

BOYS AND GIRLS

The Education of Bones.

(Harriet Lummis, in 'Congregationalist'.)

It was the little teacher's first school and the first day of school. She was wearing her first long skirt, too, and had done her hair on the top of her head in the effort to make herself look old and dignified. But down in her heart she felt like a frightened little girl. Some of the older boys, Timothy for one, were taller than she, and when she looked in their direction she unconsciously put on her most severe expression, to make up for her lack of inches.

It was just half-past nine when the visitor came. The scholars were bending over their books, and the schoolroom hummed like a beehive. The little teacher was getting ready to put some work upon the board when the visitor pushed the door open, and came down the aisle with noiseless steps. Then he lay down by Timothy's desk.

The odd thing was that no one seemed to notice it. No one looked up nor laughed. The little teacher was so astonished that for a moment she could not find her voice. Then she said in her sternest tone, 'Timothy Goss, put that dog out.'

Instead of obeying, Timothy raised his hand as a sign that he wanted to speak. 'It's only Bones,' he explained, smilingly. 'Bones always comes to school. He behaves so well that the teachers don't mind and he likes it.' Timothy was going on with his explanation when the little teacher interrupted him by rapping on the desk.

'That will do, Timothy,' she said. 'I don't wish to have you answer me back. Put the dog out at once.'

Timothy rose to his feet in bewilderment, and then Bones, who seemed to understand that he was the subject of the conversation, without catching the exact drift, made things worse. He walked straight up to the teacher's desk, wagging his tail, as if to say, 'I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance, but I always liked the teachers, and they like me. Let's be friends.'

The little teacher did not understand dogs. She caught up the ruler with a frightened idea of using it to protect herself. 'Call him away,' she cried, her lips very white. In another moment she would have screamed, but Timothy spoke Bones's name, and Bones stopped short where he stood. Then he followed his master out of doors, while the school buzzed with indignation.

District Number Two School was proud of Bones. His record as a school-going dog had been talked of in every farmhouse within a dozen miles. He never missed a session, and not only was he a model of deportment, but he strongly disapproved of anything like inattention on the part of the scholars. If a slate was dropped, or a laugh broke the stillness of the study hour, a low growl from Bones reproved the offender. When a boy wandered off at recess and failed to hear the bell, Bones promptly hunted him up, and drove him back, just as he drove home the cows at sunset. In short, he was one of the features of the school, a sort of

teacher's assistant, and to have him turned out in this ignominious fashion, touched the pride of every scholar. But no one else could feel it as Timothy did.

Timothy was the good boy of the school. He was an orphan, and had less to love than some of the others, which may have been the reason why he cared so much for Bones. The two were friends, comrades and allies. They had been inseparable from the time Bones was a clumsy puppy, always tripping over his own paws. And now the teacher had turned Bones out of school and Timothy could hear him whining uneasily under the windows. When the teacher called him to put an example on the board, Timothy shook his head and the scholars whispered to one another. Timothy never failed in arithmetic.

This was the unfortunate beginning of the little teacher's first school, and as the days went by, things grew no better. Bones was no longer on hand to awe the refractory by his low, deep growl. Timothy was sulky, and the others missed the help of his good example. Day after day the inattention and lawlessness grew. The little teacher lost her color and her eyes had a worried look. How could she bear to go home and tell father and mother that she was a failure.

Two slow weeks dragged by, and at last it was Friday afternoon. The hands of the schoolhouse clock were pointing to four. The little teacher kept her voice steady till school was dismissed, and then she sat down and cried. She was to spend Saturday and Sunday with friends in the next village, and for these two days she meant to forget all about school worries. After she had refreshed herself by a good cry, she wiped her eyes and went cheerily to work sweeping up the schoolroom and setting things to rights. School District Number Two expected the teachers to act as janitors as well.

She carried her dust-pan and broom into the closet, hung them on the wall and then turned to go out, when a breeze swept through the open windows and closed the door. The little teacher laughed—her heart was light by now—and felt for the latch. The surface she touched was smooth. There was neither knob nor latch on that side. The little teacher was a prisoner.

It took her some minutes to realize what it meant. She was shut in the closet of that lonely schoolhouse, and it was Friday night. The people at her boarding-house would not expect her back. Her friends in the adjoining village would suppose that she had been prevented from making her visit. The schoolhouse stood back from the road, and it was unlikely that the few passers-by would hear her screams. They might not find her till the boys and girls came to school on Monday morning.

'Oh, what shall I do!' cried the poor little teacher. 'What shall I do!'

Then, though she knew that it was almost useless, she screamed until she was hoarse and out of breath. After that she crouched on the closet floor, sniveling and putting her hands over her face.

All at once her straining ears caught a sound in the schoolroom. Velvet feet came nearer and nearer, there was a sniffing at the crack of the door and then

a short, quick bark. 'Oh, Bones,' cried the little teacher. 'Dear old Bones!'

In the dark she held out her hands to him, crying for joy. And Bones evidently understood, for in a moment she heard him jump and catch the latch in his teeth. The door did not open, but the shaking and rattling of the latch were some comfort. That dreadful sense of being alone and forgotten no longer weighed her down. Bones was there.

For five minutes Bones jumped and growled and worried the latch, and then all at once there was the sound of scurrying feet across the schoolroom floor. 'Bones,' the little teacher called faintly. 'Oh, Bones, come back,' but no understanding bark answered her.

But though she was alone again, there was a tiny hope down in the little teacher's heart which kept her company. Somehow she could not believe that Bones had deserted her. In spite of herself she trusted him. He would come back. He must come back. But as the slow minutes passed, the hope grew fainter, and the old dread returned. If Bones had forgotten her, whom could she trust.

It seemed to the little teacher that she had been imprisoned for hours, when there was a lusty barking outside the schoolhouse door, and again Bones's padding footsteps made music in her ears, while behind him sounded the glad clatter of Timothy's boots. When the closet door opened, the little teacher tumbled out upon the floor in an undignified heap. Without a word she put her arms around Bones's neck, and that meant more to Timothy than any words of thanks she could have spoken to him.

While Timothy helped her finish cleaning the blackboards, he told her all about Bones, and his record for school attendance, and the little teacher was sorry that she had not listened to the explanation earlier, and Timothy was ashamed not to have made allowance for her not knowing that Bones was an uncommon dog. And both agreed that another time they would try their hardest to see things from the standpoint of others as well as their own.

On Monday morning when Timothy walked into school, a brindled dog followed at his heels, and lay down in the aisle. And when a little later Eb Cole shuffled his feet noisily, Bones looked up with a low growl that spoke volumes. Every boy and girl in the room realized that the time of disorder and inattention had passed, and went to work with a will. And until there is a new teacher in School District Number Two, there will be no further interference with the education of Bones.

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