



For Love of a Woman; New Romeo and Juliet.

CHAPTER XXIV. IN THE HOUR OF NEED.

It need scarcely be remarked that it is not usual for young ladies unattended to pay gentlemen visits at their chambers. Scandal is only too ready to seize upon the slightest excuse for the exercise of its malignity, and the fact, if it were known, that Lady Grace Peyton had been seen in Cecil Neville's rooms would be quite sufficient to set evil tongues wagging. All this flashed across Cecil Neville's mind as she stood in the doorway, picture of queenly beauty which seemed to light up the room, and made the sheriff's officer stare with all his eyes. Lord Cecil went forward, a slight flush on his face denoting his embarrassment. "Lady Grace!" he said. Then he stopped suddenly, remembering that it would be well not to mention her name before the man. She bit her lip and looked from one to the other as she gave him her hand. "I-I thought you were alone," she said, in a low voice full of confusion and anxiety. The officer rose and made a light bow. "I'll step outside, my lord," he said, respectfully, and he did so. "I-I did not know," faltered Lady Grace, looking after him. "Have I done anything very wrong in coming? I did not stop to think. I was so anxious that I thought I would come up to town—" "Will you not sit down?" he said, gravely, and he placed a chair for her. She sank into it, and looked up at him. "What news is there? Have you heard of her? I can't tell you how anxious I am! Ah! I see by your face that something has happened! What is it?" "Yes; I have had news," he said, in a low voice. "My uncle was right, and you and I were wrong, Lady Grace. Miss Marlowe—his voice grew grim—" "Has sailed for Australia."

THAT CHANGE IN WOMAN'S LIFE

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She held out her hand to him. "Oh, I am so sorry! What can I say, dear Lord Neville, to comfort you?" He smiled wearily. "Nothing, I am afraid. There is nothing to be said—or done; I have got to bear it, that is all! I am not the only man who has been—killed." The cruel word left his lips like a note of steel. "Probably my lot is all too common. Yes, I have got to bear it!" "There—there is no doubt about it," she asked. "None whatever," he replied. "I have been down to the office and seen the list of passengers, and her name is amongst them, together with this man's."

"Oh, what is it now?" she exclaimed, almost clasping her hands. "Nothing, nothing," he hastened to reassure her, though his voice was anything but reassuring; "only that I have just remembered that I cannot leave the house just at present. The fact is, I have important business with this man, and—oh, Lady Grace, I am so sorry! Don't misunderstand! I'd give all I'm worth—he laughed bitterly, and corrected himself—"ten years of my life, to come with you, but—"

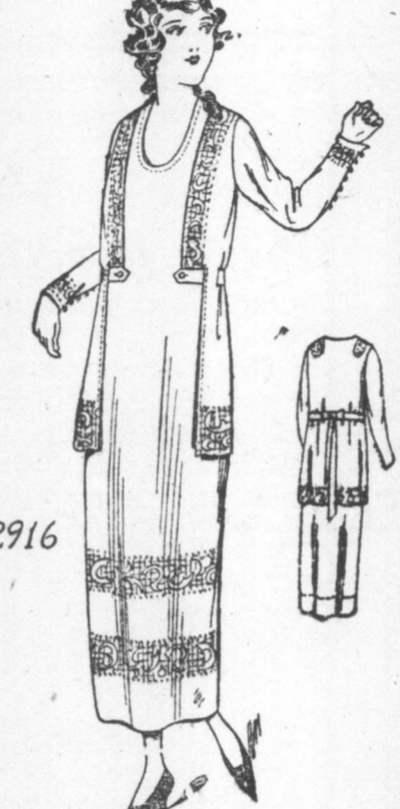
He walked back to Clarges Street—almost ran, indeed—and, opening the door in response to Lord Cecil's gloomy "Come in," entered, and pantingly surveyed him with a smile. "Well!" said Lord Cecil, grimly. "You are agreeably surprised at finding me here still. Most jailbirds would have taken advantage of your absence and flown, would they not?" "Yes, they would," assented the man, emphatically. "But I spoke the truth when I said you were a real nobleman. And I didn't hurry back because I was afraid. No—I knew you'd wait. You are the right sort, you are, my lord!" "Thanks," said Lord Cecil, curtly; "and where have you been?" "Bidding your pardon, my lord, that's a secret; but I've been on business, and there it is!" and he laid the discharge on the table. Lord Cecil took it up indifferently; then, when he had realised its purpose, he started and flushed. "Why, what does this mean?" he demanded. "It means that the claim is settled, and that you are a free man, my lord," said the officer, warmly; "and if you'll allow me to offer my respectful congratulations and a word of warning—" "A word of warning?" said Lord Cecil, confusedly. "Yes, my lord. This business—though it's all right in a legal way—has had a curious feature or two about it. I mean that there's been some underhand work going on—Jews, I expect. You see, though the amounts were owing to several persons originally, they've been bought up by someone—someone who's got a grudge against you. Can you guess who it is?" Lord Cecil shook his head. "I know no one who has any grudge against me," he said, still bewildered. "Very well, my lord, all the more reason that you should keep your eyes open. At any rate, you're clear of 'em now, and I wish you good-day. You won't be sorry to see the back of me, I dare say."

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