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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.

SYNOPSIS.

Florabel was a dependent of her stepfather, 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 Claverling, an heiress.

CHAPTER XIX—(Continued.)

"If you could prove to me the truth of your assertions, Miss Dean, I would be only too glad to retain you," she said, earnestly.

Florabel turned her clear, bright eyes upon her.

"I have no other proof than my simple word," she answered. "I would not stay, however; your cruel suspicions have wounded me too deeply for that."

The leave-taking between the children and Miss Dean was affecting indeed. Mrs. Kensington was sorry to part with Florabel, but it must be done, she told herself.

And once more, while the summer sun was shining and the whole earth glad, one heart was heavy enough, for once more Florabel was facing the cruel world.

Should she write to her brother and tell him how hard she had found life? she wondered, vaguely. Would he care? She thought not. Even her own husband did not care. How kind and tender he had been to that little waif of the street—yet how cruel toward her!

But to return to Inez Claverling. As time rolled by, the mad love in her heart for handsome Max Forrester increased instead of abating.

"He has learned to forget Florabel," she told herself, "and my patient love will win him at last."

Miss Claverling laid her plans so cunningly that every summer she was invited to spend several weeks with Mrs. Forrester, and in that way she was thrown much into the society of the son. Inez improved her opportunities so well that Max had learned to look upon her with more than ordinary interest.

"A sister could not have been more devoted to me during my great sorrow than was Inez," he thought, gratefully. But Inez believed in her foolish heart that he was learning to care for her with more than a brother's love.

How she trembled when matters called Mrs. Forrester to Boston, and Max signified his intention of accompanying her.

What if by any chance he should meet Florabel? In a single moment of time the work of years would be destroyed.

Eagerly she watched for their return, and when Inez Claverling saw



The world contains no more charming picture than that of happy and radiant girlhood. All too frequently the happiness and radiance in the young girl's face is doomed to be blotted out by the lines of sickness and suffering. No young woman is fitted for wifehood and motherhood who suffers from weakness and disease in a womanly way. For such women wifehood only holds out the prospect of suffering and motherhood the probability of death.

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Max step from the carriage, holding the child in his arms, she almost fainted with guilty fright.

A few moments later Max was standing beside her, still holding the little one.

"I have rescued this little one from the slums of the street, Miss Claverling," he said. "I intend to adopt her. Is it not a strange fancy? There was something about the little waif that drew my heart toward her at first glance. Kiss Miss Claverling, my dear," he said, holding her out toward Inez. "You must learn to love this pretty lady very dearly if you care to please me."

He could not understand why the child recoiled from Inez with a low cry of fear.

Inez had grown pale as death. In the little waif she had recognized, at first glance, poor Florabel's child.

CHAPTER XXX.

Terrible as the shock of the discovery had been to Inez Claverling, she did not cry out, she did not faint; but her heart had almost ceased beating as she looked with guilty terror into the face of Florabel's child.

She noticed, with great relief, that the little one did not recognize her. As in a glass, darkly, the past like a panorama spread itself out before her—how she had stolen the child on the night of its birth from its mother's arms, carrying it to the asylum; and again, how she had wrested it from Max Forrester's grasp by removing it from the asylum, and leaving it in care of a coach driver, when she had missed the out-going New York express.

For months Inez had forwarded money for its maintenance, and when the remittances ceased the little waif had been cast adrift; and now the hand of fate had brought this little one and Max together again. How cruel it was that some instinct did not warn him that this was his own child!

It was strange that no feeling of remorse stirred Inez's heart as she saw the little one was lame.

"What do you call her, Max?" she asked; and the child answered the question promptly herself—"Flora."

"I would not call her that, if I were you, Max," she said; "it recalls too many unpleasant memories."

"It is a very dear name to me, Inez," he said, briskly. "I like to have her called that."

Terrible jealousy sprang up in Inez's heart. Was this child, whom she had taken such pains to put out of his life, destined to come between her and Max's love just as he was learning to care for her?

"It must not be, it shall not be!" she cried out, vehemently, when she reached her own room.

"You will like Miss Claverling, little Flora," said Max, when the door had closed behind Inez. "She is a good, kind lady."

"But I do not like her," declared the child, looking up solemnly into his face. "When you was not looking there was a look like this on her face," and the little one drew her eyebrows down into a horrible frown. "She hates me."

"My dear," said Mrs. Forrester, coming forward, "it is wrong to have such thoughts. Why should a kind young lady like Miss Claverling hate you?"

"I don't know, but she does," persisted Flora.

"The child can never be seen about the house in this fashion," declared Mrs. Forrester that afternoon. "A French madame, who can take charge of furnishing her a suitable wardrobe, must be sent for at once."

"There is something of far greater importance to be done," declared Max; "a surgeon must be sent for to straighten that little limb at once."

"She is so delicate she can hardly stand such an operation."

That was the opinion, too, of the doctors, who were called to consult in regard to the case; yet there was another disease which had been caused by this lameness, which would result fatally unless arrested in very early childhood; and it was decided the operation must be performed at once. And it was done.

It was galling to Inez to see how the child clung to Max, and how fond he was of her.

Was she sorry little Flora had not died? Yes, she admitted to herself. For she despaired of ever winning Max's love while Florabel's child

hovered about him like a guardian angel.

The child's subtle instinct was quite correct; Miss Claverling hated her.

It was at a very critical turning point in the case that the old nurse was taken ill by overwatching, and one of the doctors had suggested that Miss Claverling should take her place for that one night.

Inez was too diplomatic to refuse; but in her own heart she felt excessively annoyed.

How she hated the lovely young face, so fatally like Florabel's, which lay against the pillow. The doctor aroused her from her bitter reflections by touching her cold hand.

"Here are the medicines, Miss Claverling," he said. "Now, I want to advise you in regard to administering them. This," holding up a small phial of amber drops that sparkled like liquid diamonds in the softened lamp light, "must be given the child at midnight. Her very life hangs on the promptness with which it is given. I can leave it in no safer hands than yours, Miss Claverling; and with a stately bow the old doctor quitted the apartment.

(To be continued.)

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