Mathews Joanna Hooe

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Содержание

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I.
BELLE AND HER PAPA

Dear little Belle!

There she sat, upon a low stool, doll and picture-book lying unheeded at her feet, as she watched the slanting beams of light which streamed in between the crimson curtains and poured life and gladness over all within the pleasant room. There she sat, watching them thoughtfully, yet with a half-smile upon her lips, as they travelled slowly and steadily from spot to spot, now over the carpet, now up the table-cloth, now touching the gilded mirror-frame and making it flash with added brightness, and now falling softly on a vase of lovely flowers and bringing out their brilliant colors in new and more perfect beauty. And now in their noiseless but busy march they fell upon her own little self, the brightest and sunniest thing in all the room, to the loving eyes which watched her.

"What is my darling thinking of?" asked Mr. Powers, breaking the stillness.

In an instant Belle was upon his knee and nestling close to

him; but she did not answer his question till it was repeated.

"What were you thinking of, my daughter?" he asked again, laying his hand fondly on the little round head, with its short, dark rings of hair.

"About sunbeams, papa," answered the child, turning her eyes again upon the bar of light, which was now quivering and shimmering among and over the prisms of the chandelier above their heads.

"Ay, they are very pretty," said her father.

"But it was not about *those* sunbeams, papa, though they did make the thinking come into my head. It was about being a sunbeam. I would like to be a little sunbeam, papa."

"And so you may, and so you are, my darling," said the father. "You are papa's little sunbeam, the brightest sunbeam he has on earth; and his way would be very dark and sad without you."

"Yes, papa," said Belle: "you mean I am your comfort, and you are my sunbeam, papa, 'cause you are my comfort; but I was thinking I would like to be a sunbeam to other people too. I wonder if I could. Maggie Bradford says I could."

"I am sure you could, darling."

"Maggie does say such nice things, papa; and so does Bessie; and sometimes when a thing does not seem very pleasant, or as if I would like to do it, they talk about it so that it seems very nice indeed, and so very right that I feel in a great hurry to do it. That is, if I do not feel naughty; for do you know, papa," – and Belle's voice took a mournful tone, – "do you know sometimes

I am so *very* naughty that I feel like doing a thing just because I know I oughtn't. Papa, could you have b'lieved that of me?"

"Yes," said Mr. Powers, smiling: "I could believe that of any one, Belle."

"Could you, papa?" said Belle, solemnly. "Well, that does make me a great relief; for when I used to get good again after I had been so naughty as that, I used to think I must be 'most the wickedest child that ever lived. But one day when I told Maggie and Bessie about it, Maggie said sometimes she felt that way too; and then we made each other promise to keep it a great secret, and never tell anybody."

"And so you keep your promise by telling me," said her father.

"O papa! we didn't mean our fathers and mothers. We don't think you're anybody."

"Thank you," replied her father, taking the compliment as it was meant, though somewhat amused at her way of putting it. "That is right, dear. It is better for little children not to mean their fathers and mothers when they promise not to 'tell anybody.'"

"Yes, papa; and then you see you have nobody but me to tell you secrets, so I would feel too badly not to do it. But I want to know about being a sunbeam, papa; how I can be a sunbeam to 'most everybody, or to a good many people."

"What did Maggie Bradford say about it?" asked Mr. Powers: "let me hear that."

"Why, it was yesterday, when I was spending the day with Maggie and Bessie," answered Belle; "and it was cloudy, and the

sun came out from the clouds, and Maggie said – Papa, Maggie is the smartest child; and do you know what I heard Mrs. Norris say about her? She said Maggie had quite a – quite a – a – talent, that was the word, quite a talent for poetry. Are you not very glad, papa, that my in-sep-era-ble has a talent for poetry? Don't you think that is a pretty nice thing for a child to have?"

"Very nice; and I am indeed happy that my Belle has such a talented friend," said Mr. Powers, who knew that he could not please his little daughter more than by joining in the praise and admiration she showered upon her young friends and playmates, Maggie and Bessie Bradford, – "very nice, indeed; but still I do not hear what Maggie said about the sunbeams."

"Well, such a beautiful sunbeam came out of the cloud, papa; and it made every thing look so bright and pleasant, even though the clouds were there yet; and I said if I wasn't myself, I would like to be a sunbeam, 'cause every one was so glad to see it, and it seemed to make things so bright and happy; and then Maggie said we could be ourselves and sunbeams too. Not *really*, true sunbeams, you know, but like sunbeams, to make all bright and glad about us; and she said we did that when we helped each ofer, or when we tried to make sorry people feel glad, and comforted them, or did a kind thing that made some one feel nice and happy. And Bessie and I were very proud of her for saying such a nice thing as that, papa; and we begged her to make some poetry about it, and she made one verse; and then Bessie said she b'lieved we could be sunbeams for Jesus if we chose, and she coaxed Maggie

to make another verse about that, and we learned it. Shall I say them to you, papa?"

"Certainly," said her father; and Belle repeated the following simple lines, which she plainly thought extremely fine: —

"I wish I was a sunbeam,
To sparkle all the day;
And make all glad and happy
Who came across my way.

"I'd like to shine for Jesus,
And show to every one
That all my light and brightness
Did come from Him, my Sun."

"There, what do you think of that, papa?" she asked in a tone of triumph, which showed her own delight and pride in her little friend's composition.

"I think it very fair for a nine-years-old girl," answered her father.

"I think it is be-ew-tiful," said Belle. "Maggie writes lots and lots of po'try, and she copies it all. Some of it is pious po'try, and she puts that in one book called 'Bradford's Divine Songs,' and she puts the unpious in another called 'Bradford's Moral Poems;' and Bessie and I learn a great deal of them. They're splen-did, and she is just the smartest child, – Bessie says she is."

If Bessie said a thing, it must be so, according to Belle's

thinking; and her father did not dispute the fact. Belle went on, —

"And that is the kind of a sunbeam I would like to be, papa, 'cause I s'pose that is the best kind, – to have the light and brightness come from Jesus, – and it would make me nicer and pleasanter to every one."

"Yes, my darling."

"But I don't see how I am to be much of a sunbeam to any one but you, papa. Maggie and Bessie seem to know how without any one telling them, but I don't know so very well. They are my sunbeams next to you, I know that: are they not, papa?"

"Yes, indeed, my daughter. God bless them," said her father, speaking from his heart as he remembered all that these two dear little girls had been to his motherless child; what true "sunbeams" they had proved to her, cheering and brightening the young life which had been so early darkened by her great loss. Gay, bright, and happy themselves, they were not only willing, but anxious, to pour some of the sunshine of their own joyous hearts into those of others who had not so many blessings.

All this, and more than this, had her young friends done for the lonely little Belle, not only bringing back the light to her saddened eye, and the smiles to her once pitiful face, but also giving her a new interest by awakening in her the wish to shed some happy rays on the lot of others, and leading her by the shining of their own example to become more obedient, gentle, and unselfish than she had ever been before.

"Daphne told me I'll have a whole lot of money when I am

a big lady," continued Belle; "and then I should think I could be a sunbeam to ever so many people, and do ever so much to make them glad and happy. I'll build a room, oh, ever so big! and bring into it all the lame and deaf and blind and poor people, and make them have such a nice time. The good ones, I mean: I won't have any naughty people that do bad things. I shan't be a sunbeam to them, or have them in my sunbeam home; no, nor the disagreeable ones either, who don't have nice manners or be pleasant. I'll take ugly people, 'cause they can't help it; but everybody can be pleasant and polite if they choose, and I shan't help the old things who are not. Ugh!"

"But that is not the way Jesus wants us to feel, dear. When He was here on earth, He taught us that we must try to do good to all, that we might be the children of our Father in Heaven, who, He tells us, 'makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.' Do you know what that means?"

"Um – m – m – yes, papa, I b'lieve so," answered Belle, half unwillingly: "I s'pose it means I ought to try to be a sunbeam to disagreeable people, just the same as if they were pleasant."

"Belle," said Mr. Powers, "do you remember the story Mrs. Rush told you of Lem and Dolly, those naughty, unkind children who treated your little friends so badly; and who were so disagreeable and rude in every way, both in looks and behavior?"

"Oh, yes, indeedy!" answered Belle, in quite a different tone from that she had last used. "I never *could* forget that story; and

now I do see what you mean, papa. Maggie and Bessie were sunbeams to poor Lem and Dolly, for all they were so very naughty to them."

"Yes, dear; and they lighted the path to Jesus so that Dolly found the way to Him before she was taken from this world; and by all that we hear it may be that some ray of light has fallen across poor Lem's way too."

"Yes," said Belle, eagerly; "and the ofer day Maggie and Bessie's papa had a letter from the captain of the ship what Lem is a sailor on, and he said he was a real good boy, and tried to do right all he could. But, papa, you see I don't know any very dirty, ragged, horrid children to be a sunbeam to; so what shall I do? I s'pose when I say my prayers I could ask God to let there be some *for* me. I'll ask Him to-night to let there be six dirty beggars, three boys and three girls, that I can be good and kind to, and show the way to Him. Wouldn't that be a good plan, papa?"

"Well, I think I would hardly do that," said her father, smiling. "There is quite enough of misery in the world without asking for more only that we may cure it; and some of it is pretty sure to come in your way. But any little child may in her daily life shed light and brightness around her, even though it does not happen to her to find any such special work as was given to your Maggie and Bessie; and with the will and heart to do it, I think my Belle will be a sunbeam indeed to all with whom she has to do."

Now as you may not know the story of which Belle and her father were speaking, you may like to hear something about it;

and you shall have it in a few words.

These two little girls, Maggie and Bessie Bradford, the young friends of whom Belle thought so much, went one summer to spend the season among the mountains; and, while there, fell in with two poor, neglected, and wicked children, named Lem and Dolly Owen. From these children, who seemed to love mischief and wickedness for their own sake, and to feel a spite toward all who were better off than themselves, Maggie and Bessie, and indeed all their family, had much to bear. Every petty annoyance and vexation which they could invent was tried by Lem and Dolly to trouble and grieve those who had never injured them. But although it did cost them a hard struggle, the two dear little girls had forgiven all this, and so won upon the miserable outcasts by the sweet, forgiving kindness they had shown, that the latter were at last brought to look upon them as friends, and to feel sorry for all the evil they had done to them. Nor was this all; for by their simple teachings and bright example they had pointed out to poor, sick Dolly the way to Jesus; and before she died she was led to His feet, and knew that He could save her and take her to dwell with Him. So, happy and trusting, she had gone from a world where she had known little but misery, to that other and better home where sin and suffering never come; while Lem, softened partly by his sister's death, had been put under the care of kind Mr. Porter for a while, and was now, as you have learned from Belle's words, gone as a sailor boy with a prospect and promise of doing well.

All this, and much more which it is not necessary to repeat, – since, if you choose, you may learn all about it in a little book called "Bessie among the Mountains," – had been told to Belle by some of Maggie's and Bessie's older friends; and had, if possible, increased her love and admiration for them. She had received such tenderness and affection from them herself, this motherless little one, and their friendship had brought her such new happiness and comfort, that it was not surprising that she did indeed look upon them as her "sunbeams next to papa," and love them with her whole heart.

Whether Belle and her papa would have talked much more cannot be told, for now they were interrupted by a knock at the door; and when Mr. Powers said, "Come in," a waiter obeyed, bringing a note directed to —

"Miss Belle Powers,
Care of her Papa,
In the hottel,
U. S. of America,
New York."

Happily, this note had not gone by post, but had been brought by one servant-man who knew for whom it was intended, and had given it to another, who brought it directly to the young lady whose name it bore. Otherwise, I think it just possible that it might never have reached her.

II.
AN EXCITEMENT

"That is Maggie's writing," said Belle, seizing eagerly upon the note, as the man handed it to her. "I s'pose it's about something nice: Maggie's notes always are, – Bessie's too. Please read it to me, papa."

Mr. Powers did as he was asked; and when Belle had opened the envelope, which was a part of the business she must of course attend to for herself, read aloud these words, written in Maggie Bradford's large, round hand: —

"Oh! my dear, darling Belle, – We are so glad Bessie and I are that your papa has made up his mind not to take you away to your home in the south this winter. And not to have you go in that horrid steamer and sail with monsters of the deep and be seasick, which is such a horrible fate that I could not wish it of my worst enemy of which I hope I have none in this world or that which is to come. And because we are so glad about it we wanted to have a public rejoicing, and mamma says we may, and if you don't know what a public rejoicing is it means when people are very glad about something and want other people to be glad too and so they make a great fuss and have something very nice. And so in the present case mamma says you can come and make the public rejoicing with us to-morrow afternoon and Lily Norris is

coming too and Nellie and Carrie Ransom. And mamma is going to let us have a very nice supper and some mottos, of which she knows you are fond as I suppose are all mankind or ought to be if they have any sense, and we think she is the very dearest mamma that ever lived and I hope I shall be her grateful child as I am yours till death and Bessie the same.

"Maggie Stanton Bradford."

"Oh, yes! I'll go, 'course I will," said Belle, clapping her hands, as her father finished reading the note; and too much accustomed to going and coming to and from Mrs. Bradford's house as she pleased to think it necessary to ask permission. "'Course I'll go. And, papa, isn't this a lovely note? and isn't Maggie just the smartest child to write so nicely? I think she writes just as good notes and letters as big people: yes, I think hers are a good deal more interesting than big people's. And she makes me understand every thing too. I'm glad she told me what a public rejoicing was, 'cause I didn't know before; and isn't that nice and pretty about not going away and monsters of the deep?"

"But you must send your answer: Patrick is waiting," said Mr. Powers.

"Oh! to be sure," said Belle. "Please write it for me, papa;" and accordingly her father wrote as she dictated: —

"Dear Maggie and Bessie, – I guess I will; and I thank you very much for making a public rejoicing, and mottoes and all. Your mamma is so good; and I love her and you,

and hope I'll be a sunbeam to everybody. Good-by.
"Your own precious
"Belle."

On the afternoon of the next day Belle was taken to the home of her young playmates by Daphne, the old colored nurse who took care of her. She was in very good time, you may be sure; for she insisted on going immediately after her own early dinner; and Daphne was too much accustomed to giving her her own way in all things to dream of disputing her wish.

The preparations for the "public rejoicing" were not quite finished, as might have been expected; but that did not much matter where Belle was concerned, for she was so much with the little Bradfords that they looked upon her almost as one of their own family; and she was at once called upon by Maggie to "help with the arrangements," which she was quite ready to do.

"Mamma hasn't had time to buy the mottoes yet," said Maggie, "'cause she couldn't go out this morning; but she is going now and says we are to go with her. Don't you want to come too, Belle?"

Belle was only too glad; and as soon as Mrs. Bradford was ready, the three little girls, Maggie, Bessie, and Belle, set forth with her to make the important purchase.

As they were on their way to the store, Maggie, who had skipped ahead to a corner they had to turn, came running back with face all aglow and eyes full of excitement.

"Oh! mamma!" she said: "there's such a fuss round the corner,

and I'm afraid we'll have to pass it."

"What is the trouble?" asked Mrs. Bradford.

"I don't know; but there's a crowd, and I saw a carriage, and a policeman; and there's such a fuss."

"Well," said Bessie, who held the most unbounded faith in policemen, "if there's a policeman, I s'pose he'll fix it all right: won't he?"

"But you see we'll have to pass it to reach the candy-store," said Maggie; "and maybe, it's a drunken man, or a carry-on horse, or an animal escaped out of the menagerie, or a mad dog, or some other dreadful excitement;" and she looked quite distressed as she finished the list of horrors she had imagined.

"I think I can take care of you," said her mother; "and if there should be any danger we will stop in at grandmamma's till it is over."

Thus consoled, but still clinging tight to her mother's hand, Maggie thought they might venture to go on; but as soon as the corner was turned, it became quite plain that there was no danger for them, though there was indeed what she called "a fuss."

In the middle of the street was a carriage about which a crowd had gathered, one of the horses having stumbled, fallen, and broken his leg. On the sidewalk stood a lady in deep mourning, with a nurse, and a child about Bessie's age, the latter screaming at the top of her voice, and dancing up and down, seemingly partly in fear, partly in anger; for she would not listen to her mother and nurse when they tried to soothe her, but struck out

her hands passionately at the woman when she tried to draw her away from her mother's side, so that the lady might find opportunity to speak to those about her.

"Oh! the poor little girl! just see how frightened she is," said Bessie.

"I am afraid she is a little naughty, too," said her mother, as the child gave another furious scream and stamped wildly with both her feet upon the pavement; while the lady, who was plainly weak and nervous, drew her hand across her forehead as if the uproar her little daughter was making was almost too much for her.

"But I must speak to the lady and see if I can do any thing for her," continued Mrs. Bradford; and stepping up to her, as she stood a little withdrawn from the crowd, she said kindly, "Can I be of any assistance to you?"

"No, thank you," said the lady: "I am not ill, only startled; and – if Mabel would but be quiet and let me speak and think."

Mabel seemed inclined to do this now that she had caught sight of the other children; for ceasing her loud screams, and standing still, she stared open-mouthed at them.

"My house is but a few steps farther on: will you not come in and rest, and compose yourself?" asked Mrs. Bradford of the stranger.

"No, thank you," she answered again: "I believe we have but little farther to go. Is not the – Hotel near here?"

"Only a block or two," replied Mrs. Bradford.

"Then we will walk on," said the lady; and directing the

nurse to bring some shawls from the carriage, she thanked Mrs. Bradford for her kindness, and taking the hand of her little girl would have gone on.

But this did not please the child, who now drawing sharply back from her mother, said pettishly, —

"No: I want to go to that lady's house and play with those nice little girls."

"But we're not going home. We are going to the candy-store to buy some mottoes," said Belle.

When Mabel heard this, she said she wanted to go to the candy-store and buy mottoes too; and her mother, who, it was plainly to be seen, gave way to her in every thing, said she might do so.

"But if I go and buy you mottoes, will you be a good girl, and come with me to find your uncle and little cousin?" asked the stranger lady.

Mabel promised, anxious now only to secure the mottoes; and she and her mother and nurse followed Mrs. Bradford and our little friends to the candy-store.

Mrs. Bradford politely waited and let the saleswoman attend to the stranger first, for she saw there would be small chance of peace till the spoiled child had all she desired.

All she desired! There seemed no end to that. Not only Maggie and Bessie, but Belle also, who was accustomed to the most unbounded indulgence, and to have every wish gratified, stood amazed at the number and quantity of dainties which Mabel

demanded, and which she was allowed to have. Parcel after parcel was put up for her, till not only her own hands and those of her already well-laden nurse were filled to overflowing, but those of her mother also.

"Now do come, dear," said the latter, when it was impossible that any one of the three could carry another thing: "let us go and see the little cousin, and she shall share them with you."

"No, she shan't," whined Mabel: "I don't want little cousin, and I shan't have her now."

"Well, never mind, then. She is such a nervous child," said her mother, turning to Mrs. Bradford. "She shall not tease you if you do not choose. Come, darling, won't you, with poor mamma?"

But it took so much more promising and coaxing before the unruly child could be persuaded by her weary but foolish mother to go on, that Mrs. Bradford made her purchases and quitted the store with her own little flock, leaving Mabel still whining and fretting, and at the last moment insisting upon having a sugar "Temple of Liberty," which the shopwoman told her was not for sale, but only put there for show.

"That's the spoildest child I ever saw," said Belle, as they turned homewards, each little girl by her own desire laden with a parcel.

"Yes," said Maggie: "she's just the kind of a child to cry for the moon, and get it too, if she could; but she couldn't. I'm glad," she added, with an air of deep wisdom, "that our parents saw the error of their ways and didn't train us up that way. What are you

laughing at, mamma?"

But mamma made no answer; the reason of which Maggie took to be that just at that moment she bowed to a gentleman who was passing; and before she could repeat her question Bessie spoke.

"I'm glad enough I'm not her little cousin she is going to see. I'm sorry for her cousin."

"So am I," said Belle. "I wouldn't have such a cousin as Mabel for any thing. She's too horrid."

"You have a cousin named Mabel, though, haven't you?" asked Maggie.

"Yes, so I have; but then she's not one bit like that Mabel, you know," answered Belle.

"You never saw her, did you?" asked Bessie.

"No, 'cause she lives about a million thousand of miles off, way off in Boston; but she is coming to see me some time," said Belle.

"But if you never saw her, how can you tell she is not one bit like that child?" asked Bessie.

"Why how could she be?" demanded Belle, indignantly: "her mamma is my papa's own sister, and he'd never have such a foolish lady as that for his sister. I guess he wouldn't;" and Belle shook her head in a manner which seemed to say that such an idea was to be put out of the question at once.

"Yes: you know 'birds of a feather flock together,'" said Maggie.

"What does that mean?" asked Bessie.

"Why," answered Maggie, slowly, as she considered how she might make one of her favorite proverbs fit the occasion, "it means – well – it means – that a foolish mother is apt to have a foolish child, and things of that kind. Do you understand, Bessie?"

"Oh, yes!" said Bessie, looking at her sister with admiring pride: "you always make every thing plain to understand, Maggie. Don't she, Belle?"

"Yes," said Belle: "she's an excellent explainer. And, Maggie, do you know I told papa what nice things you said about being sunbeams, and told him those verses you made; and, oh! didn't he think it was splendid?"

"I don't believe Mabel is much of a sunbeam to her people," said Bessie. "I'm 'fraid her mother don't teach her to be."

"No, indeed, I guess she isn't!" said Belle; "and I wouldn't want to be a sunbeam to her."

"But our Father in Heaven makes His sun to shine on the evil and on the good," said Mrs. Bradford, softly. "Does not my little Belle want to copy Him?"

Just the words her father had used yesterday when she was talking with him on this very subject. They set Belle thinking; and she walked more quietly on towards the house, trying to make up her mind if she could "be a sunbeam" to such a disagreeable child as the one she had just seen.

She had not quite decided when they reached Mrs. Bradford's

door, and there for the time her thoughts were taken up with her play and playmates.

But Mrs. Bradford was rather amused when, one of the dolls being supposed to have behaved badly, Belle was overheard to say, —

"This child must be punished severely, she is so very nervous."

III.
AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE

The "public rejoicing" had not nearly come to an end, when, at a much earlier hour than she was accustomed to go home, Belle saw Daphne entering the play-room. Daphne's turbaned head was thrown back, and her lips pursed up in a manner which showed Belle that she was not pleased with something or some one. But whatever might be the cause of the old nurse's displeasure, Belle knew well enough that it would never be visited on her; and Daphne's appearance just at the moment when she was so delightfully engaged did not suit her at all.

"You haven't come to take me home a'ready?" she said.

"But I has, honey: more's de shame," said Daphne, with a look of mingled pity and affection at her little mistress, while a chorus of exclamations arose from all the children.

"I shan't go, now! It's too early," said Belle. "Why, it isn't near dark, Daphne. Did papa send you?"

"S'pose he tinks he did," replied Daphne; "but I specs dere's a new missis come to han', what tinks she's goin' to turn de worl' upside down. 'Pears like it."

"What?" said Belle, not understanding such mysterious hints, yet seeing something was wrong; and Mrs. Bradford asked, "What are you talking about, Daphne?"

"I'se been bidden to hol' my tongue, and I neber talks if I ain't got leave," answered Daphne, with another toss of her turban and several displeased sniffs.

"But you're talking now, only we don't know what it's about," said Bessie.

To this Daphne made no answer, except by closing her eyes in a resigned manner, and giving a sigh which seemed to come from her very shoes.

"I shan't go home, anyhow," said Belle: "the party isn't near out."

"Not when papa wants you, dear?" said Mrs. Bradford, gently.

Belle gave a sigh which sounded like the echo of Daphne's; but she made no farther objection when her nurse brought her hat and prepared to put it on. Daphne clapped on the hat, giving a snap to the elastic which fastened it that really hurt the child, though she was far from intending to do so. Then she seized her in both arms and gave her a loud, sounding kiss.

"You just 'member you allus got yer ole mammy, whatever else you loses, my honey," she said. By this time not only little Belle and the other children, but Mrs. Bradford also, thought something dreadful must have happened; although the latter did know that Daphne was sometimes foolish, and very apt to make a mountain out of a molehill.

"What's the matter? Where's my papa?" said Belle, in a frightened tone. "Is he lost?"

"He's safe to de hotel, dear," said Daphne. She never

condescended to say home: "home" was far away, down on the dear old Georgia plantation. "He's safe to de hotel; that is, if somebody ain't worrit de eyes out his head or de head off his shoulders. You come along, Miss Belle, 'fore all yer tings is gone to rack an' ruin."

"What is the matter, Daphne?" said Mrs. Bradford.

"I telled yer, missis, I ain't got leave for talk; an' I neber breaks orders, no way. But I'se been forgetten: dere's a letter what Massa Powers send you;" and diving into the depths of her enormous pocket, Daphne produced a note which she handed to Mrs. Bradford. The lady opened and read it; while Belle watched her, fearing some evil. But Mrs. Bradford smiled and looked rather pleased, and said to Belle, —

"It is all right, darling: run home now; papa has a great pleasure for you."

It would be impossible to express the length and depth of the sniff with which Daphne heard this; but Belle did not notice it, and was now rather in haste to say good-by and to go to her papa.

"I wouldn't say any thing more if I were you, Daphne," said Mrs. Bradford, following them out to the head of the stairs.

"Dear! I ain't said nothin', Missis," said Daphne: "didn't her pa forbid it? on'y some folks is so blin'."

"Who's blind? Not papa?" said Belle.

"It am a kin' of sperit blin'ness I'se speakin' ob, honey," said Daphne. "Talk ob spilin' chillen, indeed! Dere's some what's so bad by natur', you couldn't make 'em no wuss if you tried all de

days ob yer life."

With which she disappeared, banging the front door after Belle and herself with a force which told that she was anxious for some object on which she might safely vent her displeasure.

Belle talked and questioned all the way home, but received for answer only the same mysterious and alarming hints; till the child hardly knew whether to believe that something dreadful had taken place, or that she was going home to the promised pleasure.

"Now, Miss Belle," said the foolish old woman, as they crossed the hall on which Mr. Powers' rooms opened, "you min' I ain't goin' for let you be snubbed and kep' under. You come and tell yer ole mammy ebery ting; an' I'll fight yer battles, if de French nusses is got sich fly-a-way caps on der heads."

So she opened the door of their own parlor; and Belle, feeling a little worried and a little cross at the interruption to her afternoon's pleasure, passed in.

What did she see?

Upon the sofa, beside her papa, sat a lady dressed in deep mourning; and upon his knee – was it possible? – yes, upon papa's knee, in her own proper place, was a little girl, quite at her ease, and sitting as if she had a right and belonged there. And – could it be? – Belle took a second look – it really *was* the child who had been so naughty and shown herself so spoiled. She stood for a moment near the door, utterly amazed, and speechless with displeasure.

Now Belle was what is called a generous child; that is, she

would readily give away or share what she had with others; but she was jealous of the affection of those she loved, especially of her papa's. He was her own, her very own: all his tenderness and petting must be for her. She could hardly bear that he should caress even her beloved Maggie and Bessie; and if it chanced that he did so, she would immediately claim a double portion for herself. She was quick and bright too; and now she saw in a moment the cause of all Daphne's mysterious hints and melancholy; and they helped to increase the angry, jealous feeling in her own heart. Daphne had feared that this naughty, contrary child was coming to interfere with her; and Belle feared it now herself. Indeed, was it not plain enough already? There she was on papa's knee, the seat to which no one but herself had a right; and papa's arm was about her.

"Come here, my darling: come and speak to your aunt and little cousin," said Mr. Powers.

And now Belle spoke, indeed, but without moving one step forward, and with a very different tone and manner from those which her father expected.

"Come off of there!" she said, in a low, deep tone of intense passion. "Come off of there! That's my place, he's my papa; you shan't have him, and I shan't have you. You're not my cousin; I won't have you, bad, bad girl!"

She said this with her face perfectly white with rage, her eyes flashing; and she stood bolt upright, her two little hands clenched and stretched downwards on either side. Then the color came fast

and deep, rising to the very roots of her hair; her lips were drawn, and her little bosom heaved.

Mr. Powers knew what this meant. Putting Mabel hastily from his knee, he rose and walked over to Belle. When Belle was a baby, and little more than a baby, she had the naughty habit, when any thing displeased her, of holding her breath until she was almost choked and purple in the face. Other children have this ugly way, which is not only naughty, but dangerous. But Belle's mamma had broken her of this when she was very young; and it was a long, long time since her father had seen her do it.

But it was coming now, and must be stopped at once.

"Belle!" he said sharply, and almost sternly, laying his hand on her shoulder, – "Belle!"

It did seem hard, but it was necessary, and was, Mr. Powers knew, the only way to bring his angry little child to her senses. It was enough. She caught her breath hard, then gave one or two deep sobs, and burst into a passion of tears, at the same time turning and trying to run away.

Poor child! It seemed to her that this was proof of her jealous fears. Papa had never spoken so to her before, and it was all because of that strange child who was coming in her place. So she thought, and only wanted to run away out of sight and hearing.

But her father caught her, took her up in his arms, and now spoke to her in the tenderest tones, covering her wet face with kisses and trying to soothe her.

Belle knew that she had been naughty, oh! very naughty; but

she still felt very much injured; and, although after a time her sobs became less violent, she clung tightly to her papa, and kept her face hidden on his bosom; shedding there the tears which brought no healing with them because they came from anger and jealousy, and obstinately refusing to look up or speak to her aunt and cousin.

And yet if Belle had been told but yesterday that she was soon to see this little cousin, she would have been delighted. They had never met before, for Mrs. Walton, Mabel's mother, had been living abroad for many years: the little Mabel had been born there, and there several brothers and sisters had died. Perhaps this last was one reason, though it was certainly no good excuse, that Mabel had been so much indulged.

For some months there had been talk of their coming home, but their appearance just at this time was quite unexpected. Young readers will not be interested in knowing what brought them: it is enough to say that here they were, the steamer having brought them to Boston, whence Mr. Walton had sent on his wife and child, he staying behind to attend to some business.

Mrs. Walton had thought to give her brother an agreeable surprise; and so she had, for he had been longing to see her, and to have her help in the training of his motherless little Belle; but Mrs. Walton and Mabel had not been with him half an hour before he began to think that Belle would do quite as well without the training which Mabel received.

The child had been clamorous to see her young cousin from

the first moment of her arrival; but Daphne, unwilling to call her darling from her afternoon's pleasure, had invented one excuse after another, till Mr. Powers had insisted that she should bring Belle.

The jealousy of the old colored nurse, who was already put out at Mabel's wilful, pettish behavior, and the way in which she was allowed to handle and pull about all Belle's toys and treasures, was immediately aroused at the idea that her nursling should be made to yield to the new-comer; and she had shown this in the manner which had awakened a like feeling in Belle the moment the child discovered the cause.

Mrs. Walton was vexed, as indeed she might well be, at the reception which Belle had given to herself and Mabel; but the weak and foolish mother readily excused or overlooked in her own child those very faults which she saw so plainly in her little niece.

At first Mabel had been too much astonished at Belle's outbreak to do more than stand and look at her; but when her cousin's cries were quieted, and she lay still with her face hidden on her father's shoulder, giving long, heaving sobs, she began to whine and fret, and to insist that Belle should be made to come and play with her, and show her a set of carved animals, one of Belle's choicest treasures which Mr. Powers had rescued from her destructive little fingers.

"My dear brother," said Mrs. Walton, "it is indeed time that your child was put under other female management than that of

servants. She is quite spoiled, I see."

Here a prolonged sniff, ending in something very like a groan, came from near the door where Daphne still stood: while Belle, feeling that both she and her devoted nurse had been insulted, kicked out indignantly with her little feet.

But her father's hand was on the nestling head; and he said very quietly, pouring oil on the wounded spirits, —

"My Belle and her Daphne could not well do without one another; and Belle is much less spoiled than she used to be. She is a pretty good girl now, thanks to the kind teachings she has had, and her own wish to profit by them. Mrs. Bradford, the mother of her little friends Maggie and Bessie, has been very good to her; so has her teacher, Miss Ashton, and several other lady friends: so that she has not been left lately without proper training, even if her papa and old nurse do indulge and pet her perhaps a little too much. Belle and I are all in all to one another now, and she knows I want her to be a good girl. It is a long, long time since she has had such a naughty turn as this, and I know she is sorry and ashamed."

Ashamed Belle certainly was; but I am afraid she was not sorry, at least not truly sorry, for she was quite determined not to look up or speak to her aunt and cousin; and she nursed the angry feelings in her little heart, and made up her mind that they were both quite unbearable.

She was the more sure of this when they all went together into the dining-room. Belle was accustomed to go there with her

father, and to eat her simple supper while he dined; and indulged though she was, she never thought of fretting or asking for that which he said was not proper for her; but Mabel called for every thing that she fancied, and was allowed to have all manner of rich dainties, her mother answering when Mr. Powers interfered, —

"It don't do to refuse her any thing. She is so nervous and excitable. I have to manage her the best way I can."

Probably Mr. Powers thought the management which fell to the share of his motherless little Belle was better and more profitable than that bestowed upon Mabel, whose mother was always with her.

It was the same thing when they went upstairs again. Mabel wanted to stand in the gallery above, and look down into the great hall below, where were lights, and numbers of people coming and going; and all the pleadings and promises of her tired mother could not persuade her to go on to their room, where the nurse was engaged unpacking.

But her uncle, who was tired of all this wilfulness, soon put a stop to it, by unclasping the little hands which held so obstinately to the banisters, lifting and carrying her to her mamma's room, where he set her down without a word.

Mabel was so unused to such firm interference with her wishes, and was so astonished at it, that she quite forgot to scream or struggle till he had gone away and the door was shut upon her. Then she made up for lost time; but we will leave her and go with Belle.

Her father saw that she was in no mood for advice or reproof; just now either would only add to her sudden and violent jealousy of her cousin: so he determined to pass over her naughtiness for to-night, and hoped that she would be more reasonable in the morning. She herself said not a single word about what had passed, or about her aunt and cousin, – at least not to her papa; but when Daphne was putting her to bed, both the little one and the old woman found enough to say to one another; Belle telling her nurse how she had met Mabel that day and how the latter had behaved; while Daphne encouraged her to say as many unkind things as she would, and made the most of all Mabel's spoiled, troublesome ways.

Poor little Belle! She could hardly say her prayers that night, and went to bed feeling more unhappy than she had done for many a long day.

IV.
SUNLIGHT

Things were no better the next morning.

Mrs. Walton did not come down to breakfast, but Mabel chose to go with her uncle and cousin. She was in a better humor than she had been the night before, and would willingly have made friends with Belle if the latter would have allowed her to do so. She was less unruly and wilful at the table also; for after the way in which her uncle had compelled her to obey last night, she was a little afraid of him, and had an idea that he would not allow her to have her own way in the manner her papa and mamma did. She did not like him the less for that though, and when she asked for one or two things which he did not think proper for her, submitted quietly to his refusal, and took what he offered instead. As for Belle, she not only would not speak to her cousin beyond the unwilling "good-morning" which she uttered by her father's orders, but she would not appear to be conscious of her presence at all; never lifting her eyes to her, and if she was forced to turn her face that way, making a pretence of looking over Mabel's head or beyond her. And when they returned to their own parlor, where Mrs. Walton now sat, Belle gathered every toy, book, or other trifle that belonged to her, put them in a closet given for her use, and with some difficulty turned the key and took it out; then

planted herself with her back against the door, as if she thought the lock not enough to keep Mabel's hands from her treasures, standing there with a look of the most determined obstinacy and sullenness.

Such behavior was not at all like Belle, and her papa scarcely knew what to make of it. Even in her most wilful days she had never shown herself selfish or sulky; and knowing that she now felt herself aggrieved and injured by Mabel's presence, and fearing to excite fresh jealousy, he did not know how to deal with her.

As for the little girl herself, – no matter how much of all this had been caused by old Daphne, – Belle knew well that she was very naughty; but she determined to persist in that naughtiness so long as Mabel should be there.

To describe Daphne's high-mightiness, not only with Mabel and the French nurse, but also with Mrs. Walton, would be impossible. She carried her turban so straight, and moved and spoke so stiffly, that she almost awed even her little mistress; and Mabel was quite afraid of her. Nor would she give any help or information to the French woman, pretending not to understand her English, which, although broken, was plain enough.

"'Dere ain't no use yer talkin' to me," she said. "I don't unnerstan' yer, nor I ain't goin' to. I'se allus been fetched up 'mong de Peytons, – Miss Belle's mamma she was a Peyton, – an' I'se used to fust-rate English; an' me an' Miss Belle we allus uses it, and neber can unnerstan' no low talk. 'Sides, I'm deaf as

a post dis mornin' and can't hear no way."

Daphne was troubled with a convenient kind of deafness, which always came on when she did not wish to hear a thing.

So Mr. Powers, knowing that both Belle and Daphne must be brought to their senses and to better behavior, but not seeing exactly the way to do it without making matters worse, betook himself to his good friend Mrs. Bradford to ask advice.

"What am I to do?" he said when he had finished his story: "if I punish Belle or reprove Daphne, they are in such a state of mind that it will give fresh food for jealousy and bad feeling to both; and yet I cannot let this go on."

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Bradford; "but before we try punishment or reproof, let us see what a little management and kindness will do. Suppose you send Belle, and, if Mrs. Walton will allow it, Mabel with her, to spend the day with my children."

"My sister will allow any thing the child fancies, I fear," the gentleman answered with a sigh; "but you do not know what you are undertaking. A more ungovernable and ungoverned child than my little niece would be hard to find; and I fear that neither you nor your children would pass a pleasant day with Belle and Mabel here, especially if Belle continues in her present mood."

"I do not fear that she will," said Mrs. Bradford. "Maggie and Bessie being of her own age, and having a great sympathy for her, may be able to do more in their simple way to charm the evil spirit than we older people can. As for Mabel, if she will come, she will be under some restraint here, as we are all strangers to

her."

"Ah! you do not know her," said Mr. Powers. "I was a stranger to her until yesterday, and yet" – his look and the shrug of his shoulders spoke as strongly as the unfinished sentence could have done.

"Never mind: send her," said the lady. "I will not let her annoy the other children or me *too* much, and I may do her some good."

"Yes," said he, gratefully: "I know that you and yours never shrink from doing good to others because the task may not be an agreeable one. But do you mean to keep a house of correction, or, I should say, of good influences, for all incorrigibly spoiled children?"

"Not exactly," said Mrs. Bradford, returning his smile; "and I believe I have our little Belle more than Mabel in my mind just now; but let them both come, and we will see if we cannot send them back to you this evening in better and happier moods."

Repeating his thanks, Mr. Powers bade her good-by and went home; where he found that Belle had quitted her stand at the closet-door, Mabel having gone out. For when the latter found that she was not to be allowed to have her cousin's toys, she raised such an uproar as soon as her uncle was out of the way, that her mother promised her every thing and any thing she chose, and had sent her out with the maid to purchase all manner of playthings.

Belle was glad to hear that she was to go to the Bradfords'; and even when she learned that Mabel was to accompany her, she

still felt a satisfaction in it, because she was sure that the children would sympathize with her, and be as "offended" with Mabel as she was herself. She was wild to go at once, without waiting for her cousin; and her papa consented that she should do so, hoping that Mrs. Bradford and the children would bring her to a better state of feeling before Mabel made her appearance.

Somewhat to Belle's surprise she found Bessie rather more ready than Maggie to resent her supposed injuries. Bessie did not, it is true, encourage her in her naughty feelings, or in returning evil for evil; but she had been so shocked by Mabel's behavior on the day before, that she could not wonder at Belle's dislike. Moreover, Bessie was a little inclined to jealousy herself; and although she struggled hard with this feeling, and showed it but seldom, she was now ready to excuse it, and find just cause for it, in Belle.

But Maggie was disposed to look at things in a more reasonable light, and to make the best of them.

"Why, Belle," she said, cheerily, "I should think you'd be glad, 'cause now you can be a sunbeam to your cousin, and try to do her good."

"I guess I shan't be a sunbeam to her," said Belle. "I'd be nothing but an ugly, old black cloud, what blows a great deal and has thunder and lightning out of it; and it's just good enough for her."

And at that moment, indeed, little Belle looked much more like a thunder-cloud than like a sunbeam.

"I just can't bear her. I b'lieve I just hate her, and I'm going to do it too," she continued.

"But that is naughty," said Bessie.

"I don't care: it is truf," said Belle. "I can say the truf, can't I?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.