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Bessie's Dream

L. M. Montgomery

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Bessie Hill was a very forgetful little girl. Her intentions were good and when she did do anything she did it carefully and painstakingly; but eight times out of ten she forgot all about it and it was not done at all unless mother or aunty reminded her of it many times.

One warm Saturday morning Bessie was swinging in the hammock under the big trees of the garden reading a very fascinating new story book which her Uncle Fred had given her on her birthday. Presently her mother came out and said:

“Bessie, I am going up to Aunt Ella’s to spend the day. Now, my dear, don’t forget to water your flowers and feed Dick and sew up that terrible rent in the sleeve of your muslin dress.”

“All right, mother,” promised Bessie, and she meant it. She also remembered that she must re-write her composition, which had to be handed in to the teacher early Monday morning. But she would just finish her chapter first; and that was the last Bessie thought about flowers or bird or dress or composition.

During the forenoon her dearest friend, Edna Longworth, dropped in and Bessie coaxed her to stay to lunch and spend the afternoon with her. They went for a walk and they swung in the hammock and had a “good old talk.” When Edna went home it was five o’clock and all Bessie’s duties remained undone.

She watched Edna out of sight from the windows of her room, leaning her head on the sill. How dreadfully warm it was! Where had she left her book? She must go . . . and get it . . . and finish . . . her . . . st-o-ry . . .

Why, where was she? Surely this wasn’t her room! She was in a big, gloomy apartment. Before her, at a desk, sat a grim looking personage who was certainly a man and yet bore such an odd resemblance to the old grandfather’s clock which stood on the stair landing at home that Bessie felt bewildered.

Behind him sat a row of people who grinned and winked at her and changed countenance with a rapidity that made her giddy, for now they all looked like the cups and saucers of grandmother’s china set and now like the series of water-colors in the hall at home and the next minute like a row of brooms, dustpans and dusters.

At the right of the clock-like personage sat another who was busy writing and who looked just like a scribbling book. Presently this clerk arose, bowed to the judge and jury, and said:

“May it please your lordship and gentlemen of the jury to proceed to the hearing of this case. The prisoner is now before you, charged with serious crimes and misdemeanors. The first witness to be examined is Richard Dandy. Richard Dandy, step forward.”

The next minute a fluffy yellow canary bird fluttered forward and perched on the

edge of the witness box.

“Oh, Dicky!” cried Bessie, suddenly remembering that she had forgotten to feed him all day. Then she paused in sheer amazement for Dick was talking in a faint, chirpy voice.

“I know the prisoner well. She is my mistress. She was told by her mother to be sure to feed me today but she forgot, as she very often does. All this long, hot day I have been in my cage without one bit of food or one drop of drink. As you can see, my strength is almost gone and I can with difficulty speak. My mistress has been guilty of great cruelty and if I had died of hunger my death would have been at her door.”

“Oh, Dicky, I’m sorry,” said Bessie with a little sob; but nobody paid any attention to her.

“You may step down, Richard Dandy. Call the next witness,” said the judge, in a voice that was as much like the ticking of the clock as anything could be.

“Tiger Lily,” called the clerk of the court, and a fierce looking fellow strode forward with a gorgeous mantle of orange and crimson flung over his shoulders.

“Your lordship and gentlemen of the jury. I am here to witness on behalf of all my kindred and friends in Bessie Hill’s garden. This morning she was told to water us but she did not do so. All this hot day we have drooped and wilted in a burning sun while the earth baked about our feet. Many of my friends fainted and some of them may be dead. We have all suffered terribly and that cruel girl is the cause of it.”

“Monday’s Composition,” called the clerk, and something walked into the witness box of so odd an appearance that Bessie would have laughed had not her terror prevented. It was tall and lank and white and all marked over with scratches and blots.

“Look at me,” said a dolorous voice, “and see if my appearance does not call for compassion. I am Bessie Hill’s composition and must be handed to her teacher on Monday morning. She ought to have re-written me, but she has not done so and I must go in this shocking state. Her teacher will write some biting criticism over me as if I did not already feel the disgrace of my position keenly enough. I will suffer for her fault. Gentlemen of the jury, I appeal to you for justice.”

“Oh dear, oh dear, I never thought compositions could feel,” wailed Bessie, but the composition, after one contemptuous glance in her direction, stalked out and its place was at once filled by her muslin dress with the long rip from elbow to wrist in the sleeve.

“Bessie was told to sew this rent up,” rustled the dress, “and she has not done so. Nobody knows what I have suffered in this mutilated condition. I have been like

this for a whole week. Just think of my feelings. Justice, my lord and jury, justice.”

“Oh, what are you going to do with me?” cried poor Bessie. “If you’d only give me another chance! I’ll sew you up right now if you’ll let me . . . indeed I will!”

“Silence in the court,” ticked the judge threateningly.

Then the jury held a consultation. Presently the foreman arose and announced that they had come to a decision.

“Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?” demanded the judge.

“Guilty,” said the foreman solemnly. He looked very like a teapot that had been broken in the Hill household the previous week because Bessie had forgotten to put it in its proper place.

“Elizabeth Hill,” said the judge gravely, “have you anything to say before sentence is passed on you?”

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” sobbed Bessie. “If you’ll only let me off this time I’ll never forget again . . . truly I never will. Please forgive me. I didn’t know compositions and dresses and things felt that way.”

“You knew that your canary bird had feelings and yet you left him to starve,” said the judge sternly. “This is your punishment. You shall be deprived of your food for a whole day as he was; you shall be left without water to drink for the same time as your flowers; you shall be mutilated like your composition; and finally you must wear that dress everywhere you go for the rest of the summer.”

What a terrible punishment! Bessie felt helpless. On every side she saw only angry, unsympathetic faces. She gave a pitiful little shriek as she saw the clerk of the court advancing towards her and then dingy room, stern faces, judge and jury vanished and there she was sitting by the window of her own room while the old clock was ticking majestically outside her door.

“Oh, it was only a dream,” cried Bessie, with a gasp of relief. “But how dreadful it was.”

She flew downstairs to the sitting-room where poor Dicky was twittering feebly in his cage. In a few minutes he was rejoicing over a plentiful supply of food and drink. Then the drooping flowers in the garden were liberally watered. The torn sleeve was next attended to and when Mrs. Hill came home Bessie was re-writing her composition.

When she had finished it she sat down by her mother’s side and told her the story of her funny dream.

“But it didn’t seem very funny to me at the time,” she concluded. “I never was so frightened in my life. How glad I was when I wakened up. Of course I know that dresses and compositions can’t really feel, but poor Dicky can and perhaps the

flowers, too, and I was a very cruel girl. Dear me, I can see that horrid old judge's face yet. When you find me forgetting any thing again, mother, just say 'dream' and that will be enough."

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Bessie's Dream* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]