

WHERE BOBBY WENT



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BOBBY was generally a very good boy, but there were times when he was apt to be cross and fretful. This particular morning was one of them.

He had quite worn out the patience of the family, and, at last, his mother had told him to run away, and not come back to her until he felt better natured.

He accordingly, for want of a better place, went to the summer house, and curled himself up comfortably on one of the broad, low seats.

It was a very warm day, and that was one reason for Bobby's ill-temper.

At the end of the garden, not far from the summer house, was a noisy little brook, which ran from morning until night, and in the summer usually ran away, leaving the muddy bed behind.

Bobby lay for some time lazily looking at the place where the brook should have been, with his hands clasped under his head.

The day seemed to grow warmer, the flies buzzed, the wasps tumbled about, and the bees went booming through the clover.

It would be difficult to say how long he remained in that position. Suddenly he noticed a strange-looking hole in the centre of the brook's bed. It was very big and round, and looked as if some large object had been forced out of it from below. It was strange he had never noticed it before.

"Perhaps it hasn't always been there," he thought. "It's dreadfully hot! But I must go and take a look at it."

Bobby's curiosity always overcame his laziness. He went slowly down toward the brook. When he reached the place he found plenty of soft mud, into which he splashed, never thinking of his boots.

As he drew nearer the hole, he tried to run, but running ankle-deep in mud is by no means easy—as he found, for just as he reached the edge of this strange opening he fell.

Down, down, he went! It seemed as though he would never stop. Too much frightened to think, he could only shut his eyes and continue to fall.

It is impossible to tell why he should shut his eyes. It certainly was dark enough.

He stopped at last, and for one-half second lay perfectly still. He never could, under ordinary circumstances, keep still half as long; but this was a very extraordinary circumstance, as he found, when he opened his eyes.

He was lying on a large body of water, while at a little distance he saw bright green grass and what appeared to be ground.

It certainly was water he was on, for he could see the waves roll, and yet it felt as hard and firm as the paths in his father's garden.

"This is queer!" he exclaimed, aloud. He always talked to himself when there was no one else to speak to.

"Perhaps I had better stand up."

He rose cautiously to his feet, and found himself in no wise injured by his fall.

"It is queer," he said again. "Walking on water! Well, I declare!"—which was not very clever, but it was all that he could think of at that moment.

"I believe I will walk on, and see where I come to," was his next remark; and he started along the water as though it were firm earth.

It was a little odd he did not feel frightened at finding himself in so strange a place. Possibly he was too much astonished.

The moon appeared to be shining brightly. Bobby looked up, and there it was, sure enough—only it was square instead of round. Every once in awhile he would come to spots of grass or bare ground, but the idea of walking over the rolling waves was so novel to him that he did not attempt to leave the water.

At last he came to a large patch of green grass, with a pool of water glistening in the centre. Quite near the edge of the grass sat six boys, all crying bitterly.

This surprised Bobby, and the idea of seeing six boys all crying at once was so absurd he laughed aloud.

Hearing this, they all stopped and looked hastily up. One of their number, a tall boy, with a very pleasant face, jumped to his feet and came quickly toward him, running backward.

"What is the matter?" he asked, as he reached Bobby. "Are you hurt?"

"Hurt?" said Bobby, rather surprised.

"No!"

"Then why do you laugh?"

"You all looked so queer, sitting there crying, I had to laugh."

"Rather a strange thing to laugh at!" returned the boy.

Bobby thought it was now his turn to ask a few questions.

"What are you all doing there?" was the first.

"Playing tag."

"But why were you crying?"

"Why, because we were having such a jolly time. One always cries when one is jolly."

Bobby was too much bewildered to make any comment upon this astounding piece of information. He looked at the five other boys, still sitting on the water.

"Why don't they play?" he asked. "Are they waiting for you?"

"They are playing."

Bobby rubbed his eyes, and then stared hard at the others.

"They are all sitting still," he said.

"That is the way to play tag. All sit still, and the one who gets up first is 'it.'"

And the strange boy looked as though he thought Bobby did not know much.

"What?" was all Bobby could say.

"Of course!" said the other. "It is a nice game. Don't you like it?"

Bobby had his own ideas about a game where every one sat still.

All this while the stranger had been studying Bobby attentively, and the fact became clear to his mind that he was different in many ways from most boys. He wore his collar buttoned under his chin, instead of at the back of his neck, and his clothes were likewise all buttoned down the front.

"I should like to know where you came from," he said, at last.

"I came through the hole in the ground," replied Bobby, promptly.

At this the strange boy burst into tears and shouted:

"Boys, boys, come quick!"

The five boys jumped up and came running backward over the water.

"Here is a boy who says he came through the hole in the ground, as he calls it."

At this they all jumped about him, crying and shouting:

"Oh, how nice! Isn't it funny?"

Bobby could not help laughing again.

"Don't laugh," said one, soothingly. "We won't hurt you."

This only made him laugh the louder.

It was so strange to be standing there in the moonlight, with six boys about him, all crying, while some way off he could hear a bell ringing.

"What is that?" he asked.

"The school-bell," was the answer, from a boy who stood near, adding, with a look of pleasure, "It will stop soon."

"Hurry, you better hurry, then?" suggested Bobby, who had a wholesome terror of arriving after the bell had done ringing.

"What for? 'Tain't time," was the reply, quite as ungrammatical as Bobby himself could have delivered it.

"Not time, when the bell is ringing?"

He was more than surprised.

"Of course not; it rings when it isn't time, and stops when it is."

"Well, I declare!" said Bobby, for the second time that day.

"There, now it has stopped," said another, "and we must run or we shall be late. Would you like to come with us?" he asked, politely.

Bobby accepted the invitation, and a boy catching him by each hand started to pull him backward, as they ran themselves.

Poor Bobby, unused to this manner of walking, stumbled and fell upon the ground. Jumping quickly to his feet, he begged to be allowed to go his own way. And now it was their turn to be surprised, for Master Bobby started to leave the water and walk directly on to the grass.

"Take care!" they shouted, in alarm. "You will be drowned."

And one seizing him by the arm dragged him back.

They had not spoken a moment too soon, for his right leg had sunk down over his knee in the grass, and was unpleasantly wet when he drew it out.

"Never mind," they cried. "Come along; there goes the bell again—hurry up!"

And they all ran toward a little red school-house not far from where they were.

Bobby could see, through the half-open door, several boys inside studying hard, and not one looked up from his book as they came in.

"Who is this?" asked the master, catching sight of Bobby.

"He came through the hole in the ground!"

shouted all the boys at once, pushing him forward.

Such a queer-looking person as the schoolmaster was! His clothes all buttoned at his back, and a pair of glasses on the back of his head.

"Wonderful, wonderful!" he said, taking the glasses off in order to see Bobby better.

"Then the doctor is right—there are people living up there, after all!"

He then proceeded to explain to Bobby why his arrival among them had created so much excitement.

It seems that there lived in this strange place a learned man, who, like many another, had plenty of ideas and theories about what was going on over his head. He had studied the firmament from his youth up, and believed if he could only get above it, he would find many new and wonderful things.

He had at last succeeded, how, cannot be told, in making a great hole over head, and while he and his followers were vainly racking their brains for a means of ascent Bobby most fortunately tumbled down to them.

The schoolmaster was, of course, delighted with this proof of the doctor's theories, and would like to have taken Bobby at once to his friend; but when anything unusual took place, he always treated the boys to two more hours of school.

Bobby, therefore, was given a seat, and a nice new Greek grammar to amuse himself with, until the master could attend to him.

The school-room was very quiet; not a boy was idle. Bobby tried to attract the attention of one or two; but in vain—they would only look at their books.

As no one would speak to him, he sat and tried to make it all out, but he could come to no very definite conclusion, except that he was in a very queer place, where everything seemed to be exactly opposite to the way he had been accustomed to having it.

"I suppose that is why the moon shines during the day," he thought, "and why it is square instead of round; it gets squeezed coming through."

But he did not have time to decide how it became round again, for just then it was time for recess, and a very strange thing happened.

The boys did not want to go out to play; the teacher begged and prayed them to go. At last he succeeded in getting them out, although they went very unwillingly.

Once outside, they showed themselves to be much like other boys, by crowding about Bobby and asking him many questions about himself and the manner of living in the upper world.

"Do you ever have holidays there?" asked one. "Don't you hate them?"

Before he had time to answer another exclaimed:

"Oh, sometimes they are nice! On cold, moony days the teacher rows us over to the island there"—pointing to the pool of water in the centre of the patch of grass—"and we spend the whole day in learning verbs and studying arithmetic."

"That is fun!" said a third, enthusiastically.

Just then the bell, which had been ringing all the time, stopped, and the scholars rushed eagerly back into school.

Again the studying and reciting went on, the school-bell ringing all the time. Bobby wondered how it was kept going; but no boy was inattentive enough to be asked, so he was obliged to be content with wondering.

School was over at last, and the teacher, having persuaded the boys to go home, started off with Bobby, talking pleasantly all the way.

Master Bobby greatly enjoyed feeling himself of so much importance. Being encouraged to talk was something quite new to him.

He had by this time become so well accustomed to the strangeness of things that he showed no surprise whatever, when, on reaching the house, they went in at the side door:

He was, however, scarcely prepared to hear the schoolmaster say, as he laid aside his hat:

"Dinner does not appear to be ready. I suppose they have not finished eating."

"Who?" asked Bobby, never very slow with his questions.

"My servants—they always eat first, you know."

Bobby did not know, but, having nothing to say, kept quiet, which was rather a good idea.

Presently the dinner came. But here was a fresh surprise:

First appeared a huge, smoking plum pudding. Quite a large slice had been cut from it, but there was plenty left.

"Ah!" said the master. "It is lucky you came on an ordinary day, because we have a good dinner. If you had happened here on a feast day you would have fared badly."

"How nice that pudding looks!" was Bobby's reply.

"Do you like it? Boys seldom do. Don't eat too much, or you will have no appetite for the meat and vegetables. I hope they have not eaten them all. That often happens when they are particularly good."

Bobby made haste to seat himself at the table. The schoolmaster placed a generous slice of pudding on his plate. Just as he was preparing to put a much larger piece in his mouth than he would if he had been sitting beside his mother, the schoolmaster put out his hand, seized him by the collar and began shaking him violently.

It was such a surprise. Never in his life had he been so shaken. The room seemed to turn round; his teeth clattered together; the table, plate, schoolmaster and pudding all disappeared. For the second time that day he shut his eyes. When he opened them he was lying on the seat on the summer house, with his aunt standing over him.

"Bobby! Bobby! get up!" she said. "I have been calling and looking for you everywhere. You must have been asleep."

Bobby rose, but said nothing. He thought a great deal, however, and arrived at two conclusions—one that he had not been asleep, and the other that he would pay another visit to that strange country at his earliest opportunity.

That afternoon it rained, and continued doing so all the next day. The day after Bobby went to visit his grandmother, and when he came back the brook was at home again. By the next summer he had forgotten all about it.