

In the House of Many Flowers

BY FLORENCE WILLARD.

IN THE MIDST of the dirt, the filth, the squalor that mark the very poor of a certain southern city, stands a low white house surrounded by a tangled garden of vines and flowers. To left, to right, on every side, stretch the shacks of poverty, crusted with grime and reeking with foul odors; but the white house in its circle of green seems always fair and lovely, like some little pool that reflects the sky in the midst of a muddy street. Some call it the "Settlement," but to the children of the poor, those for whom it is primarily intended, it is "The House of Many Flowers." Here, in the great sunny rooms, they meet together, all ages, all nationalities, held together by the common bonds, ignorance and poverty.

It was a warm Saturday afternoon, and the Settlement was full of children. Little Miss sighed as she bent over Panca and adjusted the tangled floss with which she was striving to embroider a bit of cardboard. The girl looked up with a grateful smile as she dug her needle into her work. Little Miss turned away. The child who had given her that name had long since left the circle and was dead, or gone, no one knew where, but the name still clung to her. She was a slight little woman of perhaps fifty years. Her hair was gray and waved about a face a little worn, a little lined with care, but full of a sweetness that mirrored the soul within. The twenty years that Little Miss had spent in the Settlement had given her more things than her name. There had been joys that almost erased the thought of the tragedies she had witnessed; but today—somehow, today seemed different. After twenty years Little Miss had paused to think, and today she was passing judgment on her work.

It had begun that morning when Little Miss, at her solitary breakfast had picked up the paper and on the front page had found the story of a convict's escape. Little Miss rarely read the more sensational parts of the paper, avoiding them with the nice distinction of long practice, but today the picture of the convict had been published, and Little Miss caught and held by the eyes. The young face reminded her of something, someone—she scarcely knew what, and she paused to read the column beside it. "Patrick O'Harren"—the name was familiar. Her mind worked back along the years, and suddenly she remembered. So he was a convict now, the little Patsy O'Harren who had worked and played in this very house ten years before. She remembered with a pang that he had committed some small offense and had left her for the reform school, a lad of ten or twelve. She had lost track of him, and now—now he was an outlaw, being hunted like an animal. She searched the column for his crime. Some jewelry, a matter of a year. He was an "old offender," it seemed—an old offender at twenty-two! It was on his way to prison that he had made his escape, and now it was reported that he was in the South. Little Miss had thrown aside the paper and risen from the table. She felt tired and very, very discouraged. She toiled with them, taught them, loved them, and they ended in prison, or worse. She had worked for twenty years and failed, and yet—she wondered wherein the fault lay—what she could have done to make her influence more lasting.

Somewhere within, the clock chimed the hour, and Little Miss hurried about her accustomed tasks. Her assistants joined, and soon after came the children. At their advent the rooms seemed to blossom into life.

There was little time for thinking now, and yet the smiles on the faces of the children brought a sort of pain to Little Miss, and as she bent over them, directing their awkward fingers, putting a stitch here, a stitch there, the same question rose again and again in her mind. How long would they remember?

Little Giuseppe with the soulful eyes and the grimy fingers, would he go out of her life forever and leave behind all that he had gained? Ludwig, bending over his woodwork, Pedro, wielding his brush with romantic skill—would they, too, pass on and forget?

She called herself from her reverie with a start in time to prevent her scissors from disappearing into the cavernous pockets of Kanakitchi Lamuro. Kanakitchi received her words of admonishment with an inscrutable expression in his slant eyes. Usually the incident would not have worried her; she was too well acquainted with oriental ideas of morality to be surprised by anything, but today it

seemed of moment. It had even crept into her classes, this sinister thing. No wonder Little Miss sighed as she bent over Panca's sewing.

It grew late, and the children one by one gathered their work into their lockers and ran laughing into the streets without. Little Miss watched them go, and a pain stabbed at her heart as they turned to wave a goodbye to The House of Many Flowers. Sometime they would leave it forever and forget.

It was almost like a dirge ringing in her ears again and again. They would forget, forget. She tried to shake it off, and, leaving the house, stepped out of the French windows into the garden. Dusk had come, and the tangled shrubbery was all a quiver in the light breeze. From without came the sound of calling, of busy wagons, of clanging bells, but within everything was quiet. Suddenly Little Miss heard a step, and looking up found that she was not alone. A man stood before her. He was poorly dressed, even ragged, but he was not a man of the neighborhood. He loomed before her, large, shambling, evidently ill at ease. Little Miss was not frightened. She was used to calls of help at any hour of the night.

"Well," she said kindly, "is there anything I can do to help you?"

The man took a step forward out of the shadows. "Little Miss," he said, "I'm Patsy, Patsy O'Harren."

The woman's heart gave a leap within her. He was one of her boys, and he had come back! She took a step toward him and held out her hand. "I'm glad to see you, Patsy," she said, "so glad!"

The man looked at her furtively. "You've seen the papers?" he asked.

Little Miss made no answer, but motioning him to follow, entered the house, where she drew the curtain and lighted the light. Then she spoke. "You must be hungry," she said quietly. "I'll make you some tea." She hurried about her preparations. The man stood in the center of the room and looked about him as though he would drink in his surroundings. He put his hand almost lovingly on one of the little low tables that stood around the wall.

"We aster call it The House of Many Flowers," he said slowly. "Some little dago named it that; I bet. They wasn't so bad in them days, the dagos." He turned to Little Miss with the ghost of a smile on his face. "Do you remember Pedro Rafael?" he asked, "and Toni—I disremembered his other name?"

Little Miss, looking back through a myriad of Pedros and Tonis returned the smile. "Yes," she said, "I remember them, and I remember you, too. You were such a fine little fellow, and you enjoyed the work so."

The man turned on her almost fiercely. "D'y know," he said, "'twas the only thing I had that wasn't bad, rotten bad, the only thing." It all came out in a torrent, a stream of almost incoherent words. "My mother—well, I'll not say anything agin her, for 'twas not her fault, but the old man—" his fists clenched. "Many's the time I've come here with my back raw from beatin'. They was all bad, rotten bad, but this wuz just—heaven. Some might have stood the other without goin' down, but I wuz rotten, too, I guess. The Judge said so, 'tany rate, an' I got sent up for thievin' an' general deviltry. When I came out, they all know. There weren't nothin' to do, so I snatched some stuff an' got sent up for three months, an' then I didn't care. When they caught me this time I took my chanct an' lit out, an' then, somehow, I just come here." He ended simply.

"Poor boy," said Little Miss, "you must eat."

The man doubled his length awkwardly into the chair she drew up to the table and fell to eating ravenously of the things it contained. Suddenly there was clanging from without, and he sprang from his chair. A cup dropped from his hand and crashed on the floor unheeded.

"The Black Maria!" he cried breathing hard.

The patrol clanged past and the hubbub in the streets subsided gradually. Neither the man nor the woman had moved or spoken, but now he turned to her.

"They're after me," he said, "I'd almost forgot, an' I ain't got any place to go!" He was no longer a man, he was a child, a frightened child, coming to her for help. Little Miss put her hand on his arm.

"Listen," she said, "Listen! I could hide you—yes, I might even keep you safely for a time, but you'd always be a fugitive, Patsy, you never

could be anything but an escaped convict, while if you go back—"

"Go back!" cried the man—"to that?"

"Listen, Patsy," she pleaded. "Go back and take your punishment like a man, go back, and then come out and start afresh—"

"Start fresh!" cried the other, breaking in on her words. "Who'd give me the chanct after this?"

It was a question that had puzzled wiser theorists than Little Miss, and she was silent for a minute. There were steps on the walk, and some one rapped heavily on the door. Little Miss went white. Suddenly she turned to the man.

"Don't you see," she cried, "your chance is here, among your own people? Come back to me, and I will give you work here in The House of Many Flowers."

The knocking was repeated, and she hurried down the hall and unbolted the door. On the steps she found a policeman of the beat with several others.

"Pardon, Miss," said the officer, scraping, "we saw a man come in here awhile ago. Is he still here?"

For the fraction of a second Little Miss paused, uncertain of her reply.

Then a voice rose behind her. "I'm here," said Patrick O'Harren, as he stepped into the hall. "And if you want to take me, be quiet and don't alarm the lady."

The man behind the officer put his hand to his hip, but his companion arrested his arm. "He's surrendered, you fool," he said gruffly, and drew from his pocket a couple of metallic objects that gleamed in the lamplight. The man winced as the handcuffs touched his wrists, but submitted quietly. The detective beside him put his hand on his shoulder.

"Better get a move on," he said curtly.

Patrick raised his head and looked about him from the chairs and low tables to the flower pots at the window. Then he turned to the woman who stood beside the table staring at him, white and silent.

"I'll come back, Little Miss," he said slowly, "I'll come back in a year."

The woman started forward, her hands outstretched. "You won't forget?" she pleaded. "Oh, you are very, very sure you won't forget?"

The man turned and looked down at her, and his eyes were the eyes of the little Patsy of long ago.

"No, Little Miss," he said, "I'll not forget."

Then he passed into the hall beyond, the burly policeman at his elbow.

The trampling steps passed down the hall, the door slammed, the gate clicked, and Little Miss was alone in The House of Many Flowers.

The Silver Lining.

There is no cloud can hide for long
The beauty of the breath of song;
In dark and heavy folds, we cry,
They hang above us in the sky,
But sweetness through the silver day
Soon blows the dreariest pall away.
And upward to the sun we shine
Mid old revealings grown divine.

All life the silver linings run
Behind the shadows gray and dun,
And there amid the heaviest gloom
A sudden beauty bursts in bloom,
Transmuting all our grief and woe
Into the old, angelic glow
Of joy and cheer and living grace
Beneath the glory of his face.

The storms, however fierce they roar
Shall soon pass o'er, shall soon pass o'er;

And there the sunny hills lift up
Their peaks and every vale a cup
To hold God's beauty, brim to brim,
Shines with the utmost sweet of him,
Till song and sunshine borne together,
Bring back the dream of pleasant weather.

The silver lining—it is there,
Mid all our sorrow and our care,
So sweet, so true, so bright, so pure—
Be brave, oh, heart, that we may see
Through all we have to know and be
That they are best who best endure
The cross of each day's calvary,
To bear it with an earnest will—
The silver lining gloweth still.
—Baltimore Sun.

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