

# A Millionaire; Countess Westerleigh.

CHAPTER V.  
(Concluded.)

"Ay, ay, sir!" responded Vane cheerily; but she did not smile at this pleasantry. Evidently the race which he was enjoying was a serious business to her. What could it mean? Who were those men, and why was she flying from them as if her life depended on it?

But although he was thus speculating, he was keeping a sharp lookout, and when, suddenly, her clear "Now!" rang out, he dropped the sail. It fell with a flop, she sprang to the bow, and thence like a bird to the shore.

"Quick, quick!" she cried, and began to run up the beach. Vane stopped to fling out the anchor, then followed her.

Suddenly he saw her stop, avert her eyes, and heard her utter a low, sharp cry; the next moment a man sprang from behind a rock and seized her by the arm.

She struggled like a wild animal, her lithe, graceful form swaying like a sapling, and she raised her hand and struck at him. The man laughed and gripped her still more tightly; but the next instant he heard Vane behind him, and swung round.

Vane did not wait to ask questions, but dealt him a good, honest blow between the eyes, and the man went down like a lump of lead.

Nora shook her arm in the air, as if to shake off the contamination of the man's touch, then turned to Vane. Her eyes were burning, flashing; her lips quivering.

"That was good—good!" she panted. "Oh! that was beautiful!"

A swift shudder ran through her; she seized Vane's hand and touched it with her lips. Then she sprang away from him like a wild thing.

"Come—quick!"

But it was too late for flight; the other boat had touched the shore, another had dashed up the beach, and stood beside Vane and Nora.

"Stop!" shouted the leader. "Stop in the Queen's name!"

"Too late!" murmured Nora; then suddenly she opened her lips, and up rose the strange cry Vane had heard her give in the Calderon.

The man with the gold band looked sternly at Vane.

"Caught at last!" he said; then he hesitated, and an expression of surprise came into his face.

"Who are you, sir?" he demanded, Vane, standing in front of Nora, confronted the man squarely.

"What the deuce business is that of yours, my good fellow?" he retorted.

The man bit his lip, and looked from Nora to Vane and back again.

"Come, sir," he said; "it is of no use to pretend innocence. You know who we are well enough. It isn't the first time you have seen a revenue officer and his men."

"If you are a revenue officer, you must be an idiot, also," said Vane. "For you wouldn't permit your men to behave to a young lady—in the manner that fellow behaved;" and he pointed to the man he had knocked down.

The officer stared at him, and seemed in too great a rage to be able to reply for a moment.

"Look here, sir," he blurted out at last; "I don't know who you are, or whether you are what you pretend to be—a gentleman, and ignorant of

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what's going on in this place—but I know that that young woman there,"—he pointed to Nora—"is connected with a gang of smugglers."

Vane opened his eyes, then he laughed. "Smugglers? Oh, nonsense!" he said. "Smugglers! Why, there isn't such a thing! Smuggling has gone out long ago."

The officer stared and sneered. "Oh, has it?" he retorted. He turned to his men. "Have you searched the boat?"

"Ay, ay, sir," said one of them. "There's nothing there."

"The officer looked rather crestfallen. "Do you mean to say that you thought we had been out smuggling—that we had got spoils, tobacco—whatever it is they used to smuggle on board that boat?" Vane asked.

His surprise was so evidently genuine that the officer could not but accept it.

"I certainly did," he said, shortly. "You appear to be a stranger in these parts?"

Vane nodded. "And you don't know that half the people here get their living, or a greater part of it, by carrying tobacco and spirits from the foreign craft that lie in the bay?"

"I don't know it, and I don't believe it," said Vane.

The officer shrugged his shoulders. "I'll trouble you for your name and address, sir," he said.

"And I refuse to give it," said Vane, quietly.

The officer eyed him. "I could arrest you. You have obstructed an officer in the execution of his duty. You have committed an assault."

"Arrest away," said Vane, more cheerfully. "I don't know much about the law of this business, but I do know that this fellow assaulted this young lady, and only got what he deserved."

The officer bit his lip, and turning aside, conferred with one of the men; then he addressed Vane, who had taken out his pipe and lighted it, and was smoking with cheerful composure.

"Look here, sir; my man tells me that he does not know you, and that you are evidently a stranger here."

"Vane nodded. "I, too, am new to the place; but I know from my instructions that contraband articles are landed at this spot from vessels bringing them from the Continent. The game has been going on for some time. My predecessor either shared in the plunder or winked at the business, and that's why he was removed. Now, I'm a different kind of man, and I'm determined to do my duty, and burst up the gang and stop their little game. No smuggling! Why, it's just because everybody thinks it isn't possible that it's been thriving so well."

Vane was silent. He remembered Nora's words: "Aren't you the excise-man?" her strange prayer that he would ask no questions, the faint, peculiar smell in the cottage. He was also amazed—as amazed as if some one had told him that a highwayman had been seen at work on the Queen's highway. He managed however, to keep his face blank and expressionless.

"Now, what do you say?" demanded the officer.

Vane shrugged his shoulders. "I know nothing of the matter," he said.

The officer smiled. "You see, you don't know everything up in London that goes on in these parts," he said. "Search the

place, men. Where do you live, girl?" he demanded of Nora, sternly. Vane motioned to her to be silent.

"Any questions you may wish to put to this young lady, you may put through me," said Vane. "Smuggling or no smuggling, she has been grossly insulted."

"Why didn't she stop when I called to her?" broke in the officer. "It's my opinion you know more than you pretend. But I'll soon find out."

He sprang past them and up the incline to the cottage, toward which five of the men had already gone.

Vane turned to Nora with a questioning look. She met his glance for a moment, then her eyes fell.

"Good Lord!" he muttered. "It is true, then!" Then in a low voice he asked her the pertinent question: "Will they find anything? Your aunt?"

She shook her head. "I will go to her," she said. "Not you. Go and get your horse and leave us."

"Not much—thanks!" he said, cheerfully.

"Go, go!" she breathed; but her eyes glowed with an exquisite gratitude and tenderness.

"My dear girl, what do you take me for?" he said, with a smile. "Come on. I may be able to help you, though goodness knows how. If they find anything they'll make a row—well, I'm afraid I can't knock them all down, but I'll try;" and he laughed.

They went slowly up the path and entered the cottage, the door of which was wide open. Mrs. Trevanon stood by the fire-place, a long spoon in her hand, her gaunt figure drawn to its full height, her face grim and indignant. A large pot was on the fire, and the cottage filled with an overpowering scent of herbs.

"ane's glance instantly went toward the inner room, but a singular transformation had taken place. The sick, low door he had noticed in the wall had gone, and a slab of rock was in its place—rock that showed no interstices at its edges, and looked as if it had been there for centuries. He could scarcely believe his eyes—scarcely realize that he was awake and not asleep and dreaming that he had been transported into the eighteenth century.

"Well," demanded the officer, "have you found anything?"

"No, sir," was the reply.

Mrs. Trevanon stood with her foot upon resting on the table.

"What is it you expect to find?" he asked, quietly.

"You know, my fine woman," he replied.

She shrugged her shoulders, and turned to the fire.

"Look where you please," she said. "You are fools for your pains. But I tell you this, the law's on our side, you'll find that."

A close search was instituted. It did not take long, for the tiny cottage did not offer much hope, and presently the men stood outside baffled, puzzled, and more than disappointed.

"Well," said Mrs. Trevanon, "are you satisfied? What do you suppose we know of smuggling—two lone women, who get a bare living by their fishing. You have been listening to idle tales, and been fooled, and deceived, sir."

The officer stood and eyed her with watchful suspicion.

"You've beaten us this time," he said; "I'll confess that much; but I warn you—"

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She turned upon him with a sudden blaze in her gray eyes. "Keep your warnings for those as want them, and if your business is done, leave my house!"

He bowed and went to the door. Then he paused and looked at Vane. "You refuse me your name, sir?"

"No," said Vane, and he gave it. The officer took it down in his note book, touched his hat, and went out, closing the door after him.

"Well," began Vane; but instantly Nora placed her hand over her lips. "Hush!" she said; "they are listening outside."

Vane fell into a chair, and stared from one woman to the other in silent bewilderment. But the strange rama had not yet finished; he was to find still further cause for wonder.

(To be Continued.)

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