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One in a Thousand,

BUT TRUE TO THE LAST

CHAPTER XXVII.

A SELF-WILLED RACE.

"Well, well, my child, you shall never have to blame your old father for anything; we must hope it may all come right in the future."

My father does not argue with me any longer; he sees it is useless; and an hour later we have turned our backs on the grand old house of which I am the rightful mistress—of which I ought to be the loving **chatelaine.**

I go back to the old life, but not the listless, indifferent, useless existence I led before. I have now important work to occupy me, the preparation for the birth of the child who is, I hope, to be the heir to the old name. I find endless delight in turning over the wee garments and arranging new beauties in the matter of robes and cloaks, and Loys is just the best girl in the world to aid in my choice. And so two months pass away during which time I have never once mentioned Adrian's name, except it be in my dreams. I have never even asked if he has fully recovered from the effects of his accident. More than once one or other of the family has broached the subject, or—no, I must not say that; but they have beaten about the bush, as if trying how far they could venture without offending me. But to all their hints I turn a deaf ear; I will not listen to any one of them, charm they ever so wisely.

Then "daddy"—poor, dear, innocent man—adopts a new method; he leaves letters in Adrian's large, careless writing lying about, just where I am most likely to see them. I smile at his harmless, little plan, and one day say:

"Daddy, it's of no use your leaving these letters lying about, for I don't read them."

"I wish you would," he says, wistfully.

"But I won't," I answer; "and you are on dangerous ground, so I warn you."

He sighs—a sigh full of impatience and sorrow—and I am vexed that he is so worried; and yet what can I do? I am not quite so love-sick that I will go humbly to the feet of a man who calls me a wicked woman—which I am not—foolish, perhaps, but not wicked—and says that he knows me to his cost. I cannot do that, even to oblige my dear father, for whose sake I would stretch a dozen points to their utmost limit.

"The old Duke of Idleminster is dead," says Loys, one afternoon, when we are sitting together.

"Then the colonel will be leaving?" I say, indifferently.

"Yes; he wouldn't have remained after the marriage. Theo does not like the idea of what she calls 'trailing about at the tail of a regiment.' She wasn't very long in forgetting Lasselles, was she?"

"She seems to have a grand bump of forgetfulness in general," I answer, "for she had the impertinence to write to me this morning."

"To you? What about?"

"Well, you see, she can hardly have Col. Cardylion staying at Park Royal just now, and she wants to come down here."

"What did you say? Have you answered her?"

"Oh, yes! I answered it at once. I suggested that Thornton Charteris would be more appropriate, and on a scale more suited to her tastes, than Sea View. I said I was quite sure Adrian would be charmed."

"Audrey, you never said that?" exclaims Loys, in a shocked tone.

"I did, indeed," I say, coolly.

"I think it is a pity; it is unwise—I do, indeed!"

"Well, Loys," I say, with a great sigh, "I am only eighteen, a mere baby, who ought to be still in the schoolroom; and it's not to be wondered at if I haven't conducted my affairs with brilliant success."

"I think you might make them all right even yet," says Loys, in a tender, pleading voice.

"So daddy seems to think," I say, dryly.

"Women ought to forgive," she says, with an air of wisdom; "it is more especially the province of our sex to be gentle and free from anything like vincictiveness."

"Loys," I say, pathetically, "you don't know what it is; you've had nothing to make you other than gentle little mouse you are. You don't—how should you?—understand the agonies of unrequired affection." I end with a wild burst of laughter which frightens poor Loys and completely exhausts my small amount of strength, leaving me panting for breath and strongly inclined to hysterics.

My answer to Theo's letter has apparently satisfied her that her presence at Sea View would hardly be welcome; or perhaps the sudden death of the old duke has somewhat altered their plans. Yes, considering all things, I should say that is the most probable reason for her staying away. I am sure no dislike or sarcasm of mine would have prevented her from coming if her mind had been made up to do so. She would have enjoyed with keenest pleasure the gratification of seeing me in my state of widowhood, and of parading her happiness and her pomp before my sad eyes. However, I am mercifully spared this. And so the days glide slowly by, and I am less and less able to get about; and one day when I am sitting in my own room I become aware that something is going on downstairs.

"What is all that bustle?" I say to Loys, when she comes in after a while.

"Bustle, dear?" she says, inquiringly.

"Yes, bustle," I answer. "Has anyone come to stay? It surely is not Theo?"

"Oh, dear, no! What foolish fancies you take into your head!" she says, with a laugh.

"But I heard the sound of wheels," I persist; "and I am sure some one is come!"

"Nonsense; it is the butcher, or the baker, or perhaps Teddy going for a drive. Yes"—going to the window and looking out into the dusk—"the dogcart is at the door now. It's only Teddy, and I'm sure he is harmless enough!"

(To be Continued.)

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A Millionairess;

— or. —

Countess Westerleigh.

CHAPTER III.

(Continued.)

The girl bent over the edge of the rock for a minute, looking into the ravine into which horse and rider had been precipitated; then she sprung to her feet, upright as a dart, and listened. All was silent below her. She stood motionless for a time, then with firm and steady steps descended by the narrowest of tracks down the rock.

A stream ran at the bottom of the gully, and beside it she saw the horse struggling to rise. She sprung lightly from stone to stone, and cleared the bridle, which had got round his leg, and the horse, shaking and trembling, rose. Holding it, she peered round for the man. He lay a few feet from her, his face turned up to the angry sky, his tall form stretched its full length.

She hesitated a moment or two, but after a while, leading the horse, went toward the man. The scurrying clouds left the moon clear for a space and lighted up Vane's face and form.

The girl looked, started slightly, then bent down over him. She looked at his face, at his hands, at his clothes, and on her own face dawned an expression of surprise and slowly gathering horror. She drew back and looked at him thoughtfully for a time, then she dropped the bridle, and scooping up some water in her hands, flung it on the white face. Presently she drew nearer, and sitting on the ground beside him, raised his head and unfastened his collar and shirt, and after a moment's hesitation placed her hand on his heart.

As she did so, the fine texture of the linen, the gold albert, the thickring on his little finger, seemed to attract her attention, and her dark brows met in a puzzled frown. She reached for some more water, and laid her cold hand on his forehead and presently her primitive efforts for his recovery were rewarded.

Vane Tempest drew a long, painful breath, and slowly opened his eyes. There was no intelligence in them at first, but they began to clear and his lips opened and quiveringly muttered:

"Sen, what's happened?"

The girl bent over to catch the words, and at the sound of his voice her expression of surprise and bewilderment grew intensified.

As he came still nearer consciousness, she gently put his head from her knee and laid it on the grass, and drawing a little way from him, sat half coruching, and watched and waited.

Vane sighed and stretched himself then painfully raised himself on one elbow and looked around with dazed inquiry.

Presently his eyes fell upon the figure opposite him, and he stared at her with blank amazement.

The moon was clear and bright enough for him to see her quite distinctly; and her loveliness, her half-wild, barbaric attitude, the silent, intent gaze of her splendid eyes, fascinated him and drove the wandering sense almost out of him again.

In that moment he noticed that her eyes were not really black, as he had thought, but a dark, brilliant gray. This fact, in his half-delirious condition, seemed to attain most ridiculous importance in his mind.

She looked at him fixedly, remaining as motionless as if she were a carven image, but for the tresses of dark hair which moved with the wind.

Vane found his voice at last.

"What has happened?" he asked. "Where's—where's my horse?"

She raised her hand and pointed to the horse, who was limping and grazing at a short distance; then her hand fell into her lap.

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