

The Family Circle

BEWARE OF 'BY AND BY'

If you have work to do,
Do it now.

To-day the skies are clear and blue;
To-morrow clouds may come in view;
Yesterday is not for you;
Do it now.

If you have a song to sing,
Sing it now.

Let the notes of gladness ring
Clear as song of birds in spring;
Let every day some music bring;
Sing it now.

If you have kind words to say,
Say them now.

To-morrow may not come your way;
Do a kindness while you may;
Loved ones will not always stay;
Say them now.

THE PLEBEIAN PRIZE

'Twas a warm, sultry day, and the white paint of the new piazza uncomfortably reflected the heat through the partly open kitchen window, where Mildred Pendexter stood by the sink, 'doing up' the breakfast dishes. There were only a few knives and forks left in the larger dishpan, and these were fast disappearing under the dexterous hands of the 'gingham-aproned girl,' as Mildred's grandmother loved to call her.

'I wish Carl would come now with the canvas; he's been gone exactly an hour and twenty minutes,' glancing hurriedly at the clock through the open door of the dining-room, 'and it shouldn't have taken him more than half that time.'

With the last dish carefully put away, Mildred sat down for a moment on the little dull red chair—the only one that the kitchen afforded—and spread out in her lap a crumpled piece of the one local newspaper. She knew the contents of the paragraph 'by heart,' and yet Mildred slowly reread—for the what-th time she herself couldn't have told—the brief clipping:

'In order to increase our girls' interest in those things that pertain to a well-cared-for home, a prize of twenty-five dollars will be given by a former citizen of the town to the young woman under twenty years of age who shall exhibit something made by her own hands—something which will make the home life more worth the living. Such articles must be delivered at the Brae-Burn Club House parlors before nine o'clock, Tuesday morning, the 25th. All contributions will be on exhibition during the day, and in the evening, in the presence of all citizens who care to attend, the award of the judges will be made.'

Mildred arose and laid the bit of newspaper on the kitchen shelf.

'I'm glad mother is so much better. I can now have plenty of time to paint a rose piece—if Carl ever comes with my canvas,' with a glance from the window. 'If she hadn't improved so rapidly, I couldn't have thought of entering the competition. She'll be sitting up by to-morrow.'

Just then a quick step was heard on the hard gravel walk outside.

'That's Carl,' and Mildred ran to the door.

'I found it—just what you wanted,' almost panted Carl, wiping the perspiration from his heated forehead. 'But it wasn't at Lord and Homer's; they were all out. They told me where they thought I could get it, and I did; but I had to go over to Silas Faunce's for the stuff. There's an artist boarding there, and he let me have a piece just the size you wanted. And he wouldn't take a cent for it—human sort of a chap, wasn't he?'

'You're a dear—the best boy in the world!' exclaimed Mildred, giving her brother a hug. 'I'll fry an extra big doughnut for you the next time I make them, and I—I'll forgive you for being gone so long,' playfully.

'All right, Mildred; you're a brick!' and Carl hurried away to his interrupted work.

'If I am only the fortunate one—I know it's selfish in me to hope for it—he shall have something good,' planned Mildred, looking fondly after the retreating form of the jolly-natured boy. 'But it can't be much, though, for 'twill take at least twenty dollars to send

mother to Colfax. A little visit at Aunt Sarah's, among the mountains, will do her worlds of good. If I can only get it—I must,' and Mildred listened a moment to see if her mother was calling.

Before noon Mildred had her canvas stretched, and was ready, after the washing of the dinner dishes, to start on the to-make-home-attractive picture.

'I wonder what Lucy Holman will take—probably one of her embroidered centre-pieces,' reflected Mildred, as she sketched in the outline of her rose pattern. 'And I wouldn't be a bit surprised if she stood a chance of winning the prize; she does her work beautifully. And Nora Lockwood—if I were in her place I'd take some wood-carving. Her music rack is the most exquisite thing I ever saw. Mildred, girl, look well to your laurels if she takes that!'

Slowly, with great pains, Mildred bent over her rose piece that afternoon, having taken her work into her mother's room in order to be near if she wished for anything.

'Is it for Aunt Mary's birthday?' asked Mrs. Pendexter, interestedly, as she watched Mildred prepare her paints.

'No; it's a secret, mamma—just an awful one—but it's a beautiful one, also,' and Mildred looked over to her mother on the bed with a mysterious smile.

'If I can only make the secret come true,' thought Mildred, 'won't she be surprised—a whole month of rest among those dear old mountains! It must come true—I must make it!'

The next morning Mrs. Pendexter's rheumatism was worse.

'I'm afraid,' announced the doctor, gravely, 'it means another week in bed—perhaps longer; but I hope not. There's no use, though, in crossing bridges till one has to. Mildred is a good nurse and an excellent housekeeper; it isn't as though you were alone, or had incompetent help.'

With the extra work to do Mildred had no time that day to devote to her secret, as she called her rose piece.

'Perhaps I won't have so much on hand to-morrow,' she thought, cheerfully, as she prepared the dinner for her father and the children. 'And I've five days before it has to be carried to the club; and I can finish it in three if mother's no worse.'

That evening brought a letter from Mr. Pendexter's brother. 'I'm planning to spend a week with you on my way from Colorado—shall be at Welchville, if nothing happens, the twenty-first.'

'That's to-morrow,' in a troubled tone, and Mildred's courage quickly sank. 'I—I never can do it—not if Uncle Mason is coming—with all the extra work. And the housekeeping must be done first—that's mother's way. I'm afraid—and I had so hoped on her going. But—'

Mildred took up the tray with the delicately prepared food, and carried it slowly to her mother's room.

'It is so nice-looking, dear,' and Mrs. Pendexter's face flushed appreciatively, as Mildred set down the tray in a chair beside the bed. 'Everything you make is so tempting!' Then, looking up inquiringly, 'I'm afraid you haven't had much time lately for your roses, with the many mouths to feed and Uncle Mason's coming.'

'Never mind about the roses,' replied Mildred, smiling, brushing back her mother's hair. 'When you are about again I'll have all the time I need.'

Three days passed quickly, and the 'secret,' of necessity, remained untouched.

'I wanted so much to try, and to get it—if possible—for mamma's sake, and there were traces of disappointment in Mildred's voice. She was speaking to herself, the afternoon of the twenty-fourth, as she sat about preparing her bread for the next morning's baking. There had to be extra loaves, for the company was still there.

Mildred arose the next day, while it was cool—the day of the prize contest—and baked the bread before breakfast.

'I never had such good luck before,' she said, with pardonable pride, on taking the tins from the oven. 'It's baked exactly according to grandmother's recipe—with the crust the color of the leather on a new saddle. I must show a loaf to mother—it's so light and—and eatable!'

'I couldn't equal that,' commented Mrs. Pendexter, smiling, as Mildred held out for her mother's inspection a loaf of the warm bread. 'And you know my bread at different fairs has taken more than one prize'—Mrs. Pendexter immediately interrupted her own particular formed sentence. 'Why not take some of this to the Brae-Burn Club?'

'This—bread?' exclaimed Mildred, in amazement. 'Why—but—but'