# The Memento

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Miss Lynnette D’Armande turned her back on Broadway. This was but tit for tat, because Broadway had often done the same thing to Miss D’Armande. Still, the “tats” seemed to have it, for the ex-leading lady of the “Reaping the Whirlwind” company had everything to ask of Broadway, while there was no vice-versa.

So Miss Lynnette D’Armande turned the back of her chair to her window that overlooked Broadway, and sat down to stitch in time the lisle-thread heel of a black silk stocking. The tumult and glitter of the roaring Broadway beneath her window had no charm for her; what she greatly desired was the stifling air of a dressing-room on that fairyland street and the roar of an audience gathered in that capricious quarter. In the meantime, those stock-ings must not be neglected. Silk does wear out so, but — after all, isn’t it just the only goods there is?

The Hotel Thalia looks on Broadway as Marathon looks on the sea. It stands like a gloomy cliff above the whirlpool where the tides of two great thorough-fares clash. Here the player-bands gather at the end of their wanderings, to loosen the buskin and dust the sock. Thick in the streets around it are booking-offices, theatres, agents, schools, and the lobster-pal- aces to which those thorny paths lead. Wandering through the eccentric halls of the dim and fusty Thalia, you seem to have found yourself in some great ark or caravan about to sail, or fly, or roll away on wheels. About the house lingers a sense of unrest, of expectation, of transientness, even of anxiety and apprehension. The halls are a labyrinth. Without a guide, you wander like a lost soul in a Sam Loyd puzzle.

Turning any corner, a dressing-sack or a cul-de-sac may bring you up short. You meet alarming tragedians stalking in bath-robes in search of rumored bathrooms. From hundreds of rooms come the buzz of talk, scraps of new and old songs, and the ready laughter of the convened players.

Summer has come; their companies have disbanded, and they take their rest in their favorite caravansary, while they besiege the managers for engagements for the coming season.

At this hour of the afternoon the day’s work of tramping the rounds of the agents’ offices is over. Past you, as you ramble distractedly through the mossy halls, flit audible visions of houris, with veiled, starry eyes, flying tag-ends of things and a swish of silk, bequeathing to the dull hallways an odor of gaiety and a memory of frangipanni. Serious young comedians, with versatile Adam’s apples, gather in doorways and talk of Booth. Far-reaching from somewhere comes the smell of ham and red cabbage, and the crash of dishes on the American plan.

The indeterminate hum of life in the Thalia is enlivened by the discreet popping — at reasonable and salubrious intervals — of beer-bottle corks. Thus punctuated, life in the genial hostel scans easily — the comma being the favorite mark, semicolons frowned upon, and periods barred.

Miss D’Armannde’s room was a small one. There was room for her rocker between the dresser and the wash-stand if it were placed longitudinally. On the dresser were its usual accoutrements, plus the ex-lead- ing lady’s collected souvenirs of road engagements and photographs of her dearest and best professional friends.

At one of these photographs she looked twice or thrice as she darned, and smiled friendlily.

“I’d like to know where Lee is just this minute,” she said, half-aloud.

If you had been privileged to view the photograph thus flattered, you would have thought at the first glance that you saw the picture of a many-petalled white flower, blown through the air by a storm. But the floral kingdom was not responsible for that swirl of petalous whiteness.

You saw the filmy, brief skirt of Miss Rosalie Ray as she made a complete heels-over-head turn in her wistaria-entwined swing, far out from the stage, high above the heads of the audience. You saw the cam-era’s inadequate representation of the graceful, strong kick, with which she, at this exciting moment, sent flying, high and far, the yellow silk garter that each evening spun from her agile limb and descended upon the delighted audience below.

You saw, too, amid the black-clothed, mainly mas-culine patrons of select vaudeville a hundred hands raised with the hope of staying the flight of the brilliant aerial token.

Forty weeks of the best circuits this act had brought Miss Rosalie Ray, for each of two years. She did other things during her twelve minutes — a song and dance, imitations of two or three actors who are but imitations of themselves, and a balancing feat with a step-ladder and feather-duster; but when the blossom-decked swing was let down from the flies, and Miss Rosalie sprang smiling into the seat, with the golden circlet conspicuous in the place whence it was soon to slide and become a soaring and coveted guerdon — then it was that the audience rose in its seat as a single man — or presumably so — and indorsed the specialty that made Miss Ray’s name a favorite in the booking-offices.

At the end of the two years Miss Ray suddenly announced to her dear friend, Miss D’Armande, that she was going to spend the summer at an antediluvian village on the north shore of Long Island, and that the stage would see her no more.

Seventeen minutes after Miss Lynnette D’Armande had expressed her wish to know the whereabouts of her old chum, there were sharp raps at her door.

Doubt not that it was Rosalie Ray. At the shrill command to enter she did so, with something of a tired flutter, and dropped a heavy hand-bag on the floor. Upon my word, it was Rosalie, in a loose, travel-stained automobileless coat, closely tied brown veil with yard-long, flying ends, gray walking-suit and tan oxfords with lavender overgaiters.

When she threw off her veil and hat, you saw a pretty enough face, now flushed and disturbed by some unusual emotion, and restless, large eyes with discontent marring their brightness. A heavy pile of dull auburn hair, hastily put up, was escaping in crinkly, waving strands and curling, small locks from the confining combs and pins.

The meeting of the two was not marked by the effusion vocal, gymnastical, osculatory and catecheti-cal that distinguishes the greetings of their unprofessional sisters in society. There was a brief clinch, two simultaneous labial dabs and they stood on the same footing of the old days. Very much like the short salutations of soldiers or of travellers in foreign wilds are the welcomes between the strollers at the corners of their crisscross roads.

“I’ve got the hall-room two flights up above yours,” said Rosalie, “but I came straight to see you before going up. I didn’t know you were here till they told me.”

“I’ve been in since the last of April,” said Lynnette. “And I’m going on the road with a ‘Fatal Inheritance’ company. We open next week in Eliz-abeth. I thought you’d quit the stage, Lee. Tell me about yourself.”

Rosalie settled herself with a skilful wriggle on the top of Miss D’Armande’s wardrobe trunk, and leaned her head against the papered wall. From long habit, thus can peripatetic leading ladies and their sisters make themselves as comfort. able as though the deepest armchairs embraced them.

“I’m going to tell you, Lynn,” she said, with a strangely sardonic and yet carelessly resigned look on her youthful face. “And then to-morrow I’ll strike the old Broadway trail again, and wear some more paint off the chairs in the agents’ offices. If anybody had told me any time in the last three months up to four o’clock this afternoon that I’d ever listen to that ‘Leave-your-name-and-address’ rot of the booking bunch again, I’d have given ‘em the real Mrs. Fiske laugh. Loan me a handkerchief, Lynn. Gee! but those Long Island trains are fierce. I’ve got enough soft-coal cinders on my face to go on and play Topsy without using the cork. And, speaking of corks — got anything to drink, Lynn?”

Miss D’Armande opened a door of the wash-stand and took out a bottle.

“There’s nearly a pint of Manhattan. There’s a cluster of carnations in the drinking glass, but — “

“Oh, pass the bottle. Save the glass for company. Thanks! That hits the spot. The same to you. My first drink in three months!”

“Yes, Lynn, I quit the stage at the end of last season. I quit it because I was sick of the life. And especially because my heart and soul were sick of men of the kind of men we stage people have to be up against. You know what the game is to us — it’s a fight against ‘em all the way down the line from the manager who wants us to try his new motor-car to the bill-posters who want to call us by our front names.

“And the men we have to meet after the show are the worst of all. The stage-door kind, and the manager’s friends who take us to supper and show their diamonds and talk about seeing ‘Dan’ and ‘Dave’ and ‘Charlie’ for us. They’re beasts, and I hate ‘em.

“I tell you, Lynn, it’s the girls like us on the stage that ought to be pitied. It’s girls from good homes that are honestly ambitious and work hard to rise in the profession, but never do get there. You bear a lot of sympathy sloshed around on chorus girls and their fifteen dollars a week. Piffle! There ain’t a sorrow in the chorus that a lobster cannot heal.

“If there’s any tears to shed, let ‘em fall for the actress that gets a salary of from thirty to forty-five dollars a week for taking a leading part in a bum show. She knows she’ll never do any better; but she hangs on for years, hoping for the ‘chance I that never comes.

“And the fool plays we have to work in! Having another girl roll you around the stage by the hind legs in a ‘Wheelbarrow Chorus’ in a musical comedy is dignified drama compared with the idiotic things I’ve had to do in the thirty-centers.

“But what I hated most was the men — the men leering and blathering at you across tables, trying to buy you with Wurzburger or Extra Dry, according to their estimate of your price. And the men in the audiences, clapping, yelling, snarling, crowding, writhing, gloating — like a lot of wild beasts, with their eyes fixed on you, ready to eat you up if you come in reach of their claws. Oh, how I hate ‘em!

“Well, I’m not telling you much about myself, am I, Lynn ?

“I had two hundred dollars saved up, and I cut the stage the first of the summer. I went over on Long Island and found the sweetest little village that ever was, called Soundport, right on the water. I was going to spend the summer there, and study up on elocution, and try to get a class in the fall. There was an old widow lady with a cottage near the beach who sometimes rented a room or two just for company, and she took me in. She had another boarder, too — the Reverend Arthur Lyle.

“Yes, he was the head-liner. You’re on, Lynn. I’ll tell you all of it in a minute. It’s only a one-act play.

“The first time he walked on, Lynn, I felt myself going; the first lines he spoke, he had me. He was different from the men in audiences. He was tall and slim, and you never heard him come in the room, but you felt him. He had a face like a picture of a knight — like one of that Round Table bunch — and a voice like a ‘cello solo. And his manners!

“Lynn, if you’d take John Drew in his best drawing-room scene and compare the two, you’d have John arrested for disturbing the peace.

“I’ll spare you the particulars; but in less than a month Arthur and I were engaged. He preached at a little one-night stand of a Methodist church. There was to be a parsonage the size of a lunch-wagon, and hens and honeysuckles when we were married. Ar-thur used to preach to me a good deal about Heaven, but be never could get my mind quite off those honeysuckles and hens.

“No; I didn’t tell him I’d been on the stage. I hated the business and all that went with it; I’d cut it out forever, and I didn’t see any use of stirring things up. I was a good girl, and I didn’t have anything to confess, except being an elocutionist, and that was about all the strain my conscience would stand.

“Oh, I tell you, Lynn, I was happy. I sang in the choir and attended the sewing society, and recited that ‘Annie Laurie’ thing with the whistling stunt in it, ‘in a manner bordering upon the professional,’ as the weekly village paper reported it. And Arthur and I went rowing, and walking in the woods, and clamming, and that poky little village seemed to me the best place in the world. I’d have been happy to live there always, too, if —

“But one morning old Mrs. Gurley, the widow lady, got gossipy while I was helping her string beans on the back porch, and began to gush information, as folks who rent out their rooms usually do. Mr. Lyle was her idea of a saint on earth — as he was mine, too. She went over all his virtues and graces, and wound up by telling me that Arthur had had an extremely romantic love-affair, not long before, that had ended unhappily. She didn’t seem to be on to the details, but she knew that he had been hit pretty hard. He was paler and thinner, she said, and he had some kind of a remembrance or keepsake of the lady in a little rosewood box that he kept locked in his desk drawer in his study.

“‘Several times,” says she, “I’ve seen him gloomerin’ over that box of evenings, and he always locks it up right away if anybody comes into the room.’

“Well, you can imagine how long it was before I got Arthur by the wrist and led him down stage and hissed in his ear.

“That same afternoon we were lazying around in a boat among the water-lilies at the edge of the bay.

“‘Arthur,’ says I, ‘you never told me you’d had another love-affair. But Mrs. Gurley did,’ I went on, to let him know I knew. I hate to bear a man lie.

”’ Before you came,’ says he, looking me frankly in the eye, ‘there was a previous affection — a strong one. Since you know of it, I will be perfectly candid with you.’

“‘I am waiting,’ says I.

“‘My dear Ida,’ says Arthur — of course I went by my real name, while I was in Soundport — ‘this former affection was a spiritual one, in fact. Although the lady aroused my deepest sentiments, and was, as I thought, my ideal woman, I never met her, and never spoke to her. It was an ideal love. My love for you, while no less ideal, is different. You wouldn’t let that come between us.’

“‘Was she pretty?’ i asked.

”’ She was very beautiful,’ said Arthur.

“‘Did you see her often?’ I asked.

”’ Something like a dozen times,’ says he.

“‘Always from a distance?’ says I.

“‘Always from quite a distance,’ says he.

“‘And you loved her?’ I asked.

“‘She seemed my ideal of beauty and grace — and soul,” says Arthur.

“‘And this keepsake that you keep under lock and key, and moon over at times, is that a remembrance from her?’

“‘A memento,’ says Arthur, ‘that I have treasured.’

“‘Did she send it to you?’

“‘It came to me from her’ says be.

“‘In a roundabout way?’ I asked.

“‘Somewhat roundabout,’ says he, ‘and yet rather direct.’

“‘Why didn’t you ever meet her?’ I asked. ‘Were your positions in life so different?’

“She was far above me,’ says Arthur. ‘Now, Ida,’ he goes on, ‘this is all of the past. You’re not going to be jealous, are you?’

‘Jealous!’ says I. ‘Why, man, what are you talking about? It makes me think ten times as much of you as I did before I knew about it.’

“And it did, Lynn — if you can understand it. That ideal love was a new one on me, but it struck me as being the most beautiful and glorious thing I’d ever heard of. Think of a man loving a woman he’d never even spoken to, and being faithful just to what his mind and heart pictured her! Oh, it sounded great to me. The men I’d always known come at you with either diamonds, knock-out-drops or a raise of salary, — and their ideals! — well, we’ll say no more.”

“Yes, it made me think more of Arthur than I did before. I couldn’t be jealous of that far-away divin-ity that he used to worship, for I was going to have him myself. And I began to look upon him as a saint on earth, just as old lady Gurley did.

“About four o’clock this afternoon a man came to the house for Arthur to go and see somebody that was sick among his church bunch. Old lady Gurley was taking her afternoon snore on a couch, so that left me pretty much alone.

“In passing by Arthur’s study I looked in, and saw his bunch of keys hanging in the drawer of his desk, where he’d forgotten ‘em. Well, I guess we’re all to the Mrs. Bluebeard now and then, ain’t we, Lynn? I made up my mind I’d have a look at that memento he kept so secret. Not that I cared what it was — it was just curiosity.

“While I was opening the drawer I imagined one or two things it might be. I thought it might be a dried rosebud she’d dropped down to him from a balcony, or maybe a picture of her he’d cut out of a magazine, she being so high up in the world.

“I opened the drawer, and there was the rosewood casket about the size of a gent’s collar box. I found the little key in the bunch that fitted it, and unlocked it and raised the lid.

“I took one look at that memento, and then I went to my room and packed my trunk. I threw a few things into my grip, gave my hair a flirt or two with a sidecomb, put on my hat, and went in and gave the old lady’s foot a kick. I’d tried awfully hard to use proper and correct language while I was there for Arthur’s sake, and I had the habit down pat, but it left me then.

“Stop sawing gourds,” says I, “and sit up and take notice. The ghost’s about to walk. I’m going away from here, and I owe you eight dollars. The expressman will call for my trunk.’

“I handed her the money.

“‘Dear me, Miss Crosby!’ says she. ‘Is anything wrong? I thought you were pleased here. Dear me, young women are so hard to understand, and so different from what you expect ‘em to be.’

“‘You’re damn right,’ says I. ‘Some of ‘em are. But you can’t say that about men. When you know one man you know ‘em all! That settles the human-race question.’

“And then I caught the four-thirty-eight, soft-coal unlimited; and here I am.”

“You didn’t tell me what was in the box, Lee,” said Miss D’armande, anxiously.

“One of those yellow silk garters that I used to kick off my leg into the audience during that old vaudeville swing act of mine. Is there any of the cocktail left, Lynn?”