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Take off the candles. Cut into generous pieces. Now the feast's begun!

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A Millionairess

Countess Westerleigh.

CHAPTER XIX.
(To be Continued.)

"And glory, when the picture comes to be exhibited," said Vane.

The conversation thus started ran on art lines, and Senley Tyers, exerting himself, talked well. Lady Florence joined in now and again, and, to Vane's surprise, seemed to listen with something like deference. Every now and then he looked over to Nora, and managed to convey a smile of encouragement. But every one else seemed to have forgotten her; Lord Warlock, as usual, devoting the whole of his attention to the dinner, and growling at intervals at some dish or wine.

Suddenly, so suddenly as to make Nora start, he said:

"You are eating nothing and drinking less, my lad. When I was your age I shouldn't have passed that last entree."

Nora colored and looked down, and the earl signed to the footman to bring the dish back.

"There," he said gruffly, but not unkindly, "don't tell me you don't like it. Every boy likes good things, and this happens to be decent for a marvel. Let me see, what's your name—Mortimer? Knew a Mortimer once. You're not like him, though.

Better Than Wealth

is perfect health; but to enjoy good health it is necessary first to get rid of the minor ailments caused by defective or irregular action of the stomach, liver, kidneys and bowels,—ailments which spoil life, dull pleasure, and make all sufferers feel tired or good for nothing.

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Too good-looking. What's that they are talking about—art? Pooh! there is no art nowadays. All the painters are dead; so are the actors. Painting, and acting, and everything else have gone to the dogs. And so you are a cousin of Vane Tempest, are you; and he's looking after you. I suppose?" he chuckled, as if the idea seemed an amusing one. "Egad, if you follow in his footsteps, you'll need looking after by some other fellow." He glanced across the table at Vane, and chuckled again. "Pardon my word, I'm sorry for you. He's about the worst example you could have."

"Why?" asked Nora, opening her eyes wide upon him.

The old earl stared at her as if she were going to have a fit, then shook his head and turned his attention to his plate again, as if the question were too hopelessly innocent.

Soon after the appearance of the lessert Lady Florence rose; and Nora, remembering Vane's instructions, went to the door and opened it for her. Lady Florence bestowed a faint smile upon her, and Nora bowed, as she passed back to her place she heard Vane breathe a sigh of relief.

"Vane, port," exclaimed the earl, handing him the decenter. "I suppose you will have some; you haven't the gout yet, you lucky young beggar!" he said to Nora.

Nora half filled her glass and sipped it, and Lord Warlock eyed her with keen amusement.

"Well, you are the most abstemious sailor I ever met with," he remarked. "But I suppose you prefer hot grog and a short pipe to that."

Vane went to him at once and sat beside him, and Nora, left to herself, found a seat at a little distance. Lady Florence was at the piano playing softly and at random, and Senley Tyers crossed the room with his noiseless step and stood beside her. She had, in the mirror, seen him approaching, and, as he drew near, her lips grew tighter and a set expression came into her face.

"You did well to ask me here to-night, Lady Florence," he said in a low voice, and pointing to a piece of music as if he were merely asking her to play or sing.

She was silent for a moment, then she said:

"Why?"

"Because by so doing you have rectified the compact between us."

"I know of no compact," she said, almost between her closed teeth.

"Oh, it is not for me to contradict you," he said, smoothly. "Let us say that it was only in imagination that I offered you my humble as-

istance toward the realization of your dearest wish."

She opened her lips and turned her eyes upon him, with a proud defiance and indignation flashing in them; but the flash faded, the eyes fell beneath the keen, cool gaze of his. Lady Florence had lost her power over him and she knew it.

"I am not fond of melodrama even in its proper place—the theatre. Mr. Tyers," she said, with an attempt at scornful irony.

"Nor I," he said; "and I rarely indulge in it. You are quite right when you accuse me of having done so the day I pretended to destroy Vane Tempest's picture, and—discovered your secret; but you will admit that it was a very successful melodrama. You will find that it has a very practical purpose. I am terribly in earnest. Lady Florence, when I am in earnest—which is seldom; and I make no vain boast when I offer you my assistance."

She forced a smile.

"You said all this in your studio," she rejoined; "and I think that I reminded you that, even supposing your romantic supposition were correct, and that I—"

"Loved Vane Tempest," he murmured.

Her proud face became suffused, and she seemed as if struggling for breath.

"You are too ridiculous!" she faltered. "But—she shrugged her shoulders—"how could you help me?"

"Pardon me, but that is my part of the contract."

"And mine?" she said. "What does that consist of, if you insist upon playing at theatricals?"

"Simply this," he said.

He drew a sheet of paper from his pocket-book quite openly, and laid it on the edge of the piano; any one noticing the action might easily have concluded that he was submitting a sketch for her inspection.

She looked down at it with a scornful smile, then picked it up and examined it. These words were written in Senley Tyers' artistic scrawl:—

"I, Florence Tempest, owe Senley Tyers one thousand pounds."

(Signed.)

She dropped the paper with a contemptuous laugh.

"Oh, I understand!" he said, with a smile. "It is an old trick, and has done duty in many a stage play. Besides, why do I not make it for a large sum? And why, again, do I not, after the usual fashion of nerdy adventurers—because that is what I am, am I not, Lady Florence?—ask for payment in advance?"

"Yes," she said, scornfully. "You have read my thoughts with tolerable correctness, Mr. Tyers."

"Exactly. Will you forgive me if I reply that the answer to these questions is part of my scheme? Come, why should you not sign? It commits you to nothing unless you become the wife of my dear friend. It is made out in the name of Florence Tempest—not Heathcote. You shall sign it in the same way. If you never become Florence Tempest, then—he shrugged his shoulders—"my poor little bonus is lost—my little paper just waste paper."

She shook her head.

"Good!" he said, as if her refusal were final and closed the matter. "I can understand your disbelief in my power. It is only natural; but, Lady Florence, when I go to-night I take with me your only chance of becoming Vane Tempest's wife."

She raised her eyes and met his; a faint shudder ran through her, and, as if the movement cost her agony, she took the paper from him.

"Sign it," he said, in a low voice.

An inkstand of Venetian crystal stood on a table near him; he took up a pen and handed it to her. As he did so, Vane strolled up to them.

"What are you two conspiring?" he said, with a smile.

Senley Tyers leaned against the piano, so that he almost hid Lady Florence from Vane's view.

"Lady Florence is signing the order permitting me to exhibit her portrait," he said.

He turned to her with a smile.

"Have you finished, Lady Florence?"

She raised her eyes, opened her lips as if about to defy him; then her head drooped, she signed the paper rapidly, and handed it to him.

"Thanks," he said, and he bowed almost humbly.

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