

The boys laughed and questioned. Finally one asked why she didn't ever visit camp.

'She's going to,' Carter answered. 'She's coming Sunday; I asked her. I don't know why Teddy's been so remiss.'

Teddy looked up sharply at that. When Carter started off he followed him. 'See here,' he said, 'you understand once for all that I won't have any nonsense about 'Mother'.'

Carter looked at him a moment, a strange expression darkening his eyes; then he pushed by roughly. 'Are you a fool?' he asked, 'or do you only think I am one?'

There were many allusions to Teddy's girl the next few days. When Sunday came the boys reminded each other that they must look their prettiest. The camp was always crowded with visitors that day. The men amused themselves by calling each other's attention to various pretty girls and guessing which was Teddy's. There was a snap to the drill that it had lacked for some weeks past; the captain, smiling with approval, never guessed it was due to Teddy's girl.

After dress parade Teddy and Carter disappeared. The boys looked eagerly about; presently they discovered the two. Carter was with a shabby old man, whose bent shoulders were straightening and dim eyes brightening with every step he took. Teddy had given his arm to a little wrinkled woman, with an absurd bonnet and ancient dress.

The men stared at each other in dismay. 'Well, if that ain't a go!' one said, while a second added: 'Boys, he's in earnest,' and a third cried, dramatically: 'Which is Teddy's girl?'

But there was no time to talk. Straight down to them came the little group, and then—well, then, 'Mother'—absurd bonnet, ancient dress, and all—walked right into the hearts of the boys; then and there the company adopted her. They had seen pretty girls, hundreds of them, and other fellows' mothers—hundreds of them; but this 'mother,' with a heart big enough for all, who looked at each home-hungry fellow as if she loved him especially, they had found no one like Mother in all those weeks. They clustered about her, eager for the dear homely mother phrases; those who couldn't reach her took the old man about, enjoying his keen interest and vivid tales of how 'we' fought. When the old couple finally left a whole group escorted them to the boundary.

That was the beginning. There were few in the company who did not find their way to the cottage after that. Finding the place so poor, they tried not to take gifts from her; but, when she insisted, they tried to make it up to her by gifts of their own, or by sharing the contents of home boxes. She mended for them and lectured them and petted them and dosed them for incipient colds, and watched over them unceasingly. She encouraged them through the long days of waiting, and when sickness came and two of the boys died, how she helped the others then!

So the summer dragged by and the war was ended, and the boys who had served by patience and faithfulness, and seen their dreams of glory fade away before the dull routine of daily camp life, received welcome discharge at last. Mother baked great loaves of cake and asked them over for a last time. They came singly or in groups as they could, and there was not one who did not leave behind him something for Mother. Then they went their different ways, never to meet together again.

But they didn't forget her, even those who did not write. One or two were in the city again and slipped down to see her. At

Christmas time letters and gifts thronged to her. The ones that pleased her as much as those from the boys themselves were two or three shy, grateful little notes from their sweethearts, thanking her for her goodness to Charlie or Joe. She beamed all over at those.

'Bless their hearts,' she would say admiringly to Father, 'ain't they happy now!' And, putting her wrinkled old hand on his, she would drift back to years fragrant with memories. Once she looked up suddenly.

'I shouldn't ask any better happiness than we've had, Father,' she said.

And he answered, tenderly, 'I guess not, Mother.'

But when little Collins sent the picture of his baby and wrote her that he and Nellie were going to bring it down to see her in the summer, her joy was complete.

'Just think of that, Father!' she cried, 'Sakes alive, do you remember how homesick he was? I'll warrant he's tickled now!'

But little Collins never carried the baby down. In February there came a broken word from the old man—Mother had gone Home.

A few weeks later a young fellow stopped at the old station—so familiar and yet so strange. The big storehouses built for the camp stood blank and desolate. Empty spaces met his eye where long white streets of tents had been. Already nature was busy, and a tender green growth was springing up over old landmarks. He tried to imagine himself drilling where the grass was, marching now or standing sentry under the big oak with pink-tipped, woolly leaves uncurling to the sun. Why, that was where Mother—he turned away and took the familiar road.

The old man was sitting on the porch; he looked up absently when the gate clicked. The young fellow stopped and something choked in his throat.

'Don't you remember Teddy, Mr. Fairlee?' he cried. Mother would have remembered if it had been twenty years.

But the dim eyes brightened then, and the old man hurried down the steps.

'It's good to see ye,' he cried, eagerly. 'It's the clothes—if you'd come in blue, now! It's real considerate of ye to come,' he repeated.

'I couldn't help it,' Teddy answered. 'We all loved Mother. If I had known I'd have come in time.'

'I didn't know,' the old man cried. 'I thought 'twas jest a cold. I never thought she could go before me—why, I'm ten-years older.'

He stopped because his voice was growing uncertain. In a moment he went on steadily.

'I've come to be glad,' he said, quietly. 'It's only a little while for me. I'm glad she wasn't left to be lonesome. Won't you come in, sir?'

'No,' Teddy answered, 'not to-day. Tell me please—she didn't suffer?'

'No, she didn't suffer. She jest sort o' slept away. She spoke of the boys almost the last thing. She said to tell them that she would look for them, every one. She named 'em all over, and counted to be sure and then counted again. There was sixty-three that she called her boys. I should like them all to know—I've been a-meaning to write, but 'tain't easy for me. Mebbe you'll tell them now?'

'I'll tell them; I promise.' Teddy's voice was steady and quiet. He was thinking about Carter—some of them were anxious about Carter. He was glad to have the message to give him.

A silence fell between them. Then Teddy spoke again.

'I have some business in town for a week; then I will come out again, and will you take me there?'

Over the old man's face shot a quiver of pain. 'It's so far,' he said, in a low voice, 'I can't walk; I've only been once since she left me.'

Teddy's hand closed firmly over his. 'You shall go Sunday; I will come for you.'

There really was not much business to do—nearly everything had been done before. There were some letters to be written; they all brought prompt answers. At ten o'clock Sunday morning Teddy drove up to the cottage. The old man came immediately. He held a little cluster of early violets; their stems carefully tied up in wet paper. When he reached the carriage he stopped, lifted his head eagerly.

'It smells like roses,' he said.

'Look in the back,' answered Teddy.

The old man lifted the cloth over the back of the buggy. Roses, hyacinths, lilies, lay there crowding petals against petals; their fragrance smote him in the face—it was like many voices.

'The boys sent them,' Teddy said. 'More than half came from Carter.'

They drove on in silence, but there was no sadness in the silence. All about them was the thrill of new life opening joyously to the sun; it was impossible to believe that 'Mother' did not know and rejoice, too, and, from the beautiful silence where she was waiting, look lovingly down upon her boys.

When they reached the little cemetery Teddy tied his horse, and they stepped softly through the quiet place. Suddenly the old man stopped and turned his tremulous, questioning face towards the other. For at the head of the plain green mound was a low white stone with a name and dates and the simple inscription 'In memory of Mother, by her Boys.'

'They all wanted to do it,' Teddy said, in a low voice.

The old man answered nothing; he laid one knotted hand softly on the stone and stood looking off into the shining distance. There was no sorrow in the uplifted face—only a great gladness; it was as if the veil had worn so thin that behind its shadowy folds he caught a vision of the wonder and mystery of love triumphant and eternal.

Teddy, bending above the grave, laid the flowers gently over the green. He placed Carter's first of all.

A Word for the Mother.

Send the children to bed with a kiss and a smile;
Sweet childhood will tarry at best but a while,
And soon they will pass from the portals of home,
The wilderness ways of their life-work to roam.

Yes, tuck them in bed with a gentle 'Good night!'
The mantle of shadow is veiling the light;
And maybe—God knows—on this sweet little face
May fall deeper shadows in life's weary race.

Yes, say it: 'God bless my dear children,
I pray!'
It may be the last you will say it for aye!
The night may be long ere you see them again,
The motherless children may call you in vain.

Drop sweet benediction on each little head,
And fold them in prayer as they nestle in bed;
A guard of bright angels around them invigilate;
The spirit may slip from the mooring tonight!
—Cottager and Artisan.'