

## Children's Department.

## Auntie's Story.

We were seated one evening in the gloaming, before a bright fire—we "Oldsters" in our cosy arm chairs, with three little heads very close to ours. We listened to the rain as it dashed against the window panes, and the wind that came in fitful gusts, making the old willows creak and groan and toss their giant arms as if in mortal agony. It was a restful feeling, among all this unrest, to know that all our belongings were safely housed for the night, and we (at least one of the party) was just thinking of "forty winks" before lighting the lamp and diving down into a well-filled stocking basket, when one of the little heads was violently shaken and an indignant little voice exclaimed:

"Oh, Auntie! That's not fair! Now for one of your long, long stories. Hush! Auntie's going to commence."

And so I "commenced," and this was my story.

In a little shell of mother-of-pearl, with lining of soft pink, sat the dearest of little fairies. Her hair fell like a mantle of gold over a face like the "snow drift," her gossamer wings were folded; one round, white arm and hand supported her dimpled chin; with the other she guided her shallop, which glided silently over the stream. At length her rose-bud lips were parted, and with a sigh she said:

"I shall, I will, I must! That's naughty, so says our Queen, but I should like so much to go amongst those bipeds who call themselves 'human beings,' men, women, but above all, little children. I've peeped at them; human nature is such a study! One man can scarcely tell which is human and which is nature, whether it is natural to be human or human to be natural. I must consult my log-book and see whether my ideas are at

all logical. If I could only find my dear old friend, Monsieur Spidare, the weaver; he is so wise and would advise me what to do. Yes, I'm tired of this lazy life! Dancing on the green all night, then swinging in my lily-bell all day. Ah, happy thought! Why not make use of the gift my fairy grand-dame left me, who, as she handed it to me, said:

"Little one, you will soon weary of this good-for-nothing gay life, or else my talent of knowing your inner life is playing me false. Some day, soon, a longing will seize you to give up this pleasant life; remember I say, *pleasant life*: you will cry out for something deeper and fuller; then open this little casket; in it there is something that will help you to use your thorns with discretion, or else be assured of this, my Rose, that:

The thorns you use, 'tis true, so oft in play, Will turn against yourself some autumn day."

"Then she was wafted away on the wings of the wind, and I've not seen her since. Most likely she has been changed into a flower—the future existence of all good fairies. I should like to be a rose; I'm called 'Sweet Rose' now. How can I be sweet and have thorns? Easily; what are my thorns? My not too honied words, in other words, my—ahem! doubtfully—sweet temper. Therefore, I can be sweet when it so pleases me, and use my thorns when it so pleases me. But I sprang into existence with thorns, therefore it is my nature to be thorny. Ah, but I can rub off the sharp edges, so that when I use them they may not wound deeply. And now I must see what this contains." And, taking the silver casket, which was fastened to her waist, she touched a spring; it opened easily, and "Sweet Rose" saw, first, a bunch of Forget-me-nots, which she held to her breast, then pressed reverently to her lips. "My grand-dame's name," she whispered; then, lifting the sheet of silk on which they had lain, her hand touched a wreath of Rue. On the silver paper on which it was folded was written, "She who wears this wreath will have many sorrows, many trials, many tears; her duties will be to watch the sick and guide the erring. If she fulfil her duties faithfully, she will never rue her sorrows, never rue her trials, and will weep tears of joy."

The wreath lingers in her fingers, she is sorely tempted to put it out of sight, but the words, "duty faithfully" and "tears of joy" haunt her, and she says, "I will!" as she places the wreath on her head, and, laying the Forget-me-nots tenderly in their silken sheet, closes the casket. Then guiding her skiff to the sweet briar bush where she lives, orders a "fly" of black and gold, and on its wings is soon borne away through lovely lanes and pretty villages into a dusty town, 'till they dash suddenly into the morning room of a suburban villa and rest on the back of an easy chair in which sat the younger of two ladies who occupied the room; they were discussing the last night's ball.

"The ball," said the younger of the two, "was, I suppose, very pleasant; but, my dear mother, I am so tired of this sort of life!"

"This sort of life, Florence! What can you possibly mean? How ungrateful! Are we not most indulgent parents? Giving you pleasure in every way, travelling, balls, dress, —"

"Everything heart can wish, mother

mine, and I thank you for your loving thoughtfulness of me, but I should like to do some good in the world. Only let me visit the sick and poor."

"Never! leave that for women who have no ties; people who are weary of the world. Why, I've no patience with you! Think of the fevers you might catch too? No—a thousand times, no!"

"But, mother, why should one wait till one is weary of the world to do good to others? Spending the young life that is given us in frivolity, and then, when youth is passed and health is gone, seek for excitement in looking on the miseries of the wretched poor. I fear, unless I learn to know and love them now, I shall never do so."

Without deigning to answer, her mother left the room. The closing of the door bore testimony to very strong excitement on her part.

Sweet Rose, who had been seated quietly on Florence's chair, whispered softly:

"Be patient, your motives are good and unselfish, only be patient;" then, mounting her fly, she ordered her attendant to take her where she could find little children, as she might be of some service to them. Away they flew till the window-ill of a fashionable house is reached. Here Rose sees two lovely children, a boy and a girl, blowing soap bubbles and laughing loudly. The door is opened and nurse brings in on a tray nicely cut bread and jam, a jug of milk and silver cups.

"Oh!" exclaimed the boy, "Only that! I'll break my bread and spill my milk."

"So will I," said little Miss. "It's quite ridiculous of cook sending such a miserable tea."

"Ah, little ones," said nurse, "if you had seen the longing look the char-woman gave at your tea! I heard her say, 'If my poor, dear sick child could only have a taste of those good things, what good it would do her.' Indeed, Master Frank, it's a shame the way you waste!"

"O!" cries the boy, "my papa is very rich; what do I care for the char-woman and her youngster!"

Little Tina looked very sad, and said:

"I'm very sorry, nursey; pray send my bread and jam to the little sick child."

Nurse, not caring to descend four flights of stairs for a char-woman, said:

"Cook will look after her; she has gone away home to Charwell Alley."

Sweet Rose did not wait for more, but ordered her fly to take her to the alley where the sick child lay. The very respectable livery of gold and black looked askance, and, for the first time refused to do his mistress's bidding. At this the little fay stamped her tiny foot, and with her wand turned him into a caterpillar. With what a "flop" he came to earth! She never waited to notice, for, seeing a grave little moth floating past, she hailed it and was soon taken to the alley, where the houses were so closely built that they had to lend a kindly support to one another.

On the window of one of the most dilapidated of those houses the moth softly lighted.

"Now," thought Sweet Rose, "shall I go in, or shall I return to Fairy Glen? It's so unlovely here."

"I'm so thirsty," said a sweet, feeble voice, "and I cannot reach that

cup of water, but I must be patient till mother comes home."

An instant, and the little fairy had lighted on the sick child's pillow, and in passing the cup, had dipped her finger in the water and moistened the sick child's lips; then, shaking gently her little dress of pink rose leaves, she filled the air with sweet perfume and fanned the child to sleep, to dream "of a pure river, of streets of gold with gates of pearl, and sweet incense."

The door opened and a poorly clad woman entered; going quickly over to the child, she said:

"Nothing but this for you, darling; the lady could not pay me. 'No change,' she said, and cook gave me some broken bits."

"Mammy, dear, never mind; I've had such a sleep, and I have seen such a beautiful place; how I wish we could both go there."

"Ah, lass, we must just wait our time, and my Liza must just get well. I'll make you more comfortable, and tidy up a bit, for I must be off early the morn."

After raising the sick one, and feeding her with some of the bread, she commenced a war on the cobwebs.

"Oh, not that!" cried little Liza, "that is my very dearest old spider; don't kill him, mother."

"Well, well, child, if you take any diversion out of him, I'll leave him be."

Fairy Rose looked up, and there, spinning his loveliest web of lace, was her old friend the weaver. Wafting a sweet perfume 'round the sick child's pillow, she flew to his web and touched him lightly with her wand. The old spinner stopped his work and put out a *feeler*, raised his eyebrows and remarked:

"By all that is beautiful! the fair Rose! Pray, have you left your thorns behind?"

This was a very stinging remark, but poor Rose was too sad to cross swords with him, therefore only crossed him with questions.

"How came you here? Where is the lovely place she speaks of?" here

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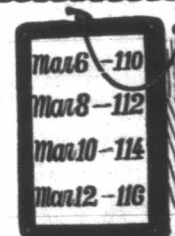
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