

ner out and tell her so, without disloyalty to his dead friend.

Yet, before doing this, he must resolve certain doubts that, against his will, continually troubled his mind.

The weeks grew into months and still he found these questions unanswered, until one day the matter for his debate was settled by the news that Lady Dyart—the widow of a year—was to be married again and to Mr. de Freyne. The talk about her, which had abated, flowed once more and reached so high a tide that some of it was carried to Clementina herself. It had such an effect on her that she broke off her engagement, and retired from social life, realising at last the reason why so many of her former friends had made no attempt to draw her from the seclusion of her time of mourning.

When Lord Wrexham heard that she had thrown Mr. de Freyne over and had shut herself up in a lonely villa in Italy, his sensation was one of relief. His faith in her, dimmed by all that had happened, revived; and he wrote at once telling her he would soon be yachting in the Mediterranean and wished very much to see her.

But before her answer came, a curious thing happened—one of those coincidences that occur in real life, and seem stranger than fiction.

He was motoring on his way to Southampton to join his yacht when he came upon the scene of an accident in which a woman had been knocked down by a runaway horse and badly hurt. He conveyed her to the nearest infirmary and was present when she died there, almost immediately.

Just before the end, to his surprise, she recognised him and said she had known him well by sight in her days of service, when she was cook to Sir Francis and Lady Dyart, in Mount-st. It was her last place; she had been living on her savings since then.

"Her ladyship was an angel," she faltered in broken sentences, "and I worshipped her. I wasn't the only one—she had a lot of love given to her. I did what I wouldn't have done for anyone else

in the world; I soiled my hands to get her free. She wasn't happy and I knew what she wanted—and gave it to her."

"What do you mean?" questioned Wrexham eagerly. "Won't you tell me—for Lady Dyart's sake?"

The woman looked at him comprehensively. "I see!" she said, "We'll I'll tell you for your own sake, because you were a good friend to her and she liked you. I gave Sir Francis what the Indian woman gave her master."

"Of your own accord?" demanded Wrexham breathlessly.

"Lady Dyart knew nothing about it," the woman answered evasively. "She wouldn't have harmed a fly—let alone her husband. Sir Francis and she had drifted apart, not through her fault either, and—I thought I would set things right."

And then, with a sigh, the woman died.

But Lord Wrexham, with a lightened heart, went on his way rejoicing and before many days had passed found himself at the Villa Andrea, on the shores of an Italian lake.

Lady Dyart was in her garden, and as she came through the cypress trees towards him, he thought what a lovely, desolate figure she looked, in her black dress, and how changed, in her pensive sadness, to the brilliant Society star whom he had last seen. Yet there seemed a new gentleness and sweetness about her that made her, to him, infinitely more attractive.

"You are the first of my old friends to come to me," she said, as she gave him her hand. "I thought I had lost them all."

He kept the hand in his while he answered: "I was coming two months ago, and then I heard some news that stopped me."

"You mean about my engagement?" she said quite simply. "But that is all over now, over and done with, for good." Then as he looked surprised she went on: "I should like to tell you all about it, Lord Wrexham, if I may. We are such old friends and—and I wish to justify myself to you."

"Before you justify yourself," he said, "I want to tell you that I love you—that I have loved you all along—and that I have come here to ask you to be my wife."

She made an exclamation of surprise, and flushed rose-red, while her eyes had the shimmer of sudden tears.

"You care for me?" she said wonderingly. "You believe in me—in spite of all that has been said and thought?"

"I believed in you, thank God, when I wrote and asked you to see me. Since then I have learnt something that I will tell you when you have given me my answer. Will you marry me, Clem? I have waited a long time—and very hopelessly—for you. Will you make me happy at last?"

"But are you sure it would make you happy?" she questioned. "Happiness seems far away from me, and I am doubtful of myself and you. I have felt so lonely—so deserted!"

"You shall never be lonely any more," he said, and he took her in his arms.

A little later, when they sat on the terrace together, she told him of all that had happened to change her life.

"I think Eustace de Freyne had a strange influence over me," she said. "I have wondered sometimes whether he did not cast a spell on me. He was a Mexican, you know, on his mother's side, and had curious thoughts and ways that made him different from Europeans. I always wanted to please and attract him, yet when I did so it repelled me. I was frightened of him. Frank had a great dislike to him, and gradually he seemed to create a barrier between my husband and myself. We never had a real quarrel, Frank and I, but we ceased to be companions—we grew distant and constrained to one another. And then Frank died—so suddenly, you know—and I felt miserable and self-reproachful, and made up my mind never to see Eustace again. But he seemed to have the power to magnetise me, and when we met at last and he told me I must marry him, I had no courage to resist. But one day a rumour reached me that I was suspected of causing poor Frank's death.

I went to Eustace and told him of it with indignation, and he laughed in my face.

"It may be true," he said; "you may have caused it indirectly, and in any case it was a happy release for you."

"Then the scales seemed to fall from my eyes, and I saw him suddenly as he really was—saw him as Frank must have seen him, and then and there I left him. He has tried entreaties, threats, commands; they are all useless. He has lost his power over me. I no longer dread him. He is nothing to me.

"I have been realising all I have lost through him, and I have even dared to think—" She broke off in agitation, her face white and anguished.

"Think of it no more," said Lord Wrexham. "The past is done, and cannot be undone. Come home to your own country, to your old friends, with me, and forget this man's existence. Your future is in my care now, Clem, and I mean to make it worth living—for both of us."

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