



NEXT Sunday being the Easter festival the church will mark its triumph by the usual floral offerings. All members of the congregation who are desirous to contribute will send cut flowers or plants to the church on Saturday next, not later than 5 p.m."

The words, uttered in the young minister's clear, natural tones, broke the monotone of service, arresting the attention of even the most somnolent pew occupants; and before drowsiness could again overtake them the closing hymn was sung, the closing prayer offered and the congregation passed down the shadowed aisles out into the daylight.

Up in the choir seats, so speedily vacated, a girl of dwarfed, deformed figure moved here and there gathering up the scattered music and casting an occasional swift glance at the white-robed minister, who still knelt with hidden face. Presently he arose and, meeting the shy dark eyes across the chancel rail with a kindly recognition in his own, passed slowly into the vestry. The organist played a few crashing closing chords, then pushing back the series of stops sprang jubilant from his seat.

"Well, Miss Tuman, you are the tidiest young lady in the choir. Not one of them takes care of the music as you do. Come along or the sexton will lock us in. We'll need two practices this week in order to be certain of our Easter music. Be sure you don't fail us. You are the only one who can reach that upper A easily, and we want the anthem to go well. Glad you live so close at hand, we can count on one good voice at least, no matter what the weather. What did you think of the sermon this morning?"

So chatting in good-natured content the little man accompanied his silent companion

across the street to the brown bow-windowed cottage, and with cheery "good morning" left her at the gate.

Walking slowly up the gravelled path, bordered with late-lying snow, the girl paused to watch the tall figure that emerged from the

outer vestry door and walked with easy swinging gait down the street; then turned into her own doorway.

Crossing the hall, she entered the sitting-room, a very plainly furnished room it was, shabby-looking perhaps on dark days, but glorified just now by the flood of spring sunshine that streamed in through the great bow window. What a magnificent window that was for plants! They leaved and blossomed and sunned themselves through all the winter days, growing in a joyous luxuriance that was the despair of less fortunate plant lovers, who declared that the flower fairies bestowed special favor upon the bow window of the little brown cottage.

In a comfortable rocker, pulled out of the strong sunlight, a delicate-looking elderly woman sat reading. Her face was crisscrossed with fine thread lines that had deepened into grooves on the narrow, high forehead; the thin lips were drawn into a little fretful curve, the dark eyes were dimmed by years—or tears, and upon the thin, wrinkled hand a worn gold band moved loosely.

"How late you are Bertha?" The voice, half complaining, half enduring, fitted the face.

"Yes. The Gospel and the Lessons were long to-day. It is Palm Sunday you know." As the girl answered she moved to the window and began toying absently with the green leaves. Presently she spoke again.

"Mother, Mr. Armstrong has asked for contributions of flowers for the church. Do you think I have any fit to send?"

"I'm sure your plants are nice enough for anything" answered the mother plaintively.

"But I have not any in blossom. Last week my daffodils were lovely, and a month ago the hyacinths were all in bloom. The crocuses will not be out for a week or two, and my lilies will not flower this spring. I really have nothing except my rosebush and, indeed, that is lovely. It has four buds and I am sure two will be full-blown in a week and the others partly open."

Standing in the sunlit window, her hands straying eagerly among the green leaves, her face brightening as she talked, the girl looked wonderfully attractive, despite her deformity, for she had the mother's dark eyes, enhanced by the softness and brightness of youth, and

the luxuriance of hair with which nature seems ever to try to compensate her earth-marred children. In thick, soft curls the brown hair waved and covered the curved back, forming a fit framework for the nervous face, so delicate yet so strong, so sensitive yet so controlled.

Day by day throughout the last Lenten week, Bertha sat among her plants, making the dainty child garments that brought her large custom from the mothers of the neighborhood. And day by day the rosebush flourished, and the buds unsheathed their damask petals.

Once the tall rector, in company with a fair young lady, passed the brown cottage, and discerning the deformed girl among her flowers, gave her smiling recognition. She returned the salutation, then drew back behind her green screen, while a shadow crept about the patient mouth, and the busy needle wrought a few uneven stitches.

Once, too, the fair young lady came, bringing yards of lace and cambric.

"Mr. Armstrong thinks your window is lovely, Miss Tuman," she said, after the sewing had been discussed. "He is passionately fond of flowers. Some day," with a little laughing hesitancy, "some day, when I have a home of my own, you will tell me the secret of your success with plants, will you not?"

Bertha noted the white fingers that crept tenderly over the turquoise ring, the same ring she had seen but a few days before shining from out the folds of a surpliced robe; she heard the musical girlish voice, and, without looking, saw the pretty blushing face, and her own face grew very white while she spoke a few grave words of assent.

When her visitor had departed, Bertha finished her seat, then walked slowly upstairs to her own room, and, locking the door, pulled up both blinds, and in the full noon-tide light stood before her mirror. Lifting the long thick curls, she viewed herself searchingly, pitilessly, the great hungry eyes scanning every defect. Then with a quivering sob she shut out the glaring light and threw herself upon the bed.

For a long afternoon she lay there, fighting her woman's battle, striving to drink her cup of renunciation, to look without shrinking down the solitary years that stretched in barrenness before her. Bitter was the struggle, fierce and passionate the rebellion, but it passed, and when evening came she gathered her books and crossed the moonlit street to attend the choir practice. How sweet and clear her voice lifted itself that night! Up and up she carried the triumphant Easter music, till the church overflowed with melody, and out into the still night issued the joyous alleluia.

The little organist rubbed his hands in ecstasy.

"We shall do excellently. Miss Tuman, you have surpassed yourself. But you look pale; you must not sing any more. The anthem is safe enough if that young scamp only keeps plenty of wind in the bellows and doesn't go to sleep." Good Friday came and went, and on Saturday Bertha noted, with eager pleasure, how rapidly the crimson petals of the rosebuds were uncurling and how fragrant their perfume.

"My rosebush will be just perfect tomorrow, mother," she said. "It's a pity the buds are not white. But then," with a catch in her breath, "I am not a very white bird myself."

"I wish you would take that baby robe home, and not talk nonsense," answered her mother with anxious sharpness. "You promised Mrs. Wood she should have it to-day, and the walk will do you good. You're as pale as a ghost."