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"Flowers of the Valley,"

OR
MABEL HOWARD,
OF THE LYRIC.

CHAPTER IV. A FRIEND FROM ITALY.

She noticed again that his hands were white and shapely; but it was not until he had taken up his spoon for his soup that she remarked their peculiar facility of expression. The long fingers seemed to have a voice, like so many tongues, and to be as expressive as another person's eyes.

Stern and grim, Godfrey Knighton sat at the head of the table; in solemn silence the butler and footman waited, but neither the stern taciturnity of his host, nor the magnificence of the surroundings, seemed to awe Signor Ricardo. As he partook of his soup he talked, now to Godfrey Knighton, and now to Iris.

"No pen can describe the horrors of your Channel, Miss Iris! Ah, hah! It was terrible! Nothing but the thought that I should soon meet my dear—my very dear old friend, your father, would have comforted me! I handed, I came offlight here, and here I am under the roof of my old friend, the—ah, what do you call it?—the squire of the Revels."

"Is this your first visit to England?" said Iris, feeling that she must say something.

"My first," he answered. "I have heard much of your charming country, Miss Iris, but, ah, no, this is not your country! Italy is your country!"

"Take some wine," Godfrey Knighton broke in, in a stern voice.

"But I am English," said Iris, smilingly, "quite English!"

"Bah!" said the signor, and his fingers seemed to say "Bah!" too.

"You are Italian—one-half of you, at any rate. Once an Italian, always an Italian. Is it not so, my friend?" and he appealed to Godfrey Knighton.

"My daughter is English in teaching, and training, and instinct," he said, sternly.

"That for your teaching and training," retorted the signor, and he snapped his fingers. "The signorina is Italian, I tell you. Ah! how the years roll on. But they roll very smoothly over you, Knighton. Yes, indeed, you seem no older than when I saw you in Florence."

"Try that salt," broke in Godfrey Knighton.

So the dinner progressed. Whenever the signor referred to Italy and the past, Godfrey Knighton interrupted him; and, at last, when the dessert made its appearance, Iris rose, and the signor, gliding from his chair, opened the door for her.

Be sure you get

Bovril



land, we do not use knives, nor guns. Is it not so? Only—brains! Let us join your charming daughter; we can talk over our little business—morrows!"

"Stop!" said Godfrey Knighton, letting the knife fall with a clatter against his plate. "You are right; it is not with knife or revolver we must settle this."

"Santa Lucia! I should think not! No!" assented the signor, shrugging his shoulders.

"It is with you a question of money," continued the squire, wiping his face upon which great beads of sweat stood. "You can have no other motive, no other object. How much do you want? Take it, and for Heaven's sake begone and leave me in peace!"

The signor raised his glass, and sipped his wine with an enjoyment as rare as the wine itself.

"You are right," he said; "it is a question of money, but not money only. Oh, I am aware that whatever I ask you must pay. You must pay. For you wouldn't like me to go to that beautiful girl, your daughter, and say, 'Miss Iris, I can tell you the story of your mother!' No, you would not like that! Therefore, you are willing to pay anything—anything! But my friend, my dear old friend, I have not yet made up my mind how much to ask! I have just arrived on your bleak shore. I find myself in comfortable quarters. I say to myself, 'Here are you, Babstie, in the house of your friend; you may stay here and live like a prince.' And naturally, I decide to stay—for a while? Yes, is it not so?"

Godfrey Knighton sat with knitted brow and clenched teeth.

"Take care!" he said. "Do not push me too hard!"

"Push you too hard!" echoed the signor. "How do I push you too hard? I come as an old friend—your guest. I stay at your invitation! Is it not natural? And stay I shall, my friend, depend upon it!"

Godfrey Knighton leaned forward.

"Have you no pity, no mercy?" he asked, hoarsely. "You have seen her. You see how innocent she is, how trusting. Are you such a fiend that you can destroy her young and hopeful life?"

The signor interrupted him with a snap of his elastic and eloquent fingers.

"Bah, my friend! A man of the world thinks only of himself! I was young and innocent, and the wolves and the hawks they fed upon me! I am no longer young or innocent—and it is my turn. You talk—pardon me, my dear Knighton—like a character in a play! Here am I with a secret—your secret—top disclosed. I have a price—good! You are prepared to pay that price—good! But I am not yet ready to say what that price shall be! Meanwhile I remain the guest of my distinguished friend the squire of the Revels—and what is the place?—Beverley. Good again! And now let us go to your charming daughter."

Godfrey Knighton rose without another word, and they went into the drawing-room.

Iris was seated at the piano, but she rose as they entered.

"Do not rise, I beseech you," said the signor; "I am Italian, and therefore a slave to music! Play for us, Miss Iris; or, better still, sing!"

Iris looked at her father. He averted his face and stood with stern, bent brows, looking at the ground.

"You do sing!" said the signor, triumphantly. "I pray a song of you, Miss Iris."

Iris did not know what to do. She knew that her father did not like to hear her sing, and yet this visitor, this "old friend," demanded it of her.

"Sing, Iris," said Godfrey Knighton, in a strained voice.

Still hesitating and reluctant, she sat down to the piano, and turned over the music; then she chose a song, and commenced.

Silence reigned supreme until she had finished, then the signor clasped his hands.

"Bravo, bravissimo!" he said. "Miss Iris, you have a voice, one in a thousand! It is a voice which the crowd would gladly listen to! It is a fortune, is it not so, Knighton? Speak truly; is not her voice magnificent, splendid, overwhelming?"

Godfrey Knighton bowed his assent coldly, and the signor added, in an undertone:

"It is her mother's voice! Note for note! It is splendid!"

The signor then asked:

"Will you sing again, Miss Iris? I am an Italian, and I love music! It is the food of my nation! Truly yes!"

"Shall I?" she murmured to her father.

"Yes, if you like," he answered, and she sang again.

The signor's admiration seemed to know no bounds.

"It is splendid!" he said. "It is a voice which would move a crowded theatre to enthusiasm! Ah, but what a gift! And wasted, wasted!"

Coffee was brought in, and Iris gave him a cup, then took her fancy work, and drew away from them.

The squire stood and drank his coffee in silence. The footman came in with the bedroom candles.

AT THE CORNERS.

I now recall, with deep dejection, the accident of yesterday; it happened at the intersection of Bunkum Road and Hayseed Way.

Had I gone slowly, as my pastor has urged me to, a thousand times there would have been no fierce disaster to swell the list of auto crimes.

But I was sending my tin Lizzie a gait no Lizzie ought to know, and I, alas, was far too busy to scan the landscape, to and fro. And so that bus of Hiram Horner's came scorching to me all unseeing, and we collided at the corners, and rolled in burning gasoline.

I'm full of tin and grease and gravel and as I sit here, sick and a-dour, I swear that I will never travel at more than seven miles an hour. Of course, I blame the other fellow, and say he should be pinched and tried; it is a habit, rather yellow, wherever motorists abide. And Hiram sits in silence solemn, and knows not I am telling fibs; the surgeon wired his spinal column, and put my washers on the ribs. The two poor Lizzies are so mingled, so void of a dividing line, the tinsmith says he will be jingled if he can tell me which is mine. And so, in gloomy retrospection, I think about that ghastly wreck, while surgeons make a close inspection of sundry fractures in my neck.

The roads are strewn with wrecks unholly, their number never can be told; it seems that poppy won't drive slowly, however bitterly I scold.

Godfrey Knighton sat with knitted brow and clenched teeth.

"Take care!" he said. "Do not push me too hard!"

"Push you too hard!" echoed the signor. "How do I push you too hard? I come as an old friend—your guest. I stay at your invitation! Is it not natural? And stay I shall, my friend, depend upon it!"

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