

Ide

Try an Ide Collar and note the number of trips it will stand to the laundry before showing signs of wear.

TRIMMING AMBLY LENOX

For Love of a Woman, New Romeo and Juliet.

CHAPTER XXIII.
A SAD HOME-COMING.

"Yes, she is," she assented, as if the admission cost her an agony. "Oh, yes! And he is going! I thought he would have stayed the night!"

"And I didn't," said the marquis, grimly. "He is a Stoye, and it's not our way to take the loss of our mistresses meekly."

"Did you give him the letter?" she asked.

The marquis uttered an exclamation. "Phew!" he said, with a laugh. "I knew there was something I should forget. I told you and Churchill that you'd better play the game yourselves and that I should bungler it. You see, I am so unused to intrigues of this description, and the great intriguer of his generation smiled grimly."

"Give it to me," said Lady Grace, as she struck by a sudden idea.

The marquis pointed to a cabinet. "It's there somewhere," he said, indifferently.

Lady Grace opened the door sharply.

"Take care, please," he said, with a smothered yawn. "That cabinet is unique, and I have left it to you."

She made an impatient gesture, caught up poor Doris's letter, and glided from the room and up the corridor.

As she did so, Lord Cecil came out of his room, followed by his valet, with a portmanteau in his hand, and wrap on his arm.

"Lady Grace!" said Lord Cecil.

"Why, where are you going?" she exclaimed. "I have only just heard of your return. You are not going again?"

"Yes," he said, trying to speak lightly, and force a conventional smile; "I am as bad as a queen's messenger."

She laid her hand lightly on his arm. "Something's the matter," she said, in a low voice. "What is it? Is it anything you can tell me—anything I can help you in?"

He shook his head as he signed to his man to go on.

"I have learnt bad news, Lady Grace," he said, as coolly as he could;

but his voice shook as he added, "No, you cannot help me, and I fear, no one can!"

She came closer to him, and laid her hand upon his arm, looking up at him with her magnificent eyes softened with womanly sympathy.

"I am so sorry! Can you tell me what it is? Stay! Where are you going?"

"To London," he replied.

"To London!" She leaned over the balustrade and looked at the great clock in the hall. "You have plenty of time. Stay one moment. Lord Cecil, do you remember the first night you came?"

"Yes," he said, gravely.

A faint flush rose to her face.

"And all I said to you? Do you think I should have spoken to you as I did unless—unless I had liked you?"

"I appreciated your candour, Lady Grace," he said, in the same grave tone.

Her hand trembled on his arm.

"Well, then, I am going to be still more candid. I am going to ask you to try and fancy that you had asked me to be your wife and that I had refused."

It was his turn to flush now, and his eyes dropped under her fixed, earnest gaze.

"Do you know why I say that? It is because you may not misunderstand me when I ask you—as I do now—to let me be your friend."

"I am grateful, Lady Grace—" he began in a low voice; but she stopped him.

"Wait. It is no idle, meaningless offer. I will be a real friend, Lord Cecil, if you will let me. I will prove that a woman and a man can be friends without being—lovers! Now, then, trust me, and show me that you trust me by telling me what this trouble is."

Her eyes looked so honest, so eager, so trustworthy, that Cecil—his heart wrung with the misery of suspense and doubt, his brain heavy and bewildered by fatigue and harassing anxiety—fell into the net.

"I will trust you, Lady Grace," he said, and there was a quiver in his voice which was no discredit to his manliness. "In a word, I have lost the girl I love."

"Lost her!" she said, with wide-open eyes. "Ah, yes, I know! Miss Marlowe, is it not?"

"Yes," he said. "Do you know anything? For Heaven's sake tell me everything!"

"I will," she said. "But I have heard nothing more than this: that she has gone to Australia with—a with a man

to whom she was engaged before—

"And you believe it?" he said, with grave reproach.

"No," she said, at once, "I do not believe a word of it."

He took her hand and pressed it, all unconsciously, so that the rings almost cut into her delicate fingers.

"How shall I thank you for saying that?" he exclaimed, in a low voice, which showed how deeply he was moved. "They are the first words of comfort, of encouragement! You do not believe it?"

"No, I am certain it is not true. She has left Barton, I know; but as to the rest, why it is too absurd! Shall I tell you why I do not believe it? Because I have something for you which will explain all, I've no doubt," and she held out the letter.

He almost snatched it from her.

"A letter! Why—where—when—how—"

And he stared at her with eager impatience.

"It came while you were away, and I took it. Don't be angry."

"Angry! Has anyone seen it but yourself?"

"No one! No one! I kept it—Of course I felt that its safety was of importance to you. I should have forwarded it to you, but I knew you were moving about, and I feared it might be lost."

"I see, I see!" he said, and already hope was displaying itself in his face and voice.

"Yes, that will tell you where she is, and why she has gone, no doubt," said Lady Grace; and with an affection of delicate consideration she turned to the great oriel window that he might read it undisturbed.

Suddenly he uttered a cry, and, looking round, she saw him leaning against the balustrade staring at the letter, which shook like an aspen leaf in his hands.

"Oh, what is it?" she breathed, and her face went almost as white as his own.

He looked up with a bewildered stare; then, with a working face, seemed to struggle for composure.

"You—I—we were both wrong!" he said, hoarsely. "She—she has gone!"

"Oh, no, no!" murmured Lady Grace; "don't say that! Do not believe it! Oh, Lord Cecil!" and she laid both her hands upon his arms and looked up at him beseechingly, sympathizingly, as a sister might strive to soothe and encourage a brother.

"Yes," he said, almost inaudibly, and with a catch in his voice, "it is true—it is true! Great Heaven! and I loved—I trusted—I—"

He turned his head aside for a second, then faced her, every muscle of his face quivering under the effort to appear unmoved.

"Lady Grace, the letter proves the marquis's estimate of women to be a true one, and mine—Heaven help me!—false! Read it. No, I cannot! It is the only letter she ever wrote me—it is sacred! The first and the last! Great Heaven! to think that she—she—"

and as he recalled the pure and innocent face, the truthful, trustful eyes that had looked up so devotedly, so passionately, with such an infinity of love into his, his voice broke and he could not utter another word.

"No, do not show me the letter!" she said. "It should be sacred to you. And I do not believe it yet. Where were you going, Cecil?"

Her omission of his formal title escaped him at the moment.

"To London," he said. "But where"—and he made a despairing gesture—"it doesn't matter. Nothing matters now!" and he forced a rueful smile.

"Yes, but it does matter," she said. "There may be some mistake—there is, there must be! It is useless to ask you to remain here, I feel that. Go to London, Cecil, and go to the offices of the 'Orion.' Go and see if her name is on the passenger-list. I will stake my faith in the honour and truth of my sex that it is not."

He seized her hand and pressed it again.

"How can I thank you?" he breathed. "Yes! Ah, what woman's wit will do! I will go to the office."

"And you will let me know? You will not forget—your friend?"

"I shall never forget all you have done, all you have been to me this day, Lady Grace," he said, fervently; and with a grave solemnity that might well have become one of the old knightly Stoyes whose pictures looked down on them, he raised her hand to his lips.

A deep red suffused Lady Grace's face, and she drew a quick, sharp breath.

"Go, then!" she said, her hand rest-

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