Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

What the flowers told Martha

Abbie Phillips Walker

Martha was visiting her grandmother, who lived in the country. At the back of the farmhouse was a very large porch, and in the front of that a garden in which grew all kinds of flowers. One afternoon, when everyone else was taking a nap, Martha sat on the porch. It was warm and a bee was buzzing around the flowers. Every little while he would fly around Martha's head.

"I wish I had someone to play with," thought Martha. "Everybody is asleep and I am lonesome."

"The flowers want you to come into the garden," buzzed the bee. Martha listened, for she could not believe the bee was really speaking to her, but she heard again, "The flowers want you to come into the garden."

Martha walked down the path to the Rose Bush. "I'll find out if that bee is telling the truth," she said.

"I am so glad you came," said a Rose, and as Martha looked it seemed that she could almost see the face of a little girl in its petals. "I wanted some one to talk to," said the Rose.

"So did I," said a Lily.

"We all are glad to see you," said a Tulip, "for we never have anyone to talk to."

"I never knew before that you could talk," said Martha.

"Of course we can," said the Rose, "but we are tired of telling stories to one another."

"Oh! can you tell stories?" asked Martha as she seated herself on the ground beside the flowers.

"Yes, indeed!" said the Rose. "I'll tell mine first."

"Did you ever hear how the Rose happened to have thorns?" she asked.

Martha said she never did, and the Rose said, "I will tell you."



"Before I bloomed here I lived in the warm climates, and although you may not think it I also lived in the land where Jack Frost dwells. But I love best the land where the nightingale lives and tells me of his love. One night when he was singing and telling me that my perfume was the sweetest in the garden and my damask cheek the softest, a Thorn Bush which grew near and had tried many times to win him from me began to tell how sweet were his notes and how graceful his form."

"'Do come and sing in my bush,' she said, 'and let me show you how strong I am. You will be safer in my bush than on the swaying branches of the Rose.'

"But the nightingale would not leave me, and told the Thorn Bush it was far too bold and its sharp points far too treacherous. 'You are not so fragrant as the Rose,' he said, 'and my love is all for her.'

"'You shall pay for this,' screamed the Thorn Bush, angrily, 'and you will find that your beautiful Rose has thorns as well as I.' But the nightingale only sang lower and more sweetly to me, and we forgot the Thorn Bush in our happiness.'

"The cruel Thorn, however, did not forget or forgive, and one day she twined herself around my roots and pressed into my tender stems until she was a part of me. I tried to cry out, but her strength was greater than mine. That night, when the nightingale came to sing his love song, she raised one of her sharp thorns and pierced his foot.

"'You see your beautiful Rose has hidden thorns,' she said, 'and she is no more to be desired than I am.'

"'I should be a poor lover were I not willing to suffer for the one I love,' replied the nightingale as he came closer and sang to me even in his pain.

"'I will always love you,' he said; 'I know you are not to blame for the thorns you wear, and that my love for you brought this upon you. I will never leave you.' And he sang to me all through the night, and in the morning a deep, red Rose bloomed where the nightingale's bleeding foot had rested, and the Thorn Bush was more angry than ever when she beheld its beauty.

"'You shall never be free,' she said to me; 'every Rose shall wear a thorn.'

"The nightingale still sings to me and never fails to tell me of his undying love."

"That is a very pretty story," said Martha as the Rose finished, "and I am glad to know about that Thorn, for I have wondered many times why a flower so beautiful as you had that sharp point under your soft leaves."

"Martha! Martha!" some one called from the doorway, and Martha jumped up.

"Come back tomorrow and hear my story," said the Tiger Lily; "and mine," said the Tulip; "and mine," called out the Jonquil.

Martha promised that she would and ran toward the house. The next day as soon as Martha found herself alone she ran into the garden, for she was curious to hear the promised stories.

The Jonquil spoke first. "My story," it said, with dignity, "will be historical. I am a descendant from the great Narcissus family, and the Narcissus, as you know, is a very beautiful flower; it grows in wild profusion among the stony places along the great Mediterranean and eastward to China. All that you may have heard, but do you know why Narcissus loves to be near the water?"

Martha said she did not.

"I will tell you," replied the Jonquil. "Ages and ages ago Narcissus was the son of a river god. He was extremely vain of his extraordinary beauty, which he beheld for the first time in the water. He sought out all the pools in the woods and would spend hours gazing at his reflection, and at last he fell in love with his own image."

"Narcissus could neither eat nor sleep, so fascinated did he become with his reflection. He would put his lips near to the water to kiss the lips he saw, and plunge his arms into it to embrace the form he loved, which, of course, fled at his touch, and then returned after a moment to mock him."

"'Why cannot you love me?' he would say to the image; 'the Nymphs have loved me, and I can see love in your eyes'; which, of course, he did, for he did not know he was gazing at his own reflection.

"At last he pined away and died, and in the place of his body was found a beautiful flower, with soft white petals, nodding to its reflection in the water."

"The Daffodils are also my cousins," the Jonquil explained, "and descend from the beautiful Narcissus."

"That is a very pretty story," said Martha, "and the fate of Narcissus should teach all vain people a lesson."

The Tulip spoke next.

"I am afraid," she said, "that my story will not be very interesting, but I don't suppose that many people know that I bloomed long ago in Constantinople, the

city of beautiful hills, where the mosques and the tombs and the fountains make a strange picture in the moonlight. There the ladies wear draped gowns and their veiled faces leave only their bright eyes exposed."

"Afterward I bloomed in a country where everybody seems happy, and that is the land I love best. The children in that country look like little stuffed dolls in their many petticoats and close-fitting bonnets around their chubby little faces. Their little shoes clatter over the stones, sounding like many horses in the distance. There I was best loved and grew in profusion and beauty around the quaint homes of these quaint-looking people."

"Ah, me, it is a long way from here," sighed the Tulip, "and I often long to hear the sound of the Zuider Zee as I did once long ago."

"Why, she has gone to sleep," said Martha as the Tulip closed and drooped her head, "and I must go in the house. Grandmother will be looking for me."

"Will you come again?" asked the flowers; "there are many more that have stories to tell."

"I shall be glad to hear them," said Martha, "for I had no idea that flowers could tell such interesting stories."

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