Zona Gale

The loves of Pelleas and Etarre

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THE ODOUR OF THE OINTMENT

Ascension lilies were everywhere in our shabby drawing-room. They crowded two tables and filled a corner and rose, slim and white, atop a Sheraton cabinet. Every one had sent Pelleas and me a sheaf of the flowers—the Chartres, the Cleatams, Miss Willie Lillieblade, Enid, Lisa and dear Hobart Eddy had all remembered us on Easter eve, and we entered our drawing-room after breakfast on Easter morning to be all but greeted with a winding of the white trumpets. The sun smote them and they were a kind of candle, their light secretly diffused, premonitory of Spring, of some resurrection of light as a new element. It was a wonderful Easter day, and in spite of our sad gray hair Pelleas and I were never in fairer health; yet for the first time in our fifty years together Easter found us close prisoners. Easter morning, and we were forbidden to leave the house!

“Etarre,” Pelleas said, with some show of firmness, “there is no reason in the world why we should not go.”

“Ah, well now,” I said with a sigh, “I wish you could prove that to Nichola. Do I not know it perfectly already?”

It is one sign of our advancing years, we must suppose, that we are prone to predicate of each other the trifles which heaven sends. The sterner things we long ago learned to accept with our hands clasped in each other’s; but when the postman is late or the hot water is cold or we miss our paper we have a way of looking solemnly sidewise.

We had gone upstairs the night before in the best of humours, Pelleas carrying an Ascension lily to stand in the moonlight of our window, for it always seems to us the saddest injustice to set the sullen extinguisher of lowered lights on the brief life of a flower. And we had been looking forward happily to Easter morning when the service is always inseparable from a festival of Spring. Then, lo! when we were awakened there was the treacherous world one glitter of ice. Branches sparkled against the blue, the wall of the park was a rampart of silver and the faithless sidewalks were mockeries of thoroughfare. But the grave significance of this did not come to us until Nichola entered the dining-room with the griddle-cakes and found me dressed in my gray silk and Pelleas in broadcloth.

“Is it,” asked our old serving-woman, who rules us as if she had brought us from Italy and we had not, more than forty years before, tempted her from her native Capri, “is it that you are mad, with this ice everywhere, everywhere?”

“It is Easter morning, Nichola,” I said, with the mildness of one who supports a perfect cause.

“Our Lady knows it is so,” Nichola said, setting down her smoking burden, “but the streets are so thick with ice that one breaks one’s head a thousand times. You must not think of so much as stepping in the ar-y.”

She left the room, and the honey-brown cakes cooled while Pelleas and I looked at each other aghast. To miss our Easter service for the first time in our life together! The thought was hardly to be borne. We reasoned with Nichola when she came back and I think that Pelleas even stamped his foot under the table; but she only brought more cakes

and shook her head, the impertinent old woman who has conceived that she must take care of us.

“One breaks one’s head a thousand times,” she obstinately repeated. “Our Lady would not wish it. Danger is not holy.”

To tell the truth, as Pelleas and I looked sorrowfully from the window above the Ascension lilies we knew that there was reason in the situation, for the streets were perilous even to see. None the less we were frankly resentful, for it is bad enough to have a disagreeable matter occur without having reason on its side. As for our carriage, that went long ago together with the days when Pelleas could model and I could write so that a few were deceived; and as for a cab to our far downtown church and back, that was not to be considered. For several years now we have stepped, as Nichola would say, softly, softly from one security to another so that we need not give up our house; and even now we are seldom sure that one month’s comfort will keep its troth with the next. Since it was too icy to walk to the car we must needs remain where we were.

“I suppose,” said I, as if it were a matter of opinion, “that it is really Easter uptown too. But some way—”

“I know,” Pelleas said. Really, of all the pleasures of this world I think that the “I know” of Pelleas in answer to something I have left unsaid is the last to be foregone. I hope that there is no one who does not have this delight.

“Pelleas—” I began tremblingly to suggest.

“Ah, well now,” Pelleas cried, resolutely, “let us go anyway. We can walk beside the curb slowly. And after all, we do not belong to Nichola.” Really, of all the pleasures of

this world I think that the daring of Pelleas in moments when I am cowardly is quite the last to be renounced. I hope that there is no one who has not the delight of living near some one a bit braver than himself.

With one accord we slipped from the drawing-room and toiled up the stairs. I think, although we would not for the world have said so, that there may have been in our minds the fear that this might be our last Easter together and, if it was to be so, then to run away to Easter service would be a fitting memory, a little delicious human thing to recall among austerer glories. Out of its box in a twinkling came my violet bonnet and I hardly looked in a mirror as I put it on. I fastened my cloak wrong from top to bottom and seized two right-hand gloves and thrust them in my muff. Then we opened the door and listened. There was not a sound in the house. We ventured into the passage and down the stairs, and I think we did not breathe until the outer door closed softly upon us. For Nichola, we have come to believe, is a mystic and thinks other people’s thoughts. At all events, she finds us out so often that we prefer to theorize that it is her penetration and not our clumsiness which betrays us.

Nichola had already swept the steps with hot water and salt and ashes and sawdust combined; Nichola is so thorough that I am astonished she has not corrupted me with the quality. Yet no sooner was I beyond the pale of her friendly care than I overestimated thoroughness, like the weak character that I am, and wished that the whole street had practiced it. I took three steps on that icy surface and stood still, desperately.

“Pelleas,” I said, weakly, “I feel—I feel like a little nut on top of a big, frosted, indigestible cake.”

I laughed a bit hysterically and Pelleas slipped my arm more firmly in his and we crept forward like the hands of a clock, Pelleas a little the faster, as became the tall minute hand. We turned the corner safely and had one interminable block to traverse before we reached the haven of the car. I looked down that long expanse of slippery gray, unbroken save where a divine janitor or two had interposed, and my courage failed me. And Pelleas rashly ventured on advice.

“You walk too stiffly, Etarre,” he explained. “Relax, relax! Step along slowly but easily, as I do. Then, if you fall, you fall like a child—no jar, no shock, no broken bones. Now relax—”

And Pelleas did so. Before I could shape my answer Pelleas had relaxed. He lay in a limp little heap on the ice beside me, and I shall never forget my moment of despair.

I do not know where she came from, but while I stood there hopelessly reiterating, “Pelleas—why, Pelleas!” on the verge of tears, she stepped from some door of the air to my assistance. She wore a little crimson hat and a crimson collar, but her poor coat, I afterward noted, was sadly worn. At the moment of her coming it was her clear, pale face that fixed itself in my grateful memory. She darted forward, stepped down from the curb and held out two hands to Pelleas.

“Oh, sir,” she said, “I can help you. I have on rubber boots.”

Surely no interfering goddess ever arrived in a more practical frame of mind.

When Pelleas was on his feet, looking about him in a dazed and rather unforgiving fashion, the little maid caught off her crimson muffler and brushed his coat. Pelleas, with bared head, made her as courtly a bow as his foothold permitted, and she continued to stand somewhat shyly before us with the prettiest anxiety on her face, shaking the snow from her crimson muffler.

“You are not hurt, sir?” she asked, and seemed so vastly relieved at his reassurance that she quite won our hearts. “Now,” she said, “won’t you let me walk with you? My rubber boots will do for all three.”

We each accepted her arm without the smallest protest. I will hazard that no shipwrecked sailor ever inquired of the rescuing sail whether he was inconveniencing it. Once safely aboard, however, and well under way, he may have symbolized his breeding to the extent of offering a faint, polite resistance.

As “Shall we not be putting you out?” Pelleas inquired, never offering to release her arm.

And “I’m afraid we are,” I ventured, pressing to her all the closer. She was frail as I, too, and it was not the rubber boots to which I pinned my faith; she was young, and you can hardly know what safety that bespeaks until you are seventy, on ice.

“It’s just there, on the south corner of the avenue,” Pelleas explained apologetically, and for the first time I perceived that by common consent we had turned back toward home. But neither of us mentioned that.

Then, as we stepped forward, with beautiful nicety rounding the corner to come upon our entrance, suddenly,

without a moment’s warning, our blackest fears were fulfilled. We ran full upon Nichola.

“Ah, I told you, Pelleas!” I murmured; which I had not, but one has to take some comfort in crises.

Without a word Nichola wheeled solemnly, grasped my other arm and made herself fourth in our singular party. Her gray head was unprotected and her hair stood out all about it. She had thrown her apron across her shoulders and great patches in her print gown were visible to all the world. When Nichola’s sleeves wear out she always cuts a piece from the front breadth of her skirt to mend them, trusting to her aprons to conceal the lack. She was a sorry old figure indeed, out there on the avenue in the Easter sunshine, and I inclined bitterly to resent her interference.

“Nichola,” said I, haughtily, “one would think that we were obliged to be wheeled about on casters.”

Nichola made but brief reply.

“Our Lady knows you’d be better so,” she said.

So that was how, on Easter morning, with the bells pealing like a softer silver across the silver of the city, Pelleas and I found ourselves back in our lonely drawing-room considerably shaken and hovering before the fire which Nichola stirred to a leaping blaze. And with us, since we had insisted on her coming, was our new little friend, fluttering about us with the prettiest concern, taking away my cloak, untying my bonnet and wheeling an arm-chair for Pelleas, quite as if she were the responsible little hostess and we her upset guests. Presently, the bright hat and worn coat laid aside, she sat on a hassock before the blaze and looked up at us, like a little finch that had alighted at our

casement and had been coaxed within. I think that I love best these little bird-women whom one expects at any moment to hear thrilling with a lilt of unreasonable song.

“My dear,” said I, on a sudden, “how selfish of us. I dare say you will have been going to church?”

She hesitated briefly.

“I might ’a’ gone to the mission,” she explained, unaccountably colouring, “but I don’t know if I would. On Easter.”

“But I should have thought,” I cried, “that this is the day of days to go.”

“It would be,” she assented, “it would be—” she went on, hesitating, “but, ma’am, I can’t bear to go,” she burst out, “because they don’t have no flowers. We go to the mission,” she added, “and not to the grand churches. And it seems—it seems—don’t you think God must be where the most flowers are? An’ last Easter we only had one geranium.”

Bless the child. I must be a kind of pagan, for I understood.

“Your flowers are beau-tiful,” she said, shyly, with a breath of content. “Are they real? I’ve been wantin’ to ask you. I never saw so many without the glass in front. But they don’t smell much,” she added, wistfully; “I wonder why that is?”

Pelleas and I had been wondering that very morning. They looked so sweet-scented and yet were barren of fragrance; and we had told ourselves that perhaps they were lilies of symbol without mission or message beyond the symbol, without hue or passion or, so to say, experience.

“Perhaps if one were to make some one happy with them or to put them in a bride’s bouquet they would no longer be scentless,” Pelleas quaintly said.

But now my mind was busy with other problems than those of such fragrance.

“Where do you go to church, my dear?” I asked, not daring to glance at Pelleas.

“To the mission,” she said, “over—” and she named one of the poorest of the struggling East Side chapels. “It’s just started,” she explained, “an’ the lady that give most, she died, and the money don’t come. And poor Mr. Lovelow, he’s the minister and he’s sick—but he preaches, anyhow. And pretty near nobody comes to hear him,” she added, with a curious, half-defiant emotion, her cheeks still glowing. It was strange that I who am such a busybody of romance was so slow to comprehend that betraying colour.

Pelleas and I knew where the mission was. We had even peeped into it one Sunday when, though it was not quite finished, they were trying to hold service from the unpainted pulpit. I remembered the ugly walls covered with the lead-pencil calculations of the builders, the forlorn reed organ, the pushing feet upon the floor. And now “the lady who give most” had died.

“Last Easter,” our little friend was reiterating, “we had one geranium that the minister brought. But now his mother is dead and I guess he won’t be keeping plants. Men always lets ’em freeze. Mis’ Sledge, she’s got a cactus, but it hasn’t bloomed yet. Maybe she’ll take that. And they said they was going to hang up the letters left from last Christmas, for the green. They don’t say nothing but ‘Welcome’ and ‘Star of

Bethlehem,’ but I s’pose the ‘Welcome’ is always nice for a church, and I s’pose the star shines all year round, if you look. But they don’t much of anybody come. Mr. Lovelow, he’s too sick to visit round much. Last Sunday they was only ’leven in the whole room.”

“Only ’leven in the whole room.” It hardly seemed credible in New York. But I knew the poverty of some of the smaller missions, especially in a case where “the lady that give most” has died. And this poor young minister, this young Mr. Lovelow whose mother had died and who was too sick to “visit round much,” and doubtless had an indifferent, poverty-ridden parish which no other pastor wanted—I knew in an instant the whole story of the struggle. I looked over at our pots of Ascension lilies and I found myself unreasonably angry with the dear Cleatams and Chartres and Hobart Eddy and the rest for the self-indulgence of having given them to us.

At that moment my eyes met those of Pelleas. He was leaning forward, looking at me with an expression of both daring, and doubt of my approval, and I saw his eyes go swiftly to the lilies. What was he contriving, I wondered, my heart beating. He was surely not thinking of sending our lilies over to the mission, for we could never get them all there in time and Nichola—

“Etarre!” said Pelleas—and showed me in a moment heights of resourcefulness to which I can never attain —“Etarre! It is only half after ten. We can’t go out to service —and the mission is not four blocks from us. Why not have our little friend run over there and, if there are only two

dozen or so in the chapel, have that young Mr. Lovelow bring them all over here, and let it be Easter in this room?”

He waved his hand toward the lilies waiting there all about the walls and doing no good to any save a selfish old man and woman. He looked at me, almost abashed at his own impulse. Was ever such a practical Mahomet, proposing to bring to himself some Mountain Delectable?

“Do you mean,” I asked breathlessly, “to let them have services in this—”

“Here with us, in the drawing-room,” Pelleas explained. “Why not? There were fifty in the room for that Lenten morning musicale. There’s the piano for the music. And the lilies—the lilies—”

“Of course we will,” I cried. “But, O, will they come? Do you think they will come?”

I turned to our little friend, and she had risen and was waiting with shining eyes.

“O, ma’am,” she said, trembling, “why, ma’am! O, yes’m, they’ll come. I’ll get ’em here myself. O, Mr. Lovelow, he’ll be so glad….”

She flew to her bright hat and worn coat and crimson muffler.

“Mr. Lovelow says,” she cried, “that a shabby church is just as much a holy temple as the ark of the gover’ment—but he was so glad when we dyed the spread for the orgin—O, ma’am,” she broke off, knotting the crimson scarf about her throat, “do you really want ’em? They ain’t—you know they don’t look—”

“Hurry, child,” said Pelleas, “and mind you don’t let one of them escape!”

When she was gone we looked at each other in panic.

“Pelleas,” I cried, trembling, “think of all there is to be done in ten minutes.”

Pelleas brushed this aside as a mere straw in the wind.

“Think of Nichola,” he portentously amended.

In all our flurry we could not help laughing at the frenzy of our old servant when we told her. Old Nichola was born upon the other side of every argument. In her we can see the history of all the world working out in a miniature of wrinkles. For Nichola would have cut off her gray hair with Sparta, hurled herself fanatically abroad on St. Bartholomew’s day, borne a pike before the Bastile, broken and burned the first threshing-machine in England, stoned Luther, and helped to sew the stars upon striped cloth in the kitchen of Betsy Ross.

“For the love of heaven,” cried Nichola, “church in the best room! It is not holy. Whoever heard o’ church in a private house, like a spiritualist seeonce or whatever they are. An’ me with a sponge-cake in the oven,” she concluded fervently. “Heaven be helpful, mem, I wish’t you’d ’a’ went to church yourselves.”

Chairs were drawn from the library and dining-room and from above-stairs, and frantically dusted with Nichola’s apron. The lilies were turned from the windows to look inward on the room and a little table for the Bible was laid with a white cloth and set with a vase of lilies. And in spite of Nichola, who every moment scolded and prophesied and nodded her head in the certainty that all the thunders of the church would descend upon us, we were ready when the

door-bell rang. I peeped from the drawing-room window and saw that our steps were filled!

“Nichola,” said I, trembling, “you will come up to the service, will you not?”

Nichola shook her old gray head.

“It’s a nonsense,” she shrilly proclaimed. “It will not be civilized. It will not be religious. I’ll open the door on ’em, but I won’t do nothink elst, mem.”

When we heard their garments in the hall and the voice of Little Friend, Pelleas pushed back the curtains and there was our Easter, come to us upon the threshold.

I shall not soon forget the fragile, gentle figure who led them. The Reverend Stephen Lovelow came in with outstretched hand, and I have forgotten what he said or indeed whether he spoke at all. But he took our hands and greeted us as the disciple must have greeted the host of that House of the Upper Room. We led the way to the table where he laid his worn Bible and he stood in silence while the others found their places, marshaled briskly by Little Friend who as captain was no less efficient than as deliverer. There were chairs to spare, and when every one was seated, in perfect quiet, the young clergyman bowed his head:—

“Lord, thou hast made thy face to shine upon us—” he prayed, and it seemed to me that our shabby drawing-room was suddenly quick with a presence more intimate than that of the lilies.

When the hymn was given out and there was a fluttering of leaves of the hymn-books they had brought, five of our guests at a nod from Mr. Lovelow made their way forward. One was a young woman with a ruddy face, but ruddy with

that strange, wrinkled ruddiness of age rather than youth, who wore a huge felt hat laden with flaming roses evidently added expressly for Easter day. She had on a thin waist of flimsy pink with a collar of beads and silver braid, and there were stones of all colours in a half-dozen rings on her hands. She took her place at the piano with an ease almost defiant and she played the hymn not badly, I must admit, and sang in a full riotous soprano. Meanwhile, at her side was ranged the choir. There were four—a great watch-dog of a bass with swelling veins upon his forehead and erect reddish hair; a little round contralto in a plush cap and a dress trimmed with the appliquéd flowers cut from a lace curtain; a tall, shy soprano who looked from one to another through the hymn as if she were in personal exhortation; and a pleasant-faced tenor who sang with a will that was good to hear and was evidently the choir leader, for he beat time with a stumpy, cracked hand set with a huge black ring on its middle finger. The little woman next me offered her book and I had a glimpse of a pinched side-face, with a displaced strand of gray hair and a loose linen collar with no cravat, but I have seldom heard a sweeter voice than that which up-trembled beside me—although, poor little woman! she was sadly ill at ease because the thumb which rested on the book next me was thrust in a glove fully an inch too long. As for Pelleas, he was sharing a book with a youngish man, stooped, long-armed, with a mane of black hair, whom Mr. Lovelow afterward told me had lost his position in a sweat-shop through drawing some excellent cartoons on the box of his machine. Mr. Lovelow himself was “looking over” with a mother and daughter who were later presented to us, and

who embarrassed any listener by persistently talking in concert, each repeating a few words of what the other had just said, quite in the fashion of the most gently bred talkers bent upon assuring each other of their spontaneous sympathy and response.

And what a hymn it was! After the first stanza they gained in confidence, and a volume of sound filled the low room—ay, and a world of spirit, too. “Christ the Lord is risen to-day, Hallelu—jah! ...” they caroled, and Pelleas, who never can sing a tune aloud although he declares indignantly that in his head he keeps it perfectly, and I, who do not sing at all, both joined perforce in the triumphant chorus. Ah, I dare say that farther down the avenue were sweet-voiced choirs that sang music long rehearsed, golden, flowing, and yet I think there was no more fervent Easter music than that in which we joined. It was as if the other music were the censer-smoke, and we were its shadow on the ground, but a proof of the sun for all that.

I cannot now remember all that simple service, perhaps because I so well remember the glory of the hour. I sat where I could see the park stretching away, black upon silver and silver upon black, over the Ascension lilies. The face of the young minister was illumined as he read and talked to his people. I think that I have never known such gentleness, never such yearning and tenderness as were his with that handful of crude and careless and devout. And though he spoke passionately and convincingly I could not but think that he was like some dumb thing striving for the utterance of the secret fire within—striving to “burn aloud,” as a violin beseeches understanding. Perhaps there is no

other way to tell the story of that first day of the week —“early, when it was yet dark.”

“They had brought sweet spices,” he said, “with which to anoint Him. Where are the spices that we have brought to-day? Have we aught of sacrifice, of charity, of zeal, of adoration—let us lay them at His feet, an offering acceptable unto the Lord, a token of our presence at the door of the sepulcher from which the stone was rolled away. Where are the sweet spices of our hands, where the pound of ointment of spikenard wherewith we shall anoint the feet of our living Lord? For if we bring of our spiritual possession, the Christ will suffer us, even as He suffered Mary; and the house shall be filled with the odour of the ointment.”

“And the house shall be filled with the odour of the ointment,” I said over to myself. Is it not strange how a phrase, a vista, a bar of song, a thought beneath the open stars, will almost pierce the veil?

“And the house shall be filled with the odour of the ointment,” I said silently all through the last prayer and the last hymn and the benediction of “The Lord make his face to shine upon you, the Lord give you peace.” And some way, with our rising, the abashment which is an integral part of all such gatherings as we had convoked was not to be reckoned with, and straightway the presentations and the words of gratitude and even the pretty anxiety of Little Friend fluttering among us were spontaneous and unconstrained. It was quite as if, Pelleas said afterward, we had been reduced to a common denominator. Indeed, it seems to me in remembering the day as if half the principles of Christian sociology were illustrated there in our

shabby drawing-room; but for that matter I would like to ask what complexities of political science, what profound bases of *solidarité*, are not on the way to be solved in the presence of Easter lilies? I am in all these matters most stupid and simple, but at all events I am not blameful enough to believe that they are exhausted by the theories.

Every one lingered for a little, in proof of the success of our venture. Pelleas and I talked with the choir and with the pianiste, and this lady informed us that our old rosewood piano, which we apologetically explained to have been ours for fifty years, was every bit as good and every bit as loud as a new golden-oak “instrument” belonging to her sister. The tall, shy soprano told us haltingly how much she had enjoyed the hour and her words conveyed sincerity in spite of her strange system of overemphasis of everything she said, and of carrying down the corners of her mouth as if in deprecation. The plump little contralto thanked us, too, with a most winning smile—such round open eyes she had, immovably fixed on the object of her attention, and as Pelleas said such *evident* eyes.

“Her eyes looked so amazingly like eyes,” he afterward commented whimsically.

We talked too with the little woman of the long-thumbed gloves who had the extraordinary habit of smiling faintly and turning away her head whenever she detected any one looking at her. And the sweat-shop cartoonist proved to be an engaging young giant with the figure of a Greek god, classic features, a manner of gravity amounting almost to hauteur, and as pronounced an East Side dialect as I have ever heard.

“Will you not let us,” I said to him, after Mr. Lovelow’s word about his talent, “see your drawings sometime? It would give us great pleasure.”

Whereupon, “Sure. Me, I’ll toin de whol’ of ’em over to youse,” said the Greek god, thumbs out and shoulders flickering.

But back of these glimpses of reality among them there was something still more real; and though I dare say there will be some who will smile at the affair and call that interest curiosity and those awkward thanks mere aping of convention, yet Pelleas and I who have a modest degree of intelligence and who had the advantage of being present do affirm that on that Easter morning countless little doors were opened in the air to admit a throng of presences. We cannot tell how it may have been, and we are helpless before all argument and incredulity, but we know that a certain stone was rolled away from the door of the hearts of us all, and there were with us those in shining garments.

In the midst of all I turned to ask our Little Friend some trivial thing and I saw that which made my old heart leap. Little Friend stood before a table of the lilies and with her was young Mr. Lovelow. And something—I cannot tell what it may have been, but in these matters I am rarely mistaken; and something—as she looked up and he looked down—made me know past all doubting how it was with them. And this open secret of their love was akin to the mysteries of the day itself. The gentle, sad young clergyman and our Little Friend of the crimson muffler had suddenly opened to us another door and admitted another joyous presence. I cannot tell how it may be with every one else but for Pelleas

and me one such glimpse—a glimpse of two faces alight with happiness on the street, in a car, or wherever they may be—is enough to make glad a whole gray week. Though to be sure no week is ever wholly gray.

I was still busy with the sweet surprise of this and longing for opportunity to tell Pelleas, when they all moved toward the door and with good-byes filed into the hall. And there in the anteroom stood Nichola, our old servant, who brushed my elbow and said in my ear:—

“Mem, every one of ’em looks starvin’. I’ve a kettle of hot coffee on the back of the range an’ there’s fresh sponge-cake in plenty. I’ve put cups on the dinin’-room table, an’ I thought—”

“Nichola!” said I, in a low and I must believe ecstatic tone.

“An’ no end o’ work it’s made me, too,” added our old servant sourly, and not to be thought in the least gracious.

It was a very practical ending to that radiant Easter morning but I dare say we could have devised none better. Moreover Nichola had ready sandwiches and a fresh cheese of her own making, and a great bowl of some simple salad dressed as only her Italian hands can dress it. I wondered as I sat in the circle of our guests, a vase of Easter lilies on the table, whether Nichola, that grim old woman who scorned to come to our service, had yet not brought her pound of ointment of spikenard, very precious.

“You and Mr. Lovelow are to spend the afternoon and have tea with us,” I whispered Little Friend, and had the joy of seeing the tell-tale colour leap gloriously to her cheek and a tell-tale happiness kindle in his eyes. I am never free from

amazement that a mere word or so humble a plan for another's pleasure can give such joy. Verily, one would suppose that we would all be so busy at this pastime that we would almost neglect our duties.

So when the others were gone these two lingered. All through the long Spring afternoon they sat with us beside our crackling fire of bavin-sticks, telling us of this and that homely interest, of some one's timid hope and another's sacrifice, in the life of the little mission. Ah, I dare say that Carlyle and Hugo have the master's hand for touching open a casement here and there and letting one look in upon an isolated life, and sympathizing for one passionate moment turn away before the space is closed again with darkness; but these two were destined that day to give us glimpses not less poignant, to open to us so many unknown hearts that we would be justified in never again being occupied with our own concerns. And when after tea they stood in the dusk of the hall-way trying to say good-bye, I think that their secret must have shone in our faces too; and, as the children say, "we all knew that we all knew," and life was a thing of heavenly blessedness.

Young Mr. Lovelow took the hand of Pelleas, and mine he kissed.

"The Lord bless you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you, the Lord give you peace," was in his eyes as he went away.

"And, O, sir," Little Friend said shyly to Pelleas as she stood at the top of the steps, knotting her crimson muffler, "ain't it good, after all, that Easter was all over ice?"

That night Pelleas carried upstairs a great armful of the Ascension lilies to stand in the moonlight of our window. We took lilies to the mantel, and set stalks of bloom on the table, with their trumpets turned within upon the room. And when the lower lights had been extinguished and Nichola had bidden us her grumbling good-night, we opened the door of that upper room where the moon was silvering the lilies; and we stood still, smitten with a common surprise.

“Pelleas,” I said, uncertainly, “O, Pelleas. I thought—”

“So did I,” said Pelleas, with a deep breath.

We bent above the lilies that looked so sweet-scented and yet had been barren of fragrance because, we had told ourselves, they seemed flowers of symbol without mission or message beyond the symbol, without hue or passion, or, so to say, experience. (“Perhaps if one were to make some one happy with them or to put them in a bride’s bouquet they would no longer be scentless,” Pelleas had quaintly said.) And now we were certain, as we stood hushed beside them, that our Easter lilies were giving out a faint, delicious fragrance.

I looked up at Pelleas almost fearfully in the flood of Spring moonlight. The radiance was full on his white hair and tranquil face, and he met my eyes with the knowledge that we were suddenly become the custodians of an exquisite secret. The words of the young servant of God came to me understandingly.

“‘And the house shall be filled with the odour of the ointment,’” I said over. “O, Pelleas,” I added, tremulously, “do you think....”

Pelleas lifted his face and I thought that it shone in the dimness.

“Ah, well,” he answered, “we must believe all the beautiful things we can.”

II

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THE MATINÉE

Somewhat later in the Spring Pelleas was obliged to spend one whole day out of town. He was vastly important over the circumstance and packed his bag two days before, which alone proves his advancing years. For formerly his way had been to complete his packing in the cab on his way to the train at that moment pulling from the station. Now he gave himself an hour to reach the ferry to allow for being blocked.

“Yes, that alone would prove that we are seventy,” I said sadly as I stood at the window watching him drive away.

Yet if ever a good fairy grants you one wish I advise your wishing that when you are seventy your heart and some one else’s heart will be as heavy at a separation as are ours.

“Pelleas,” I had said to him that morning, “I wish that every one in the world could love some one as much as I love you.”

And Pelleas had answered seriously:—

“Remember, Etarre, that every one in the world who is worth anything either loves as we do or expects to do so, or else is unhappy because he doesn’t.”

“Not every one?” I remonstrated.

“Every one,” Pelleas repeated firmly.

I wondered about that after he went away. Not every one, surely. There was, for exception, dear Hobart Eddy who walked the world alone, loving every one exactly alike; and there was, for the other extreme, Nichola, our old servant.

She was worth a very great deal but she loved nobody, not even us; and I was sure that she prided herself on it. I could not argue with Pelleas on the eve of a journey but I harboured the matter against his return.

I was lonely when Pelleas was gone. I was sitting by the fire with Semiramis on my knee—an Angora cannot wholly sympathize with you but her aloofness can persuade you into peace of mind—when the telephone bell rang. We are so seldom wanted that the mere ringing of the bell is an event even, as usually happens, if we are called in mistake. This time, however, old Nichola, whose tone over the telephone is like that of all three voices of Cerberus saying "No admission," came in to announce that I was wanted by Miss Wilhelmina Lillieblade. I hurried excitedly out, for when Miss "Willie" Lillieblade telephones she has usually either heard some interesting news or longs to invent some. She is almost seventy as well as I. As a girl she was not very interesting, but I sometimes think that like many other inanimate objects she has improved with age until now she is delightful and reminds me of spiced cordials. I never see a stupid young person without applying the inanimate object rule and longing to comfort him with it.

"Etarre," Miss Willie said, "you and Pelleas come over for tea this afternoon. I am alone and I have a lame shoulder."

"I'll come with pleasure," said I readily, "but Pelleas is away."

"O," Miss Willie said without proper regret, "Pelleas is away."

For a moment she thought.

“Etarre,” she said, “let’s lunch downtown together and go to a matinée.”

I could hardly believe my old ears.

“W—we two?” I quavered.

“Certainly!” she confirmed it, “I’ll come in the coupé at noon.”

I made a faint show of resistance. “What about your lame shoulder?” I wanted to know.

“Pooh!” said Miss Willie, “that will be dead in a minute and then I won’t know whether it’s lame or not.”

The next moment she had left the telephone and I had promised!

I went upstairs in a delicious flutter of excitement. When our niece Lisa is with us I watch her go breezily off to matinées with her young friends, but “matinée” is to me one of the words that one says often though they mean very little to one, like “ant-arctic.” I protest that I felt myself to be as intimate with the appearance of the New Hebrides as with the ways of a matinée. I fancy that it was twenty years since I had seen one. Say what you will, evening theater-going is far more commonplace; for in the evening one is frivolous by profession but afternoon frivolity is stolen fruit. And being a very frivolous old woman I find that a nibble or so of stolen fruit leavens the toast and tea. Innocent stolen fruit, mind you, for heaven forbid that I should prescribe a diet of dust and ashes.

I had taken from its tissues my lace waist and was making it splendid with a scrap of lavender velvet when our old servant brought in fresh candles. She looked with suspicion on the garment.

“Nichola,” I said guiltily, “I’m going to a matinée. And you’ll need get no luncheon,” I hastened to add, “because I’m lunching with Miss Lillieblade.”

“Yah!” said Nichola, “going to a matinée?”

Nichola says “matiknee,” and she regards a theater box as among all self-indulgences the unpardonable sin.

“You’ll have no luncheon to get, Nichola,” I persuasively reminded her.

Old Nichola clicked the wax candles.

“Me, I’d rather get up lunch for a fambly o’ shepherds,” she grimly assured me, “than to hev you lose your immortal soul at this late day.”

She went back to the kitchen and I was minded to take off the lavender velvet; but I did not do so, my religion being independent of the spectrum.

At noon Nichola was in the drawing-room fastening my gaiters when Miss Lillieblade came in, erect as a little brown and white toy with a chocolate cloak and a frosting hood.

“We are going to see ‘The End of the World,’” said Miss Willie blithely,—“I knew you haven’t seen it, Etarre.”

Old Nichola, who is so privileged that she will expect polite attention even on her death-bed, listened eagerly.

“Is it somethin’ of a religious play, mem?” she hopefully inquired.

“I dare say, Nichola,” replied Miss Willie kindly; and afterward, to me: “But I hope not. Religious plays are so ungodly.”

Her footman helped us down the steps, not by any means that we required it but for what does one pay a footman I would like to ask? And we drove away to a little