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LILACS AND LYRICS

By GERTRUDE BURNHAM.

(© 1920, by McClure Newspaper Syndicate.)
"Come down to Kew in lilac time, in lilac time,
It isn't far from London."

The lilting refrain persisted in the mind of a girl who stood irresolutely upon the London pavement one spring morning, when even that dingy city was being afforded a glimpse of blue sky. At the corner a barrel organ was grinding out its tunes to appreciative groups of dancing children.

Well, why not go down to Kew? It really wasn't "far from London," and now that the war was over she would soon leave England for America and the opportunity would be gone. With sudden decision she hailed a passing bus and started on the journey to Kew with the haunting refrain still in her mind.

Lilacs, that was the magic word. Lilacs, white and purple, how lovingly they clustered about the little New England home.

Her eyes clouded with a sudden mist. She saw again two figures standing by the bushes, a lithe, sturdy lad in khaki, and a girl in a lilac frock who raised shy, adoring eyes to meet his. The heavy odors of the white and purple glory with which he had heaped her arms filled the air during those last sacred moments before his departure for France. There were caresses and promises, but few tears, for the girl was one of a race who unflinchingly sent their best to fight for liberty under the banners of the United States, and the man would have scorned to show emotion.

After his departure she had written him again and again. At first the replies were received as regularly as could be expected, then had come silence, unbroken silence. All attempts to locate him had been in vain and the corroding agony of suspense grew upon her. No one had heard and his name appeared on no prisoner or casualty list.

Finally she had volunteered as a Red Cross nurse for foreign service, and there found partial surcease from personal sorrow. Now her work was over and she was going home. Going home, to what?

With a start she came to herself. The bus had reached Kensington, and Kew Gardens lay before her. She alighted and walked slowly along. The birds were singing and their sweet notes were all that broke the silence. The peace of it stole over her and she sank down on a bench, half-hidden among the lilac bushes, and gave herself up to bitter-sweet memories.

A man wearing the silver bars of a first lieutenant in the service of the United States stood beside a London bookstall, idly turning the leaves of a book of poems. His eyes caught the following lines:

"Come down to Kew in lilac time, in lilac time,
It isn't far from London."

He read absordedly to the end of the poem, then re-read it. Turning with sudden decision he asked the bookseller how he could reach Kew. The bookseller gave him the necessary directions and advised him to go by all means to see the famed beauty of the gardens.

The young man thanked him and purchased the book of poems. The next bus that rumbled along toward Kensington found him on its top, immersed in deep thought. His mind was far away in a little New England village which he had not seen for over a year. There stood a farm house with clustering white and lavender lilac bushes, and beside them a girl in a frock to match, her laughing face bent over the lovely blooms.

He swung off the bus at Kew and strolled down the winding paths, enjoying the rustic solitude to the utmost. He turned a corner and came upon the lilacs filling the air with magic sweetness. This was familiar, this was home, and all that was needed to complete the picture was the girl, looking up at him with the love-light shining in the depths of her eyes.

Still held by the enchantment of his dream, he turned and saw a girl sitting on one of the garden benches with bowed head. As he looked she raised her head and he saw her face. As recognition came he swiftly stretched out his arms and she flew to them like a homing bird, too happy to be surprised. So swiftly had the dreams of both become reality that there was no consciousness of abrupt transition.

One hour later a squirrel skipped out from behind the bushes and cocked his head to one side. He was watching this couple who were so close together on the park bench, so quiet, save for the low murmur of voices and soft laughter.

The man had explained the long silence in a way which increased the girl's love and trust. He had been on a secret service mission of great danger, which had made it impossible for him to communicate with anyone. He had since been promoted and cited for bravery.

Then came the story of their appearance in the garden, and he unwrapped the book of poems. Two heads came close together and the listening squirrel heard words which sounded strangely like this:
"Come down to Kew in lilac time, in lilac time,
It isn't far from London."

And the man, the girl, and the squirrel all agreed with the poet that it was an excellent thing to do.

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Can't name all of them, but let us add you to the list.

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