

The Alleluia Plant

By
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It seemed to Margaret Ward, spending two weeks in the country for the first time in her life, that she could never get her fill of green growing things. Molly Spencer, her cousin, laughed at that. Molly's inclinations tended away from growing things: she hankered for town.

"We ought to change places, Meg," she said one day. "Only, you'd mighty soon tire of the monotony of farm life."

Margaret smiled. She was wondering how soon Molly would tire of book-keeping, with a lodging house to return to at the end of the day. But she only said, "I wish I could take a piece of Barnesfield back with me."

Old Uncle Adrian Shaw, another visitor at the farm, looked up from his whittling. "That ain't a hard wish to grant yourself," he observed. "Dig up a hardy plant in the old south woods and carry it back in a pot."

Uncle Adrian spent his time in cheerful pilgrimages up and down the land. When Margaret sought him later for further information, she found that he had drifted away as he had drifted in, without a word of warning.

"But if he told you there are hardy plants in the south woods, then there are," her Aunt Emily assured her. "He knows. You'll find an empty flower pot in the old pit, Margaret, and good rich soil in the garden."

Molly laughed again. "Look at her—you'd think she was on the trail of buried treasure," she said to Margaret. "I wish you were."

Margaret was thinking of Molly's eager words as on her last golden afternoon she set out for the woods, basket and trowel in hand. Her cousin was still more or less a stranger to her, for the Spencers had only recently moved from their Western home to the Barnesfield place. But the two girls were very congenial, though sometimes Margaret was obliged to smile at Molly's funny little whims.

"She'd let clothes keep her from taking that trip," the city girl mused. "Now, I'd have come down here, if I had to, in a—grass hat!"

She was smiling at her own nonsense as she paused at the little post office and received the one letter that was there for her. As she unfolded the single sheet of paper a coin slid into her hand. The letter, which bore a strange postmark, was signed Adrian Shaw and was very brief. It told her that Uncle Adrian was sending a little gift to Molly and herself—and ended abruptly. "No thanks," and there was no return address.

The old man was given to doing such things and to doing them in his own peculiar way, but Margaret was astonished when she looked at the coin. It was a twenty-dollar gold piece.

"Why, bless his heart!" she said fervently. "My half will pay my dentist's bill. And Molly's—little Molly can have her hat and fixings, so she can!"

Turning to go back to the house, she halted uncertainly. Molly ought to have the great news at once, but the sun was already sinking. After a few moments of irresolution she decided to keep on. She slipped the piece of money into the breast pocket of her sweater and slipped the pocket carefully with a strong clasp pin from the neck of her blouse. That same pocket and pin had often done similar service when she hurried from her room late Saturday afternoons to buy her Sunday supplies at the grocery round the corner. The action made her think of town with a little pang of distaste.

The south woods were sweet with early autumn and Margaret took a

long breath of delight. Her knowledge of wild flowers was limited, but there was at least a chance of her finding a plant for her purpose. After a while, where the undergrowth thinned at the north edge of the woods, her faith was rewarded. A little colony of slender-stemmed growths was huddled in a plot of moss. The plants had stopped blooming, but their clover-like leaves were still graceful and green. They might be "hardy plants" and they might not; it would be worth while to make the trial.

She went home with her spoils, warm and tired, but triumphant, and took them to her aunt for inspection. "Wood sorrel," Mrs. Spencer said. "I don't know how it will behave when transplanted; but it might thrive in a warm room, I should think."

On her knees in the garden, busy with her trowel in the yielding brown earth, Margaret made plans for the new possession. It should have a place of honor in the warm corner of her window sill where in winter the sun sometimes shone. She sang to herself as she bent above the unaccustomed task. Then, throwing the trowel down, she sank back on her knees and wiped her hot face. What must ploughing be like?

The rest of the work was easier; but by the time the last ounce of earth had been packed into the pot dusk was falling.

The gate clicked, and Molly came swinging down the walk. "Still grubbing?" she challenged as she paused beside her cousin. "Going to take that heavy thing back under one arm? I wish that you were going to take me instead!" Margaret came hastily to her feet. Molly's last words had recalled with a rush what in her absorption she had utterly forgotten. Uncle Adrian's gift! Her hand flew to her pocket; then she gave a little gasp. The pin and the coin were both gone!

Molly was moving toward the house, serenely unaware of disaster. She called over her shoulder that there was to be ice cream for supper in honor of Margaret's last evening.

Margaret stood stock-still in the twilight. It seemed incredible that such a dreadful thing could have happened; yet the empty pocket was an unimpeachable witness. She tried to steady her thoughts and take account of the matter. The safety catch had been in place the first time; that was certain. Later on she must have unfastened it absent-mindedly to get her handkerchief and flicked the coin out on the soft ground. That seemed the only explanation.

Margaret groaned. She was not thinking of her own loss, but of her cousin's. To save herself a little inconvenience she had taken the foolish risk; and now poor Molly's heart's desire was lying somewhere—anywhere—out yonder in the ten acres or more over which she had been rambling.

With a faint hope that the tragedy might have occurred nearer home, she got down on her hands and knees and groped about in a half-hearted fashion. Then she took up her plant and walked slowly back to the house. She was not going to leave Barnesfield until the afternoon of the next day; that would give her the whole morning in which to search for the money. It would be a needle-and-haystack business; but she would do her best.

She made a big effort to appear gay and natural at supper, but all the time she was busy with her difficult problem. She would replace the money from her own salary, of course. Meanwhile, should she tell what had happened, or not? Surely Molly had a right to know; and yet, the knowledge would only make her unhappy.

Through the buttered muffins and broiled chicken Margaret wrestled with herself; by the time she had choked down the ice cream her decision was taken. She would keep her own counsel for a while.

She spent the next forenoon in the

woods. But her trail the day before had led along a dozen winding paths, through briar patches and across a swift stream, the search was really hopeless from the start. A needle in a haystack would have been easy by comparison.

The family welcomed her back with good-natured reproaches. "You love the birds—and bushes better than you love your kin," said Molly's father, laughing. "It's a pity you and Molly here can't change places for a little. She's aching to hear her shoe heels click on the pavements, aren't you, Molly?" Margaret caught the flash in Molly's blue eyes, and her heart sank. She was glad when it was time to go.

The journey back to the city was dismal. Beside her on the seat, sheathed in protecting stiff paper, was the little green plant, the cause of all the trouble. Margaret turned her back on it and watched the flying landscape. Every time she caught sight of a gold autumn leaf lying solitary she gave a jump.

By the time the engine blew for the city station she was positive that the gold piece was at the bottom of the swift woods brook. She remembered distinctly having picked up a muddy stone just there; of course she had pulled out her handkerchief to wipe her fingers. Well, with the money so utterly lost it would be sheer cruelty to tell Molly. Instead, she would put by several dollars every week and send in the whole amount by Christmas.

But the weeks moved swiftly toward Christmas, and the sum grew slowly. Margaret found that the task would be harder than she had thought. Her

room rent was raised the first of October; last year's shoes balked a further service; the dentist's bill was unexpectedly high. When she broke her glasses just after Thanksgiving she was seized with panic. It was like trying to climb a greased pole.

After a while the panic subsided to grinding worry. If she saved only a dollar a month, then it would be nearly a year before the matter could be set right. That was unthinkable. A letter from Barnesfield soon after Christmas added to her unhappiness. Molly, writing with flourish on new stationery, enumerated her gifts. Keeping the best for the last, like a child, she announced in a postscript that her godmother had sent her five dollars.

"Think of it—the price of a ticket to town and back! With a little more money, Meg, I could snap up Hilda Burnley's invitation—it's come again—and be walking in on you."

That night Margaret wrote to Molly and made a clean breast of it all. She enclosed a five-dollar bill—all she had been able to save up to that time.

The little gray letter that came whirling back by return mail was almost childish in its petulant anger. Margaret could not restrain a wry smile as she read.

"Why on earth," Molly wrote, in a flurry of indignant punctuation points, "didn't you tell me at first I could have found the money then; now it's a child in drifted leaves. Here's your five dollars; you mustn't send me your money. I'm not stupid enough to blame you for the accident, Margaret, but I do blame you for treating me like a three-year-old child!"

The signature was worst of all—a bitter, significant little blot, blurred by a tear.

"However, I deserve it," Margaret said.

One day in February Uncle Adrian Shaw appeared suddenly from nowhere. Margaret was dismayed when she found him, genial and travel-stained, in her room. The sight of him brought up hard associations; but she managed to give him a welcome.

"Where's Molly?" he demanded. Margaret flushed. "Molly?"

Uncle Adrian explained. When he had dropped in at Barnesfield a fortnight before, Molly was about to come to town. "The child was so droopy round Christmas time," he went on, "that John Spencer said 'twould be worth the price of a calf to give her a change, and so they packed her off. She'll be hunting you up soon as ever she gets her bearings."

Margaret was silent while her visitor talked on. Molly in the city without letting her know! Surely she would not carry her resentment so far. Still, Uncle Adrian had been cheerfully certain of his information. She did not want to question him on that subject, anyway.

"You look bothered, Maggie," the old man said suddenly. He ruminated a while, regarding her averted face. "Well, these are hard times," he offered presently. "But the old stone has managed to gather some moss." He was reaching for his pocket, but Margaret saw the movement and caught his arm.

"No, please don't!" she begged. If he offered her money again it would be the last straw.

Uncle Adrian, who had the wisdom that is better than understanding, rose and strolled to the window. Margaret, watching his back, debated with herself whether she should mention his first gift or not. She was so preoccupied that she did not see him bend over the sill and adjust his glasses.

"Aha, alleluia!" he said suddenly; and in spite of her woe she laughed aloud at the queer exclamation.

"That's right," laugh, her visitor said, turning to beam on her. "It's a dark time of year, this February, but by April you'll be as joyful as your flower—see if you're not." With that, he took himself off.

Margaret wondered idly what he meant. But she was chiefly concerned with trying to decide what to do about Molly. She would have liked to walk straight up to the Burnley house and ring the bell. The inclina-

The Easter Lily



THIS is the tale of a lily bud that would not bloom as a lily should. The little girl gave it her kindest care, she wanted it so for Easter Day; but ever the flower seemed to stay stiffly wrapped in its little green hood. On Easter Eve not a sign of white. The little girl looked, then turned away. She didn't have even a word to say, but she cried herself softly to sleep that night.

At twelve o'clock, or a quarter of, fairy Raindrop and fairy Light and fairy Beauty and fairy Love (the four good 'fairies that set things right) came and worked in the dark of the night. They climbed the stalk and the tall green stem and dusted the leaves and polished them; they slowly opened the tight green bud, and smoothed out its petals creamy white; two of them carefully lifted up the fair frail bell of the lily cup, filled it with sweetness, all it would hold, then powdered it deep with shining gold.

The little girl stirred in her sleep to say, "I wanted my flower for Easter Day." Then her eyelids moved, for she dreamed she heard tinkling laughter and whispered word, flutter of wings and silver cries,—"Quick, be quick, or she'll open her eyes!" And deep in her dreams again she stirred.

The fairies fluttered around the room, and hid themselves in the fireplace, and clung in the gauzy curtain's lace, waiting for dawn of day to come; and the little girl slept with a smile on her face, and the tall white flower was fair in the gloom.

At peep of daylight she wakened wide. "Easter is here," I think, she said. She sat up straight in her little bed and thought of the lily plant, and sighed. Then day broke over the edge of the wood, and a ray of sunshine came peeping through and shone on the spot where the lily stood.

"Oh, most beautiful—look!" she cried. She could scarcely believe that it was true, yet there was the lily, brave and new.

"Everyone come," she cried, "and see what a wonderful thing has happened to me!"

The flower nodded away in the sun. The fairies folded their tired wings—dear little helpful, happy things—and silently, softly stole away. And the little girl sang all Easter Day!



"We call it alleluia in England, where it came from," Mrs. Avery answered. "It blooms at Easter there."

When she had left the room Margaret put the plant back in the window and stood gazing at it for a while. Somehow its brave beauty made her glad in spite of herself. She sat down to her weekly darning with a lighter heart.

Alleluia: that was what Uncle Adrian had meant. After all, it was springtime, and Easter. As she sent her needle swiftly in and out she decided to stop her useless worrying. At length she folded up her work and put on her raincoat and rubbers. Then she crossed the room and picked up the rosy plant.

"You belong down at the church," she said. "There'll be nothing lovelier in the whole chance to-morrow, I know there won't."

Her hand was on the knob when there came a sound of light steps rattling up the stairs. The next instant the door flew open. The shock of contact sent Margaret's burden spinning out of her arms to the floor.

"Oh, what have I done?" the intruder cried. It was Molly Spencer, brought up short in alarm.

Margaret thrust out two eager hands, and drawing her across the threshold, thrust her into a chair. "You've come to see me!" she cried. "That's what you've done!"

Molly's dark head dipped. "I had to come," she declared, "though I was ashamed to, and that's the truth. Margaret, I rushed into writing that hateful letter just the way I rushed into your room a moment ago. What are you going to do about your plant?"

Margaret stooped to pick up the broken pot. "The corner florist will help me out," she said. "Look, isn't it beautiful?"

As she lifted the plant something fell to the floor with a sharp click—a small bright object that rolled swiftly under the sofa. Margaret made a dive, but it wheeled out again, spinning toward the fireplace and making gold circles in the little gray room.

It was Molly who captured the thing. She held it out shamefacedly. "I suppose it's that everlasting gold piece," she said.

Margaret blinked at the thing, frankly bewildered. Molly had a theory to offer. "You flipped it out with your handkerchief that evening; then you shoveled it in with the earth."

"And all these months," Margaret said slowly, "it was right here at my elbow." She looked at the yellow disk glimmering in her palm. Then she looked at Molly, her face shining.

Molly read the look of relief; for the first time she realized what Margaret had endured. She laid an eager hand on her cousin's arm. "I know how we'll invest part of it," she said. "To Barnesfield for Easter, Meg!"

Margaret shook her head. "No," she said. "I want you to have it all. You must be needing it, now that you are living in town."

Molly's eyes began to dance. "Oho, but I'm no longer living in town," she said. "The city was fine in February, but when spring came back I knew where I belonged. Hurry! Where's your suit case, Meg? Mine's down at the door. We can take the five-o'clock train and walk out to the farm. Look; train and walk out for our special benefit!" She was folding blouses and collecting pins. "The south woods are one mass of anemones," she flung over her shoulder to Margaret, who stood wavering in a shaft of sunlight.

Margaret hesitated no longer. "I'll be back as soon as I mend my alleluia plant," she said.

"Your what?" Molly echoed hollow-

ly from the depths of the clothes closet. But Margaret did not hear the question. She was already halfway down the stairs. She had one hand firm under the little mould of fragrant, crumbling earth, and with the other she was steadying the starry pink petals of her flower.

Spring Joyousness.
Spring is coming, yes I know,
For the birds tell me so,
They are singing in the trees,
My delighted heart to please.

All of nature, everywhere,
In their joyousness will share.
Nodding, blooming flowers say,
Spring is coming back our way.

They will make the world so gay,
In her floral, spring array.
All my heart is singing, too,
In this joyous time to woo.

Love is creeping in our hearts,
As old winter now departs,
And the warmer days will seem
Making us so sweetly dream.

Thrilling spring is in the air,
Making life all seem so fair,
That our hearts all long to sing
With the joyousness of spring.

Easter Eggs in the Making.
Probably not one person in a thousand who buys Easter eggs knows how they are made.

Most of the eggs are made by machinery. First a soft, jelly-like mass of sugar and other ingredients is boiled in cauldrons, and then, when still soft, it is cut into oblong or brick-shaped pieces of many different sizes by machinery. These pieces are thrown into huge copper cauldrons, with wide-open, gaping mouths.

When the soft sugar bricks are thrown in, the kettles begin to revolve, and the pieces rolling around and around shape themselves into eggs, and grow harder and harder, although the inside still is soft. And, after the "shell" is formed it is colored to suit the taste.

The great fancy eggs are made of sugar crystals. The crystallized sugar is moulded into egg shape, in moulds the size of just half the egg, and then the two halves are sealed together, and the delicate sugar flowers and pictures are put on and colored by hand.

The fluffy little Easter chicks are made of real feathers, which are glued to a body generally made of paper-mache, although sometimes of wool, cotton or wood.

The putting on of the feathers is a delicate task, and is mostly done by girls who stand all day pasting little soft feathers on the forms, as the bodies are called. Then the bodies are turned over to the men who color them after the glue is dried.

These men are excellent workmen and sit with their brushes and paint chickens all day, sometimes using an air-brush to color the delicate little feathers. After they are colored they look exactly like a crowd of fluffy little chicks.

Then they are dried again and placed in long rows on shelves, after which they have little chocolate eggs put on them.

A Russian Easter Service

Dramatic and awe inspiring was the midnight Easter mass at the cathedral of St. Isaac in Petrograd. There was in it even perhaps a touch of the barbaric. In his reminiscences Lord Frederic Hamilton, formerly of the British diplomatic service, gives a striking account of the splendid spectacle.

We were always requested to come in full uniform, and we stood inside the rails of the iconostasis, behind the choir. The time to arrive was about half past eleven at night, when the church was wrapped in almost total darkness.

Under the dome stood a catafalque bearing a gilt coffin. The open lid showed a strip of silk on which was painted an effigy of the dead Christ, for it should be remembered that no carved or graven image is allowed in a church of the Eastern Rite. As the eye grew accustomed to the shadows, tens of thousands of unlighted candles, outlining the arches, the cornices and the other architectural features of the cathedral were just visible. The wick of each of these candles had been touched with kerosene and was surrounded with a thread of gun-cotton, which ran from candle to candle.

At half past eleven the only light was from the candles round the bier, where black-robed priests were chanting the mournful Russian office for the dead. At about twenty minutes to twelve the blind was drawn over the dead Christ, and the priests, feigning surprise, advanced to the rails of the iconostasis and announced to an archi-

mandrite that the coffin was empty. The archimandrite ordered them to search round the church, and the priests walked up and down with gilt lanterns; while they did so, the catafalque, the bier and its accessories were removed. The priests announced to the archimandrite that their search had been unsuccessful; whereupon he ordered them to make a further search outside the church. They went out and so timed their return as to arrive before midnight. Again they reported that they had been unsuccessful. As the first stroke of midnight pealed from the great clock, the metropolitan of Petrograd announced in a loud voice, "Christ is risen!" At an electric signal given from the cathedral, the artillery of the fortress boomed out in a salute of one hundred and one guns; the gun-cotton was touched off, and the swift flash kindled the tens of thousands of candles running round the building. The enormous congregation lighted the tapers they carried, the "royal doors" of the iconostasis were thrown open, and as the choir burst into the beautiful Russian Easter anthem the clergy appeared in their festival vestments of cloth of gold.

And so the Easter mass began. Nothing more dramatic, more impressive, could possibly be imagined than the almost instantaneous change from intense gloom to blazing light; from the plaintive dirges of the funeral service to the jubilant strains of the Easter mass.

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Easter Morn

Bloom on, brave wind-flowers, in your sheltered nooks;
Lift high your golden crown, fair daffodil;
Sing, sing your maddest melody, O brook—
The world but yesterday was grey and chill.

Narcissus nestling in the tender grass,
And violets blue as are the skies above,
Hark to the rapturous song in winds that pass:
"Two things there be immortal—Life and Love!"

O lily, lifting up your fragrant breath
Where snowflakes spread themselves but yesterday,
You softly cry: "Where is thy sting, O death?
O grave, where is thy boasted victory?"