

“A Lesson in Bird-Shooting”

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One spring we boys were having a splendid time with our rubber shooters; every boy in the neighbourhood had one or more.

One day I was wandering about the lower end of our garden with my shooter. There were plenty of birds all round, but I did not want to shoot at them, if I could find anything else to shoot at. I got over the fence into another lot, but still there were birds everywhere.

I shot a few times, just to frighten them a little. Then I heard one singing beautifully right over my head. I couldn't see it very plainly, and I don't believe I meant to hit it at all, and I was frightened when it came falling down at my feet, with a sad kind of little scream. I picked it up and tried to make it fly, or walk, but it would not; its pretty eyes were half shut, and it kept panting with its bill. It was a bluebird.

I knew I never could keep it from mother; for when I have been doing anything dreadful, I always feel as if I was lost till I have told her. As I carried the poor bird through the garden, a drop of blood fell from its mouth, right on a great white lily that seemed looking up to ask me what I had been doing. Mother was standing near the back door; as I laid the bird on her hand, it stopped panting, and was still.

Mother said, “What is the matter?” But there was such a lump in my throat, I couldn't speak a word. Then she saw the shooter in my hand, and she said:—

“Did you kill that little bird?”

I tell you it scared me, the way she spoke. I never heard her speak in such an awful voice before.

Then she said: “You have stolen away its little life—it was all the life it had. The Lord loves His helpless little creatures; He gave them to us to make us happy, and He will never bless those who are cruel to them.”

Then she put the little bird up to her cheek, and I saw her tears come. She took the shooter, and laid it on the kitchen fire, and then she said:—

“You may go to your room.”

I would rather have been whipped than to have to go there and just have to keep thinking. I thought of all the beautiful days of sunshine I had taken away from that poor little bird, and how it would never fly through the air, nor sing in the trees, nor see the flowers and the grass any more. And I wondered if it had a nest and little birds, and what would become of them.