Snowdrop

Winter; it is cold; the wind cuts sharply, but in the earth it is good, cozy; there lies a little flower in its bulb, covered by earth and snow. But then rain fell; the drops penetrated through the snow cover into the earth to the flower bulb and told it about the white world above it. Soon a sunbeam made its way there too, so thin and drilling; it bored through the snow and earth and gently tapped on the bulb.

"Come in!" said the flower.

"I cannot!" answered the ray. "I am still too weak now, and I cannot open the bulb! But by summer I shall gather my strength!"

"And when will summer come?" asked the flower, and it asked the same question of every new guest—the sunbeam. But summer was still far off; not all the snow had melted, and every night the puddles froze over again.

"How long this drags on!" said the flower. "I simply cannot stay still! I want to stretch, to lengthen, to open, to go out into freedom, to meet summer! Oh, what a blessed time that will be!"

And the flower stretched inside its thin shell, softened by water, warmed by snow and earth, pierced by sunbeams. Soon a green stem shot up from the earth beneath the snow, with a light-green bud surrounded, like a little screen, by narrow, thick leaves. The snow was still cold, but it was flooded with sunlight—it had become loose enough for them to break through easily, and they themselves had now grown stronger.

"Welcome! Welcome!" they sang, and the flower peeked out from under the snow. The sunbeams caressed and kissed the little one, so that its snow-white cup with green veins opened completely. Joyfully and modestly it bowed its head.

"Dear little flower!" sang the sunbeams. "How fresh and tender you are! You are the first, the only one! You are our beloved child! You announce summer, wonderful summer! Soon all the snow will melt, the cold winds will fly away! We shall reign! Everything will turn green! And you will have companions: lilac and yellow acacia will bloom, and then roses, but you will still be the first, so tender, so translucent!"

What joy it was! It seemed as though the very air sang and resonated, the sunbeams penetrated into the very petals and stem of the flower. And it stood there, so tender, so fragile, and yet full of strength, in the lush bloom of youthful

beauty, so dainty in its little white dress with green ribbons, praising summer. But summer was still far off; clouds covered the sun, cold, sharp winds began to blow.

"You have appeared too early!" they said to the flower. "Strength is still on our side! Wait, we will teach you a lesson! You should have stayed sitting warmly instead of hurrying to show off in the sunshine—the time has not yet come!"

The cold pinched sharply. Days passed after days, and not a single sunbeam appeared. The tender little flower might well have frozen to death. But it was stronger than it suspected itself; it was strengthened by joyful faith in the promised summer. It must come soon! Had not the sunbeams announced it? The flower firmly believed their promise and stood patiently upon the white snow in its white attire, bowing its head beneath heavy, thick flakes of snow; around it raged the cold winds.

"You will break!" they said. "You will wither, you will freeze! What did you need to be here for? Why did you let yourself be lured out? The sunbeam deceived you! Now you have only yourself to blame! Ah, you snowdrop!"

"Snowdrop!" rang out in the cold morning air.

"Snowdrop!" rejoiced children who had run out into the garden. "Here grows one, so cute, so lovely, the first, the only one!"

And these words warmed the flower as if they were sunbeams. From joy it did not even feel that it had been picked. It found itself in a child's little hand, childish lips kissed it. Then it was brought into a warm room, admired, and placed in water. The flower came alive, was reborn to life, and thought that summer had suddenly arrived.

The eldest daughter, a lovely young girl—she had already been confirmed—had a sweetheart; he too had been confirmed and was now studying at university.

"I'll play a little joke on him! He will think we already have summer!" said the girl, took the tender flower, and placed it in a fragrant sheet of paper on which verses about the snowdrop were written. They began with the word "snowdrop" and ended with the words: "Now, my friend, you will remain a fool all winter long!" Yes, that is what was said in the verses which she sent to her friend instead of a letter. The flower found itself in an envelope; how dark it was there! It was as if it had fallen back into the bulb! And so it set off on its journey, spent time in the mailbag, was squeezed and crumpled; there was little pleasure in that, but this too came to an end.

The letter reached its destination; it was opened and read. The sweetheart was so pleased that he kissed the flower repeatedly and hid it together with the verses in a drawer. There lay many other equally precious letters, but none of them had flowers; this one was the first, the only one, as the sunbeams had called it, and the flower could not rejoice enough at this!

And it had plenty of time to rejoice: summer passed, the long winter passed too, summer came again, and only then was it taken out once more. But this time the young man was not cheerful and began rumbling through the letters and papers so angrily that the sheet with the verses flew onto the floor, and the snowdrop fell out of it. True, it had dried up and become flattened, but that was no reason to throw it onto the floor all the same! Still, lying on the floor was better than burning in the stove, where all the letters and verses ended up. What had happened? What often happens. The snowdrop had deceived the young man—that was a joke; the girl had deceived him—that was no joke. During the summer she had chosen herself a new sweetheart.

In the morning the sun illuminated the little flattened snowdrop, which looked as if it had been painted on the floor. The girl, who was sweeping the floor, picked it up and inserted it into one of the books on the table; she thought she had accidentally dropped it from there while tidying the table. And so the flower found itself among verses once again, but this time printed ones, and those are surely more important than handwritten ones, at least they cost more.

Years passed; the book stood on the shelf; but then it was taken down, opened, and someone began to read. The book was a good one: poems and songs by the Danish poet Ambrosius Stub; they are worth getting to know. The person reading the book turned a page.

"A snowdrop! No wonder it was placed here. Poor Ambrosius Stub! You too were a snowdrop among your brethren! You appeared too early, you outran your time, and you were met by wild winds and bad weather. You had to wander from house to house, from one Funen landlord to another, playing the role of a flower in a glass of water or inserted into a rhymed letter! Yes, you too were a snowdrop, deceptively announcing summer, a misunderstanding, a joke, and yet you were the first, the only one, breathing with youthful freshness, a Danish poet. Remain here then, snowdrop! You were placed here for a reason."

And the snowdrop was placed back into the book; it was both flattered and glad to learn that it had been placed in this beautiful collection of songs for a reason and that the singer himself had been such a snowdrop, over whom winter had played a

trick. The snowdrop understood everything in its own way, just as we understand every thing in our own way.

That is the whole tale of the snowdrop.