

Legend

BY FLOYD DELL
A ROMANCE

TO KIRAH MARKHAM

"Legend" was first produced, under the title, "My Lady's Mirror," at the Liberal Club, in 1915, with the following cast:

He Clement Wood
She..... Kirah Markham

A small room with a little table in the centre, and a chair on either side of it. At the back is the embrasure of a French window opening on a balcony. In another wall is the outer door. The room is lighted by tall candles. There is an image of the Virgin in a niche in the corner.

HE. (*a cloaked figure, standing with hat and stick in one hand and holding in the other a large square parcel*) First of all, I have a present for you.

SHE. (*where she has just risen when he entered*) A present! Oh, thank you, Luciano!

HE. It is not me you have to thank for this present! (*He puts it on the table.*) It is some one else. I am only the bearer.

SHE. Who can it be? Who would send me a present?

HE. What a question, Donna Violante! Not a man in Seville, not a man in Spain, but would send you gifts if he dared. It is not "Who would?" but "Who could?"

SHE. No man, as you know, Luciano, has that right.

HE. Have you so soon forgotten your husband, Violante? He, surely, has that right! And it is thoughtful of him, too, to pause in the midst of his antiquarian researches in Rome, to think of his young wife and send her a gift. He appreciates you more than I imagined. Under his

grizzled and scientific exterior, he is a human being. I respect him for it.

He puts down his hat and stick.

SHE. My husband! But why, then, do *you* bring it?

HE. I was commissioned by him to do so. I received the package, this morning, with a letter. Shall I read it to you?

He takes out the letter.

SHE. Yes.... But why should he not send it direct to *me*?

HE. Your husband is a man of curious and perverse mind, Violante, and, in spite of his interest in dead things, not without some insight into the living soul. I think it gave him an obscure pleasure to think of *me* the bearer of *his* gift. But shall we let him speak for himself?

He opens the envelope.

SHE. Yes. Read the letter.

She sits down to listen.

HE. (*reading*) "My dear young friend: I am sending you a package, which I beg you, as a favour, to deliver to Donna Violante, my wife. It contains a gift of an unusual sort, which you as well as she will appreciate. As you know, it is the unusual which interests me--the unusual and the old. And yet, antiquarian though I am, I flatter myself that I understand the mind of a beautiful young woman, especially when that young woman is my wife. I have found her a mirror. Yes, a mirror! Under this name it seems commonplace enough, but when you have seen it I do not think you will say so. It is not the kind of mirror that is ordinarily found in a lady's boudoir. Yet it will give to her a faithful reflection of her loveliness as it is in truth. I found it-- this will interest you--in the Catacombs. You would not think the early Christians had so much vanity! Yet it was a mirror into which the virgin-martyrs-to-be of the time of Nero looked each day. As they looked, let Donna Violante look. Say to her from me--'Look long and

well into this mirror, and profit by what you see.'--Humbly your friend, Don Vincenzo." . . . Is not that a pleasant letter?

He restores the letter to his pocket.

SHE. There is something in it that makes me shiver.... Let us look.

She takes the paper from the box and is about to open it when he stops her.

HE. No. Not now. I want to talk to you.

SHE (*lapsing into a hostile coldness*) Yes.

HE. You know what I have to say. I have said it so often. I shall say it once more.

SHE. (*appealingly*) Luciano!

HE. No, let me speak. You are not happy. You do not love your husband. And you are too young and beautiful to live without love.

SHE. Please!

HE. I love you. And you love me. Why do you not surrender yourself to love?

SHE. Why do you say such things? They hurt me.

HE. They are reality. Does reality hurt you? Are you living in a shadow-world, that you should flinch from the hard touch of truth? I say it again. I love you.

SHE. Before you started to talk like that, we were so happy together.

HE. Before I spoke out the truth of my own heart and yours. You didn't want it spoken out. You didn't want to be told you were in love. It was a thing too harsh and sweet. It frightened you to think of. You wanted us to sit for ever, like two lovers painted on a fan, fixed in an everlasting and innocuous bliss.

SHE. Well, you have succeeded in spoiling that. You have made me unhappy, if that gives you any pleasure.

HE. It was not I who have spoiled your shadow-world. It is love, coming like the dawn on wings of flame, and shattering the shadows with spears of gold. It is love that has made you unhappy. You tremble at its coming, and try to flee. But the day of love has come for you.

SHE. Ah, if it had only come before--before....

HE. Before you married that perverse old man. If it had come while you were still a maiden, free, with a right to give yourself up to it! Ah, you would have given yourself gloriously! It is beautiful--but it is a dream, and the time calls for a deed. We love each other. We can take our happiness now. Will you do it? Will you come away with me?

SHE. No.

HE. Then I if you cannot take your happiness, give me mine. If you cannot be a woman, be an angel, and lean down from your dream heaven to slake my earthly thirst.

SHE. No.

HE. No angel? Then a goddess! You want to be worshipped. You want to be adored. I will worship you, but not from afar, I will adore you in my own fashion. I will praise you without words, and you shall be the answer to my prayer. Will you?

SHE. No.

HE. "No." "No." "No." How did your lips learn to say that word so easily? They are not made to say such a word. They are too young, too red, to say "No" to Life. When you say that word, the world grows black. The stars go out, the leaves wither, the heart stops beating. It is a word that kills. It is the word of Death. Dare you say it again? Answer me, do we love each other? . . . Silence.

SHE. I think . . . I am going . . . to cry.

HE. And tears. Tears are a slave's answer. Speak. Defend yourself. Why do you stay here? Why do you deny yourself happiness? Why won't you come with me?

SHE. I cannot.

HE. Always the same phrase that means nothing. Ah, Violante, lady of few words, you know how to baffle argument. If I could only make you speak! If I could only see what the thoughts are that darken your will!

SHE. Don't.

HE. By God! I wonder that I don't hate you instead of love you. There is something ignobly feminine about you. You are incapable of action-- almost incapable of speech. Your lips are shut tight against kisses, and when they open to speak, all that they say is "Don't."

SHE. What do you expect to gain by scolding me?

HE. I gain the satisfaction of telling you the truth--that you have the most cowardly soul that was ever belied by a glorious body. Who would think to look at you that you were afraid?

SHE. It's no use bullying me.

HE. I know that, Violante. It's the poorest way to woo a woman. But I have tried every other way. I have pleaded, and been answered with silence. I have wooed you with caresses, and been answered with tears.

SHE. I am sorry, Luciano.

HE. I want you to be glad.

SHE. I am glad--glad of you--in spite of everything.

HE. Gladness is something fiercer than that. You are too tame. Oh, if I could reach and rouse your soul!

SHE. My soul is yours already....

HE. And your body...?

SHE. It is impossible.

HE. No. It isn't impossible. But I'll tell you what is impossible. This--for me to go on loving you and despising you.... I came here today to make one last appeal to you. I don't mean it as a threat. But I am going away tonight for ever--with you, or without you. You must decide.

SHE. (*rising*) But--I don't want you to go, Luciano!

HE. You will miss me, I know. But don't think too much of that. You will find a new friend--if you decide against me.

SHE. And I must decide now?

HE. Yes--now.

SHE. But how can I? Oh, Luciano!

HE. I know it is hard. But I will not make it harder. Violante: I have sought to appeal to your emotion when my appeal to your will was in vain. But tonight I will leave you to make your own decision. You must come to me freely or not at all. There must be no regrets.

SHE. I cannot do it.

HE. If you say that when I return I will accept it as a final answer. I am going out on the balcony--for a long minute. And while I am gone you must decide what to do. Will you?

SHE. Yes.

HE. (*turning at the window*) And if while I am gone you wish to recall my arguments to your mind--(*he points to the box on the table*)--look

in your mirror there. Your beauty will plead for me. As Don
Vincenzio said: Look long and well into that mirror, lady, and profit
by what you see.

*He goes out. . . . She looks after him, and when he is gone holds out
her arms towards the door. She makes a step towards it, and then
stops, her hands falling to her sides. Her head droops for a moment or
two, and then is slowly lifted. Her eyes sweep the room imploringly,
and rest on the image of the Virgin. She goes over to it and kneels.*

SHE. Mary, Mother of God, give me a sign. I do not know what to do.
Help me. I must decide. Love has entered my heart, and it may be that
I cannot be a good woman any longer. You will be kind to me, and
pity me, and send me a sign. Perhaps you will let me have my lover,
for you are kind.

*She crosses herself, rises, and looks around. She sees the box on the
table, and puts her hand to her face with a gesture of sudden thought.
She smiles.*

Perhaps that is the sign!

She goes to the box and touches it.

He said it would plead for him. . . .

She opens it--and starts back with a gesture and a cry.

It is the sign!

*With one hand over her heart she approaches it again. She takes out
of the box and puts on the table a skull. . . . She stares at it a long
while, and then turns with a shiver.*

How cold it is here! Where are the lights?

She is compelled to look again.

I had never thought of death. My heart is cold, too. The chill of the
grave is on me. Was I ever in love? It seems strange to remember.

What is his name? I almost have forgotten. And he is waiting for me. I will show him this. We should have looked at it together. . . .

A silence, as her mood changes.

So *he* had planned it! He wanted to cast the chill of the grave upon our love. He saw it all as though he had been here. He sent us-- this! How well he knew me--better than I knew myself. An old man's cunning! To stop my pulses throbbing with love, and put out the fever in my eyes. A trick! Yes, but it suffices. One look into the eyeless face of Death turns me to ashes. I am no longer fit for love. . . .

She turns to the door.

Why does he not come for his answer?

She looks for a lingering moment toward the door, and then turns back again to the table. Her mood changes again.

A present from a husband to a wife!

She takes it up in her hands.

A lady's mirror! What was it that he said? "Look long and well into this mirror, and profit by what you see," My mirror from the Catacombs!

She sinks into a chair, holding it between her hands as it rests on the table. Her tone is trance-like.

I look. I see the end of all things. I see that nothing matters. Is that your message? Why do you grin at me? You laugh to think that my face is like your face--or will be soon--in a few years--tomorrow. You mock at me for thinking I am alive. I am dead, you say. Dead, like you. Am I?

She rises.

No. Not yet. For a moment--a little lifetime--I have life, I Have lips and eyelids made for kisses. I have hands that burn to give caresses,

and breasts that ache to take them. I have a body made to suffer the deep stings of love. This flesh of mine shall be a golden web woven of pain and joy.

She takes up the skull again.

You were alive once, and a virgin-martyr? You denied yourself love? You sent away your lover? No wonder you speak so plainly to me now. Back, girl, to your coffin!

She puts the skull in the box, and closes the lid softly. She turns to the door and waits. At last he enters.

HE. (*dejected*) You have--decided?

SHE. Yes. I have decided.

HE. I knew. It is no use. I will go.

He turns to the door.

SHE. Wait! (*He turns back incredulously.*) I have decided to go with you. (*He stands stock-still.*) Don't you understand? Take me. I am yours. Don't you believe it?

HE. Violante!

SHE. It is hard to believe, isn't it. I have been a child. Now I am a woman. And shall I tell you how I became a woman? (*She points to the box on the table.*) I looked in my mirror there. I saw that I was beautiful--and alive. Tell me, am I not beautiful--and alive?

HE. There is something terrible about you at this moment. I am almost afraid of you.

SHE. Kiss me, Luciano!

