

— AN EASTER LILY —

It stood apart from all its kind on the florist's table, a perfect creation. Never before had Angus McKay, the old Scotch gardener, raised so fine a plant. From the very first he had watched it with bated breath, fearing lest some mischance, some blight, some injury might mar its flawless beauty. But no such evil was in store for this marvellous crown of all his labors.

Stately, exquisite, it held itself with royal grace, as though already conscious of the high mission it was to fulfill—so beautiful, so chaste that it almost seemed to exhale the spirit of the Creator from its pure lips.

Angus came to carry it in his own hands to St. Christopher's the afternoon before Easter Day. He could trust it to none less loving. Quite unconsciously he pulled off his tam o'shanter as he bent to look once more into its snowy chalice and to drink deeply of its delicious fragrance. An expression of awe stole over his rugged face as his eyes sought its heart.

"O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all. The earth is full of Thy riches!" he said in reverent tones.

Then he replaced his cap and lifting the precious burden with tender carefulness he bore it down the flowered isle of the greenhouse, out into the quiet street, and so around, not far away, to the massive gray stone church, whose slender spire pointed heavenward through the golden sunlight. He loved his church with all his big, warm heart, and one of the greatest joys of his simple life was the part he took in its decoration at Christmas time and at Easter. Large orders were always given him at these festivals; but this lily was to be his own personal offering.

He entered the church at a side door, and as he passed into one of the parlors, where the flowers were placed before being arranged in the audience room, he met a lady, who greeted him pleasantly. She had been looking at the many beautiful pots of lilies standing about.

"Good evening, Angus," she said, "You have outdone yourself this year," and was moving on.

"Oh, just coom back and look at this, Mrs. Seabright!" was his reply. "Saw ye ever sae fine a bloom?" he asked, eagerly, as he set the pot on the table and carefully unwrapped the soft tissue paper which protected it.

Radiantly the snow-white lily smiled into the faces of the two as they stood in silence before it. An answering light gleamed for a moment upon the fine, sad features of the lady. Then a shadow fell, lightly, deeper; her sensitive lips quivered; hot tears welled up into her soft, dark eyes; bitter pain clutched at her heart-strings. She turned away, sobbing.

Angus, absorbed in the beauty of his treasure, did not at first notice, but when he heard the low moan he turned at once. With the privilege of an old, tried friend, he laid his broad, brown hand upon the bowed head. He knew something of the cause of that grief.

"Ye dinna read the heavenly flower aright, my bairn; it bears a message of comfort and of peace to every achin' heart."

No answer came. He could not even tell if she had heard. He stole quietly away.

In a few minutes Mrs. Seabright drew her heavy veil over her face and also left the room. A handsome carriage awaited her at the church gate. She sank back upon the luxurious seat and did not stir until her home was reached. The perfume of flowers was heavy in the air as she entered the house; soft lights shed their faintly tinted rays over all that taste and wealth could contribute to the making of an ideally lovely home. But the slender, black-robed figure

saw nothing of what was around her. She ascended at once to her own apartment and locked the door behind her. With hurried impatient movements, as though they stifled her, she tore off her gloves and bonnet and long costly wrap. Then, with her hands tightly clasped over her aching heart, she paced up and down the length of the beautiful room, trying in vain to still the tempest of emotion raging within her breast.

"I thought I was strong," she cried brokenly. "I thought—I hoped—oh, my God, I can never live it all over again! Amy, Amy, my darling child, come back, come back to your mother's hungry heart! O heaven, is there no help, no pity, no mercy?"

The flood-gates burst at last. She threw herself, half fainting, upon the bed, weeping with the utmost violence. For a long time she lay there, overwhelmed by the renewed bitterness of a bereavement which at the time of its occurrence had crushed her to the earth. For some months, however, she had experienced a calm-



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ness which made life less burdensome, and she had hoped never again to know the poignant keenness of that first piercing grief.

At length, exhausted, she fell into a light slumber. When she awoke, the last rays of sunshine were stealing softly from the room. The face of a lovely young girl looked down upon her from a white velvet frame on the wall opposite the bed. A tender light seemed to shine in the large eyes and the mouth curved as if smiling.

The lonely mother gazed hungrily at the beloved features; the fierceness of her pain had passed, and she felt now only a terrible sense of desolation and of loss.

"Amy, Amy, Amy," she murmured, "how can I bear to live without you?" No answer came from the girlish lips, but almost as if spoken in her ear came the words of the old Scotch gardener:

"Ye dinna read the heavenly flower aright, my bairn; it has a message of comfort and of peace for every achin' heart."

"Comfort and peace." What sweet words these were! She said them over and over, until a great longing to look again into the beautiful lily seized her.

"I will go," she said aloud. "No, I will not," she added immediately. "It was the sight of that pure loveliness which brought Amy so vividly before me and wrenched my sore heart almost in twain."

So she argued with herself, conscious all the while of an irresistible force drawing her back to St. Christopher's. She yielded to it finally, and rang for her carriage. Then she put on her bonnet and wrap and gloves, and shrouding her red and swollen face in her heavy veil, stepped out into the afterglow of the sunset.

Arriving at the church she found, as she had hoped to do, that the young ladies whose duty it was to see that the finishing touches were put to the decorations and that all which it was possible to arrange the day before was in readiness for the early Easter service, had come and gone. And so she was alone before the exquisite blossom to which she had felt so strangely drawn. It stood on a small table just within the chancel rail. More divinely than ever its spotless purity gleamed forth in the dusky twilight of the great church. Like a heavenly messenger of "comfort and peace" unspeakable, it breathed its blessed message to her sorrowing, empty heart.

"Old Angus knew," she said softly, as she turned away. "Father, forgive my weakness. I did not mean to murmur against Thy ordering. I thank Thee for this revelation of Thy tender love for all Thy creatures."

She did not, on leaving the chancel, at once pass to the outer door; but, withdrawing still further into the dim space, she knelt in earnest prayer.

When she arose she was startled to see the figure of a man approaching from one of the side doors. It was not Dennis, the sexton, but a younger, more slender man. She could not see his features from where she stood, but she noticed that he was thinly clad and that he glanced furtively around. Then, apparently satisfied that no one was near, he came forward and gazed at the masses of beautiful flowers to be seen in every direction. As soon as his eyes fell upon the peerless lily he looked no further. Stepping at once inside the chancel he raised it in his arms and put in its place a tall plant from the dozens grouped near. Before he could take another step he felt a light but strong grasp upon his wrist, and starting guiltily he turned to meet the reproachful glance of a pair of soft dark eyes and to hear a gentle voice say:

"Oh please do not take that lily! I

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