

and little Lina, bless her heart! made me her baby-house. She played there day after day, a tiny matron, with her dolls, her kitten and her bits of furniture, as happy a child as ever sang "Bye-low" to a dirty-faced rag-darling. She is my greatest comfort and delight; and the proudest moment of my life was when Hans painted her little name on my door and gave me to her for her own.

Here my story ends; for nothing now remains to me but to crumble slowly to ruin and go where the good 'busses go; very slowly, I am sure, for my little mistress takes great care of me, and I shall never suffer from rough usage any more. I am quite happy and contented as I stand here under the trees that scatter their white petals on my rusty roof each spring; and well I may be, for after my busy life I am at rest; the sun shines kindly on me, the grass grows greenly round me, good friends cherish me in my old age, and a little child nestles in my heart, keeping it tender to the last.

XI.

RED TULIPS.

"PLEASE, ma'am, will you give me one of them red tulips?"

The eager voice woke Helen from her reverie, and, looking up, she saw a little colored girl holding on to the iron railing with one hand, while the other pointed to a bed of splendid red and yellow tulips waving in the sunshine.

"I can't give you one, child, for they don't belong to me," answered Helen, arrested by the wistful face, over which her words brought a shadow of disappointment.

"I thought maybe you lived in this house, or knew the folks, and I *do* want one of them flowers dreadful bad," said the girl, regarding the gay tulips with a look of intense desire.

"I wish I *could* give you one, but it would be stealing, you know. Perhaps if you go and ask, the owner may let you have one, there are so many."

And having offered all the consolation in her

power, Helen went on, busy with a certain disappointment of her own, which just then weighed very heavily on her girlish heart.

Half an hour later, as she came down the street on the opposite side, she saw the same girl sitting on a door-step, still gazing at the tulips with hopeless admiration.

The child looked up as she approached, and recognizing the pretty young lady who had spoken kindly to her, smiled and nodded so confidently, that Helen could not resist stopping to say, —

“Did you ask over there?”

“Yes, ma'am, but the girl said, ‘No,’ and told me to clear out; so I come over here to set and look at the pretties, since I can't have none,” she answered with a patient sigh.

“You *shall* have some!” cried Helen, remembering how easily she could gratify the innocent longing of the poor child, and feeling a curious sympathy with all disappointed people. “Come with me, dear; there is a flower shop round the corner, and you shall have a posy of some sort.”

Such wonder, gratitude and delight shone in Betty's face, that Helen felt rejoiced for her small kindness. As they walked, she questioned her about

herself, and quite won her heart by the friendly interest expressed in Betty's mother, Betty's kitten, and Betty's affairs generally.

When they came to the flower shop little Bet felt as if she had got into a fairy tale; and when Helen gave her a pot with a blue hyacinth and a rosy tulip blooming prettily together, she felt as if a lovely fairy had granted all her wishes in the good old way.

“It's just splendid! and I don't know how to thank you, miss. But mother takes in washing, and she'll love to do yours, and plait the ruffles elegant — 'cause you done this for me!” cried Betty, embracing the flower-pot with one hand, and squeezing Miss Helen's with the other.

Helen promised to come and see her new friend, and when they parted, kept turning round to watch the little figure trotting up the hill, often pausing to turn, and show her a beaming black face, all smiles and delight, as Betty threw her kisses and hugged the dear red tulip like a treasure of great price.

When she vanished, Helen said to herself, with a smile and a sigh, —

“There, I feel better for that little job; and it

is a comfort to know that some one has got what she wants, though it is not I."

Some weeks later, when Helen was preparing to go into the country for the summer, and wanted certain delicate muslins done up, she remembered what Betty had said about her mother, and had a fancy to see how the child and her flowers prospered.

She found them in a small, poor room, hot and close, and full of wash-tubs and flat-irons. The mother was busy at her work, and Betty sat by the one window, listlessly picking out ruffles.

When she saw the face at the door, she jumped up and clapped her hands, crying, delightedly, "O mammy, it's my lady; my dear, pretty lady truly come at last!"

Such a welcome made friends of the three at once, and Mrs. Simms gladly undertook the work Helen offered.

"And how are the posies?" asked the young lady, as she rose to go.

"Only leaves now, miss; but I take real good care of 'em, and mammy says they will blow again next spring," answered Betty, showing her poor little garden, which consisted of the hyacinth,

tulip, and one stout dandelion, blooming bravely in an old teapot.

"That will be a long time to wait, won't it?"

"Yes'm; but I go and take peeks at them flowers in the shop, and once the man gave me a pink that hadn't no stem. Maybe he will again, and so I'll get along," said Betty, softly touching her cheerful dandelion as if it were a friend.

"I wish you would come and see my garden, little Betty. You should pick as many flowers as you liked, and play there all day long. I suppose your mother couldn't spare you for a visit, could she?"

Betty's face shone at the blissful thought, then the smile faded, and she shook her head, saying, steadily, "No, miss, I guess she couldn't, for she gets so tired, I like to help her by carrying home the clothes. Some day, maybe, I can come."

Something in the patient little face touched Helen, and made her feel as if she had been too busy thinking of her own burden to help others bear theirs. She longed to do something, but did not know how till Mrs. Simms showed her the way, by saying, as she stroked the frizzly little head that leaned against her,—

"Betty thinks a heap of flowers, and 'pears to git lots of comfort out of 'em. She's a good child, and some day we are going to see the country, soon as ever we can afford it."

"Meantime the country must come to you," said Helen, with a happy thought shining in her face. "If you are willing, I will make a nice little plan with Betty, so she can have a posy all the time. I shall come in town twice a week to take my German lessons, and if Betty will be at the corner of the Park, by the deer, every Wednesday and Saturday morning at ten o'clock, I'll have a nice nosegay for her."

If she had proposed to present the child with all the sweeties in Copeland's delightful shop, it would not have given greater joy. Betty could only dance a jig of rapture among the wash-tubs, and Mrs. Simms thank Helen with tears in her eyes.

"Ain't she just like a good fairy, mammy?" said Betty, settling down in an empty clothes-basket to brood over the joyful prospects.

"No, honey, she's an angel," answered mammy, folding her tired hands for a moment's rest, when her guest had gone.

Helen heard both question and answer, and sighed to herself, "I wish somebody else thought so."

When the first Wednesday came, Betty was at the trysting-place half an hour too soon, and had time to tell the mild-eyed deer all about it, before Miss Helen came.

That meeting was a pretty sight, though only a fawn and an old apple-woman saw it. Helen was half-hidden behind a great nosegay of June roses, lilies of the valley, sweet jonquils and narcissus, sprays of tender green, and white lilac plumes. Betty gave one cry of rapture, as she clutched it in both hands, trembling with delight, for never had she dreamed of owning such a treasure as this.

"All for me! all for me!" she said, as if it was hard to believe. "Oh, what *will* mammy say?"

"Run home and see. Never mind thanks. Get your posy into water as soon as you can, and come again Saturday," said Helen, as she went on, with a nod and a smile, while Betty raced home to fill every cup and plate they owned, and make a garden of the poor little room, where mammy worked all day.

All through the summer, rain or shine, these two friends kept tryst, and though Helen seemed no

nearer getting her wish, this little flower-mission of hers helped her to wait.

Strangers watched the pretty girl with her nose-gays, and felt refreshed by the winsome sight. Friends joked her about her black Flora, and would-be lovers pleaded in vain for one bud from her bouquets.

She found real happiness in this small duty, and did it faithfully for its own sake, little dreaming that some one was tracking her by the flowers she left behind her in the byways of her life.

For, seeing how much these fragrant messengers were to Betty and her mother, Helen fell into the way of taking flowers to others also, and never went to town without a handful to leave here and there, by some sick-bed, in a child's hand, on a needle-woman's table, or dropped in the gutter, for dear, dirty babies to find and crow over.

And, all unconsciously, these glimpses of poverty, pain, neglect, and loneliness, taught her lessons she had never learned before,—a sweeter language than German, a nobler music than any Herr Pedal-strum could give her, and a more winning charm than either youth or beauty could confer,—for the gay girl was discovering that life was not all a sum-

mer day, and she was something better than a butterfly.

When autumn came, and she returned to her city home, her young friends discovered that Helen's quiet season had improved her wonderfully, for behind the belle, they found a tender-hearted woman.

She took up her old life where she laid it down, apparently; but to those who knew her best, there was a difference now, for, in many unsuspected ways, pretty Helen was unconsciously fitting herself for the happiness that was coming to her very soon.

Betty helped to bring it, though she never guessed that her measles were a blessing to her dear lady. When Dr. Strong, finding a hot-house bouquet beside her bed, very naturally asked where it came from, Betty told all about Miss Helen, from the time of the red tulips to the fine tea-roses in her hand.

"She has lots of bunches like these sent to her, and she gives 'em to us poor folks. This one was for her to take to a splendid ball, but she kept it all fresh, and came herself to fetch it to me. Ain't she kind?"

"Very, to you; but rather cruel to the gentlemen

who hope to see her wear their gifts, for one evening at least," answered the doctor, examining the bouquet, with an odd smile.

"Oh, she does keep some, when they are from folks she likes. I was there one day when some violets come in with a book, and she wouldn't give me one. But I didn't care a mite, for I had two great posies, all red geranium and pinks, instead."

"She likes violets, then?" and the doctor gently patted Betty's head, as if he had grown suddenly fond of her.

"I guess she does, for when I went the next week, that very bunch was in the vase on her table, all dead and yellor, and she wouldn't let me fling it away, when I wanted to put in a rose from the bush she gave me."

"You are a grateful little girl, my dear, and a very observing child. Now keep warm and quiet, and we'll have you trotting off to Miss Helen's in a week or so."

The doctor stole a sprig of rose geranium out of Betty's last bouquet, and went away, looking as if he had found something even sweeter than that in the dingy room where his patient lay.

Next day Miss Helen had fresh violets in the vase

on her table, and fresh roses blooming on her cheeks. Dr. Strong advised her not to visit Betty, as there was fever in the neighborhood, but kindly called every day or two, to let Helen know how her little friend was getting on.

After one of these calls, the doctor went away, saying to himself, with an air of tender pride and satisfaction, —

"I was mistaken, and judged too hastily last year. Helen is not what I thought her, a frivolous, fashionable beauty, but a sweet, sensible girl, who is tired of that empty life, and quietly tries to make it beautiful and useful in the best and truest way. I hope I read the blue eyes right; and I think I may venture to say now what I dared not say last year."

After that same visit, Helen sat thinking to herself, with a face full of happiness and humility, — "He finds me improved, so I have not waited in vain, and I believe that I shall not be disappointed after all."

It is evident that the doctor did venture, and that Helen was not disappointed; for, on the first day of June, Betty and her mother, all in their best, went to a certain church, and were shown to the best seat in the gallery, where several other humble

friends were gathered to see their dear Miss Helen married.

Betty was in high feather, with a pink dress, blue sack, yellow ribbons in her hat, and lighted up the seat like an animated rainbow. Full of delight and importance, was Miss Betty, for she had been in the midst of the festive preparations, and told glowing tales to her interested listeners, while they waited for the bride.

When the music sounded, Betty held her breath, and rolled up her eyes in a pious rapture. When a general stir announced the grand arrival, she leaned so far over the gallery, that she would have gone head first if her mother had not caught her striped legs, and when the misty, white figure passed up the aisle, Betty audibly remarked, —

"If she had wings she'd look like an out-and-out angel, wouldn't she, mammy?"

She sat like a little ebony statue all through the service; but she had something on her mind, and the moment the bridal couple turned to go out, Betty was off, scrambling down stairs, dodging under people's arms, hopping over ladies' skirts, and steadily making her way to the carriage waiting for the happy pair.

The door had just closed, and Dr. Strong was about to draw down the curtain, when a little black face, with a yellow hat surrounding it like a glory, appeared at the window, an arm was thrust in offering a bunch of flowers, and a breathless voice cried, resolutely, —

"Oh, please, do let me give 'em to my lady! They bloomed a-purpose for her, and she *must* have 'em."

Those outside saw a sweet face bend to kiss the little black one, but they did not see what happened afterward, for Helen, remembering a year ago, said smiling, —

"Patient waiters are no losers. The poor child has red tulips all her own at last!"

"And I have mine," answered the happy doctor, gently kissing his young wife, as the carriage rolled away, leaving Betty to retire in triumph.