself no time to think, and in a few moments he had reached the quiet figure which was half concealed by a clump of trees, and, with a push of his powerful hand, sent it whirling over into the valley below."

"Oh, the bad, bad man!" said Bessie. "He was just like a Cain, and his poor brother who never did him any harm! I think that is a bad story."

"Probably it's not true, but just a fable," said Mr. Porter.

"Then they oughtn't to say it about the poor Indian," said Bessie, indignantly. "If he didn't do it, they ought not to make it up about him."

"And likely enough the man himself never lived," said Mr. Porter.

"Then they oughtn't to say he did," persisted Bessie; "And to make him so wicked too. There's enough of bad people without making up any more."

"Well, what was the end of it?" asked Fred.

"Just as the poor lost one went over the edge, a scream rang out on the night air, and the Indian knew it was the voice of his beloved wife whom he had thus sent to her death. The story goes on to say that he was so stricken with horror and grief when he found what he had done, that he wished the earth might open and swallow him, which it did, all but his head, which was turned into stone, and so has remained to speak of the punishment of his wicked deed."

"That tribe of Indians must have been giants then," said Harry, laughing as he looked up at the enormous mass of stone.

"Now I know that story never was," said Bessie. "People don't be turned into stone because they are bad, and nobody ever had such a big head, and people ought not to say it."

Bessie had heard many a fairy tale, many a fable, and had never objected to them, though she always preferred to listen to stories which were, or might be, true; but somehow, no one could tell why, this fancy about the rock seemed to shock her sense of truth, and from this time she could never be persuaded to call it the "Chief's Head." Her mother also noticed that when she was out of doors, she always sat or stood with her back towards it if she could possibly do so.

But they were by no means to mount so far as this before they came to their resting-place. Chalecoo Lake lay a good way below the "Point," nestled in a beautiful basin among the hills, and here the road ended. Those who wished to go higher must do so by a rough mountain path which led to the very summit.

The children were delighted to see what a quantity of birds and squirrels there appeared to be in the woods. The former were hopping about all over the trees, singing among the branches, and seeming scarcely disturbed by the approach of the wagons.

As for the squirrels, they were as saucy as possible, waiting and watching with their sharp, bright eyes till the travellers were close upon them, then gliding ahead to a short distance and looking back, or perhaps leaping from one to another of the old fallen trunks which lay by the roadside almost within arm's length.

Once as the party, who were all growing somewhat tired, were rather quiet, they suddenly heard a long, loud chirrup; and looking round to the side whence the noise came, there, upon a heap of stones, sat a large gray squirrel, with his tail curled gracefully over his back like a plume, and seeming to call attention to himself by his song. Not in the least alarmed by the eager delight of the children, or the whistling and shouts of the boys, he sat still till all the wagons had passed, when he darted ahead of the foremost one, and seating himself this time on an old rail fence, began his pretty call again, and took a second close look at our friends. This he did five or six times in succession, to the great amusement and satisfaction of the little ones, who were beginning to hope he would go with them all the way to the house, when with a pert, defiant whisk of his bushy tail, he leaped down the bank, and was lost to sight in the thick trees of the ravine.

At another time a rabbit ran across the road, but he was by no means so sociable as Bunny, and scampered away as if his life depended on hiding himself among the bushes as fast as possible.

"You wait till to-morrow morning," said Mr. Porter, as Bessie said how sorry she was that the squirrel had not kept on with them; "You wait till to-morrow morning and you'll see squirrels enough for the asking. Tame as your little dog there, they are too."

"Oh, Mr. Porter!" said Bessie, "do you shut the poor little squirrels up in a cage?"

"Not I," answered Mr. Porter. "I would not allow it on any account, and never did. You'll see how my boy Bob manages them."

And now they came to the lake itself. What a wild, curious place it was, such as none of the children had ever seen, not even Harry, who was considered by his brothers and sisters quite a travelled young gentleman, because he had at one time gone with his father to Washington, and at another to Niagara.

Great masses and blocks of granite lay piled one above another round three sides of the lake, here and there poised in such a manner that many of them looked as if the slightest touch must send them headlong into the waters below. And yet thus they had remained for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years, held firmly by the Almighty Hand which had given to each its place. Mosses and lichens, of all shades of gray, green and brown, covered their weather-beaten sides, while their tops were crowned with oaks, maples, pines and firs.

Around the southern side, and close to the mountain, which here rose still farther up, up, steep and rugged, to the Point, or Indian's Head, wound the road; and a dangerous road it looked, with the deep waters of the lake on one side, the rough mountain on the other where the huge boulders overhung the travellers as they passed on. But with sure-footed, steady horses, and a careful driver, Mr. Bradford said there was no danger, for the road was good and strong, "built upon a rock," and kept in capital order by Mr. Porter and his industrious sons. Still, more than one of the ladies drew a breath of relief when it was safely passed.

Away at the eastern end, where there was a break in the rock, and a little back from the lake, stood Mr. Porter's house, a long, low, pleasant-looking building, painted white, with green blinds, wide piazzas, and magnificent shade trees. Garden, orchard and fields lay behind on the slope of the hill where it fell gently away to the valley below, and the whole place told of order and industry, showing in beautiful contrast to the wild grandeur of the other sides of the lake.

So here Maggie and Bessie were at last, at the long-talked-of Chalecoo Lake; and glad enough they, as well as the rest of the party, were to be at their journey's end, pleasant though it had been. Ten hours of steady travelling was tiresome work for little people.

In the wide-open doorway stood Mrs. Porter, waiting to welcome them.

"What a jolly-looking old lady!" exclaimed Fred. "I shall like her, I know. She looks as if she belonged to this dear old place."

"That's so," said Mr. Porter, putting his head on one side, and gazing admiringly at his wife; "She's as jolly as she looks, and as good as she's jolly. My! but she'll spoil your children, Mrs. Bradford."

Mrs. Bradford smiled, and did not look as if she thought the "spoiling" would hurt her children very much; and now, with a loud "whoa," Mr. Porter drew in his horses, and his wife with her two daughters came down to help unload.

"You see I have brought you a large family, Mrs. Porter," said Mrs. Bradford, "but you have room for all, I believe?"

"Yes, and heart room too," was the answer, as the old lady took baby from her nurse, and covered her with kisses. Miss Baby looked for a moment as if she had half a mind to resent this liberty, but thought better of it, and presently was crowing and smiling in the kind old face, which looked so pleasantly at her. Indeed, not one of the children could resist the cheery, coaxing voice and tender manner; and in five minutes they were all crowding about her, as she told of all the treats she had in store for them; and even shy Maggie had summoned up courage to ask a question which had long been troubling her.

"Mrs. Porter," she whispered, pulling the old lady's head down towards her, "may I ask you a secret?"

"To be sure, my lamb, a dozen if you like," answered Mrs. Porter.

"Do you have trundle beds?" whispered Maggie again.

"Trundle beds? Well, I believe there is an old one up garret," said Mrs. Porter, "but I'll have it down for you, and put to rights if you like."

"Oh, no!" said Maggie, "please don't. I *do hate* them so, and I had to sleep in one all last summer at Quam."

"Oh! that's it," said Mrs. Porter, "well, you shall sleep in no trundle bed here, since you don't like it. Come along up-stairs, and you shall see what nice little cottage beds we have for you young ones."

So this trouble was at an end, and Maggie felt quite free to enjoy all the new pleasures about her, without fear of the dreaded trundle bed.

II.

THE SQUIRRELS AND THE ICE GLEN

MAGGIE would have liked very well to run about a little on that first evening of their arrival at Chalecoo; but Bessie was so tired that her mother wished her to keep quiet; and as Maggie would not go out without her sister, they both contented themselves with making acquaintance with the house and the people who belonged there. And a delightful house it was to make acquaintance with, – full of all kinds of odd nooks and corners, with two or three steps here leading up to one room, two or three there going down to another; queer little pantries and cupboards and crooked passages, and altogether unlike any other house the children had ever seen. Through the centre was a wide, cool hall with a green blind door at either end, a capital place for a play-room on a rainy day; and around three sides ran a broad piazza, well shaded with vines and the noble old trees among which the house stood.

From the front, one looked out upon the lake and rocks; from the back, far away over hill and valley, mountain and river. Green fields and meadows lay below, with here and there an orchard or a lovely piece of woods. Then the rooms were so large and pleasant, with so many doors and windows that not a breath of air could stir but a breeze must sweep through them, while nothing could be more neat, clean and fresh. Not a speck or spot was to be seen anywhere, not a thing was out of place, and Bessie looking gravely about her as she noticed these signs of care, said anxiously to Mrs. Porter,

"Are you very particular about your nice house, ma'am?"

"Well, yes," answered Mrs. Porter, looking around with an air of some pride and satisfaction, "don't it suit you?"

"Oh! yes, ma'am," said Bessie, "it suits me very much, but you know sometimes children make a little disorder when they play, and I only meant would you mind if we mussed up your nice house just a very little bit?"

"Not I," said Mrs. Porter, "there's plenty of hands to set to rights any disorder you may make. Just you play away and don't trouble your head about that."

The measure of Maggie's content was full when she followed the old lady up stairs and saw the two neat, small, white beds intended for Bessie and herself.

"Bessie," she said, a little later, "don't you think this place is nicer than Quam Beach?"

They were standing together in the lower hall, looking out upon the lake, while the rays of the setting sun came flickering through the vine leaves, and dancing over the two little figures standing in the doorway, as if it were bidding them a friendly good night, and giving them a promise of a fair day for tomorrow's rambles.

"I think it is very nice," answered Bessie.

"But don't you think it *nicer* than Quam, Bessie?"

"No, Maggie, for the sea is not here."

"But the lake is," said Maggie.

"But the lake is not the sea," said Bessie.

Maggie could not contradict this, but she did not feel satisfied that Bessie should not be as well pleased as she was herself, and she said wistfully, —

"But don't you think you could be a little contented here, Bessie?"

"I can be much contented here, Maggie," answered the little girl. "Why, dear, do you think I would be so ungrateful of this very nice place, and the kind people that are here as not to be contented? Oh! I like the mountains very much, but not quite so very much as the sea."

"Oh, ho!" said Mr. Porter, who had just come up behind them and heard what Bessie had said last, "so you do not like the mountains as well as the sea? Well, I shall make you change that tune."

Why, you don't know all the things there are to see here. Before you've been here a week you'll tell me you like the mountains a heap better than the ocean."

But Mr. Porter was mistaken. He never heard Bessie say that. She spent a very happy summer, and was well satisfied with all the new pleasures she found among the mountains, but they never could make her forget her beloved sea, nor could the old gentleman persuade her to acknowledge that she liked the one as well as the other.

Bessie might well say they were nice people in this house. Besides Mr. and Mrs. Porter, who have already been introduced, were their five sons, "the boys," Mr. Porter called them. Queer "boys," Maggie and Bessie thought them; all, save the youngest, great, sturdy men with sunburned faces and toil-hardened hands. But though their hands were hard, their hearts were not, and seemed to have a particularly soft spot for all these little ones. Mr. Porter's family were all fond of children, and never seemed to think anything too much trouble which could possibly give them pleasure. Next to these grown up "boys," came Fanny and Dolly, two lively, good natured young women; and last of all, Bob, a boy about fourteen, quite ready to make friends with the children, and to show them all the wonders of the place.

The first thing to be thought of after breakfast the next morning was the squirrels. Bob was as anxious to show them to the little strangers as they were to see them; and followed by the whole troop, he led the way to their haunt. This was a great black-walnut tree, which stood at a short distance from the house, and threw its green branches far and wide, casting a delightful shade below, and furnishing a cosy home and leafy play-ground for the squirrels. About half way up the trunk was a hole which was the entrance to their nest. At this hour of the day, Mr. and Mrs. Bunny and their family were generally to be seen frisking about all over and among the boughs, waiting for the nice breakfast which was sure to be provided for them by the kind young master who had chosen them for his pets. If the squirrels could have reasoned about it, they would probably have said that Bob Porter was a capital master to belong to. He fed them and played with them, never shutting them up or asking any work in return; their love was all he wanted, and that he had gained in a way curious to see.

They were usually ready enough to welcome his approach; but now, startled by the unaccustomed sight of so many strangers, every mother's son and daughter of them scampered away to hide themselves in the nest. In half a moment not the end of a tail or the tip of a nose was to be seen, and the children feared that they were to be disappointed.

But telling them to stand at a little distance from him, yet not so far but that they could see all that passed, Bob sat down upon the end of a log and began calling gently, "Bunny, Bunny."

Presently a black nose, two cute little ears, and a pair of sharp, bright eyes appeared at the opening in the tree. The nose sniffed about in a very suspicious manner, and the eyes wandered from Bob to the group beyond, and then back again to Bob, as if they would ask, "Who are all these strange people? Are they friends or foes? and why have you brought them here?"

But at last, as if satisfied that the new faces were friendly ones, Papa Squirrel, for it was he, put forth his whole head, next his gray body appeared, and then his beautiful, feathery tail. Running along a branch he curved his tail over his head, and sitting down, gave a cheerful, chirruping call, which perhaps meant that there was no danger; for in a moment the whole tree seemed to be alive with the rest of the family. Eleven squirrels in all, large and small, were counted by the delighted children. But although they watched their young visitors from among the branches, they still seemed too timid to come nearer and take the tempting breakfast which Bob had provided for them; till Mrs. Bunny, either more hungry or less cautious than her mate and children, came whisking down the trunk of the walnut-tree, and in another moment was seated upon Bob's shoulder, holding in her fore-paws the almond he had given her, and opening it with her sharp, pointed teeth. This was too much for the others, and one after another they descended the tree and received their breakfast. There sat Bob, a squirrel upon each shoulder, one on his head, others on his knees and hands, while one little fellow perched upon the toe of his boot, and, with a very contented air cracked and ate his almond.

It was a pretty sight, and a proud boy was Bob, as he sat thus surrounded by his pets, and listened to the exclamations of delight and wonder uttered by the other children in a low tone, lest they should again startle the little creatures. They were particularly amused by the antics of one saucy rogue, who, not satisfied with the share which had fallen to him, crept under Bob's arm, and actually began thrusting his nose into his pocket in search of more almonds. Not finding any, he became indignant, and raced off to the tree, where he seated himself on the end of a bough, and chattered away as though he were scolding at Bob for not having provided more.

"He is the greedy one of the lot," said Bob, "and I have to watch him, or he eats his own share and then robs those that are weaker than himself, if he gets the chance."

"But how did you do it, Bob?" asked Harry. "How did you tame them so when they were not in a cage?"

"Oh! it's not so hard," said Bob, a little boastfully. "You see father will never let me shut up any animal or any bird that is used to being free; and I was set upon having a tame squirrel. This old fellow here," and Bob pointed to the largest of the squirrels which sat upon his shoulder; "this old fellow and his mate lived in the walnut, and I was wild to catch them. But, as father said no, I thought I would hit upon a plan by which they would learn to know me, and come at my call. So one day I left two nuts here on the log, and went away. When I came back some time after, the nuts were gone. This I did the next day and the next, always keeping about for a while first. Then I put down the nuts and went off yonder to that maple, where I waited. It's not so far but that the squirrels could see me, but after watching me for a few moments as if they thought I might be laying a trap for them, they whisked down after the nuts, and then whisked back again in a terrible hurry. Every day I came a little nearer than the day before, and they soon learned to know me; I could even see that they watched for me. At last one day I laid a couple of almonds on one end of the log, and sat down on the other. It was a good while before they would come down that day, but at last they did, and after that I had no more trouble. When they found I did not try to touch them, they came nearer and nearer, till at last they took the nuts from my hand, and now as you see, they are as tame as squirrels could be, and have taught their young ones to have no fear of me. It is two years this summer since I tamed the old pair, and now the rest all know me as well as they do."

"It's jolly fun to see them," said Fred.

"And it's a great deal jolly funnier than if you caught them and shut them up in a cage, is it not?" said Bessie.

The boys laughed.

"Yes, indeed," answered Bob. "Hi, hi! what ails the fellows?" as all the squirrels sprang from him and whisked up the walnut tree. What "ailed the fellows," was soon seen, for even as he spoke, Flossy, who had been left shut up in the house lest he should frighten the bunnies, came tearing round a great rock, and rushed to the foot of the tree, where he commenced a great barking. But the squirrels were all safe in their green house, and as if they knew this, peeped down from among the leaves at Flossy with the greatest unconcern.

Flossy was followed by papa, Uncle Ruthven and the Colonel; and Uncle Ruthven confessed himself the guilty person who had let Flossy escape out of his prison.

"The poor fellow thought it hard he should not have his share of fun, and was making a pitiful whining and whimpering," said Mr. Stanton, "so I let him out on the promise that he should be good."

"But how could he promise when he can't speak?" said Bessie.

"I asked him if he would be quiet and good like a well brought up puppy if I let him out, and he said 'wow,' which in dog language means yes, does it not?" asked Uncle Ruthven.

"And it means no, and thank you, and if you please, and I love you, and everything else he wants to say," said Maggie, catching up her frisky pet in her arms and giving him a hug, which he returned by putting his cold nose in her face, after which he struggled to be put down again, for so glad was he to be free this pleasant morning that he wished to show it by frolicking about on his own four feet.

And now papa proposed they should visit the Ice Glen, to which the children, who had had enough of the squirrels for the present, readily agreed. This Ice Glen was a very wonderful place, interesting even to grown people, and the whole party were anxious to visit it; so they stopped at the house that mamma and the other ladies might join them. The last part of the walk was rather rough, and it was as much as the Colonel, with the help of his cane and Mr. Bradford's arm, could do to make his way over the rocks and fallen trees. Uncle Ruthven helped the ladies, and lifted the little girls over such places as were too hard for them. But Maggie would not have much help, and scrambled and climbed almost as if she had been a squirrel herself. As for Flossy, if he had made that promise of which Uncle Ruthven spoke, he certainly did not keep it.

Bessie said she thought that "wow" had meant no, not yes.

First, the mischievous puppy started a little black and white rabbit, and sent it scampering away as fast as its feet could carry it, rushing after it among all the underbrush and briars, and never heeding the coaxing calls of his little mistresses or the louder and sterner voices of their brothers; then coming back he rushed into a brook which ran by the way, and after rolling himself in it till the water was dripping from his silky coat, he shook himself and sent a shower of drops over the clean white dresses of the little girls; and then finding the hole of a wood-chuck, he began scratching and burying himself in the earth in a frenzy to find the poor creature; so that, his hair being wet, he was a sight to behold when Harry pulled him out, covered with mud from head to foot, and had to be sent behind in disgrace.

The Ice Glen was truly a curious spot. A narrow pathway led through it, on one side of which was a wall of rock, so steep that not even nimble Fred could have climbed it; on the other was a shelving bank covered with tall pines and firs. It was a gloomy place where the sun never shone, and our party felt the chill from it before they entered, so that mamma said she was half afraid to have Bessie go in, so great was the change from the warm summer air without. But Mr. Bradford said there was no danger if they did not stay too long, or sit down in the glen. At the foot of the wall of rock lay great stones piled one over another; and looking through the spaces between these, the little girls saw masses of ice hard as the rock above, which lay there all the year round. How far below the surface they reached, no one knew; but there must have been a great quantity of ice there, since summer or winter, it never disappeared. Little rills and springs, cold as the ice itself, and delicious to drink, slowly trickled from each end of the glen, but though they ran all summer long, they never seemed to make any difference in the great mass which lay within. The children thought it wonderful, as indeed it was, and were very unwilling to come away when mamma said they had stayed there as long as she thought safe. They were forbidden to go there without some grown person, but this command was scarcely needed by the little girls, since Bessie could not have made her way alone without the help of some stronger hand; and though Maggie thought the glen a great curiosity, she did not like the chill and gloom of the place, and was glad to come out once more into the bright sunshine which met them at the entrance.

And here there was another thing which interested her and Bessie very much. Directly over the little stream which ran from the glen, was a small, neat, wooden building, carefully closed. The children had asked what it was when they passed it the first time, but papa said he did not know; it had been put up since he had been there last. But now they saw Fanny Porter unlocking the door, and Maggie and Bessie ran eagerly forward to ask the use of the little house.

"I'll show you," said Fanny, good-naturedly, and she threw open the door and window shutters, letting in the light and air. "This is our new dairy, Mrs. Bradford," she continued, as the older people came nearer. "Will you not walk in with the other ladies and gentlemen?"

The whole party were well pleased to enter the neat, pleasant-looking dairy. The floor was paved with large flat stones, sloping from the front and back of the building towards the middle, and through the channel thus formed was led the clear, cold stream which ran from the glen. In the icy water stood several great earthen pots, carefully covered. Around the room ran a broad shelf, also

of stone, and on this were placed the bright tin pans, most of them now full of milk, and in one corner were two or three churns. The whole dairy was as neat as hands could make it, so it was quite a pleasure to think of milk and butter which should come from such a place.

"Father thought he would make the Ice Glen useful as well as curious," said Fanny Porter. "See, Mrs. Bradford, what this cold water does for our butter;" and taking the cover from one of the stone pots, she handed a wooden spaddle to the lady. Mrs. Bradford pressed it upon the butter, which she found almost as firm and hard as the rock.

"Do you make butter here?" asked Bessie.

"Indeed we do," said Fanny. "I am going to churn now, and if your mother will let you stay, you may see how I do it."

Permission was given, and the grown people went away, leaving Maggie and Bessie with the good-natured Fanny.

"Could you let us help you a little?" asked Bessie.

"Help me?" repeated Fanny, looking with a smile at the tiny figure she was just lifting upon a high stool, the only seat the dairy contained. "I guess you do not know what hard work churning is, do you?"

"Oh, we are accustomed to it," said Bessie. "We have a little churn at home, and we churn water, only it never makes butter."

"No, I suppose not," said Fanny. "And now would you like a drink after your walk?"

The children said they would, and taking down a dipper from the wall, Fanny gave them a drink of the rich, cold milk. After this she poured into the churn a quantity of thick, yellow cream, and putting on the cover, she told Bessie to stand upon the stool and go to work.

But Bessie found churning water in her own little churn at home, was a very different thing from trying to make the butter come with that heavy dasher; she could scarcely stir it, and in a moment she was quite satisfied. Maggie being stronger, pulled the dasher up and down a few times, and did not give up until she was red in the face, and her little hands were smarting with the hard work they were not used to.

The butter did not come by any means as quickly as the children expected, even when Fanny took hold; and, tired of waiting for it, they presently began to amuse themselves with sailing the acorn cups which they had picked up in their walk, in the stream which ran through the dairy. It was great fun to launch them at the upper end, and watch them as they floated down, now driven against a butter pot, now passing round it, and at last carried out at the farther end of the dairy.

By the time they had had enough of this amusement, the kind Fanny said the butter had come, and taking off the cover of the churn, she dashed in a quantity of cold water from that convenient little stream, having first lifted Maggie and Bessie upon the shelf, so that they might be high enough to look down into the churn. The butter which was floating about in tiny lumps, instantly collected together, and bringing a dish, Fanny scooped it out with a wooden ladle, and laid it in a rich, creamy mass. Then she threw in a little salt, and having worked and pressed it till it was free from every drop of water, she packed it away in a stone pot, and set that with the others in the running water. The children watched her with great interest until all was done, and were still standing by while she skimmed the cream from some of the many pans of milk, when Jane came to tell them their mamma wished them to come back to the house.

III.

A VISIT TO AUNT PATTY

MR. BRADFORD had brought from the city a famous rockaway, or carryall, large enough to hold all his own family and one or two persons beside; light but strong, and just the thing for these mountain roads. The first use to which it was to be put was to take them all for two visits that afternoon, one to Aunt Patty, the other to the homestead where Cousin Alexander lived. It was a bright, sunny afternoon, yet not too warm to be pleasant, the air was gay with the hum of bees and butterflies, the blue sky, dappled with fleecy clouds, was reflected in the clear water, mingled with the shadow of the rocks and trees; swallows skimmed over the surface of the lake, chasing the myriads of insects which hummed in the summer air; and as the carriage drove along the road which lay between the water and the great overhanging rocks, more than one fish was seen to dart swiftly away from the shady pool where he had been snugly lying till disturbed by the rumble of the wheels.

They did not go down the mountain by the road up which they had come the night before, but struck into another which led in an opposite direction. It ran through the forest for a long distance, and was not so steep, and more shady, which was no objection on this warm day.

"Stop at Todd's cottage, if you please, Mr. Porter," said Mr. Bradford, as they came out of the forest and saw before them a small farm-house, with half a dozen out-buildings about it.

"Who is Todd, papa?" asked Maggie.

But before Mr. Bradford could answer, all curiosity about Todd, or why they were to stop at his house, was set at rest. As they turned the corner they saw, standing in the porch of the farm-house, a woman with a baby in her arms; while hanging over the gate and whistling as he looked up the road, was a boy about the size of Fred. They were Mrs. Richards and Willie, no longer "blind Willie," the sightless little child whose sad face and patient, waiting manner, had so touched the hearts of all who looked upon him. A delicate looking boy Willie was still, though two weeks' stay in this fresh, pure, mountain air had done wonders for him. It was a pretty sight to see his delight in all about him, in the sunshine and clouds, in the blue sky and the bright water, in the grass and flowers, in birds and animals, and above all in the dear faces which had been shut out from his poor eyes for so many weary months.

A light flush mounted to his pale cheeks as he caught sight of his friends in the carriage, the good, kind friends to whom he owed so much; and calling to his mother, he sprang from the gate, as Mr. Porter drew in his horses, and hastened to open it.

"Never mind, Willie," said Mr. Bradford; "we cannot come in this afternoon. Some other day, perhaps; but now we only stopped to ask how you are coming on? How do you do, Mrs. Richards?"

"Bravely, sir," answered the smiling Mrs. Richards; "and as for Willie and the baby, they are improving wonderfully, thanks to your kindness."

"It is my little girls you must thank, Mrs. Richards," said Mr. Bradford.

"But we don't want to be thanked," said Bessie, quickly. "We quite liked to have you come up here, Mrs. Richards, and we felt very much thankful ourselves when Uncle Ruthven gave us the money to send you."

"Willie," said Maggie, "do you enjoy being *disblinded* just as much as you did at first?"

"Oh, yes," answered Willie, laughing at Maggie's new word; "and everything looks so much nicer than it did before I was blind. Somehow, I think the world *did* grow prettier while I could not see it, though mother says it only seems so to me."

"Ah, that is often the way, Willie," said Mr. Bradford. "God sometimes has to teach us the worth of the blessings He has given us by taking them from us."

After a little more talk with Willie and his mother, they bade good-by; kind Mr. Porter first saying he would send down for Willie some day and let him come up to his place.

They drove on till they came to the more open country, and saw before them Aunt Patty's house, and beyond that, the grand old homestead of which they had heard so much, and of which papa was so fond.

Aunt Patty's home was a pretty, snug cottage on the side of a hill; its front covered with a beautiful trumpet creeper, which went climbing up to the very top of the many-cornered old chimney, and wreathing itself over the little porch and the bow window of the sitting-room, until the house looked like a quiet green nest. A great white cat peeped out from behind the geraniums which filled the window; a greyhound lay upon the doormat, and beneath and about the porch hung several bird-cages, containing half a dozen canaries and two mocking-birds, while a donkey and a tame goat looked, the one over, the other between the bars of the fence which divided their little pasture ground from the neat garden. For Aunt Patty was very fond of dumb pets, and had collected about her a number, each one of which knew her voice, and would come at her call; and she was never sharp and short with them as she sometimes was with her own fellow creatures, for they never, even by accident, gave her offence.

The old lady herself came to the door to meet her guests, more pleased than she would have been willing to say, that they had come to visit her on the first day of their stay at Chalecoo. She seized Frankie in her arms and covered him with kisses; but that roguish young gentleman after exclaiming, "Hallo, Patty!" would have nothing more to say to her, and struggled to be set free that he might run and see "dat nanny-doat and dat pony wis long ears."

Maggie and Bessie were more polite than their little brother, and though they would have liked to follow him at once, waited quietly till Aunt Patty asked them if they did not wish to run about and make acquaintance with all her pets.

Glad of the permission, the little girls ran out, and turned to the paddock, where they found Frankie seated upon the donkey's back.

The boys had not gone into the house, but after shaking hands with Aunt Patty at the door, had remained without in search of what amusement they could find. The donkey was the first thing that had taken their attention as well as that of Frankie; and when the little fellow came out clamoring for a ride, they were quite ready to indulge him. Harry had been half doubtful if they had not better first ask Aunt Patty's permission, but Fred had said, —

"Pooh! what's the use? She would let Frankie dance on her own head, if he wanted to."

So Harry had allowed himself to be persuaded, and in another moment the donkey, much to his own astonishment, found Frankie seated upon his back.

Now this donkey was not at all accustomed to children; for those of Mr. Alexander Bradford, who lived at the homestead, seldom came to see Aunt Patty, and when they did so, they would as soon have thought of asking to ride upon her back as upon that of the donkey. To be harnessed in the little pony-carriage, and trot about with the old lady for her daily drive, was all the work to which Nonesuch was used; and when he found Frankie perched upon him, he was very much displeased, and began a series of antics and prancings which were more becoming some frisky pony than a sober, well-behaved donkey. But try as he would, he could not shake Frankie off. The bold little rogue was not at all frightened, and clung like a burr to his indignant steed. It was hard to tell which would come off victor. But at the side of the paddock ran one of the many streams in which this mountain country rejoiced, shadowed with a growth of elder, sumach, and other high bushes. Nonesuch had raced with Frankie to the very edge of this little rivulet, and then stood still for a moment as if considering what he would do next, when a hand, holding a long, thorny switch, was suddenly put forth from the clump of bushes, and Nonesuch received a stinging blow across his haunches. Down went the donkey's nose and up went his heels, as he sent Frankie flying directly over his head into the stream, and then tore away to the further side of the field.

Maggie and Bessie were very much startled, and screamed aloud, and even Harry and Fred were a good deal alarmed; but the child himself did not seem to be at all frightened, and when his brothers pulled him out of the water, did not cry, but looked after the donkey in great surprise, exclaiming, —

"Why, dat pony spilled me a little!"

Harry and Fred laughed at this, but Maggie and Bessie thought it no laughing matter; nor did mamma, when alarmed by their screams the grown people came running from the house. Frankie was drenched from head to foot, and had to be carried at once to the house, undressed and rubbed dry. Then he was wrapped in a blanket, while a messenger was sent to the homestead to borrow some clothes for him. The little fellow thought this rather hard, and a very poor ending to his afternoon's amusement, especially when no clothes could be found to fit him but those of little Katy Bradford.

Meanwhile Fred was off, no one knew where. At the moment Frankie had gone over the donkey's head a loud mocking laugh had resounded from behind the clump of bushes, as though the person who had given the blow were rejoicing in the mischief he had done.

Fred only waited to see Frankie safely out of the water, and then, leaving him to the care of his brother and sisters, darted across the stream and forced his way through the bushes in search of the guilty person. At a little distance from him stood two miserable looking objects, a boy about his own size, a girl rather younger; both dirty, ragged, and half-starved, hatless and shoeless. A wicked looking boy and girl they were too, and as Fred appeared they greeted him with grimaces and vulgar noises; then as he darted at the boy, turned and ran.

Fred gave chase, and in a moment had overtaken the girl. But hot-tempered and hasty though he was, Fred was not the boy to fight with one who was weaker than himself; and he passed her without notice, keeping on after her companion. But active as he was, he soon found he was no match for the young rascal in front of him, whose feet scarcely seemed to touch the ground, and who threw himself headlong over fences and hedges, as though he had forgotten he had a neck and limbs which might be broken.

So turning about, Fred went after the girl, and soon had his hand upon her arm, calling upon her to stop. She did so, at the same time cowering and raising the other arm to shield her head and face as if expecting a blow.

"You don't think I am going to strike you?" said Fred, "a nice kind of a chap I'd be to strike a girl. I say, what did you hit that donkey for?"

"I didn't," she replied sullenly, "it was him."

"What did he do it for? Nobody was doing anything to him. And I'll be bound you had the will to do it."

"He did it cos he had a mind to," she said, shaking herself free from Fred's hold, "and he'll do it agin if he has a mind to."

"He'd better not," said Fred, "if he does, I'll fix him."

"S'posin' you can catch him," she answered, growing bold and impudent, as she saw she need fear no violence from Fred. "'Taint none of your donkeys."

"It was my little brother he meant to plague though," said Fred. "He'd better look out how he troubles us again. Just you tell him that."

"He aint afraid of you," said the girl, "I jist hope the young un's fine clothes was spoiled. Good enough for him," and making up a hideous face at Fred she ran off a few steps, and then as if the spirit of mischief within her were too strong even for her fear of him, stooped, and picking up a large stone threw it with all her strength. It hit Fred upon the knee with such force that, brave as he was, he could scarcely help crying aloud, and was obliged to sit down upon the ground until the pain had somewhat passed. By the time he was on his feet again the girl was out of sight, and poor Fred limped back to Aunt Patty's cottage.

Here the bruised and swollen knee was bathed and bound up, but Fred was forced to keep still, not only this afternoon, but for several succeeding days.

It would be hard to tell with what horror the children looked upon the boy and girl whom Fred described, and who had done all this unprovoked mischief.

After the donkey and goat, the birds, kittens and other pets had been visited, there was not much to interest the children in Aunt Patty's house; and they were not very sorry when the visit came to an end, and they were all on their way to the homestead.

There was certainly enough to please them here. It was a grand old house, standing in the midst of a grove of maples, and behind it stretched an immense orchard, with its mossy old apple trees giving promise of the rich harvest they would furnish a few months later. There was the flower garden, delicious with all kinds of roses now in full bloom; the very swing where papa used to swing when he was a boy, the stream and pond where he used to sail his boats and set up his water-mills; and beyond all, the large farm-yard with its many outbuildings, looking almost like a village by itself; while from one of the great barns whose wide doors stood open came the cackling of poultry and cooing of pigeons, the lowing of cows and oxen, and bleating of calves, all the pleasant noises of a large and thrifty farm.

The children were all anxious to see the spot where the old burnt barn had stood, the place where Aunt Patty had saved Uncle Aleck from the fire; but all trace both of fire and barn had long since passed away, and a bright green pasture field, where a flock of sheep were feeding, took up the very ground where, as Maggie said, "the story had happened."

The children of the homestead, eight in number, of all ages and sizes, from cousin Ernest, a tall youth of eighteen, down to little Katy, the household darling and pet of four, were only too glad to welcome their city cousins and show them all the wonders of the place.

They had the most delightful summer play-room; one side of the verandah enclosed with a lattice work, covered with flowering vines, where they kept their bats and balls, graces, hoops, rocking horse and other toys. They had a little garden house too, where they kept their spades, rakes and other tools, for each child had a plot of ground for its own, and every fall they had a flower and fruit show, when their father and mother gave prizes, not only for the best flowers and fruit, but also to those whose gardens had been neatly kept during the summer.

Poor Fred with his lame knee could not run about with the others, and as he sat on the verandah with his cousin Ernest, who stayed with him lest he should be lonely, and heard all about the flower show, he began to wish that he and his brother could have something of the same kind.

"I dare say Mr. Porter would give us each a little piece of ground," he said, "but then it is too late to plant things, is it not?"

"Oh, no," replied his cousin, "it is only the middle of June, and there are several things which you might yet plant. Then you could join us and try for the prizes at our show, and I would ask father to have it a little earlier in the fall, before you go home. There are lots of seeds and plants that we will give you if you have a mind to try."

Fred was eager enough, as he always was for every thing new, and promised to ask his brother if he would like to have a garden, and also to speak to his father and Mr. Porter about it.

"And your sisters, too," said Ernest, "would they not like to try what they could do?"

"Oh! they are too little," said Fred. "What could such a mite as Bessie do with a garden of her own? She might dig and plant in it to be sure, but then she would not know how to take care of her flowers and things, and she would only be disappointed if she failed."

"You and Harry might help her," said Ernest, "and even if she did not have any fine flowers she might gain a prize if she had been industrious, and tried as well as she knew how. It is not so much for the worth and beauty of the flowers themselves, as for the pains we have taken with them and what we deserve, that father rewards us. Why, last year dear little Katy took a prize and for what do you think? Why, for a poor forlorn zinnia which she had nursed through the whole summer, and which bore but one scanty flower."

"I'll tell Maggie and Bessie then," said Fred, "and Harry and I will do all we can to help them with the work that is too hard for them. I am sure papa will be willing for us to try, if your father will allow us to join you."

"He is willing enough," said Ernest, "indeed he was saying the other day he should like it. You had better ask Mr. Porter for the ground and begin directly."

Fred was so anxious to talk over this new plan with his brother and sisters, and to ask his father and Mr. Porter what they thought of it, that he could scarcely wait to do so till it was time to go home.

IV. *LEM AND DOLLY*

AS soon as they were all once more in the carriage, and the horses' heads turned homeward, Fred told what Ernest had proposed. Mr. Bradford willingly gave permission for his children to join their cousins in preparing for the flower show, and promised to furnish whatever seeds and plants it would be best for them to have, in case Mr. Porter could give them the ground.

"That I will," said the old man readily. "And, by the way, there's a plot in the lower part of the garden that will be just about the right thing for you. There's nothing planted there yet, for I only took it in this spring, but it has been all dug and raked over, and is ready for whatever is to go in it. I'll give you boys each ten feet square, and the girls six. I guess that's about as much as they can manage."

"More, I fear," said Mrs. Bradford, "at least such little hands as those of my Bessie, are scarcely strong enough for work that could raise any flowers fit to take a prize."

"But we will help her, mamma," said Fred "and if she tries, and cousin Alexander thinks she has done her best, that is all that is necessary." And he told the story of little Katy and her zinnia.

"I may try, mamma, may I not?" said Bessie earnestly, "Katy is a very little girl, only four years old; and I am quite old, you know, for I was six last month."

"Certainly you may try, my very old girl," said mamma, kissing the little, eager, upturned face; "and I will do all I can to help you; but then if you and Maggie do not take the prizes you must not be too much disappointed."

"Oh! no, and I can have satis – fac – tion in my garden any way, mamma," said Bessie, "in tending to it and watering it; and then I can give my flowers to you and Aunt May and every one else I love, and that will be enough of pleasure for me."

Mamma smiled and thanked her, and thought if her dear little girl were to give flowers to every one who loved *her* she would need a very large garden with a great many blossoms in it.

Mr. Porter knew that Frankie had been in the water, but he had not heard how the accident came about, nor of its after consequences; and now as he saw Fred moving restlessly to ease his aching knee, he asked him how he had been hurt.

Fred told the story of Frankie's ducking, of his own chase after the mischief-makers, and of what had happened to himself.

"Whew – ew – ew!" said Mr. Porter, as he finished, "I am sorry to hear this; sorry enough, sorry enough. Can you tell me what kind of looking boy and girl they were?"

Fred described the boy and girl, as nearly as he could, and Mr. Porter gave another long dismayed whistle.

"Yes, I thought so," he said, "there's no one here about but those two who would have been up to such an ugly trick as that. So, they're back again. I hoped we were rid of them for good and all."

"Who are they?" asked Mr. Bradford.

"Lem and Dolly Owen, sir; as bad a pair, and the children of as bad a father as one could find on a long summer day. Poor neglected creatures, they are to be pitied too; but it is useless to try to do anything for them, for all help is worse than thrown away. They live in a little tumble-down shanty back of the rocks at the lower end of the lake, and a terrible nuisance they are to me and every one in the neighborhood. The father is a drunkard of the worst sort, the mother long since dead, and these two children, liars, vagabonds and thieves, up to every sort of wicked mischief, and a terror to all the children in Chalecoo. They live as they can, by robbing orchards, hen-roosts, dairies and cornfields during the summer; picking up odd bits, and stealing whatever they can lay their fingers on in the winter, half starved and half frozen the most of the time."

"Can nothing be done for them?" asked Mr. Bradford.

"No, sir; as I say, it is not worth while to try to help them. All that the father can lay his hands on he spends in drink. My wife was distressed about the children, especially the girl, to think she should be growing up in such wickedness and misery; and last winter she fixed up a suit of warm clothes for her, and coaxing her into the house with a deal of trouble, for she is as wild as a hawk, she dressed her in them, and promised to give her and her brother a good meal every day if they would come quietly to the house and get it. My dear old woman hoped she might do them both some good if she could but keep a hold on them in this way. But the girl just took what she could get that day as sullenly as you please, never speaking a word of thanks, and making no promises, though she did look mighty proud of her new clothes, and hugged herself up in them as if she were glad to feel herself in something warm and comfortable. My wife, knowing what a thief she was, watched her all the time, and thought she could not possibly carry off anything; but somehow the sly creature got the better of her, and she had scarcely gone when a china plate was missed. Now my wife set a deal by that plate, for it had been hers when she was a little child, and the boys set out at once in search of Dolly. Well, will you believe it? no sooner did she catch sight of them, and guess what they were after, than she just dashed the plate down on the rocks, smashing it to atoms, and ran like a deer. They'd promised their mother not to hurt her, so they let her go; but the next day she was seen in all her old rags, and we found the new clothes had been sold by Owen at the next village. Of course they went for liquor, and that's the way everything goes. Kindness is all wasted on the children; they'll take what you give them with one hand, and steal from you with the other, and then abuse you for what you've done for them."

"Did Dolly and her brother come to get the nice meal kind Mrs. Porter promised them?" asked Bessie.

"No, indeed; they've kept clear enough of the family ever since; not that they are ashamed, but afraid."

"I should think they ought to be ashamed," said Maggie, indignantly. "I never heard of such ungratefulness, and Mrs. Porter ought to serve Dolly right, and never do another thing for her; she don't deserve it."

"Ah! my little girl, if we were all served right, and had nothing but what we deserve, where would we be?" said the old man. "But that did just discourage my wife, and she has left the wretched creatures to themselves since. She saw it was of no use. Owen won't leave his children a decent thing to their backs, a bed to sleep on, or a cup or plate to eat from. My old woman is not the first that has taken pity on them, and tried to make them a little comfortable; but whatever is given them just goes for drink, drink; and we have all given it up as a hopeless job. Besides, the children themselves are so lawless and thankless, that every kindness that is done for them they only turn into a means of mischief."

"Does the father ill-treat them?" asked Mrs. Bradford.

"Yes, he not only encourages them to steal and lie, but beats them when they bring nothing home which he can exchange for liquor. We often hear their cries away up at my house, but there's no way of stopping it, as I see."

"And must these poor children just be left to go to ruin?" asked Mrs. Bradford, sadly.

"There's no one can reach them to teach them better, I am afraid," said Mr. Porter. "You'll just get hard words and worse for your pains if you try it. Why, there was the clergyman from down in the village, came up to see them, and he brought along a bundle of good things and gave them to Dolly; and while he was talking kindly to her, he got a blow on the back with a big stone, and others came about him thick and fast. He knew it was Lem, but what could he do? He could not see the boy or fix it on him. And that's the way; they are both so sly and artful, they are seldom or never caught in the act; so though when a melon patch or hen-roost is robbed, or some fine young trees are hacked to pieces, every one feels sure it was Lem or Dolly who did the mischief, yet it is difficult to prove it on them. Lem has had more thrashings than any boy of his size that ever lived, I believe, but what's the use? It only makes him worse than ever. Farmer Grafton caught him once stealing clothes from

the bleaching-ground, and handed him over to the constable for a few days; but that night his hay-ricks were burnt down. Folks first thought it was Owen that did it, but he was proved to have lain dead drunk all night in the liquor shop down in the village; and then everybody believed it was Doll, and with reason too, for she's just bad enough to do it, young as she is. Last March they all went off, father and children, and I did hope we should see no more of them; but here the young ones are back, it seems. I trust Owen is not with them. If you little ones come to me to-night, I'll tell you what old Sol here did for that fellow, and how the dumb beast showed himself the wisest of the two."

"I am very sorry for Lem and Dolly," said Bessie. "If their mother had not died maybe they would not have been so naughty. It's very sorrowful for children not to have any mamma to teach them better. Don't they have any one to love them, Mr. Porter?"

"Well, they seem to love one another after their own rude fashion," answered Mr. Porter. "It's about the only mark of good that's left in them."

"I wish we could do something to make them a little better," said Bessie.

"The Lord love you for the wish," said Mr. Porter, looking kindly around at her, "but you could never do anything, you little lamb. Why, they'd tease you out of your senses if you went to speak to them, and they're not fit for the like of you to notice either. Just you keep out of their way as much as you can, dearie, or they'll do you a mischief if they find the chance."

Mr. Bradford here began to talk of something else, and they all forgot Lem and Dolly for the time. But as they were about half way home, Fred, who was sitting in front with Mr. Porter, suddenly exclaimed, —

"There are those children!" and looking before them, they all saw the ragged, miserable boy and girl standing on a stone at a little distance from the road side.

As the carriage approached, they darted away into the woods, but soon after a shower of gravel and sand flying into the carriage, as it slowly toiled up a hill between two walls of rock, made it known in a very disagreeable manner that they had returned to annoy our party by further mischief. They kept out of sight behind the trees and rocks, however; and when Fred, who was furiously angry, begged Mr. Porter to go after them with his long whip, the loud, taunting laugh which rang from above told that their tormentors felt themselves secure from punishment.

The carriage was soon beyond this narrow pass, and they saw and heard no more of Lem and Dolly, and reached home without further mischief.

"Why, how long you stayed," said good Mrs. Porter, coming out as they drove up to the door. "I waited to feed the chickens, as I promised the dear little girls here; but I am afraid they want their supper badly. Come along, my darlings," and with a pan in each hand, and followed by Maggie, Bessie and Frankie, the kind old lady went out to feed the fowls.

"Margaret and Bessie, come here," said Mr. Stanton, calling his wife and sister to the door as they passed through the hall. "Is not that a picture?"

A picture it was indeed, and one which mamma thought so pretty that she had to call the rest of the family to enjoy it. Beneath a great spreading pear-tree sat the motherly old lady, the last golden rays of the setting sun falling over her ample figure, in her neat black gown, white apron, and snowy kerchief folded over her bosom, spectacles in hand, and in her lap the pan which held the corn and barley; while around her were the three little ones dipping their chubby hands into the measure, and scattering the contents among the noisy, scrambling crowd of fowls, themselves full of glee and happiness at this, to them, new pleasure.

There was one jealous old fellow, a pet rooster and a great beauty, who would take his supper from no hand but that of his mistress; and flying on the bench beside her, he courted her notice and a supper by himself. Mrs. Porter was about to indulge him, but Flossy, who was seated by her, watching with great satisfaction the feeding of the chickens, seemed to think it quite unfair that he should not take his chance with the others, and soon chased him from the bench. Upon which the rooster refused to eat at all, and after pecking one or two of the smaller chickens pretty severely, he

strutted away with his neck stretched very straight, and expressing his displeasure in a loud and by no means pleasant voice. In vain did Mrs. Porter call him by his name, "Coxcomb," which he knew quite well; he only flapped his wings and walked farther away, screaming louder than ever.

"He is a very naughty bird, and now he must just go without any supper," said Maggie.

"Ah! my poor Coxcomb," said Mrs. Porter, "don't you think he is pretty?"

"Yes," said Maggie, "he is very pretty but he is not a bit good. He is not at all 'handsome is that handsome does – ' pecking that dear little yellow chicken! I'd rather be that brown guinea hen who is so nice and good, even if she is not so very pretty."

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Porter, "that is the way, all the beauty in the world will not make us loved if we are not kind and sweet."

The feeding of the fowls was scarcely done when they were called in to their own supper; and when this was over, our little girls with their elder brothers ran off to find Mr. Porter, and beg for the story about old Sol.

The old man was seated outside the kitchen door, enjoying the lovely summer twilight, and waiting, he said, to see if the children would not come to claim his promise. He took Bessie upon his knee, and bade Fanny bring a stool for Maggie, while Harry and poor limping Fred, who came slowly after the others, sat upon the curb stone which ran around the old well.

"It was just about this time last year," began Mr. Porter, when they were all settled, "that I hired a new farm hand. His name was Ted, and he was a simple, half witted fellow, easily led by those about him. I don't think he had much judgment or conscience of his own, poor lad, but was ready to do either right or wrong according as he was persuaded at the moment. Tell him to do a certain thing in a certain way and he would obey, unless some one else came along and told him differently; when he would do as the last speaker said, and forget all his former orders. He meant to be faithful, but of course he was not to be trusted without a good deal of watching to make sure he was not interfered with, and there were folks enough, bad boys and girls, who were always ready to meddle with him and set him up to some mischief, just for the bit of fun it would make for themselves. He was the son of a poor widow in the village, who had hard work to keep herself and her seven children fed and warmed through the winter; and Ted, who was ready enough to help his mother so far as he knew how, could get no steady work. No one had patience with the simple lad who was so easily led astray without intending to do wrong; and who would come and confess his mistakes with the most triumphant air, believing that he must have done right since he had obeyed the last orders he had received.

"But I thought with me and the boys to look after him, he could get along here, so I hired him. He was a capital hand with horses, and his work was mostly about the stable, feeding the horses, rubbing them down and the like. He used to pet the dumb creatures and talk to them as if they were human beings, and it was wonderful to see how fond they all became of him, old Sol in particular. He would run to meet Ted, and follow him about the fields just as your little Flossy there follows you; or if he was in the stable would whinny with delight the moment he heard his step.

"Ted had a way of curling himself up in Sol's manger and going to sleep when his work was done, and the horse would never suffer any one to come near or disturb him till he had had his nap out.

"Well, so Ted was doing very well, being obedient and industrious, when one day about Christmas time my son Bill went down to the steamboat landing to bring up a load of stores which had been brought from the city. There was a deep snow on the ground, with a prospect of more to come that day, and I did not feel just so willing to have him caught in the storm. A snow storm on these mountain roads is not a nice thing to be out in, I can tell you; but some of the stores were pretty badly wanted, and we were afraid they would spoil, lying on the dock.

"So Bill started off, taking Ted with him to help him load up, and driving Sol and Nero before the sledge.

"When he reached the village he went to the post-office, where he found a letter to himself, telling him his favorite brother Walter, who was at college in the city, was very ill and wanted to see

him. There was but an hour or two before the train would be along, not time enough for him to come up home and go back again; so he went to the dock, loaded up the sledge, and giving the reins to Ted, bade him go straight home and stop for nothing.

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