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## "Flowers of the Valley,"

MABEL HOWARD,  
OF THE LYRIC.

### CHAPTER III.

"No, sir," replied Clarence, nervously. "I have not. I have thought of doing so—have tried to do so—but—"

"I am glad that you have not," said Godfrey Knighton in a deep, grave voice.

The young man looked down at the carpet, anxious but too modest to be amazed at the reception that was accorded to him. Why should Mr. Knighton receive his proposal so coldly and regard him with such a stern, forbidding countenance?

The Knightons were the Knightons of Revels, of ancient lineage, and great social standing, it was true, but he was an earl, and on his mother's side was descended from one of the Conqueror's companions. He was young, possessed of a good rent roll, and of good character; why, then, should Mr. Knighton receive him as if he were somebody altogether objectionable?

"I hope I have not offended you, Mr. Knighton," he said at last, timidly. "The squire started as if his thoughts had been wandering right away from the subject and a red flush mounted to his brow."

"No, no; certainly not!" he answered quickly, but still sternly. "You must know that in proposing for Iris's hand you are doing me a great honor, Montacute."

"No, sir, the honor is all on your side!" said Clarence, and he said it very nicely.

Mr. Knighton shook his head.

"It is a great honor, Montacute," he repeated, "and I am sensible of it; but—" he stopped, and, rising from his chair, began to pace the room, the look of trouble, and doubt, and indecision.

ion growing more distinct upon his face. "Your proposal takes me by surprise," he went on. "I had no idea that you entertained such thought of Iris. She—she is so young."

"My mother was married before her age, sir," said Clarence.

The squire frowned.

"Times have altered, Montacute," he said. "Girls are girls still until they are beyond Iris's age. And you have not spoken to her? Have you any reason to hope?" he paused, and regarded the young man with the keen glance that seemed to go through him. Clarence shook his head rather dolefully.

"No," he replied, with a sigh. "Miss Knighton is always kind to me—but, then, so she is to every one," and he stopped.

"She is young, young," said Mr. Knighton. "Montacute, I don't know what to say. If it were any one else I would say 'No' at once. But you—you are an old friend. Montacute, it is a strange question I am going to ask you."

"You can ask me what you like, sir," said Clarence.

Mr. Knighton took a turn or two, then stopped and regarded him closely. "Montacute, I don't know your sincerity for a moment. I believe you think you love Iris; but I want to ask you this. You have seen her at her best, surrounded by luxury, in a home which has been as a most favourable setting for her. Supposing that you had met her under different circumstances, supposing she had been one of the girls from the factory at Beverley, a poor girl of humble birth—"

He stopped and frowned, and seemed for a moment lost in thought; then went on: "Montacute, are you sure it is Iris herself, and not Irish Knighton, the heiress to the Revels, whom you wish to marry?"

Clarence Montacute crimsoned.

"It is not necessary that I should marry an heiress, sir," he said, with quiet dignity.

The squire shook his head.

"You misunderstand me, Montacute," he said, with a sigh. "And I can scarcely hope to make myself understood. No, I did not mean to infer that

you were marrying her because she would be mistress of the Revels when I am gone—far from that, I meant—"

He stopped again, and, sinking into his chair, covered his eyes with his hands. "I don't think I can speak more plainly," he said at last, as if something were weighing heavily upon his spirit; then he looked up and added quickly: "Don't misunderstand me in another way, Montacute. Iris will be the mistress here, and I am, as you know, what the world considers a rich man. It would be a suitable match; and yet—" He paused, and then looked at the young man with a steady frown, "and yet I cannot give you my consent."

Clarence's face fell. His hopes had been growing at each moment, and the conclusion fell upon him like a thunderbolt.

"You—you forbid me to speak to Iris—Miss Knighton, sir?" he faltered.

"Forbidden is too harsh a word, Montacute," said the squire. "No, no; I don't forbid, but I ask you most earnestly not to do so at present. Let—let us wait. Heaven only knows there is plenty of time. Iris is only a girl as yet; and you—you are young enough to change your mind."

"I shall not change my mind if I live to be as old as Methusalem," said Clarence, flushing and almost forgetting to breathe. "I love Iris with all my heart, sir, and I shall go on loving her, you—she—couldn't prevent that. As to loving her because she is Miss Knighton of the Revels, that doesn't count with me. I would marry her if she were without a penny and was a plain Miss Smith!"

The squire looked at him steadily. "Montacute," he said, "you are a good fellow. If you knew what it cost me to say 'wait,' you would sympathize with me. But you don't know, you do not understand, and—" He paused if irresolute, and the frown deepened. "Not I cannot tell you! All I can say is 'Wait for a while.' Indeed," he added quickly, "in any case I should say that. Iris is—rather a peculiar girl! It is as likely as not if you were to speak to her she would say 'No,' and that would be worse for you than my 'Wait,' for Iris is not a girl to change her mind."

Clarence turned his hat round and looked hard at the maker's name in the crown. It was a heavy blow to him, and he felt half stunned.

"And—and while I'm waiting," he said, "perhaps some one may come to my mind."

The squire interrupted him quickly and steadily.

"If it is any consolation to you," he said, "I will tell you that what I have said to you I should say to any one who came to me and asked me for Iris, be he who he may!"

Clarence rose and sighed.

"Well, sir, I suppose I must be contented with that," he said. "I—I think I'll go now."

The squire held out his hand. "Montacute," he said, "the time may come—will come—when you will know and acknowledge that I have acted rightly. I can say no more—even to you! I won't ask you to stay; it is better that you should not!"

"I—I suppose I may come here as usual," said poor Clarence, dolefully.

"Certainly! Why not?" assented Mr. Knighton. "Because I do not accept you on the spot as a suitor of Iris, is no reason why we should lose a friend! Montacute, I will say this, that if I had to choose a husband for my daughter I should choose you before any one else."

The young man's face brightened.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "I'll do exactly as you say. I'll wait—and hope," and he got outside.

The squire did not accompany him to the hall door as he usually did, but sank into the chair, and, shading his eyes with his hand, seemed lost in thought; and though he was by no means an old man, he looked, as he sat there, as if he were broken down by premature old age.

He may have sat there for an hour without moving, when the door opened and Iris came in.

He looked up as her light step fell upon his ear, and, used as he was to her presence, her extreme beauty seemed to strike him with greater force than it had ever done before; something else seemed also to strike him. There was a different look upon her face to any he had seen there; a certain vague shyness and confusion utterly novel to her.

"Father," she said, in her musical voice, "is anything the matter?"

"No, no!" he said. "You have been for your ride?"

"Yes," she said, and a faint color stole into her face, and her eyes fell.

She had never concealed anything from him; she would tell him about her adventures, though she felt a strange reluctance to do so.

"Yes, and I met—"

"Lord Montacute; I know," he said.

"He has been here."

She stopped; there was an expression in his face she did not understand.

"Yes, he told me he was coming," she said, with a smile, as she recalled his nervous manner and sturred "r's."

"Did he tell you—no! Did you guess why he was coming, Iris?"

She shook her head carelessly, and, taking off her hat, pushed back a few tendrils of the soft, black hair.

"No! To ask you about the ball, I suppose?" she said, with a smile.

(To be continued.)

## Strange River in Africa.

Natural barriers have kept the

Orange River in Africa along much of its course a secret that natives or explorers have not been able to solve. The Africans call it "Gariep," or Great River. At Great Falls the river plunges over falls twice as high as Niagara, and from this point to the sea few white men have seen its course. Exploration is so dangerous and difficult because the river has worn deep gorges through rock, and it is impossible at most points to approach its zig-zag course because of precipitous and pitfalls. The unique feature of the river is that its upper course is known, and spring floods deposit on its bank silt as rich as that of the Nile. At these points on the edge of the desert its banks produce an amazingly abundant foliage. But the course of the river down stream enters wilder and wilder country, until all civilization is stopped as it plunges into the inaccessible broken country. There is one break in the wilderness, where the Molopo, a vanished river, once traversed the Kalahari desert and joined the Orange River. Venomous snakes, scorpions, baboons and a few natives, refugees from native uprisings against European colonization, make the trip perilous where the natural barriers are less dangerous.

### HOURS OF DESPAIR.

I sometimes think of suicide, with guns or ropes or axes, for I admit I'm sorely tried by all these modern taxes. The molasses beads upon my brow, for life seems harsh and spiteful, there are so many taxes as now, and all of them are frightful. It is with dark and gloomy frown I pen my rhythmic sallies; assessors dog me over town, and chase me through the alleys. I think about the good old times, and pray for their returning, when man could brag about the dimes that happily he was earning. I used to walk the village square, but that was before, and flash my bundle in the air, to make my neighbors jealous. And that's a comfort no man knows in these harsh times of taxes; no voter will his wad disclose—it wanes instead of waxing. I'm taxed by city, county, state, and by the hungry nation; and every day I send a crate of kecks to the station. And when my busy life is stilled, by timber hushed forever, and I lie prone, by taxes killed, and done with all endeavor, the tax collectors will arrive, all through the house they'll trundle, and with the law's assistance, strive to bear away my bundle. Oh, that's the meanest tax of all, as hard-worked men consider, that will approach the bier and pall, and rob a weeping widow. They tax us roundly while we live, and bring us ruination, and all the taxing powers should give a corpse a real vacation.

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(To be continued.)

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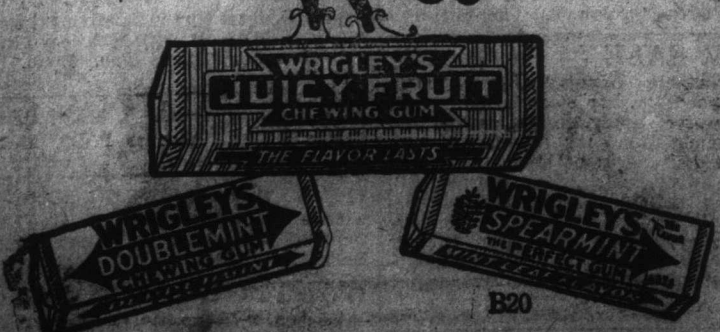
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