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**"Flowers of the Valley,"**

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

CHAPTER XXV.  
THE MIDNIGHT CLUB.

"Mabel, I want you to hear what I have done." He spoke modestly and hesitatingly, but when he had got his violin in his hand he played with his usual verve and force, and Iris was delighted.

"Oh, Paul!" she exclaimed, "you are fond of talking about my 'greatness'; you will be 'greater' than I am or ever shall be! It is beautiful, delicious, thrilling!"

"Do you think so?" he said, doubtfully. "I'm afraid you are not an impartial judge, Mabel, dear."

"Then go to some one else," she said, with tender defiance. "Go to Mr. Montmorency, the leader of the band; he is a musician, although he parts his hair at the back and wears white kid gloves."

Paul thought for a moment. "He parts his hair at the back because the audience can only see the back of his head," he said, laughing. "But he is a musician, yes; but Mabel, I can never get hold of him unless it is after the curtain is down; he never seems to have a moment to spare in the daytime, and no one knows where he lives."

"Then attack him to-night after the piece is over," said Iris. "I will speak to him. He won't refuse me, Paul. I will get his true opinion. You will find, dear, that it coincides with mine."

Paul smiled. "There isn't one of them who wouldn't say anything to please you, Mabel," he said. "We will say it is 'beautiful, grand, anything, because he will know you want him to say it.'"

"Then I won't stay," said Iris. "You'll come home alone!" exclaimed Paul.

Iris laughed softly. "I will come home alone. Why, you don't think the cab will be stopped in O'Connell Street by highwaymen, do you?"

her companion and protector, and for no single night had he left her to thread the passage from the green room to the cab alone.

They went down to the theatre, and Iris sent a courteous message to Mr. Montmorency. Would he kindly give her a few minutes in her dressing-room?

Mr. Montmorency was a middle-aged man with a large family. A very respectable man, and a good musician, but with a foible. Most of us have one, some of us, alas! have two, or more. Mr. Montmorency's foible was a love of the bottle, and an ambition for mixing with his betters. He was fond of taking a glass in the refreshment saloon before and after the piece, though it was against the rules of the theatre for any of the actors or band to appear in the front of the house, and his glass always tasted better and more pleasant if there happened to be a noble lord, or even an "honorable" lounging in the little room.

Mr. Montmorency could sing a good song, and play the piano like an angel, and sometimes he was asked by one of the aristocrats whom he met at the refreshment bar to come and play at a bachelor's evening party, and Mr. Montmorency was rather given to remarking that he had been spending the evening with Lord Hailford, or the Marquis of Fordingbridge. He called playing the piano or singing a couple of songs "spending the evening."

A message from Miss Mabel Howard was viewed in the light of a summons by all connected with the Lyric, and he obeyed at once.

Iris was ready dressed for the first scene, and stood, a thing of beauty, arranging one of the bouquets of flowers which some unknown donor had sent her; and in a few words she communicated her request.

"I want you to hear what he has composed, not for my sake or for his, but for the sake of the music itself," Mr. Montmorency said, in her sweet way.

"I'll do it for your sake alone, Miss Howard," he said, gallantly. I have a little engagement to-night, but I'll let that slide. Paul shall play—or what he has composed, and I'm sure it will prove first rate," and he bowed himself out.

There wasn't a minute to spare before the raising of the curtain, and he made his way to the refreshment saloon. As he entered, Signor Ricardo, beautifully attired in evening dress, with his hair thrown over his spotless shirt front, sauntered in.

The signor was so frequent a visitor that he had become known, in a fashion of the habitués of the Lyric, and he bestowed a friendly nod on Mr. Montmorency.

"House as full as usual," he asked, rolling a cigarette in his thin, white hands.

liquor, and remarked: "Yours is a hard life, my friend."

"Hard? Yes, I should think so," said Mr. Montmorency, in a tone of commiseration. "What with the regular performances, and the rehearsals, there is quite enough, and more than enough. And to-night, to make it harder, I've got to stay and listen to the music for the new opera."

The signor nodded sympathetically. "Sob!"

"Yes," said Mr. Montmorency, draining his glass, and looking into it fondly and regretfully. "By Paul Foster, composer of that pretty song Miss Howard sings, I shall be kept for a couple of hours, I expect, Hailford!"

The signor pricked up his ears. To-night, Friday, was the night upon which the duke had wagered to produce Iris at the smoking-concert. The signor had gone halves in that wager on the spur of the moment and had been pondering since how he should entice or force Iris to be present. His quick and ready wit saw an opening.

"Is Paul Foster going to remain after the performance alone?" he said. "Miss Howard will keep him company, no doubt? Sob!"

"No," said Mr. Montmorency, with a smile; "Miss Howard is anxious that I should give him an impartial hearing; she is going home."

"Ah!" said the signor, indifferently, but his eyes glittered. "Another drink? No? Well, adieu, my friend."

Mr. Montmorency grasped his hand, and presently made strange adventures. The signor looked at his appearance in the mirror, but the signor lolled against the bar, and smoked thoughtfully.

"Two hundred and fifty pounds," he murmured more than once. "Yes, it is worth chasing."

The play commenced; he could hear that it had done so by the roar which welcomed Miss Mabel Howard's appearance, but still people kept dropping in.

Presently the Duke of Rosedale, next as was figure, came into the refreshment saloon.

"A brandy and soda, my dear," he said, then, seeing the signor, he gave a little stare and a smile, that was half a frown, as he nodded.

"Good-evening, your grace," said the signor, raising his hat, and showing his white teeth.

The duke nodded again, and his little eyes looked at him out of the bed of wrinkles, with the cunning of a man who has met the signor several times since the night the bet had been made, but had not vouchsafed a word, beyond returning the signor's greeting. His grace had felt that he had done rather a reckless thing in accepting the bet at the prompting of a stranger, especially a stranger who was a foreigner with a melodramatic face and an evil smile, but his grace had met with some strange adventures since his life, and there was something in the man's manner which led him to hope that the signor had not made an empty boast when he said that he was Miss Howard's friend.

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placed before Mozart the MS. of an elaborately-written composition. Mozart at once sat down and proceeded to play the piece, scornfully observing, as he dashed off page after page, that it was absurdly easy.

Haydn accepted the challenge and church organ, from which he drew such a marvellous flood of music that crowds flocked to hear him. After the recital he was asked to give his name. "B.A.C.H." he replied on the organ, then, playing another wonderful extemporization on the same theme, he departed, leaving everyone astonished.

A special symphony written apparently as a joke by Haydn once resulted in a curious scene at a performance. In those days orchestral players had candlesticks fixed to their stands. All went well in Haydn's symphony until the middle part was reached, when the fiddler discovered that his contribution to the orchestra came abruptly to an end, a marginal note on his music sheet directing him to blow out his candle and retire.

A few minutes later the trumpeter found himself similarly directed; and after him, the first, second, and third horns. The orchestra platform, and smaller and smaller, grew the number of players until finally only one fiddler was left. He went on playing, apparently oblivious of his surroundings until, roused by the shrieks of laughter from the audience, who, at first, thought the orchestra had gone mad, he looked up, realized his predicament, and then rushed panic-stricken from the platform, by which time the audience was almost hysterical.

and he resolved to have his revenge. He wrote an overture in which the violinists were instructed to tap their candlesticks with their bows at every second bar, an early jazz effect, which many members of the audience regarded as an insult to their intelligence. Midway through the overture the people rose from their seats and made for the composer, threatening to lynch him on the spot. He escaped in the nick of time, the opera house meanwhile being wrecked.—Tit-Bits.

On reaching the last page, he found himself faced with a chord which, if it was to be played at all, necessitated both hands being employed at the top and bottom of the keyboard respectively, whilst requiring a single note to be struck simultaneously in the middle.

To the eyes of the master this looked impossible. "No one on earth could play that!" he said, rising from the piano.

"Then admit yourself beaten!" cried Haydn. And, taking Mozart's seat at the instrument, he placed his hands on the keyboard, as required, and at the same time struck the baffling middle note—with his nose!

Fond of Fun.

Just as fond of fun was Bach. While performing on the harpsichord before Frederick the Great, he asked that monarch to give him a theme on which to extemporize. The emperor took up his flute and played the notes—B-A-C-H. (B natural in German being known as H), and on this the composer executed a brilliant extemporization.

A few days later, while visiting a village, where he was unknown, he obtained permission to play on the

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