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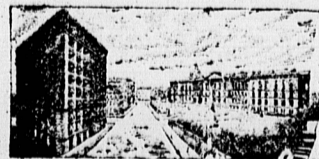
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**THE LIGHT OF THE LILIES.**

An Unexpected Harvest For the Artist Who Turned Gardener.

By BELLE MANIATES.  
(Copyright, 1909, by Associated Literary Press.)

He was an artist, ordained by his Maker and indorsed by the Royal academy, but because one to whom he had made a plea had broken faith he had drawn a brush of fresh paint across his last picture and locked the studio door.

Then he had gone down to a little place in the valley. Here he planted fields of lilies, toiling from morning mist until the lowing cattle at twilight. Then he went into the tiny, tumble-down cottage and sought his sea of dreams. He worked steadily in his flower fields, watching and waiting for the fulfillment.

One morning he looked out upon a sea of lilies, white, purple and pink tinted. "The only true picture I ever made," he thought.

Many persons rode down the little crossroads to see the wondrous field, and many a car honked brazenly at his door that imperious, dust coated woman might demand a purchase of lilies.

"I love flowers too well to sell them," he always replied to such as these, but to the humble wayfarer, to the wistful eyed children, he was a generous giver.

One day a phaeton stopped in the roadway, and the occupant, a slender girl, came down the path. She did not ask the stereotyped question.

"You have so many lilies," she said, half timidly. "Will you spare me a few?"

He didn't answer for a moment. He was comparing the faint tints underneath her exquisite pallor with the shades of his lilies.

"Are they for some one who is ill?" he asked gently.

"For one who has been ill," she made answer.

He understood. "Do you want the white ones?"

"No; the pink, please, if I may."

He cut ruthlessly of his fairest lilies.

"I wish I could do more than thank you," she said as they came back



"HAVE YOU, TOO, LOST SOME ONE?"

to the doorway. "If there is anything I can do for you inside," glancing within.

"I keep it clean," he answered, amused.

"Yes, but a man can't 'tidy' you know."

"And how do you know," he asked, "that I haven't a woman about to 'tidy' for me?"

"You and your lily fields are famed. I live ten miles from here, but I have heard of you as living here alone and that you refuse lilies to people who ask for them."

"And yet you ventured?"

"I had driven past and seen them. I knew that one who worked among such beautiful flowers must love them and one who loved them would not refuse me if he knew."

"I would not have refused if you had asked me to give them to you for yourself," he replied quickly.

"I must go," she said presently.

"Is it far to—the place where you are taking the lilies?"

"Five miles from here—halfway to my home."

"Any time that you come," he said earnestly, "I shall cut the lilies for you."

At twilight he walked to the cemetery and searched jealously for a grave decked with his lilies. His heart gave a bound when he found that it was a tiny mound. On the second day he picked lavishly of his lilies and walked again to the cemetery, covering the little grave with the pink-white lilies. Two days later he saw her phaeton stopping before the house.

"Oh, it was you!" she cried breathlessly. "You took fresh lilies."

"Yes, it was I," he replied. "I shall be glad to take them again."

"My little sister was blind," she said simply.

"I have the lilies," he reminded her, "and—memories."

"Have you, too," she asked softly, "lost some one?"

"Yes, but not the best way—not by death. It is comfort, surely, to mourn for one who is dead—only dead."

He looked at her startled eyes and felt a sudden shock of knowledge. Had he really felt the loss of the one he mourned or only the loss of something she had taken from him? He was conscious of a sense of relief as if something had been lifted from him.

"I am going to parade my culinary skill and offer you some light refreshment. May I, Miss?"

"My name," she said, smiling and adapting herself to his change of mood, "is Claire Wynthrop."

She looked at him expectantly.

"My name," he said slowly, "is Sherman."

"Will you come to my home some day, Mr. Sherman?" she asked naively after their luncheon of brown bread, cream and fruit.

"I will come tomorrow," he replied.

The following day he drove to her home, his cart filled with lilies. She lived in a rambling brown house, with an oak park in front and an old-fashioned garden at the back. Her mother was an invalid.

The following days were passed in pilgrimages to the little grave, in visits to her home and drives in her phaeton. One day he read of a new kind of lily, and he went to the nearest city to buy the bulbs and learn how to nurture them. The florist was away. The artist waited a week for him. When he returned to his little cottage he found a note under the door signed "Claire." The doctor had ordered an ocean voyage for her mother, and they had gone abroad for six months.

He found no light in his lilies now. The next week some workmen came and put skylights in the roof of his tiny dwelling. The passersby concluded he was making a greenhouse.

When the work was completed he brought his studio appointments and began to work as unobtrusively within as he had without. When his picture was finished he took it to the city. Art critics stood silent before it. It was his masterpiece.

On the day after her return he asked Claire to go with him to an art gallery.

"Did my letter of the 2d reach you?" he asked.

"Yes; just as we were about to sail."

"And did you know what it was I said you had restored to me?"

"I think so," she said.

He led her straight to a picture. She was strangely silent as she gazed upon the picture of a slender girl with trustful eyes. Her arms were full of lilies. Finally she turned to her catalogue.

"The Light of the Lilies—Sherman Waldemar."

"Oh!" she gasped. "Are you Mr. Waldemar, the artist?"

"I am, though I was much happier as Sherman, the gardener. But—do you like the picture? Do you mind my having painted you? It is for myself—for my own. It is the harvest of my lilies."

"I know now," she said in a low, sad tone, "what it was you meant I had restored to you. It was the desire to paint."

"No," he protested; "not that. You restored my faith. No, Claire, I love you, and you only."

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