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# FLORABEL'S LOVER

By LAURA JEAN LIBBEY

Author of "When Lovely Maiden Stoops to Folly," "A Broken Betrothal," "Parted by Fate," "Parted at the Altar," etc., etc.

Florabel was a dependent of her step-father, Squire Pemberton. His daughters hate Florabel, and when the Squire dies, order her out of the old home. Max Forrester a rich young man marries her and introduces her into his family the members of which disapprove of his marriage, as they wanted him to marry Miss Clavering, an heiress.

CHAPTER XI—(Continued.)

max—handsome Max—looked haggard and worn. He was a shadow of his former self.

"My son is grieving himself to death over the loss of Florabel," sighed Mrs. Forrester. "I would gladly take her back, if but to see my poor son smile once again."

Inez looked at her aghast.

"He has not the pride I gave him credit for if he could forgive her—this woman who eloped with another!" cried Inez Clavering.

CHAPTER XXII.

The next afternoon, as Max Forrester sat in his arm chair by the lace-draped window, his fair head bent dejectedly on his hands, the door opened softly and his mother entered.

"Max," she said, huskily, "you are wearing your life out. Will you never be able to forget?"

An expression of deep pain crossed his handsome face.

"No," he answered, desperately. "Try as I will never for a moment am I able to forget; waking or sleeping, alone or in the midst of crowds, the face of Florabel is ever before me. Despite all, I cannot believe my darling has gone—to him. I will not believe it."

"You must not brood over this matter, my son," said Mrs. Forrester, laying her jeweled hand on his fair, clustering curls. "Constant brooding has dethroned many a man's reason. You are my only son, Max. If anything should happen to you, I—I should die. You must give up the hope of searching out Arthur Hurlhurst and holding him accountable," she faltered.

"I will trace him and find out what he is to Florabel if it costs me my life," he answered, bitterly. "He is in New York, mother," he went on, huskily. "I have traced him here; sooner or later we shall meet."

"I pray Heaven you may not," answered Mrs. Forrester, fervently.

The following day, as Max stepped from a Broadway car, the first person whom he met was Gerald Thorndyke, his old college friend.

"Why, Forrester," said Gerald, aghast, "how changed you are! I would not have recognized you if you had not spoken. Come into this cafe."

"I have heard of it," replied Thorndyke, extending his hand and grasping that of Max in earnest sympathy; "but I hope all will come out right in the end."

"Never!" declared Max, firmly.

As he spoke he took the portrait from his breast pocket and handed it across the table to his friend.

One glance, then Gerald Thorndyke sprang to his feet with a startled cry.

"My God! am I mad, or do I dream?" he cried, excitedly. "No, no, my senses are not playing me false; this is the portrait of Miss Vane! Even her name, in her own delicate chirography, is beneath it—Florabel. Do you mean to tell me this—is this your wife, Forrester?" he said, his voice husky with agitation.

"Yes," replied Max, wonderingly.

"Then, by all that is wonderful, I declare this is the same young girl I knew as Miss Vane—Florabel Vane," said Gerald, white to the lips, but not more white than Max. "This is the girl with whose lovely face I fell madly in love at first sight."

Max had sprung to his feet in intense amazement.

"I do not comprehend what you say," cried Max, hoarsely. "Make this thing clear to me, Thorndyke."

"I will," replied Gerald. "Calm yourself. Sit down and listen. I will tell you all," and he told him briefly and truthfully the story of Miss Carlisle's accident, which had brought her and the beautiful young stranger together, and all that had transpired since.


"It is but two days since you saw her in the park, you say?" gasped Max.

"It is so," replied Gerald.

"And you have been searching for her ever since, but can find no trace of her?" questioned Max, breathlessly.

"If the green earth had suddenly opened and swallowed her, she could not be more completely lost to the world," said Gerald.

For weeks she had been the companion of Miss Carlisle. That was proof positive, then, that she was not with Hurlhurst. He could have cried aloud to Heaven with very joy for that. How cruelly the world had



A mother pays a heavy price for the privilege of motherhood. The days of waiting and hoping and anxiety before the little one comes; the after years of care and solicitude, nursing the little life into physical completeness; guiding the little footsteps, the little hands and the gradually expanding mind—all this is part of the burden of motherhood. Yet an expectant mother is happy with it all in blissful anticipation of the dear, soft, nestling little bit of humanity which is all her very own.

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Mrs. W. Robinson, of Springhill, Cumberland Co., Nova Scotia, writes: "I feel that I cannot say enough about your 'Favorite Prescription.' I was confined on the 8th of April, and I was only sick about thirty minutes in my case. Although the physician was in the house I did not seem to require his aid."

I have not defined yet, and we will have a talk over old times. What do you say?"

"Certainly," said Max, leading the way.

"What is this you wrote me," said Max, turning abruptly to his friend after they had given their order, "about going to marry one woman while your heart was another's? Take my advice; don't do it."

Gerald Thorndyke flushed red, then turned deadly pale.

"Fate has taken all choice in the matter out of my hands," he replied, with much embarrassment. "The heiress broke off the engagement with me; and the girl for whom I would have renounced a fortune refused me point blank, with scorn and derision, then suddenly disappeared. I have been trying to discover her whereabouts ever since."

Gerald Thorndyke knew his friend's strict notions of honor too well to tell him exactly how the affair had happened; indeed, it was a source of deep annoyance to recall the matter at all, all save that part of it relating to Florabel.

"No doubt you censure me, Forrester, for admiring one when I was engaged to another, but if you had seen Miss Vane you would not have marvelled at that. Why, she was as beautiful as a dream, with a beauty at once peculiar and striking. Her face was as fair as a lily; her dimpled cheeks like two pink roses; and her eyes—it would take a painter or a poet to describe them—they were of a rich hazel, wonderfully pathetic; and the little head was crowned with a mass of curly, golden hair. Why, heavens! Forrester, what is the matter? You look as pale as a ghost."

"A ghost of the past has just risen up to confront me. Do you know, Thorndyke, you have described accurately—my wife! I did not believe the round world held one like her. You shall see her picture, and you can judge for yourself. No doubt but you have heard my story; the newspapers have aired it pretty thoroughly."

"Everything pertaining to Music."

judged her, his poor, innocent darling.

A flash of something very like the truth dawned upon him. Believing that he would keep his word, that he meant to leave her—she had gone quietly away, to face the great, cold world, alone.

Then, in the face of all this, he remembered her letter. She had written on that tear-blotted page that she was "going to Arthur;" and at the thought his face grew dark and stormy. He would have given his life to have believed in her innocence; but, ah, Heaven! how could he? how could he?

He bowed his handsome, troubled face in his hands, his tall form shaking like an aspen leaf.

It had been a severe breaking up of a pretty love dream to Gerald Thorndyke. It was his creed to fall in love with lovely young girls; but he never made the fatal mistake of admiring or giving one thought to a beautiful woman on whom another had claims which should always be held sacred.

"I will pledge you my word to do all in my power to aid you in finding her, Max," he said, as they parted an hour later. "Rest assured, if she is in New York city we shall soon know it; and this fellow Hurlhurst—we will give him a little attention, too."

Gerald Thorndyke walked back to his hotel.

"I'm the most unlucky dog under the sun," he ruminated. "Miss Carlisle and her fortune gone; and the girl I have loved so madly Max Forrester's bride. Was there ever such a contretemps, such a strange revolution of the wheel of fate?"

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