

DRUSILLA

Two startled old faces looked down from the haymow. What was Drusilla saying?

She was carrying on a conversation in the cow stall—a conversation of the most personal character. To whom was she unfolding family secrets? To whom was she making such a moan about loneliness and misery and other girlish nonsense?

"Now, you see, my dear Duffy," her voice went on, "I must do something. I cannot live on in this state. Here am I eighteen years old. When I was fifteen, I thought I would run away. You said, 'Wait a bit.' I did wait till I was sixteen. Then I wanted to run away again. You said, 'Wait again.' Wait, and I've waited and waited, and now I'm not going to wait any longer."

"But surely you are not going to do such a silly thing as to run away?" said a voice singularly like the girl's own.

"Good gracious, no, Duffy; I've too much sense now, I've outgrown that foolishness. I've read too many stories of girls and boys running to large cities. Oh, the poor things!"

There was a quiver of compassion in the girl's voice. "I can just see the crowded streets, the cold buildings, the stony-hearted strangers. No, I don't want to stay near my aunts. They are not wholly disagreeable. They are good and kind in their way; but, oh, it's a terrible way for young people! We get up, eat, drink, work, and lie down again. Why, we are no higher in the intellectual scale than you are, Duffy," and she convulsively hugged her listener's neck.

"Other people live in the same way," was the severe response.

"And other people have their children leave them!" said the girl, passionately. "If you don't make some pleasant young children drift away, who comes to see us? I haven't a friend in Grovetown—no, not one!" and the unhappy young voice trailed away into miserable weeping.

One of the two old women in the haymow above held up her dismayed hands. "Who's Drusilla got down there?"

"Sh-h, Purpose!" murmured Aunt Melinda, shaking a forefinger at her. "No one—no one," and she shaped her mouth into a big O. "She's talking to the cow—our family cow. Thank fortune, she's not blabbing her secrets to any of the neighbors—the baby!" and she listened contemptuously to the pitiful sound of the young girl's sobs.

"Talking to the cow!" whispered Aunt Purpose, stupidly. "But there are two people. I hear their voices."

"Do hush; she'll hear you! I tell you she is alone—the little mix! She talks to the cow, and the cow talks back."

"But I don't understand!" said Aunt Purpose, in deep bewilderment. "Cows can't talk."

"Well girls can rattle on enough for themselves and a whole herd of cows," said her sister. "She's pretending Duffy can talk. Hush! She's stopped crying."

There was silence below for a few minutes; then the cow remarked, brokenly: "You say you are going to leave your aunts, and yet you do not intend to run away. What are you going to do?"

The girl answered in a choking voice: "This evening, after I have washed the dishes and hung up my nap-towels, I shall say, 'Aunts, I am going to leave you. If I could do you any good or myself any good by staying, I would do so. I have written a note to Mrs. Leary—I see that she is advertising in the "Guardian" for a nursery governess for her children. I think she will give me the place. It isn't much of a position, but it is a step above that of a household drudge, and something higher may come of it. Then if I leave you, aunts, you will be forced to get a hired girl, which will be a better thing, as you are getting too old for hard work.'"

"And what do you suppose your aunts will say to this?" inquired the cow.

There was another long silence, broken finally by the girl: "Duffy, I leave that to your imagination."

Consternation reigned in the haymow, and when self-possession came, the girl was declaiming mournfully, "Oh, the abomination of desolation of two old women living alone and eating company! Were they ever young, Duffy? Did they ever jump and run about, or were they born stone images?"

"Come, come!" It was Duffy's turn to speak. "You are too hard on them. My mother, who was family now before me, said she remembered when the Graybetter Mansion was the liveliest place in town. There were six children growing up, and the Judge and Mrs. Graybetter kept open house. Your Aunt Melinda was always a serious girl, and fond of housekeeping, but your Aunt Purpose was the gayest of the gay, and a beauty, too."

At this point Aunt Purpose, on the haymow above, blushed, bridled and nervously clasped her hands.

Duffy went on: "The young men used to hover round her just to hear her talk and watch her shake her golden curls."

"Golden curls, Duffy!" said the girl, incredulously. "That iron gray hair!"

"The hairdresser, Time, will finger

your yellow locks, my dear," said the cow, severely.

"Then let me pass a caressing hand over my aunts' gray heads," said the girl, brightly. "But if only they would change, if only they would become model old women!"

"What is a model old woman?" asked the cow.

"A model old woman is one who wears a simple, pretty gown, and sits by the fire or the window, and knits and reads, and encourages the young people to come about her. She doesn't wash dishes and sweep floors and do all kinds of housework if there is no need for her to do so and that only exhausts what little strength she has."

"It takes money to have a pleasant time."

"But we have plenty, Duffy, plenty. People think we are poor because we lost half our fortune. There is enough left to keep us in mild luxury."

"But your poor aunts got a fright."

"Yes, because we lost a part they thought the whole would go. But our money is safe—safe as a bank. I've heard old Mr. Dilkington, the lawyer, telling them again and again. They could relax this frightful grind whenever they liked. Oh, how I should like to make them over and have a lovely home here!"

"Now, what would you do," said the cow, kindly, "if you had your own way? Just make believe for a minute."

"Oh," cried the girl, in an ecstasy of imagination, "what wouldn't I do! First of all, I'd throw open the doors and windows, and say to every fly in Grovetown, 'Come in, innoculate us with some of the spirit of the outside world, soar into these old-fashioned corners, and bring some life into our lives!'"

"H'm!" said the cow, dryly. "You'll never do that while your aunts live."

"Then I'll never do it after they're dead!" said the girl, vehemently. "Never, never will I do anything after their death that they would not have approved of in life! I'd shut up this house and move away. I'll never, never have any pleasure here!"

Fortunately the girl could not look into the haymow. Aunt Melinda had become rigid, and a menacing crease was forming itself about her lips. Aunt Purpose, seized by a sudden fit of trembling, gasped miserably. "Sell the house—the old Graybetter mansion?"

Drusilla was going on with her imaginary changes.

"After the flies get in, and I had become tired of watching them have a good time, I'd go downtown. I'd buy hammocks and red garden chairs to put under our lovely old elms, and I'd get hanging-plants and bird-cages at the veranda, and little tables, with all the latest books and magazines; and I'd keep two maids to do the work in this enormous house, and I'd take music lessons and study some more, and I'd have all the young people running out and in, and once in a while I'd give a party; and I'd go to the different ministers in Grovetown and say quietly, 'If you know of any lonely and homesick young people in this town, just give me their addresses and I'll invite them to my house.'"

"And I'd buy handsome black silk dresses for Aunt Melinda and Aunt Purpose, and have a horse for them to drive, and I'd try to get them to make a little fuss over me, and not act as if I didn't belong to them, and—"

"Drusilla Mary Graybetter!" exclaimed a terrible voice.

The girl sprang out to the floor of the barn.

Her Aunt Melinda, in cap and glasses, was on her hands and knees in the hay, peering down at her like some gigantic, unfriendly spider calling a halt to a timid fly below.

"Drusilla Mary Graybetter," she said again, "have you sent that letter?"

"No, Aunt Melinda," murmured the frightened girl.

"Go destroy it!"

The girl hesitated.

Aunt Melinda's cap-strings trembled. "Are you going?"

"I don't know, aunt."

Something choked in Aunt Melinda's throat. This rebellion had come to a head. "Keep you letter, then, for a few days," she said, firmly. "Do not send it."

"Very well, aunt," said the girl, and she went, slowly toward the house.

"Oh, Melinda," said Aunt Purpose, hysterically, "what are you going to do? What does this mean?"

Aunt Melinda groaned. She knew better than her sister what it meant. It meant ruin—ruin to her family pride. It had never occurred to her that her young niece, apparently so meek under her iron rule, would, at the first opportunity, break away and go to live among strangers.

A long and painful silence fell between the two sisters. "She wants to go," said Aunt Purpose, at last, "and we are old and set in our ways. I suppose it's dull for a young person. I've said nothing, but I've often felt dull myself."

"She shan't go!" said Aunt Melinda, sternly. "Not if we have to make ourselves over to keep her."

"How will you keep her?" said Aunt Purpose, mildly. "She's too old to whip or put in a closet."

"You'll see!" replied her sister, harshly. "Here, let me go down that ladder first. You might slip."

Aunt Purpose looked over her shoulder. "I haven't been up here for years," she said softly. "It takes me back to the time when we were children in the hay, Melinda?"

Aunt Melinda grunted some inaudible reply.

"We always had a good time when we were young," continued Aunt Purpose. "Mother was very kind about letting us have our friends visit us."

"Make haste!" said Aunt Melinda, but she did not lift her head, for her grim, old eyes were full of tears.

The two old ladies strolled slowly to the house, through barnyard, henyard, and chipyard. Aunt Purpose sat down in the first chair she came to, and clasping her aching head with her hands, murmured, "I feel as if I had been out in a thunder storm."

Aunt Melinda strode through to the wainscoted front hall, where she threw open the big oaken door.

"There!" she said to a swarm of amazed Grovetown flies playing without, "come in and see what the old family portraits look like. I guess you've never seen them before."

The swarm needed no second invitation. Headed by one swarthy veteran, they came sailing in over their hostess' head. Aunt Melinda groaned again as she watched them, but she was not one to put her hand to the plough and then turn back.

Her sister, startled by the flies, had come out of the kitchen and was staring at her as if she thought she had gone crazy. Then with a troubled air, she followed her from one room to another. Shutters were thrown open, rusty hinges creaked, old mahogany furniture glistened and shone.

Finally Aunt Melinda sat down at the late Judge's seldom-used writing-desk. For a few minutes she wrote happily; then she turned to her sister. "Listen, Purpose. Will this do for the first day? I've just put down what comes into my mind. Two hammocks, six rustic benches, flower-pots, garden tools, birds and cages, ice-cream freezer, one pound caddy, books and magazines, black silk dress for Purpose, lustre one for me, two hats and two muslins for Drusilla, three pair kid gloves, two pairs silk, croquet set and house games—"

"Good gracious!" ejaculated her sister.

The elder woman laid down her paper and steadily confronted her. "Purpose, we've got to bribe that girl to stay."

"But are you going to get all those things?"

"Yes, and I'm going to take her with me, Drusilla!" she called, going to the foot of the wide staircase.

The girl had not used these stairs since house-cleaning time. Her aunts always made her go up and down the back stairway. Now she came reluctantly, making, although she did not know it, a touching, girlish picture on the broad, old-fashioned steps.

She was pale and unhappy, and her eyes looked as if she had been crying again.

"I want you to go to town with me," said Aunt Melinda.

"I don't care to go," Drusilla said, in a low voice.

Aunt Melinda stared, and Aunt Purpose shook in her slippers. "I want you to go," Aunt Melinda repeated, doggedly, "to help me buy some things."

Drusilla changed the subject. "I am very sorry that you heard what I was saying out in the cow stall."

"I'm glad you have sense enough to confide in a cow instead of a gossip," said Aunt Melinda, dryly, "but a relative is a step higher than a cow. In future, when you want anything, come to me. I didn't know you were lonely."

The girl's lip quivered. "Have you ever heard anything else I have said out there?"

"No," said her aunt, sharply, "we're not in the habit of eavesdropping! We were up in the mow looking for eggs. Purpose thought she heard a hen cackling."

"Aunt, I want my liberty," Drusilla said, slowly, but with determination. "If Mrs. Leary doesn't take me, I will go somewhere else. I have quite made up my mind; but I will wait till you get a girl, if you like."

"And what are we going to do with all these things?" asked Aunt Melinda, handing her the shopping list.

Drusilla took it, turned it over and over, then went from red to white, and white to red.

"Don't cry," said Aunt Purpose, sympathetically.

Drusilla immediately burst into a flood of tears. "I—I don't want to make you miserable," she said, at last.

"What matter, if you have a good time?" observed her aunt, coolly.

Drusilla looked up through her tears.

"Can one have a good time alone?" she exclaimed, generously. Then from the depth of a loving nature rose an unerring impulse. She sprang from her seat and flung her arms, first round the neck of the older woman, who sat calmly, polishing her glasses; then she embraced Miss Purpose, who had been softly patting her hand.

The girl did not know what she had done. There was an immense reserve force of affection in the stern New England nature of the aunt who was the leader in household affairs. The girl had appealed to it, and her appeal was not in vain; and when she hurriedly began to murmur apologies for her seeming ingratitude, Aunt Melinda forcibly checked her. "No

more of that, Drusilla! Get your hat and come with me, I'm going to hire two girls, and a week from tonight we'll give you a party."

Drusilla half closed her dazzled eyes, while Aunt Purpose ejaculated aintly, "A Party! What will people say?"

"All sorts of things," replied her sister, composedly. "We'll tell them we've been waiting for Drusilla's majority."

They went to town and did their shopping, coming home with flushed faces. They did more shopping on successive days, and soon the party was given. It was an exceedingly stiff party, for the Graybeters had grown out of the way of entertaining. The supper was good, however, and Aunt Melinda, far from being daunted, began a series of parties. What she went through, and what her sister, and the still more shy niece went through, on making their lunge into Grovetown society, would fill a volume; but Drusilla soon had all the friends she wanted, and the unwonted stir about the old house filled the veins of its elderly owners with animation. The Graybetter mansion regained its former reputation of being the most popular place in town, and Miss Melinda's heart was secretly filled with pride.

"Your niece is a most charming talker," said a neighbor to her one day. "She is really brilliant. It is wonderful, considering the quiet way in which you brought her up."

Miss Melinda hesitated an instant. The lady's tone was engaging, yet curious. How much she would like to know about good old Duffy out in the cow barn, and of poor, lonely Drusilla's conversation with her on every imaginable subject, from making pies to Emerson's philosophy!

But she would never know. The neighbors had never found out the reason for the sudden change in the Graybetter style of living, and Aunt Melinda did not intend that they should.

"She had always been a great reader," she said, calmly waving her black fan to and fro. "We have an attic half-full of books, in addition to my father's library."

Then she gazed across the lawn at Drusilla, who was surrounded by a flock of girl friends. The Misses Graybetter were giving a garden-party.

"Will you excuse me for a minute?" said Aunt Melinda. "I have an important order to give about a sick animal. Or will you come with me?"

"I should like to go with you," said the neighbor, agreeably. "I have not seen your new house yet."

"Urrah," said Aunt Melinda at the barn door, "where are you?"

A man came out from the cow stable.

"You sent word that Duffy is sick?"

"Yes, ma'am, old age. Shall I shoot her?"

"No; send at once for the best veterinary you can find. Doctor her and put her out to pasture. Don't kill her unless she suffers."

"One gets attached to a family cow," said the neighbor, sympathetically.

"I like this cow," replied Aunt Melinda, reflectively, "about as well as any cow we ever had, and Drusilla would be upset if anything happened to her."

"Japan says she proposes to demolish China," said Mr. Blykins. "She ought to have our servant girl," replied his wife, wearily.

"He married her because he thought she was the cleverest woman on earth. But I wonder why she married him?" "Probably because he showed such splendid judgment."

Said a miserable little boy, who had just received a scolding from his father, "Ma, I wish I'd never been born."

"Why, Charley?" "Well, I think I'd be a better boy."

AN IRISH VIOLET FABLE.

In the ancient times, when flowers and trees and fairies were on speaking terms and all friendly together, one fine summer's day the sun shone out on a beautiful garden where there were all sorts of plants that you could mention, and a lovely but giddy fairy went sporting about from one to the other (although no one could see her because of the sunlight) as gay as the morning lark; then said the fairy to the rose:

"Rose, if the sun were clouded and the storm came on, would you shelter and love me still?"

"Do you doubt it?" said the rose, and reddened up with anger.

"Lily," said the fairy to another love, "if the sun were clouded and a storm came on, would you shelter and love me still?"

"Oh! do you think I could change?" said the lily, and she grew still paler with sorrow.

"Tulip," said the fairy, "if the sun were clouded and a storm came on, would you shelter and love me still?"

"Upon my word!" said the tulip, making a very gentleman-like bow, "you're the very first lady that ever doubted my constancy."

So the fairy sported on, joyful to think of her kind and blooming friends. She reviled away for a time and then she thought of the pale blue violet that was almost covered with its broad green leaves, and although it was an old comrade, she might have forgotten it had not been for the sweet scent that came up from the modest flower.

"Oh! violet!" said the fairy, "if the sun were clouded and a storm came on, would you shelter and love me still?"

And the violet made answer: "You have known me long, sweet fairy, and in the first springtime, when there were few other flowers, you used to shelter from the cold last under my leaves; now, you've almost forgotten me—but let it pass—try my truth—if ever you should meet misfortune—I say nothing."

Well, the fairy skitted at that and clapped her silvery wings and whistled, singing off on a sunbeam; but she was hardly gone when a black cloud grew up out of the north all in a minute, and the light was shrouded and the rain fell in slashings like hail, and away flies the fairy to her friend the rose.

"Now, Rose," said she, "the rain is come, so shelter and love me still."

"I can hardly shelter my own buds," said the rose; "but the lily has a deep cup."

Well, the poor little fairy's wings were almost wet, but she got to the lily. "Lily," said she, "the storm is come, so shelter and love me still."

"I am sorry," said the lily, "but if I were to open my cup the rain would beat in like fun, and my seed would be killed entirely; the tulip has long leaves."

Well, the fairy was down-hearted enough, but she went to the tulip, whom she always thought a sweet-spoken gentleman. He certainly did not look as bright as he had done in the sun, but she waved her little wand and, "Tulip," said he, "the rain and storm are come, and I am very weary, but you will shelter and love me still?"

"Begone!" said the tulip; "be off," says he; "a pretty pickle I'd be if I'd let every wandering scamp come about me."

Well, by this time the fairy was very tired, and her wings held dripping at her back, wet indeed, but there was no help for it, and, leaning on her pretty silver wand, she impeded off to the violet, and the darling little flower, with its blue eye, that, clear as a kitten's, saw her coming, and never a word she spoke, but opened her broad green leaves and took the wild wandering creature to her bosom and dried her wings and breathed the sweetest perfume over her and sheltered her till the storm was clear gone.

Then the humble violet spoke and said: "Fairy Queen, it is too bad to flirt with many, for the love of one true heart is enough for earthly woman or fairy spirit; the old and humble love is better than the gay compliments of a world of flowers, for it will last when others pass."

And the fairy knew that it was true for the blue violet, and she contented herself ever after and built her downy bower under the side spreading violet leaves that sheltered her from the rude winter's wind and the hot summer's sun, and to this very day the fairies love the violet beds.—S. C. Hall.

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