

The Right Kind of a Boy.

Here's to the boy who's not afraid
To do his share of work;
Who never is by toll dismayed,
And never tries to shirk.

The boy whose heart is brave to meet
All lions in the way;
Who's not discouraged by defeat,
But tries another day.

The boy who always means to do
The very best he can;
Who always keeps the right in view,
And aims to be a man.

Such boys as these will grow to be
The men whose hand will guide
The future of our land; and we
Shall speak their names with pride.

J. Cole, the Boy Hero

BY

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CHAPTER IV.

And now I must confess to those—for surely there will be a few—who have felt a little interest so far, in the fortunes of J. Cole, that a period in my story has arrived when I would fain lay down my pen, and not awaken the sleeping past, to recall the sad trouble that befell him.

I am almost an old woman now, and all this happened many years ago, when my hair was golden instead of silver. I was younger in those days, and now am peacefully and hopefully waiting God's time for my summons. Troubles have been my lot, many and hard to bear. Loss of husband, children, dear, good friends, many by death, and some troubles harder even than those, the loss of trust, and bitter awakening to the ingratitude and worthlessness of those in whom I have trusted. All these I have endured. Yet time and trouble have not sufficiently hardened my heart that I can write of what follows without pain.

Christmas was over, and my dear husband again away for some months. As soon as I could really say, "Spring is here," we were to leave London for our country home, and Joe was constantly talking to Mrs. Wilson about his various pets, left behind in the gardener's care. There was an old jackdaw, an especial favourite of his, a miserable owl too, who had met with an accident, resulting in the loss of an eye; a more evil looking object than "Cyclops," as my husband christened him, I never saw. Sometimes on a dark night this one eye would gleam luridly from out the shadowy recesses of the garden and an unearthly cry of "Hoo-oo-t," fall on the ear, enough to give one the "creeps for a hour," as Mary, the housemaid, said. But Joe loved Cyclops, or rather "Clippy," as he called him, and the bird hopped after Joe about the garden, as if he quite returned the feeling.

All our own dogs, and two or three malmed ones, and a cat or two, more or less hideous, and indebted to Joe's mercy in rescuing them from traps, snares, etc.—all these creatures were Joe's delight. Each week the gardener's boy wrote a few words to Joe of their health and wonderful doings, and each week Joe faithfully sent a shilling, to be laid out in food for them. Then there was Joe's especial garden, also a sort of hospital, or convalescent home rather, where many blighted, unhealthy looking plants and shrubs, discarded by the gardener, and cast aside to be burnt on the weed heap, had been rescued by Joe, patiently nursed and petted as it were into life again by constant care and watching, and after being kept in pots awhile till they showed, by sending forth some tiny shoot or bud, that the sap of life was once more circulating freely, were then planted in the sheltered corner he called "his own."

What treasures awaited him in this small square of earth. What bunches of violets he would gather for the "Missis"; and his longing to get back to his various pets, and his garden, was the topic of conversation on many a long evening between Joe and Mrs. Wilson.

Little Bogle, the fox terrier, was the only dog we had with us in town, and Bogle hated London. After the quiet country life, the incessant roll of carriages, trampling of horses, and callings of coachmen, shrill cab whistles, and all the noises of a fashionable neighbourhood at night during a London season, were most objectionable to Bogle; he could not rest, and often Joe got out of bed in the night, and took him in his arms, to prevent his waking all of us

with his shrill barking at the unwonted sounds.

As I have said before, I am very nervous, and the prospect of spending several more weeks in the big London house, without my husband, was far from pleasant; so I invited my widowed sister and her girls to stay with me some time longer, and made up my mind to banish my fears, and think of nothing but that the dark nights would be getting shorter and shorter, and meanwhile our house was well protected, as far as good strong bolts and chains could do so.

One night I felt more nervous than usual. I had expected a letter from America for some days past, and none had arrived. On this evening I knew the mail was due, and I waited anxiously for the last ring of the postman at ten o'clock; but I was doomed to listen in vain; there was the sharp, loud ring next door, but not at ours, and I went to my room earlier than the others, really to give way to a few tears that I could not control.

I sat by my bedroom fire, thinking, and I am afraid, conjuring up all sorts of terrible reasons for my dear husband's silence, until I must have fallen asleep, for I awoke chilly and cramped from the uncomfortable posture I had slept in. The fire was out, and the house silent as the grave; not even a carriage passing to take up some late guest. I looked at the clock—half-past three, and then from my window. It was "that darkest hour before dawn," and I hurried into bed, and endeavoured to sleep; but no, I was hopelessly wide awake; no amount of counting, or mental exercise on the subject of "sheep going through a hedge" had any effect, and I found myself lying awake, listening. Yes, I know that I was listening for something that I should hear before long, but I did not know what.

"Hark! what was that?" a sudden thud, as if something had fallen somewhere in the house; then silence, except for the loud beating of my heart, that threatened to suffocate me. "Nonsense," I said to myself, "I am foolishly nervous to-night. It is nothing here, or Bogle would bark;" so I tried again to sleep. Hush! Surely that was a foot-step going up or down the stairs! I could not endure the agony of being alone any longer, but would go to my sister's room, just across the landing, and get her to come and stay the rest of the night with me. I put on my slippers and dressing-gown, and opening my door, came face to face with my sister, who was coming to me.

"Let me come in," she said, "and don't let us alarm the girls, but I feel certain something is going on downstairs. Bogle barked furiously an hour ago, and then was suddenly silent."

"That must have been when I was asleep," I replied; "but no doubt Joe heard him, and has taken him in."

"That may be," said my sister, "but I have kept on hearing queer noises at the back of the house; they seemed in Joe's room at first. Come and listen yourself on the stairs."

It is strange, but true, that many persons, horribly nervous at the thought of danger, find all their presence of mind in full force when actually called upon to face it. So it is with me, and so it was on that night. I stood on the landing, and listened, and in a few moments heard muffled sounds downstairs, like persons moving about stealthily.

"There is certainly somebody down there, Nelly," I said to my sister, "and they are down in the basement. If we could creep down quietly and get into the drawing-room, we might open the window and call the watchman or policeman; both are on duty until seven."

"But think," said my sister, "of the fright of the girls if they heard us, and find they were left alone. The servants, too, will scream, and rush about, as they always do. Let us go down and make sure there are thieves, and then see what is best to be done. The door at the top of the kitchen stairs is locked, so they must be down there; and perhaps if we could get the watchman to come in quietly, we might catch them in a trap, by letting him through the drawing-room, and into the conservatory. He could get into the garden from there, and as they must have got in that way from the mews over the stable wall, and through the garden, they would try to escape the same way, and the watchman would be waiting for them, and cut off their retreat."

I agreed, and we stole downstairs into the drawing-room, where we locked ourselves in, then very gently and carefully drew up one of the side blinds of the bay window. The morning had begun to break, and everything in the wide road was distinctly visible. In the distance I could see the policeman on duty, but on the opposite side, and going away from our house instead of toward it. He

would turn the corner at the top of the road, and go past the houses parallel with the backs of our row, and then appear at the opposite end of the park, and come along our side; there was no intermediate turning—nothing but an unbroken row of about forty detached houses facing each other.

What could we do? I dared not wait until the policeman came back, quite twenty minutes must pass before then, and day being so near at hand the light was increasing every moment, and the burglars would surely not leave without visiting the drawing-room and dining-room, and would perhaps murder us, to save themselves from detection.

If I could only attract the policeman's attention—but how?

My sister was close to the door listening, and every instant we dreaded hearing them coming up the kitchen stairs. I could not understand Bogle not barking, and Joe not waking, for where I was I could distinctly hear the men moving about in the pantry and kitchen.

"I wonder," I said to my sister, "if I could put something across from this balcony to the stonework by the front steps? It seems such a little distance, and if I could step across, I could open the front gate in an instant and run after the policeman. I shall try."

"You will fall and kill yourself," my sister said; "the space is much wider than you think."

But I was determined to try, for if I let that policeman go out of sight, what horrors might happen in the twenty minutes before he would come back.

The idea of one of the girls waking and calling out, or Joe waking and being shot or stabbed, gave me a feeling of desperation, as though I alone could and must save them.

Luckily the house was splendidly built, every window-sash sliding noiselessly and easily in its groove. I opened the one nearest to the hall-door steps, and saw that the stone ledge abutted to within about two feet of the low balcony of the window; but I was too nervous to trust myself to spring across even that distance. At that moment my sister whispered:

"I hear somebody coming up the kitchen stairs!"

Desperately I cast my eyes round the room for something to bridge the open space that would bear my weight, if only for a moment. The fender-stool caught my eye, that might do, it was strong, and more than long enough. In an instant we had it across, and I was out of the window and down the front steps.

As I turned the handle of the heavy iron gate, I looked down at the front kitchen window. A man stood in the kitchen, and he looked up and saw me—such a horrible looking ruffian, too. Fear lent wings to my feet, and I flew up the road; the watchman was just entering the park from the opposite end, he saw me, and sounded his whistle; the policeman turned and ran towards me. I was too exhausted to speak, and he caught me, just as, having gasped "Thieves at 50!" (the number of our house), I fell forward in a dead swoon.

When I recovered, I was lying on my own bed, my sister, the scared servants, and the policeman, all around me. From them I heard that directly the man in the kitchen caught sight of me, he warned his companion, who was busy forcing the lock of the door at the head of the kitchen stairs, and my sister heard them both rushing across the garden, where they had a ladder against the stable-wall. They must have pulled this up after them, and tossed it into the next garden, where it was found, to delay pursuit. The park-keeper had, after sounding his whistle, rushed to our house, got in at the window, and ran to the door at the top of the kitchen stairs, but it was quite impossible to open it; the burglars had cleverly left something in the lock when disturbed, and the key would not turn. He then went through the drawing-room into the conservatory, where a glass door opened on the garden, but by the time the heavy sliding glass panel was unfastened, and the inner door unbolted, the men had disappeared; they took with them much less than they hoped to have done, for there were parcels and packets of spoons, forks, and a case of very handsome gold salt-cellars, a marriage gift, always kept in a baize-lined chest in the pantry, the key of which I retained, and which chest was supposed until now to be proof against burglars; the lock had been burnt all round with some instrument, most likely a poker heated in the gas, and then forced inwards from the burnt woodwork.

"How was it," I asked, "Joe did not wake during all this, or Bogle bark?"

As I asked the question, I noticed that my sister turned away, and Mrs. Wilson, after vainly endeavouring to look uncon-

cerned, threw her apron suddenly over her head, and burst out crying.

"What is the matter?" I said, sitting up; "what are you all hiding from me? Send Joe to me; I will learn the truth from him."

At this the policeman came forward, and then I heard that Joe was missing, his room was in great disorder, and one of his shoes, evidently dropped in his hurry, had been found in the garden, near some spoons thrown down by the thieves; his clothes were gone, so he evidently had dressed himself after pretending to go to bed as usual; his blankets and sheets were taken away, used no doubt, the policeman said, to wrap up the stolen things.

"Is it possible," I asked, "that you suspect Joe is in league with these burglars?"

"Well, mum," said the man, "it looks queer, and very like it. He slept downstairs close to the very door where they got in; he never gives no alarm, he must have been expecting something, or else why was he dressed? And how did his shoe come in the garden? And what's more to the point, if so be as he's innocent, where is he? These young rascals is that artful, you'd be surprised to know the dodges they're up to."

"But," I interrupted, "it is impossible. It is cruel to suspect him. He is gone, true enough, but I'm sure he will come back. Perhaps he ran after the man to try and catch them, and dropped his shoe then."

"That's not likely, mum," said he, with a pitying smile at my ignorance of circumstantial evidence; "he'd have called out to stop 'em, and it ain't likely they'd have let him get up their ladder, afore chucking of it into the next garden, if so be as he was a-chasing of 'em to get 'em took. No, marm; I'm very sorry, particular as you seem so kindly disposed; but, in my humble opinion, he's a artful young dodger, and this 'ere job has been planned ever so long, and he's connived at it, and has hooked it along with his pals. I knows 'em, but we'll soon nab him; and if so be as you'll be so kind as to let me take down in writin' all you knows about 'J. Cole,' which is his name, I'm informed—where you took him from, his character, and previous career, it will help considerable in laying hands on him; and when he's found we'll soon find his pals."

Of course, I told all I know about Joe. I felt positive he would come back, perhaps in a few minutes, to explain everything. Besides, there was Bogle, too. Why should he take Bogle? The policeman suggested that "perhaps the dawg foller'd him, and he had taken it along with him, to prevent being traced by its means."

At length, all this questioning being over, the household settled down into a sort of strange calm. It seemed to us days since we had said "Good night," and sought our rooms on that night, and yet it was only twenty-four hours ago; in that short time how much had taken place! On going over all the plate, etc., we missed many more things; and Mrs. Wilson, whose faith in Joe's honesty never wavered, began to think the poor boy might have been frightened at having slept through the robbery; and as he was so proud of having the plate used every day in his charge, when he discovered it had been stolen, he might have feared we should blame him so much for it, that he had run away home to his people in his fright, meaning to ask his father, or his adored Dick, to return to me and plead for him. I thought, too, this was possible, for I knew how terribly he would reproach himself for letting anything in his care be stolen. I therefore made up my mind to telegraph to his father at once; but not to alarm him, I said—

"Is Joe with you? Have reason to think he has gone home. Answer back."

The answer came some hours after, for in those small villages communication was difficult. The reply ran thus—

"We have not seen Joe; if he comes to-night will write at once. Hoping there is nothing wrong."

So that surmise was a mistake, for Joe had money, and would go by train if he went home, and be there in two hours.

All the household sat up nearly all that night, or rested uncomfortably on sofas and armchairs; we felt too unsettled to go to bed, though worn out with suspense, and the previous excitement and fright. Officials and detectives came and went during the evening, and looked about for traces of the robbers, and before night a description of the stolen things, and a most minute one of Joe, were posted outside the police-stations, and all round London for miles. A reward of twenty pounds was offered for Joe, and my heart ached to know there was a hue and cry after him like a common thief.

(To be continued.)