

A MARSH-MARIGOLD.

Catharine Tyman in Catholic World.

Sheila was doing her best for his sake and her mother's to live down her trouble. She took to working with feverish energy, and in the intervals when household work was forbidden she took up studies laid aside—German, of which Lance had taught her something, and her music, long neglected in the absence of a piano—anything so that she need not sit and dream. By degrees something of her old brightness came back to her. Even a little delicate flower of hope began to bud in her heart. What day of the wet autumn days it first put forth its untimely head she know not; she only knew it came there uninvited, and flourished despite her lack of encouragement. She was afraid of it, afraid of the sweetness of it which haunted her through the cold weather, giving her little glad, unreasonable thrills of hope when Christmas was mentioned casually, and she sat with her eyes down on the stockings she was darning and tried to chain her eager young thoughts to them.

No word came of Lance at all through the winter, no word even to Tom. It was the absence of news made Sheila hope; if he were married, if he were like to be, they certainly would have heard. So the days went by unevenly. She had her moods of sadness and discouragement, too, days when the November woods were sodden and hopeless, and the ragged chrysanthemums flapped their drenched heads against the window-pane, and it seemed to her that life was over for her as well as these inanimate things. She was slow to give herself up to sweetness; there were days when she almost convinced herself that if he came again she must again send him from her; you see, pride and consciousness, both very strong in her, were taking sides against her poor little heart. So, in such alternations of feeling, the time went round to Christmas.

A snowy Christmas it proved to be—not a lovely Christmas, with the snow an accomplished fact and frosty skies reddening at evening across a white world, but drizzle-tailed weather, with drifting showers of snow which changed to mud as soon as it touched earth. The hours of the Christmas eve dragged along somehow. Sheila went through her daily round in an automatic way; it was a great day of cooking and cleaning and general adornment. Sheila did her share, concealing well the painful excitement which at every sound set her heart to beating so that it deafened her, but the day brought no visitor and no message. Towards evening, and when the place was shining, the girl's heart and courage failed her; she went up to her bedroom in the thatch and lay down on her bed, turning her face to the wall with a feeling that the world was over with her. She lay staring fixedly at the moonlight, till her mother came stealing in to see if she slept, and then as the tender, homely face, which had never looked at her with anything but love, was bent down to kiss her, she sat up and laid her head with a gesture of weariness on that kind breast. The mother just rocked her to and fro, crooning soft words, and then laid her down on the pillow, comforting her till she slept, but of the cause of her trouble she would not speak. Tom and the mother could come to no conclusion about it; they had heavy hearts that night for their lamb.

The next day, Mass being over, Sheila was excused from service, her heavy eyes being cause enough. In the best parlour there was a pleasant fire of turf, and the pictures wreathed with holly and ivy, and the corner cupboard with its store of ancient china, shone pleasantly in the firelight. The short day was half over, and it had begun to grow dusk in the room; it was a dreary day, with the same monotonous, silent falling of half-melted snow. Sheila had sat down on the rug, with Trusty beside her, his head in her lap; he was old and feeble now, poor Trusty! Some one who opened the door and came in noiselessly felt the full beauty of the little group, the girl with her wistful young face illumined by the firelight, one little round wrist and hand propping the golden head. But even more swiftly he noticed, for it was Lance, the dimming of her roses, the little pathetic droop of the patient figure. Almost before she knew he had come he had his arms about her and was saying with a fierce tenderness:

"Child, what have you done to yourself? I felt that you were trying me sorely, but, like a selfish brute, I never thought that you were trying yourself."

"Oh!" she said, looking at him as if she never could look enough, "you have come back after all!"

Manlike, he was indignant with her for even supposing he would not come; he had known so surely all along that he was coming, but she—she had not known, being a woman and condemned to silence and inaction. She was very glad now just to be quiet in his love, and to let him take everything in his own hands. Before he told her what had happened to him in those months, he bound her to him, taking from his pocket his mother's engagement ring, with its heart of diamonds and pearls, and slipping it on her finger. She was only conscious of how good it was to be mastered in this imperious fashion. Then, holding her hand and stroking back her hair, he told her that she was to marry a poor man, for poor, perverse old Sir Andrew, indignant because his heir had not carried off the English lady, had married himself, proposing in a moment of heat to a buxom widow lady who was little likely to permit his recantation. And he was already a Benedict of a month's standing. But Lance, though he had his few hundreds a year of income, which to those simple people he desired to make his own seemed riches, was fallen from his high estate, for his uncle's property was not entailed, and if it were, the new Lady Armstrong was quite young enough to make other contingencies possible. So he had decided to take his fortunes in his own hands, and go out to South Africa, with a present intention of ostrich-farming, but with an idea of a future of more adventurous things.

For a dispossessed prince he was wonderfully elated; he was rather like a man who had escaped from galling poverty to riches than one who had lost wealth and position. Now that he had won his love, he seemed to have no more left to wish for; the one drop of bitterness in his cup might be perhaps his estrangement from his uncle, but he was too glad for the moment to be able to think of it. And Sheila, she could only listen to all his outpourings, and the plans for the new life with which his brain swarmed, and wonder if this beautiful world was the same gray, drenched place she had known this morning, or whether, perhaps, it might not be a dream from which she would waken too soon. So she sat there, silent from happiness, in the great chair where he had placed her, with her cheek against his arm, and her eyes shy and glad.

Tom, coming in for his Christmas dinner, was surprised to find his capable helpmate in her chair in the corner of the kitchen with her apron over her head, crying, and was not a little alarmed till he heard the cause. Then he was glad and sorry all at once, for Lance had found time before seeing his sweetheart to tell her mother something of how his affairs stood, and the old man knew his little girl would be going very far away from him. However, he was too unselfish, as was her mother, to let any cloud of sorrow darken the happiness of the lovers when they came out from the parlour, Sheila very blushing and shy, but Lance walking proudly and with a gladder light in his eyes than anyone had ever seen there before.

So at Shrovetide they were married and went off to the Transvaal. I won't sadden their story by telling how the old people mourned in secret for the child they scarcely ever hoped to see again. But the gladdest and happiest thing of all was that after five years, Sir Andrew being dead and his childless widow settled with a handsome jointure, Sir Launce- lot was sent for and came home to take up the property his uncle had left him to support the title. And the new baronet was as brown as a berry, and bigger and browner than ever, with hands roughened by toil and a voice louder than one often hears in drawing-rooms, but picturesque, said the young ladies, who were greatly taken with his manliness. As for Sheila, the vague rumors about her birth faded into thin air before the sight of the stately young creature she had grown into, and so well dressed, for the dowager Lady Armstrong, who was a good soul, had made friends with the young couple and been enraptured with Sheila's possibilities, and had assisted her in all the minor details of dress in which the girl's own good taste could not have helped her. She made a