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Echoes

Arthur S. Maxwell

Mother and seven-year-old Mary were on their way into town from their little country bungalow when they passed a group of boys in a field. The boys were making all sorts of curious noises.

“What are those boys doing?” asked Mary.

“I’m not sure,” said Mother. “Let’s go and see.”

“Hallo! Ya-boo! Pe-ter! Hoop-la!” yelled the boys.

Then they stopped and listened. Faintly but clearly, the same sounds came back: “Hallo! Ya-boo! Pe-ter! Hoop-la!”

“I know now,” said Mother. “They’re listening for the echo.”

“What’s an echo?” asked Mary.

“A sound that comes back,” said Mother. “The boys’ voices travel across the field, hit that high wall, and bounce back to them. It seems as though the wall is talking, but it’s only repeating what they say.”

“Would the wall talk to me?” asked Mary.

“Of course. Try it, if you like.”

So Mary went over to the boys, and they waited while she called. The only thing she could think of was “Mamma!”

There was a moment of silence. Then, from the wall: “Mamma!”

“Oh, Mamma,” cried Mary, “someone over there must want you!”



“No, dear,” said Mother with a smile. “That was only the wall repeating what you said.”

All the way to town and back, Mary thought of nothing but the echo. She was delighted when Mother told her she could hear one at home, too, and she made up her mind to try it the moment they got indoors.

As soon as they reached the house, Mary went from room to room calling “Mamma!” and listening. Not a sound came back. She was very disappointed.

“Mamma,” she said, running into the kitchen, “I thought you said I’d hear an echo indoors.”

“So you will, dear. Most likely at dinner time.”

“It’s almost dinner time now,” said Mary.

“So it is,” said Mother. “Run and fetch Reggie from the garden and put him in his chair.”

In a few minutes dinner was on the table.

“I don’t want any of those horrid potatoes,” said Mary.

“I don’t want any of those horrid potatoes,” said Reggie.

Mother said nothing. She put out the potatoes, and then she began to serve the cabbage.

“Mamma, I just hate greens!” said Mary.

“Mamma, I just hate g’eens!” said Reggie.

Mother put out the greens anyway, and the children ate them. They had to, once Mother gave them the look.

Then came pudding.

“Only custard for me. You know I don’t like rhubarb,” said Mary.

“Only custard for me. You know I don’t like woobarb,” said Reggie.

Mary smiled, and so did Mother.

“I think I just heard an echo,” said Mother.

“So do I,” said Mary, laughing a little sheepishly.

It had suddenly dawned on her that Reggie was repeating nearly everything she said, especially the grumbly things. She felt very grown-up and very responsible, as if she were Reggie’s schoolteacher.

“I think,” she said, “we’d better give him only nice words to echo from now on.”

Mother was so pleased that she walked all the way around the table and gave Mary a great big kiss. She didn’t say a word, but you could see how happy she was.

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