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"Flowers of the Valley,"

OR
MABEL HOWARD, OF THE LYRIC.

CHAPTER XXIII.
ACROSS THE STREAM.

It was Iris, Iris, everywhere, from her portrait in the picture gallery, to the very dogs in the stables, who had been wont to bound forward with delight at the sound of her voice.

He did his duty. He was lord and master of the vast place and he reigned no faintest do-nothing, neglectful master, but a careful and conscientious one.

If he had been going to deliver it up at a stated time, he could not have administered the vast estate more carefully. The farms were looked after, the grounds cared for, the preserves kept up, the very house and furniture cared for, as if he had been a steward who would at some time or other, sooner or later, have to render an account to an exacting master. Yet, with all his strictness, the people soon learned to like, as well as respect, him.

There was a touch of pity and commiseration, as well as liking, in their attitude toward him, for it was evident to the most careless observer that Lord Heron was not a happy man.

No one had heard him laugh since he had come back from London and taken to living at the Revels; no one had seen more than the gravest smile on his handsome face, and there was a melancholy in his dark eyes that never left them, nor lightened under any circumstances.

Alone, in solitude, he spent his days and nights, and principally in the library or in the little walled garden, in which stood the sundial. It was a



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favorite spot with him, because there he was sure of being left alone, and he gave orders that no one was to disturb him.

Many an hour he spent, pacing round the trim lawn, bordered with its old-time flowers, thinking of the strange fate which had given him land and houses and vast wealth, and with the same hand robbed him of that which he counted far above all the rest—the woman he loved with a love which absorbed his whole being. He was never tired of calling up the beautiful face, as he had seen it that day she saved his life, and, again, as pale and wet with tears, she sat beside him in the London park and bade him farewell forever.

Every word she had uttered was graven on his heart, and he could fancy that he could hear the tones of her voice as he walked in the little garden, which they had told him, was a favorite haunt of hers, and in which her presence seemed still to linger.

It is not given to ordinary men to love in this fashion; but Lord Heron was not an ordinary man. He had passed through his early youth untouched by passion; his heart had been asleep until a glance, a word from Iris had awakened it, and the love born that morning by the stream was a love which would last till death.

The country people were, not unnaturally, very much disgusted at the mood and manner of the wealthy Earl of Coverdale. They had, most of them, daughters to be married, and would gladly have seen one of them installed as mistress of Knighton Revels; but to all their advances Heron Coverdale remained as irresponsive as the rocks against which the sea beats, or tide laps, in vain.

He returned their calls, or left a card, but the exchange of civilities ended there, and it was soon accepted as an unwelcome fact that the Earl of Coverdale desired—to be left alone!

About a couple of miles from the Revels was a small place, half-cottage, half-villa, called the Priory, and a great deal of curiosity and interest was excited when it was known that Lord Foyle had taken it, and that he and his daughter, the beautiful Lady Lillian, intended spending the summer months there.

Lady Lillian's health had not been quite so robust as could have been wished, it was said by some, while others declared that other reasons than those connected with health had brought them down within hail of the Revels.

The Priory was a pretty place, of two stories only; the rooms were not large, but they were pleasantly situated and turned to the south sun; there was a nice veranda, round the house, and plenty of flowers. Lady Lillian had found the rooms plainly, and rather barely furnished, but she had set to work, and, with the help of the local upholsterer and some things from London, transformed the "best parlor" into a charming little drawing-room full of nick-nacks, and sufficiently provided with easy-chairs and lounges, with some choice pictures and rose-colored curtains.

In this little room she sat, while two miles distant Lord Heron smoked his cigar on the terrace. Lady Lillian was dressed in a morning robe of pale-blue, edged with a creamy lace, which fell upon her hands and nestled round her throat, making them seem all the whiter by contrast.

A French novel lay at her feet, and a large bowl of roses stood on a table beside her.

Outside the open window, under the veranda, stood the Earl, smoking a cigarette. His thin, sharp, aristocratic face wore a calculating, and not altogether satisfied, expression, and under his half-lowered lids the hard, gray eyes shone with a restless, irritated gleam.

Evidently he had been holding a conference with the beautiful Lillian, a conference in which she had managed to obtain the advantage, for he flung the cigarette from him, with a strange compression of the lips, and said, as if resuming the conversation:

"I don't doubt your cleverness and tact, my dear Lillian, but I am afraid they will be of little use to you on this occasion."

"Thanks, papa! Cleverness and tact are always of use," she said, with a soft smile. "Talleyrand says that the emergency proves the man—he might have added woman."

"There is emergency enough now," said Lord Foyle, grimly. "As I think I have told you, Lillian, I am almost at the end of my tether! My man of business wrote to me to say that no more money can be raised, and that something will have to be done. He doesn't say what the 'something' is—for the best of all reasons, I suppose; because he doesn't know. This, however, is plain, that, unless you think there is a chance of succeeding in the object for which we came down to this forsaken hole—"

"Lady Lillian laughed.

"Now, papa! You can't really be serious! If ever there was a lovely spot in creation, this is one, and you call it a forsaken hole!"

"I repeat, forsaken hole!" he retorted. "It may be lovely, but it is forsaken. A desert island might be beautiful enough, but I fancy that neither you nor I would find it much to our taste. There is no one down here to—"

"Play bacca! and cards with," put in Lady Lillian, with a smile.

He flushed.

"I was going to add, but I spared your sensitiveness, 'to marry!'"



Windsor Table Salt

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"Thanks!" she said. "You are always so considerate, papa. But I think you are wrong; you forget Lord Heron."

He made a gesture of impatience. "Heron Coverdale!" he said. "No; I have not forgotten him. I know we came down here to—to stalk him. And what is the result? Heron Coverdale has about himself up in the Revels, and remains there like a hermit crab in its shell; and there he is likely to remain, for all I can see to the contrary. At any rate, he does not appear at all desirous of our company. Candidly, Lillian, I am convinced you are wasting your time. I admit that he is worth trying for—I don't know a more beautiful place than the Revels—but the man is beyond you; that is my opinion. He is wrapped up in some trouble or worry, that makes him insensible even to your charms," and the Earl made a slight bow of mingled mockery and impatience.

A faint flush stole over Lady Lillian's face, and her eyes flashed under her long lashes.

"Give me a little longer, papa," she said. "I admit that Lord Coverdale is what the French call a 'little difficult,' but I don't despair. I'm sorry it is so dull for you, but couldn't you go up to town for a few days?"

"And leave you here without a chaperon?"

"Oh, I should be all safe," she said, with a soft laugh. "No one will run away with me."

He shook his head, and took out another cigarette.

"I'll give you a little longer," he said, "but on the understanding that if he should not be persuaded to emerge from his retreat in a week, then we go back to town. After all, there are other fish in the sea—"

"Yes," murmured Lady Lillian, "but if one has taken a fancy to a particular one."

Lord Foyle looked at his daughter incredulously, and with something as near a sneer as his refined nature would permit.

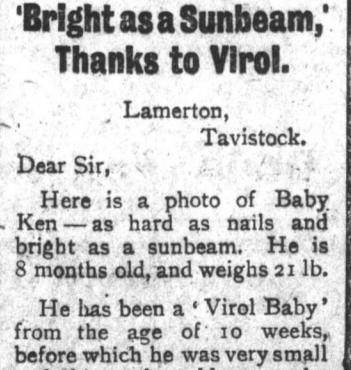
"Really? I had no idea."

She laughed.

"You did not credit me with that awkward physiological curiosity—a heart?" she said. "Well, call it a whim, papa. But, whether it is that, or anything more serious, I have set my mind upon winning Lord Coverdale."

Then, after a moment's pause, she added, in a very low voice:

(To be continued)



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