

Chamomile

Just listen to this!

Outside the town, right by the road, stood a country house. You have surely seen it? In front of it there was a small garden, enclosed by a painted wooden lattice.

Not far from the house, right by the ditch, grew a daisy in the soft green grass. The sun's rays warmed and caressed it just as they did the luxurious flowers blooming in the garden before the house, and our daisy grew not by days but by hours. One fine morning it opened completely—its yellow, round heart, like the sun itself, was surrounded by a radiance of dazzlingly white tiny ray-petals. The daisy was not at all concerned that it was such a poor, simple little flower, unseen and unnoticed in the thick grass; no, it was content with everything, eagerly stretching toward the sun, admiring it, and listening to how somewhere high—high up in the sky—a lark was singing.

The daisy was so cheerful and happy, as if today were Sunday, whereas in fact it was only Monday; all the children sat quietly on their school benches and learned from their teachers; our daisy too sat quietly on its stem and learned from the bright sun and from all the surrounding nature, learning to recognize God's goodness. The daisy listened to the lark's song, and it seemed to her that in its loud, resonant songs sounded precisely what lay hidden in her own heart; therefore the daisy looked upon the happy, fluttering songstress bird with a sort of special reverence, yet felt no envy toward it and no sorrow that she herself could neither fly nor sing. "After all, I see and hear everything!" she thought. "The sun caresses me, the breeze kisses me! How happy I am!"

In the garden bloomed many lush, proud flowers, and the less they fragrated, the more important they acted. The peonies puffed out their cheeks—they all wanted to become bigger than roses; but is size what matters? No one was more variegated, more gaily dressed than the tulips; they knew this perfectly well and tried to stand as straight as possible to attract more attention. None of the proud flowers noticed the little daisy growing somewhere by the ditch. Yet the daisy often gazed at them and thought, "How gaily dressed and beautiful they are! Surely the lovely songstress bird will fly to visit them! Thank God I grow so close—I shall see everything and admire to my heart's content!" Suddenly there rang out "queer-queer-vit!", and the lark descended... not into the garden to the peonies and tulips, but straight into the grass, to the modest daisy! The daisy was quite bewildered with joy and simply did not know what to think or how to behave!

The bird hopped around the daisy and sang. "Ah, what splendid soft grass! What a dear little flower in a silvery dress, with a golden heart!"

The daisy's yellow heart indeed shone like gold, while its dazzlingly white petals gleamed with silver.

The daisy was so happy, so glad, that words cannot tell. The bird kissed it, sang it a little song, and then soared again into the blue sky. A good quarter of an hour passed before the daisy recovered from such happiness. Joyfully yet shyly she glanced at the lush flowers—for they had witnessed what happiness had befallen her, and who else could appreciate it if not them! But the tulips stretched themselves, puffed up, and turned red with vexation, while the peonies were ready to burst! Fortunately they could not speak—the daisy would have heard plenty from them! The poor thing immediately understood they were out of sorts and became very sorrowful.

At that moment a girl appeared in the garden, holding a sharp, gleaming knife in her hands. She went straight to the tulips and began cutting them down one after another. The daisy gasped. "What horror! Now it is the end for them!" Having cut the flowers, the girl left, and the daisy rejoiced that she had grown in the thick grass, where no one saw or noticed her. The sun set; she folded her petals and fell asleep, yet even in her dreams she kept seeing the dear bird and the red sun.

In the morning the flower again unfolded its petals and stretched them out, like a child its little arms, toward the bright sun. At that very instant the lark's voice was heard; the bird sang, but how sadly! The poor creature had fallen into a trap and now sat in a cage hanging by an open window. The lark sang of the vastness of the sky, of the fresh greenery of the fields, of how good and free it had been to fly at liberty! Heavy, heavy was the poor bird's heart—it was in captivity!

The daisy longed with all her soul to help the prisoner, but how? And the daisy forgot to think about how wonderful everything was around, how gloriously the sun warmed, how her silver petals sparkled; she was tormented by the thought that she could do nothing to help the poor bird.

Suddenly two little boys came out of the garden; one of them held a knife just as large and sharp as the one with which the girl had cut the tulips. The boys walked straight to the daisy, who could not possibly understand what they wanted there.

"Here we can cut out a nice piece of turf for our lark!" said one of the boys, and, plunging the knife deep into the ground, he began cutting out a square piece of turf; the daisy found herself right in the middle of it.

"Let's pull out the flower!" said the other boy, and the daisy trembled with fear: if she were plucked, she would die, and she so wanted to live! Now she might actually reach the poor prisoner!

"No, let it rather remain!" said the first boy. "It looks prettier that way!"

And so the daisy ended up in the cage with the lark. The poor creature loudly lamented his captivity, thrashed about, and beat himself against the iron bars of the cage. And the poor daisy could not speak and could not comfort him with even a single word. Oh, how she wished to! Thus passed the whole morning.

"There is no water here!" complained the lark. "They forgot to give me something to drink, went away, and left me not even a drop of water! My throat is completely parched! I am burning all over, and I am shivering! It is so stifling here! Ah, I shall die without ever seeing again the red sun, nor the fresh greenery, nor the whole world of God!"

To refresh himself at least a little, the lark plunged his beak deep into the fresh, cool turf, saw the daisy, nodded his head to her, kissed her, and said:

"You too will wither here, poor flower! You and this scrap of green turf—that is all they have given me instead of the whole world! Every blade of grass must now be for me a green tree, every petal of yours a fragrant flower. Alas! You only remind me of what I have lost!"

"Oh, how I wish I could comfort him!" thought the daisy, but she could not move a single leaf and only exhaled her fragrance more and more strongly. The lark noticed this and did not touch the flower, although in his thirst he had plucked out all the grass.

Then evening came, and still no one brought water to the poor bird. Then she spread her short little wings, convulsively fluttered them, and several more times pitifully chirped:

"Drink! Drink!"

Then her head tilted to one side, and her heart burst from anguish and torment.

The daisy likewise could no longer fold her petals and fall asleep as she had the night before: she was quite ill and stood, sadly drooping her head.

Only the next morning did the boys come, and, seeing the dead lark, they wept bitterly—bitterly; then they dug a little grave for him and adorned it all with flowers, and placed the lark himself in a pretty little red box—they intended to bury him like a king! Poor bird! While he lived and sang, they forgot about him, left

him to die in the cage from thirst, and now they arranged a magnificent funeral for him and shed bitter tears over his grave!

The turf with the daisy was thrown onto the dusty road; no one gave a thought to her, who nevertheless loved the poor bird more than anyone else and with all her heart had wished to comfort her.