

Ladies' STORY Column.

VERLIE MASON'S HEART.

BY LIZZIE M. MULHERRN.



LITTLE dark, elfin face, a mass of tawny, waving hair, a pair of deep, dark, luminous eyes, looking half-bravely, half-shyly into the grave, proud, yet kindly face of Warren Eversleigh, as if mutely pleading for welcome.

She was very lonely—very desolate, poor little girl! as she stood there in her simple mourning-dress, worn for her father, whom she had left sleeping in a foreign land.

His last words to her had been: "Go to Warren Eversleigh, Verlie, when I am gone. He was a true and loyal friend to me, and he will be the same to my child. Tell him I sent you and that will be enough. You will do this, Verlie?"

Verlie had given her promise and had kept it, and Warren Eversleigh looked at her, a strange tenderness dawning in his eyes, and then:

"You are welcome to Eversleigh—very welcome, little one, for your father's sake and your—your mother's as well," he said, and then he bent his stately head, and, taking her face between his hands, kissed her gently on her low, broad brow.

She was very little more than a child, and scarcely dreamed all that the kiss meant, for she had never heard the romance of Warren Eversleigh's early life—never heard of the passionate love he had given her mother—her fair, young mother, who had died when her own baby eyes first saw the light—never dreamed that this grave man of thirty-eight still treasured a tress of long, brown, silken hair among his most precious mementoes of the past.

He was not a handsome man, this Warren Eversleigh; even in the heyday of his life he had not been that, but he was one whom all men honoured and trusted—a man to whom women and children would turn instinctively in danger, or in seeking a friend in the time of need.

His was a brave and loyal heart, and his early pain and disappointment, instead of warping his nature, had purified and strengthened it.

"There is some one yet to welcome you, Verlie—I may call you Verlie, for you seem a child to me, though you are—seventeen, is it not? You will be friends, I hope, for this is to be your home, for some time at least—seeing the expression that crossed her face—then, with a smile that seemed to warm her heart; "Child, your father sent you to me. You have fulfilled his wish in the letter, are you not willing to do so in the spirit? He knew I would do what was best for you, can you not trust me?"

An answer hovered on her lips, and then the window that led to the balcony was opened, the silken draperies pushed aside, and a woman entered the room—a woman tall, slim, and stately, with a face of almost flawless loveliness, and a wealth of red-gold hair crowning her dainty head.

She came forward with a slow, undulating motion that somehow made Verlie Mason think of a snake, though realizing her beauty with quick, artistic eye, as she came to her side.

"This is my cousin, Miss Barton. Ione, this is the child of friends tried and true. Don't you think we can make her happy with us?"

"We can at least try," Ione answered, as she took the girl's hand in hers, and drawing her toward her, laid her warm red lips to Verlie's shy mouth.

That was the beginning of the first brightness that had ever crossed Verlie Mason's young life.

For many years her father had been a querulous invalid, who could hardly bear her from his sight; and continual attendance on an irritable person, no matter how much beloved, is certainly not conducive to cheerfulness.

But her life was very bright at Eversleigh, and she blossomed in her happiness till she was almost pretty.

Wherever she went Frank Barton was at her side—Frank Barton, Ione's brother, whose home was at Eversleigh as well, and had been for years.

He was a very handsome man, this Frank Barton, and a genial companion, liked by men and women in general, less for his laughing eyes and handsome face than his gay, debonaire manner.

He and Verlie were standing together, beneath the shadow of drooping trees, and from a window overlooking the glade Warren Eversleigh was watching them with an undefinable expression in his eyes.

"Undefinable! Well, not perhaps to one who, leaning on the balcony, half-hidden by its vine-wreathed column, let her eyes rest on his face with an expression of mingled pain and passion—Ione Barton.

Her red-gold head was drooping, her attitude listless, but suddenly she drew her slender form to its full height, her dainty head was thrown back, and a greenish light shot into her eyes.

"I must have been a fool," she said, "not to have seen it before! My God can it be possible that this little pipy-looking girl can win without an effort what I have tried to win for years? No, no! I love wealth and position, but were Warren Eversleigh to lose his bright light I still would love him. Oh, my darling, my darling!—holding out her hands in the passion and pain of the moment—" must I lose you before I win you?"

Just then a burst of musical, girlish laughter rung out on the summer air, and Ione's face darkened.

"She will never come between me and my love—I have sworn it, and I will keep my oath. I would perjure my soul and risk my salvation, for his arms to once encircle me, his lips to meet mine in a passion of love."

She left the balcony and entered the house, and a few minutes later glided up to Warren Eversleigh's side.

"They are a well-matched couple, are they not?" she said, her eyes following his to where Frank and Verlie still stood; "wedding-cards will be next in order."

Her companion turned at her words.

"What do you mean, Ione? Verlie is too young," Ione laughed.

"Too young to be loved or to learn to love? Neither one nor the other. Love has come to her and she has nestled him to her heart. There is only one shadow on her sweet love-dream, and that is— Oh, Warren, you will not be annoyed if I tell you?"

"Annoyed? Even in the gathering gloom she could see the unwatched pallor of his face, though his voice was perfectly steady.

"What is it," he said, "this shadow on her happiness? Can I remove it, Ione?"

"It is this," Ione answered slowly, "she thinks that somehow you are not pleased about it. She is singularly sensitive, and without your sanction, she would not be happy, even with Frank's adoration, for it is something very like that, is it not? He is in earnest this time."

To tell the truth, as far as he was capable of loving anyone but himself, Frank Barton loved Verlie Mason, but his nature was light as his manner was genial, and the full power of divine passion would be a sealed book to him through life, its power of suffering and self-abnegation something never understood and perfectly incomprehensible.

"How do you know this, Ione?" Warren said, referring to what she had said.

"She is singularly childish in some things," Ione answered, "and she told me so."

"She will not feel so after this," he said. "I am glad you told me, Ione."

Glad she told him, and yet all that night she could hear him pacing his room with restless footsteps, fighting the bitter battle he had fought once before—fighting it inch by inch, till his strength of will conquered.

So roses came, and roses faded, and winter snow lay white upon the ground; but a strange, hunted look had crept into Verlie Mason's clear dark eyes, and the ready smile on her lips seemed to contradict the unrest of her manner.

One evening Ione sought her in the quaint old library, and found her kneeling before the glowing embers of the old-fashioned fire.

The firelight gleamed on her pale little face and misty eyes, that seemed heavy with unshed tears, as Ione sunk down gracefully beside her.

"Look, Verlie," she said, holding out her slim white hand, on which a diamond solitaire gleamed in the firelight, shooting out its rays in glittering splendour, "is it not beautiful? Oh, Verlie! I am so happy. Do you not wish me happiness?" Warren and Ione—

"Every happiness. Yes; oh, yes, but—but, oh, Ione, my head aches, and I feel—"

"She had risen from her knees as she spoke, and as the last words left her lips she reeled blindly forward, held out her hands with a low, gasping cry, and fell white and senseless at Ione's feet.

Next day dawned bright and clear, the ground crisp and hard, the sky overhead blue and bright.

"An ideal winter day, and just the day for runners," Frank Barton said. "Who is for the pond to-day? This question is only put for courtesy, let it be understood, for no one can say nay."

Ione laughed. "Will you come, Warren? I know Verlie is always ready; you are the only demurrer at any time."

"I will not demur this time. It is too fine a day to be indoors, so I am at your service," he answered.

So, as no one said nay, an hour later the quartette were among the pleasure-seekers on the ice.

Ione watched Verlie in wonder.

Was this girl, with cheeks aglow and eyes like stars, and whose laugh rung out each little while like tinkling music, the same little pale thing who had lain senseless at her feet in the glow of the firelight the evening before?

To tell the truth, Ione was half-frightened at the bold game she was playing; but Warren Eversleigh was going away in a few days on business that would detain him for some time, and she would watch well till then.

Verlie was standing beside Frank when Ione shot past them, a glittering vision in royal-blue velvet and snowy ermine, with cheeks like roses and eyes like violets, her red-gold hair falling in heavy waves beneath her white-plumed, velvet skating cap.

"A race—a race!" someone cried, as Warren Eversleigh followed at the same flying speed; and then, from a broken oak on the bank above a limb came smashing down, and Warren Eversleigh lay white and motionless on the ice, the red blood streaming from a jagged wound on his temple.

And then, quick as a meteor, a slender form had shot from Frank Barton's side, and a dark-eyed girl with pallid face and horror-filled eyes was kneeling at his side, and had raised his head to her shoulder.

Then Ione knelt down beside him.

His eyes opened and rested on Ione, and then they turned to Verlie.

"Darling—darling, I must speak," he said. "Oh, my precious one, bend down and kiss me once. Soon another will claim them all, and I will be alone—ah, God so utterly alone."

Verlie glanced at Ione, and it seemed she read the truth in her beautiful, treacherous eyes.

"If that there must be a mistake all round, Ione," she said.

And then she bent her head and laid her lips to Warren's brow.

"Warren—Warren! speak to me again. Did you call me your darling? Speak to me, beloved. Oh, God, he is dead! Warren—Warren!" she cried in a frenzy.

Helping hands were plenty now.

"He is not dead," some one said, "only unconscious. He must be got home at once, and his injuries attended to. No one can tell much till the doctor comes."

He was far from dead, however, and in two weeks was pronounced out of danger, and then he sent for Verlie.

"I want you to forgive me, little one, for what I said that day—to forgive me and forget my words. I was scarcely conscious of what I said, and I would not have pained your tender heart for all this earth could give me."

"She was a brave little thing in her own way, and she showed it now."

"Do you mean you are sorry you called me "darling," while I— Oh, I was so glad—so proud! Oh, Warren, Warren! do you not understand? He must have been blind had he not read the truth in her tender eyes."

"Can I call you darling?" he whispered low. "Do you mean, Verlie, that no one else has a better right? Sweet-heart! sweetheart!"

"No one else has a better right," she answered softly, "and do you think you will always call me it?"

"And she could be generous as well, this Verlie Mason, for she never told him the story of Ione, and the diamond ring, but only thanked God for the gift of his love, as he folded her close in his arms, his own forever more."

LONDON AND PARIS FASHIONS.

SOME SPECIALLY CHIC SPRING STYLES.

(SEE FASHION PLATE, PAGE 521.)

THE sketches for the fashion plate this week are from costumes made by one of the most popular London firms, and represent in a very striking fashion the latest and most tasteful novelties of the season.

No. 1 is a simple foulard gown in petunia and white, trimmed with white lace and velvet of a darker shade than the flower on the silk. The skirt is draped in graceful folds and trimmed with lace and ribbon velvet. The bodice is slightly full yet fitting the figure. It has a lace vest and a shaped piece down the back of the bodice. The pretty hat worn with this gown is made of fine white straw, trimmed with feathers and ribbon to match the colours of the gown.

No. 2 is a most becoming coat made in black velvet. It is very long in the skirt which is out in deep tabs, edged all round with narrow feather trimming and bright jet. The fronts are loose, opening over a very handsome beaded waistcoat, the whole being lined with rich corded silk in a deep shade of heliotrope. The bonnet worn with this coat is of pale heliotrope velvet and feathers.

No. 3 is a charming gown for afternoon wear, made in a soft dove coloured fancy poplin, with a satin check. The skirt is slightly draped, and trimmed round the bottom with two narrow cross-way frills, each being piped with light moss-green velvet. The bodice is made in a most becoming style with two narrow frills round the hips to match the skirt. Half the front of the bodice is made of green velvet, the other side being formed of graceful folds of poplin. The trimming is of rose-pink crepe de chine, finely tacked and drawn into the waist. The hat is a fawn straw trimmed with feathers to match.

For spring and early summer wear I saw some pretty fancy spot materials in various shades, the skirts laced up the sides, and skirts of foulé, in cornflower blue and all the new shades, handsomely braided. A very effective diagonal twill in a pretty shade of réséda, with panels of bengaline, and a handsome costume of the new coté in a delicate shade of grey, the front of the skirt cut in tabs, edged with cord over a flounce of silk, and full fan back. A fine cashmere fawn cloth, profusely embroidered with cream and brown appliqué, and trimmed with bengaline silk to match, and a printed pongee silk, with a flounce across the front, and trimmed with ribbon. An extremely handsome costume is of striped silk, trimmed on the skirt and bodice with beaded fringe; the yoke of the bodice is trimmed with gimp.

A pretty bonnet of Tuscan straw is trimmed with gold tinsel ribbon and foliage, and stylish little pinnacle turbans, with velvet rosettes in any two colours and sprays. An extremely becoming hat has a brim of gathered yellow gauze, lightly covered with black lace, and an openwork jet crown. It is trimmed with yellow wheat-ears, and finished off by black-velvet strings.

In the mantle department some remarkably stylish goods are shown, a fashionable French cape, with braided V-shaped yoke back and front, and another, with the yoke trimmed with jet and jet fringe, and pinked-out edge. A specially handsome cape of fawn cloth, with a V-shaped yoke of brown velvet appliqué, edged with gold, and a handsome coaching or driving cape, with a yoke of gold braid are lovely. This latter is sure to be very popular, as the style is perfect, and the material novel, being similar to that used for gentlemen's overcoats. Long travelling cloaks of navy, fawn, or grey, with yokes of silver or gold embroidery, and a pretty little black jacket, with revers of silk, which can be worn open or closed, are very useful goods.

A writer in an English journal says:—"You may be interested in hearing of a pretty idea for bridesmaids' presents I saw carried out the other day. It was at a very pretty and smart country wedding, at which the bridesmaids were dressed in ivory and daffodil coloured silk, trimmed with gold passementerie, and carried lovely posies of daffodils, and the bridegroom's gifts to them were so in character with their frocks, and so pretty and artistic altogether, that I could not help writing to tell you about them, knowing how interested you always are in novelties, especially wedding ones. They were large cream gauze fans, edged with lace, and carved ivory framework, and on the gauze was painted a dainty group of daffodils, and near to them the initial letters of the bride and bridegroom's names in gold. The fans were finished off with long bows of yellow ribbon and were greatly admired."

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