

Heart of Liane

by MABEL McELLIOTT

CHAPTER XIX

Liane stood outside the door for a moment, catching her breath. She clenched and unclenched her small hands. "I hate her," she said to herself. "Oh, I hate her!"

She said no to Clive's proposal that they announce their engagement before the arrival of Miss Lord and her sister. Now she wished she hadn't. That would have given her at least a sort of standing. It would have been a protection against snobs.

She went into her mother's room now and shut the door softly behind her. She was sleeping. The shadows under her eyes had almost disappeared. Liane had a sudden desire to snatch her up to dash back to the shabby little flat in West 68th street where they had been so poverty-stricken and oftentimes so happy.

But she knew that she couldn't do that. No, she must go through with that monstrous agreement. She had given her word and she must keep it.

"Who does that Liane girl look like?" Fanny Amberton was saying as she brushed her short black hair and pressed the wave in with skillful fingers.

"Don't know," Tressa answered shortly. "Like no one I know. Why?"

"It's rather perplexing," mused her sister, wrinkling into a black net frock. "I could swear I've talked to her—known her before. But of course her name's not Liane."

"Nineteen," Tressa said and laughed shortly. "A highly improbable age!"

"My dear," murmured Fanny Amberton significantly, "do you realize Clive will be 25 soon after the first of the year?"

"There was something unpleasant about Tressa's brief laugh. Fanny made up her lips meticulously. "He'll have—well, millions!" she said.

Tressa's smile was confident. "Don't worry, old thing. I'll surely pull it off this time." She dabbed the stopper of the Chanel bottle against her right-angled ears.

"I'll get in some good work tonight," she said. "Why ever doesn't Eva have a properly trained French maid to turn over to us? I wouldn't dare ask one of those colleens to look me up. They'd be sure to tangle their big fingers in the lace and rip it to bits."

"I'm simply not good at it either," Fanny Amberton announced flatly. "Call that girl and have her come you up."

A look of pure malice came into Tressa's eyes. "You do have an inspiration occasionally, darling. It is drawn, pressing a button. It will be the perfect touch. Unless the young woman turns bullish."

She stood there in a single brief garment of chiffon and hand run lace as Ellen answered. The maid stared frankly at the beautiful figure in the chemise. "Send Miss Barrett to me, that's a good girl," Tressa said lightly. "At once. It's rather important."

When Liane arrived Tressa had slipped the exquisite beige lace frock over her head and stood, eyeing its artful simplicity, the manner in which it pruned her curves and flowed away into lines of sheer innocence.

"Oh, Miss Barrett, do look me up, won't you?" Tressa asked in a drawing-voice.

"Certainly." With dignity Liane managed the intricate fastenings. She stood up. "I'm tant all," Liane's face was like a white mask. Her manner was chill, impersonal.

"Thanks so much. No lady's maid could have done better."

Their glances met, clashed.

"You're quite welcome," Liane met the insolence with studied unconcern. But as she left the room her heart was hammering with anger. It was in prisoned her teeth!

Liane stood like a trapped young thing in one corner of the library. Van Robard faced her, grim in his black and white, his splendid head arrogantly lifted.

"You've got to hear me out," he was saying doggedly.

Liane stammered. "The others are coming. Miss Lord—Muriel—they'll be in any minute. They mustn't find us." She cast a despairing glance around.

He said, coldly resolute. "They're playing ping pong in the game room. Mrs. Amberton is at backgammon with my aunt. You've got to stay. I've been trying for months to explain. That's why I came tonight."

The young girl drew herself up proudly. "There's nothing to explain."

This—funny—thing called love?" The girl ground her nails into her palms. She repeated. "There's nothing you need to explain, is there?" She even smiled.

The man in the perfectly fitting dinner coat folded his arms grimly, staring at her.

"There is," he said. "And well you know it."

Liane sat down suddenly, meekly. She passed a shaking hand before her eyes. "Go on, then, and do be quick about it," she said faintly.

"You knew," Van Robard said softly, "that I was mad about you last summer. It was like a fever. It hit me—hard. Like nothing else I've known. You knew that?"

Liane nodded. Pride and reserve were swept away. She forgot this man was betrothed to another girl, forgot everything except the burning fact that they had five moments alone together and that they loved each other.

"Well—," Robard struck one clenched fist into his open palm. "Well, that was that. I meant to, wanted to tell you. This—well, I got tangled up in this hideous mess. Muriel ran off with that actor fellow, Blue. You know. His wife turned nasty, threatened to sue and name her as co-respondent. Adele nearly went frantic. I happened to be in Atlantic City that night. She wired me, asking me to stand by. She flew down and made a fearful row. Got me to say I would tell Mrs. Blue I was I Muriel had gone off with. I did and the dreadful woman professed to be satisfied. But she said unless our engagement was announced before the week was out she'd carry out her original threat. I was the root," he finished bitterly. Liane felt quite ill.

"You—were under obligations to Mrs. Blue?" she asked, her throat constricting as she formed the words.

"Oh, you've heard that gossip? Liane, sweet, you mustn't believe all you hear of me. Indeed you must not! People have filthy minds and filthy tongues, too."

She looked up at him. She wanted with all her heart to believe him.

"Well, it can't make any difference now, anyhow," Liane said dully. "Because—I've promised to marry another man."

He stared. "You! Sweets, you haven't!"

Liane twisted her fingers. "Yes, I have. It's done."

"You don't want to tell me who it is?"

"Not now. I can't. It's a secret."

He flung himself about. "Ah, I was mistaken, then. I thought you cared, though I'd seen something real in your eyes. I was wrong. Forgive me. I've been wasting your time."

He bowed low. Liane started to speak, started to fling out her hand. The moment was shattered. Tressa Lord, trailing her lace draperies, entered the room.

"Ah, a-tete-a-tete! So sorry," her laugh was brittle.

"Not at all," Van's laugh was ugly. "Miss Barrett was just sending me about my business and riches, too. You arrived in the nick of time."

Tressa gave Liane a sharp glance of inquiry. "At your old tricks, Van?" she said, letting him light the cigarette she had thrust into a lady holder. His handsome face in the flare of light looked lowering.

"You flatter me, my dear," he said, lightly. "I'm growing old. My technique is out of date. Can't try it with these youngsters."

"Your technique always has been grand, love."

"Charming of you to say so," he dawled.

"Truly, I'll never forget how mad I was about you the summer before the summer before last," said Tressa mockingly. "I thought you were simply swell. Prince Charming. The first time you kissed me—"

"Van winced with a side glance at Liane who stood white-faced and uncomfortable.

"Now you are flattering me." His voice was low. "You know I never stormed that evening."

"Ah, my dear, would you fling a lady's memories in her teeth?" Tressa's green eyes shone with malicious pleasure as she watched him squirm under her raillery.

Liane, with a low toned exclamation, slipped from the room. She passed Liane on the stairs, "You're not leaving us so early?" he asked in polite concern.

"I must. I have a fiendish headache."

(To Be Continued)

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Not Hard, But Not Easy

HORIZONTAL

1 Delicate leather trimming.

7 During whose administration was the Slavery Amendment proposed?

12 To maltreat.

14 Born.

16 Sea-weeds, classified as a whole.

17 To reënt.

18 Yellow bugle.

19 Carried.

20 Notion.

21 Part of a cask.

22 Action.

23 Devices for sowing seeds.

26 Drink of the gods.

30 Azo shed.

34 Late-like instrument.

35 Producing motion.

36 "Little has lost her sheep?"

VERTICAL

37 Gloomy.

39 Derivative of pine tar.

41 Animal.

42 Principle.

44 Part in a drama.

45 To tattle.

46 Caterpillar hair.

48 Box.

50 Bed lath.

52 Matching group.

54 Japanese fish.

SATURDAY'S ANSWER

12 Implement used in sewing.

15 To elude.

21 Cherubs.

22 Infested with ergot.

24 Surfeit.

25 Silk.

27 Self.

28 Mug.

29 Scarf.

31 Edge.

32 Vestment.

33 Driving command.

36 Developed rapidly.

37 Gloomy.

39 Derivative of pine tar.

41 Animal.

42 Principle.

44 Part in a drama.

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