



For Love of a Woman;
OR,
New Romeo and Juliet.

A TERRIBLE THREAT.

Half an hour later Jeffrey was making his way along the foot-path through the woods, his thin, bent figure throwing a fantastic shadow on the tree-trunks, as he walked with his head projected and drooping, his eyes fixed on the ground. Every now and then he raised his head, looking about him as if he remembered that he had asked Doris to meet him; but he almost immediately again relapsed into his preoccupied manner. Once he stopped and took the papers from the pocket in his breast and looked at them with a deep and thoughtful frown.

"Yes, to-day!" he murmured. "I will tell her to-day! Why should I be afraid? It will make no difference; she will be my child still; it will make no difference." He took off his hat and wiped his brow and sighed. "Yes, I'll tell her to-day. I'm not so strong as I was, and one can't tell what may happen. If I died before I'd told her—"

The muttered words stopped suddenly, and he looked up with a startled air which swiftly changed to one of fierce anger. A dapper, comfortably rounded figure stood before him, with placidly smiling face and serene benevolent air.

"Spenser Churchill!" exclaimed Jeffrey, hoarsely, his hands closing with a gesture at once threatening and repressive.

"My dear Mr. Flint!" purred Spenser, his head on one side, his hand extended benignly. "My dear Mr. Flint! What a delightful coincidence! After all, nothing is more true than the rather hackneyed assertion that the world is a small place."

Jeffrey, glaring at him fiercely, waved his hand.

"Pass on—pass on!" he panted. "I will have nothing to say to you!"

"Now really, my dear Jeffrey," murmured Spenser Churchill, remonstratingly, "is it—I put it to you as a sensible man—is it really worth while to nourish these—un-Christian-like resentments? Look at me." It was quite an unnecessary request, for the fierce, deeply sunken eyes had never left the smooth, supple face. "Look at me, my dear Jeffrey. I, too, have

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had my trials; but—er—I sink them. I let them drop, I bury them, and I make it my principle to forget and forgive."

"Let me pass you!" panted Jeffrey, his whole frame shaking with an effort at self-control.

"To forget and forgive," repeated the other, as if the words were a sweet morsel he was turning over his tongue. "Believe me, dear Jeffrey, that is far, far the wiser plan."

"You think so?" said Jeffrey, hoarsely. "You can forget, Spenser Churchill; I cannot, for it was you who wronged, I who suffer! So you have forgotten, and you dared to think that I had done so? That you may say how will I remember, villain—No, stop!" For Spenser Churchill had backed a few steps, and glanced round, as if meditating a retreat. "Stop, Spenser Churchill, while I remind you why, when the devil sends you across my path, that it would be wiser for you to crawl on one side, lest I crush you, you smiling, fawning reptile. You forget! You forget the life you ruined. Look on me and remember! I was young, rich in health and hope, blessed with the love of an honest, tender-hearted girl, when that devil—your master—the Marquis of Stoylo, the beast for whom you jackalled, employed you to entice her from me. You succeeded, Spenser Churchill, and have forgotten her misery, and mine; all, save perhaps the sum your master flung you."

His hands were so near the delicate white throat opposite him that Spenser Churchill drew his head back sharply, and turned pale.

"My dear Jeffrey!" he murmured, soothing. "Now, come, come. Now, really, you know! If anyone were listening—which I am thankful, for our sake, is not the case—they would gather from your—er—really extravagant language that I had, like the bad man in a play, contrived the ruin of the usual virtuous young lady; whereas I must, in justice to myself, remind you, my dear Jeffrey, that the young lady in question was only guilty of the remarkably bad taste of jilting you for the Marquis of Stoylo, who, like an honourable gentleman, made her his lawful wife and sharer of his exalted rank."

"Yes," said Jeffrey, hoarsely. "Because, by no other means could he get her in his power! Made her his wife! Yes, that he might crush her the more easily! enough, Spenser Churchill!"

"Pardon me! One word more! You appear to have forgotten that the lady, marchioness as she was, preferred to return to her first admirer—There, there!" he broke off, putting up his hand to ward off the threatened blow; "as you say, it is not worth talking about, and, as I say, it is as much wiser to forget. The poor lady is dead, and the child—"

"Is dead, too!" said Jeffrey.

"Is playing Juliet at the Theatre Royal, Barton," put in Spenser Churchill, smoothly. "Miss Doris Marlowe, otherwise Lady Mary, daughter of the Most Honourable the Marquis of Stoylo—"

Jeffrey staggered, and sank trembling down his white, wrinkled face. Spenser Churchill took out a cigarette and lit it, smiling blandly down upon the stricken figure.

"Upon my word, my dear Jeffrey," he said, pleasantly, "I am almost inclined to cry 'Fie, for shame!' and to retort one of the ugly words which you so liberally applied to me. To afford shelter to the wife of the dear marquis is one thing, but to steal his child—"

"She—she died!" gasped Jeffrey, hoarsely.

"So it was stated, and so it was believed by all excepting the gentleman who has the honour to stand before you." He laughed unctuously. "I had my suspicions from the first, and I found them justified when I saw Miss Doris Marlowe in her charming performance the other evening, and, on enquiry, found that she was the daughter of Mr. Jeffrey Flint."



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Jeffrey extended his trembling hands entreatingly.

"Stop—stop!" he panted. "I—I did it for the best! I did it for her good—"

Spenser Churchill laughed mockingly. "Yes!" cried Jeffrey, rising with sudden despair. "For her good! You saw her—you saw how happy, how innocent she is! All her life has life been happy and free from care. What would it have been if I had yielded her back to the man who broke her mother's heart, the man who would have hated her for that mother's sake? Man! man! don't torture me with your devilish smile! I did it for the best!"

Spenser Churchill laughed again. "Dear, dear!" he murmured, "how dreadfully easy it is to deceive one's self! Now, here are you, a most excellent man, I have no doubt, my dear Jeffrey, actually persuading yourself that in robbing another man of his only child and depriving her of her rights, you have been committing a noble and virtuous action! Now, I am sorry to say that I don't agree with you. I've no doubt you have become attached to the girl—"

Jeffrey put up his hand. "Silence!" he said, hoarsely. "It is not for such as you to understand the love I bear—my child, my child!"

"Pardon me, the Marquis of Stoylo's child!" said the sneering voice. Jeffrey raised his head and confronted the smiling, mocking face.

"Enough. You know my secret, and you alone—"

"Are you sure of that?" said Spenser Churchill, smoothly. "Are you sure that no one else shares it?"

Jeffrey made a gesture of assent. "No one else. Not even she. To-day I had resolved to tell her."

A flash came into the watchful eyes.

"To-day—ah, yes!"

"Yes," said Jeffrey, with a sigh that

was almost a groan, "I have brought myself to it at last, after such a struggle as you cannot understand. To-day she was to be told, was to take her future into her own hands; to choose—his voice broke—"between one who has loved her like a father, and the man who drove her mother from his house and broke her heart!"

"Hem! Yes," murmured Spenser Churchill, "and you flatter yourself she will remain with you, of course?"

"You do not know her," was the tremulous reply. "You do not know her! My child, my child!"

Spenser Churchill watched him in silence from under his white, smooth lids.

"By the way, my dear Jeffrey," he said, he said, softly, "did it ever strike you that, supposing Lady Mary decided to return to her father—Jeffrey winced—her after—that the marquis might refuse to acknowledge her?"

Jeffrey looked at him as if he scarcely understood.

"You see," continued Spenser Churchill, resting his foot on the tree, and leaning forward with a subtle smile; "it is such an extraordinary story. The marquis might be inclined to remark that he would require some proofs. I need scarcely remind you that he is not the most credulous of men; in fact, that he is rather inclined to be suspicious."

Jeffrey nodded grimly. "I know him," he said, almost as if to himself. "I have thought of that, and am prepared with proofs." He put his hand to his breast-pocket mechanically, and drew out the papers, and Spenser Churchill's eyes darted to them with a swift eagerness.

"If—Doris chooses to—to go to him and leave me, it will not be in his power to repudiate her. These—and he touched the papers with his forefinger, and then put them in his pockets again—"these will establish her birth beyond dispute."

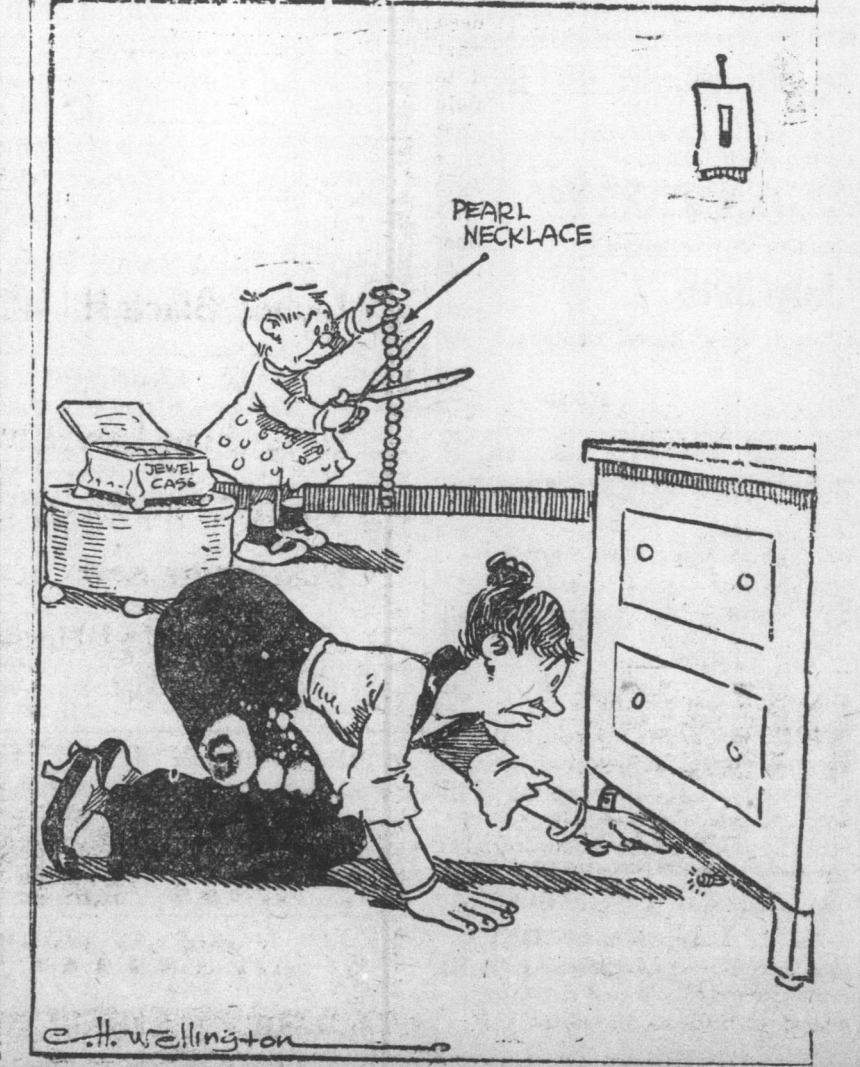
"I am delighted to hear it. That is quite satisfactory—quite. And so, my dear Jeffrey, you expect the young lady to renounce her father, the marquis, her rank and title and all that would become hers—think of it—and remain with you; all will go on as before, and the father and his adopted child will be happy ever afterwards, like the people in the fairy story?"

Jeffrey nodded, and the deep lines in his face grew lighter. "Yes," he said in a low voice again, as if he were communing with himself rather than answering the other man's question; "yes, we shall take up our lives as before, my child—my Doris and I! She will be my Doris still, mine to love suppressed eagerness. "There was truth in what you said, though you meant it insultingly; she will be a great actress—great! And it is I who have taught her—I who loved her mother! You taunted me, Spenser Churchill, with selfish aims in keeping from her the knowledge of her birth. It was unjust. "Hide my child from him always—always, Jeffrey!" she said. They were her last words. Poor Lucy!"

(to be continued.)

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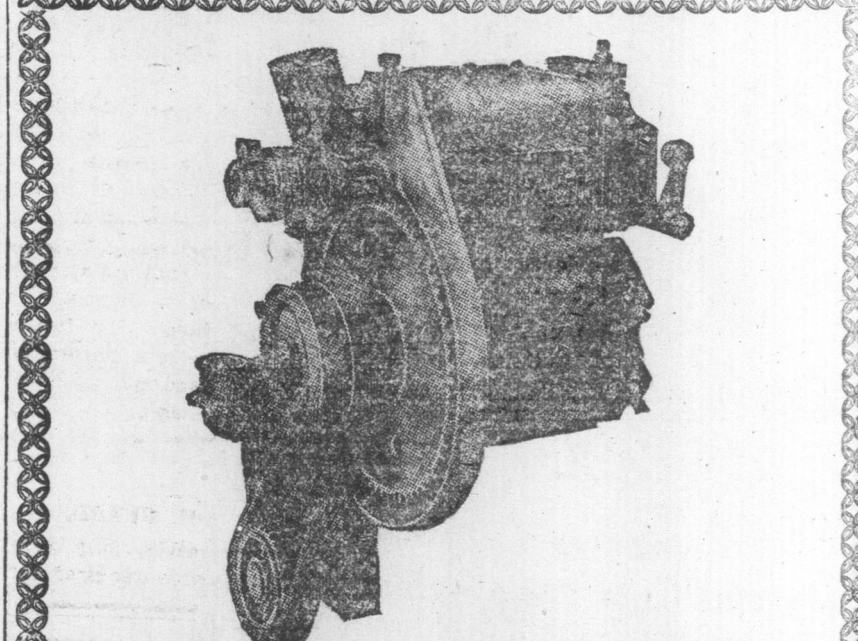
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