

**ROMAN VIOLETS,
AND WHERE THEY
BLOSSOM**

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Roman Violets, and Where They Blossom by Theodora M. L. Lane-Clarke

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THEODORA M. L. LANE-CLARKE

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And where they Blossom.

BY

THEODORA M. L. LANE-CLARKE.

'There are buds that fold within them,
Close and covered from our sight,
Many a richly-tinted petal
Never looked on by the light :
Fain to see their shrouded faces,
Sun and dew are long at strife,
Till at length the sweet buds open—
Such a bud is life.'

JEAN INGELOW.



LONDON: BURNS & OATES.

1879.

251. c. 892

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ROMAN VIOLETS.

CHAPTER I.

‘HATH FORTUNE SMILED ON US?’

IT was a sunny morning in Rome. Eastertide, the busiest season of the year, had brought strangers from all parts to witness the great Paschal ceremonies, and a very Babel of conflicting tongues flowed unceasingly from the Pincio to St. Peter's, from the old Flaminian Gate to the ruins of the Colosseum. Two children, bare-footed, hand in hand, ran across the great Piazza del Popolo, on which the sun was streaming down fiercely enough, even at that early hour, and paused where three long busy streets carried the traffic of the town in divergent lines to south and east and west.

‘Shall we go down the Corso or the Babuino, Cesare?’ says the smaller one, a girl of about

nine years old, with torn and dirty brown skirt, and black bodice fastened over what had once been a white chemisette, though now so grimy as to be almost indistinguishable.

The boy is a bright, black-eyed, brown-skinned little fellow, clothed in a nondescript kind of shirt, open at the neck, and very short in the arms, with pantaloons of the same material, reaching to the knee, whence his little bare legs, thin and brown as sticks, were the only continuations.

In his hand is a great dewy bunch of fresh violets, neatly tied together with a bit of ribbon ; and the girl holds a basket full of the same fragrant flowers, carefully shaded from the sun by large leaves, which she lifts now and then to peep at her treasures.

'I think the Via Babuino is the best,' he answers, looking down it as he speaks with anxious gravity ; 'it is the street of the Inglesi, and they are so fond of flowers. Why, all the flower-shops are there, you know.'

'That is just why I am not sure of its being the best,' answers Nanna, hesitating ; 'for of course if they can buy violets in the shops, they will not care to take ours.'

'We must run after them and tease them, until they give us a solde to get rid of us, as Rita does,' laughs Cesare, showing all his white teeth in malicious glee. 'Come, Nanna, do let us try the Inglesi to-day; and if they fail we will take the Corso to-morrow.'

'Very well,' she assents; and the two run off for their first essay in street-selling.

'Look, Nanna; I am going to speak to those ladies across the road;' and he is over in a minute, training his small voice to the whine of a professed beggar.

'O dear ladies, charity, charity! Only four soldi for these beautiful violets! Do buy a bunch of violets!'

'O, they are beauties!' laughs an English girl, stooping to inhale their fragrance; 'so fresh, too, with all the dew still on them! How much do you ask?' she questions, taking out her purse.

Quick-witted Cesare seizes the opportunity, like a true Italian.

'*Six* soldi a bunch, dear lady; only six!'

'O, I think it is too much, is it not, Kate? I never heard of such a price. Six soldi! Why that is threepence! Threepence for one bunch!'

'Of course it is too much. Don't you know