

BOYS AND GIRLS

Bobolink.

('Sunday at Home.')

'Bobolink! Bobolink, my precious!'

A little voice called out softly and plaintively, again and again. Its owner, Esty Vyner, the lonely little heiress of the Manor, was trotting up and down the staircases, and round and round the gallery that looked upon the large hall below, where the sunlight glinted here and there upon the polished armour.

Everything at the Manor was big and grand—everything but its little owner, who was small and white faced. Perhaps the largeness and grandeur had rather choked Esty's growth; or perhaps it might have been the loneliness. Anyway, the child had not thriven briskly at all, and the tenantry whispered that their little lady was but a peaky mite who sadly needed mothering.

Derry Derwent, the stranger boy who had lately come all the way over the seas from South Africa in order to grow up his grand-

long days whipping the stream where the cunning speckled trout lay in hiding, the tramps with Spicer the keeper through the preserves, where the pheasant-houses, queer little cabins, were dotted about. To lose the hundred delights belonging to a country house, for the sake of amusing a rag doll! No, Derry couldn't, really.

'Very well,' said Granny disappointedly, and Derry, who had a good heart, was vexed to see the kind old face gloom over. Still, the thing was impossible!

It was on the same afternoon, while Derry was grieving Granny with his selfishness, that Esty wandered up and down calling for 'Bobolink, her precious.'

Bobolink was a thorough gentleman. A pure Persian by birth, this handsome cat could trace his pedigree for generations. That is if cats are ever given to dig up ancestors; being accounted wise animals, possibly they do not possess such a curious weakness as pride of birth. However, Bobolink stalked through life displaying his

The little girl walked down to the village beyond her gates, with her favorite Jenny, the nursemaid, where she held a secret consultation with Ben Barker, an old soldier who had set up as the 'handy man' of the neighborhood. Ben, who thought all the world of the little lady of the Manor, touched his cap a great many times as he listened attentively. Indeed, Esty might have said that Ben punctuated her sentences in that fashion, only she knew little or nothing as yet of the sorrows of grammar.

'I understands 'sackly, sir!' Ben persisted in addressing the little mistress as 'sir,' out of old habit, possibly. 'What you wants is a comfortable home for your pet cat. And you wants it made of red bricks, with a roof o' slates and a front door—'

'With a porch, Ben!' put in Esty, mindfully.

'With a porch, sir! All right, sir, I'll step up and see to the business,' which Ben did to some purpose. A delightful miniature red-brick cottage, just large enough, and no more, to hold a single tenant, was built against the Manor house, exactly under Esty's schoolroom window, on the panes of which the roses knocked their big, yellow heads.

True, it was some little time before the new tenant could be persuaded to take possession of the smart abode, and Esty feared the cottage would end in being 'To Let.' However, at last Bobolink 'moved in,' and after he once comprehended that he was sole master of the little mansion it would have been a bold cat or dog that intruded upon him.

But, with all his advantages of high birth and his home comforts, Bobolink had some serious faults—who, be it cat or man, has not? He was, terrible to confess, a poacher. Many a night when his mistress believed him to be peacefully sleeping in his cottage, Bobolink was swiftly stepping his way to the spinney, bent on stealing a pheasant chick for his supper. Not only in the Manor preserves did the Persian commit woeful havoc, but he went further afield, and Spicer, the keeper at Southmoor, told Derry that nothing would give him greater pleasure than to wring the neck of such a poacher or to shoot him.

When we enter on evil courses, it is a fact that we are bound to move on apace—if we don't move back by mending our ways. Bobolink, growing bolder, began his raids in the broad daylight. On the afternoon when Esty wandered up and down, calling her 'precious,' the Persian had stepped over to Southmoor preserves, and there met a well-deserved punishment. When Derry Derwent found him, the hapless Bobolink was screaming in the grip of a trap, its cruel teeth fastened in his leg. Derry, who had a soft heart, hurried to the spot, and recognized the well-known pet of the little girl whom he had called a rag-doll.

'Spicer will be safe to shoot him this time, if he finds him!' muttered the boy as he carefully released the trapped poacher, who was so spent from loss of blood that he could not stand on his three legs while Derry bound up the injured fourth with his handkerchief torn into strips.

'Oh, my precious! What are you doing to my Bobolink, boy? Why, he is in rags, his fur is torn, and—and oh, is that blood?'

It was Esty and her nursemaid, Jenny. The two had wandered all the way across the park and meads, in search of Bobolink. With frightened sobs Esty heard the particulars of the terrible disaster, and Derry, as he assisted to carry home the patient on a



mother's prop and stay at Southmoor, called Esty a poor little rag doll the first time he saw her. The lands of Southmoor and the Manor matched, and the two families attended the same parish church, where the little heiress was pointed out to Derry, who scoffed at her smallness. But then Derry himself was, like most of the English children born in the fine climate of South Africa, tall and straight, with sturdy limbs. 'She wants knocking about a bit, your Miss Esty,' the boy continued good-humoredly enough.

'I don't think you're right, Derry, boy!' said his grandmother, a sweet, old, silver-haired lady. 'Esty is a hot-house blossom, too frail to stand roughing it. When but an infant she lost both of her young parents in a melancholy yacht accident, which made of baby Esty the lady of the Manor. Her life has been a sad one since; she's alone in the world. Derry, don't you think you could show some kindness to the lonely little girl? Shall I take you to see her?'

'Oh, no, Granny! I couldn't really!' was the hasty reply. 'You see, I am having such a regular jolly time here, and the holidays will so soon be over!' Derry stood up, his hands deep in his pockets, and stared wistfully in Granny's face. The idea of having to give up the splendidly happy time he was having in the new English home, the rides on Shelly round the meadows, the

hall-marks, in the shape of a most enormous bushy tail, and a frill of fur round his neck. So nobody ever dreamed of nudging a neighbor and saying, 'I wonder who that is!' for all the world knows a real, true Persian cat when they see one. Bobolink also possessed a large, affectionate heart, in addition to his handsome presence and all his affections were given to his mistress, the lonely little lady of the Manor, who loved him back devotedly. He was her most precious possession. Her pony, which she had christened 'Tip-cat,' was too high-spirited for such frail little hands as Esty's to rein in, and he had given her more than one fright.

Her birds Esty could not squeeze to her; a serious drawback in loving. And her dolls, well, wax can never come up to flesh and blood, can it? So Bobolink was first favorite, and Esty's constant companion by day. By night he was banished. The Fraulein, a dreadfully clever, rather severe German lady, with blue spectacles, whom Esty's guardians had appointed to take full charge of the little heiress, would not hear of a cat, even a Persian cat, sleeping in the night nursery. Esty knew by experience that Fraulein was, meantime, the queen to be obeyed, so did not rebel.

'But,' she determined, 'my precious shall have a home of his very own. I shall have a cottage built for him!'