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THE  
BUNCH OF VIOLETS

By

W. G. BOWDOIN

*Author of Jack and Jill Modernized*

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A Memory Note  
Half Fact, Half Fancy

by

W.F.B.

Memoranda



## THE BUNCH OF VIOLETS

*The violet's charms I prize indeed,  
So modest 'tis and fair,  
And smells so sweet. —Goethe*

HERE IS SOMETHING very appealing to the feminine mind about flowers. A violet, an orchid, a pink, a rose, a lily of the valley, a narcissus, or other flower, single or in mass, when neatly pinned on, nestles at the corsage or on the bosom, as a harmonious adornment of the feminine wearer, to whom the flower's exquisite shape or delicate perfume, is offered as a deserved tribute. Flowers and the woman go hand in hand.

✿ Oliver Stone knew this, as he walked along the street one Sunday afternoon. He recognized, vaguely perhaps, but nevertheless recognized the affinity that always has & always will exist between flowers and femininity. It was because of this recognition that he stepped into a florist's shop, by which, with less discrimination, he might easily have passed, and bought a bunch of violets. Mr. Stone, it may be said, in passing, had an engagement to dine at his club with his soul's idol, and he had an idea that violets would look well upon her as he sat at table and looked across at her. So he bought the bunch of violets and paid their winter price. The florist wrapped them up, but the bundle looked suspiciously like the flowers that they were. Mr. Stone

did not seem to care anything about this circumstance, however, and after leaving the florist's, continued his walk with a jaunty air. He even hummed a few lyrical bars from one of the light operas.

There was nothing very remarkable about the appearance of Mr. Stone to differentiate him from any other man. He was neatly but unobtrusively dressed. His shoes were well polished and a careful observer might have noticed that his four-in-hand tie was a new one. The January air was brisk, and, as he breathed it, he realized something of the joy of living even when a man lacks riches. He saw things tinted with *couleur de rose* and naturally felt jovial. The shop windows were for the most part uncurtained as he passed and their

diversified contents were cunningly arranged so as to be as alluring as possible. Every now and then Mr. Stone would pause and look at one of the show windows. He was particularly interested in the art shops & he gazed long and earnestly at certain pictures that were hung on the line in their windows.

He was conscious of the hum that precedes the passing of a metropolitan trolley car, but he paid no attention to the frequent dashing by of these cars. He was thinking about a certain personality that had great charm for him, and the people that he met and passed, the shop windows, the traction cars and everything else that tended to distract, were, after all, only backgrounds, against which, conjured up by a vivid mentality, stood

out in bold relief, the girl and the delightful red coat that she was wearing this season.

Mr. Stone was not particularly hurried, but he walked on. His fleeced lined gloves kept his hands warm in the chill air. The city trees along the traversed streets were bare of the foliage that makes them so attractive in summer time, but the trolley wires seemed to sing merrily to him of her in a manner which entirely offset the melancholy suggested by the denuded trees. It is singular what a mighty influence is often exerted by one who is far away. Possibly there is more to the absent treatment practiced by the Christian Scientists than the skeptics are willing to admit. However this may be, Mr. Stone walked on and on and on. At a certain cross

street he met his friend James Osborne walking toward him. Osborne advanced with extended hand.

“How are you, Stone?” said he.  
“Pleasant day after the rain.”

The two shook hands cordially. Osborne continued uncrushed by the iron look of Stone, inspired perhaps by premonition:

“I see you are about to call upon her and that you are going to pay the usual tribute in the way of flowers. Is it not so?”

It is difficult to say why, but under the influence of psychology, the analysis of which need not here concern us the manner of Stone changed quickly but almost imperceptibly from gay to grave. He liked Osborne, but to be questioned thus by him was a jarring note. In another moment



Talleyrand's famous dictum, that language was given to us for the purpose of concealing our thoughts, came over him in a flash of happy inspiration, unconsciously shaping his reply.

"My dear Osborne," said Stone, "your conclusions do you credit, but, alas, they are based upon false premises. It is true that I carry flowers. In point of fact I may say that they are violets, but their destination is, unfortunately, not such as you have outlined. I weep bitter, scalding tears when I think of the joy that might come to me if your suggestions could only be realized, but my errand to-day is concerned rather with an attempt to moderate the sufferings of one of the members of our lodge, Freeman you know, who now

languishes in St. Luke's hospital, and these violets will, I trust, lend themselves to comforting him when I leave after I have visited with him for a brief hour or so."

"You will, said Stone, gaining confidence in the realization of a good lie, well told, "again see how easy it is to be mistaken, in this sad world of ours, and that more than one disposition may easily be made of violets, sweet violets."

He paused for reply. "Yes," said Osborne, "I see, I see. By the way," he remarked somewhat irrelevantly, "give my regards to your mother and let us hope that your hospital friend will soon recover. It is a joyous thing to have a friend, such as you, to bring violets to his cot-side. My dear Stone, let me not detain you

longer lest your languishing friend should over-languish. Farewell, Stone, you ministering angel, farewell," and Osborne passed on.

So did Stone, who could not help wondering meanwhile if Osborne suspected insincerity. Mr. Stone continued his walk toward the trysting place already agreed upon. Suddenly a fire engine with frenzied horses and clanging bell dashed past him, followed by the usual throng of idlers who are always attracted by a fire engine. The Sunday calm was rudely broken. So also was the train of thought on the part of Mr. Stone, which had easily drifted back to the red coat, the girl in it, and the flowers he meant that she should wear at dinner that night. Fire engines at such a time are very distracting.

✿ Mr. Stone reached the Brooklyn Bridge and began to walk over it. He looked toward New York City and saw its skyline. He had seen it many times before, but upon this particular Sunday afternoon it seemed to stand out stronger perhaps than ever. When he vaguely realized what it meant to so many people he was tremendously impressed.

“Dear old New York. There is no other city like it.” So he mused as he looked toward Governor’s Island. Now he had passed over the bridge and essayed to cross Broadway. A street car got persistently in front of him and barred his progress for fully ten minutes. When the way was finally cleared of this obstruction he saw another friend, one William Lathrop, approaching. He greeted

him pleasantly but not with over enthusiasm, as he now wished to avoid detention.

Mr. Lathrop was, however, uninfluenced by similar considerations. He was in no hurry whatever. The two exchanged greetings and passed the time of day.

Suddenly Lathrop noticed the flowers, and suspicion entered into him as did the evil spirits into the herd of swine, who thereupon dashed violently down a steep place into the sea to their universal undoing. "Where away with the flowers, friend Stone?" said Lathrop. Stone again dissembled. "These violets, you mean? Oh, I am taking them to the Club to be distributed to the heathen," said he, without pausing to think. But suddenly realizing his careless

utterance he murmured *sotto voce* "Heaven save the mark! May I be forgiven these vain words!"

"Are these heathen foreign or domestic?" inquired Lathrop.

"Yes. No. I guess so. I don't know," confusedly said Stone. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh nothing, only such people have interested me for years," said Lathrop. "I have always wondered why the heathen rage and why they imagine vain things the way they are said to do. Can it be that the heathen are feminine? But no, of course they can't be. And yet, and yet, and yet—" He did not finish. Into the eyes of Lathrop there came a far-away look that strikingly resembled the so-called "hunted look" that finds mention in folklore tales.

He was thinking hard and ere he was aware he had mechanically moved on, just before a blue coated policeman wearing his new military cap, could formulate his intended order for him to do so. Stone gazed meditatively after the retreating form of Lathrop and mentally wished him a pleasant journey and a safe return, in the manner of the landlord of the fashionable seaside hotel, whose business it is to welcome the coming and speed the parting guest. Stone felt that he could with a clear conscience speed Lathrop, in spite of his mythical story of the heathen destination of the violets that he still held firmly clasped in his right hand.

Breathing easily, at this last escape, Stone had but just turned the corner when who should reappear

but the ubiquitous Osborne, and wonderful to relate, with him was Miss Freeman, the sister of his only real creation, the sick fellow lodge member.

“Well met,” cried Osborne gleefully. “Miss Freeman is just on her way to St. Luke’s. You can take her there and make your visit at the same time.”

With a wrathful glare, barely smothered as Miss Freeman looked in amazement at him, Stone muttered an excuse about a previous engagement before he would be ready to go to the hospital, and fled precipitately down a side street.

Reaching at last the place of meeting, worn out with his fabrications of the afternoon, exasperated by the open incredulity of his friends, and

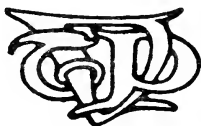


the final narrow escape, he threw the flowers into the girl's hands, saying somewhat impatiently, "take them!" All unconscious of their previous history, the girl drew herself up indignant at the manner of the gift. Dire consequences threatened to overtake Stone, but truth, though late in the day, and almost crushed to earth, triumphed at last. As he faithfully delineated the agonizing experiences of the afternoon her anger faded, and she wore the violets for him just as he had intended she should do in the first place, and all the time. When he looked over the teacups at her, he forgot all about the hypothetical visit to St. Luke's hospital and the mythical distribution of his flowers to the heathen by his club, about which he had so wickedly romanced. And the

only thing about which he could possibly think was how becoming the delicately perfumed violets looked on the girl who in dining sat immediately facing him at the table.



Here ends "The Bunch of Violets," written by W. G. Bowdoin; with frontispiece in photogravure from a study by Agnes Vinton Luther. One hundred two copies printed for the author by Frederic & Bertha Goudy at The Village Press, New York in November, 1907, and the type distributed. This copy is No.



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