

He knew full well that she had. That day he must have been deaf did he not overhear the bursts of laughter, the bright chatter, the gay voices wafted into his open library window from the window next door. And perhaps he left his own window open much longer than he would have deemed necessary at another time, for from smiling and listening sympathetically he had grown suddenly cold and chilled. They had spoken of him—only a few words, a few simple and sympathetic words:

'The poor, lonely, rich old man next door!'

And he knew himself then for what he was—'a poor, lonely, rich old man!'

He pushed his book away from him and sat back in his chair, the light fading from his countenance. He had never looked at it in quite that way. He had always been proud of his station, his birth, his independence, his adamant will, his firm disposition, even his good health. He was pleased to see that men considered him clever and consulted him and asked his advice, even though he were now somewhat advanced in years. These things he was indeed proud of with a very great pride, and because he had very great wealth he was never undeceived. For the first time in his singularly lucky, supremely contented and highly respectable existence he had heard his name spoken with sympathy and pitifully. It had been the older one with the soft gray eyes, the one he liked the best, and perhaps it was the thrill of feeling in her low and gentle

After that the old man saw little of the city streets as his carriage rolled through them. In spite of himself, he could not help but remember past Christmases—Christmases which had been very, very happy contrasted to that which he would know on the morrow. The memory saddened his old face and tightened his thin lips, yet he could not, even if he would, have put the memory away.

He stopped at his club. Before entering, acting on an impulse, he went into the big confectionery store close to it and ordered a box of candy, monstrous in size. With it he enclosed his card.

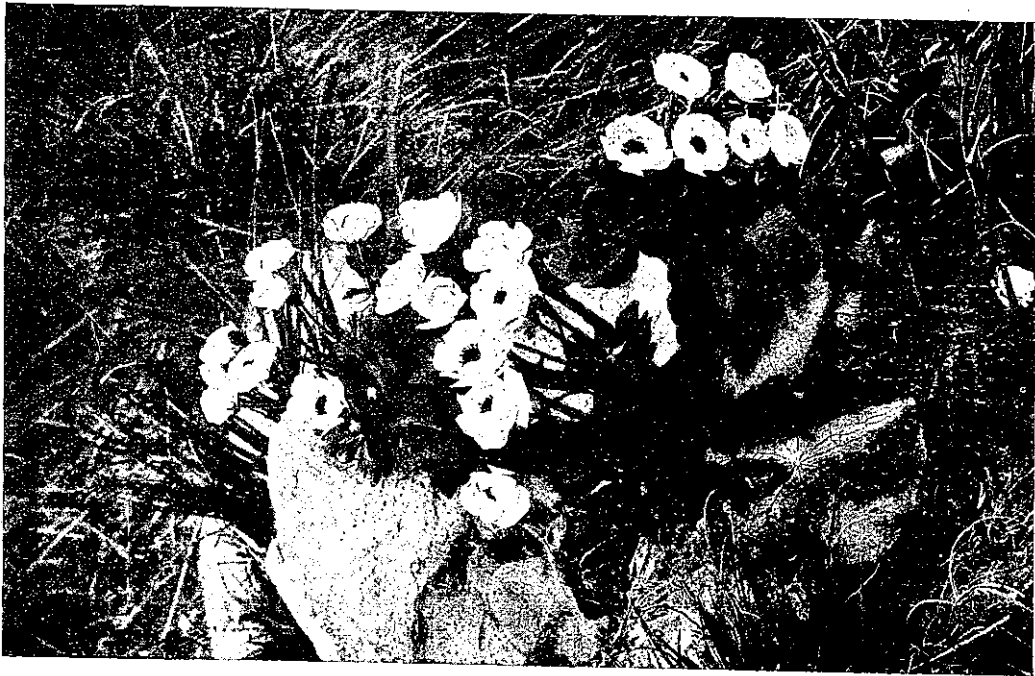
'To my three pretty neighbors, from the poor, lonely, rich old man next door,' he scribbled on the back of it, smiling as he did so, thinking what they would say when they received it. And his old lips were so unused to such smiling, and his face so accustomed to its severity, that a fellow-member, meeting him as he stood in the hall of the club house, looked at him in some astonishment.

'Hello,' he exclaimed. 'Have you heard good news?'

Raymond drew himself up.

'No,' he said, rather shortly. 'Why do you ask?'

'Oh, you've got a sort of Christmasy look!' He laughed as if it were a joke. 'A good-cheer-and-let's-be-happy look; a sort of long-lost-relative-just-found look!' And again he laughed, while Gordon Raymond turned away displeased, a frown on his forehead and an uncomplimentary word on his lips.



MOUNTAIN LILY (*Ranunculus Lyallii*).

voice that brought home the words with such stunning force:

'The poor, lonely, rich old man!'

'No Christmas tree!' Ah, that had been one of the sorrows of the season which they felt he must endure. 'No tormenting sisters!' Another sorrow, this? 'And, oh,' with a laugh and a rush that sounded as if there were thirty instead of three girls in the room, 'no sweet, beautiful, altogether lovely and charming mother, with a father in the background who was a veritable Santa Claus!' And then a deeper and fuller and older voice remonstrating, drowned amid a shower of kisses and shrieks of laughter. For was not this Christmas Eve, and were they—children at heart still—not privileged to be as foolish as they pleased?

No wonder he ordered his carriage—'the poor, lonely, rich old man—' and shut his window tight, and planned a drive off with his thoughts and his pride to keep him company and forget the noisy happiness he might never hope to take part in, though once— But he had no regrets; he surely had no regrets, he, the wealthy and highly respected Raymond, the millionaire?

And as he came down the steps the youngest one with the pretty smile passed below him and nodded and laughed and held up her bunch of holly.

He threw off his overcoat and sank into a leather chair near the open grate. The room was warm, bright, well lighted, but Gordon Raymond was chilled to the marrow. He ordered a hot drink; it did not warm him, nor the cigar that he puffed at slowly, nor the heat of the room, nor the nearness of the blazing logs. He was cold. He looked at his fine, thin, white hands, bluish in hue now, and shrunken. He moved his feet closer to the fire. They were numb. And as he sat and meditated, a curious thought struck him. The chill came from within; his heart and soul were cold and empty; and because this was the season of warmth of heart and soul, because this was the eve of that great day which the Lord had made, his life seemed most barren and valueless.

Again, as once before that self-same evening, Gordon Raymond let his head fall back. 'A poor, lonely, rich old man'—truly, now, that was his proper title. And the lines about his mouth deepened, and the shadows grew darker until his tired eyes and his forehead took on a frown that was not all due to the light of the room, but seemed rather to signify repressed pain. His thin hands—one lying upon his knee, the other holding his cigar—clasped and unclasped nervously. And while he sat thus a cheery voice called to the irreproachable waiter, and the