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## For Love of a Woman;

OR,  
New Romeo and Juliet.

CHAPTER XII.  
TO WED AN ACTRESS.

The ring was nowhere to be seen! Full of pain and remorse, Lord Cecil was obliged to admit to himself that it was gone beyond recovery; he might search for a week, a month, and not find it, for it might have dropped off his finger and fallen at any spot between the tree and the brook.

"My darling's ring!" he murmured aloud, so that the two listeners could hear him where they stood concealed. "My darling's ring! I would give all the Stoyles jewels to get it back."

Then he mounted slowly, and with many a backward glance, as if he hoped that even at the last moment he might get a glimpse of it shining amongst the grass, he rode on.

Then the thought of his happiness rose as a tide and swept away his distress; he had lost the ring, but Doris—beautiful, sweet Doris—was still his! It seemed too wonderful too good to be true, and he recalled every word she had spoken, every glance of her lovely eyes, that he might impress them on his memory.

The air seemed full of her; the birds seemed to sing her name, "Doris, Doris Marlowe;" all the earth, clad in its bright spring colours, was smiling a reflection of the delicious joy that burnt like a flame in his heart.

She was so beautiful. He tried to think of some of the girls he had known, that he might compare them with her; but they all seemed infatigable and colourless beside the intense,

spiritual loveliness of Doris, with her deep, melting eyes, and grave, clear brows. And she was not only beautiful, but a genius. Every word she spoke was lifted out of the region of commonplace by her marvellous voice, with its innumerable changes of expression. The touch of her small smooth hand lingered about him yet; the shy kiss of the warm lips burnt upon his brow.

What had he done to deserve so great, so overwhelming a happiness? And as he asked himself the question, Cecil Neville's face grew grave, and a pang shot through his heart—a pang of remorse and shame for some of the follies of his past life.

Doris was worthy of the best and noblest man in England, and he—He set his teeth and breathed hard. He had laughed at love, had smiled almost contemptuously at passion, and now he felt that this was the only thing worth living for, and that rather than lose his darling he would ride his mare at the stone wall before him and break his neck.

Then he thought of the marquis and his own position. What could the marquis say? He laughed grimly as he pictured the scene before him. He could imagine the marquis's cold, haughty face turning to ice and steel as he listened; and the cutting, smiling voice bidding him to marry his actress and go to the devil.

He was entirely dependent on the marquis; was in debt as heavily as even the heir to such a title and estates could be. What would the marquis do when he—Lord Cecil—told him that he could not marry Lady Grace because he was going to marry—an actress?

"I wish to Heaven I were anything but what I am," he said to himself, with a sigh. "If I were only capable of earning my own living—a barrister or a doctor, or an artist or something—I could make a home for my darling

## And the Worst is Yet to Come



then; but I am simply a useless, worthless being, who happens, unfortunately, to be the next-of-kin to the Marquis of Stoyle!"

What should he do if the marquis turned him adrift? His allowance would cease; his creditors would become pressing; he would be ruined; and he would have to wait until the marquis died before he could make Doris his wife.

The thought was gall and wormwood. Much as he disliked his uncle, Cecil Neville was not the man to wish for his death. The marquis might live forever, if only Cecil could marry his darling.

"If he only had a heart in his bosom instead of a flint, and could see her!" he thought, as he rode on; "or if I were only a barrister or an artist or anything that earns money enough to make my darling my wife!"

He was in no hurry to reach the Towers. It was far pleasanter to be alone, to think over his happiness, and he made a wide circuit, bringing Polly into the stable-yard just before the dressing-bell rang.

And, after all his thinking, this was the result; that he must try somehow to win the marquis's consent to the marriage.

He had intended going to the theatre, to feast his eyes and ears upon his beautiful love; but—with a pang—he resolved to dine and spend the evening at the Towers, and after dinner he would tell the marquis. Perhaps the old port would soften the old man's heart. Anyhow, he would tell him.

As he passed through the hall he almost ran against Spenser Churchill, who was coming out of the marquis's apartments.

"Ah, my dear Cecil!" he murmured, with a benevolent smile, "just got back? What a lovely evening! Have you enjoyed the ride? Did you notice the sunset? Quite a Leader! You know those beautiful pictures: Leader paints, all crimson and mauve?"

Lord Cecil nodded and strode up the stairs to his rooms.

When he came down into the drawing-room Lady Grace was seated at the piano, playing softly, and she glanced up at him with a smile.

"What have you been doing with yourself all day, Lord Neville?" she asked.

"Oh, I've just been loafing about," he said, carelessly; "and you?"

"I am ashamed to say that I haven't been outside the grounds," she replied. "Mr. Churchill and I have been botanising in the gardens. I told him that we really ought to do something in the way of exploring the neighbourhood, but I could not induce him to go outside the gates. Are you going to the theatre to-night?" she asked, innocently.

He started and bent over the music. "Not to-night," he said.

"I didn't know," she said. "I myself should like to go and see that girl play Juliet again. It was wonderful."

"Yes," he said in his curt way.

"Yes, she played it so remarkably well. But I'm afraid a second night would spoil the impression, wouldn't it?"

"I daresay," he said.

Then the bell rang, and he gave her his arm and took her in to dinner.

All through the elaborate meal she seemed in the best and brightest of spirits, and her sallies of well-bred merriment caused a smile even to the face of the marquis.

Lord Cecil noticed that he was less bitter than usual, and that he refrained from making the sneering and contemptuous remarks with which he usually adorned the conversation.

Spenser Churchill, too, appeared in his most benevolent and amiable mood, and grew quite pathetic as he talked of his pet charity for distressed chimney-sweepers.

The dessert came, and then Lady Grace took up her fan and left the room; and Spenser Churchill, after a single glass of claret, rose and saying, "Don't let me disturb you two. I am going to ask Lady Grace for some music," glided out of the room.

The moment had arrived for Lord Cecil's announcement, and as he filled his glass his face grew set and grave.

The marquis instead of rising, seemed to linger over his wine, and leant back in his chair with a thoughtful air. Once he glanced at Lord Cecil curiously.

"Have you heard the news from Ireland, Cecil?" he said.

Lord Cecil started, and set down his glass.

"No, sir. I have not seen the papers. I was not alluding to the papers."

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said the marquis, with a trace of his cold sneer. "I rarely read them. There is plenty of fiction in the library. But I have heard from my agent in Connemara. The country is very unsettled."

"Yes?" said Lord Cecil, absently. He had his own ideas about Ireland, and they would probably have much astonished the marquis, who was a Tory of the old and thorough-going sort. But Lord Cecil was not thinking of Ireland, but of Doris Marlowe.

"Imagine you know that I—I ought say we—have a great deal of property there?"

Lord Cecil nodded.

"I suppose so, sir."

"Yes," said the marquis, glancing at him from the corners of his cold, keen face. "You don't take much interest in the matter—at present. But you will be marquis very soon, and then—" he laughed. "I don't envy you your Irish property."

"I am in no hurry to possess it, sir," said Lord Cecil.

"I daresay not."

"But I think the people have some reason for what they are doing."

"No doubt," assented the marquis, drily. "You view the business from the patriotic side."

"I sympathise with the people," said Lord Neville, firmly.

The marquis poured out a glass of wine and smiled coldly.

"Yes—you are young," he said. "But I'll admit the thing wants looking into, and I'm too old to undertake the inspection."

Lord Neville raised his head. He did not want to talk about Ireland, but about Doris Marlowe. And now, he thought, was the time. The old port stood beside them, the door was closed. Lady Grace and Spenser Churchill were in the drawing-room.

He looked at the cold, haughty face and plunged at his task.

"I'm afraid I can't go into the Irish question to-night, sir," he said.

"Indeed?" said the marquis, leaning back.

"No," said Lord Cecil, quietly; "I have a personal matter I wish to speak to you about."

The marquis eyed him calmly and patiently.

"Personal matters claim first attention. What is it? Is it money?"

"I want your consent to my marriage," said Lord Cecil.

If he had expected the marquis to express surprise by word or gesture he was disappointed.

"Your marriage?" he said, quietly.

"You intend taking my advice, I see. You are wise. Lady Grace is desirable in every way. I'd marry her if I were young."

Lord Cecil coloured, but did not flinch.

"I am sorry, sir," he said.

"That I am not younger?" put in the marquis, with a sardonic smile.

"Well, yes, I'm sorry for that, if youth would make you any happier, my lord," said Lord Neville, and he spoke sincerely. The marquis eyed him keenly. "But it is not Lady Grace, sir. I think her a most beautiful and charming lady, of whom I am quite and entirely unworthy."

"For once I agree with you," was the caustic comment.

Lord Neville inclined his head.

"But there is another reason why I cannot venture to ask Lady Grace to be my wife. I do not love her."

The marquis smiled.

(To be Continued.)

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