A Millionairess;

—OR,—

Countess Westerleigh

CHAPTER XLII.

He looked at her. The moonlight fell upon a very different—and yet the same—Nora to that which he had seen at the end of the bridge at the Witches' Caldron. That was a half-wild girl, with hair flying loosely in the breeze, with uncouth though graceful gestures; this was a refined and elegant woman—though still in her girlhood—whose beauty had developed and become perfect, whose eyes shone with a light in which dignity and sweetness were combined like some exquisite harmony in music. As his gaze rested on her his love for her—and, yes, his pride in her—swelled within him. She was a queen of loveliness and grace and she was his—his—his! His very own!

"Why—why have you come?" she faltered.

"I have come for you,' ' he responded.

She shook her head.

"No, Vane—not for me. There is another—Lady Florence."

"There is no Lady Florence in that sense," he retorted. "It is you for whom I have come. Come to me, Nora."

She held back.

"I am going away," she said, with her head drooping, her hands clasped over the flowers. "I am going away for a long time, Vane."

"All right," he said, cheerfully, but with a fierce, feverish kind of repression.

"You must forget me, Vane. I am not fit to—to—"

The tears came into her eyes.

"In-deed!" he said, with the same repression in his voice, his manner.

"No, you—you must forget that—that you ever met me."

"Yes?"

"Yes; and— Will you not come back to the house? I am sorry—oh, I am sorry that you have come!"

"I'm not," he said. "Yes, we'll go back to the house, Nora. Will you take my arm?"

She shook her head and moved away from him slightly. She would not yield an inch, she told herself.

He walked beside her in silence—a strange silence—into the hall, and she was making her way toward the drawing-room, when Mr. Lester and Milly came out.

"How do you do, Lord Westleigh?" he asked.

Vane shook him by the head cordially, and Nora clutched Mr. Lester's arm.

"Oh, tell him that—that it is of no use!" she urged. "Tell him to go away, that I am going away."

She leaned her forehead on Mr. Lester's arm.

"What's that?" said Vane.

"She says she is going away."

"She is quite right," said Vane, with a fire flickering in his eyes. "She is going away—going up to London—with me. We are going together."

Nora raised her head and looked at him with a kind of amazement at his audacity.

"Oh, no, no!"

"I beg your pardon; it is oh, yes!" he said, in exactly the same manner. "I am quite ready when you are. Run and get your things on." Then his fiercely playful tone broke down; he strode forward and caught her by the waist and pressed her to him, and kissed her passionately and in a masterful way that made Milly's eyes grow like saucers. "What!" he exclaimed, and his old tones rang in his voice, "you talk of leaving me? Why, I forbid it! A wife should not desert her husband!"

With a sharp cry Nora hid her face on his breast, and, as it were, yielded all in a moment, his strong arms surrounding her like a fortress in which she was secure against all the shafts and arrows in the world.

"Oh, papa, papa! isn't he delicious! isn't he simply lovely?" exclaimed Milly, with tears of ecstatic delight in her voice as well as her eyes. "Let us come away."

* * * * * *

There was another—a proper wedding, as Milly called it, though a very, very quiet one, a few days later. It took place in an out-of-the-way church, in London, and there were only present, beside the bride and bridegroom, Mr. Lester, Milly and the pew-opener. The clergyman was an exceedingly nice old gentleman, one who would have consideed it quite wicked to forget the little joke about the bride signing her name for the last time; but he was exceedingly astonished when he saw that, obeying her husband's orders, she had signed not only Nora Vane but "Nora Tempest." "Why, how is this, my dear lady?" he asked, blinking at the signatures. "Are these all your Christian names—or—or what is your surname?"

Nora blushed and hung her head, and Vane, with her hand upon his arm, explained:

"She has two, sir. We were married in Scotch fashion some months ago, but we wished also to be married in the usual English way;" and he explained to the old gentleman.

"Dear, dear me!" he said, "Tut, tut! How remarkable! But you have done quite right. Oh, yes! you were man and wife safely enough, for the Scotch marriage is astounding. It is shameful that it should be—oh! I'm sure I beg your pardon—but it is shameful, and this is the only case to my knowledge in which that strange law or custom has been of distinct service. All the same, I am glad you are properly married, and"—he smiled—"I'm not surprised, my lord, that you should be anxious to have a double set of chains to bind you to so beautiful and charming a bride."

(To be Continued.)

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Love a Conqueror

—OR—

WEDDED AT LAST!

CHAPTER I.

"You have been asleep, dear?" said Shirley, tenderly.

"No," came from the faint pale lips. "But I have been thinking, Shirley."

"Pleasant thoughts of home and Jack, I hope, darling?" Shirley said tremulously, for she had read the look in the beautiful eyes, and guessed its meaning.

"Of Jack Shirley—I cannot die until I have seen Jack," she said, with sudden eagerness, as she raised her head from the girl's shoulder. "Heaven would not be so cruel; I must see Jack."

"Of course, mother darling! Don't you remember? Jack is to meet us at Charing Cross when we arrive?"

"Yes—I have not forgotten; but Shirley, I am so cold and faint and tired," said the invalid wearily, as she sank back upon the cushions, gasping for breath; and Shirley hastened to pour out some of the restorative which the doctor in Paris had given her, and held it to the pale parched lips, watching anxiously for a shade of color, which stole into them as the restorative took effect.

"It was cruel to let you come with me alone," Mrs. Ross sighed faintly. "Poor little girl, what a terrible journey for you!"

"Don't, mother darling!" the girl said pitifully. "You feel tired and languid now, because you have been travelling; but when you have had a rest you will feel better and more cheerful."

"Do you think it is merely the fatigue of travelling, Shirley?" was the feeble answer, given with a sorrowful smile, which went to her daughter's heart. "I hope it is; because I have so many things to tell you, dear, before I go."

"You will tell me when we are in Scotland, mother," Shirley said cheerfully, choking back a sob which rose in her throat.

"When we are in Scotland! I wonder if I shall ever see Scotland again?" the elder woman said faintly. "My ain country! How I loved it! How I love it even now, although it was so cruel to me—so cruel!" she repeated drearily, with a terrible anguish in her dark eyes.

"Is it wise for you to talk, dear?" Shirley whispered fondly, bending down to the sweet pale face.

"I think it is," answered her mother smiling. "It prevents thought and it does not tire me much. Your uncle's letters are quite safe, Shirley?"

"Quite safe, dear."

"And you will take great care of them, Shirley? I think he will be good to you, my child."

"He writes very kindly, mother," Shirley faltered; "and Aunt Geraldine, he says, sends her love. Did you know her, mother?"

"Yes, dear," Mrs. Ross answered the pain deepening about her lips and in her dark eyes; "I knew her a little years ago, before she was married."

"Is she nice, mother?"

"She was very beautiful then Shirley," said her mother wistfully, with a far-away look in her eyes and a quiver of the lips—"very beautiful."

"Were you married first, or Uncle Gilbert?" Shirley asked innocently encouraging her mother's wish to talk and unconscious of the pain her question might give.

"I—I was married first," her mother answered.

"Then Cousin Gracie is about my age, mother?" Shirley asked.

"No, your cousin is a year older than Jack," said Mrs. Ross steadily; but the effort to speak without showing her daughter the emotion it caused her made all her slight frame tremble; and Shirley took alarm.

"You are cold still, darling," she said, tenderly drawing her wraps round her, when her hand came in contact with her mother's, and she felt the burning heat of her slender attenuated fingers. "Indeed you must not talk, mother," she added hurriedly. "Let me make you more comfortable."

"I am quite comfortable, Shirley, and resting nicely. What a careful little nurse you are!"

"But if you were to lie down, mother, and place your head here upon my lap, you would be more at rest. There—is not that better?"

"It is very nice, dear," the invalid answered gratefully, guessing that Shirley had suggested the change of posture so that her own face might be hidden.

For a short distance they went on thus; Shirley's hazel eyes, blinded with tears, looked steadily out of the window, seeing nothing of the country through which she was passing, only picturing to herself the pale still face at which she dared not look while her mother lay with closed eyes thinking of the past and wondering dimly if life, which had been so cruel to her, would be equally cruel to her children, especially to the fair young daughter who possessed, even as she had possessed, the "fatal dower of beauty."

Presently Shirley was aroused by a quick gasping sob from her mother.

"Lift me up, lift me up!" she said faintly. "I cannot breathe."

(To be Continued.)

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