

HOME CIRCLE.

TWO ROMANCES; NOT TRAGIC.

I.

"Ah, that odious posy again! No, Palmer, take it back, and tell her to bring no more flowers. I detest heliotrope; don't you, General Duncan?"

"Why, no, Miss Lorrimer," replied the General, rising, and taking the little nosegay from the footman's hand, "I think it is delicious; and these other flowers are exquisite. Only look at these violets, and these pansies, with their golden hearts! Just the thing for your hair to-night, if you will pardon the suggestion, Miss Lorrimer."

But Miss Lorrimer tossed her queenly head with an expression of supreme disgust.

"I shall wear diamonds and amethysts to-night, General," she said, "not heliotrope. Pah! how insufferable the odour is! Take them back, Palmer, and tell her I will pay for the embroidery some other time."

But the General fastened the blossoms in his button-hole.

"Begging your pardon, Miss Lorrimer," he bowed, "I will keep them. They are my favourite blossoms; the very kind we used to have at the old home, when I was a boy. And I have a fancy," he continued, "that these are not city flowers. I can imagine them budding and blooming in some dim old country garden."

Miss Lorrimer laughed silverly.

"Why, General," she cried, "I did not dream you were so sentimental, and you an old soldier, too!"

General Duncan smiled, but he sighed, too; and a sudden mist dimmed his eagle, grey eye, as an old, old memory, tender and sacred, stirred in his heart, awakened by the subtil fragrance of the blossoms on his breast.

He touched the spray of heliotrope with a kind of caressive fondness, while its sweet and peculiar odour, with that strange power which odours alone possess, recalled the one dream of his young manhood—a dream so inexpressibly sweet and holy, that, although it seemed to have for ever faded from him, he cherished and treasured it still in preference to any living reality. But Miss Lorrimer's voice recalled him.

"But you are right," she was saying. "They do grow in the country, in an old cottage-garden, away out in the suburbs. Our seamstress cultivates them, and brings them in to sell. Mamma never fails to buy them, as an act of Christian charity. But I detest the stupid things, and the girl, too, for that matter, only her embroidery is perfectly elegant. Just look at this!"

The General glanced down at the delicately-wrought fabric she was unfolding, with a feeling of tender pity for the frail fingers that had executed the marvellous work.

"And she cultivates flowers, too?" he said. "She must be an artist in her way."

"Oh, yes; no doubt!" laughed Miss Lorrimer. "Mamma thinks her a paragon. She supports an invalid mother, I believe, and is quite as angelic as possible. But I think we'll drop her for the present, General, if you don't object. How late it is!" she added, consulting her jewelled watch; "the evening has flown so rapidly! 'Tis quite time for me to dress! *Au revoir!* and I trust you'll tire of your heliotrope while I'm gone; I don't want my opera spoiled."

But an hour later, when the General and Miss Lorrimer entered the glittering opera-house, where Nilsson was to sing, the impolite General still wore his little posy in his button-hole; and while Miss Lorrimer blazed beside him in her diamonds and amethysts, and the music clashed in his ears, he seemed to see with an introverted vision.

Only one scene was before him: a garden bright with tropic bloom, and bathed in summer moonlight, and filled with the musical murmur of falling waters, and in the midst of all, a young girl, dressed in white, in some gossamer material, standing by a garden-vase that was full of flowers, and smelling of the purple heliotrope that was part of its treasures, before she plucked it for him, as a farewell token. Ah! that evening, should he ever forget it?

The June morning dawned royally in the little

cottage-garden shut in by a tangled hedge, and cut up into multitudinous beds of blossoms and berries.

There were clumps of great roses, creamy white and vivid red, and beds of emerald ferns and waxen lilies, and modest daisies and violets, and pansies, and luxuriant geraniums, and a wealth of fragrant, flourishing heliotrope, and here and there a bed of luscious red strawberries, and a gilded cage, from which a goldfinch sang.

A charming, well-kept little spot; and it was all the work of a feminine hand. The young girl came down the gravelled walk now, in the dewy glow of the June morning, wheeling an invalid's chair before her—a fair, golden-haired girl, with a face that shone like a pearl beneath her broad market-hat.

"Now, mother dear," she said, as she wheeled the chair beneath the odorous shade of a honeysuckle bower, "you will be quite cozy, and the birds and butterflies will keep you company till I come back."

The invalid smiled, and unfolded a roll of delicate needlework.

"I wish you would put your work by," continued the girl, "and take a good rest this nice morning. There's not a bit of need that you should work so hard. See my flowers how they thrive; and only look at my berries! There are no finer in the market. Little mother, we shall find ourselves growing rich one of these days."

"Then, it will be the work of these busy little hands," replied the invalid fondly kissing the little brown hands that fluttered so caressingly about her.

Alice laughed like a child.

"It is so much nicer than teaching music, or working at the needle," she said. "I feel quite proud of my vocation. But here comes Farmer Denham; I must get my baskets ready, for it puts him in a bad humour to be kept waiting. Goodbye, mother! Please don't work much, and don't get lonesome! I shall be gone just the least bit longer than usual, because I shall stop and get you a nice cool wrapper with the money my unknown friend sent me yesterday. I do wonder who he could have been?"

"Some friend of Miss Lorrimer's," suggested her mother.

"He was a General something, the footman said. I did not catch the name. Well, I trust he'll have his reward; and as I have his gift, I won't call for Miss Lorrimer's money to-day. She's so slow! Goodbye again, mother—I'm off now!"

And away she hurried to get her dainty baskets ready for the farmer's cart.

General Duncan was out of spirits; and, to tell the truth, out of humour, too, despite the royal glory of the June morning. The opera had left him with a headache. He arose with the dawn, and mounting his favourite mare galloped for miles across the country; but the blooming apple-orchards and fragrant gardens only served to increase his unrest, and he returned in a worse humour.

After breakfast he started down town for a stroll, puffing savagely at his cigar, and wearing his hat low down over his handsome, intellectual brow. The General was quarrelling with his destiny, and feeling that he had been a very badly-used man; and in some respects this was true. Not many years back he was nothing but a clerk to a merchant of fabulous fortune. His employer had an only daughter, fair as a pearl; and with this daughter Harry Duncan fell in love. She loved him in return, and their troth was plighted; but the angry father came between them. "His only child, the heiress of all his thousands, should not marry a nameless clerk," he said. The daughter was too gentle and dutiful to disobey, yet so true and womanly to prove faithless.

In the starry watches of a summer night, in the fragrant bowers of her father's garden, she met her lover for the last time.

"I cannot disobey my father," she said, "but I shall be as true to you, dear Harry, as if I were your wife, and wear your ring as sacredly as if it were our wedding-ring."

They parted. But before Harry left, she stooped over a vase of flowers, and selecting a bit of heliotrope, gave it to him as a parting-token.

And to this day, though years had passed, Harry Duncan wore that bit of heliotrope next his heart.

Harry had a natural aptitude for military affairs, and, as a consequence, soon rose to distinction in his profession. But he never forgot his early love-dream. Amid the excitements of camp and field, that sweet

memory lived in his heart, keeping it tender and true, and pure from all vice. At the end of the struggle he found himself a General; and returning home, learned that, in consequence of the death of a distant relative, he had inherited a handsome fortune.

Without an hour's delay he set forth for the city where he had once been a clerk, indulging the fond hope that he should find his early love. But all his efforts proved utterly futile. The family had disappeared. The father had failed, and had died. But of his widow and her child no tidings could be had.

General Duncan returned home, and went into society, and was lionised at once. The brightest beauties put forth all their blandishments to win him, and foremost in their ranks was Miss Lorrimer.

She was lovely, accomplished, wealthy—why not take her at the word? She would make a queenly wife. General Duncan mused after this fashion, strolling down town that June morning, and half turned on his heel determined to retrace his steps, and make Miss Lorrimer a morning call. But the instant after he strode on again, smoking more savagely than before.

"No, by Jove! I can't do it. That little nosegay has made a fool of me," he muttered, glancing down at the withered blossoms on his breast.

Suddenly a sweet, girlish voice attracted his attention.

"Heliotrope and heart's-ease," it said.

The plaintive cry floated out on the summer air, and fell unheeded on many ears, but not on his. He had had quite enough of heliotrope, but heart's-ease was another thing. He turned with a vague curiosity to look at the owner of that pathetic voice.

There she stood, with her dainty baskets of blossoms and berries arrayed before her, and a goldfinch trilling in a gilded cage above her head. A fair, graceful girl, with a face as true and tender as Heaven's own mercy—a face he had seen before. Yes! but where? The General stood breathless and bewildered.

"Would you like some flowers, sir? These are very pretty," said the girl.

She held up a cluster of violets, and the June sunlight struck the jewel on her finger, and flashed out a shower of dazzling sparkles. General Duncan uttered a hoarse cry, and caught the hand in both of his.

"Alice!" he cried at last, "have I found you, my darling?"

The sweet blue eyes opened wide, at first in surprise and terror; then, hearing his words, and feeling the thrilling grasp of his hand, the girl gave one searching look. Through all the bronze and change of his campaigns, she knew him. A beautiful flush rose to her waxen cheek.

"At last!" she murmured, while the tears of joy overflowed her eyes. "Ah! I knew you would come. I never doubted you, dear Harry."

"And you have worn my ring all these years?" he questioned anxiously.

"I have worn it as I promised," she answered.

That night, in the little cottage-garden, the General heard her story—a simple story enough. Her father, when he died, had left her invalid mother and herself without aid or support. Prompted by her love of flowers, she had leased her little garden, and reared her blossoms and berries, and sold them in the market.

"And they brought you back to me in the end," cried the enraptured General. "Ah! I was sure that heliotrope possessed some witching charm. Oh, my love! my long-lost darling!"

A week later there was a quiet marriage in one of the fashionable churches, and on the following day the newspapers announced the departure of General Duncan and his bride for a trip to the Continent.

"And to think, mamma," remarked Miss Lorrimer, sweetly, after having read the announcement, "that I should have brought it all about. Such a fortunate thing for the poor girl! And I trust the voyage will improve her mother. I feel much gratified, I am sure."

And in less than a month Miss Lorrimer wedded a man of threescore, but a millionaire.

II.

The handsome dining-room in the Mayberry mansion was all a-glitter with floods of gas-light, and the genial glow of the fire—for Mr. Josiah Mayberry was