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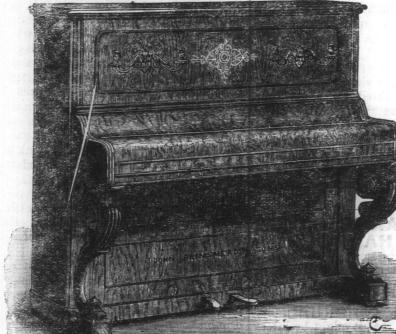
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By the Author of Dora Thorne.

CHAPTER XXVII.

(Continued.)

'Heaven has willed it!' said the girl again, as she laid down the note; and again she overlooked the fact that it was she herself who had come to Cowes in search of Miss Cameron.

That letter smoothed away all difficulties. Margarita felt no fear of not being able to win her rival's liking; she had been sure of it. Yet it was a good relief to her that Miss Cameron had taken a fancy to her. All night, between sleeping and waking, she heard the sound of the clear, sweet voice, and it seemed to mingle with the music of the waves; all night she confused the gleam of luxuriant hair with the light she had seen in the stars. She awoke confused, trembling, half faint with mingled fear and hope.

She dressed herself carefully for the momentous interview. The remainder of her life depended on it-not only her life, but how much of her husband's welfare! It was the only small hinge on which so much would turn. She chose a dress of plain gray silk, with a black lace mantle, and a plain hat with a long gray plume; but almost to her distress, when she came to survey her toilet, she looked far better than she desired. The gray dress only made the superb coloring of her face more vivid and more conspicuous. Do what she would, she could not dim its radiance, she could not deaden its beauty. With a sigh almost of despair she turned from her mirror. It seemed to her hardly probable that a beauty like Adelaide Cameron would care to have anything like a rival near her.

'If I could take the color from my face, and the light from my eyes-if I could but make myself old and plain and disagreeable-I should have a better chance,' she said to

She did not know that the rich glowing beauty of her face, with its touch of Southern fire and passion, had charmed Miss Cameron.

When the hour arrived at which it was proper to call, she set out to keep her appointment. On reaching the hotel, she was ushered into the superb apartment that was called Miss Cameron's sitting-room. It was empty, and Margarita sat down to wait, feeling very much as though she were an actress taking part in a play. When she had been there some few minutes, the door opened and Miss Cameron

The lovely young heiress, wherever she went, appeared to concentrate all the light and all the brightness in herself. The very sunshine that came through the rose silk hangings seemed to settle on her golden hair-to linger in the viclet eyes-to rest on the white morning wrapper with its blue ribbons. There floated in with her a faint sweet perfumeone of her failings was a love of sweet odors. She came forward eagerly to Margarita, her white, jeweled hand outstretched, the kindliest smile playing round her lips, the sweetest wel-

come beaming in her face. 'I am glad to see you, Miss Avenel,' she said. 'It was kind of you to call.'

'The kindness lies with you,' returned Margarita. 'Lady Davenant told me that you had expressed a wish to see me. It is that which has brought me here.'

The young heiress sat down by Margarita's

'I am afraid you will think me very childish, Miss Avenel, but I must plead guilty to a habit of conceiving either warm fancies or great dislikes; and you will forgive me if I add that I have taken the greatest fancy to

She wondered a little at the sudden flush that crimsoned the dark face.

'I am a great believer in instinctive likes and dislikes,' she continued. 'Are you?'

'I do not know,' replied Margarita. can hardly remember ever to have liked or disliked anyone in so rapid a fashion.'

'I hope,' said Adelaide, in her impulsive way, 'that you will learn to like me. I wanted to speak to you, Miss Avenel, on business; but now that I see you, I have a half fear that the business is not worthy of you?' You lived as governess with Lady Davenant, did you

'Yes,' replied Margarita, 'I was with Lady Davenant for two years.' Adelaide smiled,

'You must pardon me,' she said, 'but it seems scarcely credible-you look so unlike he ideal governess. One always imagines her subdued lady of natural tints. You are not the average type of governess at all.'

It was impossible to resist the lovely face, the sunny smile, the caressing manner. Margarita smiled herself.

'I am very sorry,' she began.

'Oh,' interrupted Mias Cameron, 'you have no cause for sorrow, Miss Avenel, I do not want a governess, but something like myself. want a companion.'

And then Miss Cameron, with a more business-like air, continued-

'Madame de Valmy, who has been living with me for some time, has recently, I am pleased to say, for her own sake, had some property in France left her. The only drawback is that she is compelled to reside there, and so to leave me. It is a great trouble to me, I assure you, for I am much attached to

Margarita murmured some words of sympathy, and Miss Cameron resumed-

'I have been quite at a loss how to replace her. I have seen many ladies this week, but none of whom I like, or felt that I should care to live with. But, Miss Avenel, I do like you -I am sure that I could live happily enough with you. May I offer you the engagement? Will you become my companion?'

For a few minutes there was silence between them. Something smote Margarita. The generous trust, the implicit confidence, the fearlessly-declared liking-how could she, with such a one, carry on a woman's war? She could not see her way as she had seen it before. An expression almost of fear came over Miss Cameron's face.

'You hesitate, Miss Avenel,' she said Surely I am not too late?'

'No,' replied Margarita-' I was thinking, believe that I was a very good governess. I took the greatest pains to teach my pupils, and to train them; but I have no idea of the duties of a companion—I do not know how to fulfill them.

'You are very candid to say so. I do not think there are many duties, as you call -at least not in this case. I have had a great sorrow. Although, perhaps, I look both well and happy now, yet there are times when the very spirit of gloom seizes me and makes me

'A bad conscience!' thought Margarita to herself. 'There is something wrong about

'I merely want some one to live with mesome one who would be very kind, would talk and drive with me, go with me to balls and parties, help me to entertain visitors, talk when I am dull-that is all.'

'It does not seem very difficult,' said Mar-

' Nor is it; there are no fixed hours, no fixed duties. You see, the fact is this-I am more onely than most girls-I have neither mother, nor sister, nor cousin, and it is terrible to be

There was something appealing in the halfsad tones and the pathetic little smile.

'I hope, Miss Avenel,' continued the young heiress, 'you will agree to what I propose.'

'If you think I am old enough and wise enough for the position, I will do all I can, she returned.

The shadows cleared from the fair face-Miss Cameron laughed with the happy abandonment of a child

'You are about my own age, I should think,' she said, 'or you may be a year older; and you are taller than I am. Suppose that you are twenty and that I am twenty-that gives a total of forty years—a period of time surely that cannot have been void of experience."

'I am not well versed in the observances of social life,' observed Margarita.

'I am,' laughed Adelaide; 'my poor uncle first, and Madame de Valmy since, have both done their best to teach me. I think, between us, we shall succeed in observing the conven-

'I shall be happy to try,' responded Margarita, again.

'Then, is you are willing,' continued Miss Cameron, ' we will consider the matter settled. I am so happy Miss Avenel, and so grateful

'The gratitude should be mine,' said Margarita, stiffly. She fought against herselfshe was unwilling to be led captive by the charms of this beautiful girl.

'You would not say so if you knew how much I have longed for you, and how greatly I have feared you would not come to me. Madame de Valmy leaves me at the end of next week; when will it be convenient for you to come?'

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