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CHAPTER XIX.
(To be Continued.)

Quiet though she was, it was evident that Nora was making a remarkably favorable impression at the Cavalliers'. Before luncheon was over several other men dropped in, mostly young fellows with plenty of money, and no occupation save that of killing time; and Vane found himself introducing Ernest Mortimer, right and left; and, indeed, if he had not introduced her, Lord Wally would. The baby was quite fascinated by this other youth, whose face was as handsome, and whose voice was even softer and more girlish than the baby's own. After lunch he insisted upon Nora's going up to the billiard-room and receiving a first lesson in that fascinating game. "Mortimer will play in no time," he assured Vane. "I can see he's got a jolly good eye, and that's the main thing, you know. You must drop in here to lunch as often as you can. Look here, will you come to-mor-

row?" he demanded, eagerly.

Vane thought it well to take Nora away, and breathed a sigh of relief as they drove off.

"Phew!" he breathed. "I'm glad that's over. I've been on tenter-hooks all the time."

"Why?" said Nora, seriously.

"Why?" he echoed, as he sent the horse spinning homeward. "My dear girl—boy, I've been dancing on the edge of a volcano all the morning. Some of those young devil-fellows are as sharp as needles, and I expected every moment to hear that you had been bowled out."

Nora thought for a moment.

"There was only one moment of danger," she said, "and that was when they asked me to write my name. That was dangerous, if you like." She paused a moment, then said, "I must learn to read and write."

Vane groaned.

"Who's to teach you?" he said.

She looked up at him with charming naivete.

"Won't you?" she said.

"Good heavens! it's about all I can do myself," he responded. "Never mind, I'll have a try."

"Perhaps if I can write and read I shall be able to earn more money."

She remarked, after a pause, during which she had evidently been thinking it over. "I have learned a great deal this afternoon, Vane."

"I suppose so," he grunted.

"Yes," she said, musingly. "It's all very strange. I had no idea people lived in such magnificent places as that club we have just left. It is like one of the palaces of the kings—used to read to me about. She used to read a great deal, especially in the winter, when there was no fishing."

"I see," said Vane; "and that's how you picked up so much and managed to speak so well."

"Do I speak well?" she said, with a pleased expression in her eyes.

"Rattling well!" he responded. "Better than most of us."

"I'm glad of that," she said, fervently. "I should like to speak like a lady—a man, a gentleman—and not like a common person."

Vane leaned back and laughed.

"You needn't be afraid," he said; "you look every inch a gentleman, and speak like one. If you hadn't our fellows would have spotted you sharp enough—even the baby, who, for all his infantile ways, is as sharp as any of them."

She laughed softly.

"I like him," she said, "he is such a boy. And he is a great lord, isn't he, Vane?"

Vane nodded.

"Well, on the way to being a very great one—that is, as far as money and land go."

"Yes?" she grew thoughtful, and was evidently pondering on all she had heard and seen that morning.

"And yet he peets the cabmen with hot potatoes! What funny people, and what a funny place this London is!"

Vane nodded.

"Yes; but it's only the wild ones that go in for that kind of thing," he felt compelled to remark. "The baby will grow up and settle down. He'll marry, and attend the House of Lords regularly, and—and be quite a different man."

She thought a moment, and then seemed to grasp the idea. It is wonderful how quick she was.

"I see," she said, thoughtfully, and lapsed into silence.

They reached Mount Street just in time to dress, and Nora went straight to her room.

Vane had a very bad quarter of an hour, as the French say, while Porter was undressing him into his evening attire.

"We dine out, after all, Porter," he said.

"Yes, sir," said Porter. "Shall I see about Mr. Mortimer's clothes? I shall have plenty of time."

"No, no," said poor Vane; "he isn't accustomed to a 'valet,' and will get on all right. Don't bother about him."

And again, as he spoke, he wondered whether it was possible for the girl to pass through the ordeal before her. It was all very well at the Cavalliers—there had been only men there—but she would have to face Lady Florence presently—Lady Florence, whose calm, sharp eyes might at any moment detect a flaw in the armor of deceit. But half an hour later Nora came into the sitting-room as self-possessed and serene as if she were on the cliffs of the Witches' Cauldron.

Vane noticed, as she entered, that she copied Lord Walter Raymond's bearing and manner exactly, and he smiled approval.

"Don't say word, I think you'll pull through," he said, admiringly. "But for goodness' sake, be careful, Ernest."

She smiled, and leaned against the mantel-shelf in the attitude he had shown her.

"I am not at all afraid," she said; "that is, if they don't ask me to read anything, or write my name; and it won't be long before I am able to do both."

"All right," said Vane, encouragingly. "Keep a sharp lookout, though, and don't forget that you are going to meet one of your own sex."

"I am not afraid," she said again; "that is, while you are near, Vane."

Vane nodded.

"Fortunately, I shall always be near," he said.

Porter announced that the brougham was ready, and Nora followed Vane downstairs. The carriage called for them.

ed forth an exclamation of astonishment and admiration from her.

"What a beautiful little carriage, and these linings are all silk!" she said. "Why?"—she looked at Vane with a puzzled expression—"you can't be so very poor."

"This isn't mine," said Vane. "I only hire, rent it. You'll understand all about it after a time."

"Yes," she said. "There seems so much to understand."

Lord Warlock held one of the much-coveted houses in Carlton Terrace and as the brougham rolled smoothly along, Nora looked out in silent wonder at the big houses and palatial clubs, and the imposing and gayly lighted shops, and presently her small hand stole into Vane's.

He pressed it reassuringly.

"Keep up your spirits, Ernest," he whispered, encouragingly and warningly. "Look here; if you are frightened and would rather not go on—we'll go back. I'll send an excuse."

"No—no," she said, under her breath. "The—the lights and the people, frightened me for a moment, that's all. No; let us go on."

Notwithstanding his anxiety and disquietude of mind, Vane could not but admire the courage of this untutored, half-barbaric child of the wild west coast, and he pressed her hand again, and drew her nearer to him. For a moment it seemed as if she would let her head drop upon his breast; but she recovered herself in an instant and set bolt upright.

The brougham stopped, and a footman, in the well-known Warlock livery, opened the door, and ushered them into the hall.

It seemed to Nora to be crowded with footmen, though, as a matter of fact, there were only two or three. One went to Vane to take off his dress Inverness, another took Nora's middy cap from her, while a third stood like a sentinel to usher them to the drawing room.

The hall was not so large as that of the Cavalliers'; but there was a certain something in its appearance and atmosphere which impressed Nora more than the club had done. Perhaps it was the silent, machine-like movement of the richly liveried servants.

Nora followed Vane into the drawing room.

A tall, thin old man, with "gentleman," "aristocrat," written large all over him, stood before the marble fire-place. He extended a swollen hand to Vane, and emitted something between a grunt and a growl.

"How do, Temper?" he said, not altogether unpleasantly. "Very kind of you to come. I've had a touch of this—d—d look. Always do at this time of the year. Ever had it? No; well, you will; and the Westleighs have it. Who's this?" and he stared at Nora, who stood just behind Vane with downcast eyes.

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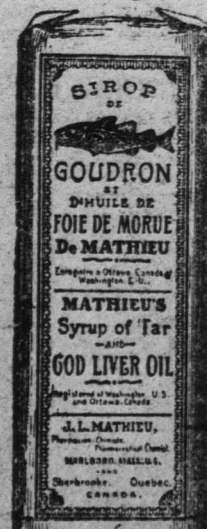
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