

THE LADY OF ST. LUKE'S

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The Lady of St. Luke's by Mark Allerton

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MARK ALLERTON

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LADY OF ST. LUKE'S

BY
MARK ALLERTON *pseud. of*
William Ernest
Cameron.



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CHAPTER I

TWO Northbury Park 'buses had swept past Rosalie Grieve; arrogantly conscious of the fact that they were full up, the conductors engaged in meditative contemplation of the evening sky. The girl glanced wistfully at a crawling taxi-cab, and decided that the fare to Northbury Park would be extravagance.

"Perhaps the third time will be lucky," she hoped, and she searched among the traffic of Piccadilly for another Super-Dreadnought of the highway.

A third Northbury Park 'bus hove in sight. Rosalie Grieve signalled. With a graceful sweep that was not appreciated by the driver of the crawling taxi, it drew near the pavement. It stopped. The friendly arm of the conductor hoisted the girl aboard.

"Room for one inside, miss," he said gallantly, adding imperiously: "Sit up on the left there!"

Rosalie Grieve decided that the third time was lucky. For a long time afterwards events shaped

their course as though on purpose to prove that she was wrong.

A very small and neatly-gloved hand gave the conductor fourpence. A very musical voice said: "Northbury Park, please." A pair of very merry dark eyes flashed: "Thank you." And then Rosalie Grieve, as befits a very pretty girl who is aware that she has upon her the eyes of a 'bus-load of people—the men admiringly, the women appraisingly—settled herself to gaze into vacancy.

A stockbroker and a modiste seated opposite came to the independent conclusion that Rosalie Grieve was not more than twenty-two, that her navy-blue costume was a very fine model and must have cost a lot, that she looked a "jolly sort," that the light and shade of her expression was suggestive of the Parisienne, that she was "quite the lady," that he wished he knew her, that she would like to make a sketch of her hat.

Divining their conclusions, Rosalie Grieve kept her eyes on the railings of the park, now growing indistinct in the Spring twilight.

At Kensington the 'bus lost some of its load. Regretfully the stockbroker got out and made his way home to his large family. Rosalie was able to use her eyes more intelligently, to discover that her companions now comprised an elderly gentleman, who didn't matter, an elderly lady who satisfied herself at intervals that she was in the right 'bus for Hammersmith, and a young man in a cap and ulster.

It was on the young man that Rosalie's eyes

rested. He was watching her, not admiringly or appraisingly, but with a kind of bland interest that was disconcerting. Rosalie flattered herself that she could avert the gaze of any man by a slight up-raising of her eyebrows—a useful knack, she had often found it. This time it was not successful. It merely encouraged the man to smile, ever so slightly, as though in reply.

He was about twenty-eight. On his upper lip was a dark moustache of the kind irreverently compared to a tooth-brush. His features were regular and good. His eyes were attractive. He might be, decided Rosalie, a soldier, only he was not smartly enough dressed.

His interest in her was embarrassing. Acting on an impulse she leant forward.

"I beg your pardon," she said with a certain ominous directness, "but do I know you?"

Now the young man laughed.

"Exactly what I was wondering myself," he said. "Do I know you? Have I met you, I mean? Of course I know you are Mrs. Grieve."

"Of course?"

"Yes. I live at Northbury Park. We all know the Vicar's wife—by sight. Not all of us have had the honour of meeting her. I was just wondering—but no, it is impossible!"

"What is impossible?"

"That I can have met you. Else I should not have forgotten."

Rosalie flushed and laughed. When compliments

are made by a gentleman it makes all the difference. This young man was clearly a gentleman.

"Yet I seem to know your face very well," she said. Then her dark eyes lit up with recollection. "Of course!" she cried. "You are Alan Wynne."

"Quite right. How do you know?"

"Don't you remember? The Atelier Villefort? But of course you don't. You were one of the top-notchers. I was nobody in particular."

"The Atelier Villefort! Were you there? Who were you then?"

"Rosalie Wakefield."

"By Jove, yes! Now I remember. Why, of course we've met."

The young man changed his seat. He came beside Rosalie. His face was lit up with interest and delight. They shook hands. The elderly lady glanced at them and enquired hurriedly of the conductor if the 'bus had yet reached Hammersmith. It had not.

Alan Wynne talked eagerly, asking questions.

"How long ago was that? Two years? Three. You were going in for etching, I remember. Of course I remember now. What made you give it up?"

"I didn't. At least I meant to stick to it. But my people died, and I got hard up, and I came back to London to teach."

"Yes? And did you?"

"For about a year, yes. And then I met Hugh." She laughed again.

"Hugh? Oh, yes, the Vicar." The young man was suddenly solemn, almost sympathetic. She was quick to read his thoughts.

"Have you met my husband?" she demanded.

"No."

"Then you must. You will like him awfully. Everybody likes Hugh."

"He is a tremendously popular preacher, isn't he?"

"I don't mean that. Everybody likes Hugh because he is—well, because he is Hugh. We've been married four months," she added, inconsequently.

"And how do you like being a vicar's wife?"

"I simply love being Hugh's wife," she replied, frankly. "I never trouble about being a vicar's wife. What are you doing?" she added.

"Portrait painting. But I'm not doing any good at it."

"I don't believe that."

"I can show you my bank book as proof."

"What does a bank book know about portrait painting? Will you let me see some of your work?"

"I should be delighted. I live at 3, Maitland Villas. My studio is a shed in the garden."

"I sha'n't forget. I live at the Vicarage, of course. You'll come and meet Hugh? I want you to. Do you ever meet any of the dear souls who were at the Atelier?"

"Never!"

"Not Dora Bettison or Frank Bettison or Madge Fairfield?"