

A Millionaire; Countess Westerleigh.

CHAPTER VI. (Concluded.) "Yes," she whispered; "so am I. I did not care then—the other night. When I am like that, in a passion, I do not care what happens, whether I kill myself or any one else. But now—" She looked round with a half-dazed expression, as if puzzled by some novel emotion. "Now we have got to be friends, you're glad I came off scot-free," said Vane. "Is that it?" "Yes," she whispered. They walked along, he with the bridle over his arm, she by his side her head drooping. "Well, I ought to consider myself an extremely lucky fellow," said Vane, after a pause. "Everybody is on the lookout for adventures nowadays, and I know half a dozen men who would give their heads to see what I've seen these last few days. By Jove! they would scarcely believe it all, if I were free to tell it. It's wonderful, incredible!" He looked at her, with a man's ready sympathy for youth and beauty in his eyes. "But I wish you had let me stay a little longer and seen you through this business." She shook her head. "You mean that there is nothing I can do, as you said? Well, I'm afraid there isn't much, but I'll give anything to help you. Shall I speak to Mr. Vane up at the Hall there? He seems to be your nearest neighbor, and may be able to help you in some way out of this trouble." She shook her head. "No," she said, "no. Aunt does not like any one to know where we live or anything about us. Do not speak of us or think of us. Forget us."



him from the corner of her eye, as if she were trying to fix the image of his face in her mind. Presently they came to an opening in the valley and to the verge of a fairly good road. She stopped and pointed. "That is the road," she said, in a low voice. "It goes straight to the Hall." He sprang into the saddle and bent down and held out his hand. She put hers into it, and raised her face to his. As she did so Vane started. He saw that her eyes were full of tears; wonderful, truly wonderful eyes they were, shining through the clear crystal, orbs to haunt the man who looked into their depths for many a day and night. "Good-bye, Miss Nora," he said. "Don't—don't be upset about that—that accident, you know; for after all it was an accident. You took me for some one else, and no one's a penny the worse, and—there's an end of it. Good-bye, and remember: If ever you are in any trouble and want a friend, send or come to me; don't hesitate a moment. You'll promise, won't you?" "I—promise!" Her eyes looked up at him pleadingly, trustingly; so unlike the eyes that had flashed upon him the other night when she had let the bridge all, that they seemed rather the eyes of some other person. Vane was but human, after all, and under the influence of her gaze he moved by an unfortunate impulse bent down, drew her closer, and put his lips to hers. It was the first kiss Nora Trevanion had ever received, and it affected her terribly. She started—a faint shudder ran through her, and her face grew instantly white. Vane crimsoned. "I—I beg your pardon," he said. "Confound it!" under his breath; "what made me do that? I beg your pardon—pray forgive me!" he said, aloud. "I ought not to have done it; but—but it was just to show that we parted friends, Miss Nora."

she breathed, almost inaudibly. "Was it because you quite, quite forgive me?" "Yes, yes," he said; "that was it." Again she seemed to force herself to raise her face, and in accents that in their tense gravity were indicative of innocence itself, she murmured: "You may kiss me again." Vane took off his hat, bent, bare-headed, and kissed her; then she broke from him, but not abruptly, and stood at a little distance. "Good-bye," she said. Vane touched the horse with his heel and rode on. When he had gone a hundred yards or so, he looked back. She was still standing looking after him, her hand shading her eyes. He waved to her and called her name, but she did not move nor make any response. So she stood until he had disappeared; then she seemed to awake as if from a dream, and looked round her, pushing the hair from her brow with a hand that quivered. A heavy sigh rose from her heavy bosom, and with an utter abandon she sunk upon the grass, and saif crouching, half lying, hid her face in her hands. A dense darkness seemed to have fallen on her young life; her half-savage nature was cowed and weighed down by an emotion so utterly novel and strange as to amount almost to the ecstasy of pain. She felt as if something had gone out of her life—out of the world itself—and forever; and as if, for her, there never would be any more gladness or even peace.

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