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MORRIS BLOCK, . . .  
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Feb 12.

# 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 Clavering, an heiress.

CHAPTER XVI.—(Continued.)

"It is not like a pretty young governess about the house," Mrs. Kensington complained to a friend one day; "but the children are so very fond of Miss Dean I cannot well discharge her. I have spoken to her about my brother's return from the South, and warned her as she values her position to keep out of his way; but you know how these scheming young governesses are always on the lookout for wealthy husbands. I am afraid in forewarning her I have forearmed her. I have invited two young ladies here to meet my brother—the Misses Pemberton. It would be really too bad if he should fall in love with our governess."

While this conversation was going on in the drawing room between Mrs. Kensington and one of her dear five-hundred friends, one sunny morning, the subject of it, poor, hapless Florabel, was standing in the rose garden with Belle and Lida, her two pretty charges.

"Oh, I had almost forgotten to tell you, Miss Dean," cried little Belle, in her pretty, childish prattle, "of the little beggar girl who came to the gate yesterday."

"I gave her a rose, and told her to come for another to-day: and, oh, how she cried over it."

"No doubt few of life's roses had fallen to her lot, more likely sharpest thorns," murmured Florabel.

"Could I invite her into the garden, and let her gather all she wants? That isn't the conservatory, you know?"

"Your mamma might not like it," sighed Florabel. "You may hand her one rose through the gate, but not invite her in."

"I do not know as she can reach it," said little Belle. "She is a cripple and walks with a crutch. She sings on the street corners, she told me, and if she did not bring home lots and lots of pennies, the bad old lady she lives with beats her."

"Heaven help the poor little waif," murmured Florabel, strangely moved.

"See look so much like 'oo, Miss Dean," lisped little Lida, climbing up into her lap.

But Florabel had not heard the remark. Her thoughts were with the little unknown, unmarked grave beneath the daisies.

"Is 'oo c'yin', Miss Dean," lisped little Lida.

"I am not sorry for you, Florabel, Dean, or rather Mrs. Forrester. You have brought it all on yourself. You, who have sinned so deeply, deserve to suffer. My wonder is great to find you ensconced in this house. No doubt you are off with the old love, and are here to see Halbert Kensington."

"Maud," cried Florabel, in a choking voice, "do not add insult to injury. I—I cannot bear it. Spare me, because I have suffered so much, and I have not deserved it. Let me see you again, and I will tell you all. Then you will pity and not blame me. I shall be in the garden at ten to-morrow morning. I pray you to come to me, Maudy, for the sake of the past."

Lida, "cus I thed see looked dest nice 'oo?"

"No," said Florabel, "it was not that which made me weep, little Lida."

Florabel had not seen the tall magnolia boughs part, and a tall, handsome, distinguished man step forth from their shadows; but the children saw him, and, with a scream of delight, darted toward the new comer.

"Oh, Uncle Hal," they both exclaimed, in a breath, "is it really you?"

"Yes, it's your Uncle Hal, come a day earlier than I am expected," answered a cheery, masculine voice. "Am I welcome?"

But it needed no words to tell him that.

As Halbert Kensington, the artist, had approached, he had caught sight of the handsomest face he had ever beheld, but even while he gazed it vanished from his view like a meteor or a dream.

"Some guest," he thought, "and truly a most beautiful girl;" but he forbore questioning the children about her.

Florabel had entered the house by a side door, hurrying up the corridor toward her room, when suddenly the door of the drawing room opened, and, to her dismay, she found herself brought face to face with Maud Pemberton.

"Maud!" she murmured, faintly, coming to a sudden stop. "Oh, Maudy, don't you know me?"

Maud Pemberton drew away her silken skirts with a haughty stare.

After the first swift glance, she sprang forward with a sharp cry: "Florabel!"

"Yes, it is I; hapless, miserable Florabel!" she answered, humbly. "Speak just one kind word to me, Maudy. I am dying of hunger for one kind word. No doubt you have heard my story—that I have parted from Max; and, oh, the life I have lived since then has been more bitter than death."

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She had no opportunity for saying another word, nor had Maud Pemberton the opportunity of replying, for at that moment Mrs. Kensington appeared at the lower end of the corridor, and Florabel turned away.

Maud Pemberton fairly burst into the room where her sister sat, some ten minutes later.

"We have no other guests than Maud and Evelyn here. It couldn't be possible you refer to Miss Dean, who is only the children's governess."

"Whether she be a governess or not, she has the face of a Hebe," declared the young man, warmly.

Maud and Evelyn exchanged glances.

"Shall we tell who she is, and have her sent away at once?" asked Maud, when the sisters found themselves alone. "There is no use in looking at a man when she is around. Why, he would never see you. It would be time lost."

"I will devise some plan," said Evelyn, thoughtfully.

When Florabel had left Maud in the corridor, she had gone out into the garden again, her eyes blinded by tears.

Ah, how cruel of Maud, who had known her since childhood!

Tying on her bonnet, Florabel passed through the gate out on to the crowded street. She must mingle with the throng, surging to and fro on the thoroughfare, to try to forget.

Suddenly the sound of a child's voice fell upon her ear. It almost seemed to Florabel that an electric current passed through her heart.

Every pulse throbbed and thrilled with a joy that was the keenest pain.

Turning quickly in the child's direction, she saw a sight that held her spellbound. A fair young face, crowned with a crinkled mass of golden hair, a pair of wine-dark eyes, and as sad a mouth as was ever seen on the beautiful face of a child.

(To be continued.)

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