

# BOYS AND GIRLS

## Nettie's Memorial

(Frances McElrath, in 'Youth's Companion.')

'I don't suppose we could afford a wrought-iron railing around it, Thomas?'

Mrs. Dorr glanced up from the paper on her lap at her husband, sitting beside her in the railway car. There was a questioning smile on her small, rosy old face.

'Why, mother, we'll try to, if you want it,' he replied. 'But we must go slow with other expenses.'

He had a cheerful, rich-toned voice, which age had mellowed, as it had his whole nature. He leaned toward his wife with gentle attention.

'I'd be willing to travel second-class all the way home to save the money,' she said.

He patted her on the shoulder indulgently, as one would a child, to the great satisfaction of a little girl in the seat just behind. She was a bright-faced, golden-haired child about eight years old, dressed in light-blue cashmere trimmed with white lace. The lace was soiled and tawdry, and the frock scarcely covered her knees. Below it were a pair of pink stockings and some shabby little bronze shoes. A dingy, gray velvet cloak and a large whitish hat in the rack overhead completed her fanciful, squalid costume.

She had large, observant eyes which, young as they were, had been somewhat trained to appreciate effects, and the dainty little old lady with the stately old husband suited her fancy.

'They're just like Lord Almont and Lady Clarissa,' she thought, and she recited to herself, with tiny dramatic fervor:

"For four and thirty years, m'lord, we've been as one, meeting with a single heart life's griefs and joys—" I wish they'd talk to me a little!' she broke off, pensively.

The paper Mrs. Dorr held was a pen and ink sketch of a winged figure, lightly poised on top of a round pedestal. It represented a flying angel with fluttering drapery, and one arm pointed upward.

The paper was yellow and had thumb-marks round the edges. Mrs. Dorr had handled it daily for twenty years—ever since she had received this design for a memorial stone to her little dead daughter. The Dorr's were on their way now with intent to have the marble cut and raised over Nettie's grave in San Francisco, where she had died.

Mrs. Dorr's desire to erect this memorial to her child had been balked by lack of money for many years. The statue was elaborate and expensive, and Mr. Dorr's income was small. They had to economize strictly to save at all. But Mrs. Dorr had done this with a method that had finally accomplished her purpose.

The idea of the memorial was her own, and, once conceived, its fulfilment seemed an almost sacred obligation due to Nettie. She wore her old clothes into positive shabbiness. She managed the household funds and dispensed with luxuries of every sort.

Finally the value of Mr. Dorr's paid-up insurance policy had been drawn, and the greater part of this, with her savings, made up the necessary sum.

Mr. Dorr patiently agreed to all his

wife's plans, the matter seemed so near her heart. But sometimes he felt that a less pretentious monument might be more consistent with their means. He was naturally liberal, and he felt the cross of never having anything to give away. But he did not hurt his wife by suggesting this. Often he wondered how she would occupy her mind when the all-absorbing object was accomplished.

He was thinking about that as he watched his wife studying the familiar angel picture in the train. Suddenly a light touch was laid on his arm.

'If you please, sir, can you do tricks?' a clear, childish voice asked in his ear.

'Eh?' he said, turning abruptly.

The little girl in the seat behind was standing at his shoulder. There was a friendly and rather wistful smile on her face.

'Do you do tricks?' she repeated, jerking her pretty, fluffy head sidewise, like a canary.

Mr. Dorr's large face beamed broadly. 'Do I look like a trained monkey?' he asked.

The child laughed lightly and explained: 'I mean tricks with paper and toothpicks and things. Because I can, and if you'll give me six matches and five more I'll show you how they'll make—how many?'

'Eleven?'

'Nine!' she cried merrily, clapping her hands.

Mr. Dorr gave her some matches from his pocket. She knelt on the floor and deftly arranged them upon the seat so as to form the letters NINE. Then she smiled brightly up at the two pairs of eyes twinkling in amusement down over the back of the seat at her.

'Mr. Blaney taught me that,' she remarked. 'He could do tricks with anything. Why, I b'lieve he'd make one out of a ham sandwich!'

'Who is Mr. Blaney, my dear?' asked Mrs. Dorr.

'Oh he's leading gentleman—of our company, you know, Watermann's Stars,' the child explained, and the old lady's face expressed mild disapproval.

'Are you a theatre child?' she asked.

The little thing nodded; then recollecting herself, she shook her head.

'Well, I'm not any more because Watermann's Stars went broke.

'Where are your papa and mamma?'

'Died. Years before I was born. I don't remember at all.'

'Deary me!' said Mrs. Dorr, compassionately. 'Who takes care of you?'

'Why, 'most everybody!' The child gave a little laugh with a vague suggestion of sorrow in it. But she went on brightly, telling off her various protectors with her fingers:

'First, the 'sylum people; then Minnie Grant 'dopted me out so I could play "The Child" in "Rushlights"; then she went starring, and the Blaneys took me; then, when we broke up, they hadn't any money, so the society took me; and now,' she stopped a moment to swallow a lump in her throat, 'now it's going to be the woman. That's all my right hand used up. I s'pose I can soon count all my left fingers, too!' she ended, merrily.

Mrs. Dorr had ready sympathies. So many changes in such a scrap of life

struck her as pathetic. Her eyes were moist.

'Who is the woman?' she asked.

The little girl lifted her heavy lace collar. Beneath it, stitched to her frock, was a small square of white muslin bearing the words:

Myrtle Bender,

For Mrs. Jane Stupson,  
Wellstown, North Dakota.

'I'm an express package,' she remarked, with the little laugh that was so suggestive of tears. She had purposely fixed the collar so as to hide the label.

'You're Myrtle, I suppose,' Mrs. Dorr said, kindly, 'and you are going out to North Dakota to Mrs. Stupson?'

'She takes girls from the society and teaches them to work, and they sent me because I'm so big—and I'm strong,' said Myrtle, throwing out her little chest.

'I'm going to be a farm-hand, and I'm very glad, because I never saw a farm, but there was a farm scene in "Rushlights," and it was so pretty, with lots of trees and grass and flowers, and a cow painted, eating right among them, and the cunningest house near the right wing that Minnie Grant came out of, holding my hand and carrying some butter, a brook on the left where she went to wash it, and she sang such a beautiful song about a dairying-maid,—that's what she was in the play,—and we both wore the beautiful-est dresses! I do love a farm!'

Mr. Dorr said 'Humph!' very thoughtfully.

'So you're glad to go to live with Mrs. Stupson,' Mrs. Dorr said.

'Well, not exactly glad,' Myrtle replied, very slowly. 'You see, I don't know her. But the gentleman at the society told me she must be a very nice lady to give a little girl a home, and I must be thankful. And I'm not going to cry, anyhow!' she added, quickly, brushing away two big tears. 'I think I'll go and ask if I can play with that baby; it's fretting again.'

As she ran down the aisle to a wan-looking woman who was making weary attempts to quiet a fractious baby, Mr. Dorr looked after her. His old face was suffused with admiration.

'There's a brave little body, mother,' he said. 'She isn't going to cry! No, indeed! She's going to forget her own troubles by helping someone else with hers.'

Then he shook his head thoughtfully. 'I'm afraid she's going to be disappointed in her farm. That part of Dakota has no trees and few flowers.'

'Poor little soul!' said his wife. 'I wish she could see our apple orchard just now.'

Mr. Dorr smiled at the thought. 'Wouldn't she enjoy that great tree where Nettie's swing was?'

'I wonder if her theatre brook was anything like the one at the foot of our garden?'

'It didn't have live fish in it, and I expect she'd like those. Mother!' The word came with such ejaculatory emphasis and Mrs. Dorr jumped.

'Well, Thomas?' inquired.

A little flush had risen to Thomas Dorr's fine face, but it faded quickly. 'I was just thinking how much I'd like to do