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For Love of a Woman, New Romeo and Juliet.

CHAPTER XXXIV.
"I, TOO, AM FREE."

Doris went slowly in the direction Percy Levant had taken; but she did not see him, and presently, losing herself in her thoughts, she wandered across the lawn which stretched between the inn and the high-road, and leaning against the low wall, gave herself to brooding over the confession which the marquis had made—if confession it could be called!

Presently she was startled by the sound of wheels coming down the steep road to her right, and a few minutes afterwards she saw a travelling carriage pull up at the door of the inn, amidst a great bustle and confusion, the stamping of horses' hoofs, the click of changing harness, and the shouting of outsiders.

Then she heard voices asking and answering questions, and amongst them the marquis's suave tones, begging someone's travellers, presumably to enter and rest themselves while the horses were fed.

Doris listened in an absent kind of fashion, in which the noises and voices came to her like those in a dream, until, suddenly looking up, she saw the moon had risen above the tree tops, and she turned to go back to the harbour in which Lady Despard was doubtless sleeping the sleep of the just. As she did so, she heard a slow step at her side, and glancing in its direction, saw a tall figure coming towards her with a slow and listless step. She was drawing back into the shadow of the shrubs to let him pass without seeing her, when suddenly the moon smiled from behind a cloud, and poured its light full on his face, and she saw that it was Lord Cecil Neville!

Yes, it was his face, but how altered! Pale and haggard it looked, as if as many years as minutes had passed over it since she saw it last in all its bright, fresh youthfulness, and it was the shock caused by this change in the beloved face, as much as the sudden



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She turned her head away, her lips quivering at the dull accents of pain in his voice.

"Few mortals are happy, my lord," she replied, in a low voice.

He waved his hand impatiently.

"For Heaven's sake, don't address me as if we were strangers!" he broke out. "It is a farce in which I find it impossible to play! Doris!—He stopped and drew nearer to her—"are you so hard of heart, or so light of memory, that you can forget, absolutely forget, all that passed between us—you and I? Have you forgotten Barton meadows? the day I fell off the horse at your feet? the day I told you that I loved you, and asked you to be my wife? the day you promised to be my wife?"

She shrank back against the wall, and put her hands against it as if to sustain her and keep her from falling.

"Have you clean forgotten?" he demanded, bitterly.

"I have tried to forget," she panted.

"Oh, Heaven!" he exclaimed, with suppressed passion; "and they say women have hearts—they boast that women are gentle and merciful! You tried to forget; and, of course, you succeeded! What I—He drew near to her and looked longingly at her pale face, all the lovelier for its pallor and the intense light shining in the beautiful eyes, the tremour on the perfectly curved lips—"while I have thought of you day by day, night by night! I swear that there is not a night in which I have not dreamed of you, in which you have not stood beside me to mock me with those eyes of yours, to murmur the vows which fell so readily from those sweet lips. Great heaven! how cruel, how merciless even the best of you can be!"

In the fury of his agony it almost seemed as if he were about to strike her with his upraised hand, and Doris felt a wild thrill run through her as the conviction that he still loved her forced itself upon her.

"He loves me still! He loves me still!" she almost cried aloud.

"Yes, the best of you," he repeated, dully, like a man whose senses are half-numbed with pain. "For I counted you the best, and—Heaven help me!—I still count you so! Doris!—I don't know by what name I should call you, but till I die you will be Doris to me—Doris, why did you deceive me? I have lain awake at nights trying to answer that question. I ask you to tell me now, now that all is over between us—And he bit his lips till the blood came, as he gazed at the lovely, downcast face. "All is over, and we are miles apart—worlds apart," and he stifled a groan, "and you can tell me safely. Why did you treat me as you did? Was it simply deviltry, coquetry—what? What fun, amusement was there in it? They said you were practising your profession upon me; that I was a mere block, which you were acting—always acting—up to. Was that true?"

She made no reply, but stood statue-like, her hands pressed against the rough wall, her heart beating in dull, heavy throbs which seemed to stifle her.

"Was it true? If so, then you were the wickedest, the cruellest woman God ever made!" he said, fiercely. "There are some women whose trade it is—professed flirts—to fool and betray men; but they carry the sign of their trade on faces and voices, and we men are aware of them. But you—you, with that innocent face of yours, with that sweet, girlish voice of yours, with those eyes whose truth a man might stake his soul upon—He stopped, and gazed at her as if his soul were slipping from him. "Why don't you answer me?" he broke off, almost savagely.

Her dry lips quivered, a longing so intense as to be almost irresistible assailed her; the desire to exclaim "I did not deceive you; I did love you; I still love you. No treachery of mine parted us!" but she remembered the promise she had made to Percy Levant, the promise renewed only that morning; remembered that he—Lord Cecil—was either already married or pledged to marry Lady Grace, and she remained silent.

He drew a long breath and shrugged his shoulders.

"You can't answer. I suppose it was merely for amusement that you led me on to loving you, merely for amusement that you promised to be my wife, and still merely for amusement—broke my heart!"

She turned. They say the worm will turn if trodden on too persistently.

"Was it only a broken heart you offered to Lady Grace, my lord?" she said.

The moment after she had spoken the words she would have recalled them, for she saw by the sudden pallor of his face, the quiver of his lips, how much they had cost him.

"I see," he said, in a low voice; "you seek to excuse yourself of unfaithfulness by accusing me!"

"No, no," she breathed; but he went on, disregarding her.

"Yes, I am engaged to Lady Grace! It is quite true. All the world knows it with a suppressed bitterness; "but I did not ask her to be my wife until you had—jilted me! Jilted! It is too high a word. Men use it as a jest. But you did not jilt, you deserted and betrayed me!"

"I—!" she panted.

"Yes!" he said, passionately. "You waited until I had left England—left England to please and conciliate my uncle—and then, disregarding my letters, my appeals to your love and your honour, you coldly—like a finished coquette!—cast me off with a few cold words. Good heavens! I cannot recall it without feeling the old pain, the old madness!" He broke off. "Oh, Doris! you have broken other hearts than mine, I daresay; but you never broke one that loved you half as dearly, half as truly, as mine did! I would have staked my life, my honour, on your truthfulness. I would have upheld it in the face of the whole world, and—with a bitter smile—"should have been rightly laughed at for my pains! Doris, the treachery that was sport to you was death to me! Look at me!" he drew nearer to her and folded his arms. "That day I lay with my head in your lap I was a young man, with all a young man's keen desire for life and belief in happiness! I feel like an old man now, bereft of all hope, haunted by the memory of your deceit. This is your work. Be proud of it, if you can!"

She hid her face in her hands, lest it should tell him too much; and he mistook the gesture and attitude for a confession of her guilt, and it moved him to a softer mood.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered. "Don't—for Heaven's sake—don't cry! That won't do any good. I'm awfully sorry I should have bargained out what I felt. It's—its all past and gone now. Of course, you are married."

Her lips formed the word "no," though it was not audible.

(To be Continued.)



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3. Thou shalt see that thy walls and thine own personality are not to forward, but modestly retiring.
4. Thou shalt use no large-patterned wall papers against which to hang thy pictures. The one will kill the other.
5. Thou shalt have no centerpiece or cornerpieces upon thy ceiling, but only a very nearly plain expanse of light color.
6. Thou shalt have thy fill of bright tints, and delicate designs for bedrooms and boudoirs, but for drawing-rooms, dining-rooms, libraries and halls, thou shalt be compelled to use less frivolous papers.
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8. Thou shalt not panel the walls of a small room, except it be above a mantelpiece, a sideboard or a bookcase, where a bit of tapestry, a mirror or a picture may be held in place by strips of moulding.
9. Thou shalt use attention-compelling cut out borders, or conventionally designed strips for divisions between walls and ceiling.
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