



Jessie Willcox Smith

September 6, 1863 - September 8, 1935

Died: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Interment: The Woodlands Cemetery, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Jessie Willcox Smith died in Philadelphia on September 8, 1935, two days after her seventy-second birthday. Born in the same city on September 6, 1863, she trained first as a teacher, found the schoolroom a poor fit, and went to the Pennsylvania Academy and then to Howard Pyle, who taught illustration as a job with deadlines and a conscience.

She became one of the Red Rose Girls - Smith, Elizabeth Shippen Green, and Violet Oakley - who shared studios and a house at Cogslea in Mount Airy and proved that a woman could live by pictures without asking a husband's permission for the rent. Good Housekeeping put her mothers and children on the cover for years. The Water-Babies, Dickens, Stevenson, and a Mother Goose that still turns up in attics: she drew childhood as a lit interior, not a sermon, and she did it so often that later critics accused her of sweetness. The sweetness was technique. Look at the hands and the weight of a child against a lap.

She never married. She kept cats, students, and a schedule. Philadelphia was the whole geography: the Academy, the magazine offices in New York she could reach by train, the garden at Cogslea, the friends who outlived the fashion for her kind of picture. When modernism made her covers look old, she did not reinvent herself for a jury. She kept working until the work was enough.

She is buried at The Woodlands in Philadelphia. The house in Mount Airy has had other lives. The covers are still the faces a certain kind of American childhood wore in print.

Services

Died in Philadelphia on September 8, 1935. Interment at The Woodlands Cemetery, Philadelphia.

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