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For Love of a Woman; New Romeo and Juliet.

CHAPTER XX.

AN EXTRAORDINARY PROPOSAL. "Unless some friendly guide extends you a helping hand and leads you out," said the philanthropist. "I can quite understand your feelings, my dear Percy, and I must say they are very natural ones. You are, without flattery, formed by nature to adorn a higher sphere than your present one. I don't think any of the young fellows you envy could do greater credit to their wealth and position than you could do. Seriously, I think you were cut out for better things than teaching the piano to the daughters of the inhabitants of Soho and its neighbourhood."

"No doubt, I was intended for the heldest-son of a baron," said Percy, sarcastically; "but there happens to be a hitch somewhere."
"And suppose I tell you that I can undo that hitch, that I can give you a helping hand to better and higher things; in short, to repeat myself, to make your fortune! Think of it, my dear Percy. Plenty of money, the entrance to good society, horses to ride, club doors thrown open to you, choice wines, men of rank for friends, and a world ready to welcome with outstretched hands good-looking and accomplished Mr. Percy Levant!"

"The young fellow regarded him with the same incredulous smile; but there was a light of subdued eagerness in his eyes, and a warmer colour in his face."
"You ought to go into the House, Churchill," he said. "I don't mean the workhouse, but the House of Commons. I suppose you learn all this kind of thing at your charitable public meetings? I'll come and hear you some of these days. They tell me you make uncommonly good speeches. Well, go on. How is this fortune of mine to be made, and—excuse my bluntness—why are you so anxious to make it?"

"A very natural question, my dear Percy, and, believe me, I am not at all annoyed by it. I intend to be perfectly frank and open-minded with you."
Percy Levant smiled, and got another cigar.

"I beg your pardon, Churchill, but the idea of your being frank rather tickled me. The spasm has passed, however—proceed. Is it a new gold mine you are going to ask me to become a director of? Or have you invented a new washing machine, and want me to travel for it? What is it?"

"It has always seemed so strange to me," resumed Mr. Spenser Churchill, ignoring the interruption, "that you have never turned your attention to matrimony."
"The young fellow stared at him, then laughed sarcastically."
"You think that the palatial dimensions of this room are too large for one individual; that I should be more comfortable if I shared my sixpenny plate of meat and threadbare wardrobe with another? My dear Churchill, you might as well ask a limping, footsore tramp why he doesn't turn his attention to riding in a carriage and pair. Matrimony! Good Lord! I am not quite out of my mind!"

"But your wife need not be poor, my dear Percy. She may be rich in this world's goods."
"Oh, yes; I didn't think of that. And you suggest that there are hundreds of wealthy heiresses who are dying to become Mrs. Percy Levant; perishing with the desire to bestow their hands and fortunes on the music teacher of Soho?"

"You would not be the first man who has married money," said the philanthropist, smoothly. "But let me be more explicit, my dear Percy. By one of those strange chances which are, indeed, providential, I happen to be acquainted with a young lady who would, in all respects, make you a most suitable wife."
"Really?"

"Yes, said Spencer Churchill, gravely. "The circumstances of the case are peculiar, not to say romantic. The fact is, I am that young lady's guardian—not exactly such in a legally qualified sense, but by—er—an unfortunate accident; and, as her guardian, I am naturally desirous of promoting her present and future welfare. Ah, my dear Percy, how sacred a trust one undertakes when one accepts the care of a young and innocent girl!" and he looked up at the ceiling with a devout sigh.

And the Worst is Yet to Come—



vinced that I shall be promoting both her future welfare and ours by—er—bringing you together."

Percy Levant stared at him. "This grows serious," he said. "And may I ask if this young lady is 'rich in this world's goods,' as you so beautifully put it?"

"She is—or, rather, she will be," replied Spenser Churchill, leaning forward and speaking in a lower tone, and with his eyes fixed on the other man's face with a keen yet covert watchfulness. "I said that there were peculiar and romantic circumstances in the case, and one of them is this: that the young lady had no idea of the wealth which will some day be hers."

"Oh!" said Percy, curiously, "she hasn't, eh? Yes, that's peculiar, certainly. I suppose there is no doubt about the golden future, eh?"

"It is as certain as that you and I are in this room."
"And the romance—where does that come in?"

"Her story is a singular one. Her name—" He stopped suddenly and smiled blandly. "But perhaps I'd better reserve that for a while, my dear Percy."
"Yes, you'd better," rejoined the young man, sarcastically. "I might go in for the speculation on my own account, and throw you over! Churchill, for a saint, you are singularly suspicious."

"Not suspicious, my dear Percy; say careful, perhaps cautious," suggested the philanthropist, with an oily smile.
"All right. Choose your own word! Go on."
"The young lady's career has been a singular one. She has been an actress."

Percy whistled and stared.
"But she is a lady in every sense of the word," continued Spenser Churchill, slowly and significantly. "She has left the stage, acting on my advice, and in consequence of the death of her only relative, and is living now with some dear friends of mine. With the exception of myself, she has no one to turn to for advice and assistance. I am her sole guardian, and—I may say—friend. She will, I am sure, be guarded entirely by me, and that is why I am so anxious to provide for her future welfare."
"By marrying her to a needy adventurer," finished Percy Levant, with a smile.

"No; to one who, though deficient in the energy which achieves greatness by its own strength is, I am sure, a man of honour," said Spenser Churchill, suavely.
Percy Levant stared at him with a curious smile.
"This is amusing and romantic with a vengeance," he said. "And the young lady—of course she is as ugly as sin?"

Spenser Churchill was about to answer in the negative, and dilate upon Doris's beauty, but he stopped himself and made a gesture of denial with his hands.
"By no means, my dear Percy. This, I will say, that she is refined, accomplished, amiable."
"And quiet in single or double—especially double—harness."
"In sporting parlance, my dear Percy, that exactly describes my charming ward."
The young man took a turn up and down the room, and then, resumming his old attitude looked down upon the smooth face of the tempter with a curious and half-troubled regard.
"You don't offer me a penny for my thoughts, Churchill, and so I'll just make you a present of them. I am wondering—what—the devil—I am you are going to gain in this business. Wait a moment. You come here and offer this young girl to me—is she young, by the way?"

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and distinct. I don't suppose it is for any love of me that you come, as you say to 'make my fortune'?"

"Not altogether; though I have always regarded you as a very dear friend, Percy."
The young man made a movement of impatience.
"Yes, yes, I know! But you have some object in view? What is it? You don't want me to believe that I am to give you nothing in return for a wealthy wife. What is it?"

Spenser Churchill drew a paper from his pocket.
"Really, it is marvellously like Faust and Mephistopheles, isn't it?"

"If that's a document I am to sign, it really is," assented Percy, with a grim smile.
"Well, I shall want your signature, my dear Percy, but only in ordinary ink—only in ordinary ink."
"What does it contain?" asked the young fellow. "One moment before you tell me. If it is anything detrimental—anything that would interfere with the happiness of this young girl, you can put your precious paper back in your pocket and light your pipe with it."
"Right, quite right. Your caution does credit to your heart and honour, my dear Percy," said Spenser Churchill. "I say nothing of the injustice you've done to me by your suspicion. I forgive you. In a word, this is a little bond by which you undertake three things: to marry the young lady which I shall request you, and not till then; to keep the marriage secret until I give you permission to disclose it; and on your wedding-day to pay me ten thousand pounds, or give me a bond for that amount."

"Is that all?" demanded Percy Levant, starting at him with knitted brows.
"Yes; and I don't think the conditions overheard. Consider, my dear Percy; I don't think you would have a chance of knowing who the young lady is without I tell you, you certainly haven't of marrying her without my assistance; as to the secrecy of the affair, why, that is not a great hardship; and for ten thousand pounds, believe me, my dear Percy, that it will be but a bagatelle to the man who shall marry my ward."
"She will be very rich, then?"

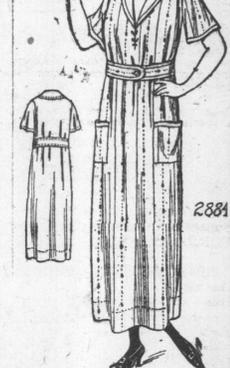
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The Pattern is cut in 7 Sizes: 34, 36, 38, 40, 42, 44 and 46 inches bust measure. Size 38 requires 5 yards of 42 inch material. Width of skirt at lower edge is 1 1/2 yards.
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2884. Here is a simple, easy to develop model, good for seersucker, gingham, lawn, percale, drill, linen and khaki. The pockets may be omitted.
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