"Listen to me. Nora, I implore you-I demand! I thought you had left me, that you did not, could not love me. I was ill, wretched, half stupefied, and-'

"And you went to Lady Florence to comfort you," she said, with white lips. "Listen, now, to me!" Broken and husky with emotion as her voice was, there was a note of womanly dignity and suffering in it that awed him into silence. 'We are parted forever!"

"No!" he breathed, with an oath. "Forever! I can see it all. I can see how you have been drawn, driven to her. I do not blame you- Hush! Let me speak; it is for the last time. It is not you I blame, but Senley Tyers. He is a traitor-a devil! He has done it. But it is done. I would not take you from her if I could. You must go to her, marry her. You must forget me"-her voice broke-"as I shall forget you. It it too late now to alter thing, even if I wished them altered; but I do not. She is better fitted to be your wife-"

He broke in passionately: "I have heard you; I will hear no more ! I will go to her-yes-but not to marry her. I will tell her the whole story-the truth-and she will release me. It is not her fault, but his-his! I will deal with him. I will-" He chok- part now!" ed and put his hand to his throat. "Wait. I will go to her and tell her how again. You hear, Nora? Give you upnow that I know you love me!" He leave me! You shall not!" laughed in wild mockery. "But there is no need. Florence is too proud to marry a man who is in love with another woman. I will tell her all."

Nora looked at him-a strange look. "Will you abide by her decision?" she

He leaped at the suggestion-at the "Yes!" he cried. "You will see! She forgive me-must be of her." will understand, release, and forgive

His face worked and his hands clinch-

Nora stood a moment with downcast head, then she said: "Will you go now ?"

"Yes," he said : "at once. I will not lose a moment. Nora, I will come to you- Ah !" broke from him, as a doubt drew herself to her full height and lookor fear stole over him suddenly. "You ed at him in all her imperial beauty. will not do that, Nora ?"

I? I have your word. Our fate hangs upon Lady Florence's decision. You have promised to abide by it, and-and so also will I. Go, now-ah, go!"

He took her hand. He would have taken her in his arms, but she drew back firmly, shaking her head, and he again and again. He sprang up the his hand to her.

"Remember your promise!" She raised her head and looked at expression in her eyes, then turned away and looked out to sea.

He leaped on his horse and rode away riage!' at the risk of his neck. His soul was in a tumult; the thought of the risk he me!" he saft, pleadingly. "I know I was running, of Nora restored to him seem to deserve your scorn, your hate, only to be snatched away again, filled him with sorrow and aprehension one would pity me-ay, and her-if you moment; the realization of Senley Tyers' vile treachery drove him half mad the next. As he reached the high-road he saw a drover, and inquired of him if she lay dead at my feet. I would to

the way to the Grange, and made for it at racing speed.

When he pulled up at the entrance to the house the horse was covered with foam-flecked sweat; his clothes were spattered with mud, some of which had drawn. He flung the reins to a groom and went quickly up the steps and into the hall. Several persons were there; the bride-maids and visitors asked down for the wedding; and they stared, with good reason, at his appearance. A pretty kind of bridegroom he looked

"Florence-Lady Florence!" he said. and his voice sounded hoarse as a ra-

They gathered round him in astonishment and alarm. "Has anything happened?" asked

Before he could answer, Lady Florence looked over the stairs and called "Vane!" He fought hard for composure, and

forced a smile. "I-I have been kept. An accident-I

"Nothing has happened," he said. He strode up the stairs with the gait

and the air of a man repressing a terrible excitement. She looked at him and uttered a faint

ery.
"Vane, something is the matter!" And

her face went white. "No, no!" he said. "I want to speak to you. Don't be frightened, Florence. Yes, something has happened. I must tell you without the loss of a mo-

She led him by the hand she still held into a small room, a kind of boudoir, and stood trembling before him. Had he discovered the hand Senley Tyers had had in promoting the marriage? had he discovered the shameful wager she had nade? If so-if so, all was over. She knew. Vane too well to hope that he would forgive such an unwomanly, im-

'What-what is it ?" she demanded. 'Tell me, tell me quickly!" and her hand went to her heart.

'Yes," he said ; "I can't do otherwise. I have come to you at once. It is right you should know the truth. Florence, pity me if you can; try not to hate me. This marriage must not take place."...

She sank into a chair and her lips

"Not-take-place! Our marriage! "Yes." he said, his eyes on the grou for he could not endure the look of fear and pain in hers. "Florence, before-before I asked you to be my wife I had met and loved-"

She gasped and half rose, but sank down again and clutched the chair. "She was to have been my wife , but a villain came between us, and with lying treachery separated us."
"His name?" she panted.

"Senley Tyers," he groaned out be ween his teeth. "Do you know-" Her lips trembled with fear.

"I know nothing-nothing!" severated. "Florence, to-day, scarcely an hour ago, I met her-"

"The-the woman you love ?" He met her wild gaze steadily. Yes, the woman I still love. All was cleared up between us. He—this devil had wronged and deceived us both. I should wrong you even more than he wronged us if I concealed the truth from you and let you marry me. I cannot

do it. Florence, forgive me the pain I am giving you. Forgive me, and-and let us part.' She clutched the chair still more

"Part! Part!" she murmured; then she looked at him with a sudden flame in her eyes. "Who is she-this wo-

"No one you know." he said. "Do not ask me.' Her face flushed and her lips curled

with scorn. "Some woman you are ashamed of? He started, and the veins stood out on his forehead.

"It is true," she said, between her teeth. "I can see it in your face. And you would jilt, desert me for her? Do it at your peril!" He started. She rose and stretched

ut her hand. "Do it at your per-" Then her mood changed, and she flung herself upon him and strained him to her. "Vane! Vane! I cannot give you up, I cannot

let you go-I cannot! He strove to unclasp her hands gent-"Florence, Florence ! for God's sake! This is madness. I have told you-I

could not help but tell you! I have only just seen her to-day-" "It was she for whom you were grievng. It was the loss of her that made you ill!" she panted, with quick in-

tuition, and with a shudder. He hung his head. "Don't ask me any more questions. For Heaven's sake, let me go-let us

"Never!" she cried, hoarsely. "You are mine! mine! You belong to me, I loved you; how you were lost—the not to her! Who is she that she should whole truth-and that I have found you; come between us? I am almost your wife. A few hours-Vane, you will not

He groaned, and tried to soothe her "You shall decide, Florence," he said, hoarsely. "I have promised that you shall decide. I would not marry you with a lie on my soul, my lips. I have wronged you. I know that. I wish I were dead! I have wronged you, but she-she has been wronged more cruelly than you have, and my first thought-

She breathed hard. "Tell me her name!" He set his teeth hard.

"Nora Trevanion." She pushed the hair from her forehead, and looked at him vacantly.

"I-I never heard of her. She is a nobody-some girl beneath you? And you would leave me-for her ?" She will not run away from me again-you "Vane, you must be mad! It must be the fever again. I will not believe it. "No," she said, gravely. "Why should You shall tell me no more-until after the wedding !"

> "Then-then-you hold me to my honor ?" he whispered huskily.

He started.

She laughed-a broken, terrible laugh. "I save you from the consequences of your mad folly, in spite of yourself," she had to be content with kissing her hand said. She drew nearer to him, and bent her head so that her face nearly met path, and at the top turned and waved his. "Play the cur, as you threatened to do, and I will hold you up to the scorn of the whole civilized world! I will degrade you in the sight of every him with a repetition of the strange | honest man. What! you dare-you dare-to dream of filting me!"-she laughed-"and on the eve of our mar-

"Florence, for God's sake, listen to but as there is light in heaven, you

"Pity!" She threw out the word with fierce gesture. "I should not pity her God she were there, dead! dead! Who is she, to come between us? But she shall not!" She raised her head and looked steadily at him. "Vane, you say the decision rests with me. I will not give you up. I will save you, in spite of fallen on his face, which was white and | yourself. I hold you to your promise-

the pledged word of a man of honor." He turned from her for a moment, and when he faced her again his face was set and rigid as if carved in stone. "Very well," he said, gravely, sternly. "The decision rested with you; you

have decided.' He moved away from her, and she sank into the chair, her head falling on the arm which hung over the side. He went up to her, and let his hand

fall on her head gently, pityingly, as it seemed. "God forgive you! God forgive us both, Florence!" he said, hoarsely. She did not look up, and he left her,

opened the door, and passed down the As he did so, the Earl of Warlock, mountaing the stairs with his crutched stick, looked up at him.

'What the devil is the matter, Vane?" he demanded, irritably. "Have you fallen from your horse, or what ?" Vane laughed, and looked at him with unnatural calmness.

"Nothing is the matter," he said. There was a hectic spot on both cheeks and an absent, vacant look in his eyes. Afternoon tea was going on in the hall below, and the sound of voices and laughter floated up to him. "Where have you been?" said the

earl, testily. "You are in a deuce of Vane looked down at his mud-bespat-

tered clothes. 'Yes; I am going home to change." "Can't you change here?" "No," said Vane, as if he were speaking from a distance. "I forgot to tell

em to send my things on. I shall not his own head. be long, but do not wait." The earl grunted. "You'd better let them drive you over," he said. "You've ridden the horse you came on to death almost. He's

quite done up." "Thanks," said Vane. He went down the stairs and joined his father on the coach that morning. "You shall judge," sa the group, and was introduced to the as luck would have it. They got him old Tempest, considering oride-maids and the other guests, and out after a time and carried him home, trop, stole out of the room. the group, and was introduced to the bride-maids and the other guests, and aughed and talked with them; but he

eemed strangely "jeray and pre-oc-upled, and they eyed him curiously ow and again. But they made the al-wance which is due to the unfortunate mortal who is cast for the part of bridegroom, and ascribed his manner to his sense of the nearness of his doom.

"A man going to be married always looks like that," said a young girl, as Vane, having been told that the dog-cart was waiting, nodded to them and strode down the hall. "He feels as if he were going to be hanged, you know." Vane went out with the echo of their

laughter in his ears. It was an awful ride through the dark-ness. Florence had decided! He had lost Nora forever. Her face danced before him all the way, her voice rang in

his ears. Yes, Florence had decided! He reached the inn and told the groom to wait. But when he got to his room he knew that he could not go back that night. He went down-stairs and sent the groom back with a message.

"Tell her ladyship that I will be over in good time to-morrow." he said. On his way back to his room the landlord intercepted bim.

"The gentleman hasn't come yet, your "What gentleman?" asked Vane, absently.

"Mr. Harold Tempest, the-the best man, sir.' "Oh, yes. No matter. He will be here presently," said Vane, mechanically;

and he went upstairs. He paced up and down the room half stupefied. After a time the landlord knocked, and asked f his honor wouldn't have some din-Vane said no; he would have some

whiskey and water. The landlord brought up a bottle, and Vane filled a glass and drank it. He drank two or three such draughts, but they had no effect upon him. Intense mental anguish, like intense physical pain, declines to be deadened by alcohol. He paced the room, or sat with his head upon his arm, throughout the live-long night. Toward morning he feli asleep. The sound of bells awoke him. He started and looked round him with a bewildered air; then his face lighted up with joy. Of ourse. It was his wedding-morning; he was going to be married to Nora-to Nora. Then the truth broke in upon the delusion, and he let his head fall again and groaned.

No, not to Nora. He should never wed her. It was to Florence Heath-

He dragged himself to his feet and began to wash and dress. Some one knocked at the door, and with the towel in his hand he went and opened it. "What is it ?"

"The gentleman has come; he wants to see you," said the voice of the land-"Very well," said Vane; "I shall be down directly."

He finished dressing and went down-

stairs into the parlor coffee-room. A young fellow in an ulster turned from drumming on the window-pane to greet him. At sight of Vane's face, white, haggard and drawn, as if he had only just recovered from a serious illness, the young fellow uttered an exclamation. "You-you have heard the news al-

ready ?" he said, solemnly. "News-what news?" said Vane, with callous indifference. "You are Harold Tempest-the"-his voice unconsciously grew bitter-"the best man ?"

'Yes, yes," said the young fellow. nervously; "but I say, you know, are you sure you haven't heard? You look so devilish seedy and cut up.' "Heard what?" said Vane. "You

are late, aren't you? We expected you earlier-yesterday." He spoke in cold. mechanical tones. The young fellow eyed him curiously. "If you haven't heard, Tempest, pre

pare youself for-for-bad news." Vane smiled a ghastly smile. "Bad news? Fire away, man," he said, with stony indifference. "What is it?"

CHAPTER XXXVIII. "Fire away," said Vane, coldly, reck-

What bad news, what news or a worse alamity could this young fellow bring im than had already befallen him? He had found Nora but to lose her again : this time indeed forever, and most hopeessly; for was he not going to marry iorence Heathcote?

The young fellow looked at him with creased surprise mingled with his olemnity. No doubt he thought Vane oked a miserable kind of of bridegroom

"I-I thought you might have heard." he said, slowly. "News travels so jolly fast, nowadays; the telegraph and all that, don't you know."

"I've heard nothing. Have only just got out of bed," said Vane, impatiently. How the deuce you have managed to et here at this unearthly hour in the rning I can't conceive. Won't your ews keep till you've had some breakfast ? You look seedy enough." He went toward the bell as he spoke.

Mr. Harold Tempest caught his arm. "Wait a moment, Vane; don't call the ervant in just yet till I've-I've told you. I came on by the day mail as far as it would bring me, and coached the rest. I've been travelling all night-" "You look it."

"Yes; they wanted to telegraph, but said that it would be awfully rough telegraphing to you, dropping on you so suddenly just before your wedding, and that I'd tell you when I reached you. stayed with them as long as I could." Vane started at him. Had the young

fellow gone mad? "What on earth are you talking about ?" he demanded, almost angrily. "I can't make head or tail of it, or understand what it is you mean. Why didn't you come last night, and what

was it you were going to telegraph to me-only you didn't ?" "Am I not telling you-breaking it to

you? Westleigh's dead." Vane started and looked at him. "Westleight-dead?" he breathed. Harold Tempest nodded gravely.

"Yes. I-I was trying to break it to "When-how-did he-" stammered

Vane. "Yesterday morning," replied Harold Tempest. "At least, about midday. It than when she stands at the altar in was an accident. The coach-you know her spotless satin and costly lace; but he had taken to tooling the coach from | if it be so, then Lady Florence was Newton Petrock to Westleigh? Well, the exception which proves the rule. something was wrong with the wheel, and the blessed thing turned over on its that he had never seen a more lovely side. Westleigh was pitched down among the horses-one of 'em was a bride-and she looked at Vane questionyoung mare, and restless-and-and she kicked him. He must have been killed

ple." He put his finger to the spot on Vane shuddered. "The coach was dragged for a distance," went on Harold Tempest, "and young Vernon appears to have been

in an instant; it was right on the tem-

underneath it-" "Young Vernon-Westleight's son ?" "Yes; didn't I tell you? He was with but he died soon after midday." "Good Heaven!" Vane exclaimed, with orror and grief. "Both-you say

"Yes, both-both on the same day. Awful, isn't it ? I wish I'd broken it to you better, Vane; but, after all I'm better than one of those beastly, sharp telegrams that come upon you like a hun-

dred of bricks.' "Yes. Thank you," said Vane, hoarsely, with his hand to his head.

"I'm glad I got down here in time to put the wedding off," said Harold Tempest. "It's an awful nuisance, a dreadful blow for you; but-but I suppose i wouldn't do to let it take place as if nothing had happened; though really, when you come to think of it, and how hard it is on you and Lady Florence-Vane started. Put off the wedding The thought-alas! the hope-shot like a gleam of light athwart the gloom of

this awful news. "I-I don't know," he faltered. "We must go on to the Grange at once. You'll -you'll have some breakfast;" and he rang. But when the breakfast was brought in neither of them was equal to more than a cup of coffee, and it was drunk almost in silence. Vane stood and stared into the fire, apparently so lost that young Tempest took upon himself to order the carriage. They got into it and were driven toward the Grange.

"I'm afraid you'll have to go straight to Westleight." said Harold.

Vane looked up. "What ?" "They'll want you at once, they are

wanting you now, in fact, and the lawyer chap-what's his name ?--told me to tell you that they could do nothing till you came. 'Tell the earl,' he said, 'that I'll send the carriage to meet each train."

"The earl-what earl ?" asked Vane, confusedly.

Harold Tempest stared at him. "Good Lord!" he exclaimed, "you can't have forgotten that young Vernon was the late earl's only son, and that, as he is dead, you have got the title, and are now the earl of Westleigh ?" Vane looked out of the window.

"I had forgotten that-yes, I had forgotten it." he said humbly. "Would to Heaven I were not! Yes," he added, after a pause, "I will go to Westleigh at once if-if the wedding does not take

"'Pon my word. I don't see how i can !" remarked Harold Tempest. "We shall see," said Vane. "It rests with Lady Florence."

As they drove up to the Grange they could plainly observe the signs of the prevailing excitement. Footmen and grooms, with white favors, stood about waiting for the guests; a group of villagers, in their Sunday best, and with favors also, and huge bunches of primoses and violets, hung about the gates and clustered in groups on the roads leading to the church.

Vane and young Tempest entered the house, and were met by Lady Florence's maid. The bride, already attired in her white satin and Brussels lace, had watched for his coming and sent to greet him.

"Her ladyship's love, sir," said the maid; "and she will come down as soon as possible." Vane nodded and passed into the

library. As he crossed the hall, the ervants noticed his haggard face, and the grave countenance of the best man, and exchanged glances and whispered

"More like a funeral than a wedding.

"Vane found the earl in the library. The old man was not in the best of humors. He hated a wedding, not only because of its attendant fuss, but because it necessitated early risings, and he did not get down usually till the world was well aired.

"Oh, here you are!" he said, rather "Thank the Lord, it will soon shortly. be all over! I swear that if I were go ng to be married again-which Heaven forbid !-I'd take the woman on my arm and be married at a registrar's, with his clerk for witness. How do, Harold ? Years since I've seen you-when you were in the chicken stage-all legs nd wings. You're looking- No, I'm hanged if I can say you are looking well! Why, I'm dashed ir you don't look as if you'd spent the night before the wedding as we used to in the good old times-three bottles a piece, and the

bridegroom first under the table !" "Well, Lord Warlock, we've-we've bad news," stammered Harold Tempest and then he told him.

The earl was terribly shocked and "I knew it would happen!" he declared. "I always told him he'd break his neck over that cursed coaching business! And the boy, too! Oh, Lord such a nice boy ! But-" He started and looked at Vane, who stood by the window,

haggard and silent. "Then you are the new earl, eh, Vane? Heavens! who'd have thought you'd ever get the title?" Vane nodded gloomily. The old man leaned back in his chair, shading his eyes with his hand for a moment or two; then he looked up suddenly with a

"But what the devil are you doing here, Vane? You ought to be at West-

"The-the wedding, sir," he said, in a low voice. The earl stared at him aghast.

"Wedding-wedding! Why, you know there can't be any wedding to-day. What! Westleigh and his boy lying dead, and you talk of a wedding! it must be put off. Harold, go and tell them the news, and send down to the church to stop those confounded bells. Wedding! You must be out of your mind to talk about it on such a day as this. The marriage must be put off till after the funeral, at any rate."

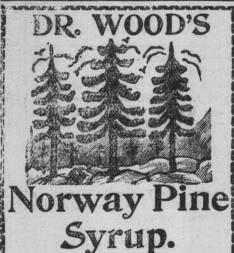
CHAPTER XXXIX. As Lord Warlock spoke, Lady Flor-

ence entered. She was fully dressed. and looked like a queen in her nuptial splendor. It is said that a beautiful bride is an anomaly; that the dead white suits no complexion, and that a woman never looks to worse advantage Harold Tempest started. He thought woman. She was pale-as becomes a ingly, as if she were uncertain how he would receive her after the scene of last night; and when he came forward she grasped his hand with one of hers and covered it with the other. She took no notice whatever of Harold Tempest; it seemed as if, for her, there were only one man in the world. "Vane," she said, "what is it papa is saying? What does he mean by say-

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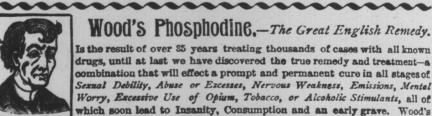
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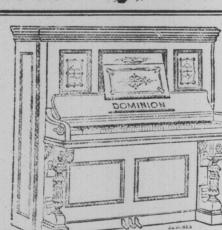
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