



He had the two inside the station house so expeditiously that no one but the two boys took the least notice.
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LORD BOUNTIFUL

BY

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Feast of St. Joseph



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A.M.D.G.

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LORD BOUNTIFUL

CHAPTER I

AN INTERRUPTED SWIM

“OH! THERE he is again. I wonder whether he is coming to see *me!*”

The young miss who thus exclaimed, sprang away from the third floor window, out of which she had been leaning for fully a quarter of an hour, hastened to a small looking-glass, gave a dab to her bobbed hair, slipped into her ears a pair of long earrings, ran a lip-stick over her lips, pinched her cheeks into an added redness, fastened a brooch upon her collar, and, as she dashed down the stairs, powdered her nose—all in less time than it takes me to set it down on paper.

The cause of this commotion was the appearance on Baum Street of an uncommonly cheerful young man who appeared to be about twenty-four years of age. He was over six feet in height, carried himself with an erectness which gave him the air of a soldier, moved with the ease of a gymnast, and smiled in a way that won him the hearts of children on sight. As a matter of fact, several groups of little ones engaged in different games dissolved on his appearance,

and with various cries of joy and welcome reunited about him.

"Hurrah!" cried a small boy, "here comes Lord Bountiful again."

Lord Bountiful shook hands with each and every one of them — and there were fully thirty on hand — and, to the delight of the youngsters, called most of them by their first names. Within three months he had appeared on Baum Street three separate times, leaving after each visit a host of friends. On the first occasion, he won the children's hearts by his engaging smile and his kind questions; on the second, he had bought cones of ice-cream for all present; on the third, about one month before, he had regaled his ardent followers with chocolate caramels. He was none the less loved that he was unknown. He was something of a mystery, and mystery appeals to the childish heart. No one had the least idea of his occupation, his residence or his name. He never spoke of himself; in fact, he had little opportunity to do so; for each child opened his little heart with enthusiasm to this kind and sympathetic friend. It was Joe Dowling, aged twelve, who had fixed upon him the name of Lord Bountiful.

The young girl, Marie Dowling, who had now reached the pavement, did not take part in the juvenile rush. She walked primly past the struggling boys and girls, nearly all of whom were anxious to catch Lord Bountiful's hands or coat, and threw at him what, from some considerable study at various mirrors, she considered a bewitching glance; but as Lord Bountiful, at that moment, was tossing a crowing two-year-

old infant high in air, the fatal dart failed to reach him. Marie Dowling, sister of Joe, having missed her mark, paused, repowdered her little nose, retraced her steps and, as she passed the center of attraction, turned her head and shot him a backward glance in the best manner of her present heroine of the screen, Bebe Daniels. Another flower wasted on the desert air. Lord Bountiful was holding two cherubs aloft, with three enterprising youngsters climbing his back.

Marie, nothing daunted, turned once more, and, standing where she turned, fixed her gaze upon the young man, ready, once she caught his eye, to transfix him with a baby stare illuminated by a fetching smile. But this was not to be. In the group was a younger sister of hers, Julia, a girl of fourteen, who, just then happening to notice that Marie was setting herself to do something stagey, artlessly put a stop to further posing.

"Say, Marie," she drawled in a clear voice, "where did you get those earrings? They are sister Peggy's, and you know she said—"

What sister Peggy said will never pass into history; for Marie, forgetting Bebe Daniels and baby stares, rushed at Julia and catching her by the arm was about to give the struggling child a good shake spiced with a piece of her mind, when Lord Bountiful in his rich voice said, "Why, if it isn't my old friend, Marie Dowling!" At which words, Marie's hand, raised to inflict condign chastisement upon Julia, suddenly lost speed and force and settled butterfly-like and caressingly upon Julia's curls, while her cheeks

colored into a vivid red, and her clear blue eyes danced in a sweet accompaniment to the tune of a smile which, being unstudied, was really beautiful. Marie, it is true, was a flapper; but still, youth and innocence had not utterly vanished. Also, it must be confessed, she was sensitive to attention. She was deeply in love with love.

Julia, who had braced herself for a blow and a scolding, was very much astonished indeed, as Marie, caressing her younger sister's hair with one hand and entwining her waist with the other, acknowledged the greeting with, "Oh, Lord Bountiful, I'm so glad you've come back."

"It is a real pleasure to see you again," cried the beaming Lord Bountiful, gently depositing the two infants upon the ground and extending the hand of welcome. And Marie, reacting to this love and kindness and forgetting Bebe Daniels and all the "Movie Queens," and the little airs and devices of a flapperhood hardly two months old, rushed forward with dancing eyes, eyes shining with love, and almost threw herself into his arms. Marie, for the moment, was a little child once more.

"And where is your brother Joe?" asked Lord Bountiful, holding Marie's hands in his own.

Marie was about to reply, when a shout and a yell startled all, and drew their eyes toward the lower end of Baum Street, which sloped sharply down in the direction of the Ohio River.

"Gee! There's trouble!" said a small boy.

Up the hill, in various stages of undress, toiled pantingly six boys. Their hair was wet, their shirts unbuttoned, three were carrying their shoes under their arms, two were holding their

clothes to keep them from falling off; while one was waving wildly a shirt, which evidently he had had no time to put on.

"Aha!" said Lord Bountiful, "they've been disturbed at their swimming. But halloa! what's this?" he continued, breaking into a grin. As he thus ejaculated, the little crowd about him broke into a chorus of thrilled yells and screams; for suddenly, some thirty yards behind the last of the runners, there came into view a youth whose simple apparel consisted exclusively of a gunny-sack, slit sufficiently to allow his head through, and short enough to display quite liberally a pair of rapidly moving legs.

"Cheese it! The cops!" panted the boy who was leading the retreat.

There were no bad consciences in the attentive crowd. No one sought shelter. Lord Bountiful now stepped forward and took command.

"Get together, children, all of you. Make a close crowd. Girls behind. Boys in front. Here, Marie, rush out a pitcher of water quick. Boys, unbutton your shirts."

Lord Bountiful now had the air of an army officer. At his word the crowd formed, the boys unbuttoned their shirts, a few, catching the idea, pulling them off, while Marie, reaching through an open window on the ground floor of the house in the third story of which she herself lived, brought out a pitcher filled almost to the brim. Lord Bountiful, relaxing to reward her with a smile, which set the girl's heart into a mild rapture, took it from her hands, and at once doused the heads of all the boys.

"Do this," he enjoined them. He puffed rapidly, his mouth open.

The boys of Baum Street understood. What a jolly idea! They puffed, they panted, they gasped. One would think they had each and every one been running in a Marathon. Returning the pitcher to Marie, who promptly put it back through the window, Lord Bountiful stepped in front of the panting youths just in time to arrest in his course the leading runner.

"Get into line with that crowd," he commanded. As this order was supplemented by a strong grasp which swung the astonished youth over to the panting boys, there was no chance for argument. In a few moments, Lord Bountiful, not without pride, was gazing upon a line of boys, all open-breasted, many without their outer shirts, several holding their shoes and stockings in their hands, and all panting as though their hearts were pounding within.

Every one of the hunted lads was now provided for, so Lord Bountiful reckoned, except the young gentleman whose person was adorned by the gunny-sack. He was now quite near. One could hear his choked breathing. He was a boy of about twelve, freckled, brown-eyed, chubby-nosed, and, at this moment, open-mouthed and highly excited.

"Why, it's Joe Dowling!" cried several. There was the note of scandal in their voices.

"Oh, won't he get it!" said Marie to a companion. "He promised Mother this morning not to go swimming in the river." Having made this observation, Marie bent a look of inquiry on Lord Bountiful.

Just then a low murmur passed through the crowd.

"There's the cop," whispered one.

"Aw, shucks! Can you beat it?" put in another. "It's Killjoy."

"Killjoy!" moaned the crowd with sinking hearts. The panting on the part of a few became real.

"Killjoy" was a title bestowed by the appreciative youth of that section upon Officer Smith. He did not understand children. If any article in the policeman's Manual gave him the guise of authority, he was prompt to stop their games and sports. He seemed to have an idea that merriment and hilarity were in fact, or constructively, against the laws of city, county, state and country. Officer Smith, be it noted, was in no wise a representative of the Cincinnati police force. In the opinion of the best youthful judges, he should have been keeper of a morgue or nurse in a pesthouse. And now there he was, running up the hill. Killjoy was rather portly. His days of sprinting were apparently over. Nevertheless, up the hill he lumbered with a devotion worthy of a better cause.

"Be ready, girls," whispered Lord Bountiful, having first by an uplifted finger demanded and secured perfect quiet and attention, "to slip Joe Dowling behind you. If you're not careful, the policeman will catch him. In you go, Joe," he continued, as the gunny-sacked youth came within his reach.

One girl of about twelve, in the back row nearest the window so convenient to the water-pitcher, having received some whispered instruc-

tions from Marie, slipped away, giving place to Joe Dowling, who, strange to say, once his hand touched Lord Bountiful's, seemed to regain courage and wind.

The scene was now set. Twenty boys with excessively solemn faces, and with an exhibition of teeth that would have been intensely interesting to a young dentist, panted and gurgled as though they were in the last stages of exhaustion. A good priest, had he been present, would have been edified by the display of medals, scapulars and badges of the Sacred Heart.

Looking upon all this not without conscious pride, Lord Bountiful whispered:

"Fine work! Just keep it up till I tell you to stop. Now, girls, keep your positions."

There were a few moments of waiting, all eyes meantime turned on the guardian of the law. In two respects, this official surpassed the boys. He was really out of breath, far more than the most winded of these, and he was stertorous in his expression of this condition.

"Good afternoon, officer," said Lord Bountiful with a vast smile, in answer to which the officer panted at him, and, attempting to close his mouth, began to choke. Thinking better of it, he opened his mouth once more, and, turning, panted at all the lines of children.

Young people, as everybody knows, are much given to imitation. Little Rosamond Egan, much impressed by the efforts of the boys, opened her fair mouth and panted, too. Her little neighbors followed her lead. In a moment every mouth was opened, and the policeman found himself gazing upon a sight seldom

granted to men of his uniform. The only person on the immediate scene who breathed regularly and held his lips together was Lord Bountiful. And so, for a period of at least sixty seconds, the policeman panted at the children; the children panted at the representative of the law.

The situation had become comic, so it seemed to Mr. Patrick McKane, who from a window across the street had been gazing on the group, in which there happened to be five of his eight children. Patrick had a laugh which, in its way, was as good as Lord Bountiful's smile. It rang out just now, clear and joyous. And then from a hundred windows—by this time crowded with spectators—came a chorus of cachinnations. The effect upon the officer was almost instantaneous. He closed his mouth, turning purple in the act, raised his head, and glared at the children, who, eyeing him sadly, panted with fresh vigor.

"Let those of you who were swimming behind that house-boat with little or nothing on, step out," he gasped.

"Pick them out yourself, Officer," suggested Lord Bountiful. "Anyhow, weren't they swimming where no one could see them?"

"It's again' the law," protested the officer.

"Against the letter, yes," conceded the Lord, "but not against the spirit. I've seen that house-boat, and I know where these boys swim. Oh, have a heart."

"Sure, I have a heart," answered the policeman, putting a large hand to that portion of his anatomy where, somewhat incorrectly, he fancied that organ to be.

Hereupon a bright little girl giggled. Other bright girls followed her example and, before you could say Jack Robinson, everybody broke into a burst of giggles as musical as the Chimes of Normandy.

Lord Bountiful raised a warning finger. That gesture was enough. With a suddenness that was startling, every mouth opened again and the panting pantomime was functioning once more.

"Well," said the officer, after a pause, "I'll let everybody go except that little imp who ran three squares with nothing on, and then stole a gunny-sack from a Commission store and cut an opening in it with his teeth for his head. He's a thief."

"Hold on, Officer," remonstrated Lord Bountiful, trying to stay him from pushing into the rows of girls. "The boy is no thief: He's a sense of decency. I'll pay you for that—"

He did not finish his sentence; for the officer rudely brushing past him made his way straight for the place where he had seen Joe Dowling hide himself. The girls stood aside with an alacrity which, to a cooler man than Killjoy, might have aroused suspicion.

There was no one clad in a gunny-sack to be seen—nothing but panting girls.

The policeman scratched his head. What had become of the boy in the gunny-sack? He could not have climbed into the window without being seen. It was a mystery.

"Oh, let it go at that!" cried Lord Bountiful, slipping a silver dollar into the other's hand. "Here, Officer, take a cigar, and here's a quarter for the Commission house."

"He's the meanest man on the force," whispered one of the real bathers to his neighbors. "He's down on boys. They say that Mike Mullen is going to get him off this beat."

The boy was right. Officer Smith, when last heard of, and before he disappeared into a fitting obscurity, was patrolling a beat where children were as rare as December roses.

The feel of the silver piece had a salutary effect upon Smith. He relaxed into something that looked like a smile, touched his hat, and, frowning at the children, hastened down the street.

"Mouths closed!" ordered Lord Bountiful. "Regular respiration. Good! Well, what in the world became of Joe Dowling?"

Out from the crowd tripped a lass with beautiful chestnut curls, large gray eyes, who was in a white dress trimmed with blue and encircled by a blue sash. She was the loveliest girl present. Lord Bountiful started, on seeing her.

"Say, Lady Jane," he exclaimed, as the child caught his hand, "I'm good at faces, but I can't remember yours."

"Please, sir," said the sweet child, "I'm Joe Dowling," saying which, she pulled off the wig, and was himself again.