

THE FLOWER-FAIRIES' RECEPTION

I have been working hard in my garden all the bright spring morning. But, tired as I was, when afternoon came I couldn't resist my little sister Nelly's urgent entreaty to go into the woods with her in search of wild flowers. Indeed it was quite too lovely to stay within doors. It was the last day of May, and as beautiful as one of the "rare" June days which were coming so soon to gladden our hearts. There was not the slightest chill in the air; the sun shone brightly; the birds sang gaily; the sky was of the deepest blue, with soft, white clouds floating peacefully over it—"boats of pearl on a sapphire sea." Nelly and I sauntered through the pleasant streets of the dear old town, under the great branches of the elms, whose young leaves, of a delicate, exquisite green, were a constant rest and delight to the eyes. We paused, as we always do, to look with interest at the big, old-fashioned, yellow house, which stands back from the street, once the residence of Washington, and now the home of the poet Longfellow. Nelly looked wistfully through the railings, hoping that she might catch a glimpse of the poet's children—

"Grave Alice and laughing Allegra,
And Edith with golden hair,"—

whose acquaintance she had made in that charming little poem, her especial favorite, "The Children's Hour." But those fortunate little maidens did not appear, so we wandered on, past the home of another delightful poet, Lowell, so buried in its grand old trees that we could see only a little bit of the house; past Mount Auburn with its marble monuments gleaming through the foliage, and at last down into the still wood, with its fragrant carpet of brown pine leaves and its wealth of flowers. Soon we were laden with treasures—delicate anemones; snow-white blood-root; jewel-like columbines; the dog-tooth, with its long, spotted leaf and graceful blossoms of yellow and brown; cowslips; and such violets! dark purple and bright blue, with golden stars in the center, and white and yellow. The yellow ones were the rarest, and very beautiful, but we liked the tiny white ones best, because they were so pure and delicate, and so fragrant. We put them all carefully into our botany-boxes, and trudged homeward just as the sun was setting, very tired and very happy. And we assured the dear mamma, who was watching for us, as we had done many a time before, that there was no pleasure in the world so perfectly delightful and refreshing as flower-hunting.

"Shall we arrange our flowers to-night, sister?" asked Nelly, after we had had our supper. She was looking up at me very earnestly, her

elbows resting on the table, her rounded chin leaning on her hand, and her dimpled fingers pressed upon her lips, after the manner of Raphael's loveliest cherub. She was trying to look very wide awake, and stretching open the blue eyes which were as pretty as our violets, just as far as she could; but it was plain that they could not stay open very long; so I pinched her rosy cheek and said: "No, indeed, Nelly. You'll be asleep in five minutes, and I don't feel very energetic myself. They'll keep nicely on the wet moss until tomorrow. Go to bed, sweet-heart, and I'll join you very soon."

Just ten minutes afterward I entered our room, and found my little sister fast asleep. What a pretty picture she made, her soft, blooming cheek resting upon one round white arm, and her golden-brown hair floating over the pillows. "After all," thought I, as I stopped to kiss her, "the human flowers are the fairest." And I felt very grateful to the Good Father for this precious little blossom with which he had blessed my life. Seating myself by the open window, I leaned my head upon the sill, thinking of many things, until the daylight died quite away, and, one by one, the stars came out, and the moon rose clear and full, and poured her silvery light through the branches of the great elms, upon my peaceful little garden. Suddenly I was startled by feeling a hand pressed tightly over my eyes; only for a moment, it seemed. Then it was withdrawn. But what a change had taken place in that moment! I looked around me in amazement. I was no longer in our little room, but standing in a magnificent garden. It contained the rarest and most beautiful trees and plants. The air was filled with the fragrance of innumerable flowers and the soft music of many fountains. On one side the grounds were terraced down to a lovely lake, whose quiet waters, scarcely disturbed by a ripple, sparkled in the moonlight. Upon the terraces were trees cut into various fanciful shapes—birds and animals and fountains. There were rare vases filled with brilliant flowers, and beautiful statues looking down upon the moonlit lake. Overlooking the lake was a graceful little summer-house, through whose closely clustering vines I caught the gleam of painted windows. Near by was a charming grotto; a fitting place for fairies to dwell in, I thought, as I looked at the great moss-covered rocks, between the crevices of which grew clusters of exquisite ferns and delicate vines, many of them bearing bright flowers; while, from some unseen spring far above, flowed little silvery streams, brightening and refreshing everything they touched. As I stood gazing in delight at this wonderfully beautiful scene, I became conscious of an unusual excitement and stir about me, and looking around, what was my astonishment to see that every flower had suddenly been transformed into a fairy, and that all had formed themselves into a grand proces-

sion, and were hastening in one direction. Of course I followed them immediately, and in a few minutes came in sight of what was evidently their place of destination. It was a large conservatory—the finest I had ever seen—built entirely of marble and glass. At the entrance stood a beautiful marble statue of Flora, the Goddess of Flowers, with a wreath around her head and a basket of roses in her hand, all exquisitely carved from pure white marble. Within were balconies with marble railings, over which hung graceful vines bearing brilliant blossoms, such as I had never seen before; but I know from descriptions which I had read, that they came from far-off, tropical lands. From thence came, also, the great palms; the tree ferns, which actually touched the ceiling; and many other gigantic and wonderful plants, among whose branches bright-colored birds—scarlet, and blue, and green, and gold, as splendid as jewels—flitted in and out. I noticed, however, that these showy creatures did not sing. This disappointed me very much; for a bird without a voice is as unsatisfactory as a flower without fragrance. But a plain, quiet-looking bird, clad in sober gray and black, was singing so sweetly that it really seemed as if he had a soul, and had put it all into his wonderful voice. I knew at once my old friend, the mocking-bird, whom I had heard many a time in South Carolina, where he used to sing sometimes, on moonlight nights, the whole night long. And I remembered what Longfellow says of him in his beautiful "Evangeline":—

"The mocking-bird, wildest of singers,
Shook from his little throat such floods of delicious music,
That the whole air and the woods, and the waves, seemed silent to listen."

Meanwhile the procession of flower-fairies had entered the palace and taken their places. It surprise me very much, at first, to see that the flowers of all different seasons, as well as of different countries, were represented. How was it possible, for instance, that Easter lilies and scarlet salvia, violets and golden-rod, should be in the same company? "But then," I reflected, "all things are possible in fairy-land. I mustn't be surprised at anything I see." And what a brilliant assemblage it was! A day or two before, I had been reading a description of Mrs. Secretary Somebody's reception in Washington. It was such a splendid affair, and I had wished so much that I could have seen it. But I am quite sure that no reception in Washington, or anywhere else, could have been as beautiful as the one I now beheld. At the head of the room, under a canopy of German ivy and jasmine, stood the noble Queen Calla Lily, looking very grand in her robe of white velvet, and her shining green mantle, with one priceless and magnificent gold ornament resting upon her bosom. So had I seen her on

Easter Sunday, lifting her graceful head above her sisters, upon the flower-laden altar of our church—a fitting type of the Divine Purity and Love.

Beside her stood the Princess White Camellia Japonica. Her robe was spotless as new fallen snow, and her mantle of the richest green. Many thought her more beautiful than the Queen, but she was too haughty and cold to suit my taste. I liked better her sisters, the Princess Pink and Red Camellia. The Princess Pink, whom I had never seen before, I thought at first perfectly lovely. There was a faint flush on her cheek, the color exactly of a soft, rosy cloud I had once seen at sunrise resting over Monadnock. I fancied she looked an angel that had just floated down from the skies. But when I talked with the angelic creature (for, by this time, I felt quite at home, and was moving freely among the distinguished guests), I was sadly disappointed. She proved to be insipid and uninteresting. And so was her magnificent sister. I therefore came to the conclusion that the Camellia family, although very splendid to look at, were not particularly interesting or lovable.

I turned from them to my especial favorite, the little Lady Heliotrope. She nestled modestly beside her proud companions, but dared not raise her timid eyes to their faces. She wore a simple robe of pale purple, and so shrinking was her manner that she would have passed unnoticed had it not been for a peculiar charm which drew all hearts toward her; and there was something very fascinating, too, in the rich, yet delicate, perfume which always accompanied her. She will never be admired for her brilliancy, but she will always be loved for her *business* and gentleness, and surely that is better. The same might be said of her dearest friend, the lovely little Lady Mignonnette, who kept close by her side all the time. It is impossible to describe in detail all the beauties which composed this court. I can only tell you about the principal personages. Of course all the ladies of the royal Rose family were there, in their garments of white and pink, and red and gold, and other exquisite colors, for which I can find no name. They were, as usual, the belles, for they were no less distinguished for their cordial, charming manners, than for their great beauty. While I was watching them I was conscious of a soft, musical tinkle, and such a delicious rush of fragrance that I turned eagerly to see from whence it came; and there, beside me, stood the dainty Lady Lily of the Valley, gently ringing her snowy bells against the green protecting mantle in which she had almost concealed herself. "Surely she is loveliest of all!" I exclaimed, in delight; but just then I met a pair of soft, dark eyes, fixed somewhat reproachfully upon me. They belonged to the *Ady Heart'sease*. She certainly was bewitching, with her arch, ex-

pressive face, and splendid in her rich robe of purple velvet and gold, and formed a charming contrast to my lovely snow-white Lily. But still I felt that the latter was nearest to my heart. All the members of the geranium family were present, and were, as usual, most tastefully dressed. The Scarlet Duchess, as she was called, delighted my eyes with her warm and vivid beauty, which lighted up the whole room. She is a tropical-looking creature. But I like her cousin, the Countess Rose, best. She was simply dressed in green, but there was something very sweet and homelike about her. The Ladies Fuchsia attracted much admiration by their perfect grace and the rare beauty of their jewels. The most beautiful one wore a robe of white velvet, very faintly tinged with pink, and a mantle of deep rose-colored velvet, with rare foreign-looking ornaments to match. Chancing to look down, I met the soft blue eyes of darling little Forget-Me-Not raised entreatingly to mine. The dear little creature was nearly crushed in the crowd, so I took her in my arms and stepped aside into a convenient corner, from which I could have a good view of the company. Did I tell you that one of the fairies had informed me that this was a reception given by the city Flower Fairies, who were spending a little time at their country seat, to their country cousins. The latter were beginning to arrive, and I looked at them with especial pleasure, because many of them were old and dearly-loved friends of mine. First came two whose gorgeous robes outshone even their splendid city cousins—the Princess Cardinalis, and the Duchess Golden Rod. The splendor of the former fairly took away my breath. The color of her robe was indescribable, it was not crimson, it was not scarlet, but a rich and deeper red than either—a color that none but the Great Artist could paint. As for Golden Rod, it was certainly "the gold of sunset skies" that she had caught and woven into that wondrous garment and graceful plume. This stately pair saluted the queen who received them most graciously; but, as they moved on, I heard the haughty Princess White Camellia say scornfully: "In what wretched taste these country people dress! They wear such flaunting, flaring colors, with nothing to relieve them. Really, I don't see how your Majesty can speak so pleasantly to such vulgar people." "Dear Camellia," answered the noble queen, "you must not judge our cousins so unkindly. Their brilliant costumes may not look so well with these surroundings; but you should see them in their own homes. The Princess Cardinalis lives on the banks of a stream. Her home is out of doors, and her bright robes make a perfect and beautiful contrast to the green banks, and clustering ferns and vines, and waving trees by which she is surrounded. The Duchess Golden Rod, too, is constantly surrounded by green grass, and her bright face and glowing dress cheer many a weary traveler who meets

her by the dusty road-side. The Great Artist has painted their robes as he has ours, and has placed them where they appear to the greatest advantage."

The Princess made no reply, for just then a sweet little band of sisters, the Ladies Violet, came up to pay their respects to the Queen. They were dressed in lovely shades of purple and blue, except two. One of these wore a soft yellow robe, delicately veined with dark purple, and the other wore a white robe veined in the same way. There was something very exquisite about these two. They were much shyer than their sisters, and more rarely seen abroad. I was particularly glad to see White Violet, with her sweet, modest, little face, and to inhale the delicate perfume she always wears. Then came graceful Columbine, in fanciful dress of scarlet and gold, and a troop of fragile little Anemones, whose robes were delicately tinted with pink, like the inside of a shell. Daisies tripped gaily along in their lovely costume of white and gold. The beautiful Lady Rhodora was there, and her cousin Azalea; and gentle Hepatica in her robe of pale purple, blue-eyed Houstonia; Blood Root, in her snow-white robe, and rough brown cloak; sweet Strawberry-Blossom; graceful Clematis and Convolvulus; "dazzling" Mountain Laurel; Lady Water Lily, in her splendid dress of white and gold; the sweet-breathed Wild Rose; and sweetest, best-loved of all, the precious little Mayflower, who had cast aside the covering of brown pine leaves and moss, under which she had slept all winter, and come to gladden our hearts with her delicious, rosy freshness. Very glad, too, was I to welcome the bonny Lady Harebell, whose soft blue robes I had last seen floating in one of the loveliest spots in New England, whither she wandered from her Scottish home. It was on the grounds of a charming country home, just at the junction of two rivers, one a grand, broad river rushing on to the sea; the other a quiet little stream gliding peacefully through the woods, its banks fringed with ferns, and lighted up by cardinal flowers, and clethra, and arrowhead, and azaleas, and roses. In this charming nook the harebell delights to grow. Our dear poet Whittier has described the spot far more sweetly than I can hope to do, in a poem addressed to the sisters who dwell there:—

"No sweeter bowers the bee delayed,
In wild Hymettus' scented shade,

Than those you dwell among;

Snow-flowered azaleas, intertwined

With roses, over banks inclined

With trembling harebells, hung!"

After Lady Harebell came some Southern visitors. The Princess Magnolia Grandiflora, in her snowy robe and mantle of rich, dark green

velvet, attracted every eye as she swept haughtily through the room, followed by her less stately but even more beautiful sister, the Princess Purple who wore a white robe veined with purple, and whose sweet breath filled the room with its delicate yet penetrating perfume. Then, bearing a still richer fragrance, came the Ladies Orange-Blossom in white and gold; and following them, the graceful Lady Yellow Jasmine, wearing a splendid dress of pure gold with emerald ornaments; and Lady Cherokee Rose, in a snowy robe, fastened by a single ornament of Etruscan gold, and wearing a mantle of exquisite, shining green. How the sight of her recalled the long, warm April days in the sunny South; when, before the fragrant Jasmine had quite left us, this matchless Lady Cherokee flung her graceful garlands over trees, and banks, and hedges, and made the whole country beautiful with her spotless white and tender green. Other distinguished visitors there were from the South, but I have not space nor time to describe them. I thought most of them more showy, but less delicate and refined, than our Northern Flower Fairies.

Glancing towards the door, I noticed a group of the more humble country cousins, Clover, Dandelion, Buttercup, and the like, who seemed rather uncertain whether to come in or not. While I was considering whether I should venture to call the Queen's attention to them, lovely Heliotrope, who is always trying to make others happy, stepped timidly up to her Majesty, and whispered a few words, and then went to the door and asked the modest visitors to follow her. She presented them to the Queen, who greeted them very kindly, and pleasantly told them that they brought to her refreshing memories of the hills and fields. But the Princess Camellia would not even return their shy salutation, but drew her shining robes about her, and scornfully turned away. Lady Heliotrope gave her a gently reproachful glance, but she regarded her with equal contempt. "Really," I heard her say to her sister, the Pink Princess, "I wonder at the presumption of that insignificant little Heliotrope. The idea of her rebuking me—me! The silly creature has certainly lost her senses. I must impress her with her own inferiority, and there will be a chance to-night, for the great Prince and Princess, you know, have promised to look in upon us, and she will soon learn from their treatment of her, how unimportant she is." The faint flush deepened on the cheek of the lovely Pink Princess, and I think she would have remonstrated with her sister had not her attention, as well as everybody's else, been drawn to a new arrival. This was an exquisitely beautiful country fairy, with deep blue eyes shaded by long fringed lashes; her dress matched her eyes, and both were blue,

"Blue as though the sky let fall
A flower from its cerulean wall."

Her robe was sprinkled with diamond dewdrops, which are certainly the most fitting ornament a flower fairy can wear, and was confined at the bottom by a rare jewel of gold, enameled with dark blue. Altogether, she was one of the most charming creatures present, and the pleasant thing about her was that she was so modest, so entirely unconscious of her own beauty. I had almost forgotten to say that her name was Lady Fringed-Gentian.

Then there was a great commotion throughout the grand salon, and Queen Lily looked expectant, and Princess Camellia drew herself up more haughtily than ever, and all the lowlier ones stood on tiptoe, and looked eagerly towards the door. The great Prince and Princess had come. Arm in arm they approached Queen Calla Lily. What a handsome couple they were!

The Prince was very tall and straight, and had dark blue eyes—almost as blue as Lady Gentian's—and curly brown hair, and a bright smile that was very pleasant to see. And the Princess was the sweetest creature that ever eyes beheld. Her hair was pure golden, and her cheeks wore the faint flush of Pink Camellia's and her eyes were large, and soft, and dark. "A rare beauty!" whispered the Flower-Fairies to each other. "Golden hair and dark eyes. Ah, there isn't one of us, not even the beautiful Rose Princesses, that can compare with her." The pair approached the Queen, who came forward to meet them, and congratulated her upon the splendor of her reception, and the beauty of her subjects. Then their eyes fell upon White Camellia, who was holding her head very high. "A superb creature," said the Prince to the Princess, in a low voice, "but rather too haughty and cold." "Ah," cried the Princess, scarcely glancing at White Camellia, "there is my darling little Heliotrope!" And she rushed forward, and embraced warmly the astonished Heliotrope. "She is my favorite of all," she said to her husband; "she is so modest and sweet, and unconscious—in every way a lovely creature." Princess Camellia overheard her, and tears of vexation and disappointment stood in her eyes. But kind Queen Calla whispered to her not to grieve, but to try to make herself always lovable, as she could be, if she wished. And proud Camellia's spirit was subdued, and she determined to try. I dare say she succeeded, as most people do who really try to be gentle and kind.

By this time I was quite worn out with the unusual excitement, and was very glad when the Prince and Princess and the other guests took their leave. I bade my flower-friends good-night, made a profound courtesy to the gracious Queen, and turned to leave the palace, when suddenly I again felt a soft hand pressed closely over my eyes. In a minute it was withdrawn, and, greatly to my astonishment, I found myself in my own room. The splendid garden, and lake, and palace, and flower-fairies—all had vanished. My head was resting upon the window-sill, and feeling very strangely, and Nelly was still sound asleep, looking lovelier than ever in the soft moonlight. I kissed her softly—my darling little lily-of-the-valley—and then went to my own bed, where I soon fell fast asleep, and dreamed all night of the Flower Fairies, and the delightful reception which I had had the honor to attend.