

## FLOWERS FOR THE LIVING

MARY COULTER, who works by the day and has little time for reading, had never heard of Mary Webb's poem about the woman who had craved flowers all her life and never had had them, and yet when she died her coffin was lined with pink rosebuds, and stately white lilies stood like guardian angels among the tapers; and blue forget-me-nots, and lilies of the valley mingled with carnations and canterbury bells and narcissus and iris to form wreaths and pillows and shields and crosses and broken columns and what-nots, covering her coffin three times over, and overflowing the altar and chancel of the church . . . while she lay, still and cold and dead, among all this belated loveliness, with a Mona Lisa smile on her face, not knowing a word about it, and certainly not caring!

But though Mary Coulter had not heard of the poem, she did not need any one to show her the tragedy of the flowers that came too late as she sat that chill November morning at her friend's funeral and looked at the roses and carnations and smilax and fern that made beautiful the cheap coffin wherein rested the mortal remains of Martha Minnis, whose tired hands had come to rest at last on the white silk front of her best black dress.

From where she sat, on the front row of seats, with the bereaved husband and son, Mary Coulter could see the mountains away to the west, darkly blue and mysterious, with their crown