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An Old Friend, The Dandelion

Mrs. William Starr Dana

There is one plant which you city children ought to know almost as well as the country children. In the back yards and in the little squares of grass which front the street, it sends up its shining stars; and as for the parks, they look as if some generous fairy had scattered gold coins all over their green lawns.

Now, what is this flower which is not too shy to bring its brightness and beauty into the very heart of the crowded city?



It is the dandelion, of course. You all know, or ought to know, this plucky little plant, which holds up its smiling face wherever it gets a chance.

And now, I am sure, you will be surprised to learn that this dandelion, which you have known and played with all your lives, is among those mischievous flowers which are laughing at you in their sleeves, and that regularly it has played you its "April fool;" for, like the dogwood and the clover, this so-called dandelion is not a single flower.

No, what you call a dandelion is a bunch made up of a great many tiny blossoms.

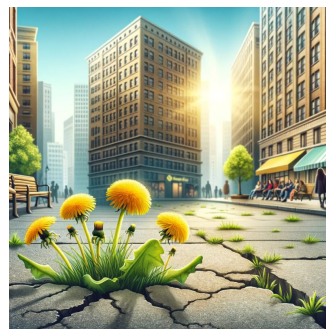
If you pull to pieces a dandelion head, you will find a quantity of little yellow straps. Each little strap is a perfect flower.

Now, if you had been asked for the building plan of the dandelion, you would have looked for the calyx, and you would have thought you had found it in the green cup which holds the yellow straps.

And when you were looking for the corolla, perhaps you would have said, "Well, all these yellow things must be the flower leaves of the corolla."

But when you began your hunt for stamens and pistils, you would have been badly puzzled; and no wonder, for these are hidden away inside the yellow straps, the tiny flowers of the dandelion.

So remember that when you cannot find the stamens and pistils within what you take to be the single flower, you will do well to stop and ask yourself, “Can this be one of the plants which plays tricks, and puts a lot of little flowers together in such a way as to make us think that they are one big flower?”



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