

Hand and Heart

By Francis Prevost

“CLEAN heart—clean hands,” he said, and looked at mine,
And caught them 'ere unclasped ; for one was red
That had besprinkled his white lips with wine :
“Clean heart—clean hands,” he said.

(What meant it ? He had whispered, on my breast,
Love's converts should therewith be christened ;
And so my hand was soiled at *his* request.
“Heart's passover !” he'd said).

And then he drew the fingers pale apart,
And with a kiss the cold, stained palm outspread,
And pressed it thus, down o'er his strenuous heart :
“So hand and heart,” he said.

When, through my thoughts, storm-fire in summer's night,
Flashed the dolt's aimless face I had loathed and wed :
He kissed my fingers still, wine-stained and white ;
“Sweet hands, sweetheart,” he said.

“Sour

Hand and Heart

“Sour both!” I gasped, and shook myself away ;
 Required my mare : he fetched her, proudly staid ;
 Tightened the girths, and closed the curb-chain’s play :
 “So hearts,” sadly he said,

And, stooping, set me deftly in my seat,
 Pulled straight my skirt, and to the stirrup led
 My spurred foot, kissed it, ranged the reins, and, sweet,
 “Light hand—light heart,” he said.

The soft, brown glove brushed o’er his sun-brown veins ;
 He breathed as though it burnt him ; there, instead
 Of its doe-skin, seemed still the wine’s wet stains :
 “Hands are but hands,” he said.

I pricked her ; felt the bridle draw my hand ;
 Bent down an icy face and burning head,
 And passed. Yet so, his eyes pierced mine to brand
 The “Heart of hearts,” he said.

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The yellow, green-girt road rushed by and roared
 Bencath, beside us. Like a silver shred
 O’er briar and bank the thin moon swept and soared :
 “Hands have high ways,” he’d said.

I leant back, straight and stiff, against the reins,
 Yet pressed her when she slackened ; half afraid
 To hear my heart beat ; till the grass-grooved lanes—
 (“Hearts have by-ways,” he’d said),

Dulled

Dulled the hoof-hammers : up the beech-bowered chase,
My face against her glossy neck I laid,
And, with the palm he had kissed, sped fast her pace :
 “Hands hold their fires,” he'd said.

Her hot breath jetted through my ruffled hair,
The loose mane on my cheek beat out her tread,
And so we cleared the park ditch. (“Would I dare
 To risk my heart ?” he'd said.)

And, thence, walked slowly o'er the withered brake,
While still his questioning face before me fled,
And where he had leaned his head my arm would ache :
 “Hearts ache and break,” he had said.

The Grange gleamed out ; within its hall I found,
Scattered and torn, my letters lying—read !
My lord sat in the card-room, muffled round ;
 “ I've taken cold,” he said.