

The Daisy

Hans Christian Andersen

Now listen to this! Out in the country, close by the side of the road, there stood a country house; you yourself have certainly seen many just like it. In front of it was a little flower garden, with a painted fence around it. Close by the fence, in the midst of the most beautiful green grass beside a ditch, there grew a little daisy. The sun shone just as warmly and brightly on her as on the beautiful flowers inside the garden, and so she grew every hour. Until at last one morning she was in full bloom, with shining white petals spreading like rays around the little yellow sun in the center.

The daisy didn't think that she was a little despised flower that nobody would notice down there in the grass. No, indeed! She was a merry little daisy as she looked up at the warm sun and listened to the lark singing high in the sky.

Yes, the little daisy was as happy as if this were a grand holiday, yet it was only a Monday, and all the children were in school. While they sat on their benches, learning things, the daisy sat on her little green stalk and learned from the warm sun and everything about her just how good God is. The daisy couldn't talk, but high above her the lark sang loudly and beautifully all the things that the little flower felt, and that made the daisy very glad. The daisy looked up at the happy bird who could sing and fly, but she wasn't envious because she couldn't do those fine things, too.

"I can see and hear," the daisy thought, "and the sun shines on me and the forest kisses me. How gifted I am!"

Inside the fence stood all the stiff, proud flowers, and the less scent they had the more they seemed to strut. The peonies blew themselves out and tried to make themselves bigger than the roses, but size alone isn't enough. The tulips knew that they had the brightest colors, and held themselves very straight, so that they could be seen more plainly. None of them noticed the little daisy outside, but the daisy could see them and thought, "How rich and beautiful they are! I am sure the pretty lark flies across to them and visits them. Thank God that I stand close enough so that I can see them!" But just as she thought that-*keevit*-down came the lark!

But he didn't come down to the peonies or the tulips! No, indeed, he flew right down into the grass to the poor daisy, who was so overjoyed that she didn't know what to think.

The little bird danced around the daisy and sang, "How soft the grass is here, and what a lovely little flower! With gold in her heart and silver on her dress!" You see, the yellow heart of the daisy looked like gold, and the little petals around it were silvery white.

How happy the little daisy was no one can conceive. The bird kissed her with his beak, sang to her, and then flew up again-into the bright, blue air. It was at least a quarter of an hour before the daisy could recover from her joy! Then, almost ashamed, yet sincerely happy, she peeped over at the flowers in the garden, for they had seen the honor and happiness that had come to her, and would understand her joy. But the tulips stood up twice as stiff as before, and looked very haughty and very red in the face because they were very annoyed. The fatheaded peonies were jealous-bah! - and it was lucky they couldn't speak, or the daisy would have received a good scolding. The poor little flower could see they were not in a good humor, and that made her very sad.

Just then a girl with a great sharp, shining knife came into the garden, went straight up to the tulips, and cut them off, one after the other. "Oh my," sighed the little daisy, "that's dreadful! It's all over with them now."

Then the girl took the tulips away, and the daisy was glad that she was only a poor little

flower that nobody would notice out in the grass. Yes, she felt very grateful indeed. The sun went down, and the little daisy folded her leaves and went to sleep, and dreamed all night about the sun and the pretty bird.

The next morning, when the flower again happily stretched out her white petals, like little arms, toward the early sun, she recognized the voice of the lark, but this time the song was mournful and sad. Yes, the poor lark had good reason to be sad.

You see, he had been caught, and now sat in a cage close by an open window of the house. He sadly sang of the free and happy roaming he used to do, of the young green corn in the fields, of the glorious journeys he used to make on his wings high up through the air. The poor bird was very unhappy, for there he was, a prisoner-in a cage!

How the little daisy wished she could help him! But what could she do? Yes, that was difficult to figure out. She quite forgot how beautiful the world was, how warm the sun shone, and how wonderfully white were her own petals. She could only try to think of the poor little bird and how powerless she was to help him.

Suddenly two little boys came out of the garden, and one of them was carrying a big sharp knife like that which the girl had used to cut the tulips. They went straight up to the little daisy, who could not understand what was going on.

"Here we can cut a fine piece of turf for the lark," said one of the boys. Then he began to cut out a square patch of grass around the daisy, so that the little flower remained standing in the middle of it.

"Tear off that flower!" said the other boy.

And the daisy trembled with fear! To be torn off would mean losing her life, and she wanted so much to live now, and go with the turf to the captive lark.

"No, leave it there," the other boy said. "It looks pretty." And then the daisy, in a little patch of sod, was put into the lark's cage.

But the poor bird was complaining about his lost liberty and beating his wings against the wires of his prison; and the little daisy couldn't speak, couldn't console him however much she wanted to. And thus the morning passed.

"There is no water here!" cried the captive lark. "They've all gone away and have forgotten to give me anything to drink. My throat's dry and burning. I feel as if I had fire and ice within me, and the air is so close! Oh, I must die! I must leave the warm sunshine, and the fresh green, and all the splendor that God has created!"

But when he thrust his beak into the cool turf to refresh himself a little, his eye fell upon the daisy, who was trying so hard to speak to him. He kissed her with his beak, and said, "You must also wither in here, poor little flower. They've given me you and your little patch of green grass instead of the whole world that was mine out there! Every little blade of your grass shall be a green tree for me, and every one of your white leaves a fragrant flower. Ah, seeing you only tells me again how much I have lost!"

"Oh, if I could only help him and comfort him!" thought the daisy.

She couldn't move a leaf, but the scent that streamed forth from her delicate leaves was far stronger than a daisy ever gave forth before. The lark noticed it, and though in his thirst and pain he plucked at the blades of grass, he did not touch the flower.

The evening came, and still nobody appeared to bring the bird a single drop of water. At last the lark stretched out his pretty wings and beat the air desperately; his song changed to a mournful peeping; his little head sank down toward the flower, and his little bird's heart broke with want and yearning. And the flower couldn't fold its leaves and sleep, as she had done the night before; she too drooped sorrowful and sick towards the earth.

It wasn't until the next morning that the boys came; and when they found the bird dead, they wept many tears and dug him a neat grave, adorned with leaves and flowers. They put him into a pretty red box, for the poor bird was to have a royal funeral. While he was alive and singing they forgot him and let him sit in a cage and suffer; but now that he was dead, he was to have many tears and a royal funeral.

But the patch of turf with the little daisy on it was thrown out into the dusty road; and no one thought any more of the flower that had felt the deepest for the little bird, and had tried so hard to console him and help him.