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**A Millionaire's
Countess Westerleigh**

CHAPTER XIII.

"Then—forgive me, Nora, dear; but if that is so, why has it not come all right? Why, now the villain is unmasked, do not you call the true man to your side?"

"Because," said Nora, with a sigh, "it is too late!"

"Too late? Do—do you mean—oh! you can't mean that he has ceased to care for you, that he has forgotten you?"

An exquisite blush slowly covered Nora's face. She could feel Vane's kisses on her lips, her cheek, her hair.

"No!" she faltered. "He loves me still."

Milly clasped her hands, and her eyes shone with excitement.

"Then how can it be too late? It couldn't be too late unless—unless he was dead, and you say—at least, you didn't say, but I guessed—you met him to-day."

"No, he is not dead, and I met him. I—I have only just left him. Oh, no! it must be hours since. But—oh, Milly! Milly!"—her voice broke and her head drooped; then she continued in a whisper—"he is going to be married to-morrow!"

Milly gave a little start.

"Going to be married to-morrow—to some other woman, and not to you whom he loves and who love him? Why, Nora, he must be mad!"

Nora shook her head.

"No, dear. This other woman, as you call her, is a rich and titled lady—one of the most beautiful wo-

men in the world! He has known her for a very long time, and—"

"She loves him?" put in Milly, shrewdly.

Nora bent her head.

"Yes, for some reason, with some object I do not know nor guess, the man who plotted to separate me and Vane wished to marry Lady Florence. But—I have told you the names now, dear; he is Vane Tempest, my cousin, and she is Lady Florence Heathcote."

Milly uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Oh, Nora, it is like a play! But go on. This villain wished him to marry the beautiful Lady Florence, and he was going to do so to-morrow. But—she dwelt on the word dramatically—"that was before he met you to-day and discovered that you and he had been deceived. Why should he marry her now? Why on earth should he? You say he is the soul of honor. Why, Nora, it isn't honorable to marry a woman while you are in love with another!"

Nora hung her head.

"That is what he said," she murmured.

"Of course, you said he wasn't wise; but no man could be such a idiot as to suppose that he would be doing anything honorable in—"

"Nora, why is he going to marry her? Doesn't he want to marry you?"

"Very badly."

"And you—you are in love with him still? You want to marry him?"

"Still more badly," whispered Nora, hot with shame.

Milly uttered an exclamation of impatience and indignation.

"I—I sent him to her. She was to decide what he should do."

"Nora, I don't know anything of the world—I am only a miserably ignorant little cripple; but even I can see that you have been, as papa

in the lovely face. Milly limped across the hearth-rug and put her arms around her, and Nora felt her sobbing.

"Oh, Nora, Nora! he has not come. Is it too late?"

"Quite too late, Milly," she said, with the shadow of a smile. "And now we will say no more about it. Milly, what do you say to going abroad—not for a few weeks or a month, but for a long time? Would you like it? Shall we speak to your father about it after dinner?"

Milly nodded sadly.

"Yes. Anywhere you like, dear. You will take me with you?"

"Yes," said Nora, with a sudden break in her voice—"yes, I cannot lose everything!"

They sat over the fire—it wanted an hour to dinner-time—and spoke now and again in ordinary tones; but Milly knew by the look in Nora's eyes how keenly she was suffering—how bravely she was bearing her bitter fate—and presently they both lapsed into silence. Nora was looking into the fire, and thinking, "They are married now! They are married now!" when the ringing of the door-bell startled her.

"That can't be papa," said Milly. "He said that he should only be in just in time to dress."

A footman entered.

"A lady and gentleman would be glad if Miss Vale could see them," he said, gravely.

Nora looked up in surprise.

"To see me? Are you sure it is not Mr. Lester, whom they asked for?"

"The gentleman said you missed an important business."

The blood rushed to Nora's face, then left it white again.

"Nora," exclaimed Milly, in an excited whisper, "it is he! He has come!"

Nora rose, trembling in every limb.

"Oh, be quick! Let them come in!" said Milly. "I will go—help me"—to the servant. But Nora stopped her.

"No; you—you shall stay!" she said. Then she signed to the footman, and stood, with her hand on the table, waiting.

The door opened again, and Senley Tyers and Lady Florence were shown in. Notwithstanding her this veil and concealing cloak, Nora knew her, and it was on her, after a glance at Senley Tyers, that her eyes fixed.

Perfectly self-possessed, with a smile on his sallow face, Senley Tyers advanced and bowed.

"I have to ask your pardon for this intrusion, Miss Vale," he began; but by this time Nora had realized his presence, and with a cry of loathing and indignation, had shrunk back from him. He stood with bowed head, his eyebrows raised, his hand waving in a deprecatory way. "I beg I implore you not to be alarmed. I have brought this lady whom you know—"

Lady Florence raised her veil slowly, and revealed her beautiful face. It was white to the lips, but in the eyes that were fixed on Nora glinted a proud defiance.

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matter which concerns you both."

Nora struggled hard for self-command.

"Why have you come?" she said at last, her voice sounding strained and hollow. "How dare you enter this house? Ah!"—she drew a long breath as her eyes flashed upon him—"I forgot. You have come!" she panted—"to tell me that you have succeeded, that you have gained your ends—?" Her breath failed her.

He looked at her curiously, still with the same sinister smile.

"You wrong me," he said, suavely. "I am the last man to triumph over a vanquished foe. You wrong me to even a greater extent, for I am here to-night, Miss Nora, as a friend."

"A friend!" echoed Nora, indignation overmastering the other emotions aroused by his presence. "A friend! You dare to use that name! Do you think I have forgotten when last you used it?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Let bygones be bygones, I implore you," he said. "Lady Florence Heathcote has accompanied me here this evening—at great, very great inconvenience—to obtain certain information."

Nora raised her head.

"I will not speak to you, listen to you," she said. "Lady Florence, that man by your side is a scoundrel."

Milly uttered a cry of alarm and clung to Nora.

"A scoundrel! He has plotted—to win a husband for you, she was going to say, but stopped.

Lady Florence stared at her, at the slim figure upright as a dart, at the lovely face with its dark brows and flashing eyes. Surely she had seen this woman before.

"I will not listen to you. Leave the house!" said Nora, addressing Senley Tyers.

He shook his head.

"If you would but wait," he said, respectfully, "Miss Nora. If you would but wait—until I have explained the reason of our presence here to-night—"

A cry from Lady Florence arrested his suave voice.

With outstretched hand she pointed at Nora.

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