

The Family Circle

WONDERFUL

Isn't it wonderful, when you think,
How the creeping grasses grow
High on the mountain's rocky brink,
In the valleys down below?
A common thing is a grass-blade small,
Crushed by the feet that pass—
But all the dwarfs and the giants tall,
Working till doomsday-shadow fall.
Can't make a blade of grass.

Isn't it wonderful, when you think,
How a little seed asleep,
Out of the earth new life will drink,
And carefully upward creep—
A seed, we say, is a simple thing,
The germ of a flower or weed—
But all earth's workmen, laboring,
With all the help that wealth could bring,
Never could make a seed.

Isn't it wonderful, when you think,
How the wild bird sings his song,
Weaving melodies, link by link,
The whole sweet summer long?
Commonplace is a bird, always,
Everywhere seen and heard—
But all the engines of earth, I say,
Working on till Judgment Day,
Never could make a bird.

DOROTHEA'S RETURN

All morning the woman had gone about with a smile on her lips, performing her homely tasks with unusual alacrity. She cared not that the late autumnal day was dark and gloomy, with lowering clouds that threatened a snowstorm. Within the home all was bright and cheerful. Flowers bloomed in the windows. The canary bird poured out his tiny soul in ecstatic song. The old Maltese cat lying on a rug before the glowing open fire purred during intervals of sleepy wakefulness.

The woman watched the old clock that had ticked the hours away for more than a quarter of a century. Its mellow chime fell on her ears like a psalm whose refrain was 'Dollie is coming home.'

'Isn't it worth it all now, father?' she asked a man who entered the shining kitchen, the worry and the struggle to make ends meet?

'I think so, if you do, mother,' the man replied fondly. 'You made the sacrifices. No hired help, no new dresses or hats, no visits, no anything but the hard work that falls to the lot of a struggling farmer's wife.'

The woman smiled. 'Well, it's all past and gone, and no regrets on my part. Our girl arrives at Camden at noon. She will take the electric car and reach home by 3 o'clock. Think of it, father! What a credit she will be to us, and I can see the look of surprise and pleasure on her sweet face when she sees the new piano and the parlor carpet. When she was home a year ago last summer, I had the carpet in mind, and found out her favorite colors, pale blue and fawn. I rather inclined to red and green, but Dollie knows. She has splendid taste.' The woman bustled about the table, and soon it was spread with a substantial lunch.

'Come, father, I'll take a cup of tea with you. I've quite a little yet to do.'

The two sat down, the woman still chatting cheerfully. 'I'll have supper about 4 o'clock. The chicken is ready to roast, the dough is raising for light biscuits, and the cream is chilled for whipping. Do you remember how Dollie always loved whipped cream cake?' They both smiled innocently.

'How long was Dollie in Europe?' asked the man.

'Over four months. Miss Thornley's health failed in June, but she kept up until after her graduation. When the doctor advised the trip across the ocean, her father was so pleased to think that we would allow Dollie as her companion and friend. Being a rich man, the expense was nothing to him, and the girls had grown attached during the four years at college. Miss Thornley over-studied, and Dollie says she is quite delicate yet, although greatly improved. Do you remember, father, how badly we felt because we could not go to see our girl on her graduation day? Of course we couldn't afford it, and then came the letter asking if she could go home with Miss Thornley, and from there go to Europe with her and her mother. Those were lonely days, but now I can see it was for the best. She will be so happy here at home with us. How I have looked forward to this day!'

The woman drew her apron across her eyes, but her lips were smiling. 'No one knows how I've missed her,' said the man, his voice breaking a little. 'She is all we have left—our little Dollie!'

'How thoughtful and unselfish she always was,' said the woman tenderly. 'Do you remember her first vacation when I was sick? She did all the work and hardly went

anywhere. When I spoke of getting a girl she said: "You don't need to hire anyone as long as you have me."'

'She would do the same again, mother, if you needed it,' said the man. 'What a help she will be to you. Now you can pay those visits you've owed for so long, and rest when you feel like it. Dollie is young and strong and better than all, she is willing and glad to do for those who have done for her.'

The man rose slowly, as if reluctant to leave the pleasant kitchen and the dear presence that brightened it. 'Well, mother, I must go and finish my husking. Then I'll clean up a little before Dollie comes.'

The woman hurried with her work. She carried a large cluster of chrysanthemums to Dollie's room and arranged them in a bowl on the dressing table. Her toil-worn hand glided over the snowy counterpane, and patted the downy pillows where Dollie's brown head would rest in peaceful slumber.

The old clock ticked away the hours. At half-past two the man entered the kitchen. A savory smell came from the oven. The golden sponge cake heaped with snowy cream, and flaky biscuits, delicately browned, stood on the table. The man and woman sat down together, and just as the clock struck three, the electric car that was to bring Dollie whistled at the curve a quarter of a mile away. They rose to their feet, their faces pale with expectancy and unconsciously they drew closer together. A moment later, the car thundered by the crossing, its whistle again shrieking like a knell of doom. The two stood looking into each other's eyes. An ominous hush fell on the room, disturbed only by the loud ticking of the clock. The silence was broken by another whistle, short and shrill, twice repeated.

'The mail carrier,' said the man, and hurried away. He came back with a letter and put it in his wife's hand. 'From Dollie,' he said. Still standing, she opened the envelope with trembling fingers.

'Dear, darling mother,' the letter read, 'I want you to share my joy. Although I am disappointed at not being able to go home for a few weeks, probably three, I am sure that you will agree that my happiness offsets it. I have often told you of Charlotte's brother George. For some time I have suspected that he was growing fond of me, and yesterday he asked me to marry him. He says he cannot wait very long for me, but I would promise nothing until I had seen you and dear father, and obtained your consent and blessing. I know you will like him, and as he has decided to accompany me home, I shall not try to describe him to you. To me he is the embodiment of everything good and noble. Your little daughter's happiness now lies in your dear hands.'

'Believe me ever lovingly your

'DOROTHEA.'

The letter slipped from the woman's fingers and fluttered to the ground. Her eyes were dry and bright, but the light had died out of them. Her lips drooped at the corners and the weight of years seemed to have fallen on her. 'Don't look so, mother!' cried the man. He seated her tenderly in a rocking-chair, dropped on his knees beside her, and caressed her cold hands.

'After all, mother, it's only natural.'

'It's only natural,' she repeated mechanically.

'And mother,' he bent his head to conceal the twitching of his lips; 'even if Dollie goes away, you will still have me.'

A wintry smile flittered over her lips, and she laid her hand on his head with a gesture almost maternal. 'Yes, father, I still have you. Thank God for that.'

INTO THE HEART OF A FLOWER

It is very interesting to watch a plant grow; it is like taking part in creation. When all outside is cold and white, when the little children of the woodland are gone to the nurseries in the warm earth, and the empty nests on the bare trees filled with snow, my window-garden glows and smiles, making summer within while it is winter without. It is wonderful to see flowers bloom in the midst of a snowstorm! I have felt a bud 'shyly doff her green hood and blossom with a silken burst of sound,' while the icy fingers of the snow beat against the window panes. What secret power, I wonder, caused this blossoming miracle? What mysterious force guided the seedling from the earth up to the light, through leaf and stem and bud, to glorious fulfilment in the perfect flower? Who could have dreamed that such beauty lurked in the dark earth, was latent in the tiny seed we planted? Beautiful flower, you have taught me to see a little way into the hidden heart of things. Now I understand that the darkness everywhere may hold possibilities better than even my hopes.

THE GIRL WHO DIDN'T KNOW

There once was a young lady who had the best of everything. She had been given the best of education by her fond parents, she had studied music and even knew a little of painting. After these courses her parents rightfully expected her to make something of herself, but she made of herself a disagreeable thing. It seemed to be born into her very fibre to seek the failings of everyone and to publish them to the world. Every young lady who dressed different from herself was either 'gaudy' or 'cheap.' It was a very hard thing to please her.