

One of the things everybody liked about Bobby Lorimer was his straightforward way of dealing with people, and he was as straightforward with himself as with any one else. So that was why at the end of two weeks he faced about squarely and put some very important questions to himself, questions which answered themselves in the asking. He had not missed an evening at Eden, as he had fancifully named the little cafe to himself, since first he heard The Voice. Even against his will the memory of it lured him back again night after night. He pleaded business as an excuse for breaking other social engagements, and his friends had begun to wonder if things were going wrong with him in a financial way.

LORIMER had thought very little of love, and when it had come into his mind at all it was as something remote and having to do vaguely with his future. He had hardly expected it to come in just this guise, but since it had come so, he made no effort to evade or deny it. He knew now, he was in love with this slender girl who had sung her way into his heart, in love not with the girl she appeared to be, but with the girl he knew her to be in his innermost heart. There was nothing more to be said, or rather there was a great deal of vast importance to be said.

To a man such as Lorimer the matter of a proper introduction was not difficult. He went about it eagerly. At the club he made inquiry and discovered that John Cressey, a fellow member, had a silent partnership in the cafe, and he sought him out that very afternoon. It was easy to bring the conversation around casually to Miss Ritchie, the name the steward had given him.

Cressey had been out of town, had only just returned, but the night before had heard her sing for the first time. He did not know who she was; it was the manager's idea to have the entertainers since every one else had them, and he believed that one of the musicians had recommended Miss Ritchie.

"It's too bad, with that voice, that she has n't some personality," he said, and Lorimer marveled how the man could be so blind. One day the whole world should see her loveliness.

When a little later he left Cressey, he had his promise of an introduction that night. Lorimer had said something about his sister wanting some talent for a musicale.

All afternoon he walked on air, with no definite purpose or thought, only waiting for the time to pass, and finally, fearing to go too early, found himself at his favorite table a quarter of an hour later than usual.

When he went in she was singing, — a difficult, brilliant aria, — and a swift light of recognition leaped into her eyes as they met Lorimer's for an instant; her voice faltered on a high note, and then she deliberately turned her head away and finished the song; but as she sat down she sent a furtive, shy glance toward his table, and then began looking over some music she held.

When finally Cressey came in, he spoke for a few minutes with the steward, caught sight of Lorimer, nodded and came toward him. He spoke to Miss Ritchie as he passed, and she nodded and smiled her rare conventional little smile. She watched Cressey disinterestedly until he sat down with Lorimer, when she became suddenly self-conscious and looked away quickly.

Lorimer could not tell whether she sang better or worse than usual tonight; the atmosphere of the place seemed to him surcharged with a sort of expectancy; nothing was as usual, nothing was ordinary; and when at last he followed Cressey up to where she sat he felt as if every one in that room knew why he was dining there that evening.

After the introduction and a few pleasantries, Cressey, with an apology, left them alone. Lorimer seated himself at her side. He had not thought it possible to feel so awkward. He did not know exactly what to say, so he began with the most obvious thing:

"You have a wonderful voice, Miss Ritchie," he said. He must make her feel at ease; she must not think he was patronizing. A queer expression came into her eyes.

"You flatter me," she said.



The prim, colorless, little woman; but, ah, the wonderful voice!

It was not the thing she said, so much as her way of saying it that shocked Lorimer. Her voice was higher than he had expected, and the tone was almost flippant. It both disconcerted him and put him at greater ease. He had not expected this, — yet he hardly knew what he had expected. Perhaps she was only embarrassed.

"No," he told her sincerely, "it is not flattery; I have come here night after night to hear you sing."

She laughed lightly, — a little too lightly, he thought.

"Only to hear me?" she asked, with an attempt at coquetry.

"I had never been here until you came."

"Yes, I know that; the steward told me."

The steward! Every word she uttered was like a blow, shattering his ideal. She had been discussing him with the steward! He could not believe it of her. He saw that a flush had suffused her cheeks, and she was nervously fingering the music.

"The steward told you I never came here before



Push yourself a little, put yourself out to be nice to them

you began singing here?" He hoped she would explain; he must have misunderstood. Again she laughed, a high staccato laugh that irritated Lorimer. It was so plainly affected.

"Certainly; I noticed how you always listened, and I was curious, so I asked about you."

With every word the metamorphosis grew more complete; the gentle, fine-souled girl he had watched night after night was vanishing and another personality was taking her place. He remembered

that he had asked the steward about her; but such women as she did not do that sort of thing, — that is, women such as he had imagined her to be. Yet, he argued, he was not himself tonight, and no more, perhaps, was she. He could not let her go so easily.

"Your voice is worth going much farther to hear." He was sincere in his praise at least. "I have been wondering where you learned to sing."

"Here, in the city," she said. He was surprised into new interest.

"I did not know there were such masters here," he exclaimed.

"Oh yes!" and an incongruous note of braggadocio crept into her voice. "Mother always gave me the best, and she said there was no use taking me to Europe to study when there were just as good teachers to be had at home. And, we have never been sorry — you have heard the result yourself."

The pretty speech that was evidently expected did not come, for another part of Lorimer's dream had gone crashing. Her life then had not been as he had pictured it; the struggle with poverty, the unsympathetic family. Her mother had always given her the very best, and she might have gone abroad to study! He almost laughed as he thought of the tragic picture of his imagination. He was now seized with a new curiosity about her, — her appearance of poverty, her curious indifference, — what manner of life did she lead? He would ask.

"Your mother — is she still with you?"

"Yes, —" she began, and then hesitated an instant before she added, "but she is away just now and I am staying with friends at the Graystone."

FRIENDS: He had not imagined her having friends, much less living with them; and at the Graystone! A fashionable apartment house in the best district. It was inconceivable then, if it was not necessary, why she sang in this place.

"Why," he heard himself asking, "do you do this — sing here at Eden — at a cafe?" he hastily caught himself.

"Oh, because I like it! I meet such lovely people here," and she smiled archly at him. He noticed that her eyes were very bright and very hard. "Why, if it had n't been for my singing here I should never have met you!"

At last the miserable truth was upon him; she thought he was beginning a flirtation with her and she was like all the others, only worse. The whole affair suddenly sickened him. The odor of food and the clatter of dishes and the glare of unshaded lights all at once smote his senses.

The place was impossible, the people stupid, *bourgeoise*, and the girl at his side, — what a fool his silly sentimental imagination had been making of him! Cressey came up just then, and with the briefest and most perfunctory of goodbyes, they left the girl's side.

As they moved away, Cressey asked: "What do you think of her?" and Lorimer answered dully: "Oh, they're all about the same, these entertainers! What this one gains in voice the others make up in style."

Near the door he turned aside into the telephone booth and called for a number.

"Not Bobby Lorimer in the flesh!" cried the charmingly modulated voice at the other end of the line. "Wherever have you been these last few weeks?"

"Oh, I've been spending a lot of time on a most tiresome piece of business; but it's finished now!" he told her.

"Come right on out, we'll be waiting. There are a half dozen people here you know."

"Expect me in twenty minutes. Jove, it'll be good to be back among you again!"

He waited impatiently (Continued on Page 9)