

The Lincoln Courier.

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Professional Cards.

BARTLETT SHIPP,

ATTORNEY AT LAW.

LINCOLN, N. C.

Jan. 9, 1891.

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Godey's Lady's Book.

AN EASTER ROSE.

BY CLARISSA DOWNS.

DR. IRWIN looked straight ahead of him, not even seeing the blue sky that seemed to fix his eyes between the twitching ears of his favorite horse, "Dandy." In truth, the young physician was vexed, and he bit his lip, and he came wisely silent, a virtue not often accompanying youth and high spirit.

But when one's opponent is a wilful girl, with the most fascinating dark eyes, that have wrought havoc in the affections of the earnest man beside her, still more is it praise worthy to maintain the silence praised as golden.

Mabel Lyle stole a look at her companion, and continued in her sweet, cool voice.

"Of course, if I wanted to be real good, I would give up every gayety, and please the Rev. Mr. Irwin, your brother, by keeping Lent in the most orthodox manner; but I cannot conceive why I should be expected to become pious, because my sister married your brother, the said reverend sire. Moreover, neither you, or the Rev. Dick, became so ardent as to my salvation until very recently. How does it all happen, may I ask?"

"That is not true, Bel, and you know it," he returned in a low voice. "There has never been a moment since I knew you, that I have been indifferent to anything that concerns your welfare."

More he will not permit himself to say, for long ago, three whole weeks ago, she had put him on probation. Even now his tone brings a flush to her cheek and a warning glance. "You trench on forbidden ground; but, seriously, why should you object to taking me to a little innocent card-party this evening?"

"I have said before I will gladly take you thither, if it lies in my power. I may be called away—"

"You will make it convenient, you mean," she interrupts, lightly. "Mabel! I have ever wilfully deceived you? My only objection to this innocent card-party, as you call it, is from the report I hear concerning it. Miss Hosbrook intends converting it later into a dance. She has even connived at getting Rhoda to attend it, and thus involve the rector's wife in a frolic. Poor, little Rhoda is quite upset by it all."

"Why do you persist in calling Rhoda little? She is much taller than I am," said Mabel, with an evident desire to lead him away from the other subject.

"Rhoda always seems to me like a beautiful child," he replied, a little tenderness creeping into his voice. "It is a great pity you did not marry her, instead of the Rev. Dick espousing her," said Mabel, recklessly. "She would have made you such a clinging, meek, little wife."

"Mabel! if I did not know you to be otherwise, I should call you the most heartless, cruel flirt I ever knew. It is not enough that you torment me, but you must speak scornfully of Dick and Rhoda. I do not know you in this mood."

"Stop, then, and put me down in the road, as you did Dick, junior, last week, when he behaved like a fiend. I can walk home."

"By jove, I have half a mind to do it!" muttered the doctor, his eyes sparkling, then suddenly catching the laughing, half tender light of the girl's eyes, he gave himself a shake, and tried to recover his old control.

"There! I hope you are satisfied. You have made me angry."

"No, I am not, Will," with a sudden seductive earnestness. "I did not want you to be vexed. You get so impatient. I really want you to take me to-night to this card-party. You won't leave me to Sherman Hosbrook's tender mercies, for I shall have to accept him—as escort, if you fail me."

"Oh!" Dr. Irwin's exclamation spoke volumes. "Then you are resolved to go?"

"Oh, yes! I must go."

"Then I will take you," in a slow, determined tone.

"Oh, thank you, Dr. Irwin," she said, fervently.

"Do you really prefer my escort to his?" he asked suddenly, lifted upon a buoyant wave of hope.

"Yes, just now I do. I am so sorry," with plaintive candor, that sends the vexed color to his forehead again; "but I do not know how I shall feel to-night, or to-morrow. I never can be sure of myself."

"Heaven help the man who pins his faith to any one of your moods," he said, with a certain cool brusqueness he knew how to use at times.

Mabel winced this time, and for a moment remained silent, then she said, as if half pleading an excuse for herself, "Lent came so early this year."

"And Easter is also early," he replied, significantly. Then Mabel Lyle resolved that she hated him. Heavily, determinedly, fervently, everlastingly, despised him!

She was very quiet during the remainder of the drive, and even let her hand linger in his as he helped her from the vehicle, but she was none the less deeply incensed.

Mabel Lyle was a strong contrast to the sister who had married the Reverend Richard Lyle. She had returned from a gay life in the city, upon the death of an aunt, to live in the quiet little country town of Broughton, for her year of mourning.

The rectory, with its quiet routine of duties, its sweet domestic atmosphere, had been very soothing to the girl at first, for she really mourned her aunt, and found little comfort in the worldly solace of having inherited a comfortable fortune in her aunt's estate.

But Mabel had been educated abroad, and grown up after her own sweet will, and Rhoda's contented spirit and contented happiness was incomprehensible to her.

Upon the scene came Mr. Lyle's brother William, a young physician, who, coming to relieve the old physician during the long siege of an epidemic, decided to remain.

It soon became evident to Rhoda and the rector that Mabel had found her heart and its royal master. But the moment Mabel had realized the situation she rebelled vigorously.

What! marry a country doctor? and one who was cold and dispassionate? Who tried to make her yield to his desires? A masterful, determined character—why—why—she despised him one moment, and—yes—Mabel admitted slowly that day, as she took her hat off before the mirror, she admired him intensely as well. But love him? No—no, a thousand times, no! Would he ever unbend, as Sherman Hosbrook had numbered times, to tell her in so many ways of his devotion? Could any one vie with young Hosbrook's tender courtesy; his mode of telling her with his handsome eyes that he adored her?

Then, suddenly, another picture arose before Mabel's mental vision. Serious brown eyes seeking hers, and a low voice, saying with honest fervor.

"You know I love you. I shall not tell you so in words again. I see it annoys you. But at Easter I will take my answer. If it is no, I will go away, and try and live my life bravely still. It yes—ah! Mabel!"

She still heard the thrill of deep gladness with which those last words were uttered. For a moment her face softened, and she dared not steal a glance at her rosy reflection in the glass. Then she tossed her head, saying to herself: "Bah! I should always fancy he was feeling my pulse, or gauging my temperature, and I hate Broughton."

Later in the day she went down stairs, to find on the hall table a lovely bunch of white roses, and lying under them, carelessly, Sherman Hosbrook's card.

She asked the servant who left them, and the girl seemed bewildered somewhat, and replied:

"She had not been to the door, but she guessed Mr. Lyle had taken them in."

Dr. Irwin was absent at the dinner hour, and the Rev. Richard was in an abstracted mood, only looking up once to say: "Did you get your

flowers, Bel? I presume you are to go to Miss Hosbrook's to-night?"

"Yes. Will is to take me," returned Mabel, who rather enjoyed making the younger brother a participant in her transgressions.

Mr. Lyle only sighed gently. Then he said, "Rhoda, my love, please tell Will when he comes in that Mrs. Wilde's babe is quite sick, and she asked me to get him to look in this afternoon."

"You cannot mean the baby, dear," gently corrected Rhoda. "It must be the poor, little deformed girl. Will is so interested in her, he will be very sorry."

But as Mr. Lyle arose to leave the room, he turned to Mabel, as if the resolve cost him an effort.

"Mabel," he said, "I am sorry you have coaxed Will into taking you to-night. I hoped you would both be wise enough to show Miss Hosbrook, who is not a church member, how we look upon Passion Week. It is only two days to Easter. Your persistent disregard of my wishes in the last few weeks has hurt and grieved me beyond measure. I have hesitated a long while in speaking of it, because I have seen Will's desires, and I love my brother. But if this thing is to go on, I can see no future happiness for him or peace for you. I am sorry if I seem harsh, but I can only hope you will both learn, very soon, how unsuited you are to one another."

It was a long speech for Richard Lyle to make to the sister-in-law he really admired. Rhoda looked distressed; but Mabel said slowly: "Do not waste any anxiety on Dr. Irwin's future, I shall have no part in it, I assure you. I do not love him. He would not accept this answer until Easter. I have no secrets from you or Rhoda, even if he has not confided in you as father-confessor. I am sorry to offend you in this matter to-night, but I have gone too far to withdraw."

And she left the room in a stately manner.

"Oh, Dick! she is so offended," cried Rhoda, tearfully.

"If it makes my wife unhappy I shall repent it; but, Rhoda, is a man not to be master in his own house?" asked the rector, something of the doctor's light of sudden indignation in his eyes.

"Oh, yes, dearest; you are always right."

Through some misunderstanding, Sherman Hosbrook appeared at the rectory that Thursday evening, prepared to be Miss Lyle's escort to the informal card-party.

Mabel, radiant with a softened, captivating expression, had just pinned one of her white roses on Dr. Irwin's coat, and the poor man was in a bewilderment of pleasant emotions, watching her slender fingers, when Mr. Hosbrook was announced.

"Promise me to keep this rose, as if it was my last gift," Mabel had said with half-real, half-mock earnestness.

"I will give it to you Easter morn'g," he replied, his eyes looking her through.

"If you do not lose it within an hour," she had returned with abrupt lightness. And then Mr. Hosbrook's voice said:

"All ready, I see, Miss Lyle; how charmingly prompt you are."

"And I have to thank you for these beautiful roses," said Mabel, gracefully, while a look of surprise passed over Dr. Irwin's face, and he compressed his lips to remain silent.

Mr. Hosbrook's countenance betrayed a little confusion, but he only said:

"Then am I de trop? I understood Pauline that Dr. Irwin could not attend the party to-night, owing to some scruples of his brother."

"Miss Hosbrook is only wrong in supposing I would not use my own judgment in the matter. Miss Lyle, however, can now choose between us."

"What an idea!" laughed Mabel; "see, I'll choose you both. Mr. Hosbrook shall also have a rose. And when you part with these roses, understand—you have forever cast yourself from favor." Both are white; it is an equal division.

"I think, however, you have given Dr. Irwin the smaller," said Hosbrook.

"It is a bud, that is the only difference. It will bloom slowly if cherished, and perish in a single hour if crushed or pushed aside."

She looked into Dr. Irwin's eyes as she spoke and read therein all he was suffering in his quiet way; and she was surprised to find she pitied him. She was so merry, and so impartial in her distribution of smiles, that she had both the men in an amiable frame of mind before they reached the scene of the card-party. Her entrance with both her devout attendants created no little amusement among her girl friends, and the evening went merrily.

But Mabel herself felt strangely excited. She had really placed her faith in the bestowal of her two roses. She had foolishly decided upon this test, as one upon which she would hinge her future happiness, because she did not understand her own weak, vacillating heart. She had wept over Richard's words, and then stormed at him, mentally, for saying she was unsuited to Will. At the same time she reiterated her scorn for that poor gentleman heartily. But as for really loving Sherman Hosbrook—well, she could not imagine Sherman in anything save the devoted attitude and a dress coat, and she knew how irksome all this would become to her.

She watched the two men with nervous anxiety to-night, secretly reviling herself for being superstitious about the simple act of dividing two roses between them.

Once she saw a petal float away from Will's bud as he passed her, and was surprised to find her heart beating violently. The card-party, after a time, became, as Dr. Irwin had prophesied, an impromptu dance. To the surprise of all, Mabel refused to join the dancers.

Sherman Hosbrook had lingered about her all the evening, with his devoted air, to the exclusion of all others, but Will was very thankful to find her alone in the library, when he sought her later in the evening.

"Oh, Bel!" he said, dropping into the familiar home name. "I am so glad to find you alone a moment. I've had a call to poor little Bertha Wilde, the washerwoman's child. She suffers frightfully, and I must go at once. You will forgive me? I shall come back for you—"

"No, never mind me. I will get home safely. Good-night." Looking at him sweetly.

"And you are not vexed with me?" "No."

"Oh, Bel! if you could only always be as you are this moment," he said, impetuously, and he caught up one of her white bends and kissed it, then murmuring, "I couldn't help it—I—know you will forgive me." He left her, pleased and agitated as she had never been moved by him before. Why, why, did he not see that she wished to be taken by storm? Some women want little less than assault and battery to win their life-long devotion.

She sat gazing into the glowing fire for some moments, wondering why Sherman Hosbrook did not return. Then she rose, rather wishing it was time to depart. Walking to the threshold of the door she saw Sherman Hosbrook, coming toward her.

"You have lost one of your roses, Miss Lyle," he said, smiling, and bending to pick up a white rose at her feet.

Mabel looked down, and then a shiver passed over her. It was the rose she had given Dr. Irwin, crushed by a careless foot.

"Are you cold?" asked Sherman, tenderly. "Why, you look quite pale. Would you like to return home now?"

"Oh, no! I think some one passed over my prospective grave. Let us go watch the dancing," she said, with a forced laugh.

Later, little Kitty Morgan, a girl with violent red hair, and a great admiration for Sherman Hosbrook, came to Mabel, asking to go home and remain with her all night, since

if she went to her own home she must resign the pleasures of the evening at once, as her father was not pleased to await her pleasure.

Mabel consented, with great reluctance, but with an outward cordiality that put Kitty at ease.

On the way to the rectory Kitty had her own devout admirer, and Mabel, to her dismay, found Sherman Hosbrook harder to repel than she ever supposed. She saved herself from any absolute reply to his importunities, but found herself confronted by a promise to give him an answer in a few days.

Kitty chatted volubly as they prepared to retire. She was sister of the Broughton postmaster, and the postmaster was also agent for the Adams Express Company; and Kitty, being a bit of a gossip, was fully cognizant of all that went on in Broughton.

"What lovely roses those were," she said, as Mabel tossed the bunch aside with a sigh of impatience. "I knew when Dr. Irwin called for them they must be for you. He is the very nicest man I ever knew."

"Dr. Irwin?" Mabel looked up in astonishment.

"Yes. He came from the flowers about two o'clock, and got Tony Gibbs to run over to the rectory with them. I guess he was on a tear after old Mrs. Coates' rheumatism. They say she is just awful!"

Mabel suddenly gathered up the roses and put them in water. How foolish of her to think Sherman Hosbrook had sent them. She remembered now that his card had laid on the hall table for a day or two. What could Will Irwin have thought of her, and why did Sherman accept her thanks? How dishonorable. But what was Kitty saying?

"I do not think Rose Lacy's roses were half so lovely as yours, if Harry Blake is her fiancee. Sherman just coaxed and begged her for one of her roses this evening, and he wore it in his coat, and I—"

"When did Sherman ask for one of her roses," demanded Mabel, a pink spot burning in her cheeks.

"I think you were in the library. You know he had one of your roses when you came in. Of course, we all saw they both wore your flowers. One lover is not enough for you, Bel," with a giggle. "Well Sherman lost the one you gave him, and then he coaxed Rose into giving him one. Rose looked so flattered, she was always half in love with Sherman, anyhow; and Harry Blake was furious. Why, how funny you look, Bel. Did I say anything to vex you?"

"No—no—only, I am not very well. I think my head aches. If—if I could see the doctor to-night, I would get some thing for it."

"I thought I heard the buggy just a moment ago," said Kitty. "Wait a minute."

Mabel stole out into the hall cautiously. She really wanted a few moments alone. Her head did ache, and she was troubled and confused. She hoped the doctor had come in, and gone to bed. She had no real desire to see any one! But she heard him in the lower hall. Leaning a little over the banister, she saw him divest himself wearily of his coat and hat. Then he yawned and sighed heavily. But Mabel fled back to her room. She had seen enough. The rose she had given him was gone.

"Did you see the doctor?" asked Kitty, sleepily.

"He says I will be all right to-morrow," said Mabel, shortly.

III
The next day being "Good Friday," passed very quietly at the rectory.

Mabel had a headache, and, after the morning service, retired to her room. There she resolved upon the fate of her present lovers, and wrote to New York engaging to spend the summer at the shore with friends.

Saturday was a very busy day at the rectory. Thirteen infants were to be baptized at Even-song, the church to be decorated, and a thousand things to keep the rector's wife

[Concluded on last page.]

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