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WHAT THE
PINE TREE HEARD

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WHAT THE PINE TREE HEARD



HERE is our pine tree, Ronald, the very biggest one there is. I can always tell when we are near it, because I can smell the great clump of sweet-fern on the edge of the woods where the hill begins to slope down to the sea. Aren't the pine needles soft and warm! I love to sit here, don't you? The waves sound ever so cheery to-day; they are blue, I know, and dancing and covered with little sparkles. Isn't it so, Ronald?"

“Yes, and there are white sails and—oh, Dorothy, look at that great yellow butterfly! He floated right over your head.”

“I can’t see him, Ronald.”

“Oh, I forgot!” said the boy hastily. “Suppose we begin on the flowers now, dear; I have a whole lot for you today.”

“How good of you! Give them to me one at a time, brother, and don’t tell me a single thing, for I am sure I shall know them all.” The little girl’s voice was sweet and vivacious, yet it possessed a vague, pathetic cadence, which the lady sitting unnoticed on the other side of the great tree trunk, could not quite understand.

“This is a clover,” went on the little one gaily, “a red clover, because the stem is fuzzy and there are some leaves growing on it.

The blossom is not real red, you know, just something between rose-color and lilac. Isn't that right?"

"Yes, exactly right. I couldn't tell it better myself, looking right at it."

"And this," went on the girl, "is a daisy. The center is yellow and the petals are white,—oh, just pure white, like the foam on the waves. I could never forget that, I know.

"And this is a buttercup. It is yellow like the center of the daisy, only it has a shiny gloss, like varnish, all over the petals; and a cowslip is just like it only bigger. You see, I do remember."

The lady was idly wondering what sort of a new game this might be, and the sweet childish voice went on:

“This is a wild rose. Oh, Ronald, isn’t it sweet! I could tell it by its fragrance without even touching it. Now listen; a wild rose is colored a lovely soft pink, with a little yellow sun in the center, that sends out tiny, yellow rays all around. I can feel them with my fingers. And, Ronald, this rose is lighter colored than this one, and the dark one has not such a smooth, even shade as the light one. Isn’t that true?”

“Why, Dorothy, how do you know?” came the boy’s astonished voice; “You—” breathlessly, “you can’t see?”

The little girl laughed gleefully. “Didn’t I surprise you though, Ronald? Well, I’ll tell you how I know: this lighter one is larger and the petals are a little thicker and juicier, and so I know that it

grew in the shade; while the petals of this other one are coarser and thinner and drier, so it grew in the bright sunshine, where the ground was not very moist; and I remember that the roses that bloomed in the sunny meadow were of a darker and more uneven tint than those that grew in the edge of the wood; so you see it was not hard at all when you know how I did it."

The boy patted her hand softly. "You are a wonder, Dorothy. Your little fingers are almost as if they had eyes in the tips of them."

The little girl sniffed luxuriously at the roses. "Oh, Ronald," she said wistfully, "I *wish* I could see them."

The boy made a hasty movement and tried to turn her thoughts. "Now here is an old friend that you will be glad to meet again," he

exclaimed playfully. "It is the very first of the season, I just found it this morning, and we shall see how well you remember old comrades."

There came a quick happy little laugh. "Oh, Ronald, it is laurel; the dear mountain laurel come back! Oh, I am so glad! Now see how well I know it: — the green leaves are dark and thick and glossy, and the lovely white flowers are sort of crepe-y, and have little knobs of — of —" the voice trailed off into puzzled silence.

"Why, you know the color, Dorothy," cried the boy; "It begins with —"

"No, no, don't tell me! I don't want you to! I want to know it just my own self. Now wait while I think back—just how they looked."

There was a short silence, then the voice came again, choked by

sobs: "Oh, Ronald, Ronald, I don't know, — I can't remember, — I don't know whether the little points are yellow or pink! Oh, and to think that I should lose my dear mountain laurel the very first of anything, when I loved it so! Oh, I can't bear it, Ronald, I can't! Why must I stay always and always in the dark, when other people can see the sun and the flowers and the sea and all the beautiful things? What did I do, Ronald? I wasn't a bad girl; I tried to be good, and I said my prayers to God every night, and what does He punish me this way for? The minister says He took my sight away to make me love Him and depend upon Him more, but how *can* I love Him, Ronald, when He did such a dreadful thing to me? How can I?" The little girl broke down, sobbing hysterically.

“Hush, Dorothy, hush!” exclaimed the frightened boy. “It is wicked —”

“I don’t care if it is wicked,” she broke in wildly. “I wouldn’t even put out my little kitten’s eyes just to make it love me and depend upon me more, I wouldn’t be so cruel, and how can God possibly be good and loving if He does such awful things?”

The lady, brushing her fingers across her eyes, rose and came quickly around the tree. She sat down beside the passionately sobbing little one and gathered her into her arms, holding her tightly to her breast, and in a tone of ineffable tenderness and assurance said:

“God never did it, dear child, for God is Love.”

The boy rose to his feet, staring half resentfully because of the

intrusion; but instantly his sister's sobs became less hysterical, and presently lapsed into mere long, deep-drawn breaths, while she still clung closely to her new found friend, instinctively recognizing the love and compassion which held her in the clasp of gentle arms. At last she spoke, in a little quavering voice.

"I — I don't know who you are," she said timidly.

"Just a friend of yours," replied the soft voice of the lady.

"But I don't remember you."

"No, you never saw me before, but —" the lady hesitated, noticing her mistake.

"I never see anyone," said the child brokenly. "I am blind, you know."

“Can you tell me about it?” asked the lady, gently.

“Yes’m. I was only six years old then,—I am eight now,—and things began to grow dimmer and dimmer, and the doctor couldn’t do anything for me, and glasses did not seem to help at all, and by and by the light went clear out and I haven’t seen anything since, and the doctors say that I never shall. That is all”—the little voice choked.

The lady held her close. “Dear little one!” she whispered.

Presently she spoke again: “What was that game which you were playing this morning,—with your brother and the flowers?”

“Oh, that wasn’t a game,—I was just remembering. Ronald and I do that very often. I love the dear flowers so, and every day in

summer he brings some to me and I describe them and try to see them in my mind, so that I shall not forget how they look,"—the little lips began to tremble again, "And this morning, for the first time, I found that I had forgotten one of them,—my dear mountain laurel,—and oh, it hurt so, and I am so afraid that I shall lose them all by and by, and forget how Ronald looks, and mamma, and everything—" Here the sobs began afresh.

The lady pressed her lips to the moist little forehead, rocking her gently to and fro.

"I — I'm sorry to bother you so," the little girl said, her voice catching piteously. "I don't know why you should care about it at all, but you do,—I could tell by your kiss."

“I care because I love you, dearie.”

“But you don’t know me. How can you love me when you don’t know me?” The girl sat up and turned a tear wet, inquiring face toward the lady.

“I love everyone, dearie.” The lady patted the small brown hand gently.

“Everyone? Ronald and Mamma and everybody there is?”

“Yes, every one.”

“All the wicked people in jails and everywhere?”

“Yes, because I separate between the real selfhood of everyone—the selfhood which God made,—and the evil which tempts people to do wrong and leads them into sin. I know that the evil is no part

of their real being; but is the darkness and desolation of evil thinking.

“God created nothing about man but what is good. We are really His offspring—His children,—and it is not hard to love what is good. I do not love the evil that people do; but I love them, and Jesus loved them and said ‘Come unto me’.

“This is the way to love the real man, all men, the only man that God ever made. Can you understand this, dear?”

The little one was silent for a time, her soft brows wrinkled in effort to grasp the idea, then:

“Is it the way that I love Ronald when he soils his hands and his clothes?” she asked. “I don’t like to feel his hands when they are dirty, and I wish that they were clean; but I love Ronald all the

time; he is my dear brother just the same, and when he is washed, it is exactly as if there had never been any dirt there. Is that what you mean?"

"Precisely what I mean, dear. You do not love the dirt, but you know that it is really no part of your brother, that it is nothing when it is washed away, and you love your brother in spite of it, just as dearly as ever."

The little girl patted and smoothed a fold of the blue linen sleeve. At last she spoke in a very low voice:

"And do you love God, too?"

"More than all else."

There was a silence.

“Do you think that you would love God if He had done to you what He has to me?—if He had made you blind so that all the world was black to you?”

“Do you think God did that?”

“Why, yes,” wonderingly. “They all said that God did it for my good, and that I must love Him and praise Him, for: ‘whom He loveth He chasteneth’; but it is very, very hard, and I am not sure that I love Him at all.”

The lady took the little one’s face between her two hands, looking straight into the sightless eyes:

“Listen, dearie; God is all that is good and loving, and He does not want you, or any one, to be unhappy. He would not take

even the smallest pleasure from you. His love for you is greater than you can possibly think, and He wants you to have more of good and more of happiness than you would know how to wish for; but you must go to Him for it, and you must realize His love for you.”

“But I do go to Him, I’ve prayed and prayed—”

“Perhaps you do not go to Him in the right way. Perhaps you do not believe that He will answer your prayer,—not even while you are asking.”

“No,” doubtfully, “I suppose I don’t. You know the doctor said that I could never see again, and I always think of that.”

“But is not God greater than the doctors’ opinions?”

The little one was silent.

“You must know, dear, that God is ready and anxious to grant any good request, only you must believe—”

“But how *can* I believe, when the doctors, the very best doctors—”

“Would you like me to help you, little one? I *know* what He can do; I know that there is nothing which He cannot do, and if you will come to me here every day I will try to help you, also, to know the truth. Tell your Mamma that I am spending a few weeks with her neighbor, Mrs. Perry, and that if she will come to see me, I will explain to her by what means I can aid you. Will you come if she is willing?”

“Yes,” said the child simply. “I don’t feel nearly so angry and

bitter as I did, and I think that you can help me to be happier, anyway. Ronald will bring me every day, wont you, brother? ”

The boy, who had been listening silently, assented, and the lady kissed the little girl's soft hair and bade her good-bye until the morrow.

And so, on every pleasant morning the boy came to the tall pine tree on the edge of the hill, leading his blind little sister by the hand, and when she was snugly ensconced close to the side of her new friend, he wandered off into the woods to spend an hour with the birds and squirrels.

Many long talks the lady and the little girl had together; the child listening eagerly to teaching concerning our God who is only kind and loving, and who never tortures His children, not even “for their own

good", since He knows that the good is theirs without need of torture. The children of earth torture themselves, that is all. Then there were long periods of silent prayer and communion with God, and the realization that "All that God has created is Good".

One day the child's face wore a look of unusual thoughtfulness as she greeted her friend.

"I've been thinking over what you said yesterday," she began. "You read something about all things being ours before we ask for them; and you said that we had only to realize that, and accept them, and we would find that it is true."

"Yes, darling."

"Now, I have been wondering if it is like something that happened

to me one time. It is quite a long story; may I tell you?"

"Please do."

"Well, it was this way: Once, when I was a very little girl, only six years old, just before things began to get dim, Mamma gave me a lovely string of coral beads,—these, you see,—and I liked them better than anything I had ever had, and Mamma let me wear them all the time. One day in winter I was sitting on the rug before the fire playing with my kitten, and I took off my beads for kitty to run after, and by and by I laid them out in a circle on the rug and began to count them, and I grew sleepy and went sound asleep. When I waked up, the first thing I thought of was my lovely corals, and I reached out for them and they were gone. Oh, you don't know how badly I felt! I looked

all over the rug and under the chairs and the sofa and everywhere, but I couldn't find them at all. Then I went out to Bridget and asked if she had seen them, and she said that Mamma had picked them up from the rug and that probably she had taken them away from me to punish me for something. I said that I hadn't been bad and so Mamma wouldn't want to punish me, and then Bridget said that probably Mamma took them just to warn me not to be bad. I said that wouldn't be a sensible way to do at all; and then she said that maybe Mamma took them so that I would love her more and think of her more; that probably she was jealous of the beads and was afraid that I would care more for them than I did for her, and that very likely she had burned them up so that I wouldn't ever see them again. And then I believed

her! I don't know how I could; but I was so miserable and so angry and felt so abused! Just to think of my Mamma being jealous of those little red beads, when I loved her so much more and so differently that there wasn't the least bit of comparison; and to think that she would go and destroy them just for that! Oh, I was so dreadfully unhappy! Of course, Bridget didn't know any better than to tell me such things; she was ignorant, and beside, she really thought that Mamma had put them away because I spent too much time playing with them; and I believed all she said, and felt so angry and ugly toward Mamma and everybody, and so dreadfully ill-used.

“I kept growing crosser and crosser, and feeling more and more abused, and by and by I went to Mamma, crying, and said:

“‘Mamma, you took my pretty beads and threw them in the fire because you were jealous of them; and I didn’t deserve to be treated that way, Mamma, and I want them back again.’

“Mamma looked at me so reproachfully: ‘Does my little girl think that I burned her necklace?’ she said.

“‘Yes, you did, because you were jealous of it! Bridget said so! Oh, please give it back to me, Mamma, and I’ll always love you!’

“‘But, daughter, if I burned it, how can I give it back to you?’

“‘Well, you can’t, and I know you can’t, Mamma, but it wasn’t fair for you to burn it. Bridget says that it is gone forever, but I want it so much! Dear, dear Mamma, oh, please give it back!’

“‘You are unreasonable, little daughter,’ said Mamma gently.

'You tell me that I cannot restore it to you, and yet, in the same breath, you demand it of me. As long as you feel this way, there is certainly no way for you to get it back.'

"Then I cried and begged and coaxed and told her that I loved her, and pleaded for the necklace which I was sure was burned up. Yes, I know that I was dreadfully unreasonable, but I was a very little girl, and I was so miserable and unhappy that I didn't try to reason.

"By and by Mamma told me to go away by myself and think about it, so I went; but I was stubborn and cross, and after a while I came to the conclusion that Bridget didn't know anything about it at all, and that is likely as not, the necklace was just accidentally

lost,—that the kitty had dragged it away, or something,—so I gave Ronald and another boy all of my pennies to hunt all over the garden and everywhere for it. They searched and searched but they couldn't find it; and then I went back to my room, which is next to Mamma's, and sat down by myself and cried and cried. I was just completely discouraged.

“While I was crying, Olive came in,—Olive Harris, she is my nearest neighbor, you know,—and she asked me what I was crying about, and I told her that Mamma had burned up my lovely string of corals because she was jealous of them.

“Olive looked so surprised: ‘Why, Dorothy Brown!’ she said, ‘I don't believe that she ever did anything of the kind!’

“‘Yes, she did,’ said I, ‘because they are gone and Bridget says that is what became of them.’

“But Olive wouldn’t believe it at all. ‘It isn’t so!’ she kept insisting. ‘I just know that it is not! Why, only think how good your Mamma has always been to you, and how much she has done for you, and how she loves you! Why, she wouldn’t treat you that way for anything. You ought to know better.’

“And then all of a sudden I *did* know. I knew that she wouldn’t want to do anything to hurt my feelings, and that she wouldn’t be jealous of a little old string of beads, and that she wouldn’t destroy anything of mine, especially when she gave it to me herself because it was nice for me to have it; but instead of that she would help me to find it and keep it.

“And then I just sat straight up and said:

“‘Why, of course my Mamma wouldn’t do such a thing, and she would be just as glad as I, if the necklace were right here around my neck now,’ and I put up my hand, and there around my neck was that string of corals! What do you think of that!

“I was so astonished that I jumped right up and down and screamed: ‘Oh, Mamma, Mamma, I’ve got it, I got it, I’ve got it!’

“Mamma came in and took me in her arms. ‘Has my little daughter had a lesson?’ she said, ever so sweetly.

“‘Yes, Mamma, but where did it come from?’ I cried, oh, so excited. Why, I felt just as if I were in a fairy tale.

“‘It was there all the time, dearie,’ said Mamma. ‘I came in

while you were sleeping and, fearing that some one might step on the beads, I fastened them about your neck without wakening you, and then, when you stood up, they slipped down inside of your pinafore in front, so that you did not see them. You did not think to feel at your neck, for you were so certain that you left them on the rug, and your neck-ruffles hid them from the sight of others. Now do you not think, dear, that you misjudged Mother very cruelly?’

“ ‘Yes’m.’ I said, very much ashamed; ‘But why didn’t you tell me where they were when I asked you for them?’

“ ‘Do you remember how you came to me? You accused me of destroying them, and asked me for them in the same breath. You had them already, and needed only to find it out by realizing

that Mother would never have taken from you what she gave you as a good gift, but instead, that she would help you to keep it and care for it. Shall you have more confidence in me now, little daughter?’

“‘Yes,’ I whispered, and oh, I love her so much more since then, and I am so grateful to Olive for making me see what a dreadful mistake I was making, for now I believe in Mamma, and know that she wants me to be good and happy more than anything else in the world, and that she does only good things for me, because she is good and loves me. Now, Miss May, is that something like the way we treat God, and the way He feels toward us?’”

The lady bent over and took the child into her arms. “Dorothy,” she said earnestly, “your little story has helped me more than I can

tell you. You have caught the true idea,—the truth itself. Little one, you have the understanding, your eyes will surely be opened. Now we will go straight to God and tell Him that we *know* that all good is ours.”

She drew the little head down upon her breast, and for a long time they sat with closed eyes, asking that they might come to a full realization of the truth which was to make the little one free.

The child’s head grew heavier and heavier, and soon the soft, evenly drawn breath betokened that she slept.

After a time the lady opened her eyes, and a marvelously beautiful light was in them as she looked down upon the child in her arms. Presently the little girl’s eyelids fluttered, then opened

wide and she lay gazing up into the lady's face. Then her lips parted in a soft little smile and she whispered, oh, so low and gently:

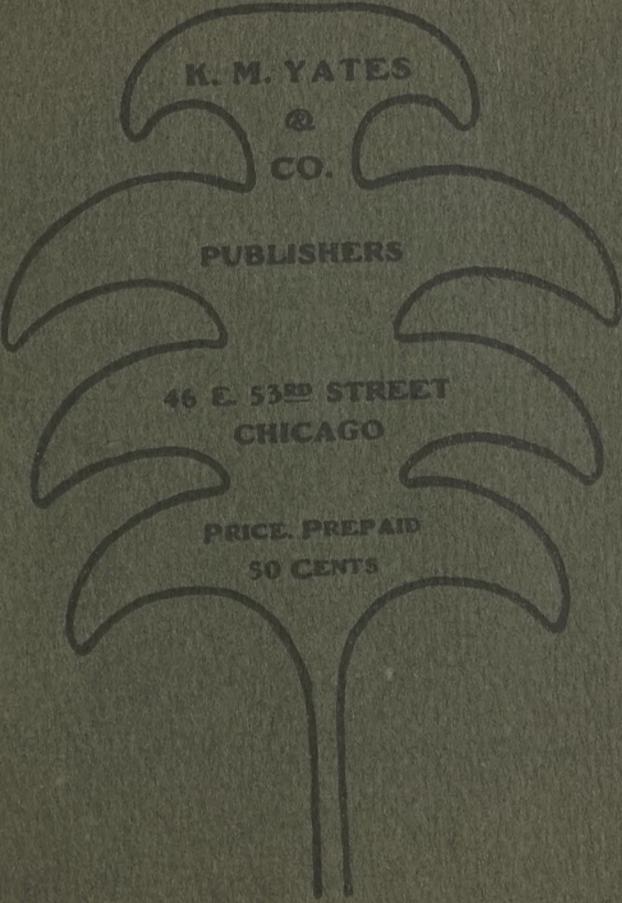
“Hush, don't speak; I am having the most beautiful dream! Don't wake me up just yet, please.”

The wide eyes roved from the lady's face up to the tall pine tree tops and the bits of blue sky above, and then came back to the sweet face once more, and she whispered again, in a soft, breathless way, as if afraid of wakening herself:

“I am dreaming that I can see, and oh, it is so beautiful! I have dreamed it before, but never like this,—never so clearly. Why, there is no mist at all!” And then, as the lady swallowed hard upon a big lump in her throat, “Don't speak, please, or I shall

wake up and then it will all be black night again forever and always, and this is just like heaven. Maybe God is going to let me dream this way sometimes, just to make me happier; it is so real, you know." Then suddenly a recollection of their prayers, and a realization of the wonderful truth, came over her; her eyes grew large with a great question, and she sat up straight, putting both of her tiny hands upon the lady's shoulders and crying out in tones vibrating with the joy of heaven within:

"Miss May, Miss May, is it real? Isn't it any dream? Am I seeing truly, truly? Oh, dear God, dear good God, I love you!"



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