

# MISSION OF THE LILIES.

By COLUMBA CARROLL.

"What beautiful lilies!" exclaimed May Norris, as she opened the door of her friend, Blanche Glenn's, elegant room and saw on the table a bunch of those pure white flowers. "Where did you get them, Blanche? They are my favorites of all the flower kingdom, because they are dear St. Joseph's lilies."

May picked up one of the sacred blossoms to admire it, saying, "These are the first I have seen this year. Oh, how I love them!"

Blanche came from her retreat in the sunny window, holding out both hands to her friend. They are indeed lovely dear May. Clive sent them to me and I am going to wear them to-night. I wanted lilies-of-the-valley, but could not get them, so he sent me these. Some of them are very small and they look lovely with my pink. I was just wishing you would come and put the flowers in the neck of my new dress. I will show it to you. But what flowers are you going to wear, May? Violets, I hope."

May's face changed a little. She cast her eyes down for a moment, then quickly looked up with a smile and said, "I am not going to wear any flowers, Blanche."

"Not going to wear any! Why, every one will have on flowers to-night, and besides—" seeing May's serious expression Blanche suddenly stopped and, putting both arms around her friend, said sweetly, "Did Fred forget to send you flowers, dear? Then you shall have some of mine. This lily looks lovely in your hair," holding the white blossom against May's sunny tresses. "I wish my hair were like yours instead of brown."

"Thank you, Blanche; I shall not need your flowers. Fred did send me beautiful roses."

"He will feel hurt if you do not wear them to-night."

"No, he will not, for I am not going," May said laughingly.

"Not going, May. Why, have you and Fred fallen out? Come tell me all about it, and then make up, for you must go."

"O Blanche! you are all wrong, so I will have to tell you. First, the flowers are in a place that it will please Fred to have them. If it did not please him—well I should not care to please him myself. They are on St. Joseph's Altar, dear, and to-morrow will be his feast day. That is the reason I'm not going to Garland's to-night."

"Well, May Norris!" Blanche exclaimed, greatly provoked. "I thought you had gotten over those foolish notions of yours; I don't see why that should keep you from enjoying yourself. What Joseph do you mean, anyhow—Joseph the husband of Mary?"

"Do not be disrespectful, Blanche. I mean St. Joseph, the spouse of the Blessed Virgin and foster-father of Our Lord. Now I must be going. Let me take one more look at those lovely lilies. They are not too beautiful for you, dear friend, but too sacred for the ball-room."

"I think you might stay and help me dress," Blanche said crossly.

"I would like to, but mother is not well and she will expect me home early."

"Well, if you will go, May, wait one moment; I will get you the book I promised. It is on papa's desk." Blanche left the room, and May took up her friend's Bible from the table near her, turning the leaves slowly as she sat thinking. Suddenly her face brightened as her eyes fell upon these words:—

"And for raiment why are you solicitous? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they labor not, neither do they spin. Yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these." Looking round she found a pencil and marked these two verses in the sixth chapter of Matthew, and laid the book open upon the table.

Blanche soon returned, bringing the volume. She handed it to May, saying: "I think you are real mean not to go to-night."

"That is because you do not understand my motive, dear. Do not part with me in anger. See, the sun is going down. I will run away while you are smiling on me. Good-night!"

May hurried from the room, down the broad stairway, and into the soft twilight.

The sun was fast sinking, but the west was all aglow with crimson and gold, and a gentle wind was blowing.

She drew a scarf over her head and shoulders and began to climb the hill for home. It was already late in the month of March, but the eighteenth was the first mild day. May loitered a little to enjoy the balmy air without and the warm beatings of her heart within. Presently she looked up. Bright eyes, blushes, and smiles improve a pretty face. Fred Holland was at the top of the hill and coming towards her.

"I am sorry about Blanche; I intended to tell her the secret," May said, as she pulled off her glove, and held out a little hand, on which a tiny diamond glittered, to Fred, who gently held it in his own a moment, and they slowly, very slowly wandered home.

## CHAPTER II.

Blanche Glenn was the only remaining child of Dr. Glenn, first physician in the village of Seaton. Blanche was the youngest of a large family of brothers and sisters, all of whom lay side by side in the town cemetery. She was the life and joy of her old father, whose heart was full of gentleness and love for his motherless child, and whose purse, like the magic lamp, was always being emptied for her and yet was always full. The sweet simplicity of Blanche's character outshone the glittering attractions of her wealth and beauty, but the tender blossoms of heaven-born virtue planted in her heart drooped sadly for want of the care and cultivation which religion alone can give. Indulged in every girlish freak and fancy, surrounded by luxuries, commanding admiration; although a Protestant herself, Blanche's dearest friend, May Norris, was a Catholic, and a poor girl whose father had lately died, leaving nothing to his family but the old homestead.

Therefore it became necessary for May and her older brothers to obtain employment, that they might keep the family together in their old home. May had spent her last school year at a convent of the Sisters of St. Francis, from which she had graduated, winning high honours and carrying away golden lessons of virtue and piety that kept her heart brave and happy, and illuminated her sweet face with holy joy. Every one loved May, and none the less now that she was the school-mistress of the village, for there was a smile and a kind word on her lips for every one. How could she have enemies?

By teaching she soon earned enough to pay the tax on the house, and now that her brothers were succeeding she was able to lay aside a little for her own use.

But to return to Blanche. As soon as May left her on the evening of the Garland entertainment, she sat down in a great arm-chair by the window, pouting like a spoiled child. "It takes all the pleasure from the evening not to have May go," she thought. "I wish I had not promised. Everyone will be disappointed if she is not there. I wonder why she don't go? Oh, yes! I remember; because to-morrow will be St. Joseph's day. Well, she's very good to give him her flowers and stay at home in his honour, which is more than I would do. I wonder how she can do it? Raving over my lilies, too, just because they are named after him. I'm sure I don't care much for them, or for Olive who sent them, or for the party—for anything in fact. I wish my dear mother had lived, if only long enough, to teach me to be good and useful. Papa thinks I am good; I know I am not. May is good, and useful too. She helps to support her mother, and although she has so little, she is always doing something for others, and everyone loves her. But for me no one cares—only May and papa; and I don't see why they should either. I am so useless, so selfish, so discontented; though I have everything I wish for. What good have I done in all my life? And yet I must have been made for something better than foolish, worldly pleasures. There is nothing in them after all. There is a void in my heart, a longing for something, I don't know what—perhaps for God, perhaps for prayer. Alas! I do

not know how to pray." And tears gathered in the full brown eyes as Blanche raised a pleading face to the starlit sky, but they closed sadly and her head dropped heavily on her arm. "I have not a friend there," she cried, with an aching heart. The storm-waves of her grief beat high, but above the tempest that raged in her bosom she heard a gentle voice crying "Save me, Lord, or I perish!" She sank upon her knees and the winds grew calm.

Silver moonbeams streamed in at the windows and shed a soft light over the kneeling figure of a young girl with wavy brown hair, and the face—ah! the face was hidden to all but God; and a voice of angel sweetness whispered consolation to her soul. "Look to God, dear child," it said, "he is your friend and mine. I am St. Joseph; I will help you; pray to God; he will guide you, guard you, love you, and teach you to love him."

"I will try, dear saint," she cried, "with my whole heart. I will, I will!"

The silver timepiece on the mantel chimed seven, and a voice from the hall called "Blanche, where are you, dear!"

"I am here, father," she answered, running to the door. "I am going out, but will soon be ready; then I will come down."

"I don't want to go, but I've promised," she mused with a happy face, "and I am not going to begin by disappointing. But the lilies—they are indeed too sacred for me; I belong to St. Joseph now, and he shall have them. But Clive—well, I will wear one for his sake, but it will be the last time."

Blanche lighted the candles on the table, and the open Bible attracted her attention. The pencil-marks she knew to be Mary's, and she read the verses. "And for raiment why are you solicitous? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they labour not, neither do they spin; yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these."

Blanche closed the book, but the words appeared still before her mind. "I will send the lilies to May," Blanche resolved, "and in the morning she will put them on the altar for me." Blanche called her maid, and the flowers were sent with a note.

"Now I must dress quickly," she said; "they will call for me at eight." The new pink dress was put on in a rather careless manner—something unusual for Blanche—the brown hair was caught loosely back, and a single white lily, half hidden in folds of pink, nestled on her bosom. Not a jewel marred the simplicity of her costume, but she never looked lovelier, was never more unconsciously of her charms. True happiness lit up her face, and everyone remarked her sweetness and affability, but not one attributed the change in her manner to the modest flower she wore.

And May—where was she on this same evening? Her cozy little parlour looked cheerful, indeed, in the warm firelight; but what made the little flames peep in and disappear like mischievous children? Ah! Fred was there alone with May. Shall we peep, too? No; let us go in honestly with the maid, who is just entering with the box of lilies Blanche has sent.

There is nothing very remarkable to be seen except that May and Fred look unusually happy. The room itself shows signs of careful dressing. Graceful loops in the muslin curtains, dainty ornaments, and fresh flowers betray May's tasteful arrangement.

Imagine her surprise to receive from Blanche the lilies she had so much admired! The note, too, puzzled her. What could have induced her friend to part with flowers, and offer them so generously to St. Joseph?

But, being ever watchful for manifestations of God's will, she ceased to wonder and said, "It is St. Joseph's work!"

"Yes, St. Joseph's work and yours, May," Fred said tenderly, anxious to hear all the circumstances.

"Oh! no! not mine, Fred; though I do pray hard for Blanche. I will tell you about it. And just think, she wants to go to Mass with me in the morning!"

"Quite natural she should want to go with you, May; so do I," Fred said.

"Well, you can't go with me this time, Fred. I must see to Blanche; but be sure you are there."

## CHAPTER III.

St. Joseph's day dawned bright and beautiful, and found May on her way to church. With light tread and a happy

heart she hastened up the avenue to Blanche's door. "What will her father think if I ring the bell at this hour?" May said; but there was no need of fear, for Blanche appeared in the doorway and ran to meet her friend.

"The last Mass bell is ringing," May said; and the girls hurried on to the little church not far distant, scarcely speaking all the way, so deeply were both impressed with the goodness of God in choosing them for a heavenly manifestation of his love.

"You must lay them on the altar, Blanche," May whispered when they reached the door, and she took the bunch of lilies from its box. They passed up the aisle, and Blanche laid her offering at St. Joseph's feet. Respectfully kneeling and with bowed head she prayed, impressed by the beauty of the services. She could not yet understand the meaning of all, but in her heart a holy sacrifice of self she offered, which God alone could see and understand.

The "Mission of the Lilies" was effected. They brought the chosen child of God to St. Joseph, and he became her guide in the narrow path that leads to joys eternal. A good work, thus mercifully begun, divine grace and love completed in a wonderful manner.

Blanche's sudden conversion filled her with fervor and happiness, and while the world looked on in wonder, and the faithful said prayers of thanksgiving, she received the first Sacrament of the church, and, pure from the font of baptism, knelt at the table of Divine Love; then, choosing the name of Joseph, she was confirmed a soldier of Christ.

Thus the glorious season of the Resurrection and the sweet month of May did not pass without a special blessing for this favoured child of the Patriarch Saint.

But the little apostle who converted Blanche—did grace and love forget her? Indeed, no; though Providence had planned for her courageous soul a life in the world, where very brave soldiers are needed to overcome temptation and sin.

June arrived and found May Norris as beautiful as the morning. In the presence of Blanche and Clive she stood before the altar and pledged her girlish love to Fred. A wreath of bridal roses graced her brow, shedding fragrance around her and tinging the future with roseate hue.

Ah! 'twill fade, sweet girl; and where your roses now shed a blooming reflection there will be clouds, dark clouds, that may chase away the sunshine of happiness. They say often, while brightness lasts, "Thy will be done"; and when adversity comes, as it surely must, how pleasing to Heaven it will be if, with bowed head and an aching heart, you still cry "O God! Thy will be done."

Days and months passed, but ere another June, with its train of sunny days, had unbarred the golden gates of summer, another bride in purest white robes knelt before a lowly altar. 'Twas a bride of Heaven, a Spouse of the Lamb. Pure as the lily she wore seemed the happiness in her soul. In a firm, clear voice she pronounced the sacred vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The white veil was placed upon her head, and she was no longer Blanche Glenn, but Sister Marie Joseph, a daughter of St. Francis de Sales.

Thus did God seal this remarkable conversion with a stamp of divine love, and thus the destinies of these two friends crossed each other. God knows best! He called the weaker to labour and pray in his vineyard, out of temptation's way, but the other must carry a heavier cross to Calvary's heights, and none but the all-just God can know which shall wear the brighter crown in the eternal city.—*Irish Catholic.*

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