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The Vision of a Dream.

BY MARY KYLE DALLAS.

From The Illustrated Home Guest.

CHAPTER III.

"The man knows where to drive," Mrs. — had said. "And there is a servant to show you to the studio."

I had been thinking of the past all day, and it was a luxury to be able to lean back on the cushions and indulge myself in memories. The Italian city was full of life and color, but to my eyes all was gray as the twilight of a rainy day.

I wondered why God had permitted me to live. Was it always to be like this for me—a stranger in a strange land, unloved and unloving? I had such a warm heart; now it was cold as ice within my bosom. I would not weep, but I moaned so tly, hiding my face in my hands. Suddenly the carriage stopped.

"This is the place, madame," the driver said.

I alighted. A sort of concierge opened the door for me and escorted me up long flights of stairs, and left me in the care of a female attendant, who ushered me into a dressing-room, and then, since I had no change of dress, into the studio.

A gentleman with a long, black beard, who wore a velvet coat, and looked at first like a genuine Italian, advanced to greet me, looked at me a moment, and then held out his hand.

"It is Mable!" he said. "I beg your pardon, I should say Mrs. Fair."

Then I recognized Harry Myrtle. I held out both hands.

"I am so glad to see you!" said I. "And no one calls me Mable now. It does me good to hear the name."

We had much to tell each other, though he knew of my grievous sorrows through his parents, with whom he constantly corresponded. He was going home soon to establish himself in New York, and they would live with him. He was very kind, very gentle.

As he painted away at the folds of lace and brocade he talked constantly, and I was glad indeed that I had found one friend again. I went home in better spirits, and I looked forward to my next sitting with pleasure. I had many. I am sure that Harry prolonged them as much as he possibly could. When they were over the attendant served a charming luncheon, and waited on us delightfully. Harry always put me into the carriage himself, and toward the end of the time he was wont to hold my hand longer than was necessary. I should utter a falsehood if I said that I did not guess that he had either loved me all along, or had fallen in love with me anew, and I knew that he would one day ask me to be his wife. What I should answer I could not tell myself. I still loved my husband. I should never love Harry Myrtle as I had him. But I was so lonely, so miserable, and the life before me seemed so hopeless that I dreaded to face it. I resolved nothing.

One day I said to myself: "I will be true to Frank until we meet in a better world." The next I faltered, saying to myself that he would not wish me to be solitary and wretched, that I had no right to refuse myself the love and protection of a good man. Thus the last sitting came. At its close he came and knelt at my feet, taking

both hands in his.

"I told you everything that I felt years ago," he said. "I have felt it all ever since. There was some one you liked better then, but you are all alone in the world now."

For a moment there was silence, then I said:

"I have only half a heart to give you, Harry."

"I am content," he said. "And now I have a proposition to make: Marry me at once."

"At once?" I said. "What do you call at once?"

"Literally at once," said he. "To-day, this hour."

"What nonsense!" said I.

"No, indeed," he said. "I know you too well. You will go home and reflect. You will say that you had resolved to die a widow, and that you must remain one. You will write to me to tell me so. You will run away, perhaps. No, I have succeeded better than I dreamed that I could, and I shall not lose the advantage I have gained if I can help it. Now for my plan: In one of the apartments of this old residence lives just now an American clergyman whom I know very well indeed. I have also an intimate friend in the next studio. I will apprise the clergyman of our intention, Madeline, the woman who attends upon my sitters, will go with us; my friend will be best man; and without fuss or formality, or dress-making or bother of any sort, we will become man and wife. For awhile we will find rooms in this building. They have a pretty suite unoccupied, and after awhile we will return to America together."

I could not help laughing a little.


"Your clergyman would think me crazy if I came to him to be married in the morning, in these gorgeous borrowed feathers," said I, "and your friend would be shocked."

"The clergyman neither knows nor cares anything about dress," said Harry. "I will explain to my friend, who is an Italian, and romantic enough to understand me. Anything the 'Signor Artist' does is right in Madeline's eyes. We are not in America, remember."

By nature I yield. I hate resistance, and though this seemed very strange, and out of the question at first, when he had talked to me as he did for a long while, urging me by every plea he could think of to comply with his request, I began to feel that he was not proposing such a singular thing after all, that my village girl's ideas of right and wrong made me believe so, and that it was true that if people loved each other it could not matter what dress they wore. There was, after all, no one to trouble about what I did. To my employer I was a paid companion, nothing more. She would be vexed at my sudden departure, perhaps; but I was not even sure about that, for she often wished that she had some one about her who was "lively and could sing;" and so I gave in, and Harry, still in his velvet coat, hastened to bring his friend to the studio, to inform Madeline of what was about to transpire, and to notify the clergyman.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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