

A Millionaire's; Countess Westerleigh

CHAPTER XXXV.

She was sitting by the fire, bending over it, with her face screened, but he saw her bosom heave.

"You are sure," she said, almost inaudibly.

"As sure as one can be in the matter of life and death," he said, with a slight shrug of his shoulders.

"Yes, sure; I am glad to say."

She shuddered slightly and looked up at him with a mixture of fear and dislike in her eyes, under which the long anxiety had painted dark shadows.

"You are glad?" she breathed, half incredulously.

"Pardon!" he said, as if with surprise. "Why should I not be glad, my friend—my closest friend—"

She rose as if his voice jarred upon her, and stood almost with her back to him.

"I don't know," she said.

He assumed a wonderful expression.

"Why should you wrong me by such a doubt, Lady Florence?" he murmured, reproachfully. "Have I not tried to prove myself his friend—and yours?"

She shuddered again.

"Oh, yes!" she said, with barely suppressed impatience—"I suppose so."

"Suppose!" he echoed, with raised brows.

"When can I see him—how soon?" she demanded, restlessly.

He seemed to consider for a moment.

"In a day or two," he said. "We must not try him too much at first, and of course your presence would excite him."

"I will not see him until it is safe for him," she said, biting her lip. "Tell him—no, I will write to him. I may do that?"

"Certainly," he answered. "I will be delighted with a letter from you. Your name has been on his lips day and night, Lady Florence."

Vane had scarcely mentioned her name. The color came into her pale face, and she turned her head away.

"It is only the thought of his approaching marriage which has given him the necessary spirit to pull round," he said, softly.

"That—that can not be for some

time," she murmured; but there was a touch of hope in her low voice.

"Forgive me, if I venture to suggest that it should be as soon as possible," he said. "He needs a loving and watchful care—such care as only a wife can give. But there; we need not talk of him as if he were a confirmed invalid. Vane will soon be the old Vane again, and then—"

He paused significantly and left her.

"You must get well as soon as you can my dear fellow," he said to Vane, half an hour later; "you've got a big business in hand, you know."

Vane looked at him with listless interrogation.

"Big business?"

"Yes. You don't call matrimony a small one, do you?" said Senley Tyers, lightly.

Vane's face flushed, and he looked down; and though he made no response, Senley Tyers' speech had its effect, and almost the first words Vane said when Lady Florence and he met were:

"When is our wedding to be, Florence?"

"It shall be when you please, Vane," she answered, her hand trembling in his, her eyes cast down for a moment, then raised with a passionate devotion to him.

"Then I'll take the usual invalid's advantage and say 'Soon,'" he said, lifting her hand to his lips. "But for this wretched illness we should have been man and wife before this. If you'll promise to take me—what remains of me, that is—and he glanced down at his thin hands with a laugh—"next month—say the end of February—I shall have something to get well for. I'll talk about it to your father when he comes this afternoon, if you'll say 'Yes.'"

A glad light brightened her face and she let her head fall lightly upon his shoulder and drew his arm round her neck.

"I would marry you to-morrow if you'd promise to get well by the time," she said, with a faint laugh.

Lord Warlock, when he came, readily assented to the date proposed.

"Get it over and done with," he said. "It's a nuisance whenever and wherever it takes place. Why on earth people can't be married without the fuss that's always made—"

"But there is to be no fuss," said Vane. "Florence particularly wishes that it shall be a quiet wedding."

"So she tells me; but I've pointed out to her if she wants a sensible quiet wedding, you must get married in the country. You'd have half the fools in London coming to gaze at you if you took place at St. George's or the Savoy. Look here, why not go down to the Grange and get married from there? You could stay at the inn—it's a decent place—for a night or two."

"The Grange?" said Vane.

"Yes; that place of mine in Cornwall. I haven't been there for years; but it's pretty and all that, and it could be got ready in a few days."

"Very well," said Vane. "It must be all as Florence pleases."

"Just so," Lord Warlock said with a grin. "That's only fair, seeing it's the last time she will have her own way. Very well. We'll go down there in the middle of February and get things ready. Meanwhile, you can go down south and pick yourself up. By George, you look more like a living skeleton or a sick girl than anything else just at present," he added, with his usual candor.

Vane laughed.

"Oh, I shall be all right in a day or two," he said, indifferently.

Senley Tyers, coming to visit his

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Jacob Able of R. F. D. No. 1, Milltown, N. J., writes: "For the last three years I have had kidney disease and backache, and I have had it so bad that for eight days and nights I could not get my clothes off. I thought I would try Radway's Ready Relief. I gave my back and hips and sides a good rubbing, and in a short time the pain was all gone. No one in this world knows but God and myself the misery I was in till I used Radway's Ready Relief."

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friend soon after the earl's departure, was told of the arrangements, and asked to play the part of best man; but to Vane's surprise he smilingly refused.

"I shall have to get you to excuse me, my dear Vane," he said. "It is a part I should play most vilely. I hate weddings, and—well, you see, it wouldn't do. You'll have to ask one of your swell relations to show up on that occasion. How did you come to forget that? You must, you know; it's noblesse oblige; the fashionable world would howl if you didn't."

Vane nodded.

"All right," he said once more. "You, all of you, have it your own way with me. But I suppose you'll condescend to be present?"

Senley Tyers shrugged his shoulders.

"I won't promise even that," he said. "It's not unlikely, we shall see. Lock here, your train goes at ten o'clock to-morrow. I've got the ticket. You go and lie in the sun in Nice for a few weeks; that's all you want now."

So, while Lady Florence was hard at work in that labor of joy—buying the trousseau—the bridegroom-elect was lounging at the Riviera. It is a wonderful place to recover one's health and spirits, and when, two days before the wedding, he drove to the inn at Runnaclesare, the village nearest to the Grange was called, he looked almost like the Vane of old.

But not quite, for, notwithstanding that the strength had come back to his stalwart frame, and the sun had restored the color to his handsome face there was still a look in the eyes and about the lips which had been absent from those of the light hearted, devil-may-care Vane Tempest who rode to the Witches' Caldron to meet Nora Trevanion.

He reached the inn too late to go to the Grange, but a groom who had been waiting Vane's arrival carried a note announcing it and promising that he would come over on the morrow, and, tired with the journey, he went straight to bed.

When he got down in the morning and stood at the inn door, looking thoughtfully at the sunlit scene and inhaling the sweet spring air, the landlord approached him with a smile of respectful greeting which was due to the gentleman who was going to marry the daughter of the great Earl Warlock, and who was himself a connection of another equally great earl.

"A beautiful morning, sir," he said.

Vane nodded, and looked up absently at the sky.

"You know that a gentleman, a Mr. Harold Tempest, is coming to-day," he said.

This was a distant cousin who had been engaged for best man.

The landlord bowed.

"Yes, sir. His lordship, the earl, told me to expect him. Everything is ready, sir."

"Very good," said Vane. "Can you let me have a horse to ride over to the Grange? How far is it, by the way?"

"Near upon four miles, sir," replied the man. "Oh, yes, sir. I've a very good horse, and I think it will be fine, your honor."

"It looks bright enough," said Vane preparing to go in to his breakfast.

"Yes, sir; it's too clear over the Witches' Caldron for rain."

Vane started and stood still.

"What—what place did you say?" he asked, his back to the obsequious landlord.

"The Witches' Caldron, your honor."

Vane turned slowly, his lips compressed, a shadow on his face. Beyond the fact that the Grange was

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near Runnaclesare, and, like the Witches' Caldron, in Cornwall, he knew nothing of his whereabouts.

"How near is it?" he asked.

"A matter of ten miles, your honor," replied the landlord. "It's a main pretty place, but wild like. It's close to the sea. You can almost see it from your window, your honor."

Vane stood silent and motionless. "In which direction does it lie?" he asked, after a long pause.

The landlord pointed to the east.

"Right in a line with my forefinger," he said. "There's the Grange as you might say, inland to the left; and there's the Witches' Caldron on the coast, a bit to the right. It isn't a sight out of your honor's way, if so be as your honor wasn't pressed for time and had care to see one of the roughest spots we've got."

Vane shook his head.

(To be Continued.)

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