

If I Were King

JUSTIN HUNTLY M'CARTHY

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"One would say I were a fool to let such occasion slip through my ten commandments. But I have learned a thing called honor, which I must not lose for the sake of my lady."

Huguette flung herself in front of him and stopped his restless walk.

"Francis! Francis!"

"Yes, child, yes."

"What does it matter to you what they do with the king?"

"Abess, I must have a finger in this pie. Abess, for the old sake's sake, will you keep me a secret?"

The girl looked up at him lovingly.

"I will always do your bidding."

"I have a mind to play my part in this enterprise. I am the king of the Cockshells and I have returned to authority. Give me your pilgrim's gown, girl, and stop me a secret."

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A HEART DIVIDED.

(Copyright, 1901, by W. R. Hearst.)

Clarisse, the dancer, was cross and impatient tonight. The awkward, fumbling service of a new and timid maid was surely sufficient to irritate any one, especially a charming danseuse like herself, whose lightning changes were the talk of the profession.

It was a bitter humiliation to have been balked and delayed by the fumbling aid of a green and utterly incapable assistant such as the pale, big-eyed Lucy had proved herself to be. The lying, deceitful little impostor! How she dared to so misrepresent herself!

Fanting and perspiring from her recent exertions, the beautiful Clarisse, once in her dressing room, lost no time in delivering her mind to the trembling offender.

She talked hoarsely and rapidly, punctuating her speech freely with profanity. Her brilliant eyes flashed scornfully upon the now thoroughly vanquished maid, whose pale, frightened prettiness contrasted strangely with her own aggressive beauty.

Lucy was small and willowy and dainty. She had the air of being out of place, in spite of the conventional cap that surmounted her abundant red gold hair.

Once, at a particularly coarse imprecation, she winced and put up her hand suddenly as if to protest.

She had laugh of amusement burst from the dancer's mouth. "Oh! I suppose the language shocks my little lady! Well, you don't have to hear it after tonight. You can just bank on that. Come on, girl, get me ready. I've got to be out of here in fifteen minutes. Promised to dine with a gentleman one of the best of the city."

"You please—and he's coming at 10:30. Talk about your tiptop dandies—Geel! but he's a winner."

"Lord, girl, haven't you unhooked it yet? Here! lemme do it. I can't wait all night. You go on and hang up the things—put them in the trunk! Behind the sheet! Can't you see? Gimme that blue silk skirt—there on the chair! Some one's at the door. I'll bet that's him now. Go and open it. Can't you hear the knock? Don't stand there with your eyes popping out of your head!"

If the face of the new maid was pale before, it was perfectly white when she took the card which the stage hand gave her. A great trembling seized her so that the bit of pasteboard fell from her fingers. Stopping to pick it up she stumbled against the door.

Clarisse turned sharply at the delay. "Good Lord, what next? Can't you bring the card? Here; let's see it—yes, it's him. Go out and tell him I'll be ready in five minutes."

Once outside the door the new maid seemed to take on a different spirit. Her shoulders lifted, her head went up, a gleam of strong determination lit her face.

She approached quietly and touched the arm of "Mr. Felton!"

He started violently. His eyes fixed themselves amazedly upon the small white face of Lucy.

"Clarisse will be out in five minutes, sir."

Then, as the man still stared, dumfounded, the maid put her hand to her head and, with a dexterous movement, whisked off the red-gold coiffure, cap and all. The hair was soft and brown.

"Perhaps," she said, in a voice that quivered in spite of its affected calm, "perhaps the resemblance is more striking now!"

"Louise! Dismay, mortification, terror, shuddered across the young man's features."

Then masculine authority asserted itself. "Louise! How did you come here? What are you doing in this place? Tell me what this means!"

"It means," she said, shaking herself free from his stern grasp of her shoulder, "it means that I acted as that dancer, maid tonight. That I know that she is, and that I understand—everything!"

He drew her aside into a darkened passageway and spoke in low, agitated tones. "Louise, my foolish child, what mad pretense is this? What wild thing do you imagine?"

"Imagine! She acted him dauntlessly now. The color was rushing back into her face. "I imagine nothing! I know. Know for a certainty the cruel thing which I have heard rumored for months, but which I could not believe until I saw this! The girl who had been dead for years and again, protesting that you could have no thought of any woman but me. Oh, you have said it over and over and over! And yet—this new infatuation is possible to you with our wedding day set for next week! You can love this creature!"

He hesitated. "Louise, when will you women understand? Can you possibly delude yourself into believing that it is love I feel for that dancer? Don't you know?"

She shook off his hand, resolutely. "Oh! it is you men who do not understand, who will not understand! You think you can keep the love of a pure woman, the influence you find in life around you, and while you indulge your propensities for the lower. It cannot be! I tell you it is impossible! You must choose me or the other. You cannot serve both. The lower will eventually drag you down and make you sensible to the higher. It is a heart divided against itself. It cannot stand. I have come here tonight, not to make a scene, but to assure you, since I know the truth, that you are no longer bound to me. I give you your freedom."

"Louise, you shall not be so harsh, so unreasonable. Would you cast me off because I have loved another woman? My love is no greater than that of other men. It is my misfortune—you should help me to fight it—not leave me to sink under its weight. Don't you know that my hope of safety lies in my love for you? I need you—I want your purity, your strength to help me to resist the temptations of the world. Indeed am I lost! Oh, can you not understand?"

But she still held him back resolutely. "As your wife," she said, firmly, "I should demand your entire homage, your absolute devotion. A division of interest would be impossible. You understand me. I am sure. Are you willing to make the choice?"

He stood and looked upon her, so small, so frail and sweet and yet so firm. And she gazed steadily back at him.

The voice of Clarisse sounded suddenly from the door. "Lucy! Lucy! Lord, where is the girl, anyhow?"

Louise still faced her lover, calmly, unflinchingly. "It is for you to choose," she said.

Joked From His Grave.

London Chronicle: The fourth Marquis of Hertford is reported to have said: "I should like to see the faces of my relations when my will is read." A rich man who has just died at Berlin was credited with a similar wish as to his codicil. He had numerous relations, but treated all who approached him as fortune hunters. He left a will which was to be opened immediately and the codicil to be opened after the funeral. The will said: "Every member of my family who shall abstain from attending my funeral is to receive 300 marks." As a result the funeral was attended by his only son, a distant cousin. On the codicil being opened it was found to enact that the residue of his fortune was to be divided among those who, notwithstanding the loss of the 300 marks, attended his funeral. Hence the housekeeper gets all; but the heirs threaten to dispute the will.

WILLIAM HARRINGTON

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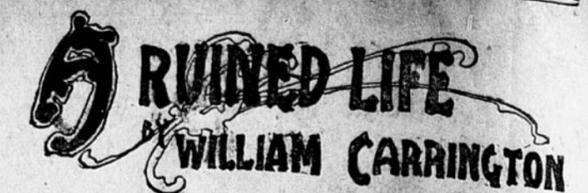
Mignonne grew in the little garden where Rose Edwards sat at work. She had plucked some of it and fastened it to her smooth black hair. Its very fragrance seemed a part of her. At least so Will Harrington thought as he stood looking at her.

"Mignonne," he said, stopping toward her, "mignonne."

He would not have spoken so to one who would have quite understood him, but she, who had gathered all she knew at the humble school of the small Vermont town, had never heard that mignonne means "little darling." It was no new thing for him to speak softly when he addressed her, and she looked up rather surprised nor startled. She said, "Yes, Mr. Harrington, I love mignonne."

Just then he was inclined to forget everything but that she was pretty. He was more or less a man of the world, prided himself on his family and spent a generous income in a genteel way. To his great surprise he found amusement and interest this summer in a home that was very dear to his mother in years gone by. It was true he had fallen in love with a country girl, humble even among simple people in 1770 position, for she was poor and the grandchild of two old people who could leave her nothing.

Will Harrington drew Rose toward him



ROSE, DE MY MIGNONNE?

and looked down into her eyes and said: "Who is the man that danced upon her. She blushed and trembled. Then he spoke more plainly: "I love you, Rose; will you be my wife?" She answered "Yes."

Afterward they sat just so, his arm about her waist, her work dropped in her lap under her small brown hands. Then again he broke the charm of a hard old year with a nasal twang. "Rose," it said, "you come in tea and 'praps, Mr. Harrington, you better come tea."

But the gentleman addressed declined and took his way homeward. Walking the country road to the fine home on the hill he thought of many things. His thoughts were not altogether satisfying.

"I shall take Rose away," he muttered. "These people will be nothing to us. We will travel a year or two and she will acquire the necessary manners."

When they parted he put a ring upon her finger and promised to come back in the autumn. They were to correspond, of course—and that was a pleasant thing to Rose. And he left her with moist eyes and a little bunch of mignonne.

The summer holidays had ended and the fashionable world had come to the city again to keep its winter holiday, and Harrington found everything as of yore, and as many gay beauties ready to unite upon him. There was an old flirtation, too, which could not well be ended while the lady was so willing it should turn into something more, between Miss Hastings, the belle, and himself. At first he did not mention Rose to his friends, because there was time enough. At last, because it was an awkward business, being put off so long. And Rose wrote too many letters and put them into coarse yellow envelopes. Her grammar was none too carefree. Still he smoothed them over, and would have gone to the Vermont town to keep his troth in the autumn had not Rose written him in the fulness of her reconciliation a loving letter in which she spoke of the trials of her grandparents and of her joy in looking forward to the time when she would have a home to which to welcome them. That letter was never answered. He burned it with a savage oath, and that night proposed to Miss Hastings.

In a month they were married, and there

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