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A Millionaire; Countess Westerleigh.

CHAPTER XXIV.

(To be continued.)

A low, inarticulate cry broke from her parched lips. What must Vane—her Vane—have thought of her? was the agonizing question that drove like fire through her brain.

"Every hour of the day I trembled for you," he went on. "Every day I expected to hear that the discovery had been made. I never looked at a paper without dreading to see an account of the scandal in high life in it. Whenever we were together—we three—I was on tenter-hooks of anxiety lest you should make a false step—a slip, and let out the secret. That night at the theatre, when you started and glared at me because, treating you as the boy you pretended to be, I touched you on the shoulder. I thought Lady Florence would notice your resentment, the woman's flash of your eyes, and I trembled."

He paused and glanced at her. Every word, carefully prepared and calculated, was falling upon her heart like hot embers.

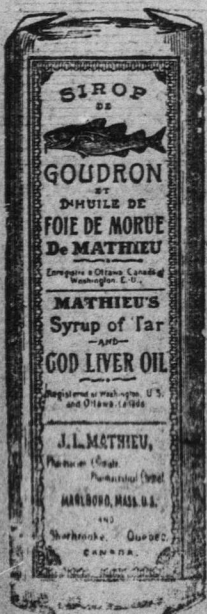
"Yes, my dear girl, I have had an

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anxious time of it—far more anxious than you or Vane have had. You will ask, "Why, what does it matter to you more than to the rest of the world—to the men at the club—for instance, to Lord Wally and the rest?" Well, you see, I happen to be a real friend of Vane. He saved my life, as I dare say you know; and I knew that such a scandal as your continual presence with him in that masquerade—in that garb—would ruin him as well as you. Ruin him! I was anxious on his account principally, but also on yours; for though you do not like me, I liked you, Nora—I pitied you."

She smiled, as if avowed a pity were fresh torture.

"You were so young, so innocent, so ignorant of the world! It was so evident to me that the folly you had committed had been done in the impulse of the moment, had been quite free from the mere idea of wrong; in short, my dear Nora, I divined the truth, and pitied you. I wanted to befriend you, to save you. I knew that if you remained in London much longer, your secret must be discovered. There was peril in every day; and so I persuaded Vane to bring you down here."

She sunk into a chair and held her face in her hands as if worn out by emotion.

"I might have stopped there. Frankly, most men would have done

so. You see, it was not a nice affair to be mixed up with. It would not be pleasant to figure as a participant in the scandal; but I could not leave you to your fate. I have come down to help you, and not only you, but my friend, the man who saved my life—the only true friend I have in the world! Will you let me help you, Nora?"

He asked the question in the gentlest, sweetest tone of truest sympathy.

"Will you let me help you? I am a man of the world. I know it to the core. I tell you frankly, honestly, as would tell my own sister, that you are not continue your course of deception much longer; that discovery means shame and ruin for you—and or him. If you will not think of our own happiness, you will consider his. I know you will, my dear girl."

She hung up her arms and let her head fall on them.

"What shall I do?" she panted, moaned, more to herself than to him. He rose softly, and seated himself at the table opposite her, and leaned forward so that there was no need for him to speak above a whisper.

"I will tell you, Nora," he said, earnestly, slowly, as if to impress every word upon her. "You must go away. You must leave him!" Her lips moved and formed the words—rent her heart: "Go away! Leave him!"

He heard the murmur.

"Yes, you must go away without a word. He must not know that I discovered your secret. I ask you only one thing, and that is to promise me that you will not tell him or anyone that has passed between us two this afternoon. Will you do that? But for your own sake you will, I now."

She did not speak, and he took her silence as equivalent to the promise he demanded.

"Nora, listen to me carefully," he said in the same cautious whisper. "To-morrow I will take him out of the way, and when we are gone you must leave this place. There is a train at eleven o'clock. You must not go to London, but to Glasgow. Can you remember? I have written the directions on this piece of paper—see." He pushed it across the table against her fingers, and they closed upon it mechanically. "At Glasgow you will find a vessel on the point of starting for Canada. I have booked a passage for you. You see, I relied upon your good sense."

I know you would trust me and believe that I was doing my best for you—and Vane."

He waited a moment to see if she would respond, but no sign came.

"You will find written on this paper an address in Canada, to which you must go. It is the name and address of a lady who will take care of you and help you to make a fresh start in life. I have told her nothing—absolutely nothing of your story. To her you will be simply the orphan of a friend of mine—a kind of ward whose welfare I am anxious to secure. You understand my dear child? You will be happy there with these good people. I am convinced, and in a new world you will soon forget this fearful mistake of yours—which, but for me, would have brought you life-long ruin."

He paused and drew out a purse. "You will want money—"

She shuddered, and with a spasmodic gesture shrunk away from the purse.

"You have some?" he said. "Very well; I understand. But if you should need any, you have but to apply to my friend or to write to me."

He stopped and looked at her beautiful head, as it lay on her arms, with keen scrutiny. He would have preferred to have seen her face.

"I know you will go, my dear Nora," he said, gravely, sympathizingly; "I know you will see that it is your only course. Yes, I have not misjudged you. Some women, I know, would laugh my proposal to scorn, and would stop and brazen it out; but you are not of that sort. It is true"—he spoke slowly, impressively—"it is true that Vane might

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marry you—probably would marry you—"

She quivered in every limb, and raising her head, looked full at him. At the sight of her face Senley Tyers felt an uncomfortable sensation. Was this pale, haggard-looking woman the boy Ernest Mortimer, the girl Nora Trevanion?

"My dear child! My dear Nora!" he murmured. "You must not take it so much to heart. You must not, indeed! It is very sad, very trying, and I can understand all you are feeling; but you are young and—and—" Before the agony in her eyes even he faltered and broke down.

He paused with downcast glance for a moment, then he raised his eyes and looked at her keenly.

"Perhaps I am asking too much of you after all," he said, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Perhaps you had better stay and see the business out. Vane will marry you, no doubt." He sighed. "After all, what does it matter? It would ruin him, it's true; but he would be an outcast—the laughing-stock of all who had ever known him. But I don't see why you should care so long as you get what you wanted and were his wife."

She sprung to her feet, her face crimson, her eyes flashing, her lips parted to let the fierce, fast breath escape, and at a glance he saw that he had won.

"Forgive me, my dear Nora—forgive me!" he murmured. "I see I have wronged you. I would ask your pardon on my knees. You love him too well to work his ruin, do you not? Ah! yes; I might have known it! And you will go! You will take my advice, accept—my assistance. Say just one word, just the 'yes,' Nora. For his sake, remember!"

He leaned over the table, his own breath coming fast, his dark eyes fixed on her.

She panted as if for breath, then the answer came.

"Yes! yes! yes!" she said, hoarsely. "You know it! Let me go anywhere, anywhere! I ruin him! Oh God!" She trembled and shook in every limb for a moment, then stood erect, firm, resolute, with an expression in her beautiful eyes which Senley Tyers was far too ignoble a man to understand.

"I will do what you tell me," she said, painfully. "Don't—don't you speak to me about it again. I—I could not bear it. I will go away. I will never see him again!"

(To be Continued.)

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