

## HOUSEHOLD.

### Miss Avery's Lilies.

(Mrs. F. M. Howard, in the 'Presbyterian Banner'.)

'A box for you, mum,' The round, red face of the good-natured expressman beamed upon Miss Avery genially. 'All the way from California, too. Guess you must have relations out there.'

Miss Avery shook her head. 'No, not a one, Mr. Joliffe. Is it prepaid?' anxiously.

'Prepaid, mum—all genteel and trig. Might be gold bricks if it was a leetle heavier,' and laughing at his own joke, Mr. Joliffe turned away, leaving Miss Avery and her box in the little hallway.

'Who can have sent it?' she asked herself, running over in swift review her list of friends; only one whom she could think of had ever lived in California, Maria East, and she was there temporarily for her health. It must be Maria she said to herself, as she lifted the box, not a heavy one, and carried it into the sunny little sitting-room, and her thoughts flew back instantly to the days when she and Maria went to school together, slept together, and shared all each other's joys and sorrows like sisters, as they were in heart.

The box cover was soon lifted and a letter appeared on top, and underneath it the queerest kind of a gift, rows of what might be apples, potatoes or onions, each wrapped carefully in paper, but Miss Avery eagerly opened the letter before unwrapping even one of the mysterious parcels.

'My Dear Janie,' she read in her friend's well-remembered handwriting, 'I am sending you an Easter remembrance in advance of the season, but I think you will enjoy it the more for that. I remember your love for Easter lilies and how carefully you cherished one poor little stalk once on a time, which we both remember, and then gave the lilies it bore to a friend, who was poorer than yourself, and I am sorry to say, less patient and generous. I am living next door to a lady who makes a business of raising Easter lilies for market, and oh how I wish you could see her fields in bloom, acres on acres, and it brought tears to my eyes last Easter as I thought of you and your one little treasure of long ago, and I resolved then and there that this year you should have for once all the Easter lilies you could want. By this you know what is in the box, and I shall enjoy the odor of Mrs. Kann's wonderful lilies the better for knowing that you are enjoying a part of them at home.'

Miss Avery unpacked her box with smiles and tears combined when she had finished her letter. She had not felt well in the morning, and also lonely and forsaken, small and useless, a most miserable feeling, caused, no doubt, by a piece of rich mince pie sent in by an injudiciously generous neighbor, which had disturbed her dreams and her digestion. Then, too, she had an unfortunate habit of self-depreciation, even without the help of pie, and the warm, wholesome words of friendship did her good.

There were dozens of them, the brown,

homely things, each with its possibility of beauty and fragrance hidden within it, and Miss Avery fairly hugged them in her delight. She was quite an expert florist, and knew just what to do with them, and the remainder of her day was a happy and busy one, as she prepared soil, which she always kept in her cellar over winter for early planting, and found places for even the least of the bulbs.

'I shall have enough for a row all around the pulpit,' she said to herself, joyfully. 'It always hurts me when I can't give the committee but one or two little offerings for the Lord's house at Easter. I guess Maria thought of that.'

Whatever Maria thought of, the lilies took to their new surroundings most kindly, and in a few weeks every bulb had thrown up a strong, thrifty stalk of green, with every indication of abundant bloom. The kitchen and sitting-room were full of them in every available shelf and window, and an obliging neighbor loaned her a large plant stand for the rest.

'Dear me, Miss Avery, I should think you would get tired of fussing over such a great batch of them,' she said, as she watched the little woman arranging her plants.

'There isn't one too many,' cried Miss Avery, almost indignantly. 'I love them, every separate one, and I have never had enough before to satisfy at all. I'd take care of twice as many if Maria had sent them.'

The fame of Miss Avery's Easter lilies began to go abroad, and many came to see them as they grew. Children watched the green, thrifty stalks lovingly, and little lame Jamie Knox came hobbling in on his crutch to look at them when the tall flower buds began to shoot up. 'My, but you've got a lot of 'em, Miss Avery,' he said, his eyes wandering from one to another hungrily. 'I had a Neaster lily once, but I didn't get to see it blow.'

'Why not?' asked Miss Avery, picking off an imperfect leaf from one of her pets.

'Something happened to it—an accident,' replied the child, a flush rising to his thin face. 'Father he—'

'Never mind, dear,' Miss Avery interposed, gently. She had seen Jerry Knox staggering into his poor home too often not to guess at once what had happened to the Easter lily, and when the child went home he had one of the pots, carefully covered with papers, gathered in his left arm, his pale little face fairly transfigured with joy.

'Grandma Lee is down again with rheumatism. Poor old soul, if her crown is burnishing with suffering it will be a shining one,' said Mrs. Graham, another neighbor, one morning. Miss Avery lived in a friendly neighborhood, where people threw shawls over their heads, and 'ran in' at all hours of the day, an old-fashioned custom which has its pleasures as well as its disadvantages. 'She has been planning so on going to Easter service this year, and now she is flat on her back. It just seems as if some folks didn't get anything but disappointments and pains in this world.'

'That is Calvary, but remember, Mrs. Graham, that after Calvary comes Easter,' replied Miss Avery, gently, 'and Grandma's Easter, we all know, will be complete and triumphant. Someway my thoughts have been on Easter more than ever this year.'

'Well, I should think so, with all this house full of lilies,' Mrs. Graham rejoined with a laugh.

'What I meant to say was, that more than ever before Easter means triumph to me. We see the lilies as they are to-day, the brown root doing its work in the soil, the leaves and stalks doing their duty as best they can, but the glory of the plant remains to be revealed in the perfect lily blossom by and by.'

'Well, there'll be enough of it when it comes,' replied Mrs. Graham, quite ignoring the spiritual thought. 'I never saw so many lilies outside of a conservatory.'

'Lightly as they were spoken, the words, 'There'll be enough of it when it comes,' lingered strangely with Miss Avery after her caller had departed. 'Yes, we shall be satisfied,' she said to herself, as she went carefully over her field of lilies to select the thrickest and best for Grandma Lee. 'Here we

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have the pain and toil of Calvary, there the glory and beauty of Easter in all its perfection.'

'Oh, thank you, dearie,' said Grandma Lee, delightedly, when Miss Avery uncovered her burden. 'I was just wishing I had something green and growing to look at. I get tired of looking at the quilt, though it has got some pieces in it that I set great store by, and the wall paper isn't very comfortin'. Those little figures on the ceiling look like a tumblin' lot of little boys, chasing each other full pelt. They make me so tired, always runnin' night an' day but never catchin' anything.'

'I should think they would grandma,' Miss Avery looked up at the ugly wall paper with a smile, 'but I think this will soon comfort you with fragrance and beauty,' and sitting down by the bedside she told the story of the box of bulbs.

'What an opportunity, dearie,' remarked the old lady. 'There are so many shut in by sickness and sorrow, so many of the least that you can do for. I almost envy you.'

'Yes,' replied Miss Avery, almost hesitatingly. 'I don't want to scrimp the church decorations, though. I've laid out to satisfy the craving I've had for so long to trim the altar for once with an abundant offering.'

'Ah, well, dearie, He knows, whether in secret or in His house, He knows how you want to honor Him, and will accept the gift wherever given.'

Day after day Miss Avery heard of new cases where the lilies might carry their Easter message to sick or sorrowing hearts, and before the opening of the first bud her supply was lessened by nearly half, but her heart was growing strangely warm and tender. It was as if each flower, as it went on its sacred mission, left behind it its odor and beauty to develop in her, and make her more loving and earnest, an alabaster box giving forth its fragrance only by usage.

'Oh, Miss Avery, how perfectly lovely they are. It seems a pity to disturb them,' cried Nettie Arlington. 'It is so lovely of you to be willing to loan them to us,' Miss Avery's class had come to carry the remaining lilies over to the church. They were in full bloom now, and the little house was redolent with perfume, while Miss Avery's cheeks were flushed with happy excitement as she loaded her pets into the arms of the waiting girls.

'Not good a bit girls,' she said, joyfully, as they all joined in Nettie's sentiment. 'It is such a pleasure for me to do it. There, go along, dears, and I will bring what is left.'

'Aren't you going to leave even one teeny, weeny one for yourself, Miss Avery?' asked Nettie, as her teacher gathered up the few which remained.

'Not one; I will enjoy them the better when they come back if I lend freely.'

It was by far the happiest Easter Miss Avery had ever experienced, and she looked at the beautiful decorations of the church with eyes misty with tears. It was the first satisfying offering she had ever been able to make, and the music sounded sweeter and the sermon more touching because her lilies were there, saying for her what she could not say for herself.

After the service someone touched her sleeve. It was lame Jamie. 'Oh, Miss Avery,

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