

Summer Short Stories

The Blackberry Bush

by Celia Thaxter

A little boy sat at his mother's knees, by the long western window, looking out into the garden. It was autumn, and the wind was sad; and the golden elm leaves lay scattered about among the grass, and on the gravel path. The mother was knitting a little stocking; her fingers moved the bright needles; but her eyes were fixed on the clear evening sky.

As the darkness gathered, the wee boy laid his head on her lap and kept so still that, at last, she leaned forward to look into his dear round face. He was not asleep, but was watching very earnestly a blackberry bush, that waved its one tall, dark-red spray in the wind outside the fence.

"What are you thinking about, my darling?" she said, smoothing his soft, honey-colored hair.

"The blackberry bush, mamma; what does it say? It keeps nodding, nodding to me behind the fence; what does it say, mamma?"

"It says," she answered, "I see a happy little boy in the warm, fire-lighted room. The wind blows cold, and here it is dark and lonely; but that little boy is warm and happy and safe at his mother's knees. I nod to him, and he looks at me. I wonder if he knows how happy he is!"

"See, all my leaves are dark crimson. Every day they dry and wither more and more; by and by they will be so weak they can scarcely cling to my branches, and the north wind will tear them all away, and nobody will remember them any more. Then the snow will sink down and wrap me close.

Then the snow will melt again and icy rain will clothe me,
and the bitter wind will rattle my bare twigs up and down.

"I nod my head to all who pass, and dreary nights and
dreary days go by; but in the happy house, so warm and
bright, the little boy plays all day with books and toys. His
mother and his father cherish him; he nestles on their
knees in the red firelight at night, while they read to him
lovely stories, or sing sweet old songs to him - the happy
little boy! And outside I peep over the snow and see a
stream of ruddy light from a crack in the window shutter,
and I nod out here alone in the dark, thinking how beautiful
it is.

"And here I wait patiently. I take the snow and the rain and
the cold, and I am not sorry, but glad; for in my roots I feel
warmth and life, and I know that a store of greenness and
beauty is shut up safe in my small brown buds. Day and
night go again and again; little by little the snow melts all
away; the ground grows soft; the sky is blue; the little birds
fly over crying, "It is spring! it is spring!" Ah! then through all
my twigs I feel the slow sap stirring.

"Warmer grow the sunbeams, and softer the air. The small
blades of grass creep thick about my feet; the sweet rain
helps swell my shining buds. More and more I push forth
my leaves, till out I burst in a gay green dress, and nod in
joy and pride. The little boy comes running to look at me,
and cries, "Oh, mamma! the little blackberry bush is alive
and beautiful and green. Oh, come and see!" And I hear;
and I bow my head in the summer wind; and every day they
watch me grow more beautiful, till at last I shake out
blossoms, fair and fragrant.

"A few days more, and I drop the white petals down among

the grass, and, lo! the green tiny berries! Carefully I hold them up to the sun; carefully I gather the dew in the summer nights; slowly they ripen; they grow larger and redder and darker, and at last they are black, shining, delicious. I hold them as high as I can for the little boy, who comes dancing out. He shouts with joy, and gathers them in his dear hand; and he runs to share them with his mother, saying, "Here is what the patient blackberry bush bore for us: see how nice, mamma!"

"Ah! then indeed I am glad, and would say, if I could, "Yes, take them, dear little boy; I kept them for you, held them long up to sun and rain to make them sweet and ripe for you;" and I nod and nod in full content, for my work is done. From the window he watches me and thinks, "There is the little blackberry bush that was so kind to me. I see it and I love it. I know it is safe out there nodding all alone, and next summer it will hold ripe berries up for me to gather again." "

Then the wee boy smiled, and liked the little story. His mother took him up in her arms, and they went out to supper and left the blackberry bush nodding up and down in the wind; and there it is nodding yet.