

# A Millionaire's; Countess Westerleigh

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Vane knit his brows. "I—I could not. When Warlock mentioned her name—the name he knew her by—her face rose before me; I heard her voice; I felt her arms around my neck, and—and I thought—"

"Thought—thought!" broke in Senley Tyers, with subdued ferocity. "Thought such as yours makes fools of us all. I've told you that Nora Trevanion cares nothing for you—that she left you because she did not love you and hated the thought of marrying you."

"But—but you may be mistaken," said poor Vane, with a cough.

"Mistaken!" echoed Senley Tyers. He stopped in front of Vane, his thin, slight figure contrasting with Vane's stalwart form. "Look here, Vane; I am your friend, am I not?"

Vane nodded. "I can claim some indulgence. If I have kept back something from you, you will admit that I have done so from the best motives—"

"Kept back?" echoed Vane. "What?"

Senley Tyers smiled to the cabinet and took a letter from it.

"Read that," he said. "I received it a week—more—ago. I kept it from you because—well, I thought it best. No one likes to deprive a friend of all hope."

Vane read the note. It was written in the stiff hand of a person who has just learned to write, and, take it altogether, was a credit to Mr. Senley Tyers, who was not a forger by profession.

"Dear Sir," it ran,—"*Do not think*

any more about me. I could not marry you, because I do not, and never could, love you. But I am grateful to you for all your goodness—very, very grateful. I am with friends who take the greatest care of me, and I should be quite happy if I could know that you forgive me and do not think me ungrateful."

There was a blot or two and a couple of words scratched out, as if the writer had experienced some difficulty in wording the note. It was indeed, a very clever production, and one which would have deceived a cuter man than poor Vane. It effect upon him was profound and indescribable.

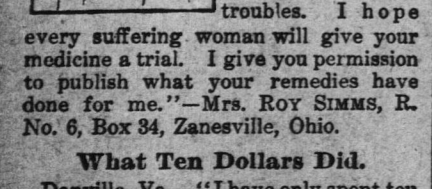
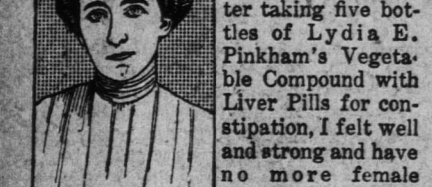
He held it in his hand, staring at it in silence for full a minute; then he looked up and laughed—the laugh

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of a man who sees his last hope disappear.

"Why—why didn't you give me this before?" he asked, hoarsely. "No matter; I understand. My poor Nora—my poor child!"

He hung his head, and Senley Tyers drew nearer to him.

"You understand at last," he said. "Give me the note and let me burn it, and so have done with her."

But Vane folded the letter and put it in his pocket.

"I—I am glad she is happy," he said. "That's a weight off my mind. She says she is happy. You noticed that?"

Senley Tyers nodded.

"Of course she is happy. Haven't I told you so? Shouldn't we have heard of her long before this, if she hadn't been? Where are you going?"

"Are—are you sure that—that you want?" she murmured.

"Yes, I want you, Florence," he said, and for the moment he believed what he said. "You will make me happy if you say 'Yes.'"

He drew a long breath. "You know—all about me. I'm no great shakes. There are scraps of better men—"

"But not for me," she said; and she turned her face to him with a

apt look on hers which filled his

with remorse. For he saw she loved

him, while he—God help him!—was still in thrall to Nora Trevanion.

"Then—then?" he said, doubtfully, hesitatingly.

"Yes," she said. "I will be your wife, Vane!"

Her voice, almost inaudible, rang like a love song; she drooped toward him so that, being a man, and human, he was bound to put his arm round her and kiss the lovely face.

But even as he did so, that other face—Nora Trevanion's—rose before him.

"Dear Florence!" he murmured, though his voice sounded as if it belonged to some other man.

"Vane!" she whispered, her hand closing over his, as if she longed to realize her glorious possession. "And—and you love me, only me?"

The brilliantly lighted room swam before his eyes, and the music of the band—the newest thing in bands—made wild discord.

"I—I love—you!" he responded.

She leaned toward him, and her beauty, the scent in her hair struck upon his senses at once as a spell and a reproach.

"Vane, dear Vane!" she murmured. "Have you always loved me?"

Heaven forgive him! What, indeed

was evident to Vane that not one of the great lady's sentences reached Lady Florence's brain. He knew too well the expression of absent-minded preoccupation which sat upon Lady Florence's beautiful face.

He crossed the room, and at his approach she raised her head.

Instantly its expression of weary boredom changed to one of interest and—yes, of welcome.

"So you have come, after all?" she said.

And something in her voice caused the statesman's wife to rise, and with a smile and a few words to Vane, to move away and leave the decks clear.

"Yes," he said. He sat down beside her in the alcove, where they were as little likely to be disturbed as if they were in her father's room next door.

"What an incongruous and miserable affair a reception is at this time of year," she said, her heart beginning to beat with a wild hope.

"Yes," he said; then he faced round to her and looked into her eyes. "Lady Florence, just now—just before I left you, I was about to ask you a question."

"Yes," she faltered, fingering her bouquet of costly orchids.

"The earl interrupted me, or I should have asked you if—if—his voice grew thick and husky—if you would be my wife?"

Her face grew colorless, and her bouquet dropped into her lap. For her it was the supreme moment of her life, a moment she had often dreamed of but never dared picture.

"Will you be my wife, Florence?" he said gravely, steadily, as if he had considered every phase carefully. "I know that I deserve a refusal, and your contemptuous refusal. I am a poor man—"

She lifted her eyes for a moment, with an expression that indicated her indifference to that fact.

"I am a poor man, without rank or—or in any way worthy of marrying you; but if you will say yes, I will do my best, my very best; to make you happy. I know that you are far too good for me, too good in every way; that there are ever so many better men who deserve to win you; but if you will consent to be the wife of a poor man, a man who is of no account whatever, I will—"

He paused, and ended, lamely enough—"I will do my very best to prevent your ever regretting it."

Not one word of love had he spoken. He had, indeed, refrained, purposely or not, from mentioning the word. But drowning men—and women—catch at straws. Lady Florence Heathcote caught at hers. Her color came and went, and her soft white hands writhed together.

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can a man in his place do but assist?

"Always," he responded; and even as he spoke, the clear-cut face, the dark hair, the very look of Nora rose before him.

"I am so happy," she said, after the pause that naturally followed.

"So happy," she laughed. "Will you approach me with this confession—"

afterward? Will you think I have been too open, too confiding? No, not you! Less noble men than you might do so, but not you, Vane!"

"God grant you may have nothing to reproach me for, Florence!" he breathed.

"I reproach you!" she murmured.

"How could I? Why should I? Oh, Vane, are you happy?"

She turned her face, glorified by her passion, toward him, and he miserable man, tried to meet the question in her eyes.

"Quite happy," he said, voicing the lie, and emphasizing it with a kiss.

She leaned back; his arm still round her, and sighed the sigh of

perfect bliss and contentment.

"This is what you were going to ask me at home?" she said.

"Yes."

She laughed softly.

(To be Continued.)

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Composed of Ladies Waist Pattern 9684, and Ladies Skirt Pattern 9685. Prune colored poplin, with shadow lace for vest, and velvet of a darker shade for trimming is here shown. The waist is cut in blouse style, and may be finished with long or shorter sleeves. The fronts are cut low over a deep vest that is outlined by a shaped revers, that forms a shaped collar over the back. The skirt shows deep tucks in front and back. The Waist Pattern is cut in 5 sizes: 32, 34, 36, 38, 40 inches bust measure. The skirt in 5 sizes: 22, 24, 26, 28 and 30 inches waist measure. It requires 6 1/2 yards of 36 inch material for a 36 inch size.

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