

Mrs. Pell's Decoration Day

By
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BY THE aid of the calendar hanging on her wall, Mrs. Pell found that there were 14 weeks before Decoration day.

She was not an adept at mental arithmetic, so that it was quite a lengthy and laborious piece of work for her to calculate that if she saved 12 cents each of those 14 weeks, she would have one dollar and 68 cents.

She had just finished counting it up a second time in order to be sure that it was correct, when her neighbor, Mrs. Wilkes, from the next room below in the big tenement house, came in for their usual evening chat. She was a thin, nervous looking little woman of middle age. Neither her faded gray hair nor her dress was tidy. She was a strong contrast to Mrs. Pell, who was always neat and clean; she was much older than Mrs. Wilkes, too.

Most of Mrs. Pell's days were spent in office cleaning, while Mrs. Wilkes' time was well filled with washing and ironing.

After they had exchanged their news of the day, Mrs. Pell said: "Would you think that a body could get a nice lot of flowers for a dollar and sixty-eight cents?"

"Sure and I'd think that a lot of money to be spendin' in such a way," answered Mrs. Wilkes, with a look of surprise on her weather-beaten face.

"I'd like it to be more," returned Mrs. Pell, "but not a cent more than 12 cents a week can I spare."

"I'm sure I'm not knowin' what your talkin' about," said Mrs. Wilkes, the surprise in her face increasing.

"I'll be tellin' you. It's for the graves on Decoration day. I've just set my heart on coverin' 'em with flowers this year. I've been wantin' to do it every



Every time she passed a Florist, she would stop and look at the flowers.

year, but somethin' always happened to prevent. But this year, they're goin' to be there."

"Oh!" ejaculated Mrs. Wilkes. "Yes," went on Mrs. Pell, "I'm feelin' sure there'll be nothin' to prevent this year. And it's white roses I want. Teddy was crazy after 'em."

She rocked her chair, and hid her face in her blue gingham apron.

Mrs. Wilkes could not enter very deeply into her friend's feelings. She had never had any children, and her husband had been lost at sea so many years before that he was now but a dim memory; besides, he had never in life given her any reason to mourn his loss.

But she kept respectfully silent until Mrs. Pell's burst of grief was over. Then she said: "White roses is nice. You ought to be gettin' a lot for so much money."

Mrs. Pell shook her head. "I don't know. Flowers is dear."

Mrs. Pell carefully put aside 12 cents each week from her meager earnings.

Every time that she passed a florist's window on her way to work, she would stop and look at the flowers displayed, and try to decide which window contained the most beautiful white roses. "For I must get the finest to be had," she would think.

The prospect of buying those flowers often formed the subject of her chats with Mrs. Wilkes.

To the latter \$1.68 seemed an enormous sum to spend in any such a way. "Be sure that you get the worth of your money," she would say.

"They've got to be fine ones," Mrs. Pell would answer.

Spring had been long in coming that year, and it was late in May before the garden roses began to show their colors. Mrs. Pell had few opportunities of seeing any of these, the tenement in which she lived being in a district where there was not enough earth room for a blade of grass to grow. Mrs. Pell, like many of her neighbors, had a few pots of geraniums on her window sills, but they were not luxuriant in growth. The air, close and sunless, was not conducive to floriculture. Mrs. Pell had once tried to raise a white rose, but it had died an early death.

But on Sundays, when she was not

too tired, she went to church. Her way thither led past many beautiful gardens. One of them she particularly admired. It was a large, old-fashioned garden surrounding a beautiful old house. There were roses and roses. Roses climbing over trellises, and clambering about the broad veranda which ran along the side of the house.

They were just such roses as had grown about the little country home to which she had gone as a bride, says the Chicago Advance. The sight of them took her back to the days when she had been so happy.

Then had come the dark time when her husband returned from the war with broken health. To mend their fortunes they had come to the city. But things had gotten worse. Her husband had soon died. She and Teddy had struggled alone. She had looked forward to the day when Teddy would be taking care of her, for he was a good boy. But he had been laid beside his father eight years ago. How he had loved those roses! He had often said that he would have a garden full of them when he was a man. He would be a man now if he were living.

The day before Decoration day came. Mrs. Pell had gone much sooner than usual to her work, and by hurrying a great deal, had been able to return home at four instead of six, her usual hour.

It was her plan to put on her best clothes and then go to the florist's and select and order her flowers. She would call for them early the next morning, and take them to the cemetery. The day was to be a holiday.

She had just unlocked her door, and entered her room, when Mrs. Wilkes came in. Her eyes were swollen from crying.

"Sure, and what's the matter?" cried Mrs. Pell.

"It's Sally. She's sick, and goin' to die. The woman that's been takin' care of her wrote to tell me. And she wants to see me once more."

"Well, sure and you'll be goin'," said Mrs. Pell.

Mrs. Wilkes burst into tears. "It's that I'm feelin' so bad about. It costs three dollars to go, and me with nothin' but a dollar and a half to my name. You see, I paid the rent two days ago. And not one of the neighbors with a cent to lend me."

"And it's too bad, it is," ejaculated Mrs. Pell, feelingly.

"Yes, and there's a train at seven," said Mrs. Wilkes, with fresh tears. "Unless—" she went on hesitatingly, "you could lend me enough!"

"It's too bad, it is," exclaimed Mrs. Pell. "Sure and I paid my rent last week, too." She looked distressed. She was always anxious to help anyone in trouble.

"I know—but—" Mrs. Wilkes hesitated more than before. "I—I thought perhaps you'd let me have that money you saved for the flowers. Poor Sallie! I'd like to see her once more. She's my own sister, sure."

"Lend you that money! Oh! Mrs. Wilkes, I can't! I've had my heart set so long on coverin' the graves this Decoration day."

"I thought likely you wouldn't want to. Poor Sallie! And I'll never see her again." Mrs. Wilkes turned away with a hopeless air, and went slowly back to her room.

Mrs. Pell hastily prepared to go to the florist's to select and order her flowers. She felt very sorry for Mrs. Wilkes, but of course she could not lend her that money. If she had saved it for any other purpose but that! She had tried for so many years to be able to cover those graves with roses, and now when she had the money—to give it all up.

She hoped Mrs. Wilkes did not think her mean. She would have been glad to do anything else for her.

And it was a pity that she could not see her sister before she died. She was the only relative she had, too.

If it had only not been that money! And if it were not Decoration day! She wanted to put flowers on their graves at the time that other people were remembering their dead.

Mrs. Pell's steps became slower and slower, and as she came in sight of the florist's shop, she stood still, and remained in deep thought for some minutes. Then she turned suddenly and walked back to the tenement, and into Mrs. Wilkes' room. She found the latter sitting with her face in her hands and crying.

Mrs. Pell put her precious \$1.68 in her hand.

"There," she said, "just take it. Hurry and get ready, and I'll go to the train with you."

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Wilkes, "sure and I always knew you were a good woman. Poor Sallie! I'll be seein' her again."

Mrs. Pell did not sleep well that night. It hurt her to think of those two graves being flowerless another Decoration day. They were in such a remote part of the cemetery that they never shared in the general decoration of graves. She decided that she would not go to the cemetery at all. She could not bear to think of seeing others carrying their flowers while her hands must be empty.

But in the morning she changed her mind. It seemed unkind to leave her graves unvisited. She would go in the afternoon when the services were over and the cemetery would be comparatively deserted. It was such a lovely day. The ride in the cars would do her good.

Mr. Graham, his wife and Berta and Tom drove out to the cemetery, their carriage filled with baskets of roses. They had almost stripped the many bushes in their garden.

After their grandfather's and grandmother's and Aunt Edith's graves had been piled high with odorous blossoms there was still a large basketful of beautiful white roses left.

"Let us drive around and see if there are any graves without any flowers," said Berta.

"Yes," said Mrs. Graham, "I like that thought."

But there did not seem to be any graves undecorated until they reached a more distant part of the cemetery.



She found these two a mass of exquisite roses.

There two sunken graves, with weather-worn wood markers at the head, were flowerless.

"How lonely they look!" said Tom. "Yes," said Mrs. Graham, "I think that you must empty this basket on them."

"Let me and Tom do it," said Berta. So she and her brother jumped out of the carriage and went over to the two graves. There were enough roses to completely cover them both.

"Now they don't look so lonely," said Berta, with a backward glance, as she drove away.

And so it was that when late in the afternoon Mrs. Pell came to the lonely spot where lay her husband and son, she found the two mounds a mass of exquisite roses. And they looked like the roses she had had in her little country home in those long past days—the white roses that Teddy had so loved.

AFTER MANY DAYS

A DECORATION DAY STORY

The street was blocked by carryalls filled with children, decked in white, companies of soldiers, men on horseback, the Grand Army veterans, now but a remnant of the mighty host that once marched away to make history, and numerous organizations in double ranks.



Threaded his way through the crowded street.

Jerky strains of the "Star Spangled Banner," mingled with the sound of the fife and drum, floated out on the morning air. The notes of "Marching Through Georgia" were caught, echoed and answered by "Columbia, Gem of the Ocean," from the adjacent streets, while the Spanish-American war soldiers contributed "A Hot Time." Flags and banners streamed from all windows.

For it was the 30th of May. Rob Mandel, a young southerner, enjoying his first glimpse of life in the northern states, threaded his way through the crowded streets, which seemed to him to bear the air of a gala day. He turned into a street where tall trees cast a grateful shade on the pavement. Then his heart beat more quickly. At the end of the block he saw Jocelyn-Jocelyn, sweet and 17, and but very recently his fiancée. His sauntering pace changed to brisker gait.

"Jocelyn!" She turned a pretty, surprised face to his.

"Where are you going, Jocelyn? I called at your house just now, but found it closed."

"I am going to spend the day with my grandmother."

"And she is the only member of your family I have not met, so I will go with you."

"No, Rob; not to-day. This is always a sad day for poor grandma."

"Oh, your grandfather was killed in the civil war, I presume," he added, feelingly.

"Worse than that, Rob. He belonged to the 'missing,' and not missing in action, either. You can walk to the house with me and I will tell you about it. Early in the war my grandfather was taken sick in quarters. Before he was well his regiment received orders to move on and commenced their march at night. Grandpa, delirious with fever, was placed in the ambulance.

"He was never again heard from, and they say the sad tidings would have killed my grandmother, but she felt that she must live to have removed from the muster roll the cruel word 'deserter.'

"For years she went continually to the window to watch for him; the doorbell never rang, a footstep never paused before the door but her heart beat with expectancy. She knew that whatever had been his fate, he did not merit the cruel charge of desertion, for he was a grand and brave man."

"She worked unceasingly to get the charge removed, and years after the war succeeded in doing so. That lifted her sorrow slightly, but this Decoration day is a dreaded one to her. She grieves so to think that she cannot care for his grave, and she envies all those women bearing flowers to their dead in the cemetery."

Rob was strangely silent after listening to the recital of this little tragedy.

"It is very sad and strange," he said, reflectively. "It recalls a war story that my grandmother has often told me—"

"I will have to hear it some other time, Rob, for this is my grandmother's house, and you must go back."

"I am going in with you," he announced, in determined tones.

"Oh, no, Rob!" she replied, hurriedly. "The fact is, I haven't told grandma of our engagement. You see you must expect her to be prejudiced at first because you are a southerner and—"

"She would naturally feel that way, for I presume she imagines that your grandfather was killed by confederates."

"Yes, and to-day, of all days, her feelings would be more keen. So you must wait, Rob, and meet her under other conditions."

"No, I am going in now!" he said, resolutely, as he ascended the steps. Jocelyn's grandmother met them in the hall. She looked like a picture grandmother with her soft white curls and gown of silver gray.

"Where is your home, Mr. Mandel?" asked the old lady, politely. Jocelyn gave him a beseeching look, but he replied unflinchingly:

"Atlanta, Georgia." Jocelyn's grandmother turned her face toward the window, and Jocelyn grew rebellious.

"Mrs. Royce," said Rob, earnestly, "Jocelyn has been telling me this morning of your sad bereavement."

Rob rose and crossed the room, seating himself beside her.

"What she told me decided me to come in and relate to you an incident of my grandmother's life during the war. She was the wife of a confederate officer and lived on the outskirts of Atlanta. Early one morning a servant came into the house and told her that he had found a sick Yankee in the stable."

Mrs. Royce started, and an eager look of interest brightened her wan face. Jocelyn's eyes grew expectant.

"Oh, Rob!" she said, softly.

"My grandmother," resumed the young man, "accompanied the servant to the stable and found the report to be correct. From the clothing and appearance of the sick man she saw, lying on the floor she knew him to be more than a common soldier."

"He was delirious and appeared to be very ill. She at once had him carried to the house and nursed him with the care and tenderness she would have given to her own. He lived but a week—"

Rob paused.

"Oh, is that all?"

Mrs. Royce gave an agonized cry.

"No," said Rob, gently. "She found in his pocket a memorandum book, on the fly leaf of which had been written a name and address in pencil—"

"And the name!" gasped Mrs. Royce, tremulously.

"The first name was illegible; the last name was—Royce—the name of the town was completely erased—the state was Ohio."

"Oh, it must have been my husband. If I could only be sure!" she cried.

"I think you can be," said Rob. "My grandmother was an artist. She thought of the absent wife, or mother, or sweetheart, who would mourn him as missing, and she sketched the soldier as he lay ill. A very accurate, carefully drawn sketch."

"Have you seen it? Can you tell me how he looked?" she implored.

"The expression," said Rob, "is Jocelyn's. I noticed the resemblance as soon as I recalled the sketch."

"And Jocelyn is the image of her grandfather!" "I will write to my grandmother to-day and tell her of you. I will ask her to write to you the full particulars and send you the sketch. She sent a statement of the case to some of the Ohio papers at the time, but never received a clew to the identity of the soldier."

"And where was he buried?" "In our grounds at first. Later, the government removed his body, and it now lies in the National cemetery at Marietta, Ga."

There followed a long conversation, in which Rob had to repeat many times all he could recall of his grandmother's oft-repeated story.

"How can I ever thank you or repay you for giving me the greatest happiness of my life since the war?" exclaimed Jocelyn's grandmother.

"I can tell you how," he said, frankly. "By giving me Jocelyn."

"With all my heart," she responded.

Jocelyn was in the depths of contrition.

"Will you forgive me, Rob?" she asked, wistfully.

"Forgive you, Jocelyn?" he asked, wonderingly.

"For what?"

"Never mind for what," she laughed.

The young maid and her lover in their paradise of love were not as happy as Jocelyn's grandmother in her new-found joy.



She turned a pretty, surprised face to his.



Her grandmother met them in the hall.



Seating himself beside her.

