

A Millionairess; or, Countess Westerleigh.

CHAPTER XXIII.
(To be continued.)

"What is it?" asked Nora, looking at the paper wistfully.

"Oh, nothing," he said. "Only a speculation of Senley Tyers' that is turning up trumps. He's a clever fellow."

"I don't understand," she said.

"Neither do I. Don't worry. Have some more of this hot cake?"

That night, when she went to her room, she drew aside the wardrobe curtains again, and, obeying a whimsical impulse, took one of the pretty prints from her hook and put it on; and as she stood before the glass, looking at herself, a curious sensation of unreality took possession of her. She felt ghost-like, and made haste to take off the dress, and with a trembling hand replaced it in its cupboard.

The days passed. Sometimes, when it was fine, she went out with Vane, tramping beside him over the heath, and singing as she went. Sometimes she wandered alone over the hills to the neighboring town and made small purchases; but she liked best to sit at home at work, and make up a big fire for Vane, when he returned home, tired, and cold, and hungry. It was a restful life of companionship and friendship—an idyllic life that both he and she were gradually persuading themselves could last forever.

Neither of them knew that the shadow of their fate was already moving toward them.

One afternoon she was bending over her books, humming softly from sheer happiness and serenity, when she heard a step outside.

It was too early for Vane's return, and after a second's pause in her song, she took it up again and went on with her work. But the step came nearer, and ceased outside the door, and she heard a knock.

Mrs. Burns and her daughter had gone out on some errand, and Nora, after a momentary hesitation, rose and opened the door.

The day was already beginning to fail; a mist hung over the hills. In the dusk of the gloaming she saw a man in a thick ulster, with the collar turned up, and for a moment she gazed at him without recognizing him; then she fell back a pace, and with a vague apprehension, she uttered an exclamation. It was Senley Tyers.

"Ah, Mortimer!" he said, holding out his hand as he passed her, and entered the room. "Quite startled you, I'm afraid. You didn't expect me? Where is Tempest?"

She had touched his hand, and now stood regarding him with her face grown pale and a shadow of uneasiness in her eyes.

"He is out shooting," she said. "Did he expect you?"

"No," he said, with a smile, as he took off his ulster and went to the fire, standing with his back to it and regarding her with a look that was a mixture of cynical amusement and cruel satisfaction at the fear his presence had aroused. "No; I happened to fancy a run up here—just to see how you were getting on; and here I am."

"Won't you sit down?" she said, trying to speak steadily, and to throw some geniality and welcome into her voice.

He nodded and smoked his cigarette.

"I had a fancy for having another look at that quaint place Tempest and I were down at some months ago—a place called Telorne. You know it, of course?"

"No," she said, her face suddenly pale.

"Oh, you forget," he said, smoothly. "You told me that you did know it, don't you remember, that night at Lady Florence's?"

He looked at her over his shoulder. "I forgot," she said. "Oh, yes."

"I daresay I pronounced it badly," he said. "Well, I went down there just on the whim of the moment, and was tempted by the wildness of the place to go a little further along the coast. A savage coast it is, too, Mortimer, isn't it?"

"Yes," she said, and she wondered whether her voice had suddenly grown thick, or whether it was only so in her own ears.

"I found one of the quaintest, wildest places I ever saw in my life down there. It is called the Witches' Cauldron."

She dropped the pen she had taken up absently, and her fingers closed spasmodically.

He glanced toward her, and continued in his smooth, low voice: "There was a small cottage, quite a sea-gull's-nest sort of place, half built out of an old boat, perched on the cliffs, and I made a sketch of it. It was empty and deserted. Her hand stole to the edge of the sideboard and clutched it. He noticed the movement, and a faint smile curled his lip. Mr. Senley Tyers was enjoying himself immensely. "I wonder whether you ever saw it?"

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He moved to the table, and glanced at the books and copy, and smiled.

"Hard at work, I see, Mortimer," he said. "That is right. A nice, quiet place to study in, you find it, don't you?"

"It is very quiet," she said. "Will you have something to eat—to drink?"

"Thanks," he said; "a glass of whiskey. When will Vane be in?"

"In about an hour," she said. "He has gone over the hills. He—he will be glad to see you."

She put the whiskey and water on the table, and he took out a cigarette and lit it. The scent of the Turkish tobacco seemed to carry her back to London, and to increase the vague fear with which the sudden sight of him had inspired her.

"Have you learned to smoke yet, Mortimer?" he asked, puffing the clouds in rings and watching them as they floated to the ceiling.

"No," she said; "but I do not mind—Vane smokes all the time."

"Mind it?" he echoed. "Fancy a boy objecting to tobacco?"

"She winced, but kept a steadfast eye upon his mocking face.

"And so Vane will be back in an hour?" he said, sipping the whiskey.

"And how is he? Has the change done him good? You are looking better, Mortimer."

"I am quite well," she said, coldly, as she collected the books and put them aside.

"You don't ask how I am?" he said, dropping with his languid air into a chair—Vane's chair—beside the fire, and hiding his thin, white hands to it.

"I hope you are well," she said. "Vane will be glad to see you. Are you fond of shooting? If so, you will be able to go out with him. He has rented part of the moor here, and gets some birds there every day."

"Thank you, Mortimer; but I could not hit a haystack at twenty paces. All the grouse in Scotland are safe for me; besides, I want to rest a few days—want to lie on my back, or sit before the fire and take my ease. I've been travelling."

He spoke as if he expected her to ask where and she put the question. The color had come back to her face, and she was rapidly regaining her self-possession. After all, why should she fear him? He would not stay long—a day, two only, perhaps.

"Where?" he said. "Well, I've been in the west coast."

"The west coast?" she repeated, vaguely, and with her back to him, as she stood at the small sideboard putting away her books.

He nodded and smoked his cigarette.

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She did not speak, and he went on, as smoothly as before:

"There was quite a history attached to the place. It seems that there lived in it at one time, and until quite recently, a woman and her niece—a Mrs. Trevanion—and a girl called Nora."

He paused, dropped the end of his cigarette from his languid fingers, lighted a fresh one, and leaning back with his hands behind his head, watched her from beneath his half-closed eyes, holding his thin, white hands to it as it sounds, smugly, fancy! How long they had been living there! I don't know, but it seems that the poor girl was drowned by the upsetting of a boat—she was on an absurd smuggling expedition. I imagine—and the aunt left the place and went to Australia—California—Jericho. Sad story, isn't it? I assure you, my dear Mortimer, that the wild place quite touched me. You know, I dare say, that I am rather romantic. We artists always are. But I beg your pardon; I'm afraid I've been telling you a story you must know already—or did you leave the place before this sad accident happened?"

She faced round and confronted him. The fire-light fell upon her white face, and dark, flashing eyes. Her lips were set tightly, her dark brows drawn in a straight line.

As he looked at her as she stood at bay the artist predominated in him, and he yielded her a reluctant admiration.

"By heaven, she is splendid!" he murmured. "If I could only paint her now!"

The pause lasted for a full minute; then she opened her lips, and in a low voice, the words, "You know?" fell from them.

He smiled up at her—a smile of

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sardonic confidence and triumph. "Of course, I know," he returned, in a kind of purr.

"When? How long ago?" she breathed.

"He arched his brows. "Since the night of the dinner-party at Lady Florence's."

She put her hand to her lips as if to steady them; the room seemed to spin round. She staggered slightly, and he rose and moved toward her, in an instant she had recovered, and, recollecting from him, she caught up the knife with which she had been sharpening a pencil and raised her arm ready to strike him.

"Keep back!" she breathed. "Do not touch me!"

He thrust his hands in his pockets, and shrugged his shoulders with a deprecatory smile.

"My dear girl—my dear Nora!" he said, "you are making a great mistake. You are treating me as a foe. I am your friend, believe me. Do you understand?—your friend! Come, come!"

His voice sunk to a soothing cooing murmur. "Come and sit down and listen to me. Keep your knife, if you like, and after you have listened to me, stick it into the breast of the friend who has come to save you."

"To save me?" she echoed, unconsciously.

"Yes," he said, with quiet emphasis: "to save you!"

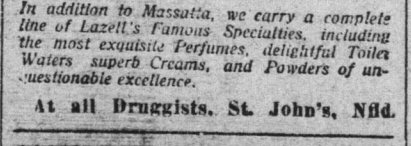
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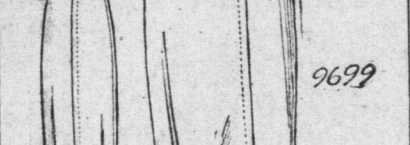
9682-9689—A COMFORTABLE STYLISH GOWN FOR HOME OR AFTERNOON WEAR.



Blouse effects are so comfortable, they continue to be popular. Blue crepe with silk in Bulgarian colors, for trimming is here shown. The waist is cut in surplice style, below a square front yoke, that is finished with a shawl collar. The sleeve in either length is effective. The skirt finished with hem tuck stitching has simple straight lines. The Waist Pattern 9688 is cut in 5 sizes: 32, 34, 36, 38 and 40 inches bust measure. The Skirt, 9689, is cut in 5 sizes: 22, 24, 26, 28 and 30 inches waist measure. It requires 5 1/2 yards of 44 inch material for a 36 inch size.

This illustration calls for TWO separate patterns which will be mailed to any address on receipt of 10c. FOR EACH pattern in silver or stamps.

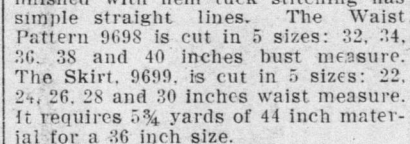
9684-9685—A CHARMING FROCK FOR AFTERNOON OR CALLING.



Composed of Ladies Waist Pattern 9684, and Ladies Skirt Pattern 9685. Fine colored poplin, with shadow lace for vest, and velvet of a darker shade for trimming is here shown. The waist is cut in bloused style, and may be finished with long or shorter sleeves. The fronts are cut low over a deep vest that is outlined by a separate revers, that forms a shaped collar over the back. The skirt shows deep tucks in front and back. The Waist Pattern is cut in 5 sizes: 32, 34, 36, 38, 40 inches bust measure. The skirt in 5 sizes: 22, 24, 26, 28 and 30 inches waist measure. It requires 4 1/2 yards of 36 inch material for a 36 inch size.

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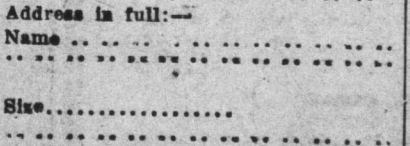
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