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than a torrent of words, and then she turned away reluctantly.

"I must go now. Farewell, Master Vesey! Esmond, for my sake be careful!"

She let him kiss both his hands again and again and escort her to the door; and as he put her into her chair, more words of caution on her part, and rapturous thanks on his were exchanged; but then—the chair was in motion, and the girl turned for one more tender smiling glance. Suddenly her face changed, stiffened, paled her eyes opened and grew cold and hard, the smile froze on her lips as she sank back in her chair with her gaze yet futtily fixed upon the thing that had arrested it.

By chance had her eyes wandered to the window, and leaning from it, watching herself, she saw Stella's beautiful face.

Its dusky hair, its glorious eyes, its vivid coloring, set off and heightened by the picturesqueness of gipsy costume, told Lady Joan, with the swift intuition of feminine jealousy, whom she was.

"How dare he flout her in my very face?" she said with all the unreasonableness of outraged feelings. "But oh, how lovely she is!"

All unconscious of what had happened—for he had not seen the face at the window, nor the change in Joan's expression—Esmond Vesey went back to his room, and for the first time he remembered Stella.

As he uttered her name she came out, silent, sullen, dogged-looking, with all the brilliancy and sparkle fled from her face, and an angry lurid light in the black eyes.

"It is time for me to go now," she coldly said. "Farewell. I will keep my promise. I will meet you on the edge of the moor and guide you across it."

"Out of the track of your own people, Stella?" Vesey laughed.

"I have promised, so I will do it. You will not have to look for me; I shall be there when you appear."

With her lithe quick grace, she turned to the door, and would have passed through but the young man checked her.

"Are you leaving me in anger, Stella? Has anything offended you?" he asked, with all the short-sighted stupidity man is capable of.

"You do not want me, save for this one thing. I will not fail you there!" she spoke with proud short tone.

"But I do want you, Stella. I count upon your assistance more than you know; and again I repeat, I can never fail in gratitude for what you have done."

She flashed a look at him he did not comprehend.

Passion, reproach, jealous, burning, yearning love, were strangely mingled in the dark mysterious orbs; then with an unexpected swift movement, she bent down, and pressed her hot lips to his hand, and was gone.

CHAPTER IV.

"Were you successful, Lady Joan? Did you find our friend at home and disengaged?"

Lord Bellinger spoke with a sneer, yet with some anxiety in his tones, and he bent very near the lady's beautiful face as he bowed in greeting.

What he saw there apparently pleased him; the grey eyes were bright and cold as ice, the lovely lips were pressed together one red spot burned on each cheek.

"Your interest in my actions is flattering," her ladyship said in her haughtiest accents. "I saw Mr. Vesey, and delivered the message I had for him."

"I trust you saw nothing to cause you any annoyance?" Lord Bellinger's tones lowered solicitously. "The moment after I had suggested to you to pay this visit, I remembered—I feared. I trust indeed you saw or met with nothing disagreeable to you, Lady Joan? I would cut my tongue out rather than through me you should be subjected to any possible indignity or outrage."

"If your lordship could possibly express yourself with more coherency and clearness, the sacrifice of your tongue need not be demanded, I think. I am not accustomed to encounter indignities wherever it pleases me to go."

He drew a deep breath. "You did not see her then. That is well! Possibly, indeed, he had dismissed her ere you appeared."

"Dismissed whom?"

For her life she could not help that question. Jealousy and curiosity conquered pride for one moment.

As if reluctantly, Lord Bellinger replied:

"I referred to Esmond Vesey's latest—admiration? a gipsy girl, beautiful as an artist's creation or a poet's dream. It happened that I saw a lovers' meeting between them yesternight, and I remembered too late, that she entered his house with him. I have heard of her, of course—in fact, he confided to me his passion. Vesey is not one to keep his conquests secret; but—but I must apologize to you a thousand times, Lady Joan, for my stupid forgetfulness on this matter."

"Why apologize to me?" She rose as she spoke, and cold and proud, as a marble goddess faced him with straight scornful gaze and unflinching mien. "If it pleases Master Vesey to fill his house with tribes of gipsies, what moment's consequence can it be to me?"

"There would be little danger in a tribe; this one lovely specimen detached from her natural protectors is—well, a different

matter, I think!" He laughed a laugh which made her blood boil, but in imperturbable pride she still spoke. "Of course, it is neither in my power nor my will to set right the innumerable mistakes your lordship appears to be in the habit of making, but your apparently exaggerated idea of my friendship for Master Vesey I feel inclined to correct. As a staunch supporter of our cause I honor him, as a member of our secret band I associate with him; but beyond that—for all else—"

She flung out her little jewelled hands with a gesture inexpressibly significant.

"For all else he is nothing to you," Lord Bellinger uttered eagerly, breathlessly, triumphantly, and his eyes glittered, his face flushed, as he bent it nearer that lovely girlish one.

"For all else he is as little to me as you are," Lady Joan uttered calmly; the pain at her heart, which was enough to blanch her lips and whiten her face, made her forget her natural courtesy.

"I appreciate the kindness of that comparison," Lord Bellinger said, his face black with wrath.

"I appreciate the unselfish kindness which prompted you to give me the information you have done," her ladyship said languidly. "Now, I must unwillingly ask you to retire, Lord Bellinger; my time is much occupied this morning."

She bowed his dismissal, graceful and calm as ever, but she had borne as much as she could.

As the door closed upon her retreating guest, she put her hand upon her heart with a sharp little cry of pain, and swaying backwards fell crouched upon the chair behind her.

How long she remained thus, motionless silent—save for a deep quivering breath that shook her frame now and again—she did not know; her little hands were clinched so tightly that the rings cut into the tender fingers, her eyes were closed, her beautiful lips pressed together as in effort to bear pain.

Presently her servant opened the door and said, with some hesitation and dissatisfaction in her manner:

"Here is a young person asking to see your ladyship for a minute or two."

"I shall not trouble you for more than that," a low strange voice said.

And, following the woman with her swift noiseless movements the gipsy girl stepped into the room.

Lady Joan rose, and for a moment these two strange rivals stood facing each other silently. Then Lady Joan waved her hand to the servant to retire, and motioned Stella to take a seat; then once more the glances of the two women turned upon each other, mentally appraising the other's beauty.

Lady Joan was looking ill—pale, haggard. Her eyes were dull, her exquisite coloring faint, her face hard and cold.

Stella, on the contrary, had never looked more lovely.

Excitement had brightened her eyes and deepened the rich glowing tints of her southern face; her red lips were parted, showing the dazzling teeth; her attitude, in its proud natural grace, displayed the perfect contour of her form to full advantage.

Regarding her wondrous beauty, the Lady Joan felt the stinging pain at heart grow keener, while a feeling of bitter repulsion rose in her mind towards the girl; but her own subtle superiority, the inimitable charm of manner and courteous grace, displayed itself as she quietly spoke:

"You wish to see me—on business, I suppose."

"I wished to see you," the gipsy girl said slowly, and then she came a step nearer, her dark radiant eyes fixed upon the pale patrician face, drinking in each detail of its beauty. "You are a friend of Master Vesey's; he told me so."

The grey eyes flashed like an electric spark, the color leaped into the pale proud face.

Lady Joan's beauty was suddenly increased a hundredfold. Her lips trembled for a moment, then she said with what composure she could collect:

"The next time you hold discussion with Master Vesey, perhaps you may remember to him with my compliments that I am unaccustomed to have my name bandied from lip to lip."

"Ah, you think I am not good enough to utter it. You are too high and proud to think me even fit for that, and yet—yet, Lady Joan Ambrose, at this moment I, the poor low gipsy girl, hold in my hand the safety—the life of the man you love."

The thrilling expression of the low rapid utterances no pen could describe; they seemed to fall upon and penetrate the listener's very heart and paralysed her lips for a moment; only the proud grey eyes challenged the audacious speaker.

With a laugh, Stella responded to the challenge.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

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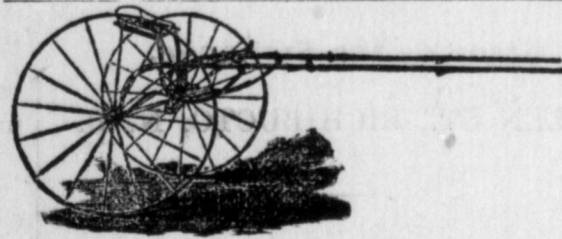
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OF THE
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Outstanding Assurance Dec. 31, 1890, \$631,016,666
New Assurance Written in 1890, 173,254,191
Premium Income in 1890, 25,357,523
Interest and Other Income, 5,035,745
Total Income in 1890, 30,393,268
Payments to Policy holders, 11,842,858
Assets, 107,150,309
Liabilities (4 per cent.), 84,221,225
Surplus, \$22,929,074
Ratio of Assets to Liabilities, 127 per cent.

Of the Life Assurance Companies of the world THE EQUITABLE has for ten years transacted the largest annual new business (in 1890, \$173,254,191); for ten years held the largest 4 per cent. surplus (December, 1890, \$22,929,074); for four years held the largest outstanding business (December, 1890, \$631,016,666); while its superior financial strength is shown by its high ratio of Assets to Liabilities, 127 per cent.

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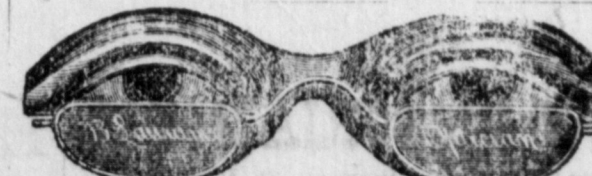
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