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**For Love  
of a Woman;**

**New Romeo  
and Juliet.**

CHAPTER IX.

A SECRET COMPACT.  
"Well!" she said, "and if I do wish it, what then? Is it so unnatural? Are there many better matches, many better men than Cecil Neville?"  
"Few, if any," he assented, blandly. "He is young, handsome, popular, brave, and—a future marquis." She picked at the moss in the crevice of the stone coping. "A very good match, indeed, and Lady Grace is worthy of such a partner, truly!"  
"And you mean to do your best or your worst for the match?" she said, swiftly.  
He took out a cigarette.  
"May I?" he asked, then lit it, and leaning on the railing surveyed the beautiful scene as if he were quite absorbed in peaceful contemplation, and had quite forgotten his companion and the subject of their conversation. Then he turned his head and smiled at her. "No," he said, slowly and softly, "I mean to do all I can to further the idea."  
She started slightly, and her lips parted in a faint sigh.  
"You do! You—you mean to help me! And why?"  
He was silent again, smoking with placid, serene enjoyment for a moment or two, then he replied:  
"If I were to answer that I am prompted solely by a desire for your happiness."  
She made a movement of impatience.  
"You see!" he said, reproachfully. "You would not believe me, so what is the use? Suppose that we do not go into my motives. Let us, if it please you, decide that they are utterly selfish and bad, abandoned and wicked ones—will that do? Very well. After all, what do my motives matter? If I can help you—and I think I can—do not seek to go beyond the mere solid fact of my assistance. Leave the reasons alone. They can't matter much, can they?" and he looked into her eyes

with the bland and innocent gaze of a child.  
She moved restlessly.  
"If I could trust you!" she said, un-  
easily.  
"I thought I had already proved my-  
self worthy of confidence," he said,  
simply; but there must have been some  
hidden significance in his words, for  
they brought the blood to Lady  
Grace's face, and then left it pale and  
white to the lips.  
"I—I—" she faltered.  
"Oh, do not say anything of the past,"  
he murmured, soothingly. "Let us  
think of the present. We will speak  
plainly. It is the dear marquis's wish  
that you should marry Lord Cecil  
Neville; you being gratified by his  
choice and willing to fall in with his  
views, an old and tried friend offer-  
ing his services to you, do not hesitate  
to avail yourself of them. I am the old  
and tried friend."  
The last words were more softly  
and coolly spoken than any that  
had preceded them; but Lady Grace  
started up and looked at him suspi-  
ciously. He, however, met her scrutiny  
with his bland and innocent smile.  
"If I really thought you would help  
me," she said, doubtfully.  
"You may think so, for I will," he  
answered. "As I said, never mind my  
motives, they concern only myself. And  
how goes the business? Has our  
dear friend Cecil—eh?"  
She frowned slightly as if the ques-  
tion touched her self-love and vanity.  
"Our dear friend does not at present  
seem much smitten by your humble  
servant's charms," she said, with a  
short laugh, which only barely hid  
her vexation.  
He smiled and nodded.  
"Our young friend is rather spoilt,  
you see. One cannot be the favoured  
of the gods in the matter of youth and  
strength and features without paying  
the usual penalty. Cecil is the most  
popular man in London. Believe me,  
there are twenty young ladies—I could  
give you their names—and his lips  
curled—who are, if not dying, living  
in love of him."  
"I know," she said, with hardly re-  
strained impatience. "Of course there  
has been a dead-set at him. That is  
very natural, is it not? But—but I  
don't think—"  
"That the sultan has shown any par-  
tiality; that he has not yet thrown the

handkerchief," he finished for her.  
"No," thoughtfully; "I don't think he  
has. His lordship has, indeed, been  
so very impartial, not to say invulner-  
able, that I have sometimes wondered  
whether there was not some young  
lady hidden away, eh?" and he looked  
at her questioningly.  
She started and coloured.  
"Then there is?" he said at once.  
"I—I don't know," she replied, mus-  
tantly. "There may be. Last night I  
dined away from the Towers—at the  
Thurtons, you know?"  
"I know," he murmured, pleasantly.  
"Thurton's grand-father was trans-  
ported for forgery; his wife's sister  
ran away with young Lengard, I re-  
member."  
"Our course, you know all about  
them, every shameful secret in the fam-  
ily for generations back?" she said,  
with a sigh.  
He laughed.  
"I have such a dreadfully good mem-  
ory, dear lady. Well, you dined there—"  
"Yes; and coming home I passed  
down the High Street, and saw Lord  
Cecil. He was standing at the door of  
a fly, opposite the theatre, talking to  
a lady—a girl."  
He nodded, and puffed at his cig-  
arette placidly, with half-closed eyes,  
looking, indeed, almost asleep; but his  
next question proved that he was very  
much awake.  
"Was she pretty, Lady Grace?"  
"I only saw her for a minute. Yes,"  
she admitted, reluctantly.  
"You did not know her?"  
She shook her head.  
"No. She was not one of the daugh-  
ters of any of the county people; be-  
sides, it was a fly. It was opposite the  
side entrance."  
"She was an actress," he interrup-  
ted, quietly.  
"How did you know?"  
"My dear lady! It is so simple! The  
fly was the only one there, or you  
would not have seen her so plainly;  
it was at the side entrance; she was  
unknown to you. Oh, plainly it was  
an actress. And it was she who was  
with Lord Cecil this morning."  
"Then you have seen her?" she ex-  
claimed, eagerly.  
He shook his head.  
"No," he said, "only heard her. I  
met our dear Cecil in the woods. As  
I appeared, I heard two voices, though  
he, of course, denied it. One was a  
woman's, and, though I am not in the  
habit of having wagers with ladies—for  
they never pay when they lose—I  
would bet something considerable that  
the voice belonged to the young lady  
whom you saw talking to Lord Cecil  
outside the theatre last night."  
She bit her lip, and the look came  
into her eyes which indicates the first  
approach of the green-eyed monster—  
jealousy.  
"Some worthless actress, painted  
and powdered. Some woman old  
enough to be his mother, though made  
up as a girl."  
He shook his head and laughed with  
serene enjoyment.  
"No, no; such an experienced bird as  
Lord Cecil is not to be caught with  
such chaff, my dear lady? Depend  
upon it, this girl is young and pretty."  
She twisted her handkerchief in her  
hand, then smiled contemptuously.  
"It must be the Juliet of last night,"  
she said.  
"Perhaps."  
"Well"—she drew a long breath—"I  
think I am a match for a common  
actress, though she be young and  
pretty!" and she raised her head and  
turned to him defiantly.  
He looked at her with the calm eyes  
of a connoisseur.  
"Yes, I should think so," he said,

**And the Worst is Yet to Come—**



blandly. "Certainly, I think so. A match for half a dozen of them. Forgive me if I say that I don't think there is a more beautiful woman in England than Lady Grace Peyton, or a more charming one!"  
She took no notice of the compli-  
ment. To her eyes there rang a tone  
of mockery behind the smooth phrases.  
"What—what is to be done? What  
do you advise?" she asked, after a  
moment's pause, and with an affected  
indifference which made him smile.  
He puffed a thin line of smoke from  
his sleek lips and watched it with half-  
closed eyes.  
"Nothing," he said.  
"Nothing?" she repeated.  
"No," he said. "Nothing, so far as  
you are concerned. Just go on being  
beautiful and charming—as you can-  
not help being—and leave it to me to  
do the rest. If this is not a serious  
business, if his lordship is really only  
scratched, why—" He laughed lastly.  
"If, on the contrary, he is badly hit and  
means business—means to make her  
the future Marchioness of Stoyle—  
why, we must deal with the young  
lady herself."  
"Deal with her?" she asked, with an  
eager interest she did not attempt to  
conceal.  
He nodded at the scenery.  
"Yes. There are two ways of going  
to work, each suited to the subject we  
are speaking on. Money and moral  
suasion. It may be money in this  
case; if so—"  
"I am rich," she said, in a quiet un-  
dertone. "If the creature requires to  
be bought; if—"  
"You will do it? Exactly. But the  
moral suasion?"  
"I will leave to you, who have so  
much of it," she said, with a half-  
smile.  
He laughed softly.  
"So they all say, dear lady; but alas!  
I am so tender-hearted that I can  
never bring myself to use it. I am all  
heart, all heart!" and he laid his hand  
on the spot in which the organ is  
situated, and beamed at her. Then,  
without moving a muscle, he went on:  
"And so, dear Lady Grace, we had the  
poor children to an evening-party, and  
gave them tea and buns, and I am  
sure you would have been melted to  
tears at the sight of their overbrim-  
ming happiness."

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Plates.**



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