

[FOR THE CRITIC.]

## THE STORY OF TWO OF THEM.

"Then, craving leave, he spake  
Of life, which all can take and none can give.  
Life which all creatures love and strive to keep,  
Wonderful, dear, and pleasant unto each,  
Even the meanest, yea; a boon to all  
Where pity is, for pity makes the world  
Soft to the weak, and noble for the strong."

This is a short story to be read to the children, if their mother approves and if the oldest sister doesn't object. Therefore it is told in words that are simple and of few syllables.

Once upon a time there lived a young bird. This bird knew nothing but joy and singing. She had seen the beautiful green leaves when she first awoke to life and they had become part of her life, together with the golden, shimmering sunlight, the dark forest pool, and the strange, soft, wavering shadows of that place. Sometimes in the night, when the other birds were asleep and the great forest was quiet, this little one would take her yellow head from under her wing and find the world covered with darkness. Black shadows, gleaming sparks, flitting hither and thither (she thought they were bits of the sunshine trying to get home) and away, up, up, through the tree tops, the marvellous shining stars. She heard the night wind moving among the branches, and it was as sweet music to her ears.

Sunshine, flowers, rippling water, the strange night wind, her own voice tuned to happiness and filled with joy, these made life and the world. O, happy bird! But this was not all. There came to her the heaven of love. Perhaps it was a real heaven. Perhaps she was only "making believe." It is more comfortable to think that way sometimes.

"He is such a brave, handsome lover," whispered the little bird. "His voice is the cheeriest in all the forest. He loves me," and she put her head under her wing that none should hear her as she chirped his name.

Marvellous, beautiful, blessed beyond all imagining, was this joy which had come to her. Being a bird she had no name for her happiness, but the rapture of it thrilled her heart and broke forth in clear tumultuous song. A psalm of praise. A chant of limitless joy. Higher, higher, higher, her voice throbbing with intensity of passion, and through it all there ran a solemn strain something akin to the night wind and comprehended not by the joyful singer. O, happy, happy bird.

The nest was built. All the old birds said that it was a credit to the builders and its construction beyond all criticism. "It will soon be more than a nest," chirped the lover, "it will be our home. A little more lining and it will be soft enough. The day has been too short."

And next to this came the mystery. The old birds were silent for many days and flitted timorously round the deserted nest. "Where have they gone?" queried the young ones.

He had a handsome cage, had the lover, and when he called and implored his lost love, everyone said he had a most wonderful voice. But this story is not long enough and words are not sad enough to translate the heartbreak of his song.

His mistress was a pretty, gentle girl. "You dear bird," she would say, "You bright, beautiful bird, I love you for your own sake as well as for the giver's. When I go away," here she blushed and her eyes shone, "when we go away you must come, too. And the bird in his cage sang aloud, for something in this girl's voice reminded him of the forest and the empty nest and of the one who helped him build it.

Now, the pretty girl was ready for a ball, and she danced into the room to show her new dress. I can't tell you how it was made or what it was made of, because I am not learned in these things; but it was black and filmy with a shine and gleam of yellow. She was dressed to represent something. The bird in the cage saw the night shadows and the moonlight of the forest. And in her hair—among the little curls—was nestled something soft and yellow.

Close your eyes, O, little prisoned bird for there are some things most pitiful to see.

"Something must have startled him," they said. Startled him? Yes, startled him so that his wings were broken in their frenzied beating against the bars; startled, so that the cry he gave touched them with something very like fear, it was so human; and when they took him from the cage, that strange spell which takes the breath and motion from all living things was upon him.

Yes, something had certainly startled him.—MARY E. FLETCHER.

## SAM AND BECKIE.

They were New Englanders and were talking about their old friends and neighbors in New Hampshire, and particularly about "Sam."

"Sam," said the elder of the twain, "was in many respects different from the rest of the boys. You remember whom he married? When the old man, his father, found that he was shying around with her, he called him one day into the barn and said:

"Sam, d'ye intend to marry Beckie? Sam never said a word, so the old man said: 'Me boy, ye know all about them. I can't tell ye nothing. Ye know how the sisters have turned out, and not one of them is now living with her husband.' Sam was as mum as a pantomime, and just as soon as he was ready him and Beckie got tied.

"They lived on a farm, and everything went on smoothly for about a year, and it came to hog butchering time. Sam got ready to have the usual party for the occasion, and just as he was sharpening up the knives Beckie came out and said: 'Sam, I'm going home.' Sam protested in his quiet

way, but it was no use, so he said he'd got a man to row her across the pond. It was about half a mile over. She said: 'No, you don't; ye'll row me yourself!' Sam told her he couldn't, and Beckie fired up and said: 'Then I'll drown myself.' Sam said he'd go with her if she wanted to do that, so the boat was got ready, she got in and they rowed out till the water was twenty feet deep. Then Sam stopped and said: 'Well, Beckie, this is a good place for you to drown yourself!' She didn't open her mouth. He waited a while and then said: 'Come, Beckie, I'm in a hurry to git back.' She never looked up. Sam put down the oars, caught hold of her and pitched her in. She grabbed for the boat, but he wouldn't let her get near it. When she was almost done out she said: 'Sam, let me in that boat and ye'll not hear anything from me out of the way.'

"So he pulled her in and they went back home. She changed her clothes and entertained the guests. They are now nearly eighty and you never saw a happier old couple. I don't think they ever spoke of that duckin' since the day she was goin' to drown herself."—*Times Siftings*.

## THE RETURN.

THE POOR AND HUMBLE SUITOR OF THE PAST HAD A FAVOR TO REQUEST.

'You do not know me!'

The speaker was a man in the very prime of life, his weather beaten face bronzed and burrowed by exposure under the fierce heat of a tropical sun, and as he stood with easy grace before the president of the great railway company into whose presence he had been admitted he represented the very type of those men in whom physical courage blends with personal beauty, and to whose unflinching spirit there is no obstacle to the accomplishment of their purpose. The distinguished man whom he addressed paused for a moment to look with deep scrutiny into the face of the stranger, and then, thoughtfully leaning back in his chair, he replied briefly:

'No, sir; I must say that I fail to recognize you.'

'You do not remember,' replied his visitor. 'The beardless youth of 10 years ago, the poor and obscure clerk, who, guided by the purest and deepest love that ever found its passionate utterance in the breast of man, sought your daughter's hand, and whom, sir, you rudely repulsed and drove in scorn from your house without one ray of hope and with all the light gone out of his life? Little did you dream, sir, when you sent me forth alone on that dark and rainy night of the fierce spirit you had aroused, for I come of a race where the indomitable puck of the Puritan still lives and which has never yet acknowledged its master.'

'Humiliated, but not utterly crushed, I set out to gain the fortune that you coldly informed me was the price I must pay for my love. I left the humble roof that had sheltered me, I bade goodby to home and friends and in distant climes I sought for the gold I had sworn to gain. With tireless energy I trod the unbeaten paths of far countries. In the jungles of the east I have tracked the deadly tiger, and stricken with disease I have lain for months tossing upon an obscure coast in India. Never once my undaunted purpose flagged, until finally in the mines of Brazil I found the thing that I had so long sought. I labored as no man ever labored before, and now, sir, I stand before you rich beyond the dreams of avarice, not as the humble and abashed suitor of a decade ago, but as the proud representative of millions.'

The look of recognition that came into the aged face of the older man had suddenly given place to a deadly pallor, and as the speaker ceased he sank back in his chair utterly overwhelmed.

'Alas, sir,' he murmured, as with a despairing gesture he seized the hand of the youthful millionaire, 'alas, Mr. Caxton—I believe that is the name—I fear it is too late!'

'Too late!' repeated the other. 'Too late! Why?'

'Yes,' interposed the old man. 'Weary and worn with hope deferred, my poor daughter, whose loving heart stood the test of so many years of waiting for your return, has succumbed. Last week she was married.'

A look of intense relief came into the travel-stained face of his listener. 'You mistake me, sir,' he said, kindly laying his hand on the shoulder of the other man. 'I am sincerely glad that your daughter has married, and I trust she has done well. That, sir, was not the object of my visit.'

'Not the object of your visit?' repeated the venerable railroad man, his hand trembling slightly as he passed it over his forehead. Then, recovering his composure and resuming his businesslike air, habitual with him, he said, 'Then may I ask, sir, what you came for?'

'Certainly,' replied the hardy traveller and representative of millions. 'I wanted to ask, sir, if, in view of our former relations, you couldn't waive a point in my case and accommodate myself and family with passes through to Chicago.'—*Tom Masson in Truth*.

## AT HOME AND ABROAD.

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