

Cornelia S. Jewels

by James Baldwin, Fifty Famous Stories Retold

It was a bright morning in the old city of Rome many hundred years ago. In a vine-covered summer-house in a beautiful garden, two boys were standing. They were looking at their mother and her friend, who were walking among the flowers and trees.

"Did you ever see so handsome a lady as our mother's friend?" asked the younger boy, holding his tall brother's hand. "She looks like a queen."

"Yet she is not so beautiful as our mother," said the elder boy. "She has a fine dress, it is true - but her face is not noble and kind. It is our mother who is like a queen."

"That is true," said the other. "There is no woman in Rome so much like a queen as our own dear mother."

Soon Cornelia, their mother, came down the walk to speak with them. She was simply dressed in a plain, white robe. Her arms and feet were bare, as was the custom in those days - and no rings or chains glittered about her hands and neck. For her only crown, long braids of soft brown hair were coiled about her head - and a tender smile lit up her noble face as she looked into her sons' proud eyes.

"Boys," she said, "I have something to tell you."

They bowed before her, as Roman lads were taught to do, and said, "What is it, mother?"

"You are to dine with us today, here in the garden - and then our friend is going to show us that wonderful casket of jewels of which you have heard so much."

The brothers looked shyly at their mother's friend. Was it possible that she had still other rings besides those on her fingers? Could she have other gems besides those which sparkled in the chains about her neck?

When the simple outdoor meal was over, a servant brought the casket from the house. The lady opened it. Ah, how those jewels dazzled the eyes of the wondering boys! There were ropes of pearls, white as milk, and smooth as satin - heaps of shining rubies, red as the glowing coals - sapphires as blue as the sky that summer day - and diamonds that flashed and sparkled like the sunlight.

The brothers looked long at the gems. "Ah!" whispered the younger, "if our mother could only have such beautiful things!"

At last, however, the casket was closed and carried carefully away.

"Is it true, Cornelia, that you have no jewels?" asked her friend. "Is it true, as I have heard it whispered, that you are poor?"

Mother's Day.

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"No, I am not poor," answered Cornelia, and as she spoke she drew her two boys to her side, "for here are my jewels. They are worth more than all your gems."

The boys never forgot their mother's pride and love and care - and in after years, when they had become great men in Rome, they often thought of this scene in the garden. And the world still likes to hear the story of Cornelia's jewels.