

A Millionairess; Countess Westerleigh.

CHAPTER XX.
(To be Continued.)

"The art of telling your fortune by the lines and marks in your hand," he said, smoothly. "It is quite a science, and some go so far as to say that it is one of the oldest in existence. The Egyptians believed in it, and were adepts at it; and a great many persons assert that it is as old as the Flood. I am surprised you had not heard of it. You come from the west coast, don't you?"

It was an arrow shot at a venture, but it went home.

"Yes," assented Nora, thrown off her guard by the careless way in which the question was put.

"I should have thought the good people down at Treloire would have been well up in that kind of thing. Country people, especially in remote places, are generally superstitious."

"I don't often go to Treloire. I don't know any one there," said Nora.

Senley Tyers kept back the glance of satisfaction that shot into his eyes as he thought: "So Vane found this 'cousin' of his down at that place in the west, did he?"

"I'll show you what I mean," he went on, languidly. He held out his hand, palm upward and pointed to the lines. "See there; that line is the line of life; that is the line of matrimony, and that the line of fortune

Any one well up in the business would rattle off my fate or fortune in no time, and sentence one to a long life or a short one almost with their eyes shut. Let me see your hand."

Quite unsuspectingly Nora held out her hand.

Senley Tyers took it in his arm bent over it with an earnestness which was not all assumed.

Of the science of palmistry he knew nothing; but in the course of his profession he had made a study of the human hand, and always gained praise for his manner of painting it.

He looked at the small brown hand in silence for a moment; and Nora who was gazing at it also, did not see that his face had gone suddenly pale, and that a look of triumph and gratified cunning glowed in his eyes. No man's hand, however, well-shaped and smooth, and white, is like that of

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a woman's; and one who has made the human hand a study can distinguish between them after a very slight examination.

"I should say you had a very pleasant life before you," he said, smiling up at her. "You are a lucky young man, if I know anything of the art of fortune-telling by the hands. There is only one thing you have to guard against, Mortimer;" and he laughed.

"What is that?" said Nora, with a rather contemptuous glance from her eyes to his.

"A fair woman, with golden hair and violet eyes," he said, half gravely. "Be on your guard against her, or she will bring you bad luck my boy."

Nora drew her hand away, and as he did so Vane glanced over his shoulder at them.

"Your cousin and Mr. Tyers appear to be getting on very well together," remarked Lady Florence. "He seems a very nice boy."

Vane's manner changed in a moment. Lady Florence had kept him so much amused that he had, for the first time, been listening to her, almost forgotten Nora's presence; but in an instant his fearful responsibility came crowding back upon him.

"Oh, yes, yes," he said.

Lady Florence looked at him. She was quick to notice every expression of his face and tone of his voice.

"You spoke as if you were not very fond of him," she said, with a smile. "Perhaps you find him just a little of a bore, and yet I should have thought you would have liked to have him with you; he is company for you, and I should fancy you find your solitude rather dull at times."

Vane colored.

"Yes; oh, yes," he assented. "Oh I like to have him with me; but of course he is rather a responsibility," he said, mentally wondering what Lady Florence would say if she knew how grave the responsibility really was. What would she say? he thought. Would she scream aloud or faint on the spot if Nora's secret and his—yes, it was his, also—were suddenly told to her?

"You must let us take him off your hands sometimes," she said. "I have taken a fancy to him, he seems such a quiet, modest boy. Did you notice how amiable papa was with him? And as a rule papa is not over-pleasent to boys. We must do something to amuse him."

"Yes—thanks," said Vane. "But I needn't let you or Lord Warlock be bored by my—my juvenile relations."

"Oh, he won't bore me in the least!" she said. "Would he never understand that she was ready to love anything that belonged to him—the very dog that received a caress from him? I rather like boys. At any rate, they are better than young girls, for they are generally a mass of affection."

"Are they?" said Vane, absently.

"Oh, you wouldn't notice it, of course; men never do," said Lady Florence, half pityingly. "Yes, I am afraid I should not feel so friendly toward Mr. Mortimer if he were a young girl. How good-looking he is! He is not a bit like you, Mr. Tempest."

"Thanks—thanks, very much," said Vane, attempting a careless levity.

"It wasn't much of a compliment," she said, with a smile. "But I meant that he was so much darker, and that his features were so unlike yours.

But you say that there is not much relationship?"

"Not so much," he assented.

At that moment, Lady Florence, catching Nora's eye, nodded and beckoned with her fan.

Nora rose at once, and crossing to her, stood with a languid but pleased smile. She was always at her best when Vane was near and when she had been with him some little time.

"We have been talking about you, Mr. Mortimer," she said.

Nora raised her lids and glanced from Lady Florence to Vane, who leaned back, nursing his knee and trying to look, as he certainly did not feel, quite at ease.

"Yes, Lady Florence?" said Nora.

"Yes; I was telling Mr. Tempest that he must let us help him amuse you and show you something of London. Would you care, for instance, to go with us to the theatre?—or rather, you could take me. Oh, you need not look at Mr. Tempest for permission!" she added, with languid amusement, as Nora's dark eyes flashed a quick glance of interrogation at Vane.

Vane colored and nearly dropped his leg from his clasped hands, but Nora did not wince in the slightest.

"Thank you very much, Lady Florence," she said. "I should like it I have never been to a theatre."

Lady Florence stared with faint surprise.

"No? Then it will be a treat for both of us." She turned her eyes to Vane. "It will be amusing to watch 'is astonishment," she said. "When shall we go? Let me see—we are engaged to-morrow. The night after-ward? Will you come, Mr. Tempest? 'apa, will, perhaps, condescend to happen on me for a few minutes; but

shall in reality place myself under the protection of Mr. Mortimer, if he will kindly undertake the charge;" and she smiled up at Nora.

Nora bent her head.

"Yes; I will take care of you," he said, so solemnly that Lady Florence laughed in her listless, languid fashion; then suddenly the laugh fled away, and her eyes dropped, as Senley Tyers had come up behind Nora.

"I have come to say 'good-night,'" Lady Florence, he said in conventional tones, "and to thank you for a very pleasant evening. I will not disturb Lord Warlock, who is, I trust, enjoying his well-earned repose." He glanced at the still sleeping earl. "Did I hear you planning a visit to the theatre? I fancied I caught the word."

"Yes," said Lady Florence in a kind of suppressed voice.

"May I enquire the date? I ask because a friend has placed a box at the Lyceum at my disposal for one night this week."

"It is the night after next," said Lady Florence in the same constrained voice.

"How fortunate!" he said. "It is the very night. Please let me transfer it to you. Don't hesitate. I can not use it, for I am engaged; and it would be a pity to waste a good box, especially when all London is 'gighting for a seat.'"

"Thank you," she said, without raising her eyes, which she kept lowered even while he was shaking hands.

He nodded to Vane in the half-careless fashion which obtains nowadays, and left the room. "There goes a good fellow," said Vane, looking after him, "and clever, too."

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"Yes? He is very clever," said Lady Florence, slowly.

The good and clever fellow paced along the side of the park with a peculiar expression on his face.

There was the triumph in it which is the reward of successful cunning, but there was also the frown of acute and profound perplexity.

"Vane, my friend," he muttered, "you must be either the most consummate scoundrel or the biggest idiot that ever lived. Which is it, I wonder? By Heaven! I think it must be idiot! Why, one false step, one unguarded word, and your volcano would explode under your feet! And she—great Heaven! she can only be a mere child! But what pluck, what audacity! Who is she? I must find that out. Steady, my dear Senley—steady! Hitherto—until this very night, indeed—you have been groping in the dark, feeling your way, step by step, like a blind man; but to-night I think Fate has dealt you a hand that ought to win

you the game, if you only know how to play it; that is the question."

(To be continued.)

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