



The Web;

OR,
TRUE LOVE'S PASSION.

CHAPTER XVII.
An Astonishing Declaration.

Cyril stopped suddenly.

"Newall wants you to paint this other picture and make it a companion to 'The Silver Stream,' and he intends calling it 'The Golden Sands.' Original idea, isn't it?" and he laughed cynically. "But it's the sort of thing the public like. And he means to exhibit them in that new gallery he and his fellow cranks—I beg his pardon, connoisseurs—are getting up. See?"

"Yes."

"I'm glad you do. A word from Newall, the mere fact that he has taken you in hand and bought your pictures, will make you. Cyril Burne will be the artist of the coming season, and—"

"Good Heavens, my dear fellow, don't attempt it!" ejaculated Jack, with much alarm.

"She is the most beautiful girl I ever saw; there is nothing in the Gallery that would do her justice. But if she were as plain as—"

"As a Dutch woman," put in Jack.

"I should love her as dearly. If you only knew her! But you will some day, soon, I hope, and you will love her for her own sake and mine, too."

"Well, go on."

"I—I might never have had another chance of seeing her, but luck was on my side. She was coming from a visit late at night, and an accident happened—"

"And you were there and saved her," put in Jack, with a forced smile of amusement covering his interest.

"Admirable! Quite a scene in a melodrama. Were you much hurt? I noticed you carried your arm rather stiffly. It isn't a cork one, is it?"

"I walked home with her to the Court," went on Cyril, taking no notice of Jack's running commentary, "and—and—yes, I told her that I loved her!"

Jack Wesley stared at him.

"Yes, most certainly the stage has lost a good deal," he muttered. "You told her?"

"Yes," said Cyril, his face flushed, his eyes glowing, and he seemed scarcely conscious of Jack's presence.

"We met in the glade the next day, and I—"

He got up and laid both hands on Jack's shoulders and looked

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down at him. "Jack, she loves me! She has promised to be my wife!"

Jack Wesley's face grew grave.

"Isn't this rather serious, my dear fellow?" he said, quietly.

"It is serious; it is the most serious thing that has ever happened to me," replied Cyril. "It has changed my whole life! Ah, if I could only get you to understand how happy I am!"

"Perhaps I do understand. And now, may I ask who the young lady is? The governess at the Court, or who?"

Cyril stared at him.

"Do you mean to say you don't know?" he demanded.

"How should I? Remember that I left the night of your first fit of madness and knew nothing. Is it the governess, or some young girl visiting at the Court?"

"It is the Earl's daughter, Lady Norah Arrowdale," said Cyril.

Jack Wesley took his pipe out of his mouth and looked at Cyril gravely.

"Lord Arrowdale's daughter?" he said, slowly. "And—and may I ask, without being impudently curious, what the Right Honorable the Earl of Arrowdale says to this pretty romance?"

Cyril's face grew as grave as his friend's.

"Well," he said, "he has said nothing at present; he does not know of our engagement."

Jack Wesley's face flushed, and he looked hard at the ground.

"You have not told him—been to him?" he said, strangely.

"No," said Cyril. "Let me tell you all, Jack. I think—I am sure that Norah is rather afraid of her father. She knows so little of him, you see. Why, she had not seen him until that night I saw her drive through the gates. There is a story concerning their separation which is too long to tell now. But she is almost a stranger to him, and we—well, we both shrank from telling him until I had made a success. Then I could go to him with greater courage. I should still be just an artist, but there is a difference between the unknown painter and the successful one. Art is noble in all its forms and grades, but—"

"I understand," said Jack Wesley, and his voice sounded strangely cold.

"And yet you decline Lord Newall's offer; you will not go to Brittany?"

Cyril looked at him. He had never heard his friend address him in this tone before.

"No, I don't decline, I accept. But if you had ever loved as I love, Jack, you would understand what a couple of months' separation from the woman you love means," and his handsome face flushed. "Of course I will accept, and with gratitude to you and to him. As you say, it means both money and fame. Why, it is just that for which I was waiting! I will go to Brittany, and then with my position assured, I can go to the earl and ask him to give me my darling."

Jack Wesley was silent.

"Aren't you going to give me one word of congratulation, Jack?" asked Cyril, in a low voice.

"I congratulate you," said Jack Wesley.

Cyril drew his chair nearer and looked into Jack's downcast face.

"What is it, Jack? You are angry

with me about something. What is it?"

"Don't ask me," and Jack Wesley got up and, turning to his table, began to pull the papers about.

"But I insist," said Cyril, earnestly.

"Jack, you and I have never spoken a cross word to each other yet; there has never been a breath of coldness between us until now. What is it?"

"Don't insist," asked Jack, with a pained look. "Let us talk of something else."

"But I do insist. I could not rest until I knew what I had done, and—"

"Well, if you will have it," said Jack, as if driven to bay, "I think you have acted—well, not as I should have expected you to act, Cyril."

"I? What have I done?" demanded Cyril.

Jack Wesley flung his pipe on to the table.

"In plain words, Cyril, you have allowed yourself to drift into a course unworthy of you. You have permitted your feelings to sweep away those barriers which every honorable man should place between him and an unworthy deed. Tell me—don't speak yet—but just tell me what you would have said to me if I, the struggling, unknown writer, had won the love of a girl so far above me as a peer's daughter would be, and had, having won that love, induced her to plight her troth to me, her father being kept in ignorance?"

Cyril's face flushed, then turned pale.

"She is, as you say, quite unsophisticated, knows little or nothing of the world. Loves you! Of course, she does. I can understand that; there is nothing marvelous in it. But that very love of hers should have made you careful of her. Do you think her father, the earl, will not say that you have taken advantage of her ignorance of the world—his world? Do you think he will not point out to you—cast it into your teeth—that she is what she is, and that you are only a poor devil of a painter?"

With tightly compressed lips and face pale and troubled, Cyril looked down at him.

"Jack," he said, in a low voice, "your heart is pure gold. I might have known what you would have thought, have guessed what you would have the honesty and the candor to say. But"—he drew a long breath—"thank God, I can say, 'Jack, you have wronged me.'"

Jack Wesley glanced at the handsome face and shook his head.

"How have I wronged you?" he said. "I am judging you by your own confession. I don't say that you could help loving this peer's daughter; I dare say not. I say that I think it only natural she should have given you her heart; but—why, lad, and his face was full of grief, "if any one had told me that you—you—had acted so, I would have given him the lie."

Cyril took two or three turns up and down the room. His face was strangely troubled, but there was no trace of shame or remorse in it.

"You are very hard on me, Jack," he said, in a low voice.

"Am I? Put it down to my regard for you," responded Jack Wesley.

"You are the only man in all the world I care to call 'friend,' and that being so, I am as careful of your honor as I am of my own. Confound the women! They blind even such a man as you to a sense of right and wrong. Can't you see it, can't you see it?" he demanded, with outstretched hands.

"Put yourself in the place of this old man; think what you would say if you learned that a man had been enjoying stolen interviews with your daughter, and that he had induced her to plight her troth to him, and then—mark this well—when the young man chose, he came to you and told you—an earl!—that he was only a poor devil of a painter?"

"Well!" said Cyril, biting his lip and looking, not at his friend's noble, earnest face, but at the opposite wall, with a strange look of doubt and indecision.

(To be continued.)

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From the date of the formation of the Newfoundland Regiment, O'Brien's influence was marked. He was a power for good. He was the lowest we all had that here, in very truth, was Nature's noblemen. When the tempests of war blew our countrymen at Pleasantville, known him to take a number to his own comfortable tent, sought refuge from the storm corner there was. In the battle of Salisbury Plain it was the same. On many a cold, winter more than one man had to thank for an extra blanket of white, deprived himself. When the rains turned our encampment quagmire and made life a man and beast, O'Brien won his spare time in seeing to it that his men in his command was as comfortable as possible under the circumstances. There was no selfishness. He sought no praise, no title. "Are the men all right?" "Then I am happy."

What a pride he took in the command! O'Brien never spoke twice—one word was yet he was in no way a straggler. He always appeared better natured of the men responded nobly. He knew heart that every mother's son loved and respected him; others, but he never traded knowledge. Always modest, assuming, he came on parade work, and he did it without of officiousness or ostentation. An officer in the Regiment a job better than did Captain and none worked harder. He was no ulterior motive in his no desire to "get on" in his ambition was for the men and to make them heroes. When he drilled a

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