

A Millionaire's; Countess Westerleigh.

CHAPTER VI.
(Concluded.)
"Ob, no," she said, listlessly; "yours is the tiring part of the business, not mine. I should think you must be weary of painting portraits."

"Of some, yes; of others, no," he said, after a pause, during which he had allowed her voice, clear, bell-like yet low, to sing in his ears. "It is hard work, painting some faces; while others—well, they paint themselves."

"Yes," she said, indifferently. Her indifference galled him, and he lowered his brush slightly. "You do not ask if yours is among the latter, Lady Florence," he said, with a faint smile, and a hesitating glance at her.

He did not know how she would take even this respectful approach to the familiar. "No," she said, not so much with hauteur, as with cool, ice-like impassivity. "It is a question for you, who have to produce the portrait, not for me."

Her half-contemptuous response fell on him like a dash of cold water for a moment; then a fierce anger at her immovability rose within him. "You are not anxious, then, that the portrait should be a success, Lady Florence?"

She shrugged her shoulders and stroked the cat. "I am afraid I do not care very much about it," she said, with the same indifference. "And yet most ladies are so very anxious," he said.

"Yes, Her Grace of Mudshire, who has just left. I think she would shed tears if her portrait were not what she expected and hoped it to be."

He went to the duchess's portrait and held it up, a smile, almost a sneer, on his dark, pale face. Lady Florence looked at the portrait and smiled.

"The duchess should be satisfied, I think," she said. He set the canvas down in its place against the wall.

"And you, Lady Florence?" he asked, standing before the easel. "Will you not see how the picture is progressing and give me your opinion?"

She dropped from her lap the cat which looked surprised at its abrupt descent and arched its back, and went toward the picture, looked at it with an indifferent eye, and said, listlessly: "Have you flattered me as you have flattered the duchess, Mr. Tyers?"

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"No," he said, almost under his breath—her nearness confused and embarrassed him—"no; that were impossible. My difficulty is in painting truthfully."

She looked at him with cold inquiry. He pointed to the face on the canvas and continued, his voice very low and hushed:

"If you look at that mirror, and then at the face I have painted, you will understand what I mean, Lady Florence. The great master of flesh tints was Ety. You may know that?"

She moved her head slightly in the negative. "I have heard of him, seen his pictures. I didn't know. I know nothing about art."

"Well, Ety himself would have found it impossible to imitate the delicate tints, the creamy white of the face you see in the mirror. The hair again. Yours has a red gold of it which would have driven even the old French masters to despair. I have tried to suggest—to suggest if only—in my picture, and you see how full the paint is compared with the original."

She glanced from the mirror to the canvas, critically, calmly, as if he were discussing some other piece than her own.

"Then the eyes," he went on. "There are one or two men who can paint eyes, or rather, the pupil; but there is not one of them who can reproduce the violet shade in yours. Shade! There are a dozen—twenty shades. Sometimes while I am painting them they will change from blue almost to black and let them be what color they may, they are so beautiful that they fill me with discouragement and despair."

She looked and listened without a blush, without a falter in eyes or other lips. She was just as unmoved as if he had been the dress-maker flitting on the exquisite perfection of her figure.

"I see you do not confine your flattery to your brush, Mr. Tyers," she said, coldly, indifferently; "but, really, I don't see why you should be disappointed. If I am as good-looking as that," she pointed to the portrait with her fan—"I am quite satisfied."

"And I am not," he said, with a subdued warmth. "It is a libel—a caricature! Sometimes I have been on the point of slashing the canvas with my palette-knife, and telling you that I had attempted an impossible task and must relinquish it."

"Pray do so, if you feel in that way about it."

"Perhaps I can show you what I mean—what I miss, where I fail," he said, after a moment's pause. "Do you see the dress, the diamonds, the fan—all that has no life in it? Well, they are painted well enough. Although I say it, I am, if not satisfied with them—for no artist is ever satisfied—at least tolerant of them. I can let them pass. But it is when I come to the face that I find my difficulty. It is as lifeless as the satin and silk; it is just a beautiful mask without soul, or the breath of life, or thought—"

He stopped and sighed, and looked at her. "Perhaps that is my fault," she said, going back to the couch and sinking down again. "But please don't be uneasy, Mr. Tyers. I am quite satisfied with my picture, and I am sure my friends will be. Though you may not think so, you have flattered me quite enough."

"Ah, no, no," he said; "I know that it is not so. I have not stood before it and studied it for hours without learning the truth. I think

you for your patience, Lady Florence—for your kind encouragement." He took up his brush and went to work again with seeming composure; but inwardly he was burning. There was not another woman in the world, he told himself, who would have stood by unmoved, and heard herself spoken of, described, as he had described this haughty beauty. Was there no way of rousing her? He felt at that moment as if he would have given half of what remained of his life to see that cold, impassive, lovely face flushed with passion—with passion of love or anger, or yes, of hate. Its marble-like impassivity tortured him.

To feel that her very presence set his heart aching, and to know that he was less than nothing to her, that no word of his could move her, was an agony which throbbled through him like a subtle poison.

He pointed on for about a quarter of an hour, then he said: "We will rest for a little while, Lady Florence, if you please."

She inclined her head, and stroked the cat, which had again coiled itself up on her lap. "Very well," she said; "painting must be tiring work."

He sauntered to the cabinet and brought out an exquisite Venetian flask and glass, and set them on the inlaid moresque table beside the couch.

"Will you let me offer you a glass of Persian wine, Lady Florence?" She scarcely raised her head. "No, thanks."

He bowed, and went to the cabinet and poured himself out a glass of the tincture which he had taken just before she came in, and his eyes began to brighten, and his hand went toward his cigarette-case; but he remembered who was present, and did not venture to smoke.

He wandered aimlessly about the room, and picked up one or two of the canvases and looked at them absently. The last he caught up was a sketch of Vane Tempest.

He carried it to the light, and stood looking at it with his back to Lady Florence.

It was not a bad sketch and it was not a good one. He was about to set it down again, when he heard Lady Florence's voice behind him say: "Mr. Tyers—"

There was no novel a tone in it that he turned round quickly, the sketch in his hand. She was leaning on her elbow, her eyes fixed on the sketch, a faint dash of color in her face. As her eyes met his they faltered, and—yes, drooped.

He stood looking at her in a dazed kind of a maze. The lovely face had awakened to life at last; the soul had become visible in the eyes.

For a second, thinking only of his picture, a feeling of delight and gratification sprang up within his heart when he glanced at the sketch, and he delight changed to the hideous agony of jealousy. It was the sight of Vane Tempest's face that had roused her then. What else could it be?

"Mr. Tyers," she said, and he noticed that even her voice had taken on itself life and feeling, "whose portrait is that?"

"This," he said, slowly. "This is a rough sketch of Mr. Vane Tempest."

"I thought so," she said, sinking back, and speaking with what he felt sure was only a simulation of the usual cold listlessness. "Will you let me see it, please?"

He crossed the room and held it in his hand. "Often laid up for days at a time—A Wonderful Remedy to Dr. Chase's Ointment."

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a proper light before her, and his eyes watched hers as they dwelt on it. He saw—his passion—call it love for her, if you will—gave him a keen and piercing insight—her lovely violet eyes soften, grow darker, though she tried to keep their expression one of cold criticism.

"Yes," she said, "this is Mr. Vane Tempest; but it is not a good portrait."

"No," he asserted; "it lacks expression. I have missed that careless, light-hearted look that is in his eyes and about his lips. It is only a rough sketch; I made it one night while he was walking up and down—he is rarely still—smoking. It is worth nothing. They say that it is always difficult for a painter to paint any one whom he loves; perhaps that is why I have missed Vane Tempest's bright look."

"You and he are great friends?" she said; and the same interest displayed itself in her voice.

"Why, yes," he said. "I suppose we are great friends; at any rate, there is great friendship on my side. You do not know, Lady Florence, that Vane Tempest saved my life? He may have told you—"

She smiled rather scornfully. "He certainly would not have told me any one," she said.

Senley Tyers bit his lip. "No; of course not. No; but it is the fact, Vane Tempest found me starving—on the verge of suicide. He saved me. Not by giving me food and money only—that would not have done it—but by cheering and encouraging me."

"That is like him," she said, softly. He walked to the easel quickly and softly, and caught up the brush and painted quickly, as he continued talking.

"Most men would have been satisfied with playing the Good Samaritan and have said 'Good-bye'; but Vane Tempest gave me his friendship as well as his food and money. It is to him that I owe the success that has come to me. Yes, we are friends. He comes here when he pleases, and spends what are for me some happy hours. I think there is no one in the world like him—"

He glanced at her. A pensive smile sad and tender, was in her eyes, and he painted it into the eyes on the canvas.

"So bright and light-hearted, and yet so true and brave!" The violet eyes seemed to glow.

"And he is always the same," he went on. "You know—or perhaps you do not know—that he and I have been down to the west coast together?"

"No," she said. "When? where?"

"Last week," he said; "to a place called Trollope. He asked me to go down with him, for company's sake. I left him there. It is a wild spot, and I was quite sorry to leave him. She leaned forward, leaning on her elbow, her eyes fixed on the sketch where it rested against the wall.

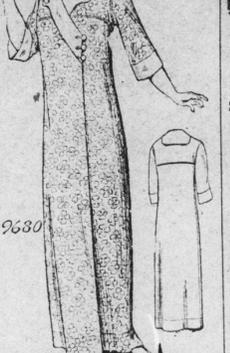
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