

LITTLE BIDDY'S BIRTHDAY.

BY CLARA B. CONANT.

"Mother, can I have a birthday?"

"A birthday?" asked Mrs. Keaney, pausing in the midst of her washing, and looking down, half bewildered, half amused, at her little daughter.

"Yes, mother. I have birthdays, don't I, just the same as Mabel Ray?"

"Shure there's no mistake about that, darlint," laughed her mother. "Eight years ago next week you came into this troublesome world. That's two things we have in common with the rich, innyhow—the day of our birth an' the day of our death."

"But, mother," persisted Biddy, her big blue eyes rounder still with eagerness, "can't I have a party on my birthday? Mable Ray had one last week! Eliza told me so. An' she had ice-cream, 'an cake wid raisins it, 'an a wax doll what opens its eyes, 'an lots o' children to play wid her. An', O, mother——"

"Sakes alive, Biddy? what's got into you?" said her mother. "She's as pretty as any lady's child of them all," thought her mother; "an' as gintle an' good." But aloud she said, decidedly:

"Honey, you're talkin' nonsense. I've hard work enough to kape us in bread an' mate, lave alone clothes, widout givin' parties for you. Ice-cream an' cake, indade! It's a nigger waiter you'll be wantin' nixt, to be openin' the door for your stylish frinds," she went on chuckling as she wrung out one of Mrs. Ray's embroidered white shirts.

"Oh! mother, I knew you couldn't give me such a party. But I thought I might have just a few little frinds in to play wid me, an' we'd have some crackers, an' some ginger cookies maybe; and them two pinnies you gave me would buy candy an' nuts. An' if——"

"An' who do you want to invite, may I ax?" said the mother, trying not to laugh.

"Oh, mother, if I could ask poor little Jim Swaney—he's lame, you know; an' little Annie, his sister. They're so poor, an' the father gets drunk, an' bates them awful. I'd like thim to have a good time for onst."

"Bliss your little heart!" said the mother, "you shall have thim in an' wilcome, and I'll buy some cookies to trate thim wid, and maybe something besides. But don't you ax another child in this neighborhood; they're a bould, bad set, an' it's sorry I am we have to live in the midst of thim."

"No mother, I won't; but I do wish I could ax some of the girls I go to school wid. There's Sally Flynn, an' Jenny Dean, 'an Mary Connor, 'an Ann Gormly, an' Kitty Fay, 'an——"

"Saints presarve us!" cried Mrs. Keaney. "Do you want to bring all New York in on me? No, no, honey, I can't afford such a party as that. Be off to school now, like a good schild, and don't bother me no more."

But the pleading face of her one little girl haunted Mary Keaney, and when, later in the day, some unexpected work arrived from a lady to whom Mrs. Ray had recommended, she resolved at once to gratify her darling.

"It comes only onst a year," she said, "an' she's the only child I've got. I'll buy em some cookies and gingerbread, an' a half-dozen limons to make some limonade wid; an' I hope they'll be satisfied, for I can't do no more."

So Biddy, to her great joy, was allowed to invite half-a-dozen little girls, her most "intimate" friends, to her "party," which would take place Thursday afternoon of the following week.

When Mrs. Keaney took Mrs. Ray's clothes home Thursday afternoon, she told Eliza, the chambermaid, as a good joke, about her little girl's "party" and the expected guests.

Thursday afternoon came, and about four o'clock "Lame Jim" and his sister arrived, and were received by Biddy, fresh and sweet as a pink in her clean cambrie frock, with a rose-colored ribbon tied above her shining hair.

How happy little Jim was! How his sweet wan face brightened like a pale flower brought into the sunshine! Mrs. Keaney placed him in her one rocking-chair, and gave him and little Annie a drink of milk and a goodly slice of bread and butter straightway, for she knew how little they had to eat at home.

And soon arrived the six girls all together; and what a merry clatter of tongues there was in that little kitchen! They were just as happy as if they had worn silk dresses and kid slippers—happier perhaps. Soon all were engaged in the merry game of "hide the

thimble," Jim, as active as anyone, hopping nimbly about on his crutches. At last they found the thimble snugly hid in his pocket, where Kitty Fay had cunningly slipped it, unknown even to the boy himself.

Game followed game in quick succession, until Mrs. Keaney, who had been looking on smiling, ordered them into the bedroom.

"Guess she's settin' the table," said Mary Connor; "I heard the dishes rattlin'." And hereupon they all fell a chuckling. A few moments after they were called into the next room.

"Aint it jist ilegant?" whispered Ann Gormly to Sally Flynn. "Look at the sugar cookies; and oh, my, there's limonade; I smell it."

"Can't you behave?" said Sally, reprovingly. "One 'ud think you'd niver been to a party before."

"No more I haven't," said Ann, quite above concealment. "Oh goody, Sally, there's slices of mate atween the bread an' butter!"

"Aint she a greedy?" whispered Sally to Jenny.

"Poor thing! they say she's most starved at home," said kindly little Jenny. "Her father's been out of work these three months."

"Mary Keaney, hospitable-hearted soul, had not been able to content herself with the bill of fare she at first meditated. The table was bountifully spread with sandwiches, cookies, molasses-cake, rosy-cheeked apples, and a plate of gay-coloured candy in the centre.

Biddy's cheeks were like roses, and her eyes like stars. Was there ever such a mother, and such a "party?" The good cheer soon set all the little tongues going, while Mrs. Keaney watched the fun, well pleased, and kept the plates and glasses filled.

In the midst of their festivity Mrs. Keaney was called down stairs. She came up in a few moments with something wrapped up in her apron.

The children were too absorbed to notice her, but when in a few moments she appeared bearing a big earthen platter exultingly aloft, what a shout went up from all the little throats!

"Ice-crame! ice-crame!" Even demure Sally joined in the cry, and Ann-Gormly-nearly fell-out-of-her-chair in her joyful excitement.

"O, mother, mother, have you given all your money for my party?" cried Biddy, not knowing whether to laugh or cry, and feeling a pang of self-reproach amid her transports.

"My lamb, who sent it I don't know, but I mistrust Mrs. Ray. An' look at the ilegant cake wid the dape white frostin' and the charlotte-russys too!" she added, setting two other dishes on the table. The children sat a moment dumb with admiration, then set up another shout.

"The man said he'd a horrible job to find the house, an' I reckon it's the first time ice-crame an' charlotte-russys found their way to Rid Lane," said Mrs. Keaney, who scarcely knew whether to laugh or cry herself.

"O, mother! wasn't it lovely in Mrs. Ray?"

"Troth, it was, darlint. It must be Eliza tould her, and——"

Scarcely were the words out of her mouth when a loud rap at the door made her start.

"Sakes alive! I hope nobody's come to say the ice-crame went to the wrong place!" She opened the door; there stood John, Mrs. Ray's coloured man.

"Good evenin', Mrs. Keaney," surveying her with a condescending smile. "Here's a package for Biddy, with Miss Mabel's love. Sorry to be so late, but I had a number of other errands, and it was hard to find the place. Good evenin'," and before Mrs. Keaney could speak, he was gone.

With trembling fingers Mrs. Keaney undid the strings while the little group looked breathlessly on. But when at last she brought out a doll—a lovely wax doll, with golden hair and large brown eyes—a cry of admiration broke from all but Biddy. She stood speechless, with flushed cheeks and dilated eyes, gazing up at the doll.

"Och, darlin', where's your tongue?" cried Mrs. Keaney. "Such a swate doll, dressed up so illigant, an' she can open and shut her eyes! Look, honey, look! Why, what are you crying for?"

"It's too beautiful!" sobbed little Biddy. "Everythin's so beautiful, I don't know what to do?"

That night as Biddy lay in her bed, while her mother was tucking her in, she said, with a long sigh, "O, mother, mother I'm so glad I've had a birthday! I'll never forget it as long as I live! O, mother, wasn't it jist beautiful?"

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Keaney. But a little jealous pang gnawing at her heart made her add, "I couldn't give you ice-crame, darlin', nor wax dolls, but——"