



OIL OF CALIFORNIA

very much as if she should like to walk out; but, resisting the inclination, she took off her glove and wrote her name and address.

Then the young lady in charge of the office opened another book, and read in a monotone the names which clearly indicated her disgust at the whole business.

"Governess: French, Italian, German, music, good English. Must be certificated. Six children. Salary twenty pounds per annum. Will that do?"

Poor Constance looked at her unsympathetic face aghast. "I am afraid not," she said. "I know neither Italian nor German."

"No! Then I'm afraid you will be difficult to suit. Almost all of them know German, at any rate," remarked the young lady. "Oh! here's another. French, English, usual accomplishments. Salary sixteen pounds per year."

"I think that might do," said Constance, her spirits rising somewhat. "Oh, and there's something else. 'Must have a good contralto voice and be a good player on the violin.'"

Constance's heart sank again. "That will not do," she said. "I can not play anything excepting the piano."

"No! Well, that's all we've got," said the young lady, with the most profound indifference. "If we should hear of anything we'll let you know. You are not very particular, I suppose?"

"No," said Constance, quietly. "Good-morning," and she went out again, feeling rather more wretched than before as she joined the throng in front of the shops.

Five minutes after she had left, the old man who had inquired his way of her entered the shop, and asked if he could engage a governess.

The young lady was much more polite this time, there being a great difference between a person who wants a situation and one who has one to fill. The old gentleman examined the list—a lengthy one—very carefully, and took a note of one or two names, especially that of Miss Constance Grahame, paid the half-crown fee, and departed.

A few minutes afterward he was bowing along in a hansom to Kensington Park Gardens, and alighted at the residence of Mr. Rawson Fenton. The usual crowd was waiting in the hall, but the old gentleman went straight up and was at once ushered to the great man's room.

Rawson Fenton was hard at work at his table, and the secretary at his, as if they had never left it, and having got rid of the secretary, Rawson Fenton nodded coolly to the detective.

"You have lost no time," he said, quietly enough; but the detective was a keen observer by trade and instinct, and saw his employer's eyes lighten and the clean-cut lips curve into a smile.

"No, sir," he said; "and I have been very fortunate. I happened to find the cabman who drove the young lady from the station, and the rest was easy." He placed the scrap of paper bearing Constance's address on the table, and continued his report. "I felt sure she would run out this morning, so I watched the house," he said as he told how he had followed Constance to the registry office.

"I recognized her at once; indeed, the young lady is not easily mistaken," he added, significantly.

Rawson Fenton leaned his head on his hand, his acute brain hard at work. Constance was found at last, and was near him. But how to keep her there?

"I'm afraid you are still tired, Miss Grahame," she said, gently. "Yes, I think I am," admitted Constance, trying to smile.

"Was it well to go out this morning?" said Mrs. Mervyn in a kindly voice. "Well, it was necessary," replied Constance, bravely. "I went to look for a situation, but—and she sighed—it seems very difficult to get one. People are all so clever now, and do not want a stupid person like myself."

"Is there so much hurry?" said Mrs. Mervyn in a low voice. Constance flushed. "Yes, there is," she said; "I am very poor. I have so very little money, and—"

"She stopped. Mrs. Mervyn's thin hand patted the table-cloth negligently. "Don't let that distress you so much, Miss Grahame," she said, timidly, her face flushing too. "You are welcome to remain here if it suits you—if you like."

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For a moment, a moment only, Mr. Thompson seemed surprised; then he chuckled and shook his head. "No, no, that wouldn't do! I want them copied out with a wide space between the lines so that I can write what notes I please between them. Do you understand?"

Constance's face brightened. "Yes, I understand now," she said. "Very good; and you can undertake this for me, Miss Grahame? I ought to say that it may prove a long job."

"It can not be too long for me," she said. "I only hope I shall not make any mistakes."

He nodded. "I am quite sure you will not; and you can begin at once—to-day, say?"

"I can begin at once," she replied, eagerly. "That's right," he said, cheerily. "And now we can come to the important question of the remuneration."

Constance flushed and shook her head. "I don't know anything about that," she said.

He eyed her for a moment, and Constance thought he was carefully considering how little he might offer her, whereas it was the other way with him.

"Wait—let me see," he said; "I shall keep you working, say—well, probably three hours a day. Would three pounds a week be enough?"

It seemed a great deal too much to Constance, even though she did not know that such work would be well paid for, as the market goes, by half the sum.

Mr. Thompson, the detective, looked at her with a faint trace of anxiety. Had he offered her too much and so roused her suspicion?

But Constance met his gaze frankly. "It seems a great deal for so little," she said.

"That's what we are agreed," he said, promptly. "I was afraid you would think I was not enough. Very well, then, I've only to leave you the book and—oh, let me see, I will call for the work at the end of the week."

He rose and laid the book on the table. Constance rose too, her face flushed. "And—and you do not want any references?" she said.

He shook his head. "No; why should I? And, if you'll pardon me, my dear young lady, your face is sufficient reference for me. I am a student of human nature as well as of flowers."

Constance looked down. "Oh, let me see, I'd better see your handwriting," he said.

Constance took a sheet of note-paper and wrote her name as distinctly as she could, and handed it to him. He laid it down again with a "Yes, yes," of satisfaction. "That will do very nicely, you will remain here, I suppose; I mean you do not think of leaving for any cause?"

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She thrust the question from her mind as she could, and, timing herself exactly, got back to Mrs. Mervyn's at the end of the prescribed hour, and fell to work.

In the afternoon Mrs. Mervyn persuaded her to take another rest, and Constance walked through some of the large thoroughfares and looked at the shops; but her mind was fixed upon the past, as it always was, excepting when she was at work, and so it came to pass, as it always does, that she went to the work as a positive relief; but even while she was writing, the face of the marquis would sometimes rise before her and the printed page, and she would hear the echo of his deep musical voice.

And at times a strange sadness fell upon her; a yearning so vague and shadowy that she could not analyze it. But it was dangerously like an intense longing to see that face and hear that voice again.

It was a lonely life! Day after day passed with scarcely a break in the work, excepting that of a walk in the park or a talk with Mrs. Mervyn. She read a little, but the books seemed vapid and tame beside her own experience.

She began to feel craving for something, she knew not what; she thought of Arol, and longed with an intensity of longing beyond all words for the sight of his face, the sound of his loving prattle, the long silences when he was leaning against her, and she had calculated it would be a week before she could see him. She was paler and thinner, and there was gradually creeping into the lovely eyes, like a shadow, an expression of sadness and apathy. The end of the week came, and the results of her toil were apparent in the pile of carefully written sheets.

"I almost think I have earned my three pounds!" she said to Mrs. Mervyn as she showed her the heap of paper.

Mrs. Mervyn smiled sadly. "Thirty?" she said in her subdued voice. "You have been working too hard. I knew you would."

"No, no," said Constance, eagerly. "I wanted to show Mr. Thompson how much I could do. I do hope he will come to-day. If he should not—"

She turned away with a faint sigh. The morning passed. She would not go out, in case her employer should arrive during her absence; and all the afternoon she sat and waited.

Had he forgotten the day, or had she misunderstood him? Mrs. Mervyn brought her up a cup of tea as the evening closed in, but Constance could scarcely find voice in which to thank her; and when, after a few words of encouragement, she left the room, Constance paced up and down, feeling utterly dispirited and sick at heart.

Suddenly she heard a knock at the door, and hurriedly getting her papers together, she stood and waited, her heart beating fast with the reaction of hope.

Mrs. Mervyn came in. "The gentleman—"

"The gentleman—"

"The gentleman—"

"The gentleman—"

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has changed, my heart remains the same. Now as then, Constance, I love you. It is this that I have come here to-day to say."

Constance, pale and motionless, listened in silence. "You are rich?" she said in a low voice.

"Yes," he replied, quietly, and with no trace of vaunting in his earnest voice. "There are few men, even in this London, richer than I am."

"Then," she said, flashing upon him—then my father, her voice broke slightly, "was not deceived, and you have grown rich on the secret for which he gave his reason and life?"

"He did not die for an instant."

"You mean the secret of the Jasper rock," she said, quietly, almost sadly. "You forget that, if secret there was, it lived only and died with him. You wrong me, Constance. I left the hut immediately after you, I was carried away by the rangers. Had I stayed and known the discovery your father fancied he had made, I should not have robbed him or you. The place was mine."

He spoke quietly, with an air and tone of unshakable confidence that almost touched Constance. "You are rich?" she said in a low voice.

"Do you doubt me?" he said. "It was mine from the beginning. I have the deeds—you shall see them."

She put out her hand. "It does not matter," she said. "But do not betray me by so unjust a suspicion. What I rob you, for whom I would lay down my life! of whom I have thought day and night for all this long and weary time! Ah, Constance, do not treat me so coldly. Surely, surely, such devotion, such faithfulness as mine is better than any other. I come to you with the same love, as true and passionate as ever, and lay it at your feet."

He moved nearer to her, and stretched out his hand as he spoke, his passion breaking down, or rather breaking through, his usual calm. His face pale and white, his lips trembling.

Constance shrank back as she had shrunk from him in the hut, and then as now his face grew set and determined.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" he said, huskily. "Does the constant love I bear you count for nothing with you? Won't you say one kind word to me when I tell you that through all the time we have been separated I have thought of no other woman than you, that I have worked with no other object than that of gaining a fortune worthy of your acceptance? If my success has been sweet, it has only been because of the hope—the hope that never left me, and that never and strengthened me—that you would consent to share it. Listen to me, Constance. Be my wife, and I will place you in a position which any woman would prize. There is no desire you can form that I will not gratify. Wealth I possess already, rank is within my reach. Give me but your love to encourage me, and I will not rest until I have gained a coronet for you! Ah, Constance, don't turn from me! There are many better men than I know, but the best, the highest, could not love you more dearly, more truly, more devotedly than I do!"

He stopped at last, breathing hard, his eager eyes fixed on her face as if by mere force of will he could melt her heart and turn it toward him.

Constance, pale, white to the lips, stood with one hand pressed against her breast, the other grasping the back of a chair. No woman could listen to such a passionate torrent, such an outpouring of a man's heart, unmoved; but the hot, passionate words only made her shrink from him with deeper repugnance.

"I will not listen to any more," she said at last, her voice coming with difficulty. "As I told you long ago, I—I—Mrs. Fenton, if you have any regard for me, if you have any pity for me, please leave me!"

He stood and looked at her, his breath coming and going heavily. "Do you realize all that is meant by your rejection?" he said in a low voice. "If you were a queen you could not dismiss me more heartlessly, more scornfully—"

"No, no," she said; "not scornfully."

"But yes," he retorted. "I am no boaster, but if I had begged the hand of one of the noblest in the kingdom I might not have been refused."

"Ah, why then do you come to me?" she said, with a weary impatience.

"Because I love you and can love no other woman," he responded, passionately. "Do you think I have not tried to crush my love for you out of my heart, that I have not fought hard against it, and tried to forget you? Yes, I have struggled as few men have struggled, but all in vain. You are necessary to my happiness. Life without you is not worth living, and I cannot will not give up all hope of winning you."

His voice grew hoarse, and he swept his hand with a passionate gesture across his brow. "Think what you are refusing, Constance," he said. "You are a woman now, not an inexperienced girl. You have seen something of life, of its trials and misfortunes. It has been a hard life for you till now. Come to me, be my wife, and I will make it all happiness for you. There is nothing you can ask that I will not give you."

He looked round the room. "Think! In exchange for this poverty and squallor I offer you a place among the best and highest. Come to me, be my wife, and I will make it all happiness for you. There is nothing you can ask that I will not give you."

Constance raised her head. "You say you know me, and you ask me to sell myself," she said, in a low voice of indignation. "Do not say anything more. Even if I were as mercenary as you think me, I am not yet helpless, and instinctively, perhaps, unconsciously, her glance fell upon the pile of paper she had covered so laboriously.

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