

The Selfishness of Dorothea.

(By Adelaide L. Rouse in 'Forward'.)

'I'd as lief be fed with a spoon.' Prue kicked at the veranda post with the toe of a somewhat 'scuffed' brown shoe. 'Anybody would think that I didn't know enough to come in when it rains. I hate being so well taken care of; I'd rather be neglected. You needn't shake your head, Barb'ry Marsh. What I need, what I long and pine for, is neglect. But I'll never have it so long as Dorothea stays at home. I wish she would get married. But she never will; she would spurn the best man that ever lived, so she could stay at home and make me—comfortable. I almost said miserable.'

'You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Prue Howard. Such a sister as Miss Dorothea is! She is so unselfish and'—

'Exactly. That is just what I am complaining of. If she were selfish I should be perfectly happy. She is selfish, now that I come to think of it. She is as selfish as selfish can be.'

Barbara Marsh was shocked. 'I don't see how you can make that out, Prue. She's a most unselfish girl; everybody says so.'

Prue laughed. 'She is selfish about being unselfish.'

Barbara shook her head. 'Why you contradict yourself,' she said. 'How can a person be selfish about being unselfish?'

'It's a paradox, I know,' said Prue, her eyes dancing. 'It's a paradox, and I made it all by myself. I'm real proud. Why, it's this way, Barb'ry; Dorothea does all the disagreeable things and does all the going without, and never gives me a chance to do anything unselfish. You see the point now, don't you?'

Barbara sighed and looked mystified. She couldn't understand Prue. Barbara had no older sister, and she always wished for one like Dorothea, who would darn her stockings and 'see to' her, generally. She thought Prue very ungrateful, and she frankly told her so.

'If Dorothea wouldn't treat me as if I were six instead of sixteen!' Prue went on, miserably. 'She never leaves me to think out anything for myself. Everything is planned and mapped out for me, and I feel as if I were running on schedule time. I have about as much individuality as a— a locomotive,' added Prue, finishing the simile. 'I hate it,' and she stopped and laughed again. 'Really, it is very bad for me. If Dorothea only realized it, she is doing me a good deal of harm. I should have some responsibility, but I have no more than a baby. She actually tells me when it is time to go to school. I know she will tell me, so if I am interested in anything I pay no attention to time. I never know what I am to wear. Dorothea buys all my clothes and hats, and she always has everything ready for me to put on, all in spic-span order. The only thing I do for myself is to learn my lessons. I suppose Dorothea would learn them for me if she could.'

'I don't see what you have to complain of. If you had a houseful of little brothers and sisters as I have, you'd be glad to have some one to take responsibility from you. I never found any fun in bearing it.'

'But I am thinking about the ethics of the case,' said Prue, roguishly. 'Doesn't that sound grown-up? As I said, Dorothea is spoiling me, and acting in a most selfish manner. There, she is calling me now. "Prue, dear, it's time to dress for tea." It's always just so. Room in perfect order, made so by Dorothea; white dress and blue ribbons put out on the bed; shoes by the low chair, with the button hook by them.

I wonder that she doesn't come up and wash my face for me. Yes, Dorothea, I'm coming.'

'Look on that picture and then on this,' said Barbara. 'It's tea time, and you need only to go and put on the fresh frock which is laid out for you. I must go home and help get tea, then look up half a dozen little brothers and sisters, and see that they are made presentable. How would you like to change places with me?'

'I should love it, I know. I'm simply spoiling to have something to do; and I know I have any amount of executive ability, if only Dorothea would let me have any chance to show what I can do.'

A pleasant-looking elderly lady, who sat in the library window, had listened to this conversation, for she nodded her head, saying: 'Good for you, Prudence Howard! I have thought for some time that Dorothea was spoiling you by kindness. I'm glad to see that you don't altogether enjoy the process. The ethics of the case—the selfishness of being unselfish. Good! We'll see if I can't make use of this hint which I have overheard.'

The next day was Saturday, and, of course, Prudence had a holiday. She did nothing all the morning but lie in the hammock, which was slung under the trees. She had a book and two magazines with her, but she didn't pretend to read, the day was too fine. She made the very weighty observation that the little white butterflies looked like the petals of a sweet pea blossom, and she spent some time trying to balance her slipper on her toe. It fell off, but it was too much trouble to recover it, so she fell asleep. Not a great morning's work, but Prue would have been willing to be of use if Dorothea had allowed it.

As for that energetic young woman, she accomplished a great deal. She gave the maid-of-all-work orders for the day, dusted the parlor and library, tidied her own room, her father's and Prue's, filled all the vases with fresh flowers, and cut a large basketful for the hospital, went to market, made a dessert for dinner, cut out aprons for the sewing society, and visited a sick protegee.

That evening Aunt Harriet and Dorothea sat together in the sitting room. Prue had gone upstairs to finish her Sunday-school lesson, according to Dorothea's suggestion.

Aunt Harriet was really the great-aunt of Dorothea and Prue, for their mother had been her niece. She was making her semi-annual visit, and as it had almost come to an end, she felt that the time had come to remonstrate with the too competent Dorothea. So she said abruptly, 'What are you doing, Dorothea?'

'I am darning Prue's stockings, Aunt Harriet.' Dorothea looked up pleasantly, as she reached for the ball of darning cotton.

'Why doesn't Prue darn her own stockings?'

'I don't believe she knows how. She has never done it. I don't mind it at all, Aunt Harriet.'

'You have a great many things to do, and Prue does nothing, but learn her lessons and go to school. You should let her darn her own stockings, take care of her room, and assume the responsibility of certain parts of the housework.'

'Really, Aunt Harriet, there is no need for Prue to do anything. I like to be useful; I really enjoy being busy.' Dorothea smiled contentedly as she wove her shining needle in and out of the black stocking.

'Dorothea, I think you are a very selfish girl.'

Dorothea flushed a deep red, then the tears came into her eyes. 'She selfish? Why,

ever since her mother died, and she took the care of the household upon her slender shoulders, she had been told how unselfish she was; and now Aunt Harriet was calling her a very selfish girl. The tears overflowed her eyes and fell into her lap.

'Of course, Dorothea, you are not to take my words in their everyday sense. Your selfishness is not of the ordinary kind.'

Dorothea wiped her eyes on Prue's black stocking, but she made no reply. She could not remember when she had cried before.

'The truth is, Dorothea, that you are very selfish about being unselfish. You want to do all the work and make all the sacrifices. If there is anything disagreeable to be done, or anything to be given up, you do it or give it up, instead of letting Prue taste some of the fruits of self-denial. Perhaps you begin to see the drift of my remarks.'

'But I love to do things for father and Prue.'

'Of course you do; and you want to do everything, and give up everything instead of sharing the burdens.'

'Surely, Aunt Harriet, the Bible says: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."'

'More blessed for whom?'

'For the giver, I suppose.'

'Exactly. Then don't be so selfish as to insist upon being the giver all the time. Change places with Prue and be the receiver, now and then, even if you have less blessedness.'

'I never thought of it in this way, but perhaps there is something in what you say.'

'There is everything in it. Really, my dear, you unselfish people are responsible for a great deal of selfishness. It's a mercy there isn't one of your kind in every family.'

Dorothea looked up from her stocking again. 'I'll finish this pair,' she said.

'Aside from the fact that Prue ought to learn how to do things,' Aunt Harriet went on, 'she would like to be useful. You don't even let her wait on her father. He asked her to bring him the evening paper a little while ago, and you sprang to get it. She offered to dust his books for him yesterday, but you wouldn't let her.'

'Father is so particular about his books,' murmured Dorothea.

'Prue should be able to dust them and arrange them to please him. She needs to have some responsibility. Another thing, you should let her begin to do her own shopping. You buy everything for her, and have it made up without consulting her.'

'I suppose my judgment is better than Prue's. She is only sixteen, you know.'

'How will she ever have any judgment if she never has an opportunity to exercise it? Let her begin to act for herself, and if she makes mistakes, she'll profit by them. It's a shame for a girl of sixteen to be so idle as Prue has been to-day. She has been killing time, while you have been overworked. If I had my way, I would spirit you away with me for a month and leave Prue in charge of affairs. It would be the best thing that could happen to both.'

Shortly after Aunt Harriet returned home an event took place which brought Prue to the front. Dorothea, the careful, prudent Dorothea slipped on the cellar stairs and sprained her ankle. Her father and Prue were out, so was Maggie, the maid, and Dorothea, lay on the floor unable to help herself, for half an hour, listening for some one to come in. At last she heard Prue come through the hall, singing, and she called her, because there was no one else to call, not because she thought she would be