

## The Mansion of Forgetfulness.\*

BY DON MARK LEMON.



OUR months after the salt-waves had laid at his feet the cold form of his Love, came the news that Herbert Munson was the possessor of a startling secret. He had, it was stated, discovered a Purple Ray that would wither and destroy certain human cells of memory without injury or danger to neighboring cells. This rumor was followed by the still more amazing report that Munson had erected the Mansion of Forgetfulness, to which all who would free their minds of a hopeless passion might repair, and in one brief hour, *forget*.

And, sure enough, here they came—those who loved not wisely but too well, those who loved deeply but hopelessly, and those who loved the Dead and could endure their grief no longer—and the Purple Ray “plucked from the memory its rooted sorrow” and they went forth from the Mansion of Forgetfulness unscarred and fancy-free.

Yet he who showed others how to forget would not himself forget. It was agony to know that she was dead, and he would never see her face again, yet he shrank from forgetfulness as the soul shrinks from oblivion. Try as he would, he could not drag himself from the haunted halls of memory, though he remembered that the world without was wonderfully fair, and other women, perhaps as lovely as she, were waiting there to love and be loved. No! Let others forget, he would not! Not that he lived in hope, for had he not kissed the salt foam from her dead face? But that memory was all that remained of a Love who was no more.

He watched them come and go—watched the many, ah, too many, pilgrims arrive with sorrowful, love-haunted faces, but

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depart with unconcerned, care-free looks, and at times he feared that his philanthropy was a sacrilege. There seemed something unholy in this sudden transmutation of grief into gladness — this swift thrusting aside of the tragic presence of sorrow — yet they had chosen of their own free will to forget a hopeless passion, and they could now return whence they came and love again, more wisely if less deeply.

Some came, thinking to blot out other memories than that of a hopeless love — memories of sin and crime — but the Purple Ray would not be thwarted to such base purposes, and they left, abashed and disappointed.

It was in winter, when the snow was changed to crystal as it fell upon the walls and cornices of the beautiful marble edifice, or piled itself in drifts of sifted diamonds against the stained glass windows, when a lady came alone across the vales and entered the broad gateway of the Mansion of Forgetfulness.

Something in her manner — perhaps her agitated hesitation at the portals — moved the master to accost her.

“Kind friend,” he said, “were it not better to remember what you now seek to forget?” As he spoke he drew closer about his face the cowl he wore to conceal his identity from the merely curious.

A sigh was the only immediate answer, as the pilgrim leaned wearily against a marble pillar. Then came the low spoken words:

“Perhaps I may only half forget. I would remember, yet not remember so acutely.”

“No, you will wholly forget. The Purple Ray is oblivion itself.”

“Ah, well, better I kill these painful memories than break my heart!”

“Then, if it must be so, enter and forget.”

“Show me the way and let me go quickly,” was the plea of the veiled lady. “I have come far, and the worst is only a few steps farther on.”

“Come, then!” and the master led the way to the room of the Purple Ray.

An hour passed, when the door was opened and the veiled

visitor came forth and descended the broad stairway. She moved quickly and lightly, and at the foot of the stairs she laughed musically as she again met the master.

"Have you forgotten?" he asked.

"Forgotten! I know that I have forgotten something, else why am I here, yet I do not know what I have forgotten."

"So they all say!"

A flush of rosy light shone from a slender window overhead, haloing the pilgrim like a saint.

"How beautiful everything is!" she exclaimed. "Why do I wear this veil? I will no longer!"

So saying, she loosened it, disclosing a face young and exquisitely fair. The man shrank back as if pierced by a bolt.

"My God, it is her spirit!" he gasped.

"No, no!" protested the visitor. "I am not a spirit, and I fear I am too, too human."

"You are Morella!" whispered the man, staring before him like one peering through intense darkness.

"I am. Who are you that you ask?"

"Morella! I thought you dead! I kissed you for dead and then the waves swept me away and I saw you no more."

"Some fishermen once found me on a sandy beach, where they said I had fainted. Who are you?"

The man drew back his cowl. "Look!" There was no light of recognition in the other's eyes. "My God! the Ray has blotted out all memory!"

"Pray tell me what you mean, and let me go," came the passionless words.

A groan was the only reply, and the man hid his face in his hands.

"You seem to know what I have forgotten. Has it aught to do with you?"

"O Morella, it were better that I thought you dead than to know that you have forgotten! Do you not recall our betrothal? See, you have the ring upon your hand! Does it not awaken one recollection of other days?"

The girl gazed blankly at the ring on her hand, and shook her head.

“Has the Ray blotted out every fair memory! Have you returned to life only to forget! Try to think, dearest: Do you not remember that day in Naples when we pledged eternal love for one another?”

“I remember no betrothal.” A deep look of pity came into the speaker’s eyes when she saw the pain her words had caused. “If remembrance is so sad, why do you not also forget?”

“My love!” he groaned, “you are making the world darker to me than to dying eyes! You ask me to forget! You!”

“You forget that I have forgotten.”

The man groaned in utter anguish.

As she turned to go he stayed her by a gentle touch. “*Wait here while I, too, go and kill that memory!*”

He dragged himself up the broad stairway, looking back once when he had reached the landing, then turned and staggered towards the room of the Purple Ray.

