



"KYRA,"

OR,
The Ward of the Earl of Vering.

CHAPTER VII.

"For Justice and Atonement."
"I have something to say to you," said the old earl.

Percy listened with deep attention. "We have not met since you were a boy," said the old earl, "but I know all about you; you live in London, and you live the life of the times, not the old life—that is out of date, they tell me. Quite naturally, too," he commented, grimly; "it was too fierce and fast to last long. You know nothing of that—I do; I was the soul of it. Fool! But I had my day—I had my day. Eh, Gringe?"

The old man beside the chair raised his eyes, and turned them on his master with an expressive glance, but preserved his watchful silence.

"Yes, I hear of you," resumed the old lord, "and they give you a good character; they tell me you neither dice nor drink. Ah, they are both out of fashion—true, true. They say that you dabble in literature, art—tricks and tastes that we used to think belonged to the province of women. You are no milkop, to judge by your make—there is still the Chester breed in you. They tell me that you have sold out of your regiment, and that, though you are fond of horses—you are a Vering, and that taste is of course—and are lavish with the money, you are not in debt."

"Your informants might have reminded you that the absence of that vice was owing to your generosity, my lord," said Percy, with quiet dignity. "True liberality save one from that pitfall."

"Ah," said the earl, with a keen glance and dry, sardonic smile, "liberality in the matter of pocket money would have been only useful in my time as an increased facility for getting into debt. But you are wise—I was a fool. How do I know enough of you to justify me in calling you wise? You don't ask me that, but you would like to. Ask Gringe, here; he has friends in the world outside—I have none, not one, and I don't want one; they write to him, I suppose—I don't ask, I don't care; but he, Stephen Gringe, tells me what sort and manner of man is the next Earl of Vering."

Percy glanced at the old steward, still impassive, impenetrable.

"I am content to leave my reputation in his charge, my lord."

"You can't help yourself, seeing that I never exchange a word with any other living soul, either by word of mouth or letter," retorted the old earl, with deliberate astuteness. "So! Stephen Gringe tells me you

are no fool—that you will wear the old name, and keep it out of the slime. I dragged it through a gutter of folly and madness for twenty years; and so I say to Stephen Gringe, on good authority, I take it, that Percy Chester is a sensible man, and so—send for him."

There was a minute's pause. Percy drew his chair a little away from the fire, and the old earl looked up, slowly muttering:

"You are a little warmer now. Another log directly. The weather is cold—always cold." Then he roused himself. "Yes, I sent for you against my own inclination, for I hate trouble and worry; I hate to have to think, I hate to talk—why should I do otherwise? Yes, but I must think—I must think, and I have been thinking for myself and for others—for you. You spoke of my liberality—of your allowance. You are satisfied; well, it is not much. You think that I must be rich to say that, and you look forward to the time when I shall have crept into the vault out in the chapel yonder."

"My lord," said Percy, "you wrong yourself and me by such an accusation. No such thought has crossed my mind since I have had a mind to think. If your life depended on my will and wish I should never wear the Vering coronet."

The old man peered across at his proud, earnest face, and nodded. "Well spoken. There is the Vering voice, Gringe—the Vering voice. You think when it shall please Providence to remove me to another sphere—is that better, Nephew Percy?" he asked, with a thin smile—"that you will be the head of an ancient house, and the master of a large estate, and a rich man. Percy Chester, you will soon be the Earl of Vering, but you have no estate to lord over, and no money to count—that is from me."

He paused and leaned forward to watch the effect of his assertion upon the handsome face before him.

Percy looked his uncle full in the face.

"I am sorry to hear it, my lord," he said, with quiet composure. "None knows better than yourself what is due to an ancient name and an honorable—once powerful—house."

"Neither can be supported without money—money," said the earl, in a thin, stern voice, "and that money I cannot give you. The estate is mortgaged to its neck. Thanks to me, my father and I sucked it as dry as an orange; there is the skin left for you, but it is empty—the fruit is gone. Sucked as dry as an egg-shell—acre by acre, homestead by homestead, guinea by guinea, we melted it away, flung it away, drank it away, dined it away—eh, Gringe? It has gone!"

"It has gone!" echoed Stephen Gringe, in a dry voice.

"But not for good. No! What the fool dragged down, the wise man can build again. I was the fool, you are the wise man, Percy Chester, and it is

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for you to clear the Vering lands, and fill the Vering coffers."

He paused, drew his hand across his lips; they were nearly as blue as the veins, starting out so distinctly in his hands.

Percy looked at him with profound attention.

"If that be my duty in the future it is no light one, my lord. I am at a loss to conceive how I am to fulfil it."

A light, faint but perceptible, came into the old earl's eyes.

"By the old way, Percy Chester. The old royal road—the only road which we of the old nobility, we who have blue blood on our side, can travel. When we want money we can neither beg, earn, nor steal it—we marry it!"

Percy started, and his hand, which had been supporting his head, fell on the arm of the chair.

The old earl, looking straight at the fire with an absent air, did not see the movement, and after a pause went on, talking now more to the fire than to either of his listeners, and evidently oblivious of both.

"Yes, we marry it; we make an exchange—coronet titles, ancestral honors, for wealth, practical brains, fresh blood—and who says it is not a fair exchange?"

"Not I, my lord," said Percy, quietly. "For those who care to make the traffic," he added, with composed dignity.

"It's an old track," continued the earl, still communing with himself. "Monteague did it—he married the soap chandler's daughter, a girl with a flat nose and twenty thousand a year—poor Mont! I won his last pony at Crockford's. They were all for having me marry her, but I—"

Then he aroused suddenly, flushed slightly, and waved his hand. "It is no new thing," he said, looking at Percy, "and I have no doubt the idea has suggested itself to you."

"My lord, I can safely assure you that it never has, nor ever would have done."

The earl nodded, not a whit discomposed.

"You are not so wise as I deemed you. But I have not sent for you to merely suggest ideas, but to place you in a position to execute them. Percy Chester, I wish to deal candidly with you; my money, and it is not inconsiderable, will not come to you. Do not ask me whether it will go—"

Percy shook his head.

"No, you are too proud to do that; I understand—you are a Chester. I have justice to do, atonement to make; atonement and justice—eh, Gringe?"

And he turned his piercing, sunken eyes on the old steward.

Stephen Gringe turned his head, and from under his shaggy brows cast a glance at the heir.

Percy's face showed no sign of disappointed avarice—did not even wear the regretful gravity which would have been perfectly excusable and natural under the circumstances; the face was quite composed with the serenity of self-respect.

"Justice and atonement," repeated the old earl, as if the phrase soothed him. "What I intend doing, what I have done—eh, Gringe?—has been forced upon me by my conscience—that conscience which, in the silence of this old house of my fathers, will make itself heard. I have been dear to it too long—now it forces a hearing from me. Justice and atonement!"

As he spoke he leaned back, and his eyes grew absent and dreamy.

There was a profound silence.

Stephen Gringe stretched out his lean hand, and touched his master's arm.

"Eh, Gringe?" he said, rousing. "Ah, Percy Chester, you take the news well; you are too wise to wear your heart upon your sleeve, for two old daws to peck at; besides, you have decided to follow my advice, to fall into my plans. Yes, I have plans—they have been making for years. I am a Vering, and I would not have the old place sink into the poverty-stricken embrace of a penniless earl. You cannot have my money, but you may be rich and powerful with hers."

"Hers!" exclaimed Percy, in a low tone.

The earl opened his eyes interrogatively.

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"True, I have not told you yet, nephew. I dream so much, that often I think the words I speak in my dreams others have heard and responded to—the scenes and visions of sleep are realities. I have not seen you together—no?"

"Of whom do you speak, my lord?" asked Percy, with deep, eager interest, and then a glance at Stephen which was pregnant with suspicion as to the earl's sanity.

Stephen Gringe raised his head, and shook it.

"Mr. Percy has arrived only to-day, my lord," he muttered, in a low voice.

"True," said the earl, leaning forward in his chair, and folding his thin, white hands, "he has not seen her. A fine girl, big and tall, as those bourgeois are. Emily—Sarah—what is her name? No matter; she comes of a healthy stock, and will improve the Vering race. Health, youth, and money!—no bad match, even for a Vering, if you can forget her antecedents. They are not much to forget; these people never have a grand-father, but her father is rich enough to buy up all the Howards and the Verings that are left. Coal is a grand thing, now you feed your iron horses on it; and he has—how many?—two, three, four coal mines. Ay, coal mines, cotton mills, stocks, shares, houses—all will be hers, and shall be yours. The old man would give every penny he possesses to make his daughter a countess, to be his grand-father to an earl; and she is yours, Nephew Percy, at the asking."

There was a minute's silence, during which Stephen Gringe looked from one to the other of the faces in front of him with curious scrutiny. A touch of his master's hand startled him.

"Young men are fastidious—you will have no cause to complain; the girl has a decent face and straight limbs. Give me that portrait, Gringe."

Stephen Gringe shuffled to one of the cabinets, opened it by a secret spring, and returning to his master's chair, placed an oval miniature in the earl's hand.

He peered at it for a minute, and then held it out to Percy.

"There she is, with a million in her pocket."

With pardonable curiosity, Percy examined the painting.

(To be Continued.)

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The Blouse Pattern is cut in 6 sizes: 34, 36, 38, 40, 42 and 44 inches bust measure.

The Skirt is cut in 6 sizes: 22, 24, 26, 28, 30 and 32 inches waist measure. It will require 3 yards of 44-inch material for the waist and 4 1/2 yards for the skirt for a medium size. The skirt measures 4 yards at the foot, with plaits drawn out.

This illustration calls for TWO separate patterns which will be mailed to any address on receipt of 10 cents FOR EACH pattern in silver or stamps.

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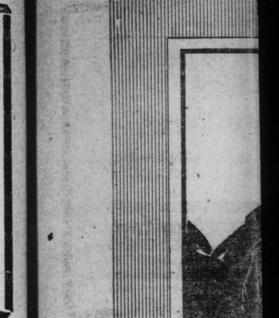
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War News

Messages Received Previous to 9

DISTRESS IN EAST COAST DISCUSSED IN COMMONS

LONDON. Distress in East Coast town result of the war, was discussed in the Commons to-day. Members of the constituencies affected, made an appeal for the relief by the Government. It came out during the night. Arthur Peell, Conservative member for Great Yarmouth, said that forty per cent. of the population of the town have been displaced, and that the Government should proceed to interior planning. He said that the Government should have dwelt almost to none residents of the towns have been displaced, and that the Government should proceed to interior planning. He said that the Government should have dwelt almost to none residents of the towns have been displaced, and that the Government should proceed to interior planning.

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