

"Indeed," he said. "How strange you must find it all! When did you leave your ship ?"

He spoke in the lesurely tone with which a grown man addresses a young lad ignorant of the world, and Nora, as she listened, felt that already she was beginning to hate him. "Not long," she said.

He seemed to listen with a sudden increase of attention. "What is the name of your ship?" he

"The 'Neptune,' " replied Nora, her eyes fixed on Vane, that she might see which spoon to use, and what dish to accept or refuse. The number of knives and forks and glasses embarrassed her,

though she had not felt embarrassed by nearly the same number at the club. "Do you like the navy?" asked Senley Tyers, after a pause, during which the soup was served.

Nora hesitated a moment. "I am in the merchant service," she said, coldly. Senley Tyers looked at her out of the

corners of his eyes. How did a cousin of Vane Tempest, a connection of the great Westleighs, come to be in the merchant service?

"You are away on leave, I suppose ?" Nora felt her heart beginning to beat fleree'v at this persistent questioning, and her dark brows came together. She did the unwisest thing she could

have done, and pretended not to hear the question. If she had simply answered "yes" or "no," Senley Tyers would have left her alone. But when no reply came he glanced at her, and saw that her color had risen, and that her eyes were flashing, and knew that she had shirked

his interrogation. And though he turned from ne addressed Lady Florence, he watched

her closely. Most men would have seen nothing suspicious in the handsome lad, and attributed his silence to a not unbecoming shyness; but Senley Tyers pos-sessed the mind of a detective, and just now was on the lookout for anythingany incident or circumstance in Vane Tempest's life which he might be able to turn to advantage.

Vane leaned forward. "I was just asking Lady Florence if she wasn't tired of sitting for her por-

trait." he said. "Quite, I am afraid,' said Tyers, with a smile. Then he looked at her, and

Vane quite expected her to say, with her usual hauteur, "More than tired"; but instead she said, with a sudden drooping of the eyes:

"No; I am not. It is very interest-

Senley Tyers leaned back as if he had got what he wanted.

"Lady Florence is patience itself, and too kind. Yes, the picture has been a long time in hand; but the dress-by the way, I have to thank you for suggesting it, Tempest-is an elaborate one, and means a vast amount of

"And glory, when the picture comes to be exhibited." said Vane. The conversation thus started ran on art lines, and Senley Tyers, exerting himself, talked well. Lady Florence joined in now and again, and to Vane's surprise, seemed to listen with something like deference. Every now and then he looked over to Nora, and managed to convey a smile of encouragement But everyone else seemed to have forgotten her; Lord Warlock, as usual devoting the whole of his attention to

the dinner, and growling at intervals at some dish or wine. Suddenly, so suddenly as to make Nora start, he said:

"You are eating nothing and drinking less, my lad. When I was your age I shouldn't have passed that last

Nora colored and looked down, and

the earl signed to the footman to bring the dish back. "There," he said, gruffly, but not un kindly, "don't tell me you don't like it. Every boy likes good things, and this

happens to be decent, for a marvel, Let me see, what's your name-Mortimer? Knew a Mortimer once. You're not like him, though. Too good-looking. What's that they are talking aboutart? Pooh! there is no art nowadays.

All the painters are dead; so are the shoulders—"my poor little bonus is lost actors. Painting, and acting, and everything else have gone to the dogs And so you are a cousin of Vane Tem. pest, are you; and he's looking after you, I suppose ?" he chuckled, as if the # you follow in his footsteps, you'll | Florence, when I go to-night I take with need looking after by some one else," He glanced across the table at Vane, and chuckled again. "'Pon my word, I'm sorry for you. He's about the worst example you could have."

"Why?" asked Nora, opening her eyes she took the paper from him.
"Sign it," he said, in a low voice.
An inkstand of Venetian crystal stood The old earl stared at her as if she were going to have a fit, then shook his head and turned his attention to his plate again, as if the question were too

embering Vane's instructions, went he door and opened it for her, dy Florence bestowed a faint smile her, and Nora bowed, and as passed back to her place she heard breathe a sigh of relief. 'ane, port," exclaimed the earl, ling him the decanter. "I suppose will have some; you haven't the tyet, you lucky young beggar." he

Nora half filled her glass and sipped

it, and Lord Warlock eyed her with keen

"Well, you are the most abstemious sailor I ever met with," he remarked. "But I suppose you prefer hot grog and a short pipe to '48 port; and I don't know that you're wrong. If I'd stuck to gin and water instead of this"—he tapred the decanter with his gouty knuck-les—"I shouldn't be a cripple in the prime of my life !"

Nora smiled faintly. "Oh!" he exclaimed, shortly, "you think I'm old, do you?" He sighed and leaning back, looked at her wistfully. So I am, boy. Very old, and very tired, and worn out-"

"In his country's service," murmured The earl glanced at him from under senley Tyers.

"What the devil do you know about it?" he muttered ; and, sinking back, rehis brows. speed into silence for a quarter of an our, during which he appeared to have ergotten the presence of his guests. At the end of that time he roused, lookround, and uttered the usual forula : "Shall we join Lady Florence ?" ad struggled, with the aid of the back

his chair, to his feet. instinctively Nora put out her hand to help him, and after a moment's hesitation, during which she thought he meant to refuse her assistance, he

laid his hand on her shoulder. "Thanks, youngster," he said, leaning on her rather heavily. "Humph! you are stronger than you look." Nora smiled up at him.

"I am very strong," she said "And as straight as an arrow," he muttered. "Help me to that chair, and then go and amuse yourself. By gad ! you'll find it precious dull, I expect. Here, Vane, come and talk to me."
Vane went to him at once and sat be-

side him, and Nora, left to herself, found a seat at a little distance. Lady Florence was at the piano playing softly and at random, and Senley Tyers crossed the room with his noiseless step and stood beside her. She had, in the mirrer, seen him approaching, and, as he drew near, her lips grew tighter and a set expression came into her face.

"You did well to ask me here tonight, Lady Florence," he said in a low voice, and pointing to a piece of music as if he were merely asking her to play or sing.

She was silent a moment, then she

"Because by so doing you have ratiled the compact between us." "I know of no compact," she said, aljost between her closed teeth.

"Oh, it is not for me to contradict ou," he said, smoothly. "Let us say that I-and you-only dreamed the little dramatic scene which took place in my studio. Let us say that it was only in imagination that I offered you my humble assistance toward the realization of your dearest wish."

She opened her lips and turned her yes upon him, with a proud defiance and indignation flashing in them; but the flash faded, the eyes fell beneath the keen, cool gaze of his. Lady Florence had lost her power over him, and she knew it.

"I am not fond of melodrama even in its proper place-the theatre, Mr. 'yers," she said, with an attempt at

"Nor I," he said; "and I rarely indulge in it. You are quite right when you accuse me of having done so the day I pretended to destroy Vane Tempest's picture, and-discovered your secret; but you will admit that it was a very successful melodrama. You will find that it has a very practical purpose. I am terribly in earnest, Lady Florence, when I am in earnest-which is seldom; and I make no vain boast when I offer you my assistance."

She forced a smile. "You said all this in your studio," she rejoined; "and I think that I reminded you that, even supposing your romantic upposition were correct, and that I-" "Loved Vane Tempest," he murmur-

Her proud face became suffused, and she seemed as if struggling for breath.
"You are too ridiculous-" she faltered. "But"-she shrugged her shoulders -"how could you help me ?"

"Pardon me, but that is my part of the contract." "And mine ?" she said. "What does that consist of, if you insist upon playing at theatricals ?"

"Simply this," he said. He drew a sheet of paper from his pocket-book quite openly, and laid it on the edge of the piano; any one noticing the action might easily have concluded that he was submitting a sketch for her

She looked down at it with a scornful smile, then picked it up and examined it. These words were written in Senley Tyers artistic scrawl:

"I, Florence Tempest, owe Senley Tyers one thousand pounds. (Signed),-." She dropped the paper with a contemptuous laugh.

"Oh, I understand!" he said, with a "It is an old trick, and has done duty in many a stage play. Besides. why do I not make it for a large sum? And why, again, do I not, after the usual fashion of needy adventurers-because that is what I am, am I not, Lady Florence ?-ask for payment in advance ?"

"Yes," she said, scornfully. have read my thoughts with tolerable correctness, Mr. Tyers."

"Exactly. Will you forgive me if I reply that the answer to these questions is part of my scheme ? Come, why should you not sign ? It commits you to nothing unless you become the wife of my dear friend. It is made out in the name of Florence Tempest—not Heath-cote. You shall sign it in the same way. If you never become Florence -my little paper just waste paper."

She shook her head. "Good!" he said, as if her refusal were final and closed the matter. "I can understand your disbelief in my idea seemed an amusing one. "By gad, power. It is only natural; but, Lady me your only chance of becoming Vane Tempest's wife."

She raised her eyes and met his; a faint shudder ran through her, and, as if the movement cost her an agony,

on a table near him; he took up a pen and handed it to her. As he did so, Vane strolled up to them. "What are you conspiring?" he said.

plane, so that he almost hid Lady Plorence from Vane's view.
"Lady Florence is signing the order termitting me to exhibit her portrait,"

he said.

He turned to her with a smile.

"Have you finished, Lady Florence?"

She raised her eyes, opened her lips as if about to defy him; then her head drooped, as she signed the paper rapidly, and handed it to him.

"Thanks," he said, and he bowed al-A CARROLL SALES A

CHAPTER XX. Nora sat in her corner, with a photograph album, as still as a mouse, but with eyes as sharp as that peculiarly

She saw the whole of the business between Lady Florence and Senley Tyers, and watched the changed expressions in the beautiful face. But though her woman's wit made her suspicio was too ignorant of the world and its wiles to understand; she only thought that if she were the proud beauty she would not have permitted Mr. Tyers to bend over her and talk in such low and confidential tones—for Nora's dis-like and distrust of that accomplished gentleman increased every moment.

As Vane went up to Lady Florence,

Senley Tyers walked away and stood by the fire; and Nora, watching him, saw him smile with a peculiar satisfaction.

While she was watching him he turned, in his softly sudden fashion, and met the gaze of her bright eyes; and, as if reminded of her existence, he crossed the room and approached her.

Nora bent over her photograph album and knit her brows, on her guard in a mement, and determined to say as little to him as possible. Senley Tyers drew up a chair beside

"Have you found some interesting hotos, Mr. Mortimer ?" he said. His voice was particularly soft and pleasant, but nevertheless it jarred upon Nora and caused her brows to

grow straighter. "Yes," she said in a tone that did not invite further questions. But Mr. Senley Tyers always met a

epulse with bland persistence. "What are they-views?" he asked. 'Let me see. Ah, yes. Lord Warlock has been abroad a good deal; he was Secretary for the Colonies at one period of his useful career, and has travelled neuch. I suppose you know some of these places? Where did the 'Neptune' sail to last ?" "To Australia," replied Nora, short-

"Ah, yes," he said. "Delightful trip How I envy you! Of course you saw Sydney? There ought to be a pnotograph of it here." He turned the pages of the album. "Tell me if you recognize it. Ah! here it is. Is it a good view?" Nora felt her color coming and going. "I don't know," she said. "I didn't

go ashore Senley Tyers glanced at her out of the corners of his eyes. "Oh, oh!" he said, with a smile

"Then you had been misbehaving yourself, I'm afraid, and were kept aboard for punishment, Mr. Mortimer. Was that Nora's face went scarlet, and an indignant denial rose to her lips, but she

checked it and looked guilty. Senley Tyers laughed. To inflict mental pain was a much-valued amusement of his, and he promised himself unlimited enjoyment of that kind to be got out of Vane's mysterious cousin. "Let me see," he said; "they don't flog now in the merchant service. do they? It's a mistake, I fancy. I dare say you youngsters would infinitely prefer a few lashes from the cat-o'ninetails to being kept aboard when the ship's in port."

Nora still hung her head, but her face was pale now and the delicate nostrils were distended, the clear-cut lips tightly pressed together. Senley Tyers watched her with a smile that suddenly fled from his face

and left it acutely suspicious. He saw that a tear was forcing itself from under the lowered lid next him. Now, even the softest-hearted shipboy is not in the habit of shedding tears when he is chaffed, and the appearance of that crystal drop positively startled Senley Tyers. His keen eyes scanned the handsome face-too delicately beautiful in all its features for a boy's-and then fell upon the hands

with which Nora clutched the photograph album. A doubt, a suspicion, a merely nebulous suspicion, rose in his mind; but vague and impossible as it seemed, it sent the blood to his face and made his

heart leap. He bent forward slightly, and his whole tone and manner altered as he murmured :

"Forgive me! I have pained you. did not intend to do so ; but I am afraid I have offended you past forgiveness.' The tear dropped-unseen, as Nora fendly hoped-and she forced a smile. "Oh, no, you haven't," she said, as boyishly as she knew how. "But I don't care of talking of my sea life; I wasn't

happy, and-" "Of course-of course," he murmured, sympathetically. "I quite understand. It was very thoughtless and inconsiderate of me. I won't mention it again.' He was silent a moment or two, then

"Are you fond of pictures, Mr. Mor-"Yes-very," said Nora, with an agerness which she attempted to sub-

am glad of that," said Senley Tyers. "I shall be very pleased if you will come and see some of mine. Ask our cousin Tempest to bring you." Nora thanked him, but rather coldly. She had no desire to go to Mr. Senley Tyers' studio, even though it might contain the most beautiful pictures in the

"I am painting a portrait of Lady Florence, as you may have heard" he went on, "and I should like you to see that, and to hear your opinion of it. She is very beautiful, don't you think?"
His keen eyes watched Nora's face closely as he spoke. Nora raised her head, and looked at Lady Florence absently. She and Vane were seated on an ottoman, Lady Florence talking, Vane listening. It was evident that she was trying her hardest to amuse and nterest him, and every now and then Vane leaned back and laughed shortly; and at such moments a look of gratification softened Lady Florence's proud

As Nora watched them-watched the exquisite smile which Lady Florence ent upon the unconscious Vane, lou ng on the ottoman in his usual rather indolent manner—a look came into Nora's face which possibly Senley Tyers had been waiting for.

"They are very old friends?" he mur-"Yes." assented Nora, as carelessly as she could ; but her voice sounded dry

"Lady Florence is, perhaps, the most beautiful weman in London," he went on in soft, reflective tones, almost as if he were communing with himself

tunately we cannot all be Vare Tempests, and so"—he shrugged his shoulders—"we have to love hopelessly."

Nora's brows came together.

"Is he"—she paused—"is he in love with her?" she asked, almost under her breath, as if the question caused her

"How could he help it?" responded Senley Tyers. "Could you, if you were sitting there where he is sitting, and Lady Florence were looking at you and

smiling as she is smiling now?"

Nora scarcely breathed; it seemed as if some one had suddenly stabbed her. She looked at Vane, and something in his negligent attitude and careless laugh seemed to comfort her and dispel the sharp pain which Sen'ey Tyers question had caused her.

"I don't believe-" she said, involuntarily; then she stopped. "Ah, well! perhaps not," he said. "They say that it is a case of loving or being loved. No one gets back the love which he or she gives. It's a matter of fate. By the way, do you believe

in fate, Mortimer ?" He put the question carelessly and casually enough, but he had been carefully leading up to it, and it had something more behind it than Nora suspect-

"Fate?" she said, with a little frown 'I don't know." "Do you think that our lives are allotted to us-that we are bound to do certain things, whether we like them or not ?"

"I don't know," she said. "Who can tell whether there is any truth in that. Nobody can know."

Nora raised her eyes to his with a

He nodded. Well, some say they can tell your fate. The gypsies, for instance; and not only the gypsies ; palmistry is quite "What is that?" she asked.

"The art of telling your fortune by the lines and marks in your hand," he suid, smoothly. "It is quite a science, and some go so far as to say that it is one of the oldest in existence. The Egyptians believe in it, and were adepts at it; and a great many persons assert at Nora. that it is as old as the Flood. I am surprised you had not heard of it. You come from the west coast, don't you ?" It was an arrow shot at a venture, but it went home.

"Yes," assented Nora, thrown off her guard by the careless way in which the uuestion was put. "I should have thought the good people down at Trelorne would have been

well up in all that kind of thing. Country people, especially in remote places. are generally superstitious." "I don't often go to Trelorne. I don't know any one there," said Nora. Senley Tyers kept back the glance of satisfaction that shot into his eyes as he thought: "So Vane found this

'cousin' of his down at that place in the west, did he ?" "I'll show you what I mean," he went on, rather languidly. He held out his hand, palm upward, and pointed to the "See there; that line is the line of life; that is the line of matrimony, and that the line of fortune. Any one well up in the business would rattle off my fate or fortune in no time, and sentence one to a long life or a short one

see your hand." Quite unsuspectingly Nora held out ier hand. Senley Tyers took it in his and bent over it with an earnestness which was

not all assumed. Of the science of palmistry he knew nothing; but in the course of his profession he had made a study of the human hand, and always gained praise for his manner of painting it. He looked at the small brown hand

in silence for a moment; and Nora, who was gazing at it also, did not see that his face had gone suddenly pale, and that a look of triumph and gratified cunning glowed in his eyes. No man's hand, however well-shaped and smooth and white, is like that of a woman's; and one who has made the human hand a study can distinguish between them

after a very slight examination. "I should say you had a very pleasant life before you," he said, smiling up at her. "You are a lucky young-man, if I know anything of the art of fortunetelling by the hands. There is only one thing for you to guard against, Mor-

timer"; and he laughed. "What is that?" said Nora, with a rather contemptuous glance from her palm to his face. "A fair woman, with golden hair and

violet eyes," he said, half gravely. "Be on your guard against her, or she will bring you bad luck, my boy." Nora drew her hand away, and as she did so Vane glanced over his should-

er at them. "Your cousin and Mr. Tyers appear to be getting on very well together, remarked Lady Florence. "He seems very nice boy.'

Vane's manner changed in a moment Lady Florence had kept him so much amused that he had, for the short time he had been listening to her, almost forgotten Nora's presence; but in an instant his fearful responsibility came crowding back upon him. "Oh, yes, yes," he said.

Lady Florence looked at him. She was quick to notice every expression of his face and tone of his voice. "You spoke as if you were not very fond of him," she said, with a smile. "Perhaps you find him just a little of a bore, and yet I should have thought you would have liked to have him with you; he is company for you, and I should fancy you find your solitude rather dull at times.'

"Yes; oh, yes," he assented. "Oh, like to have him with me ; but of course he is rather a responsibility!" he said, mentally wondering what Lady Florence would say if she knew how grave responsibility really was. What would she say ? he thought. Would she cream aloud or faint on the spot if Nera's secret and his—yes, it was his. also—were suddenly told to her? "You must let us take him off you

ands sometimes," she said. "I have taken a fancy to him, he seems such a ulet, modest boy. Did you notice how miable papa was with him? And as a we must do sometring to amuse him."
"Yes—thanks," said Vane. "But I needn't let you or Lord Warlock be ored by my—my juvenile relations."
"Oh, he won't bore me in the least!"
he said. Would he never understand
hat she was ready to love anything
hat belonged to him—the very dog that
toeived a caress from him? "I rather

ke boys. At any rate, they are better an young girls, for they are general-

"It wasn't much of a computation, she said. with a smile. "But I meant that he was so much darker, and that his features were so unlike yours. But you say that there is not much relation-

"No, not much," he assented. At that moment Lady Florence, catching Nora's eye, nodded and beckoned with her fan. Nora rose at once, and crossing to

her, stood with her hands folded, her eyes downcast. Lady Florence looked up at her with a languid but pleased smile. She was always at her best when Vane was near and when she had been with him some

"We have been talking about you, Mr. Mortimer," she said. Nora raised her lids and glanced from Lady Florence to Vane, who leaned back, nursing his knee and trying to look, as he certainly did not feel, quite

at his ease "Yes, Lady Florence?" said Nora. "Yes: I was telling Mr. Tempest that he must let us help him amuse you and show you something of London. Would you care, for instance, to go with us to the theater ?-or, rather, you could take me. Oh, you need not look at Mr. Tempest for permission!" she added, with languid amusement, as Nora's dark eyes flashed a quick glance of inter-

rogation at Vane. Vane colored and nearly dropped his leg from his clasped hands, but Nora did not wince in the slightest. "Thank you very much, Lady Florence," she said. "I should like it. I have never been to a theatre." Lady Florence stared with a faint sur-

"No? Then it will be a treat for both of us," She turned her eyes to Vane-"It will be amusing to watch his astonishment," she said. "When shall we go? Let me see-we are engaged tomorrow. The night afterward? Will you come, Mr. Tempest? Papa will, perhaps, condescend to chaperon me for a few minutes; but I shall in reality place myself under the protection of Mr. Mortimer, if he will kindly undertake the charge;" and she smiled up

Nora bent her head. "Yes; I will take care of you," she said, so solemnly that Lady Florence laughed in her listless, languid fashion; then suddenly the laugh died away, and her eyes dropped. Senley Tyers had

come up behind Nora. "I have come to say 'good-night,' Lady Florence," he said in conventional tones, "and to thank you for a very pleasant evening. I will not disturb Lord Warlock, who is, I trust, enjoying his well-earned repose." He glanced at the still sleeping earl. "Did I hear you planning a visit to the theatre ? I fancied I caught the word."

"Yes." said Lady Florence in a kind of suppressed voice. "May I inquire the date? I ask because a friend has placed a box at the Lyceum at my disposal for one night

this week. "It is the night after next," said Lady, Florence in the same constrained voice. "How fortunate !" he said. "It is the very night. Please let me transfer it to you. Don't hesitate. I cannot use it, for I am engaged; and it would be a pity to waste a good box, especially, lmost with their eyes shut. Let me when all London is fighting for a seat." "Thank you," she said, without raising her eyes, which she kept lowered even while he was shaking hands.

He nodded to Vane in the half-careless fashion which obtains nowadays, and left the room. "There goes a good fellow," said Vane. looking after him, "and clever, too." "Yes? He is very clever," said Lady,

Florence, slowly. The good and clever fellow paced along the side of the park with a peculiar expression on his face. There was the triumph in it which is the reward of successful cunning, but there was also the frown of acute and

profound perplexity. "Vane, my friend," he muttered, "you must be either the most consummate scoundrel or the biggest idlot that ever lived. Which is it, I wonder? By Heaven ! I think it must be idiot ! Why, one false step, one unguarded word, and your volcano would explode under your feet ! And she-great Heaven ! she can only be a mere child! But what pluck, what audacity! Who is she? I must find that out. Steady, my dear Senley, -steady! Hitherto-until this very night, indeed-you have been groping in the dark, feeling your way, step by step, like a blind man; but to-night I think Fate has dealt you a hand that ought to win you the game, if you only

know how to play it; that is the ques-With the question working in his acute brain, he reached Mount Street, and ascended to his studio. Flinging his dress Inverness into a chair, he lighted a cigarette and paced up and down, still softly biting his lip in the short intervals of smoking and staring at the carpet. Once he stopped before Lady Florence's portrait, and as he looked at it drew the paper she had signed from his pocket and shook it in the painted face

half triumphantly, half defiantly. "You proud beauty!" he murmured, softly, through his half-parted lips. "You beautiful tigress ! I fancy I shall cage

you yet. But how ?" He turned from the portrait and fell to pacing the room again. Then suddenly he stopped, a sharp and swift change in his face. He went with a pulck step to the book-case, rapidly ran his eye along the shelves, and taking down a volume, threw himself into a chair, and with feverish impatience turned over the leaves. It was a treatise on the laws relating to marriage. He found what he wanted at last, and

read and re-read the lines. Then, with a calm that was oming he rose and, the book clasped in his hand, stretched himself as a man stretches himself after a tremendous ental or physical strain. "By Heaven !" he exclaimed, "I think shall win! CHAPTER XXI.

One can get used to anything—to wearing an iron fetter round the ankle; to going about in thick shoes; even to paying the income tax; one grows accustomed to the most extraordinary phenomena. The steam-engine and the electric telegraph have ceased to throw us into a state of excitement. It is all matter of habit.

Vane had grown accustomed to Nora's presence and her masculine garb, and the a few days the dread of detection which had at first amounted to a positive agony grew less, and indeed almost disappeared.

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