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For Love of a Woman;

OR,

New Romeo and Juliet.

CHAPTER V.

AN IDEAL JULIET.

The Barton Theatre was a properly conducted one, and none but those who had business there were permitted behind the scenes; but Doris had to pass through a small crowd of actors and supernumeraries and carpenters, and she felt rather than saw the curious glances bent upon her.

But instantly Jeffrey was at her side.

"It has gone well so far," he said. "Mr. Brown was right; the house is in good humour, notwithstanding the heat and that it is packed. You played well, Mr. Garland," he said to the Romeo, who came striding up and bowed to Doris.

"Did I? Thanks. Not nearly so well as I shall do when I have Juliet to play to. May I, without offense, say that you are looking your part most beautifully, Miss Marlowe?"

Doris inclined her head with a smile.

"Romeo should pay compliments, Mr. Garland, and that is a very pretty one. But I want to do more than to look my part."

"Don't be afraid," said the young fellow, gallantly and seriously. "I haven't the slightest fear of the result. It will be a big hit; I have said it all along."

"And you should know!" said Doris. "I wish I felt as sure."

"Your cue," said Jeffrey, in a solemn voice, as he touched her arm warningly.

She started slightly, then, with the light, careless gait of a light-hearted careless girl, who has no forecast of the doom hanging over her, she went on the stage.

A greater part of the audience knew her, but they were astonished by the sight of her beauty, rendered more beautiful by the exquisite dress, and they led the thunder of welcome which the strangers, who saw for the first time, followed as heartily.

Doris had been taught by Jeffrey that to stop the business of the scene to acknowledge applause was a cardinal sin, and commenced at once, and the crowded house fell into instant silence, in which her sweet, clear voice rang like a silver bell.

A round of applause marked the close of the scene, but there was not much enthusiasm in it.

She had looked a typical Juliet, had played her part well, but there was nothing extraordinary in her acting.

"That's right, Miss Marlowe," said Romeo, as she passed him at the wing. "Saving yourself up. Reserve force, and all that. Quite right. let yourself go in the later scenes"

"Well?" she said to Jeffrey, as he threw a silk shawl over her and drew her into a corner out of the draughts.

"It is for you to answer that," he said, quietly. "It was well done; quietly and self-possession.

"I see!" she said, growing pale. "I have failed!"

"No!" he almost shouted; then, in a low voice that quavered, "It is not your best scene. It ought to be cut out. It is sometimes. You have nothing to fear. Did you see the house?"

She shook her head.

"No, I did not look."

He nodded approvingly.

"That's right. Take no notice of them! Don't look beyond the footlights, and—and—the next scene is a trying one; but I don't want to make you nervous!"

"You will not make me nervous." she said, almost sadly. "I wish that I could feel it more than I do—"

She turned away, and her lips quivered.

The ball-room was set; crowds of supers were hurrying on to the stage; the orchestra was playing the familiar music; the audience was applauding the really handsome scene. Then her time came, and she went on, and the house listened and watched with rapt attention. When she went off there was a distinct round of applause, but still not enthusiastic; the fire was wanting yet.

There were two London critics in the stalls, and they exchanged glances and comments.

"Awfully pretty girl," said one.

"And a lady. Plays well, too," responded the other.

"Ye-es," assented the first. "Not at all badly; but somehow doesn't she strike you as being out of the part, so to speak? Seems as if she were going through it in a dream. But she's as beautiful as a dream, too."

The balcony scene came on—the scene in which Juliet who is a Juliet can display her powers to the best advantage. In this scent are opportunities for the display of love and tenderness, maidenly fear and modesty and womanly passion, which no other play can afford.

Jeffrey, pacing to and fro behind the wings, with fingers lacing and unlacing themselves, was devoured by anxiety, mitigatey by hope.

"Now or never!" he muttered. "This is the scene. Oh, Doris! Doris! Now you raise my heart to the seventh heaven or break it—break it!"

"Awfully pretty scene, Miss Marlowe," said Romeo, as they stood together for a moment or two; "you'll let yourself go now, I expect!"

"Shall I?" she said, dreamily, almost absently. "I don't know."

He looked at her curiously.

"Yes, I think I'd put all I know into this," he said, gently and respectfully. "It's a big scene for both of us."

"Yes," she said, in a low voice.

Then she glided past him and took her seat on the balcony.

The scene began, the audience was as silent as the grave, and Romeo entered and made his well-known speech.

Then Doris moved forward to the edge of the balcony, and into the glare of lime-light that poured down upon her.

And then a strange thing occurred. As she sighed, that well-known sigh, she raised her eyes and all unconsciously looked towards the house.

It was almost darkened; but a single light had been left in the chandelier, and it fell upon the handsome face of a young man sitting in the centre box. He was leaning forward, his eyes fixed upon her face, a strange, intent expression in them. His face was pale, his hands clasped tightly on the velvet lining of the box-edge, his whole expression that of one surprised, amazed, bewildered, and fascinated.

She saw the face for a moment only, but she recognized it.

It wwas the one over which she had bent on the preceding day—it was Lord Neville's!

The colour rose to her face, and her hands, clasped tightly on the balcony edge, trembled. Then she went pale again and her eyes were raisd to the moon.

Then she spoke, and now—marvel of marvels!—the very tone of her sweet voice seemed altered. There was no longer any trace of the cold abstraction which had marred the preceeding scenes.

Melting, ravishing, they fell upon the audience like drops of dew upon sun-baked travellers.

A thrill seemed to run through the house. Romeo, experienced actor as he was, felt tne change, the difference, and actually almost faltered.

Then they took up the scene. No need to dwell uopn it; everyone knows it; there is no other like it in the whole range of English literature.

Like notes of music, sounding the full bepths of a girl's pure passion, her words dropped from her perfect lips. Her face was like a poem of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's; pale, passion-pale, yet eloquent. Every gesture—as she swept the dark, silky hair from her forehead with an impatient movement; as she bent forward in the keen hope of touching Romeo's hand; as she kissed her fingers to him; as she pressed her throbbing heart, full to o'erbrimming with love—every gesture was noted and dwelt upon by the enraptured audience, and when the scene closed a wild and unanimous burst of applause rolled like thunder from pit to boxes, from boxes to pit!

They clapped, they stamped, they cheered. It almost seemed as if a crowd of rational beings had taken leave of their senses. In plain truth, she had witched the hearts out of them, and they were fascinated.

Romeo stood, for the first time in his experience, at a loss what to do till there rose from the pit a cry: "Juliet! Juliet!" Then he went to the wings, and, breathless, grabbed at her hand.

"Come on!" he said, excitedly.

But Jeffrey held her fast by the arm. He was pale and trembling, but his voice was stern and grim.

"No!" he said. "Not yet! This is nothing. Let them wait till the last scene; then—then, if they want her, she shall go, but not till then."

The two London critics in the stalls exchanged glances.

"Wonderful bit of acting," said one. "Really wonderful for so young a girl!"

"Yes," assented the second; then he added, thoughtfully. 'I wonder what made her wake up? It came quite suddenly; did you notice?"

There was one person in the theatre, one cut of the whole crowd, however, who neither clapped nor cheered, but sat perfectly silent. It was Lord Cecil Neville. He sat, breathing slowly and heavily, like one under a spell, his eyes fixed on the spot where she had stood, all his senses in thrall.

(To be continued.)

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