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"Flowers of the Valley,"

OR

MABEL HOWARD,
OF THE LYRIC.CHAPTER XXIV.
"MY DEFTY YOUTH"

If she were not happy—and Heaven alone knew how often she fell asleep with unshed tears quivering under the lids—she was for these few days under a spell, as it were; for a few hours at least, when she stood before the footlights, she could forget the deep and terrible sorrow that had fallen upon her young life, and those hours, few as they were, were something gained.

She spent the morning in Paul's room, where they practiced together, working as hard as if her name were still to be made. Then came her lunch, and in the afternoon they would go for a walk in the park. Sometimes they took the train, and went up to one of the quiet riverside places, and there, side by side, strolled along the silver stream, or sat and talked under the shade of the great horse-chestnuts. Then home to the quiet little dinner at half-past five, and then, two hours later, they set off for the Lyric.

Sometimes Mrs. Berry would come and dine with them, and would tell them the story of her checkered life, and make Iris smile, and Paul laugh, at the quaint stories of the scenes she had gone through.

It is generally supposed that an actress' life is made up of champagne suppers and perpetual dissipation, but this is one of the absurd ideas of which the general public is gradually getting disabused. The life of an actress—that is, if she is an actress worth her salt—is one of continual hard work, for which she has to keep up her health and spirits always at a high standard, and champagne suppers would soon lower both.

As to Paul, he was in the seventh heaven of bliss. His love for the beautiful girl who had come into his gray and sober life like an angel was as pure and sweet as that of a brother for a sister; it was the devotion of a Parson for the sun. To him she seemed something more than human, and he asked nothing more of Fate than to bask in her presence. It was generally supposed that they were brother and sister, and as Iris never contradicted the statement, it grew into an accepted fact.

A fortnight passed, and one evening Paul and Iris were sitting after their dinner talking together; Paul stretched on the luxurious couch she had bought for him, and Iris lying back in her easy-chair with the great

arms, her eyes half closed, her thoughts wandering to the Revels, and wondering what Lord Heron was doing.

"The prince is coming again tonight, they say, Mabel," said Paul.

Iris awoke with a little start.

"Is he, Paul? Mr. Stapleton will be very pleased."

Paul nodded.

"I should think so. And you, Mabel, aren't you pleased, too?"

"Oh, yes," she said, quietly. "It is a great compliment to us all."

"Especially to one of us," said the boy, regarding her with a smile of admiration and pride. "It is wonderful how many times the same people come again," he went on. "The Duke of Rosedale now; he is there in his box three nights a week."

Iris' brows contracted a little, and she made no response.

It was quite true that the duke was a constant visitor to the Lyric. One of the packages which Iris had returned through the parcel post had contained a diamond bracelet, with the duke's name attached; and in addition to appearing in his box, his grace had taken it into his stupid old head to hang about the stage door. Iris had seen him with the rest, but had not mentioned the fact to Paul.

"He is very fond of music," said Paul, innocently, "and I heard him telling Mr. Stapleton the other night that he would give him fifty pounds if he would allow you to sing at one of his parties."

"And what did Mr. Stapleton say, Paul?" asked Iris.

"That you never sang at private houses, and that he thought you were quite right not to do so."

"I like Mr. Stapleton," said Iris, quietly. "If his grace were to offer us a thousand guineas we would not go again, Paul," she added, with a little shiver.

There was silence for a moment; the mention of the duke's offer had created an unpleasant annoyance in her mind, and to get rid of it she said:

"Play me something, Paul; something of your own," for he had got into the habit of playing to her for a few minutes before they started for the theatre, as Iris said, to "put her in tune" for her work.

He took his violin and began to play, when there came a knock at the door and Mrs. Barker put in her head.

"Oh, you haven't started, miss! I said I thought you had, but he said he was sure you hadn't."

"He, who?" asked Iris, sitting up.

"A gentleman, miss. He's downstairs; says he wants to see you particularly."

Iris' heart beat. Could it be Lord Heron?

"I—I can see no one, Mrs. Barker," she said. "Please tell him so. What is his name?"

"I asked him, and he said it didn't

matter, miss. I was to say that he was an old friend."

Iris grew pale.

"I cannot see any one," she said, quickly. "Tell any one who asks for me that I cannot see them; any one except Mrs. Berry and Mr. Stapleton."

"Yes, I know, miss," said Mrs. Barker, who had received her instructions some time ago. "But this gentleman will not take a 'No'; he's most civil and polite, I must say; but he sticks to the doormat like a limpet."

Iris' face flushed.

"I do not know any one who would call on me," she said, resolutely, "and I will see no one. Please tell him so."

"Well, I'll try and send him away," said Mrs. Barker, doubtfully. "But I've been telling him so for the last quarter of an hour, and there he stands still. Can't push him into the street exactly."

"I'll go to my room, Paul," said Iris. "If Mrs. Barker comes up again, say that I am gone."

As she spoke the door opened, and a pale, shivering face, with black eyes that flashed like beads, appeared at the opening.

Iris uttered a faint cry and shrank back, and Signor Ricardo glided in, with outstretched hands and waving hat.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, showing his gleaming teeth, and bowing with his hand upon his breast, his eyes fixed upon her pale face, upon which fear and loathing struggled for predominance. "Ah! At last! My dear Miss—"

Iris summoned strength to hold up her hand forbiddingly, and he stopped for a second, but the next glided softly on in his snakelike, insinuating voice, "Miss Howard! Excuse this intrusion. Pardon me that I, so to speak, forced my entrance, but an old friend—such an old friend—could take no denial!"

And he gesticulated with his thin lips and cunning eyes seemed to have grown crueler and more cunning.

What was she to do or say? Pale and motionless, she stood gazing at him as he stood regarding her with a smile of half-molent triumph upon his evil face. Paul, who had been staring from one to the other, amazed and perplexed, fearing that something was wrong, and yet not knowing what, got up, and, muttering something, limped shyly to the door.

The signor's keen, headlike eyes followed him.

"Our young friend, the fiddler," he said, with a bland smile. "Do not go, my dear boy—" But Paul, flushing and shrinking, limped out.

Then Iris found her voice.

"Why—why have you come here?" she asked.

The signor smiled and stretched out his hands, deprecatingly.

"Can you ask?" he murmured, smoothly, and in a tone of reproach. "Is Baptiste Ricardo the man to desert an old friend? Saints and angels, no! And such an old friend, the daughter of his oldest and dearest friend!"

Those of a hungry wolf.

Iris leaned against the mantelpiece, and swept her hair from her forehead with a trembling hand.

It was not so much fear of the man that affected her, but all that his presence recalled so vividly. Her old home, the dear, dead father, the scene in the library where she had first heard of the "shadow on her life!"

This man with the hateful face and white hands was bound up with it all, was so part and parcel of it that his presence brought it all back upon her like the sweeping of a cold wave.

The signor laid his hat upon the table, and, drawing a chair forward, seated himself in an easy and comfortable attitude.

"My dear young lady," he continued, "you are overcome! The sudden joy at the sight of an old friend—ah, yes, I know! But take time! Like your cousin, Baptiste Ricardo is all heart, all heart!" and he spread his right claw over his bosom. "Take time, my dear Miss Iris—"

Iris put out her hand.

"Not that name!" she said.

"True, true, I forgot. Pardon the slip," he assented, the smile growing more insolent. "Miss Mabel Howard, I should have said. Miss Howard, I know that your daughter at seeing me, the old and trusted—"

he laid a marked emphasis on the word—"friend of your father, is equal to mine. For months I have been looking forward to this reunion; ever since the day when an evil conspiracy—his face darkened—"tore me from your society. And the hour has come. My dear Miss Howard, it is unnecessary to ask after your health; those blooming cheeks, those sparkling eyes are answer enough. The world has smiled—it is a wise world truly!—upon you. You are flourishing, rich and famous. Baptiste Ricardo offers you his humble and sincere congratulations," and he bent forward, still keeping his black eyes upon her pale face.

"Why have you come?" she said, using the very words that poor Godfrey knight had spoken when the man had swooped down upon him, as he had now swooped down upon her.

The signor politely ignored the question.

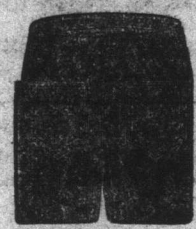
(To be continued)

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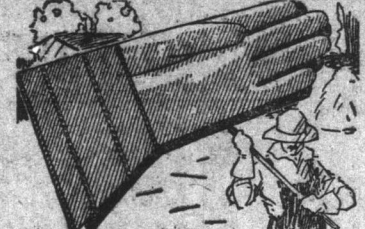
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Made of good quality Yellow Leather with stiffened cuffs and well stitched seams. Gloves that are low in price and lasting in quality—two things that make them popular with everybody.

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Brown Cape Skin Gloves, stitched with outside seams that always give a stylish as well as neat appearance. Here are excellent values indeed.

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Splendid for those who do not wish to invest a great amount of money. They are excellent values for they will give the wear and have the appearance of far higher priced bags.

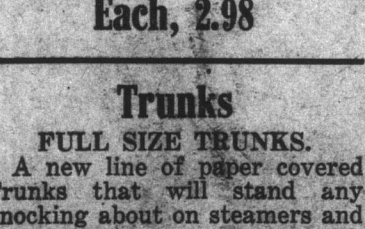
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Made of splendid White Linen, beautiful design; size 54 x 18 ins.

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Men's Winter Hose

In every color, style and weight. Many of these are just shown for the first time. Some of them are specially priced.

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Brushed worsted mixed yarn, drawing string at waist, shaped leg, enamelled foot straps.

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Just slip into one of these pretty Tuxedo Sweaters, convinces every woman that these styles are unusually becoming. Their long open revers give graceful lines to the figure.

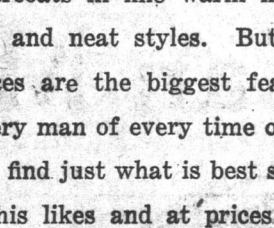
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FOR OUR NOVEMBER SALE.

The biggest values in our November Sale are to be found in our offerings of newly-shown Overcoats in fine warm materials and neat styles. But the prices are the biggest feature. Every man of every time of life will find just what is best suited to his likes and at prices that will appeal to his common sense.

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Each, 69c



Flannel

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Per Yard, 1.25

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Each, 69c



Flannel

In Red and White. This is an excellent value and it will prove an economy to buy a quantity for future sewing needs at this low price.

Per Yard, 1.25



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Practical and Comfortable—Fleece Lined.

These well cut garments give slender figure lines with no unnecessary material at the waist; fashioned to fit snugly at the ankle. Perfectly finished in every detail and moderately priced.

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We have a stock of Baby's Wool Booties in white trimmed with blue, white trimmed pink.

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Babys' Wool Booties

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