

THE TEA ROSE.

There it stood, in its little green vase, on a light ebony stand, in the window of the drawing room. The rich satin curtains, with their costly fringes, swept down on either side of it, and around it glittered every rare and fanciful trifle which wealth can offer to luxury; and yet that simple rose was the fairest of them all. So pure it looked, its white leaves just touched with that delicious creamy tint peculiar to its kind; its cup so full, so perfect; its head bending as if it were sinking and melting away in its own richness--O, when did ever man make any thing to equal the living, perfect flower?

But the sunlight that streamed through the window revealed something fairer than the rose. Reclined on an ottoman, in a deep recess, and intently engaged with a book, rested what seemed the counterpart of that so lovely flower. That cheek so pale, that fair forehead so spiritual, that countenance so full of high thought, those long, downcast lashes, and the expression of the beautiful mouth, sorrowful, yet subdued and sweet--it seemed like the picture of a dream.

"Florence! Florence!" echoed a merry and musical voice, in a sweet, impatient tone. Turn your head, reader, and you will see a light and sparkling maiden, the very model of some little wilful elf, born of mischief and motion, with a dancing eye, a foot that scarcely seems to touch the carpet, and a smile so multiplied by dimples that it seems

like a thousand smiles at once. "Come, Florence, I say," said the little sprite, "put down that wise, good, and excellent volume, and descend from your cloud, and talk with a poor little mortal."

The fair apparition, thus adjured, obeyed; and, looking up, revealed just such eyes as you expected to see beneath such lids--eyes deep, pathetic, and rich as a strain of sad music.

"I say, cousin," said the "bright ladye," "I have been thinking what you are to do with your pet rose when you go to New York, as, to our consternation, you are determined to do; you know it would be a sad pity to leave it with such a scatterbrain as I am. I do love flowers, that is a fact; that is, I like a regular bouquet, cut off and tied up, to carry to a party; but as to all this tending and fussing, which is needful to keep them growing, I have no gifts in that line."

"Make yourself easy as to that, Kate," said Florence, with a smile; "I have no intention of calling upon your talents; I have an asylum in view for my favorite."

"O, then you know just what I was going to say. Mrs. Marshall, I presume, has been speaking to you; she was here yesterday, and I was quite pathetic upon the subject, telling her the loss your favorite would sustain, and so forth; and she said how delighted she would be to have it in her greenhouse, it is in such a fine state now, so full of buds. I told her I knew you would like to give it to her, you are so

fond of Mrs. Marshall, you know."

"Now, Kate, I am sorry, but I have otherwise engaged it."

"Whom can it be to? you have so few intimates here."

"O, it is only one of my odd fancies."

"But do tell me, Florence."

"Well, cousin, you know the little pale girl to whom we give sewing."

"What! little Mary Stephens? How absurd! Florence, this is just another of your motherly, oldmaidish ways--dressing dolls for poor children, making bonnets and knitting socks for all the little dirty babies in the region round about. I do believe you have made more calls in those two vile, ill-smelling alleys back of our house, than ever you have in Chestnut Street, though you know every body is half dying to see you; and now, to crown all, you must give this choice little bijou to a seamstress girl, when one of your most intimate friends, in your own class, would value it so highly. What in the world can people in their circumstances want of flowers?"

"Just the same as I do," replied Florence, calmly. "Have you not noticed that the little girl never comes here without looking wistfully at the opening buds? And don't you remember, the other morning, she asked me so

prettily if I would let her mother come and see it, she was so fond of flowers?"

"But, Florence, only think of this rare flower standing on a table with ham, eggs, cheese, and flour, and stifled in that close little room where Mrs. Stephens and her daughter manage to wash, iron, cook, and nobody knows what besides."

"Well, Kate, and if I were obliged to live in one coarse room, and wash, and iron, and cook, as you say,--if I had to spend every moment of my time in toil, with no prospect from my window but a brick wall and dirty lane,--such a flower as this would be untold enjoyment to me."

"Pshaw! Florence--all sentiment: poor people have no time to be sentimental. Besides, I don't believe it will grow with them; it is a greenhouse flower, and used to delicate living."

"O, as to that, a flower never inquires whether its owner is rich or poor; and Mrs. Stephens, whatever else she has not, has sunshine of as good quality as this that streams through our window. The beautiful things that God makes are his gift to all alike. You will see that my fair rose will be as well and cheerful in Mrs. Stephens's room as in ours."

"Well, after all, how odd! When one gives to poor people, one wants to give them something useful--a bushel of potatoes, a ham, and such

things."

"Why, certainly, potatoes and ham must be supplied; but, having ministered to the first and most craving wants, why not add any other little pleasures or gratifications we may have it in our power to bestow? I know there are many of the poor who have fine feeling and a keen sense of the beautiful, which rusts out and dies because they are too hard pressed to procure it any gratification. Poor Mrs. Stephens, for example: I know she would enjoy birds, and flowers, and music, as much as I do. I have seen her eye light up as she looked on these things in our drawing room, and yet not one beautiful thing can she command. From necessity, her room, her clothing, all she has, must be coarse and plain. You should have seen the almost rapture she and Mary felt when I offered them my rose."

"Dear me! all this may be true, but I never thought of it before. I never thought that these hard-working people had any ideas of taste!"

"Then why do you see the geranium or rose so carefully nursed in the old cracked teapot in the poorest room, or the morning glory planted in a box and twined about the window? Do not these show that the human heart yearns for the beautiful in all ranks of life? You remember, Kate, how our washerwoman sat up a whole night, after a hard day's work, to make her first baby a pretty dress to be baptized in."

"Yes, and I remember how I laughed at you for making such a tasteful

little cap for it."

"Well, Katy, I think the look of perfect delight with which the poor mother regarded her baby in its new dress and cap was something quite worth creating: I do believe she could not have felt more grateful if I had sent her a barrel of flour."

"Well, I never thought before of giving any thing to the poor but what they really needed, and I have always been willing to do that when I could without going far out of my way."

"Well, cousin, if our heavenly Father gave to us after this mode, we should have only coarse, shapeless piles of provisions lying about the world, instead of all this beautiful variety of trees, and fruits, and flowers."

"Well, well, cousin, I suppose you are right--but have mercy on my poor head; it is too small to hold so many new ideas all at once--so go on your own way." And the little lady began practising a waltzing step before the glass with great satisfaction.

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It was a very small room, lighted by only one window. There was no carpet on the floor; there was a clean, but coarsely-covered bed in one corner; a cupboard, with a few dishes and plates, in the other; a chest

of drawers; and before the window stood a small cherry stand, quite new, and, indeed, it was the only article in the room that seemed so.

A pale, sickly-looking woman of about forty was leaning back in her rocking chair, her eyes closed and her lips compressed as if in pain. She rocked backward and forward a few minutes, pressed her hand hard upon her eyes, and then languidly resumed her fine stitching, on which she had been busy since morning. The door opened, and a slender little girl of about twelve years of age entered, her large blue eyes dilated and radiant with delight as she bore in the vase with the rose tree in it.

"O, see, mother, see! Here is one in full bloom, and two more half out, and ever so many more pretty buds peeping out of the green leaves."

The poor woman's face brightened as she looked, first on the rose and then on her sickly child, on whose face she had not seen so bright a color for months.

"God bless her!" she exclaimed, unconsciously.

"Miss Florence--yes, I knew you would feel so, mother. Does it not make your head feel better to see such a beautiful flower? Now, you will not look so longingly at the flowers in the market, for we have a rose that is handsomer than any of them. Why, it seems to me it is worth as much to us as our whole little garden used to be. Only see how many buds

there are! Just count them, and only smell the flower! Now, where shall we set it up?" And Mary skipped about, placing her flower first in one position and then in another, and walking off to see the effect, till her mother gently reminded her that the rose tree could not preserve its beauty without sunlight.

"O, yes, truly," said Mary; "well, then, it must stand here on our new stand. How glad I am that we have such a handsome new stand for it! it will look so much better." And Mrs. Stephens laid down her work, and folded a piece of newspaper, on which the treasure was duly deposited.

"There," said Mary, watching the arrangement eagerly, "that will do--no, for it does not show both the opening buds; a little farther around--a little more; there, that is right;" and then Mary walked around to view the rose in various positions, after which she urged her mother to go with her to the outside, and see how it looked there. "How kind it was in Miss Florence to think of giving this to us!" said Mary; "though she had done so much for us, and given us so many things, yet this seems the best of all, because it seems as if she thought of us, and knew just how we felt; and so few do that, you know, mother."

What a bright afternoon that little gift made in that little room! How much faster Mary's fingers flew the livelong day as she sat sewing by her mother! and Mrs. Stephens, in the happiness of her child, almost forgot that she had a headache, and thought, as she sipped her evening cup of tea, that she felt stronger than she had done for some time.

That rose! its sweet influence died not with the first day. Through all the long, cold winter, the watching, tending, cherishing that flower awakened a thousand pleasant trains of thought, that beguiled the sameness and weariness of their life. Every day the fair, growing thing put forth some fresh beauty--a leaf, a bud, a new shoot, and constantly awakened fresh enjoyment in its possessors. As it stood in the window, the passer by would sometimes stop and gaze, attracted by its beauty, and then proud and happy was Mary; nor did even the serious and care-worn widow notice with indifference this tribute to the beauty of their favorite.

But little did Florence think, when she bestowed the gift, that there twined about it an invisible thread that reached far and brightly into the web of her destiny.

One cold afternoon in early spring, a tall and graceful gentleman called at the lowly room to pay for the making of some linen by the inmates. He was a stranger and wayfarer, recommended through the charity of some of Mrs. Stephens's patrons. As he turned to go, his eye rested admiringly on the rose tree; and he stopped to gaze at it.

"How beautiful!" said he.

"Yes," said little Mary; "and it was given to us by a lady as sweet and beautiful as that is."

"Ah," said the stranger, turning upon her a pair of bright dark eyes, pleased and rather struck by the communication; "and how came she to give it to you, my little girl?"

"O, because we are poor, and mother is sick, and we never can have any thing pretty. We used to have a garden once; and we loved flowers so much, and Miss Florence found it out, and so she gave us this."

"Florence!" echoed the stranger.

"Yes, Miss Florence L'Estrange--a beautiful lady. They say she was from foreign parts; but she speaks English just like other ladies, only sweeter."

"Is she here now? is she in this city?" said the gentleman, eagerly.

"No; she left some months ago," said the widow, noticing the shade of disappointment on his face. "But," said she, "you can find out all about her at her aunt's, Mrs. Carlyle's, No. 10 ---- Street."

A short time after Florence received a letter in a handwriting that made her tremble. During the many early years of her life spent in France she had well learned to know that writing--had loved as a woman like her loves only once; but there had been obstacles of parents and friends, long separation, long suspense, till, after anxious years, she had

believed the ocean had closed over that hand and heart; and it was this that had touched with such pensive sorrow the lines in her lovely face.

But this letter told that he was living--that he had traced her, even as a hidden streamlet may be traced, by the freshness, the verdure of heart, which her deeds of kindness had left wherever she had passed. Thus much said, our readers need no help in finishing my story for themselves.