LILLIAN'S . · . · . · LOVER.

BY HELEN FORREST GRAVES.

Oh, I am afraid, said Jessie Morton to herself, "that I have missed my way."

Down in the rocky gorge the Chiquet River roared and foamed; across the snow mantled landscape a red glow of sunset yet lingered: while the black pines and cedars quivered in the wind.

"I wish," added Jessie, "that I had asked that man below which was the right turning to take. But I was afraid of him; he looked so cross."

She was a tall, slim slip of a thing, with blue, whistful eyes, hair of the real Scotch gold, and red lips, that trembled partly with cold, partly with a certain vague terror at the position in which she found herself.

In her hand she carried a heavy bag, for Jessie had no money to pay omnibus hire, or to engage a sleigh at the railway station.

"Suppose," she said to herself, "this lonely road should lead nowhere, except into the woods? Suppose it should conduct me straight into a gypsy camp? For it seems more and more desolate the farther I go. Suppose I should be frozen to death, all alone here, with no helping hand to save me?"

"Take care, child," cried a loud, clear voice. "Do you want to be run over?"

It was no gypsy, nor yet a blackbrown tramp, simply a plump, comfortable woman driving herself in a trim little red cutter. She eyed Jessie curiously through her spectacles. Jessie returned the gaze with interest.

"Please, madam," said Jessie, "can you tell me if I am near Bucknor Hall?"

"Bless me," said the woman, "don't you know? Bucknor Hall was burned down last night, and the old lady was suffocated in the smoke. Friends of yours?"

Jessie put her bag down in the snowy road; she trembled violently.

"No—not exactly friends," she said. "But I was engaged to go there as companion and reader, and—and—Oh, what shall I do now?"

The old lady looked meditatively at the lash of her whip.

"Come from New York?" said she, after a pause.

"Yes—from the Wilberforce Protective Agency. And I spent all my money for the ticket here."

One or two bright round tears detached themselves from the long lashes and rolled slowly down her cheeks.

Mrs. Parkhurst, who prided herself on her knowledge of physiognomy, made up her mind on the spot.

"One thing is very certain," said she "Mrs. Bucknor will never require a companion and reader now. And if you're puzzled what to do next, you had better jump in and go with me."

"Where?" said Jessie.

"Home," said Mrs. Parkhurst.

Now, Jessie Morton herself was not a bad judge of the human face divine, and in the indescribable solitude of this moment, she caught at the welcome idea of shelter and company.

She got into the red cutter, drew the buffalo robe around her shivering form, and nestled close to Mrs. Parkhurst, before she ventured to ask, timidly:

"Where is—home?"

Mrs. Parkhurst shook the reins. The pony darted merrily over the smooth road into the purpling dusk.

"It's the Bassett Military Institue," said she, with a very visible pride. "I'm housekeeper there."

"What!"

"Oh, take care!" scolded Mrs. Parkhurst. "You should hold on tight when we turn those sharp curves. You had very nearly fallen out. Yes, the Bassett Institute. And a fine place it is! I was thinking—if your references turn out what they should be—we might make room for you there. We need a smart young woman in the linen room. I suppose you can do something else besides companioning and reading—eh?"

"Oh, yes!"

"You'd like a place?"

"I must have one."

"Then," said Mrs. Parkhurst, "we'll think of it. Fourteen professors and one hundred and ten boys—that's a family to take care of, isn't it? For the colonel's wife is an invalid, and don't trouble herself about the housekeepin I and my widowed daughter run th whole establishment, and there are ni of us sit down to dinner in the hous keeper's room. There!" as they dro in between two massive stone gate-post into an avenue of rustling tamarack "Do you see that pretty young la gathering holly berries? It's th colonel's daughter, Miss Lillian Bassett

"You've come back, have yo Parkey?" cried a sweet, girlish you voice. "Did you bring my chocola caramels?"

"The candy store was shut up, Mi Lilly."

"Oh, how perfectly shameful!"

And a cluster of glaring red berrie aided by a not unskillful hand, hustle through the air, and hit the housekeep exactly on her nose. But, instead o evincing offense, Mrs. Parkhurst y laughed.

"Isn't she pretty?" said nd such a mad-cap. Well—pe ar- riage will sober her down."

"Is she to be married soon?" asked Jessie.

"We don't quite know," said Mrs. Parkhurst. "But one of the young professors admires her very much, and we think she don't quite dislike him."

Jessie looked wistfully back to where Lillian Bassett's scarlet mantle lighted up the snowy terrace. Why were some girls so happy, while others toiled ceaselessly on in life's shadows? Why was life such a problem?

For a while, however, the wheels revolved smoothly. Jessie's references, forwarded from the Wilberforce Protective Agency, proved allthat could be desired, and she was engaged to take charge of the linen-room.

During an outbreak of scarlet fever she found herself particularly efficient as a nurse, and Mrs. Parkhurst soon began to wonder how it was that she had ever got along without her.

* * * * * *

"Married, Lilly! Really married! And to that handsome young professor of mathematics!" cried Adela Maurice, Lillian's ex-schoolmate. "Well I never expected to see you caged! And he's quite a self-made man, they tell me."

"I tell dear Lillian," said Miss Bella Bassett, the sharp-nosed maiden sister of the genial colonel, "that she should not make too sure of anything in this world. The captain is very handsome, and all that sort of thing, but—I'm afraid he's inclined to be a flirt."

"Nonsense!" cried Lillian, coloring wrathfully.

"Oh, but indeed, I've met him twice at the shrubberies, walking with that pretty yellow-haired girl that takes care of the linen-room," persisted Miss Bella.

"What!" exclaimed Miss Maurice. "One of the servants?"

"Now, Aunt Bella, why can't you hold your tongue," flashed out Lillian, "when you know very well that old Parkhurst says she is a reduced lady?"

"Reduced ladies have no business wandering about the laurel hedges with handsome young engaged men," viciously retorted Miss Bassett. "And I really think my brother ought to inquire into it. There she goes, flouncing out of the room. Well, I'm really afraid, Adela, that our Lillian's temper isn't altogether perfect."

"I don't think mine would be," said Adela Maurice, "if I were badgered like that."

"It is a dreadfull trial, isn't it, to see your lover drifting off into another woman's snares?" said Miss Bella, wilfully misundersanding things.

While Lillian, running up stairs, paused to catch her breath at one of the big mullioned windows on the staircase.

"How I should like to cram a big bath sponge into Aunt Bella's censorious old mouth!" said she. "Only to think of—"

Suddenly she paused. Down on the lower pine walk, where the west winds had swept the path dry of snow, Captain Moreton was pacing up and down with the gold-haired young girl at his side.

"Well, why shouldn't they?" said brave Lillian, swallowing the rebellious lump in her throat. "I suppose he happened to meet her, and—"

At this precise moment, however, the couple paused beside a group of dark spruces. She could distinctly preceive her lover bend his tall head to kiss—yes, to kiss the yellow-tressed lassie. And then they passed on into the tamarack thickets and were lost to view.

Lillian stood still, her bright eyes brimming over with tears, a pang transfixing her heart as if some poisoned arrow were burried there.

"And I loved him!" she said, aloud, "Oh, how I loved him! But this is an end of it all. To-night, when he comes to talk to me—to-night there must be an end of it all!"

The young professor was certainly a very handsome man, with his brilliant blue eyes, his brown hair, shot with golden gleams, and those straight, clear-cut features of his; and when he came cheerily in that evening, Lillian's heart failed within her.

"How can he bear himself so bravely?" she thought. "Where is his conscience—his manly truth?"

"I am glad, Lilly, to find you alone," said Captain Moreton, tenderly, taking her hand in his.

She jerked it away.

"I hate sitting hand-in-hand," said she, in answer to his surprise glance. "It's so—so spoony!"

"Well, just as you like, darling," he that. Sweet, whether you marry me or not, I shall go on loving you loyally to my life's end!"

"How many girls do you love at once?" bitterly asked Lillian.

"I? Why do you ask that question?"

"Because I saw you this very afternoon in the pine walk with another woman. I saw your arm around her waist. I saw you stoop to kiss her!"

"Oh, you saw me, did you? Then my story is half told already. It is but a short time, Lilly, since I knew it myself."

She stood looking at him with large, surprised eyes.

How dared he speak so lightly—and to her?

"Lilly, that sweet young girl whom Mrs. Parkhurst has employed in the linen-room—Miss Moreton, she calls herself—is my own sister, and she has concealed herself from me, fearing that the knowledge that she was in the institute in such a capacity would prejudice my future unfavorably. She was a governess in New York—she was coming here as companion to poor old Mrs. Bucknor, who was killed in the fire—and Mrs. Parkhurst, ignorant of any relation between us, brought her here. And, noble heroine that she is, she would have gone away without betraying herself, had I not chanced to meet her by accident. She thought I would be mortified, but instead I am proud of her beyond the power of words to express.

"But Miss Bassett?" said she.

"And then I told her that this evening you should know all. I have kept my word. Now I await your verdict. Have I not reason to triumph in such a noble sister as this?"

Lillian burst into tears; she hid her face on Moreton's breast.

"Oh, Will," she cried, what a dreadful goose I have been to doubt your love! Go and bring her here at once. Tell her I want to see my dear, new sister. Tell her that, hereafter, her home must be with me. There's plenty of room in the new house for your sister. But first, Will, kiss me and tell me that you forgive me, quite."

And so the brave, young girl, who had subordinated her whole life to her brother's success, was promoted to her proper place on life's ladder.

"I could have been happy anywhere had I known that Will's future was assured," said she.

And Lillian laughingly told her that she could be as happy in the new college as anywhere else.

"And we," said she, "will be a deal happier!"

Miss Adela Maurice and Jessie were the bridesmaids.

Aunt Bella put her disappointment in her pocket, and the wedding came off on Easter, greatly to Mrs. Parkhurst's delight.

"I knew," said that worthy dame, "that she was something out of the common the first look I had in her face. Physiognomy never yet failed me!"—*Saturday night.*

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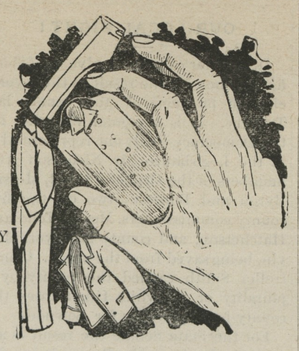

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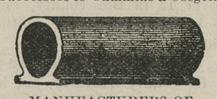

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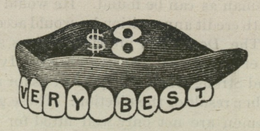

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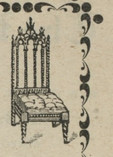

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