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ANNETTE LEIR; OR, TRUE LOVE TESTED.

(By the Author of "Mr. Arle.")

Annette Leir sat beneath a white thorn in the garden; and the afternoon sunshine, slanting on her bright hair, made her dazzling to behold.

She was employed in the homely work of mending gray woollen stockings, and was too busy to extend a hand.

'Well,' questioned the girl, when her song was ended, 'have you nothing to say?' 'A great deal, Annette.'

'Nothing amusing, I should think, by your face. I want to be amused.'

'For once let me speak seriously.' 'If I wanted serious speaking, I should stay in there—'

'You had no business to be watching me.'

'Annette, look at me; just to see how earnest I am.'

'I am sure I don't mind looking at you.' He had stooped, that his eyes might be on a level with hers; but when she raised her lashes her eyes caught a sunbeam and somewhat besides.

'Annette, you must hear me. I love you.— Will you be my wife?' he said in a voice of deep suppression passion.

'I wonder Lekham hasn't been in to-night,' said Annette's father.

'It is the first evening for a long while that he has not looked in,' said Annette's mother.

'He is a most agreeable well conducted young man, and very diligent in his business,' Mr. Leir pronounced emphatically.

'I hope nothing unpleasant keeps him from coming here to-night. I thought he didn't look very happy yesterday,' his wife rejoined.

'He is rather proud and reserved; one whose feelings ought not to be trifled with.' Mr. Leir looked full and sternly at Annette as he spoke.

Annette rose up, wished her father and mother good night proudly, and went to her own room.

'Annette, you did not answer my question.— I must have an answer.' They were alone spite of the girl's precautions; and Henry Lekham spoke in a hurried, somewhat imperious voice.

'Must you, Mr. Lekham?'

'Excuse that word; but what I feel is real.

I must speak real words; I can't choose fine ones.'

'Then I'll speak plain words too.'

'Speak true ones. Do you love me?'

'I wonder,' said the provoking beauty, 'does all the poetry I have read lie; and is all that books say untrue? I suppose the times are quite gone by when knights waited and worked long years through, only too well content if they received a smile or a kind word at long intervals from the lady they loved.'

'Those times are quite gone by, if they ever were. Life is too short; there is too much to do in it; but—'

'Then I think I will wait till those times come back; so, good evening, Mr. Lekham,' and away went Annette.

For months after that she and Henry Lekham did not exchange a word, or touch each other's hand. Annette was somewhat in disgrace with her father and mother, and grew grayer and a little thinner.

One autumn afternoon, Annette set out with a basket on her arm, which was no light weight, to pay a charitable visit to a poor woman living a good way off.

She started long listening to a story of a life full of woes, and doing what little she could to relieve present distress.

Annette wasn't particularly brave, and it was a ghastly kind of evening. Even going down the hill side, where pale light lingered, she started more than once at some eerie-sounding sigh of the wind, or at the aspect of some fantastic shaped bush.

It was very dark in the hollow through which the stream ran, and the water made a great noise.

It was so drear and dismal—only the noise of the wind and the water to be heard, and nothing to be seen but the foam on the stream, the white mist, and the black belt of wood across which her path lay.

'Who would have thought that Everreach Grange would have come to us—such a family as my uncle had?'

'I am not enquired for nothing,' he said, putting the letter into his wife's lap. 'My uncle— your great uncle—is dead, Annette; he has left us a great house and land and money, which I must go and see after.'

'Who would have thought that Everreach Grange would have come to us—such a family as my uncle had?'

'Never having received any kindness from him, never expecting to get any good by his death, I haven't concerned myself about him,' Mr. Leir replied.

'I see. Papa and mamma will be for catching a grand gentleman now.'

'You must have been drowned. The stream is very deep and wide where the bridge was washed away; if you had tried to cross there, you would have been drowned,' he said gravely.

'You might have been drowned. The stream is very deep and wide where the bridge was washed away; if you had tried to cross there, you would have been drowned,' he said gravely.

'I don't see that the noise of the water, or the dimness of the night, would make it worse to be drowned,' he replied smiling.

'I must go slower, my foot hurts me.'

'No; we will go faster—you must let me!'

'After that evening, Henry Lekham was again a frequent visitor at the cottage. Annette was more demure—showed a little shy graciousness sometimes; began to feel subdued in his presence, and powerless, as she had done when she was lame and he took her into his arms.'

The face she upturned appealingly at last, and mother did, Annette would blush and pout. Yet the tears would rise softly to her eyes if she thought about it when she was alone.

from which cold, fear, and pain had driven back all the blood, would have been difficult to identify with the laughing, sunny, saucy one of the girl who had sat singing beneath the hawthorn a few months back.

When she rose, she huddled on her bonnet and shawl; stole stealthily down the stairs and past the door of the parlor where her mother and father talked, forming splendid prospects for her future.

Annette went out into the brooding, biting mist. She was going to take counsel with her only friend—a woman years older than herself, who had shown great interest in Annette's love affair, and given the shy girl much, if not wise advice.

She found it difficult to make Emma Brown understand what had befallen her.

'I hope, Annette,' Mrs. Leir said solemnly, 'that you do not mean to trifle with his affections longer; one way or the other you shall answer him, child.'

'Why mightn't she dream out her little dream, fancy out her little romance in peace? Her mother's words seemed to brush through and destroy her pleasant self-mystifying, as the first feet crossing the grass of an autumn meadow destroy the shining, twining, fairy-webs woven from blade to blade.'

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ing attention. Locked into her 'chilly nest,' she set herself to write his first and strange love-letter. It ran thus:

'DEAR SIR: You will hear of the change that has come to us, and why we have gone away. This change can make no difference between true friends, at least I do not feel that it can.'

CHAPTER III.

'I often think, Annette, how fortunate it was that you were so capricious and shy with Mr. Lekham, and did not become attached to him. If you had been engaged to him, of course we should not have broken off the engagement; but now I hope, you will do much better. It is very fortunate you did not become attached to him, Mrs. Leir repeated.

'But, child, I wish you would not look so lost and ill at ease. You must remember we are not low bred people raised to sudden prosperity; we are only restored to a rank of life we lost for a time through your father being unfortunate. Do try and take your proper place in the house and in society. It is wretched to see you roaming about and gazing down the road all day, as you do.'

'Mrs. Leir went to the drawing room, and Annette was left alone. Spring twilight was falling. Through an open window she went out into the balmy evening, found a secret place, and cried as if her heart were broken.

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