

For Love of a Woman; New Romeo and Juliet.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PART OF A HYPOCRITE.
"Mr. Jeffrey Flint!" said the doctor, as Spenser Churchill, in sympathetic accents, gave an account of the case. "Yes, yes! Ah, yes, I know something of him. He consulted me a few days ago."

Then he passed upstairs and into the room where the dead man lay upon the bed, with Doris kneeling beside him still holding his hand.

"My dear," said the doctor, after a short examination, "this is no place for you. No one can do anything for him; your friend has gone to his last rest," and he motioned to the woman of the cottage, who stood crying at the door.

Slowly, reluctantly, Doris permitted them to take her away, and the doctor after a few minutes went down-stairs and rejoined Spenser Churchill.

"It is only too true, I see," said that gentleman, sadly.

The doctor nodded, gravely.

"Yes," he said, "he has been dead some time. It is very sad—very! That poor young creature—Miss Marlowe, I believe?"

Spenser Churchill nodded again.

"I believe so," he said.

"Poor girl! poor girl!" murmured the kind-hearted doctor, turning his face away. "So suddenly."

"My heart bleeds for her!" said Spenser Churchill, wiping away some thing that may have been a tear. "So young and friendless—"

"Friendless?" said the doctor.

"Well, I am given to understand that she has no father or mother," he explained. "I should not have said friendless. I trust, I humbly trust, that seeing I was on the spot—sent so to speak, provisionally—that she will permit me to be of some service to her, poor young thing!"

He took out his card-case and handed him a card.

The doctor glanced at it and bowed.

"Oh! Mr. Spenser Churchill? Your name is known to me, sir, of course; and I feel that I am justified in saying that this poor girl will indeed have a friend in you if you are the Mr. Spenser Churchill, the well-known Philanthropist."

Spenser Churchill cast down his eyes and sighed.

"I have no claim to so high a title, doctor," he said, meekly, "though I trust I may say that I take a humble interest in any good work. Poor girl! poor girl! I fear there will have to be an inquest. That will be a terrible trial for her!" and he shot a glance under his lids at the doctor's thoughtful face.

"Well," he replied, hesitatingly, "I don't know. I—I really think it may be avoided."

"If it is not quite necessary," said Spenser Churchill, softly, "it is a trying ordeal for the survivor at any time; but with this poor, child, so young and sensitive—"

"Yes, yes," assented the doctor. "I do not think it will be necessary. Mr. Flint consulted me the day before yesterday, and I warned him then that he must be careful to avoid all excitement; indeed, I told him as plainly as I dared that any sudden shock would be fatal."

"Dear me! Poor fellow!" murmured Spenser Churchill.

"And I think, under the circumstances, that I can give a certificate, and so avoid an inquest."

Spenser Churchill heaved a soft sigh of relief.

"I shall be glad if you tell me all you know respecting the case, Mr. Churchill?"

"Certainly," assented Spenser Churchill, with a sigh. "It is soon told. I was strolling through the woods in the direction of the town—I had left the Towers half an hour previously—when I heard a girl's voice—poor Miss Marlowe's, in fact—crying piteously. I hurried up, and found her kneeling beside him. That is all, excepting that I am quite sure he was dead when I reached the spot, and I think he had been dead some time."

The doctor smiled.

"And you met no one, saw no one, excepting Miss Marlowe?"

"No, no one. I heard and saw nothing but what I have told you," replied Spenser Churchill, quietly.

"Hem! I don't quite see. It would appear as if there had been a shock of the poor fellow who lies upstairs, and, for the sake of old times, you understand, and for the sake of the poor young lady—"

"And she such a sweet young thing!" said Mrs. Jelf, beginning to cry again.

"I will do my best for her. I am now going to the town, and I think, Mrs. Jelf, it would be as well, if anyone enquires for Miss Marlowe, if you told them that she is not well enough to see anybody. And if there should be any letters, perhaps you will give them to me; I will keep them until poor Miss Marlowe is strong enough to see them. At such times as these, in moments of such deep sorrow as this, Mrs. Jelf, the human heart must not be harassed by contact with the outer world."

"No, indeed, sir," assented Mrs. Jelf, quite touched by such sympathetic consideration. "I won't let anyone see her, and she sha'n't be worried by anything. I'll keep people form her, and I'll give you any letters."

"Thank you, I think it will be better," said Spenser Churchill. "Perhaps you might tell Miss Marlowe that a friend—you need not mention my name; you might say the doctor—has gone to the theatre and will make all arrangements. All she has to do is to try and remain quite. Rest, rest, my dear Mrs. Jelf, is the great soother for the—er—tortured breast."

And leaving this sublime piece of sentiment to do its work in honest Mrs. Jelf's mind, he went off to Barton.

I'll news travels apace, and the tidings of Jeffrey's sudden death had reached the theatre even before Spenser Churchill arrived there.

His manner with the manager was simply perfection.

"I came on at once, my dear sir," he said, "because I felt that you should be the first to know of this—er—dreadful calamity. I am fully sensible of the responsible position you occupy, and that your relations as a manager with the public entitle you to every consideration. Of course, before her Miss Marlowe will not act for some time—if she ever acts again."

(to be continued.)

"You are a good man, Mr. Churchill," he said, "and Heaven will reward you! Pray count upon me if I can be of any assistance. I will go and make out the certificate."

Spenser Churchill accompanied him to his gig, then lit a cigarette, and paced up and down for a few minutes, thinking intently.

His voice and manner, while he had been talking with the simple-minded provincial doctor, had been completely under control—quiet, calm, and sadly sympathetic; but now that he was alone he felt that his hands were shaking, and that his face was white.

"My dear Spenser!" he murmured. "Steady! steady!" and he held his hand out and regarded it critically.

"No shaking and trembling! Chance—or shall we say Providence?—has placed a great game in your hands, and you must play it properly if you mean to win, and you do mean to win! Great Heaven! what a narrow escape it was! Another minute, another half-minute, and you would have been removed from this terrestrial sphere! And to think that he should have died just at the critical moment! It was a special interposition! Let me think—now, steady, my dear fellow, steady! Jeffrey dead—thank Heaven!—no one but myself knows the secret of this girl's birth. The names—he took them from his pocket and looked at them, and, it may be stated to his credit, that a shudder ran through him as he did so, for they still seemed warm by their contact with their dead owner, from whom he had stolen them—yes, he was right. They are all here; proof incontestable, evidence that no one, not even the dear marquis, could refute! No one knows of their existence but myself! And she is alone and friendless, yes, friendless, for my letter has done it work, and Cecil Neville is too far off to undo it. We must keep you in Ireland, dear Cecil; we cannot have you back interfering in this business. No one knows that Doris Marlowe is the daughter of the Marquis of Stoyke but me. Spenser, my dear fellow, you hold all the cards; play them carefully and properly and—"

He flung the stump of his cigarette into the hedge, and, smoothing his face into its usual bland expression returned to the cottage.

The woman, the wife of the woodman, stood waiting for him.

"How is poor Miss Marlowe, Mrs. Jelf?" he said.

Mrs. Jelf dropped a curtsy.

"Ah! poor young thing, sir!" she said, wiping her eyes with her apron. "She's lying down sir, quite worn out and looking like a corpse herself! It don't seem as if she had strength to speak or move! I was thinking, sir, that we'd better send for her friends—"

"Not at present, I think, Mrs. Jelf," he said, gently. "I think she had better be left to herself for awhile. I have promised the doctor to do all I can in my poor way—"

"Oh, sir, I know you've a kind heart," murmured Mrs. Jelf.

"We must all do our simple best, Mrs. Jelf," he replied, lifting up his eyes. "I happen to know something

"Is that absolutely necessary?" suggested Spenser Churchill, softly. "In heart disease death may result—I speak with deference—without any shock or excitement."

"Oh, quite so, quite so," assented the doctor. "The deceased might have died at any moment—in his bed, or during his ordinary vocation. Oh, yes."

"I am relieved to hear you say that," said Spenser Churchill. "I am so anxious, on Miss Marlowe's account, to avoid an inquest."

"Quite so, quite so. There will be no necessity. Did you know the deceased?"

"I knew something of him some years ago," replied Spenser Churchill; "but we have not met for a long period—indeed, it must be ten or fifteen years. I only knew him quite slightly, and had not seen him of late, even at a distance. It was quite a shock to me, recognising him lying there on the grass—dead!"

"I daresay," said the doctor, quite sympathetically. "And now, what is to be done?—I mean with reference to this poor young girl?"

"If you will leave it to me," murmured Spenser Churchill, meekly, "I will do all that lies in my power. She may have relations and friends. I will ascertain from her, and communicate with them. You may trust me to do all that I can to soften the terrible blow for the poor young creature."

The doctor took his hand and wrung it.

"You are a good man, Mr. Churchill," he said, "and Heaven will reward you! Pray count upon me if I can be of any assistance. I will go and make out the certificate."

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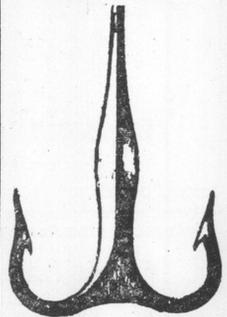
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