

fact, Forrest and the Princess, who were in pursuit of them, appeared. The Princess looked curiously at the Duke, and Forrest frowned heavily when he recognized him. There was a moment's almost embarrassed silence. Then Andrew did what seemed to him to be the reasonable thing.

"Princess," he said, "will you allow me to present my friend the Duke of Westerham. The Duke was staying with me a few weeks ago, as you know, and at that time he had a particular reason for not wishing his whereabouts to be known."

"I have heard of you very often, Duke," the Princess said. "Your brother, Lord Ronald, took us down to Norfolk, you know. By the by, have you heard from him yet?"

"Not yet, Madam," the Duke said, "but I can assure you that it is only a matter of time before I shall discover his whereabouts. I wonder whether your ward will do me the honor of giving me this dance?" he added, turning to her. "I am afraid I am not a very skilful performer, but perhaps she will have a little consideration for one who is willing to do his best."

He led Jeanne away from them, and Andrew, after a moment's stereotyped conversation, also departed. The Princess and Forrest were alone.

"This is getting worse and worse," Forrest muttered. "He is suspicious. I am sure that he is. They say that young Engleton was his favorite brother, and that he is determined—"

"Hush!" the Princess said. "There are too many people about to talk of these things. I wonder why the Duke took Jeanne off."

"An excuse for getting away from us," Forrest said. "Did you see the way he looked at me? Ena, I cannot hang on like this any longer. I must have a few thousand pounds and get away."

The Princess nodded.

"We will go and talk to De Brensault," she said. "I should think he would be just in the frame of mind to consent to anything."



The Duke, who was well acquainted with the house in which they were, led Jeanne into a small retiring room and found her an easy-chair.

"My dear young lady," he said, "I hope you will not be disappointed, but I have not danced for ten years. I brought you here because I wanted to say something to you."

"Something to me?" she repeated.

"Andrew de la Borne is one of my oldest and best friends," he said, "and what I am going to say to you is a little for his sake, although I am sure that if I knew you better I should say it also for your own. You must not be annoyed or offended, because I am old enough to be your father, and what I say I say altogether for your own good. They tell me that you are a young lady with a great fortune, and you know that nowadays half the evil that is done in the world is done for the sake of money. Frankly, without wishing to say a word against your step-mother, I consider that for a young girl you are placed in a very difficult and dangerous position. The man Forrest—mind you must not be offended if he should be a friend of yours—but I am bound to tell you that I believe him to be an unscrupulous adventurer, and I am afraid that your step-mother is very much under his influence. You have no other relatives or friends in this country, and I hear that a man named De Brensault is a suitor for your hand."

"I shall never marry him," Jeanne said firmly. "I think that he is detestable."

"I am glad to hear you say so," the Duke continued, "because he is not a man whom I would allow any young lady for whom I had any shade of respect or affection, to become acquainted with. Now the fact that your step-mother deliberately encourages him makes me fear that you may find yourself at any moment in a very difficult position. I do not wish to say anything against your friends or your step-mother. I hope you will believe that. But nowadays, people who are poor themselves, but who know the value and the use of money, are tempted to do things for the sake of it which are utterly unworthy and wrong. I want you to understand that if at any time you should need a friend, it will give me very great happiness indeed to be of any service to you I can. I am a bachelor, it is true, but I am old enough to be your father, and I can bring you into touch at once with friends more suitable for you and your station. Will you come to me, or send for me, if you find yourself in any sort of trouble?"

"You are very, very kind," she said. "I have been very unhappy, and I have felt very lonely. It will make everything seem quite different to know that there is some one to whom I may come for advice if— if—"

"I know, dear," the Duke interrupted, rising and holding out his arm. "I know quite well what you mean. All I can say is, don't be afraid to come or to send, and don't let any one bully you into throwing away your life upon a scoundrel like De Brensault. I am going to give you back to Andrew now. He is a good fellow—one of the best. I only wish—"

The Duke broke off short. After all, he remembered, he had no right to complete his sentence. Andrew, he felt, was no more of a marrying man than he himself, and he was the last person in the world to ever think of marrying a great heiress. They found him waiting about outside.

"I must relinquish my charge," the Duke said, smiling.

"You will not forget, Miss Le Mesurier?"

"I am never likely to," she answered gratefully.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FLOUTED.

THE Count de Brensault had seldom been in a worse temper. That Jeanne should have flouted him was not in itself so terrible, because he had quite made up his mind that sooner or later he would take a coward's revenge for the slights he had been made to endure at her hands. But that he should have been flouted in the presence of a whole roomful of people, that he should have been deliberately left for another man, was a different matter altogether. Forrest found him in exactly the mood most suitable for his purpose.

"Come and talk to the Princess," he said. "She has something to say to you."

De Brensault rose somewhat heavily to his feet.

"And I," he said, "I, too, have something to say to her. We will take a glass of champagne together, my friend Forrest, and then we will seek the Princess."

They found the Princess where Forrest had left her. She motioned to Brensault to sit by her side, and Forrest left them.

"My dear Count," the Princess said, "to-night has proved

to me that it is quite time Jeanne had some one to look after her. Let me ask you. Are you perfectly serious in your suit?"

"Absolutely!" De Brensault answered eagerly. "I myself would like the matter settled. I propose to you for her hand."

The Princess bowed her head thoughtfully.

"Now, my dear Count," she said, "I am going to talk to you as a woman of the world. You know that my husband, in leaving his fortune entirely to Jeanne, treated me very badly. You may know this, or you may not know it, but the fact remains that I am a very poor woman."

De Brensault nodded sympathetically. He guessed pretty well what was coming.

"If I," the Princess continued, "assist you to gain my step-daughter Jeanne for your wife, and the control of all her fortune, it is only fair," she continued, "that I should be recompensed in some way for the allowance which I have been receiving as her guardian, and which will then come to an end. I do not ask for anything impossible or unreasonable. I want you to give me twenty thousand pounds the day that you marry Jeanne. It is about one year's income for her *rentes*, a mere trifle, of course."

"Twenty thousand pounds," De Brensault repeated reflectively.

He looked thoughtful for a moment or two.

"Perhaps," he said, "it would be better if I had a business interview with her trustees before the ceremony."

"Just as you like," the Princess answered carelessly. "Monsieur Laplanche is in Cairo just now, but he will be back in Paris in a few weeks' time. Perhaps you would rather delay everything until then?"

"No!" De Brensault said, after a moment's hesitation. "I would like to marry Mademoiselle Jeanne at once, if it can be arranged."

"To tell you the truth," the Princess said, "I think it would be much the best way out of a very difficult situation. I am finding Jeanne very difficult to manage, and I am quite sure that she will be happier and better off married. I am proposing, if you are willing, to exercise my authority absolutely. If she shows the slightest reluctance to accept you, I propose that we all go over to Paris. I shall know how to arrange things there."

"And now, my dear Count," she said, "I am going to ask you a favor. I am doing for you something for which you ought to be grateful to me all your life. For a mere trifle, which will not recompense me in the least for what I am giving up, I am finding you one of the most desirable brides in Europe. I want you to help me a little."

"What is it that I can do?" he asked.

"Let me have five thousand pounds on account of what you are going to give me, to-morrow morning," she said coolly.

De Brensault hesitated. He was prepared to pay for what he wanted, but five thousand pounds was nevertheless a great deal of money.

"I would not ask you," the Princess continued, "if I were not really hard up. I have been gambling, a foolish thing to do, and I do not want to sell my securities, because I know that very soon they will pay me over and over again. Will you do this for me? Remember, I am giving you my word that Jeanne is to be yours."

"Make it three thousand," De Brensault said slowly. "Three thousand pounds I will send you a cheque for to-morrow morning."

The Princess nodded.

"As you will," she said. "I think if I were you, though, I should make it five. However, I shall leave it for you to do what you can. Now will you take me out to the ball-room? I am going to look for Jeanne."

They found her at supper with the Duke and Andrew and a very great lady, a connection of the Duke's, who was one of those few who had refused to accept the Princess. The Princess swept up to the little party and laid her hand upon Jeanne's shoulder.

"I do not want to hurry you, dear," she said, "but when you have finished supper I should be glad to go. We have to go on to Dorchester House, you know."

Jeanne sighed. She had been enjoying herself very much indeed.

"I am ready now," she said, standing up, "but must we go to Dorchester House? I would much rather go straight home. I have not had such a good time since I have been in London."

The Duke offered her his arm, ignoring altogether De Brensault, who was standing by.

"At least," he said, "you will permit me to see you to your carriage."



The Princess smiled graciously. It was bad enough to be ignored, as she certainly was to some extent, but on the other hand, it was good for De Brensault to see Jeanne held in such esteem. She took his arm, and they followed down the room. They saw the Duke bending down and talking earnestly to Jeanne and the Princess was a little perplexed.

"Remember," the Duke was saying, as he drew Jeanne's hand through his arm, "that I was very much in earnest in what I said to you just now. I have seen a good deal of the world, and you nothing at all, and I cannot help believing that the time when you may need some one's help is a good deal nearer than you imagine."

"I will remember," she murmured. "I am not likely to forget. Except for you and Mr. De La Borne, no one has been really kind to me since I left school. They all say foolish things, and try to make me like them, because I am a great heiress, but one understands how much that is worth."

The Duke looked at her, and seemed half inclined to say something. Whatever it may have been, however, he thought better of it. He contented himself with taking her hand in his and shaking it warmly.

"Good-night," he said, "little Miss Jeanne, and remember, No. 51 Grosvenor Square. If I am not there, I have a very nice old housekeeper who will look after you until I turn up."

"No. 51," she repeated softly. "No, I shall not forget!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

JEANNE IS OBSTINATE.

JEANNE slept well that night. For the first time she felt that she had lost the feeling of friendlessness which for the last few weeks had constantly oppressed her. Andrew de la Borne was back in London, and the Duke, who seemed to have some sort of understanding as to the troubles which were

Continued on page 46.

