



## For Love of a Woman; New Romeo and Juliet.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN STRANGE SURROUNDINGS. "I'm sure I don't know. Oh, yes, I do. I had forgotten. He has gone down to stay with his uncle, the Marquis of Stoylo, you know."

"Poor Cecil!" commiserated the duchess, with a faint smile. "How he must suffer!"

"I heard that he'd been obliged to leave England," remarked another lady, in a subdued voice. "Up to his ears in debt, poor fellow!"

"Well, he has had a very long rope," said the duchess. "It is time he married and settled down."

"That is just what he is going to do," said Lady Despard, laughing. "I heard from Mr. Spenser Churchill—he is stopping at Barton Towers, you know—that Lord Cecil is engaged to Grace Peyton."

The duchess raised her eyebrows. "At last! Well, it is a good match, and I'm sure she'll be happy."

"Oh, how severe!" said the other lady. "You mean that he won't be, your grace?"

"I mean that if I were a man I should think twice before—"

She stopped, as if she had suddenly remembered the number and mixed character of her audience.

"Oh, she is a charming girl, and so very beautiful, you know," said Lady Despard.

"Yes very," said her grace, drily, and changed the subject.

Doris sat perfectly motionless, and very pale, fighting against the dizziness which assailed her.

"What is that the senor is playing?" asked the duchess presently.

"I haven't the slightest idea," replied Lady Despard, helplessly.

Doris rose.

"I will go and enquire," she said, feeling that she had better seize the opportunity of making herself useful.

Her grace looked after her.

"That's a very beautiful girl, my dear," she said, slowly.

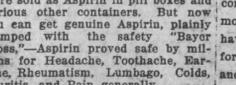
"Isn't she!" responded Lady Despard. "I call her lovely—simply lovely! I'm awfully obliged to Mr. Spenser Churchill."

"Who is she? Where does she come from?"

"Oh, it's quite a long story!" said her ladyship, who was not so simple.

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as to throw down Doris's history for her aristocratic friends to worry. "The poor child has just lost her father."

"She will create a sensation," said the duchess, calmly and emphatically. "I don't think I ever saw a more lovely face or a more graceful figure—excepting yours, my dear."

"Oh, you can leave mine out, too!" said Lady Despard, good-naturedly.

Meanwhile, Doris made her way through the crowd, and the duchess's prophecy was speedily fulfilled. Men and women, as they made room for the slight, girlish figure to pass, looked after her with a startled curiosity, and turned to one another, asking eager questions, some of which were pitched in a quite high enough key for Doris to hear. But, with the modest self-possession which her training had bestowed upon her, she reached the piano, learnt the name of the piece, and returned to the duchess.

"It is Beethoven's sonata in G, your grace," she said, in her low, musical voice.

"Thank you, my dear," said the duchess. "It was very good-natured of you to take so much trouble. Good-bye, Lady Despard," and as she shook hands with her hostess she bestowed a smile and a nod on Doris.

Lady Despard laughed.

"My dear," she said, "you are going to be a success. It isn't often the duchess is so amiable."

Two hours later, Mr. Spenser Churchill, with a smile that seemed to cast a benediction on everything it lit on, was slowly walking down the still warm pavement of Bentham St., Soho.

Bentham Street, Soho, is by no means an aristocratic thoroughfare, and the eminent philanthropist had to meander in and out of a crowd of dirty children, who shouted and sprawled over the curb and pavement, much to their own delight and the peril of the foot-passengers; but Mr. Churchill seemed quite familiar with the street and humours, and, stopping at a house half-way down, knocked at the door as if he had done it before.

A young and overgrown girl shuffled along the passage, and answering an enquiry of Mr. Churchill's as to whether Mr. Perry Levant was in, nodded an affirmative, and requested Mr. Churchill to follow her. She knocked at a door on the first floor, and receiving a peculiarly clear-voiced "Come in," opened the door, and jerked her finger by way of invitation to Mr. Churchill to enter.

Notwithstanding the neighbourhood in which it was situated, and the dingy condition of the rest of the house, this room was comfortably furnished, and indicated the possession of some amount of taste by its occupant. There was a fair-sized table, with a large bowl of flowers in the centre, some pictures rather good than bad, a Colliard & Collard piano stood on one side of the small room, with a guitar leaning against it. Besides the pictures, there hung on the walls a pair of fencing-folks and masks, and a set of boxing-gloves.

The room was full of the smoke which emanates from a good Havana, and the smoker was reclining in a comfortable chair, with his feet on another, and a glass of apparently-soda-and-brandy by his elbow.

He was a young man, who, if he possessed no other qualities, had been remarkably favoured by the gods in one particular—he was, perhaps, as singularly handsome a specimen of the human race as it is possible to conceive. So finely cut and delicately moulded was his face that it would have been considered effeminate but for the moustache which, like his hair and eyebrows, and the long lashes that swept the clear, olive cheek, was a silky, lustrous black. It was a face which Van Dyke would have loved to paint; a face which, once seen, lingered in one's memory; and it wore an

added charm, a certain devil-may-care, debonaire expression which at once attracted attention and lent it impressiveness.

"Hallo, Spenser! Is that you?" he exclaimed, with a laugh, as he rose and held out his hand, as white—though not so soft and fat—as the philanthropist's own. "An unexpected honour! Sit down! You don't mind the smoke, do you?" he asked, as Mr. Spenser Churchill coughed two or three "wow, wows" behind his handkerchief. "Rather thick, isn't it? The room's small, you see, and I've been smoking for—oh, Lord knows how long! Have anything? Brandy-and-soda, eh? All right!"

And going to the window, he leant out, and called some instructions to an urchin below.

"My dear Percy, isn't that—rather a public way of procuring refreshments?" said Mr. Churchill.

The young fellow laughed.

"Well, perhaps it is," he admitted. "But it saves trouble, and they're used to it. There are always some youngsters outside glad to earn a penny, and the Pig and Whistle keeps a very good article—so they say. Have a cigar?" and he pushed a box towards him.

"You'll find 'em all right, I think. And now, what brings you to the aristocratic regions of Soho?"

Mr. Spenser Churchill lit his cigar and took two or three preliminary puffs before answering, the young man leaning against the mantel-shelf in graceful abandon, and watching him with a faintly amused curiosity; then the great philanthropist said, in his soft, dulcet voice:

"I have come to make your fortune, Percy!"

CHAPTER XX.

AN EXTRAORDINARY PROPOSAL. "Oh, you have come to make my fortune!" said Percy Levant. "Pardon me, but that sounds rather—funny!" and he regarded Mr. Spenser Churchill with a faint smile.

"Funny!" echoed the philanthropist, in an injured tone. "Why 'funny'? I trust I have always proved myself your friend and well-wisher, my dear Percy?"

The young man smiled again, and stroked his silky moustache with his white, long, artistic-looking hand.

"Yes—oh, yes! I don't mean to be offensive; but you must allow that people don't generally go about making other people's fortunes—that's all. Pray proceed. I'm all impatience, and grateful by anticipation! Goodness knows, my fortune needs making very badly!" and he glanced round the room, and down at his shabby velvet jacket, which hung over a chair, with a little grimace.

"Forgive me, my dear Percy, if I remark that the poverty which you lament may be as much your fault as your misfortune."

"I daresay," he assented, with good-tempered indolence; "you mean that there is not enough of the busy bee about me, Mr. Churchill?"

The philanthropist shook his head gravely.

"I am afraid you have not been industrious, my dear Percy. Let us for a moment review your position."

"Review it for half an hour if you like," said the young fellow. "It won't hurt me, and it will probably amuse you. Meanwhile, here's something that won't hurt you and it will amuse both of us," and he opened the door to the urchin who had brought the liquid refreshment. "Go ahead while I mix. Plenty of brandy in yours, eh?"

"Here you are, my dear Percy," said Mr. Churchill, blandly, "in the possession of youth and health and—shall I say?—remarkably good looks—"

"Say what you like. You'll excuse my not blushing."

"And, in addition to those great advantages, a wonderful talent for one of the fine arts. I believe, my dear Percy, that you are a musician of a high order—"

"Thanks again! Here's your health!" interjected the young fellow.

"Yes, I can 'play a bit and sing a bit and jump Jim Crow.' As to being a musician—"

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"You play and sing like an artist, my dear Percy, and most young fellows so highly endowed as you are would have made a name for themselves and a place in the world."

"Instead of which, here I am in dingy Soho, with the last two quarters' rent unpaid, and forced to borrow a five-pound note from my dear friend Mr. Spenser Churchill," he said, lightly.

The philanthropist shook his head.



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"Well, ten pounds would certainly do me more good. Are you going to make it ten?"

"I will make it much more than ten if you will listen to me and—er—promise to follow my advice. Just consider your position, as I say, my dear Percy. Have you no ambition? Surely you, with your great gifts and youth and good looks must feel that this is not the place for you—"

"That I am wasting my sweetness on the desert air? Just so. I often feel it; but once having got lost in the desert, it's rather difficult to find one's way out, you see. Have I no ambition?" The black eyes flashed, and the clear, olive tint of his complexion grew warm. "Of course I have! What do you take me for—a mule, a pack-horse? Why, man, I never see a well-dressed man of my own age, but I envy them their horses and their acquaintance with the pretty girls—the daughters and wives of swell people; I never pass a good club, but I feel that I'd give ten years of my life to be a member and one of the class to which it belongs. Do you think I live in this stifling den from choice? Do you think I dine on a sixpenny plate of meat, and drink porter, sit in the gallery of a theatre, and wear old clothes because I like doing it?"

He drew himself up to his full height, and flashed upon his servant listener for a second, then relaxed into his old lounging attitude, and laughed moustically.

"Why do you come here with your Arabian Nights' kind of speeches and stir me up? Bah! it's too hot for such mental exercise!" and he sank into a chair and folded his hands behind his head. "No, Churchill, I am in the desert, and there I shall stick."

(To be Continued.)

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