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Cough Syrup
One to two tablespoonsful in dish makes it dishes spotlessly clean.

"Flowers of the Valley,"

MABEL HOWARD, OF THE LYRIC.

CHAPTER XXII. BEHIND THE FOOTLIGHTS.

There was a moment—it seemed an age to her—of profound silence, so profound that in deed and in truth, one might have heard a marble if it had been dropped; then, as she raised her eyes and spoke, a short, swift buzz of welcome was accorded her.

It was merely a recognition of her beauty, of the grace which the pretty peasant costume set off and revealed; but it gave Iris heart, and the blood that had ebbed from her cheek, and left it pale as death, flowed back again.

The voice—she was speaking as yet—sounded deliciously fresh and refined to the audience, and they leaned forward expectantly as the orchestra commenced the prelude to her first song.

She did not prance down to the footlights. It was her first night as an actress, but Iris was a girl of intelligence and culture, and she brought both to bear upon what she had undertaken. She had to sing this song to the tenor, and she turned her face to him—addressed it, in a word, to him.

The audience drew its breath as the marvelous voice, well within itself, and perfectly in command, poured out the music, every word distinct and clear, and perfectly emphasized; then that peculiar motion which all who have seen it must remember, seemed to agitate the vast crowd—the movement preparatory to an enthusiastic expression of approval.

The roar—it was nothing less—was so loud, so swollen, so intense that Iris stood for a moment in doubt whether she had received sentence of condemnation or a token of approval. Then there rose a loud cry: "Encore! encore! encore!"

She stood for a second, then Mrs. Berry murmured: "No!" Iris obeyed, of course, and went on with her part. "Encore!" resounded through the house, but Mrs. Berry shook her head, and Iris, without the slightest acknowledgment, continued with her part. They were so curious, so eager to hear her, speak even, that they quieted down.

Then came her duet with the tenor. He was a nervous man—most tenors are, by the way—but as he looked at Iris and met her eyes, steady and full of that electric light which is the illumination of genius, the poor fellow's nerves straightened themselves, and knowing that she would not break down, he sang his best. It was a pretty duet, no great thing, but soft and taking—and Iris sang it with a feeling and expression that the Lyric stage had, as yet, been strange to.

It died away in a low, soothing harmony, and then and not till then, the applause broke out. She went off the stage while the roar still rang through the house and cries of "Encore!" resounded more loudly than before.

Mr. Stapleton came up to the wings, surrounded by a small crowd, and caught her hand. "My dear young lady!" was all he could say.

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"Encore! Encore!" shouted, roared, shrieked the audience. "Go on again. Sing it again," he said, mopping his forehead, but Mrs. Berry held her arm.

"No, sir. She has a hard night's work—a heavy part. Let them wait. They will be all the better pleased later on!"

"Well, well," said Mr. Stapleton; amid the din; "what do you say, Miss Howard? It all rests with you—your word is law! Sit down. A chair here, some of you! Confound it, why don't you bring a chair? Will you sing it again?"

"I will do as Mrs. Berry advises," said Iris; "but"—she blushed—"if they encore Paul's song I will sing that again, yes, and again."

He had limped upstairs in time to hear her, and it was a sight to see the tears standing in his eyes.

"Oh, Mabel!" he exclaimed, but Mr. Stapleton drove him away.

"Now, none of that, Paul! Quiet, all of you. I can't, and won't have her upset! You can do what you like when the curtain is down on the last act, but I won't have her upset now. Go downstairs, Miss Howard. Take care of her, Mrs. Berry."

Mrs. Berry laughed as she led the way to Iris' dressing-room to change her dress for the black prison one.

"I never saw Mr. Stapleton so delighted and considerate," she said. "You think he is realized?" said Iris, who scarcely as yet realized the extent of the satisfaction she had given.

"Pleased! Yes, indeed. But I'm glad you take it so sensibly, my dear," she added. "The play is not over yet. I've seen audiences mad with delight at the first act, and mad with anger at the last. Not that I think that will be the case to-night, but you are wise to keep cool and within yourself."

But, though she spoke so discreetly, Mrs. Berry herself was trembling with delight, for Iris' modest demeanour had charmed her, and completed her conquest of the old actress' heart.

In the front of the house the debutante was being discussed with the greatest eagerness. Critics gathered round the bar in the refreshment saloon and conversed in grave undertones, while fashionable notables were already prophesying that Miss Mabel Howard would be the success of the season.

Her Grace, the duchess of Rosedale, was in a private box, and was quite elated at the impression Miss Howard had made.

"I discovered her!" she said, with a smile. "I wonder who she is? Do, somebody, and find out!"

"We have been trying to find out for the last two months, your grace," said a gentleman standing by her chair, "and not one of us can discover anything. The 'fair incognito' is the name we have given her."

"She is a lady, be she whoever and what else she may," said her grace, with quiet decision. "Did I tell you how I found her, sitting in the drawing-room, behind the curtains, and mistook her for one of the visitors?"

The second act commenced, and the audience settled in their places, with pleased and eager expectation.

It had been more than hinted that "The Imprisoned Princess" was not by any means a perfect opera, but the audience would have endured a much worse under the inducement of seeing and hearing Mabel Howard.

The orison scene opened: a moonlit stage, from which the somber walls rose, gaunt and grim. There was a chorus of peasant girls, a sort of dirge, introduced, no one knew why, but it was pretty, and prepared the way for the tenor's serenade and the song Iris had to sing in response—the song to which Paul had composed the music.

The tenor had plucked up his best spirits, under the inspiring influence of success, and sang remarkably well, but the audience did not give him an encore. They were too anxious to hear the princess' response.

Suddenly, at the large, iron-barred window, upon which the moonlight was streaming, Iris appeared. There was a sound of applause, but it was hushed instantly as her sweet, clear voice rose, with the first notes of the plaintive melody.

clapped, and cried "Bravo!" Ladies leaned forward, and waved their handkerchiefs, and from all parts of the house rose the cry of "Encore!" which denied refusal.

Iris, as she stood, with the brilliant house swimming in the yellow haze that rose from the footlights, thought of the boy, sitting in his place in the orchestra, and, for the first time since the night of her father's death, a glow of happiness suffused her sorrow-laden heart. She glanced down at the hand, and she saw Paul bending forward, with both his hands clasped before his face. He was weeping with sheer joy.

She sang the song again, even more perfectly than at first, and the house was not contented. Mrs. Berry, who stood just below her, and, of course, out of sight, whispered: "Sing the last verse again," and she did so; then gazed from the window.

But the partial view of her, and her swift disappearance, did not satisfy the audience, and they shouted her name. The uproar completely stopped the action of the scene, and the tenor stood for a moment perplexed and slightly bewildered. Then, with all an actor's grace, he stepped to the wings, and before Iris quite knew what he was doing, he had led her onto the stage, and down to the footlights. A storm of approbation greeted her, and the duchess, leaning forward, raised her bouquet, and tossed it at her feet. It was the signal for a general ovation, and half-a-dozen other ladies followed suit with their bouquets, and soon the poor tenor had his hands full. This pleased the audience, and they broke out into fresh plaudits, amid which Iris, bowing thrice, disappeared.

The greatest excitement reigned behind the scenes, and Mrs. Berry made her way to her room, she passed through a lane of spectators, who clapped as heartily as the people in front had done.

It was a success without a flaw, and it needed only the crowning point of the last act to make it a perfect edifice of triumph. In this act she had to display a joyousness and brightness which would form a striking contrast to the sadness of the first two, and in this act it would be seen whether she was really as great an actress as she was a singer.

Mrs. Berry was wild with delight, but she had her doubts about the last act. Would Iris be able to dispel the melancholy which seemed to rest upon and overshadow her?

Even at the moment, as she was arranging the magnificent dress, she noticed that the shadow was creeping over Iris' beautiful face, and she talked quickly and gaily, to dispel it.

"All this has been very trying and wearing, my dear," she said, "but you must not break down. You will want all your strength for the business in the last scene. You ought to be, and to look, happy, with this wonderful triumph. I am an old stage hand, but I never saw anything like it since Paul's first appearance. Come, now, you must take a glass of wine."

But Iris shook her head, and the shadow on her face grew darker. In the midst of the mad excitement, a voice had seemed to whisper to her: "Of what avail is it to you? You have lost all that can make life worth living, and though your praises ring from one end of the world to the other, they cannot give you back any one of the things that have vanished from you forever: father—home—the man you love!"

"My dear, my dear!" said poor Mrs. Berry, "why do you look so bad? You ought to be brimming over with delight! Aren't you glad that you have succeeded so wonderfully?"

(To be continued.)

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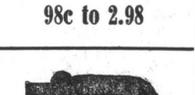
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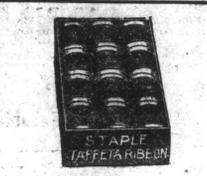
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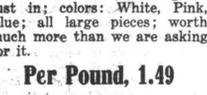
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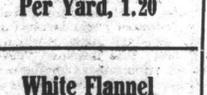
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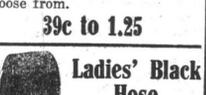
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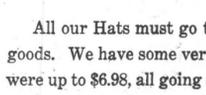
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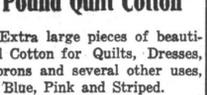
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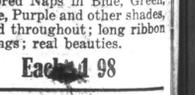
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