

Mr. Charles, Floor Walker.

IN TWO INSTALMENTS.

"I was not referring to your possible winnings at cards. Could you not sell some property, or raise a mortgage?"

"Now you are talking about what you don't understand, and therefore, woman-like you are making a fool of yourself. If I sell so much as a tree—but I can't do it, so what's the use of talking? My heir is to inherit everything as it stood when I came in for it. I wish to goodness you had married him before he got himself tied up to that doll he calls his wife."

"First cousins are not supposed to marry," observed Lady Rosamund. "And Fred never showed any signs of wishing to annex me with the rest of the property. Couldn't you repay Sir Empson out of your private income?"

"Couldn't I buy the moon?" said Lord Barenans. "For Heaven's sake don't let us have any more of this idiotic nonsense! Make up your mind to marry the man; it may be the last chance you'll get of anything worth accepting. You've refused far too many as it is. Better take my advice, and think it over quietly, Rosamund."

"I don't mind taking your advice so far: and, as I can think more quietly and thoroughly when alone, perhaps you will permit me to retire to my own room for an hour or so?"

So saying, Lady Rosamund betook herself from her father's presence.

She smiled rather bitterly as she returned to the solitude of her boudoir.

"The pity of it is that I cannot feel sure how much of it is true. If he is really borrowing all that money of Sir Empson, it must be for some reason other than that of intending to pay his gambling debts. I don't believe he owes anything like so much. He is far too cautious a player. However that may be, it is impossible that I can marry Sir Empson, and it is as well that he should know it without further delay; then, perhaps, I shall learn the truth about his forty thousand pounds."

CHAPTER IV.

Rosamund began to wonder wearily if all men wore a mask—one fitting them so badly that the first threatened to upset their cherished plans for advancing their own happiness or well-being, sufficed to dislodge it and reveal the ugly fact that out of the face behind looked a devil of avarice or selfishness, or some other equally unpleasant vice.

Sir Empson had couched his proposal of marriage in almost courtly terms, laying great stress on the advantages that must inevitably accrue to himself from a union with one so charming and accomplished as Lady Rosamund Loftus; and only hinting at any possible advantage to be reaped by herself should she decide to honour him with her hand.

Yet, no sooner had Rosamund spoken her grateful but determined refusal, than down dropped the mask, though the suitor was quite unaware that he had betrayed himself to those experienced eyes as, dangling his eye-glass slowly, he said—

"I inferred from something said to me by the earl this morning that you would be at least together averse to marriage with me. Did his lordship inform you of any particulars concerning our conversation?"

"He told me that you had offered him forty thousand pounds for me. I think he was rather surprised at my fetching so much, considering that I am nearly thirty years old."

"My dear Lady Rosamund!"

Sir Empson gasped a little, recovered himself, and went on—

"You do your father and myself a gross injustice by imagining that—"

"Oh, of course, I don't pretend to insinuate that you put the matter as plainly as I have done. But it amounts to the same thing, when you come to argue it out. My father is tired of having me constantly with him. He tries to marry me to somebody on an average of once in three months.

"His tastes are extravagant, and he is fond of money. You come along with your very handsome offer of 'lending' him forty thousand pounds, with an additional promise of settling an annual income of ten thousand on myself if I consent to marry you."

"This insures my father a constant borrowing supply without again appealing directly to you. If you can see anything in such an arrangement, except a deal between two business men, Sir Empson—myself being the thing sold and bought—I shall be glad if you will enable me to see it also."

"Of course, if you are determined to look at it in that light, Lady Rosamund, there is nothing more to say, I will, therefore, take my departure, though I must warn you that this will be a serious disappointment to the earl."

"I suppose so. He must necessarily do without the anticipated purchase money. But you will not be hard on him, Sir Empson? I fancy he really has one or two debts of honor, as he calls them, to settle. I know absolutely nothing about business and money making, and all that; but I hope you won't mind my suggesting that, with that very paying shop of yours in High street, and the others in other towns

"My dear Lady Rosamund! Again Sir Empson was reduced to a gasping condi-

tion, and this time his condition was more serious than before. He turned white, and red, and blue, and white again, while his mouth gaped until Rosamund began to fear he was going to have a fit. "Who told you?" he exclaimed at last.

She saw that she had the game in her own hands now.

"Somebody who is not like to tell anyone else; so you may set your mind at rest, Sir Empson. Are you really reluctant that it should be known? Then why leave your name over the door?"

"I am not the only Richmond in England," growled the discomfited baronet. "Can I depend on you to hold your tongue?"

"I think I may say 'Yes,' though, of course, it will depend on your future dealings with my father. Forty thousand is decidedly too high a sum to pay for silence concerning a thing there is not the slightest need to be ashamed of. But what do you say to five thousand?"

"Don't know anything about business and money-making, don't you, my lady? And yet you coolly propose to pocket five thousand pounds as a reward for holding your tongue about a little matter which does certainly not concern you."

Up went Lady Rosamund's patrician little head.

"You mistake, Sir Empson. Permit me to explain. As I told you just now, my father is continually worrying me to marry this man or that. I purpose using this money as a bribe with which to silence him and obtain peace for myself. You will, if you please, get my father's signature to a written promise that he will never again urge me to marry any man, and that he will make no objection to my choosing a husband for myself. In consideration of which he is to receive five thousand pounds, which you will gladly pay for the preservation of your business-secret, known only, so I believe, to myself and another, for whose silence I hold myself responsible."

"It isn't the earl, I suppose?"

"No; it is not my father."

"Well, here's my hand on it. I suppose I'm a fool to be ashamed of being in trade, but when you've purchased a title, and a country house, and all the rest of it, you don't want the shop pushed down your throat by everybody you meet."

"I did a deal or two in cotton some years ago, which turned out a lucky spec; and that enables me to say that I made my money in cotton. But it is these shops that keep me going—I don't mind owning as much to you. And now look here, Lady Rosamund, if you don't succeed in finding a man to your liking, please remember that my offer is still open, and I'll settle the remaining thirty-five of that forty thousand on you for your cleverness in dealing with your father and myself over this matter of marriage."

"I am not a gentleman by birth, but I think I can understand how a woman must feel to have every man she meets urged on her as a possible husband. I like you, and I admire you; and I hope we part good friends."

"The best of good friends, Sir Empson. Thank you for your generosity to my father and to myself."

"Oh, as to the earl, I don't care a straw, but I shall be glad to think I have made things a little easier for you. Mind you don't go and throw yourself away on some handsome vagabond who is not worth his salt."

"Which," said Lady Rosamund to herself, when she was once more alone, "is precisely what I purpose doing it I marry at all. Durry was never worth his salt yet—though I fancy he may be inclining that way a little now—but I know very well that, vagabond or no vagabond, I want him, and him only, of all the men I have ever met and flirted with, for my husband; and, if I cannot have him, I will live and die unmarried."

"Well?" said Lord Barenans, when they met at dinner.

"Sir Empson will probably call on you to-morrow, father."

"What? Have you been a sensible girl, after all?"

"I think I have. And I venture to hope that you also will think so, though I have certainly not promised to marry Sir Empson Richmond."

"What the deuce do you mean?"

"Suppose I hinted to Sir Empson that I preferred being his daughter-in-law to being his wife?"

"You did that? But I see you are fooling, as usual."

"As usual," she agreed. "What I did, or did not do, you will certainly learn from Sir Empson. It would be a pity for me to anticipate him."

And not another word on the subject could her father get out of her.

Rosamund ate her dinner almost in silence, and left him to recover his temper at his leisure.

"How close it is!" she said to herself, as she stood at her bedroom-window, looking eastwards, where big black clouds had gathered during the last hour. "I think I will go out; the house is simply 'sting.' But while she changed her shoes, a blinding flash of lightning made her blink, and listen expectantly for the resultant thunder.

It began rather far off, but rolled nearer and nearer, paused a second, and came on again with increasing force; rattled threat-

ingly nearly overhead, and gradually died away in the distance.

Then a few large drops of rain fell, and Rosamund slipped on her house-shoes again, deciding that it was better to be half-stuffed than to be drenched by a thunder-shower.

Another flash, followed by a louder peal, drew her to the window again.

To watch a storm, such as this promised to be, was always a treat for Lady Rosamund.

The few drops of rain became a heavy down pour, acting as most fitting accompaniment to the incessant flashes of lightning and the perpetual crashing of thunder.

In the midst of it she noticed that a man stood under the porch of a house nearly opposite—a tall man, wearing a brown cap and a macintosh that seemed familiar.

"Durry! Good heavens! 'has he been there all the time! The rain is beating that way. Why does he not stand under our porch?"

She knew why as well as though he had told her.

He could have no chance of seeing her unless he stood on the opposite side of the street.

With not a moment's hesitation she ran downstairs, and opened the hall door, in order to beckon to him.

He shook his head and she beckoned more imperatively.

Then she advanced into the drenching storm.

He was at her side in a moment, forcing her back into shelter.

"Lady Rosamund! Are you mad?"

She laughed as she shook the rain from her dress.

"I thought you were to stand over there," she retorted. "Come in here; I am alone. My father is at the club."

He hung his macintosh and cap in the hall and followed her into the parlour, in voluntarily closing the door behind him.

Rosamund walked to the window, but he did not follow her.

"Don't you love to watch a storm like this?" she asked, without turning round.

"It is enough that you give me shelter," he replied. "If I am seen at the window, what will your neighbors think? In a small town like this everybody is known. The whole feminine community would probably recognize one of the shopwalkers from Richmond and Price's."

She sent him a glance over her shoulder.

"Better the whole feminine community? I don't care a single raindrop for them. Come, Durry!"

How could he resist her?

He slowly obeyed her summons; but when he was close enough, he drew her from the window, behind the screen formed by the curtains.

"If you won't think for yourself, Rosamund, I must think for you. People are only too ready to talk, don't you know?"

"What do I care?"

She threw up her head, and met his eyes fearlessly.

Somehow—he never knew how it happened, but happen it most certainly did—before the next flash of lightning pierced the ever increasing gloom, Messrs. Richmond and Price's shop-walker—haberdashery department—held in his embrace the daughter of the Earl of Barenans.

"Darling!" he murmured passionately, adding to his presumption by pressing his lips to hers and drinking deep of love's sweet draught.

"Oh, Durry!" she whispered in an ecstasy of joy, "thank Heaven for this glorious storm!"

"I thank Heaven for the dear gift of your love," he answered. "It is mine, Rosamund?"

"Every inch of it!"

"This madness!" he murmured, presently smoothing the hair from her brow, and looking into her tender eyes "utter madness! But oh, how sweet while it lasts!"

"While it lasts?" She echoed questioningly, slipping an arm round his neck and drawing his head close to hers once more.

"While it lasts? What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I say, most dear of darlings! It is madness this love of mine for you; this love of yours for me!"

"But why?" she whispered, as their lips met again.

He hesitated to explain the many reasons why it would not do.

And while he hesitated Fate took him prisoner—a willing prisoner who was prepared to hug his chains.

During a brief lull in the storm they heard footsteps hurrying down the street.

A startling attack on the knocker, and a corresponding peal of the bell, made "Mr. Charles" lose his hold of Lady Rosamund Loftus, while she, in her turn, went to the window to see whatever might be visible of the reason for that tremendous summons of her landlady's hard-working housemaid.

Another moment, and the girl appeared at the parlor door.

"If you please, m'lady, there's a man wants to see you."

Rosamund stepped into the hall and confronted a waiter from the club to which her father belonged.

"You wish to speak to me? I am Lady Rosamund Loftus."

"Yes, my lady." The man twirled his drenched hat nervously. "It's—it's about the earl, my lady. His lordship has had a sort of fit, due to the lightning, my lady."

"Do you mean—the truth came to her with another flash of the vivid lightning which she had so enjoyed watching—'do you mean that—the storm—has killed—my father?'"

"Well, yes, my lady; I'm afraid so. Doctor Carnegie is with him; but he says 'tis all over, and he sent me along to prepare you for seeing him."

"You have accomplished your errand to the best of your ability. Go back and say that I am quite prepared."

The man retreated before the ghastly pallor in her cheeks and the feverish blaze in her eyes.

She returned to the sitting-room and held out her arms to her old maid.

"Durry, Durry! My father is dead! Kill d by the lightning. They will bring

him here presently. Stay with me, Durry, for I am afraid to be alone. My poor father! Is it not awful?"

So once more the earl's daughter was clasped in the shopwalker's arms, while he said all he could to soothe and comfort her, realizing her utter loneliness with a thrill of joy, which he tried to repress as having been born of utter selfishness.

But was he—the man who loved her—to regret the fact that there was no one to come between him and his love?

CHAPTER V.

Great was Rosamund's surprise and her lover's dismay when, after the earl had been laid to rest, they learned that he had been, if not exactly wealthy for a man in his position, at least not a pauper.

If he had not deprived his daughter of pleasure and luxury during his lifetime, it was, seemingly, in order that she should find herself a comparatively rich woman at his death.

She would have over a thousand a year and that, to a girl of her bringing up, looked untold wealth.

"Mr. Charles" learned what she called the 'good news' in a characteristic little note, which bade him call on her directly, he was off duty that evening, and discuss ways and means of leaving Richmond and Price without delay, and starting in a new line somewhere abroad.

"Bless her generous heart! Does she think I am going to rob her of her little bit of money? I wish to goodness she hadn't a penny piece in the world. I'd be content to work for her till I dropped—even at shop walking."

So the interview to which Richmond had looked forward so happily, ended in a different way to what she had anticipated and intended.

Lord Durham Carlos, it seemed, preferred the society of Maggie Brent to her own.

"I can think of no other possible reason for your desiring to remain beneath the surface of decent society," she declared wistfully when he had announced his intention of remaining with Messrs. Richmond and Price, at least for a time.

"This is nonsense, and you know it, Rosamund. Miss Brent is nothing to me. She is as good as engaged to young Richmond."

"That doesn't prevent her liking you best."

He was silent—Maggie Brent's likes and dislikes being a matter of perfect indifference to him.

But, womanlike, Rosamund put quite a different construction on his silence though pride forbade her to give utterance to her thoughts.

They parted coolly, and no sooner had the door closed behind her obstinate lover than the disappointed girl burst into tears—a thing she had not done for years.

Very much to her shame and disgust, another visitor was announced, while her eyes were still wet.

"Sir Empson Richmond!"

He imagined, of course, that her tears were shed in memory of the father who had been laid in his grave that day, and he began a kind little speech of condolence.

But Rosamund was too honest to act the hypocrite.

"Don't, please, Sir Empson. I have not yet shed a single tear for my father."

"What, then?" he asked. "Are you worrying about money? Because, if so, there is no reason for you to do so. I have with me the five thousand pounds I was going to hand over to the earl. It is yours now, to do as you like with."

"Oh, no! Indeed I could not take it. Besides, I do not need it, Sir Empson, a thousand thanks to you, all the same; I have more than enough money to keep me in comfort and even luxury."

"You don't say so! Your poor father gave me to understand that he was in difficulties."

"You must have misunderstood him. I have over a thousand a year."

"Bless my heart! Well, this is a surprise. I am really sorry, Lady Rosamund. I had looked forward to your having that five thousand pounds. But what were those tears about if they were neither for your father nor about money. Were you regretting having refused to marry me?"


"No, Sir Empson."

"Ah! I'd like you to tell me. Perhaps it is something I could put straight."

She shook her head, but she decided to reward him for his kindness by making a confidant of him, if only to prevent his thinking that she might some day change her mind concerning himself.

"It is nothing you can help me with, Sir

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Empson, because it is a question of incomprehensible obstinacy on the part of the man I love. I want him to take enough of my money to enable him to start work of some kind in some country big enough to provide work for all willing hands and heads. He has 'gone under,' as far as England is concerned. And my present trouble is that he seems disposed to stay there rather than accept my aid."

"A matter of pride, I suspect, my dear. Or another woman?"

"Don't run away with that idea. Do I know him at all?"

"You ought to—she smiled wickedly now—he is one of Richmond and Price's shopwalkers—"Mr. Charles"—haberdashery department."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Sir Empson. "You in love with one of the those fellows! What do you say he's called?"

"Mr. Charles' is what he is called just at present. In reality he is Lord Durham Carlos, third son of the Duke of Rothstora."

"Lord Durham! That good-for-nothing chap? I know him, or used to. What made a sensible girl like you take a fancy to such a ne'er-do-well?"

"I am not sure that he is a ne'er-do-well, for one thing. For another, I suppose I couldn't help myself. We were chums when we were children."

"Humph! And who's the other woman?"

"A Miss Maggie Brent, one of Richmond and Price's assistants. She also is in the haberdashery department."

"I shall make it my business to interview 'Mr. Charles' without delay, and find out the truth of this matter."

Rosamund shrugged her shoulders.

"You had better spare yourself the trouble, Sir Empson."

"Allow me to be the best judge of that, my dear."

And with that the baronet took his departure.

By means of a question or two he ascertained "Mr. Charles'" private address; and before he slept that night, he had an interview with him which resulted in the following note to the girl in which he took such an affectionate interest.

"My dear Lady Rosamund,—I have lost no time in lecturing my shopwalker (haberdashery department) on the sinfulness of pride. It is a little human failing of which I desire the monopoly. There is no other woman in the case. 'Mr. Charles' will probably call on you in the morning for orders.—Yours very faithfully, Empson Richmond."

Rosamund's cheeks burned, though her heart throbbed joyously.

It was rather hateful to know that the baronet had pleaded with Lord Durham on her behalf, and yet it was blissful to think that that obstinate Durry had been brought to his senses.

He arrived next morning, before she had finished breakfast.

She was late, for she had overslept herself, having stayed awake the first half of the night trying to realize her new position and to feel some regret, however slight, at having lost her father.

But this last was impossible.

She had felt it her duty to remain with him, and attend to his often exacting commands to the best of her ability, instead of earning her living in another way, which she would infinitely have preferred to do. Her life with her father had been entirely empty of love, and frequently without any sort of amusement or relaxation for months at a time, her chief interest and occupation being to keep down expenses in the house, in order that the earl might thoroughly enjoy himself when out of it.

She had quite expected that he would spend every penny he could touch, and so leave her to face the world as best she could; the title and estates going, at his death, to the cousin whom he had always hated for being his heir.

For the fact that she was not penniless Rosamund fancied she might thank the storm which had caused her father's untimely death rather than any intention on his part to provide for her.


Had he lived long enough, he would probably have died a pauper.

How was it possible, therefore, to grieve for him?

She had given up the attempt when she

(CONTINUED ON FIFTEENTH PAGE.)

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