

Amy's Birthday Flowers.

BY ELIZABETH M'CRACKEN.

Mrs. Dale's fingers trembled, and her lips trembled too, as she stood before her mirror, tying her bonnet strings and pinning her veil. Amy had usually tied her bonnet and pinned her veil.

It was almost a year since she had one day folded Amy's hands and slipped into them the last flowers that the ever would hold in the world, but she had not yet grown accustomed to doing for herself all the little things those once busy hands had done for her.

During the time that was almost a year she had missed Amy with that loneliness with which a mother does miss the daughter who goes away into the great, strange silence just when she is old enough to be her mother's friend as well as her child. Mrs. Dale missed all those things that had made up Amy's life, and, perhaps most, she missed the little things that Amy had done for her, and that now she did for herself.

Then, too, Amy had been her only daughter. Mrs. Dale's two sons were in college, and her husband was away from home all day. She had many interests, and many duties, too, yet she was very lonely. She was much more lonely without Amy than even her husband or her sons could know.

As she stood before the mirror, tying her bonnet strings and pinning her veil, her heart was even heavier than it usually was. The next day would be Amy's birthday, and instead of preparing gifts and surprises, Mrs. Dale was about to go into the city to buy the most beautiful flowers she could find to lay on the girl's grave. Amy had loved flowers, and the next day would be her first birthday in that other world, that world in which mothers are never left lonely.

Mrs. Dale was thinking all this to herself as she went into the city on the trolley-car. It was September, and it was afternoon. The car went past fields beginning to turn brown, and between lines of trees beginning to show among their green sometimes a red leaf or a leaf of bright gold. The sun made the leaves all the brighter, and it gilded the brown fields, too, and made the trees cast long shadows. Amy had always been so glad that her birthday had fallen on one of the mystic days that come just before September slips into October.

Her mother thought of that, too. She thought of so many things about which Amy had been glad. She was a little less sad and lonely as she remembered some of them. She thought and remembered all the time that she was in the trolley-car, and even after she was in the city, and walking along the crowded street to a florist's shop on one of its corners.

When she reached the florist's shop she stopped, and stood looking at the flowers in the shop windows.

"What shall I get?" she said to herself. "Roses, white roses; Amy always loved them. Or violets—it is rather early for violets, though. Or lilies—I might get lilies." She decided upon the roses.

"They are sweeter and simpler for a young girl like Amy," she said to herself, gently.

She turned away from the windows, and was just about to open the door of the florist's shop when she

saw coming up the street toward her one of Amy's girl friends. She paused and waited. She had always been very friendly with the girls, and now she felt even a greater interest in them. She had especially liked Eleanor Greer.

The girl was coming so rapidly up the street that she would have passed the florist's shop without seeing Mrs. Dale if that lady had not spoken to her.

"My dear Eleanor, you certainly are in a hurry," she said.

Eleanor came to a sudden stop. "O Mrs. Dale, dear Mrs. Dale, I am so glad to see you!" She took Mrs. Dale's hand and held it for a moment. Eleanor had loved Amy, and she, too, had been lonely without her. She, too, remembered that the next day would have been Amy's birthday. She said not a word, but she held Mrs. Dale's hand very closely, and looked into her eyes; and Amy's mother understood the unspoken sympathy.

"How are you, my dear child?" was all that she said, for she did not yet speak very often of the daughter who had died.

"I am very well," Eleanor said, "and very busy. I read the history of music and teach children music, and I study music and practise music—just as usual, dear Mrs. Dale." She smiled, just a little wistfully. Mrs. Dale thought.

Prompted by the thought, she asked gently, "And are you happy, Eleanor, dear?"

Eleanor hesitated for an instant, and then she smiled again and said, "Yes—usually I am. Just at present I am sighing for the luxuries of life."

Mrs. Dale was relieved. She knew that Eleanor was too sensible to sigh very long for anything. "What do you mean by the luxuries of life, dear?" she asked.

"Now really, Mrs. Dale!" Eleanor protested brightly; then, with more color in her face, she added, "Just now they are the eight concerts that the Beethoven Society is going to give."

Mrs. Dale smiled in sympathy. "They are certainly the greatest of luxuries to music lovers," she agreed.

"And to music teachers who must spend their money for—other things," Eleanor added, with a laugh. "Please don't think I'm really unhappy because I can't afford to go, Mrs. Dale. I'm not; I'm just croaking a little. It's such a help to any one to hear good music—especially to a music teacher—and such a joy! But I'm not unhappy about it; I'm glad I can do other things. I don't feel a bit like croaking any more since I've seen you!"

"You dear child!" exclaimed Mrs. Dale, warmly. She knew that most of the things that Eleanor did were done for other persons, and done willingly and bravely. "You dear child!" she repeated.

Eleanor pressed her hand closely. "I must fly to my next pupil, Mrs. Dale. May I come to see you to-morrow—perhaps late in the afternoon?" she whispered.

The quick tears came into Amy's mother's eyes. "Yes, do!" she said. "Good-bye, my dear!"

Eleanor sped up the street to her next pupil, and Mrs. Dale turned to enter the florist's shop and buy the white roses.

"Eleanor is a dear, good child," she thought, "so brave and unselfish! It is a pity she can't go to those concerts. They would give her such help, and such happiness, too! I wish I could give her a ticket to them. Amy would be so pleased; she loved Eleanor. If to-morrow were not Amy's birthday, and I were not going to get the flowers for her grave, I should be able to do that for Eleanor. She would let me, because I am Amy's mother. I wonder—"

She stood quite still. A pleasant new possibility came into her mind. She turned away from the florist's shop. In less than an hour she was going home, past the yellowing fields and sunset-lighted trees. She had no flowers with her, but the look in her eyes was less sad and less lonely for Amy.

In the last few moments of daylight she wrote a little note to Eleanor. The girl wept tears, half-happy, half-sad, as she read:

My Dear Child,—To-morrow, as you know, is Amy's birthday. If Amy were here I should give her something to celebrate it. Amy is not here, but you are, dear; and you are a girl like Amy, and her friend. Will you not take the gift for her, and go and listen to the glorious music that you so love and can so well make helpful to yourself and others? Come to see me soon, and believe me, Your warm friend,
Amy Spencer Dale.

Slipped into the note, Eleanor found a ticket to the Beethoven Society concerts. Amy's mother had sent it very happily, but after it had gone she sat alone in the gathering twilight, wishing that she had just one flower to take on the next day to Amy's grave. "Amy would have liked me to do that," she thought, "but still—on her first birthday—"

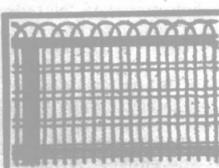
She did not finish the sentence, for just at that moment little Marjorie Williams, who lived next door, came running in.

"O Mrs. Dale," she cried, "I've been to the woods with father, and I've brought you some flowers!" She ran up to Mrs. Dale, and dropped into her arms a great mass of glowing goldenrod and blue autumn daisies. Then she kissed her and danced away home.

Mrs. Dale gathered the goldenrod and daisies in her arms, and pressed her cheek softly against them. The next morning she took them and laid them on Amy's grave. Strangely, her heart felt lighter than it had felt since Amy died.

She did not know why, but when Eleanor came, later in the day, and kissed her again and again, and thanked her with wet eyes for the gift, she began to know. Never after did she cover Amy's grave with costly, quick-fading flowers.

Instead, at Christmas and at Easter and on Amy's birthday, she did some lovely kindness for some other girl for Amy's sake. Sometimes it was small, sometimes it was large; but always it was something that made the girl happier and better, and consequently more valuable to the world.



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