

# For Her Only

him almost beyond his self-control. "But you can't really know, you know! It is so soon. And—and—I am not sure that I—ah, yes, I can't say it—for I do love you! But I won't promise to be your wife—not yet."

"And how long is this to last, Di?"

"A month," she answered; "it is not long. If at the end of the month you still—still care for me, then I will promise to be your wife, and a nice fuss there will be!"

"Very well, Di; you shall have your way. You see, I give it to you at once: I own myself your servant and your slave! A month—it is not long! And yet I would give a great deal to take you on my arm and go into the breakfast-room and say, 'Ladies and gentlemen, behold my future wife!'"

As they reached the terrace, the stable clock chimed the half hour after nine.

"Good gracious!" said Di; "and I have to change my dress and do my hair. Look at it; how you have tumbled it and dragged it down!"

Just then she saw Giffard Lisle. He stood aside for her pass, and his white hand wandered to his thin lips to hide the sinister smile.

"How pleasant to see you!" he welcomed her after so short an absence! "I was, howing to her."

"I beg your pardon. I thought it was one of the statues," she called back, coolly.

"Well, Rom, it is the early fly that catches the fish. Had a good time of it, eh?" he asked, smiling very significantly, at Lord Romney.

Lord Romney threw the baskets to a footman and told him to take him to the cook and ask him to send some of the trout up for breakfast; then, answering, he said, quietly:

"When did you come back?"

"Last train last night, quite tired out. Do you generally hold conversations with young ladies through their bedroom doors, Rom?"

Lord Romney colored, and then, with that dignity which struck awe into the hearts of those to whom it was displayed, said coldly:

"Not when I think there are listeners."

"Listeners! You forget my rooms are opposite Miss Leslie's."

"No air! I did not forget—I did not know it," said Lord Romney; and he passed into the house.

They were all seated at breakfast when Di came down.

"My dear Di, said Lady Alice, "we have been awfully alarmed. We thought you had gone out in the park, and had been attacked by a bull, until they told us you had gone fishing with Rom. You clever girl! I dare say you can hit the most fish!"

The countess looked up, with an icy stare.

"Did I hear a ring Diana?" she said, frigidly.

"Have you been out alone this morning, fishing with Lord Romney?"

"Lord Romney has been fishing with me," she said.

The earl chuckled.

"And so you're back, eh Giffard?" said the earl, blinking at the pale face next him. "Where the mischief—where on earth have you been, eh?"

"To London," said Mr. Giffard, slowly. By the way, Plant—the earl's Christian name was Plantagenet—"is the Priory still to let?"

"Why do you want to know? Think of taking it yourself, Giff!" chuckled the earl.

"I want to take the Priory—if the rent isn't too much—for a lady and her daughter."

"If he had said for the king of the Canibals Islands, he could not have created a greater sensation."

"I always thought you were married, Giff," said the earl, triumphantly. "You might have taken us into your confidence, eh?"

"So I will, if I ever commit the almost universal folly," said the honorable Giffard, "but this isn't my wife and child, I am sorry to say, especially as regards the latter, for she is a charming girl."

"Perhaps you will tell us who they are?" said the countess, sternly.

"They are the wid' and the daughter of a very old and dear friend of mine, my lady," he said. "He used to be my partner in many an adventure in America. This friend of mine was my constant companion for many years, and I corresponded with him for some time, say two years ago; then the correspond ceased, and I was thinking that he had forgotten me, when I received a letter from some London lawyers, telling me that my friend was dead, and that he had left a wife and child. I also learned that I have been named sole executor and trustee for his beloved ones, and I started for London at once, and found that the lady and her daughter had arrived."

"Without letting you know, Giff?" said the earl, who seemed particularly acute and intelligent this morning.

"Without letting me know," he said, coldly. "Poor things, they did not know my address."

"They ought to have got it from the lawyers who seem to have known it," said the earl.

Mr. Giffard shrugged his shoulders. "Women never think of these things. Of course, I called upon them, and found that, as usual, they had relied entirely upon me to plan out their lives."

"How are they left off, Giff?" said the earl.

"Oh, very well. The girl will have a large fortune. I understand!" replied Mr. Giffard, carelessly.

"I see, I see," said the earl, drumming the table with a fork. "Good idea. P. can have the Priory—eh, Rom? Rom's the business man, you know, Giff."

Mr. Giffard Lisle smiled.

"And the rent, Rom?"

"Two-and-sixpence a year," said Lord Romney, promptly. "What is

his name, sir?"

Mr. Giffard Lisle had got his coffee cup in his hand, and stopped. It half-way to his mouth, then took a drink before answering.

Then he put the cup gently down, and said:

"Delorme. The daughter's name is Eve."

## CHAPTER XII.

### The Heart's Bitterness.

Miss Eve Delorme, impersonating the Sleeping Beauty at the Priory, was effective enough in all conscience, but Miss Eve Delorme in evening dress was a vision of beauty which startled and enthralled the beholder.

"Gad, Giffard!" exclaimed the earl, when the gentlemen were alone, "that's a wonderfully fine creature, that ward of yours! And clever, too! Talks like an encyclopaedia! Didn't you say that she was very rich?"

Mr. Giffard shrugged his broad shoulders.

"There is a large sum of money, one way and another, he answered in a very careless way."

"The earl chuckled.

"Fine chance for some young fellow eh, Rom?" and he nodded over his glass at Romney.

When they went into the drawing-room, "the good girl" was sitting demurely beside the countess, looking over the portrait-album and admiring all the Fayre relations with subdued enthusiasm.

Di, as usual, had fled into the open park, and Lord Romney was making for the window. Then the countess said:

"Will you ask Miss Delorme to sing for us, Romney?"

He went back, of course, and opened the piano, but even as he did so his eyes wandered to the open window.

"I have no music, Lord Romney, and I am afraid to sing before you."

It was charmingly said, and the flattery was rendered delicate by the soft tones in which it was uttered.

Then the player struck a soft chord, and without further prelude, began a simple little ballad, which a school-girl might have attempted; but in the first notes Lord Romney turned toward her, with his eyes fixed on her face, listening intently.

With a movement that was almost a start, he said, as she finished:

"Thanks. You have a magnificent voice, and you sing like a musician, Miss Delorme."

"That is very kind of you, Lord Romney, and now you will sing, will you not?"

He meant to refuse, but he could not in decency.

Slowly, deliberately she picked out the shepherd and shepherdess ditty from "La Mascotte," and, with an apologetic smile, held it out to him.

"Do you know this?" she asked.

"I have not heard it before," he said, and he sang it with a voice that was almost a shout.

"For a moment—a moment only—he hesitated."

"I will try," he said, and in another moment they had commenced.

The instant the song began, he, musician-like forgot all else but it; and, pressing the two voices, her soprano and his tenor, were rising in exquisite harmony, filling the room and floating out into the night air.

As she sang, her eyes strayed from the music, and fell softly, pleadingly upon his; and at the last tender, wailing note, her voice sank into a soft, cooing plainness that thrilled through the hearts of all.

For a moment Lord Romney remained spellbound; then, with a start, he sprang to his feet, and with an uneasy laugh, he said:

"I must have a cigarette after that, Miss Delorme," and scarcely knowing what he was doing, strode through the window.

A figure stood leaning against the balustrade, a figure he knew at a glance and he strode up to it.

"Di!" he whispered, and he put his arm round her waist, but with a start she shrank back, and held him at arm's length, and as she did so, the light fell on her face, and he saw that it was wet with tears. "Di!" he exclaimed; "what is the matter? You are not crying, dearest?"

"Crying? No!" she retorted, indignantly; and then, before he could prevent her, she evaded his grasp, and disappeared.

Certainly Miss Delorme had not been long upon the scene before she made her presence felt. As if she knew the result of her evening's skirmish, she leaned back in the carriage on her way home with a faint smile of mischievous satisfaction, on her beautiful face, and once or twice laughed softly.

"You seem pleased, Eve," said Mrs. Delorme. "Everything has gone to your satisfaction, I suppose."

"Yes, I am perfectly satisfied."

"My dear Eve, I don't want to discourage you, but I must say that any one can see he is madly in love with Miss Leslie!"

"I know that," retorted the beauty, scornfully. "But I don't care. Wait a while! If I can have such an effect upon him on this first evening, I think I can count upon the future. And I shall have that proud old woman and the simpleton of a daughter on my side, too!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

### Playing The Part.

If Di had not forgotten the scene of the preceding night, she believed the next morning as if she had. She had lain awake nearly all night, thinking of Lord Romney and Miss Eve Delorme, and she came to the conclusion that she made rather a fuss over nothing.

But in the mornings she felt so full of self-reproach, and so penitent, that she determined to beg Lord Romney's pardon in udmb show.

Accordingly, she waited, with her door ajar, until she heard Lord Romney go down, and then stole after him, so noiselessly that he did not hear her until she was close behind him, and put her hand timidly upon his shoulder.

"How late you are, sir," she whispered her lips nearly touching his hair.

"Yes, I am darling. I sat up until the small hours in the billiard-room, smok-

ing and thinking. Di, you made me awfully unhappy last night."

She put her finger on his lip.

"Don't—don't say another word!" she whispered. Didn't I warn you that I was a dreadfully stupid, foolish thing when we were out fishing the other day? You wouldn't believe me then, but you see it's quite true!"

He drew a breath of relief, and his eyes lit up.

"Then you weren't—what shall I say—angry with me last night, Di?"

"Hush!" warned Di, stepping back just in time, as Alice called over the banisters:

"What are you two talking about?"

"Come down and listen," said Lord Romney, as Di sped away.

The countess, for reasons best known to herself, always made a point to be far as duty is concerned, perfect; but, alas, she has no sympathy with me.

The books I read, the songs I sing, are utterly foreign to her. She does not understand me, as she calls it, and when I utter the craving which my heart feels for such sympathy, she puts me off with a light laugh or a stern rebuke.

Last night, in the midst of your home, my heart ached for the tender harmony which prevailed there. When we were singing, I thought, 'If I had such a home as this, such sisters, such a brother—'

she stopped, and her voice trembled. "How many hours of bitter and hopeless longing would have been spared me, and the pleasure of being with you all mingled with so keen a pain as I at this moment resolve never to come again to you again."

"Made a what off?" demanded Di, open-eyed.

"Made a toast; drank her health after every dinner, all the men standing by, dear. Very pretty custom—"

"Plantagenet!" exclaimed the countess, tragically. "I beg that this unseemly conversation may not be continued in the presence of your wife and daughter."

"Eh, what? Oh, very well! Where's the paper? What are you going to do today, my dear, eh?" and he almost winked at Di.

"I think it would be a suitable day for a ride," said the countess.

"Really, my lady, that is a splendid suggestion. What do you say, Di—Diana, I mean?" catching an awful glare from the countess.

"If Alice likes," she said.

"Oh, Alice will do anything you do," said Lady Alice, smiling very affectionately.

"En that's us!" said the countess, with unmettle promptness. "I am glad you have decided, for I have sent off a note to Miss Delorme to ask her to accompany you."

"That's intended for me, my dear," remarked the earl to Di, with a chuckle.

Lord Romney finished his breakfast almost in silence, and then went down to the stable to select a horse for Miss Delorme, while the girls put their habits on.

Di was ready in ten minutes, and ran down to wait Lark being saddled, and was almost instantly surrounded by the grooms, each being particularly anxious to lend a hand, and gain a word from her.

"This is so kind of you, Lord Romney," she said, giving him her hand, and turning her large eyes rest on his, with a soft gleam of gratitude. "It was what I was longing for an hour ago, but I have little thought you had guessed my wish! I hope you have sent a very quiet horse; I am not much of a rider."

"Come and see!" he said. "Oh, yes, it is a very quiet animal, and I think you will be able to manage her very easily."

Di rode on ahead with Lady Alice, and Lord Romney and Miss Delorme followed.

Di tried to talk and laugh carelessly, but somehow the clear musical voice of Miss Delorme floated on to her from behind, and she could not get rid of it.

"Let us have a gallop," she said as last to Lady Alice, "Lark is ferocious his ear out for a stretch."

"I don't think we ought to leave and away sped Lark like an arrow from a bow."

Lord Romney looked after her wistfully, but could not leave his charge.

"Can you venture a gallop?" he said.

"I am afraid not," she answered sweetly. "How beautiful Miss Leslie rides! And how well she looks on a horse! I don't think I ever saw a lovelier picture!"

"Yes, isn't she? I—I am glad you admire her."

"Oh, who could fail to do so?" she responded, warmly. "I would give the world to own her as a friend—a real friend I mean!"

"I understand; and I can quite believe it," he said, eagerly. "Di—Miss Leslie is a girl who would take anybody's heart by storm!"

"Ah, yes," she said; then she sighed, and turned her head away. "I envy her! Why?" he asked. "I cannot comprehend you envying anyone, Miss Delorme."

"Can you not?" she said, and her voice dropped to a tone so low that he had to bend to catch it. "How I wish I could tell you! But I am afraid that you would only laugh at me, or, at best, think me full of myself."

"I need, I should not," he said, touched, in spite of himself, by the sad melancholy that shone in her downcast eyes.

"Are you sure? I am so tempted to confide in you!"

"If I can be of any service to you, if it will be of any relief to you, pray, do!" he said, but as he spoke an uneasy feeling smote him.

"I will," she said, after a pause.

"Lord Romney, did you ever hear of the man who was doomed to spend his days shut up in a tower and wear an iron mask?"

"Yes," he said.

"Well, then, I am a woman who has been shut up in a tower, and been doomed to wear an iron mask. All my life has been a solitary one—ah, I know what you would say! That I have had, until lately, a father; that I have still a mother. Ah, Lord Romney, if you only knew, if you could only guess, how utterly and entirely solitary a girl can be, even when surrounded by friends and relatives—"

"I think I understand," he said.

"You think I do, but—forgive me—you do not. You cannot! Lord Romney, my father was a man, immersed in business; all his heart and soul was given to the making of money. He had his reward, you will say. Ah, yes! he amassed and left behind him, so I am told, an immense fortune, but through so lavish with his gold, he had no heart to give to his child—his daughter—"

She turned her face aside, and her voice trembled.

If there were no tears in her eyes, Lord Romney thought there were, which amounted to the same.

"My mother," she continued, "is, so far as duty is concerned, perfect; but, alas, she has no sympathy with me. The books I read, the songs I sing, are utterly foreign to her. She does not understand me, as she calls it, and when I utter the craving which my heart feels for such sympathy, she puts me off with a light laugh or a stern rebuke."

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### "I Cannot Be Your Wife."

Never had the Honorable Giffard Lisle been more pleasantly amused and insinuating than he was on this evening.

The party was somewhat silent at dinner; Lord Romney, feeling that, once again, Miss Delorme had succeeded in creating a coolness between Di and him.

He tried to catch her eye, and engage her in conversation, but Di, smarting with a vague unrest and jealousy, either kept her eyes fixed on her plate or stared straight in front of her.

"Alice tried to get her to talk, but for once Di was steered against even her gentle blandishment, and it was left to Mr. Giffard to come to the rescue."

So the dinner dragged its weary course, and the gentlemen were left to their wine.

"Are you tired tonight, Di, dear?" asked Lady Alice, putting her arm round Di's waist, timidly.

"No," said Di, almost roughly, "but I am fearfully hot—there doesn't seem a breath of air in the place. Let us go out on the terrace; I always fly to that, as a bird flies to the woods when it escapes from its cage."

"I'll go with you," said Alice; but at that moment Lady Fayre called to her to play, and Di, to whom the sound of music, excepting it was produced by Lord Romney, was a direct irritant made for the open door.

"The night air blew, cool and refreshing, across the lawn and Di, throwing her head back, drank a long breath as a bird flies to the woods when it escapes from its cage."

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