

"Yes, I think so," Alice said, bending over the flowers lovingly. "Surely, lilies are the most suggestive flowers that can be used in church decorations, particularly for a font. They are as pure and sweet as the infants that are brought there to be christened."

Alice walked leisurely towards the church, knowing that she had ample time for the work which lay before her. She paused to admire the landscape a moment, when her arm was gently touched. Turning hastily, she saw a little girl about twelve, with a thin, sorrowful face, but wonderful black eyes that were fixed hungrily on the lilies in her gasket.

"Please, ma'am," the child said in quick, excited tones, "aren't those beautiful flowers lilies?"

"Why, yes," she said, kindly holding the basket that the child might examine them; "but where have you come from, my child, that you have never seen a lily?"

"No, I never saw one before," drawing in her breath in a kind of ecstatic sigh. "Mother has told me so much about them I knew them as soon as I saw them. Oh, aren't they beautiful, and don't they smell sweet?"

She clasped her hands, and her splendid eyes, full of delight and wonder, were riveted on the flowers. But suddenly the expression changed to one of profound grief.

"Oh, if mother could see the lilies once more! Poor mother!"

The tears ran down her cheeks as she spoke, and she wiped them away with her checked apron.

"Where is your mother?" Alice asked. "You are a stranger here."

"Yes'm; we come all the way from Kansas in a wagon. Papa, he's from Alabama, and mother, too. She was taken ill after she was caught out in a big blizzard that blew down our house. She longed to get back to her old home so papa sold out, and we've been travelling, oh! I don't know how many weeks. Mother became worse yesterday, and we stopped outside of town, and papa got a doctor. He says she's very low," with a choked sob, "but I reckon if she could see these lilies it would do her some good. She was always wanting them in Kansas, but we lived away from everybody, and we were too poor to buy flowers."

"Sick, poor and a stranger at your gates," Alice, as she remembered those words, forgot the christening font, her waiting friend and her duties for Easter.

"Take me to your mother," she said. "What is your name, my child?"

"Christine—Christine Bruce. Oh! I am so glad mother will see the lilies," clapping her hands, and laughing with delight.

"Yes, she shall have as many as she wants."

As they walked towards the outskirts of the town the child told her simple, pitiful tale. Her father had once been in good circumstances, and her mother, from Christine's account, was an educated woman, whose family in Alabama had been wealthy. Misfortune came to the settlers, and poverty and sickness followed.

"There's the wagon, and there's papa," Christine cried, suddenly, pointing to a canvas-covered emigrant wagon, and a man sitting on the tongue, with his face buried in his hands.

"And oh! I forgot to buy the bread he sent me for, and he hasn't a mouthful for breakfast. Oh, papa!" running to him, "I forgot your bread, but I'll run back for it. I was so taken up with some lilies that lady has brought for mother!"

"Is that you, Christine?" the man said, raising his head. His face was thin and worn, and his eyes had the vacant look of one whose thoughts were leagues away; but Alice noticed that neither face nor voice were those of a common laborer. His clothes, as well as those of his daughter, were of coarse homespun, but they were clean.

"Never mind about the bread, child, a mouthful would choke me; but your mother wants her tea, and you'd better make it immediately."

"Yes, papa, right off. Papa, here's a good lady come to see mother, and

oh! her eyes shining, "she's got the beautifullest lilies in that basket, and she's going to give some to mother."

The man rose from his seat, and with a courteous movement took off his hat.

"You are very kind, Miss," he said, "I'm afraid my poor wife has gone too far to notice flowers. If she could have seen them a month ago!"

His voice choked. "She had a sick longing for some of the lilies from her old home, but I could as soon have got her the moon as lilies in the part of the country where we lived."

"How is your wife now?" asked Alice, kindly.

"The doctor has just left here; he says she can't last many hours. O my God!" throwing up his arms, "how can I bear to give my Milly up? Go up there, Miss; I can't look at her yet, or I'll break down, and she's so afraid to die! Oh, that's the worst of all. She wanders in her mind a good deal of the time, and it breaks my heart to hear her talk."

Alice climbed into the wagon. A mattress was spread on the floor, and on it lay a woman with a white, emaciated face, looking like a corpse. Her eyes were closed, but as Alice bent over her they opened suddenly, and the girl shrunk back. There was something appalling in the brilliant eyes, so like Christine's, set in that thin face. Eyes, in which seemed concentrated all the life of the body already dead or dying.

Alice answered the unspoken question she saw in that look—inquiring, startled.

"Your little daughter met me, and told me how ill you were, and how much you liked lilies. See, I've brought you some," holding the fragrant blossoms to the sick woman's face.

"Lilies!" she cried hoarsely, clutching them with her hot hand. Oh! I've dreamed of them so often, so often, but I never expected to see one until I went up to His garden—the Master's garden, you know, where there will be no sickness nor sorrow. But will they let me in, do you think? Her eyes grew wild with terror. "Oh! I'm so scared." Her voice sank into a murmur, and she pressed the flowers to her lips convulsively. "Mother," she whispered, "I will wear lilies tomorrow with my bridal dress, they are so white and pure, and see, they have golden crowns like the saints in the pictures. Consider the lilies, they toil not neither do they spin. But I have toiled," her voice rising, "I have spun, and what has it come to?"

She lay silent for a few minutes, holding the flowers to her bosom, and when she spoke again it was in a changed voice, and she seemed, by an effort, to regain a consciousness of her surroundings.

"I'm very ill," she murmured, "and my mind wanders, I suppose. You brought me those lilies, I know," to Alice. "Thank you for them. Will you hang them where I can look at them all the time? My hands are too weak to hold them, and they are so sweet and precious to me."

"David," as her husband and child brought the tea to her, "you see His messenger has come to me—the lilies, I mean. I am not afraid any longer to cross the river. Somehow the message came to me in the flowers I love best. I'm not strong enough to tell you all they say, only that I'm not to be afraid. Put one in my hand that I may hold it as a sign. Safe, safe, thank God!"

She dozed a little, and suddenly, with a start, her eyes opened and her lips smiled.

"Beautiful, beautiful," she gasped, "great ranks of snowy lilies whispering to me. What are they saying? What—" The ecstatic, expectant look in her beautiful eyes dimmed, and with a deep-drawn sigh her soul had flown to hear the meaning of her vision at the foot of the great white throne.

Alice, with streaming eyes, left the husband and child alone with their dead, promising to send help to perform the last sad offices. When she had done that, although it was late, she took her way to the church.

As she entered, her eyes fell on the

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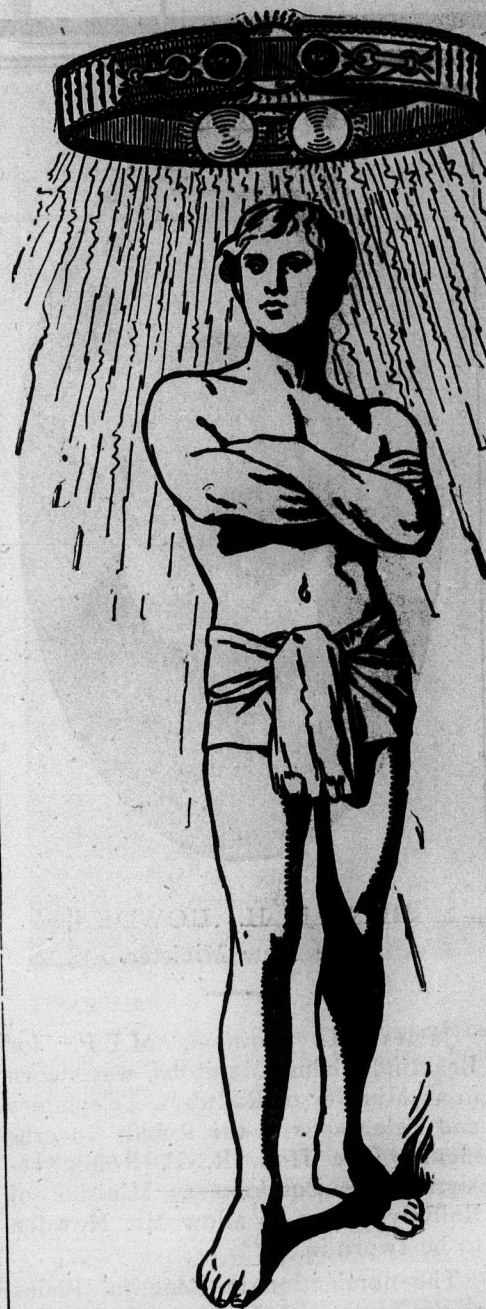
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