



WANT YOUR LAND OR YOUR MONEY. I CAN EVEN MANAGE SOMEHOW TO DO WITHOUT THIS FOR—FOR MY MOTHER'S SAKE—HIS VOICE DROPPED—“LET US BE FRIENDS, SIR”

CHAPTER XIII. The day Vane Tempest left Vale Hall a slim, girlish figure lay on the narrow ledge of the rock against which the bridge rested, looking down at the ravine into which Vane and his horse had been precipitated.

It was Nora. The rain was still falling; drifting up the vale in a thin cloud at times, at others being driven as if despatched by the heavy gusts of wind from the sea.

She lay supported by her elbows, her chin held in the hollow of her hands, quite regardless of the rain which fell upon her like a soft veil; her hair clinging to her forehead and her neck like wet seaweed, making her face, paler even than its wont, look like ivory by contrast.

There was a strange look in her face, in her eyes, as they dwelt dreamily upon the ravine half obscured by the mist. Vane had remarked the wonderful power of expression which those dark grey eyes possessed, and the variety of emotions which they could so rapidly indicate.

Every movement she made was eloquent of unstudied, unconscious grace, and no sculptor could have desired a better model than this half-wild girl stretched in semi-savage abandon on the ledge of rock, indifferent to the softly falling rain and the chill of the late October afternoon.

After a time she rose slowly and dreamily, and made her way along the narrow shelf to the ravine. She stood on the very spot Vane had fallen and looked down, as if she almost expected to see him standing beside her, or hear his voice.

Then, as if waking from the dream, she would draw a long sigh, and fling herself down on the soft, wet moss, and bury her face in her hands. Presently the silence of the grim place was broken by a shrill “oo-ee-ee!” It sounded twice before she paid any heed; then the rose slowly, reluctantly, and looked up.

Her aunt's tall, angular figure, half shrouded by the mist, was standing on the bridge. With a strange listlessness, in singular contrast to the clear, lingering notes which Vane Tempest had first heard, Nora gave back the cry.

“What are you doing there, Nora?” she called down, shrilly. “Come up, I want you.” Nora ascended the path, and stood leaning against the end of the bridge.

“Mrs. Trevanion wiped the mist from her face and eyes with her apron and looked at her.” “I’ve been calling to you this last twenty minutes,” she said, not complainingly, but with the coldness with which they always addressed each other.

“Yes,” said the elder woman, coldly. “You’re right of having worked for it. It is not a large sum, she drew from a corner of the chimney and laid it on the table, keeping her hand on it.”

“I’ll tell you, what makes you ask me?” Mrs. Trevanion kept her thin lips closed for a moment; then she said: “Because you are so silent—so—I don’t know how to put it. You have changed a good deal lately, Nora.”

“Changed?” She looked at the elder woman’s hard face inquiringly, with a frown of the dark, straight brows. “How am I changed, aunt?” She spoke as if she were almost hoping for her own sake that her aunt would be able to explain.

“No,” said Mrs. Trevanion, grimly; “not so much as you have done lately. And you seem to be in the clouds or in a dream all the time. I can’t think what has come to you, or why you should behave as you do—or what you can be always thinking of,” she added.

“I think of nothing,” she said, in a low voice. “I don’t know what you mean. Do I not do all you want me to do?” “Oh, yes, yes,” assented the elder woman, coldly. “You do what there is to be done, as you always did, and you do it without a thought, but”—she seemed to find it difficult to define the shortcoming, and paused as she went and lifted the boiling kettle from the hook and made the tea—but I don’t want to complain. I know your life is hard enough, and I will not say a word if I am not asked to do so.”

“Those is it?” asked Nora, not angrily, but so suddenly and gravely that the elder woman started slightly. “Not yours nor mine,” she said. “Why do you say that? What is it you want to know, child?”

Nora looked beyond her rather than at her. “Am I a child?” she asked, with the same kind of gravity, as if she were simply desirous of information—and if the question had only lately arisen within her own bosom.

Mrs. Trevanion peered at her with cold scrutiny and an embarrassment she concealed. “What strange questions, Nora. What has come to you? You are not a child in the ordinary sense, but in others you are different.”

“Why am I different?” demanded Nora. “Why can’t I read and write? He said that others girls as old as I am could do so. He said—” She stopped short, and a faint color came into her face, but her eyes did not drop. She forced them to continue looking over Mrs. Trevanion’s head.

Mrs. Trevanion turned and looked at her. “He why?” she asked. “Do you mean Mr. Vane Tempest?” “Yes,” said Nora. “What else did he say to you?” asked the elder woman, after a pause, during which Nora had turned her eyes to the fire.

“He did not answer the question.” “Was it he who taught you to be dissatisfied—to ask questions?” demanded Mrs. Trevanion. “No,” she said, “he said nothing. Why should he? I was nothing—as nothing to him. He has forgotten me by this time.”

“He did not speak with bitterness; the words fell softly enough from her lips.” “Of course he has. Why shouldn’t he?” said Mrs. Trevanion, sharply. “He is a gentleman as far removed—”

“He is as different from us—as Lundy Isle from London town. I thought perhaps he had been putting some folly into your head—” She looked keenly at the lovely face, but did not flush. “But no; he is too true a gentleman for that,” she broke off, almost to herself, which Nora broke off, almost to herself.

“I want you to go to Trelorne,” resumed the elder woman. “Nora looked up from her cup.” “To Trelorne? Not to the schooner?” she said, in a low voice. “The elder woman shook her head.”

“No,” she said, gloomily; “I doubt whether we shall ever be able to meet the schooner again. The men keep a sharp lookout day and night. I’ve had warning this afternoon that the schooner is being closely watched by a government cutter. Nora, our business, trade—call it what you will—is at an end.”

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