

How Bobby
Got to the
Picnic

Lucy Maud Montgomery
1909

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How Bobby Got to the Picnic

L. M. Montgomery.

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Bobby was lying prone among the lush grasses behind the dairy, crying as if his heart would break. The maple trees over him were whispering softly, and sunbeams flickered down through their boughs to dance over Bobby's tow-colored hair and play bo-peep with each other; a robin perched on a bough and twittered an invitation to Bobby to cheer up; and a big, golden bee hummed in the air above him. But Bobby refused to be comforted.

Now, who was Bobby, and why was he crying behind the dairy on such a lovely, sunshiny summer morning, when everything in the world, boys, birds, and bees, ought to have been as happy as the sunshine?

Bobby had been Bobby, and nothing else, as long as he could remember. But a year ago he had come from the Orphans' Home to live with Mr. and Mrs. Johnson, and since then he had been called Bobby Johnson. He was about twelve years old, and he had been happy enough since he had come to the farm. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson meant to "do well" by the boy they had adopted; and certainly, as far as material comfort went, Bobby had nothing to complain of. But the Johnsons had never had any children of their own, and it was so long since they had been children themselves that they had forgotten what it was like. So Bobby would have been a rather lonely little fellow if there had not always been so many chores and errands to keep his hands and thoughts occupied.

Bobby should have been down in the orchard picking currants instead of crying behind the dairy. And after the currants there would be something else. Bobby was willing to work, but who could pick currants with big tears rolling down his face? He must cry out his dreadful disappointment first.

Another boy came whistling around the dairy presently and stopped in astonishment at the unusual sight of Bobby crying. The newcomer was about Bobby's age, but he was dressed in a very natty suit of clothes and wore a white collar and tie; his hair was carefully cut, and altogether he did not look like a Butternut Ridge boy.

"I say, Bob, what on earth is the matter?"

Bob twisted himself around until his disconsolate, freckled face, stained with tears, came into sight. He was past caring whether Frank Rexford or anybody else caught him crying. They might call him baby if they would; nothing mattered after his crushing disappointment.

"It's the Picnic," wailed Bob, contriving, even in the depths of his despair, to pronounce the word with a capital, "My clothes got b-b-urned up-p, and I can't go-o-o."

His head went down again and he gave such a big sob that it almost choked him.

Frank whistled again, and sat down on a convenient stump.

"Look here, Bob, crying isn't going to help matters any. Sit up straight and

tell me the whole business.”

Thus adjured, disconsolate Bobby sat up and dashed his fists across his eyes.

“You don’t know,” he sobbed. “You’ve been to dozens of picnics, and I’ve never been to a single one. And I did want to go to this one awful bad. All the boys of my class are going—and they’re going away up the river in the boat—and going to have swings and ice-cream—and fireworks at night—and a splendid time—and now I can’t go.”

Frank knew all about this picnic. He had come down to Butternut Ridge on the train the night before for the very purpose of attending it, because his Aunt Agnes, who lived next door to the Johnsons, and who was a power in the Sunday-school, had invited him. Frank had been spending a month with her in the earlier part of the summer, and this was how he came to know Bobby well. They had been “great chums.”

“What do you mean by saying your clothes were burned up?” he asked.

“My good clothes,” said Bobby, sorrowfully. “They were hanging up in the kitchen chamber closet, you know, along with Uncle Hezekiah’s good trousers and Aunt Mary’s Sunday dress—and the kitchen pipe goes right up through. This morning Aunt Mary smelled something queer and run up and opened the closet—and it was all full of smoke. The things had caught fire from the pipe. They had an awful time to get it put out—and when they did my clothes were all burnt into holes. They ain’t any more good at all—and I haven’t got anything fit to wear to the picnic.”

Bobby filled up again.

“It’s too bad, old chap,” said Frank, sympathetically; “but you ought to be thankful the house didn’t burn down.”

“And I am,” said Bobby, indignantly, “awful thankful. And I never let on to Aunt Mary how bad I felt. I just was bound I wouldn’t. But when she said at dinner time that I’d have to stay home from the picnic ’cause I hadn’t any clothes to wear I couldn’t stand it. ’Course I knew it before, but when I heard her say it—O, dear!”

“Well, I’m awful sorry, Bob,” said Frank, slowly. “If I’d any more clothes down with me, I’d lend them in a minute. But I haven’t, because I’m going right back the next day.”

“O, it’s just my luck,” said Bobby, drearily. “I’ve never been at a picnic in my life, and I’ve been thinking about this all summer and planning such a good time. And I was to carry the flag at the head of the procession, too. Miss Helen picked me ’cause, she said, I was so straight. And I never tasted ice-cream or saw skyrockets.”

Frank dug his heels uncomfortably into the ground.

“I’m sorry,” was all he seemed a to say. “I wish you could go, Bob, but

don't see how it could be managed."

"O, it can't. I know that well enough. If it could, do you s'pose I'd be here crying? No, sir, I'd be busy managing it. Well, I've got to go and pick the currants now."'

Frank walked home in a brown study. He was trying to fight down a sudden idea that had come to him. Picnics, as Bobby had said, were common things in his experience—he had been to four that summer already. But the Butternut Ridge picnic was always a tip-top affair—more fun than a dozen ordinary picnics put together. This one promised to be particularly good, and he had been thinking about it for a week, ever since Aunt Agnes sent him word that it was to take place. It was no use talking, he simply had to go. Of course, he was sorry for Bobby. But there would be another picnic next summer, and Bobby would get to that and forget all about this disappointment.

Frank thought he had settled the question, but some way it wouldn't stay settled. He was very silent and pre-occupied all the rest of the day. Over and over something kept saying to him:

"You have been going to picnics all your life, and Bobby has never been to one, and he never has any fun. You are a selfish boy, I'm afraid, Frank Rexford."

Aunt Agnes wondered what had come over her lively nephew. She had no boys of her own, and Frank was a particular pet of hers. At twilight she said to him; "Frank, you will turn brown for good if you keep on meditating much longer. Of what are you thinking so deeply?"

Frank stuck his hands in his pockets and looked out of the window.

"I've been trying to make up my mind to do something I don't want to do, Aunt Agnes," he said slowly; "but I think I ought to do it. I wouldn't mind staying in bed all day so much, but I'd hate to miss the picnic."

"Stay in bed! Frank, what on earth do you mean?" exclaimed his aunt in bewilderment.

Thereupon Frank explained matters, and they had a long talk. It ended with Aunt Agnes saying gently: "Well, do just as you like about it, Frank. I shan't object."

The picnickers were all to meet at the wharf the next morning at 10 o'clock, and at 9 a very disconsolate Bobby was feeding the pigs, pouring great milky streams into the troughs under the apple trees and trying with all his might and main to forget what a glorious day it was for a picnic. Suddenly Frank dashed around the corner, caught Bobby by the shoulder, and whirled him about.

"Bobby Johnson, do you know what you are going to do to-day? You are going to the picnic. I'm going to lend you my clothes. They'll fit you all right. You are to come right over to Aunt Agnes's now and get them on. Hurry up,

too; you won't have any too much time to get dressed and get down to the wharf by 10 o'clock."

"But what will you do, Frank? Have you another suit?"

"O, I'm not going after all—changed my mind since last night. Bobby Johnson, why don't you hurry?"

"O, I won't go," cried Bobby, as the nature of Frank's sacrifice dawned on him. "You are going to give me your clothes and stay home yourself. O, I'm not so mean as that, Frank."

"Look here, Bob, be sensible. Why, I've been to four picnics this summer already. If you won't go to this one I won't, either—that's flat. You have just *got* to go."

After a little more argument and persuasion Bobby yielded, tipped the last foaming bucket over the fence, got Mrs. Johnson's permission, and hurried off with Frank in a high state of excitement. Frank's trim suit fitted Bobby admirably, and Frank did not have to go to bed after all, for Aunt Agnes had found in the garret an old discarded suit of his, left there after a vacation two years ago. It was badly torn and faded and very tight, but it served the purpose, and Frank stood at the door and watched Bobby and Aunt Agnes drive away with a much lighter heart than he had expected. After all, he didn't mind missing the picnic very much; Bobby was so happy.

Frank found the day a pretty long and lonely one. But he read a sea story Aunt Agnes had given him, and ate the lovely lunch she had left, and in the afternoon he took a long nap. And so the day wore away, and at last Aunt Agnes came home.

"Well, Frank, here we are back. Have you been lonely?"

"No, Aunt, really not much at all, only since it got dark. Where's Bob?"

"He is coming up with the other boys. Frank, if you could have seen that child today, you would have felt more than repaid for staying home. I really never saw any one look so happy. I am sure he enjoyed every minute of the time, and he was so careful of your clothes. But he will tell you all about it himself."

Presently Bobby came running breathlessly in, and as he got out of Frank's clothes and into his own patched ones, he gave an animated account of the picnic.

"O, Frank, it was just splendid. At first I felt bad about your staying home, and thought I oughtn't to have let you. But after a while I just couldn't think of anything but what was going on. We had a splendid sail, and when we got up to the island we landed and had lovely games, and the procession and all—and I carried the flag. And when it got dark we had the fireworks—O, my! And then we came home. Frank, I'm just awful much obliged to you."

"That's all right," said Frank, cheerily. "I'm glad you had such a good

time, Bobby.”

When tired, happy Bobby had gone home across the dewy fields, Frank turned to his aunt and said:

“I’m so glad I did it. Aunt Agnes. If I hadn’t, I’d have been the meanest feeling boy in Butternut Ridge to-night; and as it is, I’m the happiest.”

Aunt Agnes smiled and patted Frank’s shoulder tenderly.

“Picnics by proxy are not bad things sometimes, are they, Frank? I dare say you are the happiest boy in Butternut Ridge to-night, because you have been kind and unselfish; but I am sure Bobby thinks he is. He has had the desire of his heart. I wish you could have seen his eyes shining at the picnic, Frank.”

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *How Bobby Got to the Picnic* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]