

LITTLE STORIES FOR LITTLE PEOPLE

By Aunt Julia

The Zinnia and the Chichirica

A big, red zinnia held herself up. She knew that she was beautiful. She stretched her stem upward and outward above the other zinnias. Everybody that passed by said, "How beautiful!"

The girl who owned the garden came with a friend.

"Look at my giant zinnia," said the girl proudly. "Isn't she a beauty?"

"Yes," the other answered, "as big as a saucer. My zinnias are small."

The girls' words made the big, red zinnia prouder. She looked around at the other zinnias and the little, quiet chichiricas. She seemed to say, "Did you hear what they said?"

When the chichirica said nothing, the zinnia stuck out her lower lip and said,

"Why don't you speak? At least you should be polite enough to answer when you are addressed."

In her soft voice, the chichirica answered, "You are indeed beautiful. I admire your size and your color. But . . ."

"Well, but what?" the zinnia cut in angrily.

"I wonder," the chichirica said slowly, "how long your beauty will last."

"I don't know how long," snapped the zinnia, "but surely I will live longer than you. I am taller. My stalks are bigger than yours."

"Yes, they are. But I am sorry to tell you that I have seen zinnias grow and bloom and die many times. They lived right where you now stand."

"They must be the small, weak ones like my sisters around me."

After a while, the zinnia faced the chichirica again.

"Do you mean to say that you, with your little common-looking flowers, will live longer than I? Of what use are you? Nobody notices you."

"You are right. Nobody notices me. But I stay here even when all the bright zinnias are gone. The mistress does not uproot me to be thrown into the fire."

"How she envies me, the ugly little thing," the red zinnia muttered.

A week passed and the zinnia was still attractive. People stopped to admire her many bright petals. The proud flower cast meaningful glances at her neighbor, the chichirica. The chichirica said nothing.

Then came a day when the zinnia did not feel well. She could no longer meet people's gazes with a broad smile. Some of her petals were no longer bright. She could not hold herself up. All the other zinnias around her were also wilted. The once bright petals were scattered on the ground. The big, red zinnia died broken-hearted.

Soon the gardener came. He pulled all the zinnias and threw them in a heap in a corner. When they were dry, he set fire to them.

"Poor zinnia!" the humble chichirica sighed as she watched the fire.

The girl came. She lingered around the chichirica.

"I like you, my little gentle flower. Anytime during the year I see you smiling modestly at me. You are not very attractive, but you are faithful."

The little chichirica smiled with deep joy.

