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A Millionaire;

Countess Westerleigh.

CHAPTER XXIV.
(To be continued.)

"Save me!" she repeated, as if the words conveyed no meaning to her. Senley Tyers regarded her with a grave, almost pitying smile, and waved his hand to a chair.

"Sit down, my dear Nora," he said with an ironical mockery of respect mingled with the familiarity indicated by the use of her Christian name which drove the blood to her face. She stood against the sideboard, her small hand gripping the edge, her dark eyes fixed on his sallow face, with fear, dislike, distrust, eloquent in them. The knife was still in her hand.

"My dear girl, is it possible that you do not understand me?" he said in a low, almost caressing voice. "You know the danger you have been running, the peril in which you have been placed all these weeks?"

She was silent a moment, then she said in a reluctant voice:

"What danger—what peril? I do not know; I do not understand." "He turned his eyes from her face to the fire with a peculiar smile, that would have been an insult if she had understood its significance, and seemed as if debating with himself for a moment; then he said:

"My dear Nora, it is difficult to ex-

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plain to you. Your ignorance, your innocence—charming, perfectly charming as they are—are so embarrassing that it is almost impossible to explain to you. Really, I feel tempted to let you remain in your condition of blissful ignorance but for two considerations. The first is that I feel my duty toward a defenseless woman very strong upon me; and the next that if I held my hand and spared your feelings, they would only be spared for a time, and would receive the shock of knowledge from some hand less kind than mine. No, my dear Nora; it is because I am your friend, and Vane Tempests, that I feel constrained to speak—to make an effort and save you."

"Save me from what?" she said, almost inaudibly. All but the last few words of his smoothly polished speech had gone by her like the wind.

"From ruin," he said, with a look of solemnity.

She put her hand to her lips and shook her head.

"I don't understand," she said. "You are saying all this to—to vex me. You do not like me. You have never liked me. You would not dare to speak to me like this if Vane were here!"

The simple truth struck him; a faint color came into his face, and a gleam of angry light shot across his eyes.

"You are mistaken," he said, half pityingly. "My dear child, why should I dislike you? What harm could you possibly do me now, or at any time? Think! Men only dislike those they fear. Why should I fear you? Now, you dislike—shall we say hate?—me, my dear Nora; but that is because you fear me. You are very foolish. I tell you again that I am your friend: it is from sheer friendship to you and Vane that I have come down to step between you and ruin."

He stopped and watched her closely for a moment or two; then he went on, still in the smooth, soft voice:

"You say you do not understand. But are you sure you do not? I can easily comprehend that the Nora Trevanion of the Witches' Caldron would not understand; but you are quite a different person to that wild young savage—pray excuse me! You have been living in London, mixing in society; you have met men of the world, and women. You must have learned something in that time—enough at any rate, to know what I mean when I say that you have been playing on the brink of a precipice, a fall from which would land you in

the deep waters of life-long shame and ruin."

She looked at him unflinchingly, her lovely eyes distended. She did not see him. The glimmer of his meaning, in all its cruelty, was beginning to dawn upon her.

He smiled faintly.

"What do you think the world would say—those friends of Vane's, with whom you have made acquaintance—if they knew that Ernest Mortimer was a young lady?" he inquired in a smooth whisper. "What do you think, for instance, Lady Florence Heathcote would think and say if she knew?"

She did not answer, but her breath came more quickly.

"My dear Nora, I know, if you do not; but I think you can guess—imagine. She would be shocked—scandalized. All Vane's friends—the men friends—would crack their sides with laughter; but the women!" he paused and shrugged his shoulders.

"the women would gather their skirts about them and shrink from you as from some thing vile and loathsome—as if there were contamination in your touch—the very air you breathed. They would not shrink from you more, my dear Nora, if you had the smallpox or the scarlet fever."

Still she did not speak, but her breath came still faster, and her face was white, save for the two red spots that glowed redly on her cheeks. Her eyes still met his unflinchingly.

"I don't understand," she said. "You are saying all this to—to vex me. You do not like me. You have never liked me. You would not dare to speak to me like this if Vane were here!"

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"They would not believe—they would laugh the idea to scorn—that you had been Vane Tempest's companion all these weeks in pure ignorance and innocence. There is not a woman in the world who would believe it. No; they would one and all point the finger of scorn at you; would cover you with shame and disgrace; would drive you from them as if you were a leper. And indeed—indeed, my dear child, you would be a leper of the social kind; and that kind of leprosy, like the other, is worse than death."

He paused a moment. The two red spots had left her cheeks, and a deathly pallor now was spread over her face.

"It was a thoughtless whim—a freak; a little adventure, harmless enough in your eyes, I dare say—indeed, I know, my dear Nora," he said. "There seemed nothing wrong in it. How should there? And, as a matter of fact, there was nothing wrong in it; but the world"—he raised his eyebrows—"the world would look at it in a very different light. It would call Vane a scoundrel, and you—" he paused dramatically and lowered his voice—"a girl lost to all sense of decency and shame!"

She staggered slightly, and her hands went up to her eyes as she uttered a faint cry—a terrible cry—though she had been struck blind, whereas, on the contrary, she was just seeing his meaning.

His ruthless hand had cruelly torn away the veil of her ignorance and innocence, and she herself saw her action as the world would see it.

A heart of stone might have pitted her; but Senley Tyers' heart was harder than stone when his own interest was at stake. He felt no pity, no compunction. A smile of satisfaction crossed his face, and he took up the poker and stirred the fire. The light flickered on the stricken girl, and she turned her head away as if she seemed to shrink from it.

"You understand now, Nora?" he said, gently. "Ah, yes; I see you do. You know now what I have come to save you from, for I have come to save you. You know now why I persuaded Vane to take you away from London and bring you down here?"

She did not move, but her hands fell from her face and clasped themselves tightly, fiercely.

"I give you my word, my dear girl, that I suffered agonies—untold agonies—after I discovered the truth. How Vane and you could have taken it so carelessly and light-heartedly, I can not imagine. At any rate, I can not understand how he can have done so. With you it was another matter. Your ignorance of the world, and all your folly meant supported you; but he knew—he must have realized—"

(To be continued.)

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