

A Little Boy's Mother

I was living in the Smoky Mountains in Carolina. It was autumn. I needed quiet to be away from people. My mind was troubled and the mountain air helped me write better. I also wanted to see the red autumn leaves, the pumpkins¹⁾ and to feel the excitement of living free and alone. I found them all in a small house which belongs to the Children's Home. The house is cut off from the village below and from the world by deep mountain snows. The heavy fog that surrounds the Smoky Mountains hides the house from the eyes of the people.

When I moved into the house, I asked the lady at the Children's Home to send a boy to cut wood for the fireplace. About a week later, I looked up from my writing a little surprised. There, in front of me, was a small boy. My dog, Pat, had not barked²⁾ to warn me. The boy wore old torn pants³⁾ and a shirt worn thin from too many washings. He wore no shoes on his feet. "I can cut some wood today," he said.

"But I have a boy coming from the Children's Home."

"I am the boy."

"You? But you're so small."

"I can carry milk to the Baby's House, ma'am. Some days I carry it two times."

"In this bitter wind⁴⁾?"

"Yes, ma'am, stiff fingers don't feel bad once you get used to them. We get our faces bitten by the cold wind because we can't put our hands over them. But I have gloves. Some of the boys don't have any gloves."

"But cutting wood is a man's job."

He smiled at me, "I know all kinds of wood, ma'am, I've been cutting wood at the Children's Home for a long time."

"Very well, there's the ax⁵⁾. Go ahead and try cutting and see what you can do."

I began to work again. The first sounds of the ax cutting through the wood, interfered with my thoughts. But soon the steady chop, chop, stopped troubling me. I settled down and wrote for the rest of the afternoon. The sun was slowly dropping behind the cold, purple mountains when I heard the boy's footsteps coming toward my door.

"I have to go eat now. I can come again tomorrow afternoon."

"I'll pay you for what you've done."

We went together to see his work. Next to the house was a lot of cleanly-cut wood.

"But you have cut as much as a man. This is a wonderful pile of wood." I gave him some money. "You may come again tomorrow and thank you very much." He looked at me and then at the money. He seemed as if he wanted to talk. But he could not. He turned away but over his thin shoulder he shouted back to me, "I'll cut some small pieces tomorrow. You'll need small thin pieces and middle size pieces and some heavier ones."

He came again the next day and worked until it was time to leave. His name was Jerry. He was 12 years old and had been at Children's Home since he was only four. I thought of him as he must have looked when he was four years old. The same strong gray eyes with the small ring of blue around them, the same integrity⁶⁾ and courage. Integrity is honesty. But it is more than just being honest. For example, the handle

of the ax broke one day. Jerry said the Children's Home would repair it, I handed him some money to pay for it. He wouldn't take the money.

"I'll pay for it, ma'am. I broke it. I didn't hit the wood in the right place. "

"But Jerry, no one hits the wood in the right place all the time. It was a weak handle. I'll speak to the man who sold it to me. " It was only then that he would take the money.

Another thing about Jerry that was special is that he would do those little, helpful things that are not necessary but make life so much easier, things only the heart can do, things that can not be trained or taught, for they are done quickly and without thought. He found a hole near the fireplace that I had not seen. "I'll place some wood in the hole, ma'am. Then when a sudden storm comes up, you can stay warm. " Or the day he found a loose stone in the walking place outside. "Let me place a bigger stone there. I'll dig the hole deeper so it won't come loose again. "

The days passed. And Jerry and my dog, Pat, became close friends. Perhaps it was because a boy and a dog have a common spirit, a wisdom that is closer than a grown person and a dog.

One cold day, Jerry sat close by me near the fire. The dog lay close to him. We watched the fire burn. Jerry suddenly talked of something he had never talked of before. "You look like my mother, especially next to the fire. "

"But you were only four, Jerry, when you came to live at the Children's Home. Do you still remember your mother? " He nodded his head yes. "My mother lives near Manville. " Learning he had a mother surprised me. I also felt anger against her. How could she abandon⁷⁾ such a nice boy? The Children's Home was nice. The people there were kind and the boys were healthy. But what sort of a person was his mother? Jerry must have looked as nice then as he does now. His fine qualities have always been there. Any person could see them. My heart filled with questions I dared not ask. I was afraid I would cause him pain, so I talked to him carefully, "Have you seen your mother lately? "

"I see her every summer. She sends for me. "

I wanted to cry aloud. Why are you here? Why aren't you with her? How can she let you go away again?

But I said nothing.

Jerry talked with happiness in his heart. "She comes for me from Manville whenever she can. She isn't working right now. She wanted to give me a dog but they say a boy can't have a dog at the Home. She sent me a Sunday suit. And last Christmas, she sent me a bicycle. I let the other boys play with the bicycle when they promise to be careful with it. "

My mind was busy trying to understand his mother. She had not completely forgotten him. But why didn't she take him back home? What was the reason other than being poor? Jerry, still sounding happy, talked in a very soft voice, "I'm going to take the dollar you gave me and buy her a pair of gloves, white gloves. She likes white gloves. "

I could say nothing except, "That will be nice, " for I hated her. There was other food than bread, food for the soul and for the heart that only a mother can give. He was going to buy gloves for his mother while she lived in Manville away from him. I decided I would not leave the mountains until I talked with her to I earn why she had placed him in a Children's

Home. But the human mind finds many things to think about. Every wind seems to blow new and different thoughts into it. I finished my work, but it did not please me. My thoughts turned to travel. I decided to go to Mexico and then perhaps on to other places. I did not take the time to see Jerry's mother. I was busy preparing to leave and after that night by the fire we did not speak about her again. The fact that he had a mother, any sort of a mother, made me feel better about him.

When I was ready to leave, I said to him, "Jerry, you've been my good friend. I shall think of you often and miss you very much. Pat will miss you, too, after we leave tomorrow."

He did not answer.

I watched him climb the hill in silence. I expected him to come the next day but he did not come.

I placed all my things in the car, closed the house, then drove to the Children's Home to see him. I told the lady there that I was leaving and asked her to call Jerry so I could say goodbye. She was troubled. "I do not know where he is. I am afraid he might be sick. He didn't eat his dinner, and one of the boys said he had gone for a walk in the woods."

My heart felt better. I hate goodbyes and I knew I would never see him again. It was better for both of us this way.

"Here is some money," I said. "Will you use it to buy him things for his birthday and for Christmas. I might buy him the same thing his mother buys. This way he'll get different things and, well, not two bicycles for example."

She looked at me strangely and said, "There isn't much place to ride a bicycle in the mountains."

Her stupidity began to bother me. "What I mean is, I don't want to buy him things his mother might buy him. I might have bought him a bicycle if I hadn't learned she had bought him one."

She still looked at me. Then she finally said, "I don't understand. He has no mother. He has no bicycle."

赤子情深

那是秋季，我住在卡罗来纳州的烟雾山。我要远离人群求得安静。我脑子里乱糟糟的，山中的空气有利于我的创作。我也想看看秋天的红叶和南瓜，感受一下独自一人、自由自在的生活所带来的兴奋。在孤儿院的一栋小屋子里，我寻觅到了这一切。山上厚厚的积雪使小屋与下面的村落及整个世界都隔离开来；缭绕在烟雾山上的浓浓的雾把小屋子全部笼罩住了。

搬进小屋时，我请孤儿院的院长派一名男孩来给壁炉劈些柴火。大约过了一个星期，我正写着东西，偶然抬头时吃了一惊：在我面前站立着一名小男孩，而我的狗帕特竟然没有吠叫提醒我他的到来。小男孩穿着破旧的裤子和洗得次数太多而单薄不堪的衬衣，光着双脚。“我今天就可以劈一些柴。”他开口说。

“但我已经让孤儿院派一名男孩来。”

“就是我。”

“你？可你还这么小。”

“我已可以把牛奶送到育婴堂了，夫人。有时一天两次。”

“在这样的寒风里？”

“是的，夫人。一旦习惯了，冻僵的手指就不再那么难受。但我们的脸会被寒风吹破，因为我们没法用手护住脸。但我还有手套，有的男孩连手套都没有。”

“可劈柴是大人干的活。”他冲着我微笑起来，“夫人，我对各种柴都熟悉，我在孤儿院干劈柴的活儿已经有很长时间了。”

“很好，斧子在那儿。先去试试，看看你干得怎么样。”

我又回到写作中。开始斧子劈柴的声音还有点干扰我的思绪，但很快这声音便变得沉稳而又有节奏，不再使我分心。我便静下心来。后来整个下午我都埋头于写作中。当我听到男孩走到我门口的脚步声时，我发觉太阳已慢慢地落到那冷冷的紫色的群山后面去了。

“我得去吃饭了。我明天下午再来。”

“我得付给你工钱。”

我们一起去看了他的活儿。挨着屋子放着许多劈得整整齐齐的劈柴。

“你干的活不亚于一个大人。这柴劈得真棒。”我给了他一些钱。“你可以明天下午再来，非常感谢。”他看了看我，又看了看钱，似乎想说点什么，却欲言又止。他转身走了，却又回头冲我喊道：“我明天给你劈些细块儿的。你需要一些又细又薄的，还有中等大小的，也需要一些大块儿的劈柴。”

第二天他又来了，一直干到该走了才歇下来。他的名字叫杰瑞，今年12岁，4岁时便来到了孤儿院。我想像着他4岁进孤儿院时的模样：一定是同样的透着坚强的灰色的眼睛，周围布着小小的蓝眼圈；同样的诚挚和勇敢。诚挚意味着诚实，又不仅仅是诚实。比如有一天，斧子的柄断了，杰瑞说孤儿院可以修的。我把修理费给他，他却不肯接受。

“夫人，这钱应该由我付，是我折断的。我劈得不准。”

“可是，杰瑞，谁都不能每次都劈准，这柄不结实，我要去找那卖斧子的人说说。”这样他才把钱收下。

杰瑞还有一个与众不同之处。他总是做一些小而很有益的事情，这些事情并不重要，却能给生活带来方便，而且这些事情不是别人训练或教出来的，只有发自内心才行，做起来快而自然。他在壁炉边发现了一个我从没注意的小洞。“夫人，我会在洞里面塞上一些木柴，这样如果突然来暴雨雪的话，你也会感到很暖和。”还有一天他在外面的走道上发现了一块松动的石头，“让我在那儿铺一块更大的石头，我把洞挖深一点，它就再也不会松动了。”

随着日子一天天过去，杰瑞和我的狗帕特成了亲密的朋友。这也许是因为男孩与狗有一种相通的心灵，有一种比成人与狗更接近的智慧吧。

在一个寒冷的日子，我们围着火炉，杰瑞坐在我身旁，帕特则躺在他身边。我们看着炉火熊熊地燃烧着，杰瑞突然说起了他以前从不谈起的事情，“你很像我母亲，尤其是坐在火炉前时的样子。”

“可你来孤儿院的时候才4岁，你还能记起你母亲的模样吗？”他点了点头，“我母亲住在曼维尔附近。”知道他母亲还在既让我吃惊，又让我气愤。她怎么能抛弃一个这么好的男孩？当然孤儿院不错，那儿的人很好，孩子们也很健康。可他母亲是什么样的人呢？杰瑞以前一定和现在一样可爱，他的优秀品质一直在他身上，这谁都能看出来。我心里涌出许多疑问，可我没敢问。我怕使他痛苦，所以我小心翼翼地问他：“你最近见过你母亲吗？”

“我每年夏天都见到她，她派人来接我。”

我真想大声喊道：那你为什么还在这儿？为什么不和她在一起？她怎么忍心让你再次离开？

但我无言以对。

杰瑞满怀幸福地说着：“她一有空就从曼维尔来看我。她现在没工作。她想给我一只狗，

但他们说在孤儿院不能养狗。她送给我一套节日套装。去年圣诞，她送给我一辆自行车。我把车借给别的男孩玩，只要他们答应小心爱护它。”

我使劲在脑子里揣摩他的母亲。她并没有完全忘却他。可是为什么不领他回家？除了贫穷外还有什么别的原因呢？

杰瑞的声音仍然充满幸福，他轻声对我说：“我准备用你给我的钱给她买一副手套，一副白手套，她喜欢白手套。”

除说声“很好”外，我什么也说不出，因为我恨她。对人来说，除了面包外，还有别的食物，还有灵魂和内心所需的、只有母亲才能给予的食物。他要给她买手套，而她却把他放在孤儿院，自己住在曼维尔。我决心在离开烟雾山之前一定与她谈谈，问她为什么把他放在孤儿院。但人的脑子里总是会被许多事情占据，每一阵风似乎都往脑子里吹进新的不同的念头。我的工作完成了，但我不满意，我萌发了去旅行的念头，去墨西哥，然后可能接着去别的什么地方。我没有抽出时间去看杰瑞的母亲。我忙着准备启程，而自从那天晚上在火炉边的那次谈话后，我们再也没谈起过她。他有母亲——不管什么样的母亲，这一事实使我为他感到欣慰多了。

临出发前一天，我对他说：“杰瑞，你已是我的好朋友，我会经常想起你，会非常想念你。我们明天走后，帕特也会想念你的。”

他无言以答。

我默默注视他爬上山。第二天我想他还会来，但他没有。

我把东西都装进车里，关上门，然后去孤儿院看望杰瑞。我告诉院长我要走了，要与杰瑞告别，请她叫杰瑞出来。但她却为难地说：“我不知道他在哪儿。我担心他病了，他昨天没吃晚饭，有一个男孩说他去树林里散步去了。”

我感觉轻松了些。我讨厌道别，我知道我再也见不到他了，这样对我们彼此都好受些。

“这里有些钱，”我对院长说。“请你一定给他买些生日礼物和圣诞礼物。我怕与他母亲买重了。这样他可以得到不同的礼物，比如说，不会得到两辆自行车。”

她神情怪异地看着我说：“山里可没地方骑自行车。”

她的愚钝使我不耐烦。“我的意思是我不想给他买他母亲也可能买的东西。要不是事先知道他母亲给他买了一辆自行车的话，我可能也会给他买的。”

她还是看着我，然后不容置疑地说：“我不明白。他没有母亲。也没有自行车。”

NOTE 注释：

pumpkin [ˈpʌmpkɪn] n. 南瓜

bark [bɑ:k] v. 吠，咆哮

pants [pʌnts] n. 裤子，短裤

bitter wind 刺骨的寒风

ax [æks] n. 斧头

integrity [in'tegriti] n. 正直，诚实

abandon [ə'bændən] vt. 放弃，遗弃