

For Love of a Woman; New Romeo and Juliet.

CHAPTER XIII
AN ACCEPTED OFFER.

"Really," he said, "there is nothing I can think of asking you to do excepting to pass the wine, and that does not entail much sacrifice."

"I was not jesting, sir," said Lord Neville, gravely. "My offer was made in all sincerity."

"Really? Dear me, I wish I could think of something. Ah!" He stopped and looked at Lord Neville's attentive face keenly, sarcastically. "What do you say if I ask you to go over to Ireland for me?"

Lord Neville's face grew grave, and the marquis leant back and laughed with grim satisfaction.

"You see! Gratitude's a very fine thing—to talk about!"

Lord Neville flushed.

"You misunderstand my silence," he said, quietly. "If you mean by going to Ireland for you I'm to take sides with the landlords"—he stopped—"I could not join in the oppression of those poor people, my lord, even to prove my own sincerity."

The marquis tried with his fruit-knife.

"Charming! put, my dear Cecil; quite fit for a political platform. But you misunderstand me. I know nothing of the question, and care less; I hate and detest politics; they bore me—they always did. All I want is this: I am told that my agent is a rogue, who has made himself rich by grinding down the tenants. I am also told that he is the most merciful and upright of men. I'm rather curious to know—well, scarcely curious, perhaps—which account is true. Will you go and find out. I don't think you can call that oppressing the people."

Lord Neville looked up with quiet eagerness.

"Certainly I will go, sir," he said. The marquis inclined his head.

"Mind, I don't care a brass farthing whether you go or refuse; I don't care about anything; and it is very likely

that after you are gone to-morrow morning I shall have ceased to remember what you have gone about."

"To-morrow morning?" said Lord Neville, almost inaudibly. To-morrow morning! And his appointment with Doris, his interview with her guardian!

"Yes," said the marquis, carelessly, but shooting a glance, half-scornful, half-amused, at the grave face. "If you go at all, it must be at once. Someone should have started to-night. The man will collect the rents in a day or two. He should be stopped—or the other thing."

"Yes," said Lord Neville, absently. Go without seeing Doris! Without gaining her guardian's consent! His heart throbbed with a dull ache.

"Yes, of course you see that. The early train would enable you to catch the Irish mail at Sandstone Junction—Ah, I see," and he laughed mockingly. Lord Neville looked up inquiringly.

"You want to see Miss Barlow—"

"Marlowe," said Lord Neville.

"Pardon, Marlow. To tell her that the wicked uncle has proved less black than he is painted?"

Lord Neville smiled.

"Is that unnatural?"

"By no means; but permit me to suggest that you can write to her. I merely suggest it."

Lord Neville rose with a quite air of determination.

"What time does the early train start, sir?" he said.

The marquis shrugged his shoulders.

"Parkins will tell you," he said, carelessly. "You mean to go, then?"

"Yes," said Lord Cecil.

The marquis laughed.

"Will you kindly give me that despatch-box?" he said.


Lord Cecil brought it to him, and the marquis took out some papers.

"Here are the papers," he said, languidly. "I haven't read them all. You can bore yourself over them in the train. And will you favour me by accepting this towards the expenses," and he laid a roll of uncounted notes on the table.

Cecil took them up and examined them.

"There is more than enough here," he said, quietly.

"There is never more than enough money," said the marquis. "If you think there is too much, you can distribute the surplus amongst the poor people with whom you sympathise."



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ers, and I could not, if I tried, tell you how I love you or how I wish I were near you, to see and hear you, my beautiful angel!

"Ever yours,
CECIL.

P.S.—I owe my uncle something, for he has behaved with unusual kindness, and this journey to Ireland is the only way in which he will let me pay him. I will tell you all about it when I come back."

He sighed over the unsatisfactory epistle and closed it; then reopened the letter and caught up his pen to tell her of the loss of the ring and ask her to look for it; but he hesitated and put the letter back in the envelope with the sentence unwritten. Then he put on his coat and walked to the meadows. The night was dark, and he had to light a match to enable him to find the stone beneath the trees; but he found it and concealed his letter, and then, after standing for a few moments and looking round him dreamily, calling up the vision of Doris, he turned and made his way back to the Towers.

The marquis had gone to his room, as was customary with him; his valet exchanged his master's dress-coat for a velvet dressing-gown, and the old man lay back in the chair looking at the fire with half-closed eyes.

The room was magnificently furnished, but rather a subdued tone, which was rendered almost sombre by the heavy curtains that screened the window and a greater portion of the walls.

Against the deep purple of the hangings the clear, sharp-cut face, with its distinct pallor, looked almost like that of a dead man's, and only the steel-like glitter of the eyes spoke of the vitality which lingered in the body, and burnt in the spirit of the most honourable, the Marquis of Stoyle.

Presently there came a soft tap at the door, and in response to the marquis's "come in," Spenser Churchill entered.

If anything, his smooth, innocent face looked more benevolent and charitable than usual, and the smile he bent upon the hard, cold face upturned to him was like that of a man whose sole delight is in doing good to his fellow-men.

"Well?" he said—or rather purred.

The marquis waved his hand to a chair, and Spenser Churchill dropped softly into it, and leant back, his eyes on the ceiling, his fat hands clasped on his knee.

"You were right, you spoke nothing but the truth. The fool is in earnest."

"Dear Cecil!" purred Spenser Churchill.

"He is so much in love that he bore all the insults that I could heap upon him— No, I wrong him. He struck home once," and he smiled a strange smile.

"And he means to marry her?"

"Yes," said the marquis, with a cruel sneer; "he is even fool enough for that."

"Dear Cecil!" murmured Spenser Churchill again. "How delightful! how refreshing it is, in this practical, stupid life, to find—"

"And he will marry her unless this scheme of yours answers," said the marquis, breaking in upon the smooth voice.

"And you doubted his income?"

"I did," said the marquis.

"And he will go to Ireland? To-morrow?"

"He will, to-morrow," said the marquis, watching the sleek, false face.

"Now, that's very good of him," murmured Spenser Churchill. "Very good; most charming and nice. To go to Ireland on the very day he has arranged a meeting with that beautiful girl. Now—"

"Is she so beautiful?" asked the marquis, who seemed to take the unctuous words as meaningless and not worth listening to. "I suppose she must be. He has seen many pretty women, many clever ones. What has caught him? What is she like?"

Spenser Churchill shot a sidelong glance at him.

"The usual thing, my dear marquis," he said, softly. "Just the usual thing. They make those face-powers wonderfully well now—wonderfully!"

The marquis smiled grimly.

"The fool, to be caught by a painted vixen old enough—I suppose she is old, eh?"

Spenser Churchill shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, yes, of course. A young girl wouldn't have had tact to catch him so easily. And he has written to her, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Spenser Churchill; "and gone to post his letter under the stone. The romance is simply charming! Charming!"

(To be Continued.)

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