

MAGIC BAKING POWDER



"Flowers of the Valley,"

OR
**MABEL HOWARD,
OF THE LYRIC.**

CHAPTER XVII.
A MINIATURE PAGANINI.
She walked down Oxford street, to Marshall & Snellgrove's, and made her purchases—and, few and modest as they were, they made a considerable hole in her stock of ready money—and she was retracting her steps to Mrs. Barker's, when she saw a hansom cab pull up almost in a line with her. A gentleman jumped out, and, with a start which sent the blood from her face, Iris saw that it was Lord Clarence.

He paid the cabman and hurried past her, so near that he almost touched her, and Iris, drawing her veil still more closely over her face, hurried on breathless and trembling. She knew instinctively that he was searching for her, and the sight of his handsome face, so wan and haggard, smote her heart.

Yes, they were searching for her; but they must not find her! Rather than return to Knighton and appear before Heron Coverdale as the palest daughter of Godfrey Knighton, she would die in the streets! Once and for all, the Iris Knighton, of the Revels, had ceased to exist, and in her place was the unknown and friendless girl—Mabel Howard!

Weakened and unnerved by the sight of Lord Clarence and the risk of her being recognized, she reached home. Mrs. Barker had cooked a simple dinner for her, but she sat before it, unable to eat a morsel. She had thought herself safe in London, but if Clarence Montacute was in pursuit of her, and so near to her that she could pass him in Oxford street, she was anything but safe. Then, suddenly, there flashed upon her the question: Why should she not go abroad? She would have enough money, if she sold her jewelry, to pay for her passage and support her for a few weeks in America or Australia. Across the ocean she would at least be free from the chance of meeting Heron Coverdale!

In feverish haste she dressed herself again, and, taking her bag, went into Oxford street. She walked for some time, looking for a jeweler's at which she could offer the gems; but the shops seemed too large and grand, and her courage forsook her at the thought of the questions that would be asked. How could she account for the possession of such valuable articles, she who could not give her name or address, or a single reference? She turned into a by-street after a while, the bag held fast in her hand. Perhaps it would be better to wait; while

she had the jewels, she was secure, at any rate, from absolute poverty. Pondering and troubled, she walked on unconsciously, until, suddenly, as it seemed, she found herself in a street forming one of a network in a squalid quarter, apparently occupied by the poorest of the poor.

Confused and bewildered, she was about to ask a woman who was passing to direct her back to Oxford street, when some shouts and screams rose from a low public-house near where she stood, and two or three men tumbled out of the doorway fighting together.

Before she had time to turn and run, a crowd collected, and she found herself almost in the center of a seething mass of unwashed humanity. Men and women of the lowest type yelled and screamed and pushed round her; and, utterly overwhelmed by the noise and crush, she tried to force her way back to the wall, where she could stand firm, at least.

But the crowd seemed to increase every moment, not three, but apparently thirty men were hard at work fighting, and Iris was beginning to feel faint with the horror of the situation, when suddenly she heard a voice near her, and, looking round, saw Paul pushing his way toward her. "Paul!" she cried, and she held out her hand.

"All right, Miss Mabel! Don't be afraid!" he sang out; but well meant as the encouragement was, it attracted attention to her. A big, cool-begrimed costermonger turned, and stared, growled out a slang word or two to his companion; the two men slipped in between Paul and her, and one of them, snatching the bag from her hand, bent down, and, cleaving a path through the mob, disappeared.

Iris uttered one cry, then stood still, white and motionless. "Mabel! Mabel, are you hurt?" Paul said, pressing up to her anxiously, and turning white. "However came you here? Have they hurt you?" "No, no!" said Iris. "But my bag! They have taken that!"

"The bag," he said, the color coming back to his face. "Is that all? I thought you were hurt! Come away at once! Never mind the bag, so long as you are not hurt!" and by sheer persistence doggedness he forced a path for them through the crowd. "Oh, what a turn you gave me!" he said, almost reproachfully. "And how white and frightened you look! Why, Mabel, whatever made you come here? It is the worst place in London, I should think! And your bag? Was there anything in it?"

Iris forced a smile, a very wan one. "Never mind the bag, Paul," she said, bravely. "Whatever was in it is lost now!"

the sun, say that something was troubling her. "Mabel," he said, "you are unhappy!" They were sitting in his room, Iris lying back in the comfortable chair which, in his devoted loyalty, had become almost as a throne in Paul's eyes; he was practicing the music of a new operetta which was to be produced at the Lyric.

"Unhappy, Paul!" said Iris, awaking with a start from a sad reverie. "Yes, Mabel," he said, gently. "Don't deny it; indeed, it wouldn't be any use. I can read your face as plainly as I can read that sheet of music there, and it means as much to me. Won't you tell me what it is?" She tried to smile.

"If I am in trouble, Paul," she replied, "my trouble is a very common one. I am very poor."

"Poor!" he repeated, sadly and sympathetically. "Nearly all the world is. But I know what it means, no one better. I have been down to my last half-penny, Mabel!"

"And that is where I shall be presently!" said Iris, smiling, but rather ruefully. "Come, Paul, you are a man of the world, give me your advice. How can I earn some money?" He touched the strings of his violin musingly, his large, blue eyes fixed upon her face; then he said:

"Mabel, you are very clever—"
Iris shook her head.
"Oh, yes," he said, firmly, "you are. You are well educated and a lady. You could teach. Why not go out as a daily governess, Mabel?" Iris colored.

"You forget, Paul," she said, gently; "people do not take strangers as governesses for their children unless they can give references, and I cannot do that."

He hung his head, discouraged for the moment. "There must be some way," he said, musingly. "What way?" said Iris, cheerfully. "I have thought and thought for the last week, and I can find none! Paul, don't people, young women, get some needlework to do? I have read of women earning money in that way."

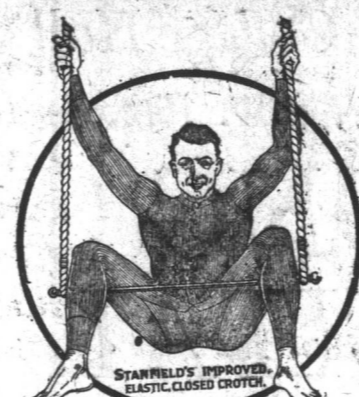
His face flushed, and he struggled to his feet. "You don't know what that means, Mabel!" he said, quickly and bitterly. "Needlework! You don't know, but I know! You would have to work from dawn to dusk—shut and after dusk—and at the end of the day and night you would have earned just enough to pay for a cup of coffee and some bread and butter. Get a living by needlework! It would be living starvation. And you don't know anything seemed to come into his throat.

"Why not?" said Iris, bravely. "Better women than I have had to earn their daily bread with their needles, Paul!" He shook his head.

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