

# The Storyteller

## A STORY OF '98

It was one of Ireland's greenest lanes that wound its way down to a rippling brook in the rear of Friend Goodman's house. And there, by a mound of rocks, that dipped their mossy feet in the rivulet, Friend Goodman walked slowly, watching for his little daughter, who had been spending the day with some children in the neighborhood. Presently, the small maiden came jumping along, with her bonnet thrown back, and the edges of her soft brown ringlets luminous in the rays of the setting sun. Those pretty curls were not Quakerly; but Nature, who pays no more attention to the regulations of Elders than she does to the edicts of bishops, would have it so. At the slightest breath of moisture, the silky hair rolled itself into spirals and clustered round her pure white forehead, as if it loved the nestling-place. Jumping, likewise, was not a Quakerly proceeding, but little Alice, usually staid and demure, in imitation of those around her, had met with a new companion, whose temperament was more mercurial than her own, and she was yielding to its magnetic influence.

Camillo Campbell, a boy of six years, was the grandson of an Italian lady who had married an Irish absentee, resident in Florence. Her descendants had lately come to Ireland, and taken possession of estates in the immediate neighborhood of Friend Goodman, where little Camillo's foreign complexion, lively temperament, and graceful broken language rendered him an object of great interest, especially among the children. He it was with whom little Alice was skipping through the green lane, bright and free as the wind and sunshine that played among her curls. As the sober father watched their innocent gambols, he felt his own pulses quicken, and his motions involuntarily became more rapid and elastic than usual. The little girl came nestling up to his side, and rubbed her head upon his arm, like a petted kitten. Camillo peeped roguishly from behind the mossy rocks, kissed his hand to her, and ran off, hopping first on one foot and then on the other.

'Dost thou like that little boy?' inquired Friend Goodman, as he stooped to kiss his darling.

'Yes, Camillo's a pretty boy, I like him,' she replied. Then, with a skip and a bound, which showed that the electric fluid was still leaping in her veins, she added, 'he's a funny boy, too; he swears "you" all the time.'

The simple child, being always accustomed to hear thee and thou, verily thought 'you' was a profane word. Her father did what was very unusual with him; he laughed outright, as he replied, 'What a strange boy is that.'

'He asked me to come down to the rock and play to-morrow. May I go after school?' she asked.

'We will see what mother says,' he replied. 'But where didst thou meet Camillo?'

'He came to play with us in the lane, and Deborah and John and I went into his garden to see the birds. Oh, he has got such pretty birds! There's a nice little meeting-house in the garden; and there's a woman standing there with a baby. Camillo calls her my donny. He says we mustn't play in there. Why not? Who is my donny?'

'The people in Italy, where Camillo used to live, call the mother of Christ Madonna,' replied her father.

'And who is Christ?' she asked.

'He was a holy Man Who lived a great many years ago. I read to thee one day about His taking little children in His arms and blessing them.'

'I think He loved little children almost as well as thou,' said Alice. 'But what do they put His mother in that little meeting-house for?'

Not deeming it wise to puzzle her busy little brain with theological explanations, Friend Goodman called her attention to a small dog, whose curly white hair soon displaced the Madonna, and even Camillo, in her thoughts. But the new neighbor and the conservatory peopled with birds, and the little chapel in the garden made a strong impression on her mind. She was always talking of them, and in after years they remained by far the most vivid picture in the gallery of childish recollections. Nearly every day she and Camillo met at the mossy rock, where they planted flowers, and buried flies in clover leaves, and launched little boats on the stream. When they strolled towards the conservatory, the old gardener was always glad to admit them. Flowering shrubs and gaudy parrots, so bright in the warm sunshine, formed such a cheerful contrast to her own unadorned home, that little Alice was never weary with gazing and wondering. But from all the brilliant things she chose two Java sparrows for her especial

favorites. The old gardener told her that they were Quaker birds, because their feathers were all of such a soft quiet color. Bright little Camillo caught up the idea, and said, 'I know what for you so much do like them: Quaker lady-bird they be.'

'And she's a Quaker lady-bird, too,' said the old gardener, smiling, as he patted her on the head; 'she's a nice little lady-bird.'

Poll Parrot heard him, and repeated, 'Lady-bird.' Always after that, when Alice entered the conservatory, the parrot laughed and screamed, 'Lady-bird!'

Near the door were two niches, partially concealed by a net-work of vines, and in the niches were statues of two winged children. Alice inquired who they were; and Camillo replied, 'My little sister and brother. Children of the Madonna now they is.' His mother had told him this, and he did not understand what it meant; neither did Alice. She looked up at the winged ones with timid love, and said, 'Why don't they come down and play with us?'

'From heaven they cannot come down,' answered Camillo.

Alice was about to inquire the reason why, when the parrot interrupted her by calling out, 'Lady-bird! Lady-bird!' and Camillo began to mock her. Then, laughing merrily, off they ran to the mossy rock to plant some flowers the gardener had given them.

That night, while Alice was eating her supper, Friend Goodman chanced to read aloud something in which the word heaven occurred.

'I've been to heaven,' said Alice.

'Hush, hush, my child,' replied her father.

'But I have been to heaven,' she insisted. 'Little children have wings there.'

Her parents exchanged glances of surprise, and the mother asked, 'How dost thou know that little children have wings in heaven?'

'Because I saw them,' she replied. 'They wear white gowns, and they are children of my donny. My donny lives in the little meeting-house in Camillo's garden. She's the mother of Christ, that loved little children so much; but she never said anything to me. The birds call me lady-bird in heaven.'

Her mother looked very sober. 'She gets her head full of strange things down yonder,' said she. 'I tell thee, Joseph, I don't like to have the children playing together so much. There's no telling what may come of it.'

'Oh, they are mere babes,' replied Joseph. 'The my donny, as she calls it, and her doll are all the same to her. The children take a deal of comfort together, and it seems to me it is not worth while to put estrangement between them. Divisions come fast enough in the human family. When he is a lad he will go away to school and college, and will come back to live in a totally different world from ours. Let the little ones enjoy themselves while they can.'

Thus spoke the large-hearted Friend Joseph; but Rachael was not so easily satisfied. 'I don't like this talk about graven images,' said she. 'If the child's head gets full of such notions, it may not prove so easy to put them out.'

Truly, there seemed some ground for Rachael's fears; for whether Alice waked or slept, she seemed to live in the neighbor's garden. Sitting beside her mother, in the silent Quaker meeting, she forgot the row of plain bonnets before her, and saw a vision of winged children through a vale of vines. At school she heard the old green parrot scream, 'Lady-bird!' and fan-tailed doves and Java sparrows hopped into her dreams. She had never heard a fairy story in her life; otherwise, she would doubtless have imagined that Camillo was a prince, who lived in an enchanted palace, and had some powerful fairy for a friend.

It came to pass as Joseph had predicted. These days of happy companionship soon passed away. Camillo went to a distant school, then to college, and then was absent awhile on the Continent. It naturally happened that the wealthy Catholic family had but little intercourse with the substantial Quaker farmer. Years passed without a word between Alice and her former play-fellow. Once, during his college life, she met him and his father on horseback, as she was riding home from meeting, on a small grey mare her father had given her. He touched his hat, and said, 'How do you do, Miss Goodman?' and she replied, 'How art thou, Camillo?' His father inquired, 'Who is that young woman?' and he answered, 'She is the daughter of Farmer Goodman, with whom I used to play, sometimes, when a boy.' Thus, like shadows, they passed on their separate ways. He thought no more of the rustic Quaker girl; and with her the bright picture of their childhood was like the remembrance of last year's rainbow. But events now approached which put all rainbows and flowers to flight. The insurrection broke out in Ireland, and a ter-