

The Family Circle

SIX LITTLE FEET ON THE FENDER.

In my heart there liveth a picture
Of a kitchen rude and old,
Where the firelight tripped o'er the rafters,
And reddened the roof's brown mould;
Gliding the steam from the kettle
That hummed on the foot-worn hearth,
Throughout all the live-long evening
Its measure of drowsy mirth.

Because of the three light shadows
That frescoed that rude old room—
Because of the voices echoed,
Up 'mid the rafters' gloom—
Because of the feet on the fender,
Six restless, white little feet—
The thoughts of that dear old kitchen
Are to me so fresh and sweet.

When the first dash on the window
Told of the coming rain,
Oh! where are the fair young faces
That crowded against the pane!
While bits of firelight stealing
Their dimpled cheeks between,
Went stumbling out in the darkness,
In shreds of silver sheen.

FREDA'S FRANKNESS.

'I like genuineness above everything else,' Freda spoke with emphasis and a nod of her pretty auburn head. 'It does seem to me the one most unforgivable thing—to be trying to pass yourself off for more than you're really worth.'

'What's up now, Free?' inquired her brother Jack. 'Who's been shamming, and what made her do it, and all the rest?'

Jack simulated a look of intense interest and curiosity as he bent over his sister, his boyish face close to hers.

'Oh, nothing very special, Jack,' Freda said smilingly. 'I was talking more in general, I suppose. And yet, I was thinking particularly of one of the girls, too.'

'Naming no names,' interpolated Jack.

'Well, it's nobody you'd be interested in anyway,' Freda replied. 'She's a nice girl in ever so many ways, but she doesn't always ring true.'

Freda paused rather complacently as if she liked the phrase she had chosen.

'They live away over on the south side, and her father is a clerk in a little store there, but to hear her telling of her trips to the seashore and automobile rides you would suppose they were in affluent circumstances.'

'Ahem!' said Jack, 'and what does that word mean?'

'You know perfectly well,' said Freda with dignity. 'I suppose somebody must have taken her out for a ride some time, for she never in the world would get a chance to go in a car of her own. Now, I'd respect her twice as much if she'd just be frank and say right out what a treat it was to be taken for a ride.'

'I like frankness myself,' Jack said seriously. 'I don't know who you're talking about, but if she's trying to fool people into thinking she's worth more than she is, I don't like her any more than you do.'

'I'm nothing if not frank,' Freda said, again in that complacent voice. 'And she wears imitation lace, too! She has a new dress with some imitation Val. on it, and when one of the girls said how pretty and becoming the dress was, she just answered, "I think those little Val. edges are dainty."'

'What on earth is "Val?"' inquired Jack, but a boyish whistle sounded outside, he stopped not for enlightenment, but vaulted through the open window.

'That was Florence Simms I was talking about, mamma,' Freda turned to the sweet-faced woman who had been arranging a pile of magazines at the library table. 'I suppose I am a little hard on girls who aren't—well, just genuine—for as I said to Jack, I'm nothing if not frank and open myself.'

'Genuineness certainly is a fine quality, and something we all need to strive after,' her mother returned.

'Why, mamma, I think it comes natural to some of us to be genuine, don't you? I'm sure I've never had to cultivate it. I'm naturally frank and I simply can't make any excuses for people who aren't. It seems so unforgivable.'

It was the next afternoon that Freda busied herself wrapping up two gifts for her twin cousins' birthday.

'This certainly was a bargain,' she remarked complacently to her mother, holding up a little gold frame containing a miniature. 'It doesn't seem as if it could be as heavily plated as they said. Only seventy-nine cents, picture and all, and the girl told me that they'd been selling for a dollar and a half. Somehow I sort of distrusted that girl, but anyway, it's pretty—now.' Freda was carefully removing the tissue paper from the box that had held it and transferring it to another box.

'Why, dearie, where did you get it?' her mother asked suddenly. 'At Benedict's? You can always rely upon what they tell you there.'

'Oh, no, mamma, I found this at Leonard's, but you don't think I would let it go out in one of their boxes, do you, when Beth knows just what a cheap store that is. I just happened to have this box from Benedict's and it's such a good fit—so I thought I'd put the frame into that—and—why, mother,' Freda's coincident voice faltered, 'what makes you look like that? Isn't it all right? Very likely the frame is as good as she girl told me, and so—what harm—'

But somehow it was hard to go on.

'Why, dear child,' her mother said, 'don't you remember what we were saying only yesterday about genuineness? Even if the frame should turn out to be all they claimed it, it wouldn't be quite honest to try to make any one think you bought it at Benedict's, would it? And on the other hand, if it should prove to be as cheap in quality as it was in price, then what injustice you would be doing that fine store! In any case, dear—'

Freda's cheeks were flaming now.

'Why, of course,' she said, 'in any case it wouldn't be square by me, would it? Oh, mamma, why is it so easy to fool ourselves into thinking we are so much better than we are? Why, when I was talking about Florence yesterday I never once thought of anything like this.' And it isn't the first time I've done things like this, either.

'You haven't stopped to think,' her mother said, comfortingly. 'Now you do think it over, you wouldn't for anything be dishonest about it. It's probably that way with Florence, and we need to be pretty careful in our judgments of other people I've found.'

'Oh, mamma, you! Why, you never say anything harsh about anybody,' Freda said affectionately.

Suddenly she tore open the carefully wrapped book she had addressed to the other cousin.

'Mamma!' she exclaimed. 'Here I've done it again. This was a bargain book—it was a dollar and a-quarter, but they'd marked it "as is" and put it down to fifty cents because it's defective—worn off at this corner, you see. I wanted Martha to think I'd spent more than I did! and so I—I rubbed out the reduced price mark and left in the dollar and a-quarter. Oh, mother, what a fraud I am!'

'No, not a fraud,' mother said, 'because you are so anxious to make it right now. You didn't stop to think, but I am pretty sure, after this, you will be on your guard and not let any of those little insincerities creep in.'

'Oh, I'm sure I will,' said Freda, 'and I won't be so hard on Florence or any of the other girls that I've been feeling so superior to.'