

❁ ❁ The Story Page. ❁ ❁

Teddy's Mother.

BY L. M. MONTGOMERY.

It was a public holiday, and almost everybody in Dalton had gone to see the football game at Seyton between the Dalton "Wanderers" and the Seyton College men.

But William Fielding had decided to spend the day in his office. His wife and his two daughters were in Europe; he did not care for football, and there was good deal of extra work to be done.

"I'll have a good look into those papers in the C. & R. railway case to-day," he thought, as he entered his office.

The big building seemed unusually quiet and hushed. He reflected with satisfaction that he was not likely to be disturbed by callers.

Later in the day he remembered that he had not read the letter which he had found in his box on the way down town. It was addressed to him in a somewhat tremulous hand, and bore the post-office stamp of a little village at the other side of the continent.

"Mother writes a good hand for a woman of her age," he thought, as he opened it.

The letter was short, and written on cheap, blue-lined paper, with frequent lapses of spelling and grammar. It told all the simple home news and bits of gossip about neighbors whom he had half forgotten. On the last page the handwriting grew shakier. She was feeling "terrible lonesome" she wrote.

"It seems so long since I've seen you, William. Can't you come home for a spell this summer when Marion is in Europe? You haven't been home for ten years, William. I'm thinking I do so long to see my boy."

Mr. Fielding frowned slightly as he folded the letter up. He dismissed his buyers on the desk. His mother's request had come at a particularly inconvenient time. To be sure, he had often said that he ought to go and see her. But he had always been so busy, he could not spare the time. A trip east to be worth while at all, would take at least two months.

"I can't spare time in this summer, anyhow," he reflected impatiently. "Those nine cases are coming on next month. I suppose Mother would attend to them, but I should hardly care to trust them solely to him." Then there's the house to look after. Even Marion is always and I've promised Tremaine to spend my vacation hunting silver tips in the mountains with him. Mother must wait until next summer. I'll just tell her how it is, she'll understand.

Nothing was easier than to understand a fellow. He decided to write a good, long, newsy letter by way of getting to his conscience, remembering with some shame that he had fallen into the habit of shirking his duty. A rap at the door interrupted him.

"Come in," he called impatiently, wondering who it could be.

The figure that appeared in the doorway was quaint enough to provoke a smile. A little old woman—such a tiny scrap of a woman, with delicate, bleached features and bright, dark eyes. Under a very old-fashioned bonnet of spotted black, with her silvery hair twisted down over her ears in a fashion which Mr. Fielding remembered seeing old ladies wear in his boyhood. Her dress was dull-colored print, plain and neat, and she wore a gay Paisley shawl. In one hand she carried a huge bunch of sweet peas, and in the other a half-covered basket.

She flashed a quick glance over the room.

"Well, isn't Teddy here?" she faltered, disappointedly.

"Teddy?" Mr. Fielding remembered that young Wyndham, the clerk who lived over next door, was called Teddy by his friends. This was probably his mother. He knew that Wyndham belonged in the country.

He rose and offered the lady a chair.

"If you mean Mr. Wyndham, his office is next door. But an afraid you won't find him there, either. I think he has gone to the football match at Seyton. This is a public holiday, you know."

"No, I didn't know it." There was a tremor in her voice and her lips quivered suddenly. "If I'd known it I wouldn't have come. Do you know when Teddy will be back?"

"Not before night I'm afraid, Mrs. Wyndham."

"The game won't be over until late in the afternoon, and I believe there is to be a banquet in the evening."

"And I must go home in the afternoon train. I won't see Teddy till night."

Well, I suppose it serves me right for not sending him word I was coming. Ted always likes me to send him word so he can meet me at the train and look after me. But I thought I'd just like to surprise him, and anyhow, I took the notion sudden-like this morning. And I've brought him a basket of jelly tarts—Ted is so fond of jelly tarts—and this posy. Ted likes flowers. Maybe you'd like to keep 'em, sir. I ain't use lugging them back—they'd only fade."

She gave a little choke of disappointment, in spite of her efforts to suppress it. Mr. Fielding felt as uncomfortable as

if he had been responsible. He got up briskly and took the flowers.

"Thank you, Mrs. Wyndham. Your sweet peas are beautiful and remind me of those which used to grow in mother's garden away down East. I'm not so fortunate as Ted—my mother is too far away to drop in and see me."

"I guess she wishes she could often enough. She must miss you dreadful," said his visitor simply. "It don't seem's as if I could live if I didn't see Ted every once in a little while. He knows that, and comes out 'most every week, for all he's so busy. If he can't come, he sends a great long letter just full of fun and jokes. Teddy is an awful good son, sir."

Mr. Fielding felt still more uncomfortable as he hunted out a glass for his sweet peas. Perhaps the contrast between his conduct and Ted's came home to him sharply. The little lady, who was evidently fond of talking went on:

"As I came along on the train I was just thinking what good times we'd have to-day. Last time he was out Teddy promised me a drive in the park next time I came to town. I'm real disappointed—but it's all my own fault. I should have remembered 'twas a holiday."

The gentle, little voice ended in a sigh. The lawyer noticed that she looked very tired. Under the impulse of a sudden idea, he said:

"Mrs. Wyndham, I think you must let me act as Ted's proxy to-day. You will be my little mother and I will give you as good a time as possible. You shall have your drive in the park."

Mrs. Wyndham looked at him doubtfully, yet eagerly.

"Oh, sir—but you're busy."

"No, I'm not—or I oughtn't to be. I am beginning to think I'm a very unpatriotic citizen, pegging away here instead of enjoying my holiday. We will have a splendid time. My name is Fielding, and I assure you I'm considered a very respectable person. The first thing is lunch. I know you're hungry, and so am I. So came along. Remember, I'm to be your son for the day."

A pink flush of delight spread over her tiny face.

"I guess you know what mothers like," she said gleefully. "And I know how much your mother must think of you, and you of her, when you're so good to other boys' mothers. Oh, I'm real glad to go with you, sir. I don't know anybody here and I always feel kind of bewildered when I haven't Ted to stick to. May I leave these jelly tarts here?"

"Yes, I'll lock them up in my desk," said Mr. Fielding, boyishly. "Ted'll get them when he comes."

She gave herself up to enjoyment with the abandon of a child. Her clear little laugh thrilled out continually. She chattered to him as she might have done to Ted, telling him all the ins and outs of the farm at home. She did not often take a holiday, she assured him. Her husband was dead and she had run the farm for years. Ted was her only son—such a good, kind, clever boy.

"There ain't many like him, if I do say it myself," she declared proudly.

They had lunch together in an up-town restaurant whose splendor nearly took her breath away. Then Mr. Fielding telephoned for his own luxurious carriage, and they went for their drive in the park. The busy, middle-aged lawyer felt like a boy again. He found himself talking to her of his own mother, describing the little down east village where he was born, and relating some scrapes of his school days that made her laugh.

"That's so much like Ted. Such a boy for mischief as he was—not bad mischief though. How proud your mother must be of you! And how often she must think of you. It is such a comfort to have a good son, who doesn't forget his mother. I'm awful sorry for the poor mothers whose boys get kind of care-less-like and neglectful—not writing to them or going to see them as often as they might."

When the drive was over he took her to the train. "Such a good time as I've had," she said gratefully. "Ted himself couldn't have given me a better treat."

"I think our holiday has been a success," said Mr. Fielding, genially. "I know I've enjoyed being Ted's proxy ever so much."

"Ted always kisses me good-bye," she said archly. Mr. Fielding laughed and bent over the little old lady.

"There! That's one for Ted, and here's another for my mother. Good-bye and safe home to you."

From the window of the car she beckoned to him as the train started.

"Them jelly tarts," she whispered, "I forgot about 'em. You keep 'em for yourself. Ted'll have such good things at the banquet that he won't want 'em. When Mr. Fielding went back to his office he saw his half-written letter to his mother lying on his desk. He tore it in two and flung it in the waste basket. Then he sat down and wrote:

"Dear Little Mother: Your letter came to-day. This is not an answer to it, but merely a note to say I'll answer it in person. I am going East as soon as I can make the necessary arrangements and you may look for me within a week or so after receiving this. We will have a real, good long visit together. With much love,

"Your affectionate son,

"William Fielding."

"So much to the credit of Ted's mother," he said with a smile. "And now for some of those tarts."—American Messenger.

Poly's Pink Dress.

"But I want to go to the party, ma! All the girls in my class are goin' and there's to be real ice cream in stripes an' a swing under the trees."

Polly Flynn chewed the string of a much washed sun bonnet as she spoke and kicked her foot disconsolately against the leg of the table where her mother was ironing.

"Sure, an' I'd like to have yez go, Polly," responded Mrs. Flynn, anxiously, all the time passing her iron with swift, skilful strokes over the dainty shirtwaist under her hands. "But what yez could wear I'm not the one to tell yez. There's niver a scrap in the house which isn't patches, an' patches don't go to no parties of Miss Tarish, bless yer swate face!"

With the words Mrs. Flynn set her iron more gently on the white ruffles, as if the wearer herself was under the stroke.

"But I don't mind 'em!" Polly put in eagerly. "Couldn't they be put where they wouldn't show? There's that pink stuff Mrs. Tarish got for curtains, an' a spot came on it, so she gave it away. 'Twould make a lovely dress, an' I do want to go so bad. There's going to be real ice cream in stripes an'—"

"Yez told me that before. Jist wait an' I'll see. P'raps Mrs. O'Rourke'll let me use her machine a bit. Thin if I work avenin's—to-day's Wednesday—Thursday, Friday, Saturday, mebbe—Run along now. I can't work with yez a-kickin' the table under me irons."

Comforted by a scrap of hope, Polly rushed out to the back gate. She had no bosom friend her own age, so all her joys and woes were chanted to herself as she swung jerkily to and fro on the rickety old gate.

"A party, pink dress an' ice cream," she crooned over and over, ecstatically, her tight little red curls wagging up and down in time to the chant.

Meanwhile Mrs. Flynn finished the white ruffles carefully dropping her iron with a clang on the stove, exchanged her work apron for a white one and, throwing the end over her head, slipped out to Mrs. O'Rourke's. Her errand was successful and Polly went to sleep that night with visions of a small, red-haired child, glorified by a pink dress, walking proudly up to the great white house on the hill.

Polly Flynn was not the only child in the city who rejoiced when Saturday dawned cloudless. On the hill workmen were busy hanging ropes for the swing from the great oak on the front lawn. In the rear of the house white-capped maids were making ready the long tables, soon to be spread with everything eatable that children love and long for.

By three o'clock Louise Tarish, a dainty figure in her white gown, with sun glancing across her bright hair, stood under the tree welcoming her small guests. She turned for a second to speak to a maid and caught a giggle from a golden-haired, blue-clad little lass who stood near.

"Oh, isn't she a freak! She couldn't be redder if she tried!"

Louise turned quickly to see Polly walking stiffly across the lawn toward her. Between tiers of glistening, tightly wound curls, her little face glowed with heat, happiness and the reflection from the pink dress. That dress! Mrs. Flynn had snapped the last thread at eleven o'clock the night before and then had viewed the result of her labor with satisfaction. To be sure, the cloth had proved to be a scant pattern when the spot was cut and the dress had to be made apron fashion, with a seam up the front. She had saved enough to make ruffles, however, so Polly's head rose proudly from a calyx of pinkness, starched and ironed in Mrs. Flynn's best style.

Louise took the moist little hand and smiled kindly into the radiant blue eyes lifted to hers.

"I am glad you came, Polly, dear," she said, and the smile and speech filled Polly's already full heart to burst, ing. She only turned a shade redder and gulped in response, but Louise understood.

"You would like to swing, I know," she added. "Manice! will you take Polly over to the swing?"

The sweet-faced little girl addressed smiled shyly at the newcomer. Polly smiled in return, walked confidently over to her side and the two ran off together.

"Elsie, please don't spoil Polly's afternoon—and mine," Louise whispered to the little girl in blue.

A red flush mounted to the yellow curls and Elsie said eagerly: "Deed I won't, Miss Tarish. I didn't know you heard. I'm awfully sorry, but she did look so funny! I'll go and help her swing."

In the games which followed, Polly's shining head and Polly's bubbling laugh were everywhere. "Oh, it's the joy o' the world!" she sighed once as she stopped to tie her shoe. Then with a dash she was back in the circle again