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# The Lady of the Manor

By K. TYNAN, Author of "Dick Pentreath," Etc.

**H**ALF the male creatures in the places were in love with Miss Flora, who was staying at the Hotel of the Golden Lion. She was quite a well-known person in Portel Saint Louis by this time, and was a guest to be welcomed with effusion by M. Jean Blanc, of the Golden Lion, since invariably she brought many other guests in her train.

Women who were neglected when she was by were accustomed to say that if Flora Ingestre did not hurry up she would find herself left some day. They hinted at crow's feet and grey hairs. It was hard to think of either in association with Miss Flora's damask-rose cheek and locks of chestnut; but it was true that she had been leading her lovers and her aunt, Miss Winchester, no end of a dance for at least eight years.

She was an orphan, and had been the little lady of the Manor of Uppington-on-Sherborne for longer than she could remember.

She had taken to the duties of her estate more like a boy than a girl, Miss Winchester often said in a way half-complacent, half-regretful. Of late she had begun to say that if Flora never married the estate would not suffer as long as she lived—but she said it in a mournful way. If Flora Ingestre died unwell, the Manor and all appertaining thereto would pass away to a distant branch of the family, the head of which had not commended himself to staid and decent people.

Of course, it was absurd of Flora not to marry, seeing that she was in the heyday of her beauty, and had troops of lovers wherever she went. But then she had shown herself so hard-hearted regarding them; she had seen so many men relinquish their unprofitable pursuit of her, and console themselves with less cruel ladies, that her aunt might be forgiven her pessimistic attitude.

Amid all the golden youth that dangled after Miss Flora, Robert Herrick was the one who hardly counted with the spectators. Indeed, his passion for the beautiful girl was such a dumb passion, so well kept in check, that no one was certain about it except perhaps Miss Flora herself. Indeed, he was not to be counted of the golden youth, seeing that he was still, at the age of thirty, an all but briefcase barrister, very slow about making the mark which men used to prophesy of him in his college days.

He had been in love with Flora Ingestre from the very first day he met her. Perhaps the hopeless love had had as much to do with making him serious

as anything else, for he had been merry—and he had still the sense of humour despite his gravity.

He was in love with Flora Ingestre; and as things were he had no intention of telling her so. Year after year he said to himself that he would follow her no longer when the Long Vacation came and she went abroad, that he would not be drawn by the little notes, sweet and imperious, bidding him attend her and her aunt when they were in town; that he would give up running down to Uppington, where his friend, Paul Leicester, had taken a pretty house after his marriage, and where he was always welcome.

Why, any day he might hear that she had accepted one of her brigade of lovers. If he should hear that, he would put a bullet through his head, or commit another kind of suicide by proposing to Mary Grey, little Mrs. Leicester's sister, who, he knew, looked kindly on him.

He had been accustomed to hold his own will in respect, but there was no doubt that so far as Flora Ingestre was concerned he was weaker than water.

When she was surrounded by her court she hardly seemed to notice him. Yet, she had a way of sending him a glance which drew him back to her at the moment when he had settled himself to leave her. It was a serious glance in the midst of gaiety that seemed to tell of a secret sympathy between them. She had worn his flowers. But then she had worn other men's flowers. She hardly seemed to notice him, yet if she had occasion to speak her voice was kind.

The season at Portel Saint Louis was at its height. This year Robert Herrick had not gone to the Hotel of the Golden Lion, which was crowded to the doors, but had taken a lodging in a little white-walled, green-shuttered cottage, owned by a tiny brown-skinned, wrinkled peasant woman, who made him excellent soups and omelettes and could cook vegetables to a marvel. He could be solitary when he liked in the little house, could hide himself away in its garden behind the scarlet runners and the gorgeous hollyhocks, so that no eyes should perceive him except the little, bright, wondering eyes of his hostess as she watched him from her open French kitchen, where she seemed to be cooking nearly all the day.

They were very gay at the Hotel as usual. Dances, theatricals, games on the sand, coach-driving, went on day after day. The gaieties did not attract Robert Herrick, or if they attracted him, they only called to be repulsed.

Indeed, great as was his desire to be in Flora's neighbourhood, it was almost counterbalanced by his irritation at the crowds by whom she was surrounded. He was not light-hearted enough for their gaiety, he said to himself, and went away for long walks alone, quite unconscious that a good many bright eyes looked regretfully the way he had gone.

The only place where he saw Flora was on the sands, where all Portel Saint Louis was to be found between the hours of nine and half-past twelve in the mornings. He seldom did more than lift his hat as he passed by where she sat on a folding-chair on the sands, a white umbrella over her head, and her little court about her.

The conveniences were much relaxed at Portel Saint Louis. The bathing was the great spectacle, the great diversion of the place. To look on at it was as good as a play; and every morning the sands, and the sand hills above, were crowded with spectators like the amphitheatre and gallery of a theatre. The ladies wore wonderful costumes, usually concealed by peignoirs till they were at the water's edge, though all were not so reticent. And there were the strangest sights to be seen, invaluable to the comic artist, although one grew used to them in time and was hardly tempted to smile.

Flora Ingestre did her bathing daintily and delicately, as she did everything. She had her bathing-tent pitched at the furthest possible point of the beach, well out of the reach of the lorgnettes and the opera-glasses. It pleased Robert Herrick, who was an ascetically-minded person, and not over well-pleased to see the ready way in which others of his countrywomen fell in, more than fell in, with continental ideas.

The coast is at times, unless the tide is well in, a somewhat dangerous one, with currents to sweep the unwary bather out to sea.

Herrick was an excellent swimmer, and he constituted himself an unsuspected guardian of the lady he loved. He would wait about on the sand hills till he saw her go to her bathing-tent. Then he would go in himself, keeping as near as he dared to the chestnut head in the water, and would not leave till he had seen that she was safely back in her tent.

One morning as he walked across the sands he passed close to two French girls, with whom he had some slight acquaintance. One of them, Therese D'Aurigny, interested him. She was very plain-looking, dark and fat, with

lumpish features, but she had beautiful eyes.

"Ah, Mademoiselle Therese," he said. "How industrious you are! Always all your beautiful embroidery. You put the idle people here to shame."

He took up the strip of fine linen which she was working exquisitely with a design of grapes and wheat.

"It is for the poor churches, Monsieur," she said. "You know we have a confraternity of ladies to attend to the needs of the poor churches."

Before he answered her he looked towards the place where Flora Ingestre had been sitting. There was the usual little commotion that attended her leaving of her admirers. It was time to secure a bathing-box for himself.

Mademoiselle Therese's beautiful eyes followed the direction of his.

"Ah!" she said in a low voice, "Mademoiselle Flora is to bathe. She is charming, is she not? And to-day the lovers are inconsolable because she has accepted the Captain Haliburton."

Her eyes were on her embroidery again, but his start did not escape her. She knew without looking that he had turned red and pale. She forgave him when he left her in a somewhat unmannerly fashion with hardly a word of leave-taking.

"Is it so, Therese?" said her sister Marie, who was placidly knitting beside her. "Thou didst not tell me, although I am, too, interested in Mademoiselle Flora. When did the betrothal take place? But that great Captain Haliburton, I do not like him. Just a great schoolboy, not interesting enough for Mademoiselle Flora."

"The story is in everyone's mouth," Therese said, turning her head away uneasily. "Shall we not bathe? Everyone is going in."

From a mere force of habit Robert Herrick went to his bathing-box, and enclosed there from the eyes, eyes, eyes, of which the beach seemed made up this morning, sheltered from the glare of the sun on the sea and sand, he sat down on the narrow seat and leaned forward with his head in his hands. So far as he was capable of feeling anything at the moment, he was feeling gratitude for the darkness and quietness of his small place of refuge.

He ought to have prepared for it, he said to himself. Was not Haliburton always by her side? Though he had not seemed to look her way, his jealous eyes had noted everything. It was true that since Haliburton had come a month ago he had pushed out the others. A big, empty-headed, foolish, brave soldier. It was incredible that Flor



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