

Heart of Liane

By MABEL McELLIOTT

CHAPTER VIII

THE visiting star that week was Curtis Blue, 25, blond, with eyes of so deep a color they seemed almost the "violet eyes" of Victorian novels. He was of the matinee idol type and professed to hate it. He had a wife somewhere in Hollywood, a feverish, dark young woman who was teaching the Marfair accent to Quene Whitehall, the comedy star.

"Isn't he a lamb?" asked Muriel the day of his arrival.

"He's rather nice. Mother played with him in 'Cabbages and Kings,' Liane returned indifferently.

"You know him before, then? Why, you air piece!" And Muriel pretended to see something that was not there.

Blue came along, perfectly groomed in his dark gray coat and striped trousers, his beautifully curved soft gray hat. His bow was a miracle of precision. He stopped with a side glance for the luscious Miss Ladd in her apple green sports shirt and shorts, her brown legs shapely and seductively bare.

Liane performed introductions and Muriel cooed at him. "I enjoyed your performance so much!" He looked as modest as possible.

"I thought you had threatened to break into the company this season," he said to Liane.

"You wretch," she pouted. "When I asked your advice last winter you said not to go on the stage whatever else I did. You told me I was an awkward cub, that I needed to learn to talk and walk and smile properly. You told me I said 'gonna'."

"Well, so you did," he returned, flashing his justly famous smile at her. "But you're improved. You might learn. Who can tell?"

Liane threw out her hand in despair. "How for your girl to know then you say 'no,' I'm bewildered."

"Oh, you'll marry within the year and settle down," she said, looking at him. "Blue drewled. "Maybe it's the best way. I don't know."

"No, I shan't! How horrid of you!" she flamed. Muriel interposed, dulcet-toned. "How about me, Mr. Blue? Would you say I had a chance?"

He favored her with an air half insolent, half honestly appraising. "The chorus for you," he said with coolness. "You're the looks, the voice. That is, if you can dance. It doesn't matter whether you sing or not, and you can speak like a man for all they care."

Muriel pouted. "You're very flattering, I must say."

"Well, you asked me," he said, looking at her. "Come along and have a cocktail with me to prove you didn't mean to hurt my feelings."

He glanced at his watch. "Five o'clock. How far is it? I've got to get back at the inn by six. Must have an early dinner or I'm all wrong for the evening performance."

Muriel said airily. "I'll drive like a trock. You need a pick-me-up with that grouch of yours."

Liane watched them climb into the speedy roadster half amused, half envious. No wonder Muriel always got her man! She certainly went after this one calmly enough. Liane wondered just how deep her feeling for the impetuous Chuck Desmond was. Muriel was frightfully susceptible. She was the modern feminine version of the roving sailor. She had a boy in every port.

Liane went down the aisle, through the now darkened theatre. A workman was hammering away at a set and the chief electrician, a tall, bald-looking young Dane, stood to stare at her. She felt impelled to explain her presence there. "I'm looking for my mother," she said. His smile angered her. "Ho, the woman's girl!" he returned, airily. "Always so polite, so correct. Wonder what she is really like, this naughty one."

Liane tossed her head and started to pass. In her haste she did not notice the tangle of wires and she stumbled and would have fallen if the big man had not reached out and caught her in his arm.

"That man!" His clothes smelled of pipe tobacco and wintergreen. Liane tried to free herself.

He regained some of her lost dignity. Before she knew actually what was happening he had planned his big face next to hers, had kissed her squarely on the mouth.

She screamed. "You—you awful creature!" She struck out at him wildly, her small fists flailing him. He was laughing, holding her tight. Oh, how she hated him! Now, she thought, she knew how murderers felt. The lust for killing. She knew what it meant to see red.

"You let me go . . ." she was calling, appalled to find that her strength availed her nothing against his rock-ribbed hardness. She tasted the salt of her own angry tears.

Suddenly a hurricane was upon them. The tall Liane went whirling. "You—accuse!" That was a familiar voice but whose?

A shabby young man in a striped suit dusted off his hands with a burlesque gesture. The Dane picked himself up, felt of his jaw.

"Was this—certain—annoying you, my good girl?" inquired the newcomer, in his best Drury Lane manner.

Liane almost gasped. He made it seem funny. He took away from her the feeling that she was soiled, unclean, from this distasteful contact.

Desmond struck out his arm and Liane crooked her fingers star to gratefully. "I'll see you to your carriage," he told her.

"You were wonderful just now," Liane murmured as they walked down the road.

"Where's this—here—now Miss Ladd gone and fluttered away to?" demanded Charles Desmond, sticking the inevitable cigar between his lips and hunting in five separate pockets for the non-existent match.

"Here it's my day off and everything and I get on my bike and trail away out here to find her missing!"

Liane started to explain but thought better of it. "She—she went home," she finished lamely. But Chuck had been watching her expressive face.

"Oh, yeah?" Desmond appeared doubtful. "Well, I can't waste the entire evening just because she changed her mind. How about you trotting off and having dinner with me? I can't eat alone. I'm funny that way. Been so since earliest childhood."

"Oh, dear. If mother only would let me," cried Liane childishly. "Well, there's nothing like inquiring," Chuck said.

Liane introduced the sale and to her utter amazement Cass beamed on the young man.

"Wasn't your mother Grace Franks, who played Shakespearean roles long ago?" she inquired.

Charles said "yes" very solemnly. "I thought so," Cass nodded. "You run along, Liane, and change your dress while I talk to Mr. Desmond. There are so many things I want to ask him."

Will wonders never cease, thought Liane, as she hastily slipped into her one reasonable frock.

Chuck Desmond was funny. He was nice, even though he wasn't the "Not Impossible He," he realized she would have had time squandering herself with Muriel if that young woman ever heard the truth.

"What are you thinking about?" inquired the irrepressible young man, Chuck Desmond.

Liane smiled faintly. "Wondering if Muriel would mind my bagging her young man."

"So, ho, then! I'm diverted as such," He pretended to be annoyed.

"You are," Liane dimpled at him. How simple it was to be gay and free while I talk to Mr. Desmond. Desmond surveyed her with interest. "You're pretty nice, ey on the eye. How come you haven't a permanent boy trailing you?"

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Famous American

HORIZONTAL

1 Shell of a fruit used as a drinking vessel.

2 Henry Clay was a famous American—?

3 Otherwise.

4 Dread.

5 Hangman's halter.

6 Scarf.

7 Stop.

8 Obstruct.

9 Toward.

10 One of two equal parts.

11 Pique.

12 To tug.

13 Truism.

14 Seventh note.

15 Common verb.

16 Self-esteem.

17 Fabulous bird.

18 Ped of cotton.

19 To arrange cloth.

20 Portion.

21 Rubber tree.

22 Throbs.

23 Excuse.

24 Road.

VERTICAL

1 Lincoln made his most famous speech at—?

2 Part of a pedestal.

3 To consume.

4 Second note.

5 Eco.

6 To make lace.

7 Measure of area.

8 Whole.

9 Smutty.

10 To sulk.

11 Onager.

12 Northeast.

13 One of the men involved in the "Oil Scandal."

14 Entrance passage.

15 Shovel.

16 Hunk of stuff.

17 Vessels.

18 Noah Webster gained fame through this.

19 Wan.

20 Box.

21 Rowan tree.

22 To contain.

23 Quartz.

24 Sudden invasion by the police.

25 Distributed.

26 Chart.

27 To heft.

28 Wing-like.

29 Hue.

30 The final purpose.

31 To spill.

32 Conflict.

33 Foretoken.

34 Form of ba.

35 Male child.

36 Barley spikulet.

37 Grain.

38 Southeast.

39 Each.