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## A Millionaire; or, Countess Westerleigh

CHAPTER XXXI.  
The fire sunk. He was cold one moment and hot the next. Too listless to ring, he took the bulky envelope full of papers and absently stuffed them under the waning coals. Life is made up of such ill chances. If he had glanced at the document whose voluminousness had frightened him, he must have seen her name, and all would have been well. A cab would have whirled him to the lawyer's, and thence to Elm Square—and happiness. But the papers smoldered into ashes, and he sat and gazed at them and shivered with his cold, while not very far off the girl he loved so passionately, and who loved him, was weeping over his supposed neglect and coldness. Surely if the gods do laugh at us, they have plenty of cause for merriment! Presently, just as the last page fell into ashes, the door opened and the servant came in with a note. Vane took it listlessly and dropped it on the table, and it was not until an hour later that he caught sight of it and opened it. The thick, ivory-tinted paper was delicately scented and stamped with "Florence" in gold and violet, and there were just a couple of lines: "Will you dine with us to-night? We are quite alone."  
"FLORENCE."  
Vane twisted the note pensively; then he smiled with a kind of grim resolution.

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"Why not?" he muttered, and twisted round in his chair, he scrawled: "Thanks; yes," in reply; and no two words were more hateful to the writer and recipient.

CHAPTER XXXII.  
When he began to dress, Vane felt half inclined to send a note of apology to Lady Florence, and very much tempted to get into bed instead of an evening suit; but he finished dressing in an absent-minded, listless fashion and got into a cab—he had "put down" the brougham for the best of all reasons, as the man said respecting his umbrella, "because he could not keep it up;" and as the cab rolled and splashed through the wet streets, he leaned forward and gazed with anxious and yet mechanical scrutiny at every passing female figure. Once he caught sight of a girl something, only something, like Nora standing at a shop window, and his heart leaped as it had leaped so often before, and his hand went up toward the little trap-door in the roof of the cab; but before he had stopped the cabman the girl had turned full face, and another disappointment was added to the long list. She was not Nora, and with the weight pressing his heart down again he dropped back and sighed and coughed. When the cab drew up at Lord Warlock's house, in Carlton Terrace, Vane felt so tired and knocked up that he could have wished that the journey were longer. The footman who met him in the hall glanced at him with the covert scrutiny which is all their well-trained respect permits, and the butler who announced him, when the drawing room door had closed upon Vane, turned to one of his satellites with the suggestion of a wink.  
"Mr. Tempest's been going it pret-

ty strongly, to judge by the look o him," he said. "Looks ten year older than when he dined here last. The cards, I suppose, for I never heard that he drank much to speak of."  
The drawing-room was empty when Vane entered, and he drew a chair up to the fire and tried to warm some of the cold out of his bones. The door opened and Lady Florence entered. She stopped dead short as he turned his face to her and rose. The color slowly left her cheeks, and her eyes, usually so cold and impassive, grew large with alarm and sympathy.  
"Have you been ill?" she asked looking at him with concerned scrutiny.  
"Ill? No," he said, with a smile. "I'm never ill."  
He laughed as he made the assertion, and, forcing a smile, she said "What, never?"  
"Hardly ever," he responded, making use of the old and almost forgotten joke in "Pinafore." "I've got a bit of a cold, I fancy, but every one as at this time of year, more or less, you are looking well."  
His eyes—were they grave and thoughtful now, with none of the old bright, devil-may-care light in them—rested on her lovely face and the graceful form clothed in a soft, exquisitely draping silk of a warm yet subdued color—he thought it was called heliotrope—and he noticed how artificially its mauve shades threw up the faultless complexion and the straw-colored hair.  
His heart was steeped in sadness—weighed down with care and unsatisfied longing—and, somehow, the sight of this beautiful, perfectly dressed woman with the violet eyes and soft speech and manners soothed him and gave him a vague sense of pleasure and repose. She went to the fire and pointed to the chair he had just left.  
"Please sit down again," she said in a low voice tremulous with the feeling which only the sight of him—the sound of his voice—could arouse. "You look—yes, cold—actually cold."  
"Well, I was cold—actually cold," he said, dropping into the chair, and holding his hands to the blaze.  
Her eyes roamed from his careworn, haggard face to his hands, thin and drawn, like those of a man just recovering from a long illness.  
"Have you been away of late?" she asked. "You have not been near me, and I have not seen you anywhere."  
"Away?" He spoke without raising his head or his eyes from the

fire. "Well, yes; I have been wandering about here, there, and everywhere."  
The lines in his face deepened as he recalled his journeyings in search of Nora, but he made an effort to free his mind and change the subject.  
"How is it you are not at one of your country places?" he asked.  
"I have been," she said. "But only for a little while. Papa had to come up to a Cabinet meeting, and I insisted upon accompanying him, not to the Cabinet meeting, of course, but up here. I always hated the country in the winter. What senseless folly it is to spend the best of the summer months in London, and then go to the country when all its beauty is dead; the trees bare and dripping, and the roads all mud!"  
"So I think," he assented.  
"Oh, you! You can shoot and fish," she said.  
"Yes," he said.  
He had not handled a gun or a rod since—since he had left Lumb. Up before him sprang the quiet hillside, the pretty cottage, and Nora's happy face. He shuddered slightly.  
"Are you still cold?" she asked and she bent over him with wistful tenderness. "Are you sure you ought to have come out to-night? I—I can not help thinking that you are really ill."  
He raised himself and sprang to his feet.  
"I am not in the least ill," he said forcing a smile. "Had you a large party in the country?"  
"Why did you not come and see?" he responded, reproachfully. "I wrote, as well as papa, and you did not condescend even to answer me."  
He looked down. Some of his neglected letters he had burned unopened; doubtless hers and Lord Warlock's were among them.  
"I am very sorry. Pray forgive me. I have been very busy—"  
"Busy!" She arched her delicate eyebrows and looked at him with gentle incredulity. "I can not imagine you 'busy.' I wonder what story you would tell me if I asked you what you had been so busy at?"  
His brows contracted, and he tugged at his mustache.  
She rested her small satin-covered foot on the marble fender curb and looked down at him with a pensive smile.  
"I wonder why men are always so mysterious? No one seems to know where you have been, not even your friend—there was scarcely perceptible hesitation—your friend, Mr. Senley Tyers."  
"You ought to say 'our' friend," said Vane, with a short laugh, and evading the question, "for you see a great deal of him, don't you?"  
"Yes," she said, with constraint and coldness. "I think he is useful to papa—"  
"Useful to Lord Warlock?" said Vane, with faint surprise. She gazed at the fire, her face impassive and set.  
"Yes; don't ask me how or in what way. I imagine he is in possession of some statistics which papa requires, or—I really don't know. Does it matter? Let us talk of something else more interesting."  
"By all means," he assented, though I must be allowed to remark that Senley Tyers is a really wonderful man."  
(To be Continued.)

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