

## ✿ ✿ The Story Page ✿ ✿

### St. Valentine's Day.

BY FREDERICK M. SMITH.

On the morning of St. Valentine's Day I sent Betty a bunch of violets—big violets, single, and of a color like the sky on a summer night. Violets go well with Betty's eyes.

On the afternoon of that day I happened in about four. It is the hour when one is most likely to find her alone. The library was full of the odor of old gardens and of places where the wild flowers grow. There was a bunch of red roses in a jar on the table, and there was a cluster of violets in a cup on the mantel. Betty wore another cluster. The flowers in both these were of the double variety, and in color they tended more to the blue. They were well enough in their way, but I do not care especially for that sort myself. The single blossoms, that I had hoped to see were nowhere in sight.

Betty welcomed me with a smile which said secrets. When she smiles that way you never can tell whether you are a party to the affair or an outsider.

"You're just in time to make a call with me," she announced.

"That depends where you're going."

"To see a lady to whom you are very much devoted."

"For this why should we leave the house?" said I.

"It's Miss Lyons. She's ill."

Miss Lyons is a lonely old lady of seventy, with very white hair and a saint's face. She has known both of us since we were little.

"Am I devoted to her?" I questioned.

"Aren't you?" said Betty, by way of answer. "I somehow thought you were."

"The word is with you," said I, as she got her coat.

"You may hold it," she said.

Although I also have known Betty since she was little, it is only on rare occasions that I am allowed to assist at the coal. I was a little surprised. I wondered what was coming. I was about to ask if the florist had made a mistake about the violets and hadn't sent them; but I changed my mind.

"Just why," I ventured, as I tucked in her sleeves, "just why are favors heaped upon me?"

Betty smiled enigmatically. "Do you like my roses?" she asked. "Proctor Lee sent them."

"I am of the same mind with Mr. Dobson," said I. "I detest Persian decoration."

"Perhaps you like violets better? Mr. Brede sent those," and she motioned to the mantel.

"Blue is a cold color," I submitted.

"George Curtin sent these," and she touched the ones she wore.

"They are not of the sort which match your eyes," I declared.

"Have a chocolate," she answered. "I forget who sent them."

I selected a comfit with a pistachio tip, and held it up.

Betty looked at me out of the corner of her eyes, and smiled. I pulled down the corners of my mouth, and her smile fled into laughter.

"I'm ready," she announced; and we went out.

There was just a suggestion, a sense of spring in the air, although the ground was snow-covered. It was a little breath out of the warm South. Betty lifted her face to it, and the color came into her cheeks. We walked nearly a block without speaking.

"After all, valentines are nice," Betty broke out finally. "I nodded."

"They make you feel that you aren't quite forgotten by your friends."

"And if they take the form of chocolates one can eat them," I observed. I still had a taste of the pistachio nut.

"It would be horrible if one had no valentines—and no friends."

"It is a situation that Miss Mallard will never know."

"When one gets old," she said, "if people remember one at all it is only on holidays when they can send useful things."

"It is one of the penalties of age," said I.

"As if old people did not need flowers and bonbons!" said Betty.

"There is more virtue in gruel," I hazarded.

"I hate useful things," said Betty.

"We have to put up with them occasionally," said I.

We turned in toward the little house where Miss Lyons lived, and the woman who took care of her admitted us. Miss Lyons was propped up in a chair by the window. She was reading "The Imitation." In a glass on the window-sill was a great bunch of violets; they were big, single and deep in color. A card lay near them.

"George and I stopped in to see how you were," said Betty.

The old lady beamed as she took my hand.

"I want to thank you," she said, pointing to the flow-

ers. "You don't know how much good they done me—how I, an old woman, appreciate being thought of."

I had opened my mouth to speak when Betty's foot touched mine lightly and meaningly. I had one quick little glance from her.

"I'm so glad you liked them," I said. "I fancied they might give you a breath of outdoors."

"And of youth," said the old lady. "It was like," she smiled, "like a valentine. I wonder if you thought of it?"

Miss Lyons was really quite merry, though to sit in the house must be rather trying. Also Betty outdid herself. So we made rather a long call; and then an hour later we were in the library again.

I was sitting in the Morris chair looking into the fire, and Betty was getting out the tea-things.

"You might explain fully," said I, as she threw a glance in my direction.

"You have been patient," she declared, as she swung the tea-ball around her finger.

"Patience is not its own reward," said I.

"I heard only this morning that she was not well—" began Betty.

"But supposing you did send mine, why give me credit for what I didn't do?"

"If you'd known, you would have thought of it. Don't you see? I could have bought some, but they wouldn't have served the purpose. They had to be from a man."

I looked at her.

"You see, we are all alike, we women. They meant twice as much to her to have them from you," said Betty, as she slowly moved a lighted match over the alcohol-cup.

"Wisdom is the better part of good deeds," I agreed. She tossed the half-burned stick into the grate, and I watched the wood fire. The silence lasted a full minute; sometimes a minute is very long.

"I might have sent Lee's roses," she said suddenly. I pursed my lips.

"Or one of the other bunches of violets," she added. I drummed with my fingers on the chair arm.

"But—" She put her chin in her hand and looked across at me. "I wonder if I could have explained it to them," she finished, with a little coax in her tone.

"He that is last shall be first," said I, relaxing.

Betty carefully put the kettle over the flame. Then she walked over to her own private writing-desk in the corner. There she picked up a little cut-glass vase of a finger's height. There were three violets in it. They were big and single and of a color like the sky on a summer night.

She touched the flowers to her face.

"But I was sure you'd understand," she said. The laugh on her lips subsided, and a smile came and played in her eyes.—Woman's Home Companion.

### The Thankful Box.

Little of the spirit of thankfulness had been shown at the Thanksgiving dinner; yet that was the occasion on which the Thankful Box was begun.

The Sargents were in a bad way. Mr. Sargent worried needlessly—about his business, Mrs. Sargent fretted over the servants, and the father and mother, sulky and irritable by turns, set the example for the children. Florence and Ned "nagged"; Bessie and Dan, who were younger, fought continually.

Yet every one of the six was privately fond and proud of every other, and would have defended him or her against the universe. The trouble was that they had all fallen into the habit of looking on the dark side of things, and of acting accordingly.

Aunt Rachel started the work of reformation. She had crossed the continent to spend the winter with the Sargents, and although there were times when she almost regretted coming, she was determined not to leave her brother's family as she had found it. So on this Thanksgiving Day, while the Sargents sat scowling over the dessert, Aunt Rachel drew from her pocket a book and a little box.

"I always read this on Thanksgiving Day," she said. "It reminds me of so many things." Then, without further preface or apology, she read aloud the One Hundred and Third Psalm. The young Sargents, who liked Aunt Rachel, although they thought her "odd," listened respectfully.

"That gave me an idea this morning, Henry," the visitor went on, brightly. Mr. Sargent smoothed a few wrinkles from his forehead and turned toward her. "We can't begin to give thanks, this day or any other, for the great blessings of life and health and home, but why can't we show more appreciation of little things?"

She held up the box. "I need to have something like this before me all the time," she went on, "but perhaps it would be more generous to share it. You see,

there's a slit in the cover. Now I propose that we call it the Thankful Box, and when a pleasant thing happens—when a man does pay his note, or the maid volunteers to help the cook, or we get an invitation to a party, or climb to the head of the geography class—then the fortunate one shall put in a cent. When the box is full, we'll open it and take the money to buy something for the house, something every one can enjoy.

"I'll start with a cent for the Indian pudding. I never expected to eat one that tasted so natural and old-timey. It was sweet of you to think of it and take the trouble to make it, Sarah," Aunt Rachel told her sister-in-law, "and here's a contribution to the box to prove that I'm thankful."

She dropped the cent through the slit and set the box conspicuously in the middle of the table. It stayed there, quite untroubled, for twenty-four hours or more. Then Mr. Sargent, wearing an expression more cheerful than common, came in, saw the box, and recalled his sister's words.

"Well," he muttered, "the man did pay the note, and I'm as thankful as Rachel could have been about her Indian pudding. By Jove I will put in a cent!"

He did so. To be sure, he stole out of the room afterward as if a little ashamed of yielding to sentiment; nevertheless, the concession had started him upon a happier train of thought.

That cent seemed to break the ice, as it were. On the very next morning Aunt Rachel found both Bessie and Dan in the vicinity of the box. The younger Sargents frequently did act together, whether for good or bad, and this time they felt a common impulse of thankfulness.

"My seat-mate thought she'd have to leave school, but she hasn't got to," the girl explained.

"Glad my ball didn't break the window!" Dan growled, enigmatically.

Even the elegant and superior Ned paid tribute to the box that day, and willingly admitted it to Aunt Rachel. "Got a photograph I've wanted a long time," he said. "Guess I'll have to put in five cents for that."

But the most convincing testimony to the compelling power and usefulness of the box was given by Florence one day in January.

"Loan me a stamp, please, Aunt Rachel," she asked.

"I can't buy it from you," she added, laughingly.

"You see, I find so much to be thankful for that the box keeps me short of pennies all the time. I wouldn't have believed there were so many pleasant things happening, or so many unpleasant things not happening, if the box hadn't set me to thinking of them!"

"Isn't it a good plan to think of them?" the older woman asked, gently.

"Why, of course it is, you dear old auntie! This is a different family since we began to remember our small mercies," as the washer-woman says. When we're doing that we don't have time to complain, and we're ashamed to borrow trouble."

Thus the box grew in esteem and in weight, and all the members of the family took pride in it, and felt it a point of honor not to withhold its dues. By April they had to manipulate it very dexterously in order to squeeze in a coin. When it was incontestably full, even to the bursting point, they gathered one night around the table and opened it.

There were coins other than pennies in the little heap, and at these the older people looked with shining eyes. The five-dollar gold piece, for instance—Aunt Rachel knew her sister-in-law had impulsively dropped that in on the day when Dan's canoe was overturned in the swiftest current of the river, and Dan was saved. Perhaps the boy's escape was too great a blessing to commemorate by means of the box; but the box had become a habit by that time, and it was natural to turn to it.

Then there were various half-dollars and quarters in the pile. Aunt Rachel suspected her brother of most of these. One of the dimes Bessie surely put in when she got a double promotion at school. Ned was known to have deposited some of the others, although in his lordly moods he pretended to deny it. But all had had a hand in giving the cents, and how many there were to witness to joyous events and happy days!

"Well, folks!" said Mr. Sargent, genially, "what shall we do with it?"

"Nobody spoke for a moment. All looked toward the mother."

"Suppose we buy rose-bushes to border a path, and call it the Thankful Walk?" she suggested. "But this was all Rachel's doing. She is the one to decide."

"I can't improve on your idea," Aunt Rachel said.

"All agreed?" asked Mr. Sargent. "Very well. And now," he added, "we'll fasten this and begin all over again, and I'll put in the first cent, to show you all that I'm thankful for the box. I know it has made me a happier man. I hope because of it that I'm a better one."—W. L. Sawyer, in Youth's Companion.