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The Heir to Beecham Park

CHAPTER II.

He glanced at her dress as they sauntered along the colonnade to the conservatory, mentally declaring it to be most charming and simple, deciding it to be most probably the work of her own hands, and would have been thunderstruck had any one informed him that the innocent-looking garment had cost nearly fifty pounds.

Vane Charteris saw her cousin's admiration, and her heart thrilled. Once more she would taste the joy of power, she would no longer be neglected. A vision of future triumph filled her mind at that instant. She would wake from her indifference. The world should see her again as queen, reigning this time by charm and fascination as well as by her beauty. The color mounted to her cheeks, the light flashed in her eyes at the thought and she turned with animation and interest to converse with the man beside her.

"You have a splendid home, Stuart," she observed, after they had walked through the heavily scented conservatory to the drawing-room. "I am glad I have come."

"And I am heartily glad to welcome you, I have heard so much of my Cousin Vane, such stories of triumphs and wonders, that I began to despair of ever receiving her here."

"You forget," said Vane, softly, waving her great feather fan to and fro, "there is an attraction here now that at other times was wanting."

She spoke lightly, almost laughingly, but her words pleased the man's vanity.

"Can it be that I am that attraction?" he asked, quickly. Then he added: "Cousin Vane, I am indeed honored."

"You jump to hasty conclusions," she retorted, "but I will pardon your excessive vanity, if you will give me a spray of Stephanotis for my dress."

"Is it your favorite flower?" he asked, leading the way back to the conservatory.

"I love all flowers," Vane answered, "that is," she added, carelessly, "all household flowers."

"You shall be well supplied in future."

"Thanks."

She drew off her gloves and plinned the spray of wax-like flowers amid her laces. Her hands were white and delicate, yet Stuart's mind unconsciously flew to two little brown ones he had seen that afternoon grasping a plainly bound book. There was even more beauty in them than in his cousin's, he thought.

"I shall look to you, Cousin Stuart," Miss Charteris observed, as she fastened her gloves again, "to initiate me into the mysteries of country life. I intend to dabble in farming, milk the cow, toss the hay, picnic in the fields, and get quite burned and brown."

Stuart laughed a little constrainedly. He was thinking of his picnic for next Wednesday, and wondering whether he could induce his cousin to be kind to Margery. His mother, for some unaccountable reason, did not appear to like Margery.

"We must get a native of Hurstley to act as chaperone," he responded, breaking off a leaf from sheer wantonness. "I have been away so long. I have almost forgotten my home."

"What are you going to do, now you are back?"

"Nothing—that is, nothing definite. You see, my father is very shaky, and I must relieve him of some of his duties. My mother has a strong wish that I should stand for Chestorham."

"A parliamentary career?" questioned Vane. "How would you like that?"

"Not at all," Stuart answered, frankly. "Legislation is not my forte. I am, if anything, a sportsman."

"English to the backbone! Cousin

Stuart, I am disposed to like you."

"Is that true?" Stuart asked, gravely.

Vane turned and met his gaze, then laughed softly.

"True? Of course it is; are we not cousins? The liking, however, must not be altogether on my side."

"Have no fear," the young man began, but at that instant the dinner-gong sounded, and his sentence remained unfinished.

Vane was led in by her cousin, and they were even yet more amicable during the meal, to Mrs. Crosbie's intense satisfaction. She made no effort to interrupt the merry conversation of the young people, and contented herself with now and then joining in the flow of reminiscences in which her husband and Lady Charteris were indulging.

Squire Crosbie was a tall, thin man with a worn, almost haggard face. His prevailing expression was kindly but weak, and he turned instinctively to his wife for moral support and assistance. Stuart dearly loved his father. The gentle student disposition certainly was not in harmony with his own nature; but he had never received aught but tenderness and love from his father, and grew to think of him as a feeble plant that required warmth and affection to nourish it. His feeling for his mother was entirely different. He inherited his strong spirit from her, the blood of an old sporting family flowed in her veins. She was a powerful, domineering woman, and Stuart had been taught to give her obedience rather than love. Had he been permitted to remain always with his mother, his nature, although in the abstract as strong as hers, might by force of habit have become weakened and altered, but as soon as he had attained his majority, he had expressed a determination to travel, and in this was seconded for once most doggedly by his father. Those two years abroad did him an infinite amount of good; but to Mrs. Crosbie they did not bring unalloyed delight. Her son had gone from her a child obedient to her will, he returned a man and submissive only to his own.

Lady Charteris resembled her brother, the squire; but the intellectual light that gleamed in his eyes was altogether wanting in hers. Her mind was evidently fixed on her child, for even in the thick of a conversation her gaze would wander to Vane and rest on her. She was heartily pleased now at her daughter's brightness, and whispered many hopes to Mrs. Crosbie that this visit might benefit her delicate nerves and health.

Mrs. Crosbie nodded absently to these remarks. She was occupied with her own thoughts. Stuart must marry; and whom could he find better, search where he might, than Vane Charteris for his wife? Beautiful, proud, a woman who had reigned as a social queen—in every way she was fitted to become the mistress of Crosbie Castle. She watched her son eagerly, she saw the interest and admiration in his face, and her heart grew glad. Of all things, Mrs. Crosbie had dreaded during those two years' absence, the fear of an attraction or entanglement had been most frequent, and not until she saw him so wrapped up in his cousin Vane did she realize indeed that her fears had been groundless.

CHAPTER V.

"Get on your bonnet, child, and trot away! I shall be content till you come back."

"Mother, I don't like to leave you to-day, you seem so weak. Miss Lawson will not mind—let me stay with you."

Mrs. Morris put out her weak hand and caressed the soft silky hair.

"No, no, child," she persisted, gently. "You must go to yer lessons. Reuben will be 'ome directly; he'll make me a cup of tea; don't you worry yourself. It's yer day of German, too, and I want you to be well on by the time her ladyship comes home."

Margery rose slowly from her knees.

"Well, I will go," she said, regretfully; "but let me make you comfortable. There is your book—why, you are getting on quite fast, mother!—and here are the grapes Mr. Stuart sent, close to your hand."

"Heaven bless him for a kind, true-hearted gentleman! Ah, there are few like him, Margery, my lass!" (To be continued.)

The lower edge of the tunic blouse may be slashed to show the undershirt.

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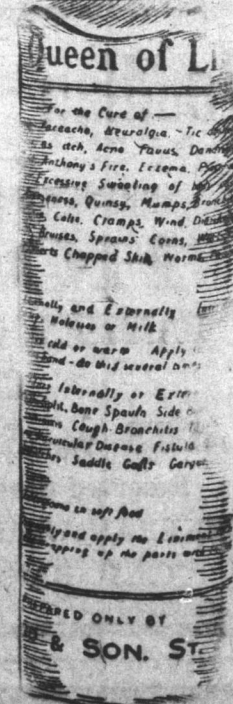
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Fads and Fashions

Kashe is the fabric for the spring ensemble.

Aprons are used in sets of twos and threes.

There is a great vogue for the novelty accessory.

The detachable cape is a feature of

the spring mode.

Many of the spring ensembles include a printed scarf.

Braid may stimulate an apron effect on a street frock.

Broad black leather belts are worn on spring models.

The draped dress may be caught up in a bow at one side.

Tea-Garden Tricks

If your morning cup of tea is made from leaves which grew on a thousand-acre plantation nestling on the foothills of the Himalayas, one of a thousand to fifteen hundred coolies had a hand in transferring it from the thousand ridged, orange-fringed garden to your homely breakfast-room.

That number of dusky Orientals are daily employed on a tea estate of that area, and since the Indian coolies little or nothing to learn from the Heathen Chinese in the way of cunning, it is possible that the leaves that made your fragrant tea enveloped a ten pound chunk of mud or something quite undrinkable body, when they were tipped from their picker's basket on to the massive weighing scales at the end of the day's work.

Ways That Make Weight.

Mud or earth is frequently added to make weight by a coolie who hopes to augment her day's "tallup," or wages. She (only women and children) usually "pick," excepting at certain times, when the leaf grows too fast and male labour is added to cope with it. The supervisor or the "chokras" will not detect her fraud, for that illegal addition is then credited to her in extra "pick."

Or perhaps a huge pommelow, a thick-skinned fruit of the orange variety, but as big as a football, is artfully hidden amongst thirty or forty pounds of green leaf—a day's "pick." Detection means a fine, varying according to the reputation of the offender, but the natives are always willing to risk that.

Sometimes the coolie soaks her basket in a bubbling lhora or stream, and since the baskets are weighed with their contents and an agreed allowance deducted from the total weight, it can readily be seen that a water-soaked basket, which would weigh pounds more than a dry one, may prove quite profitable.

Following in Mother's Footsteps.

Again, a picker may fix a false bottom to her basket and pack this with mud. Fallings some such and a daring trickster will pull heavily on the scale the moment she places her basket on the hook, and as the duffador (supervisor) has about 500 baskets of leaf to weigh, this form of deception often succeeds.

Even the chokras—the youngsters who form quite a fair proportion of the pickers, and some of whom are not more than five or six years old—copy these tricks from their elders, and so secure a few more coveted pice.

The duffador usually has one or two favourites amongst the pickers, and may pull heavily on the scales himself when weighing their "pick," adding ten to twenty pounds to their tally—and, incidentally, afterwards securing his share of the extra annas they receive.

All these little tricks, if unchecked, mean higher costs of production and smaller dividends, but they are part of the day's work and are more or less inevitable where native labour is employed.

Happy Though Humble.

The coolies live easily on a few annas a day, and as a family's earnings may run into the equivalent of £4 or £5 a month, they are, in their humble way, very well satisfied and happy.

But the few Europeans who have to supervise their labours, and to guard against their tricks, find the life rather monotonous. It is only at week-ends, or at longer intervals, that the rabbits on a garden and other white clubs. For, though there is a central club for bridge, polo, tennis, and the exchange of news and views, it is usually at a good distance from many of the plantations.

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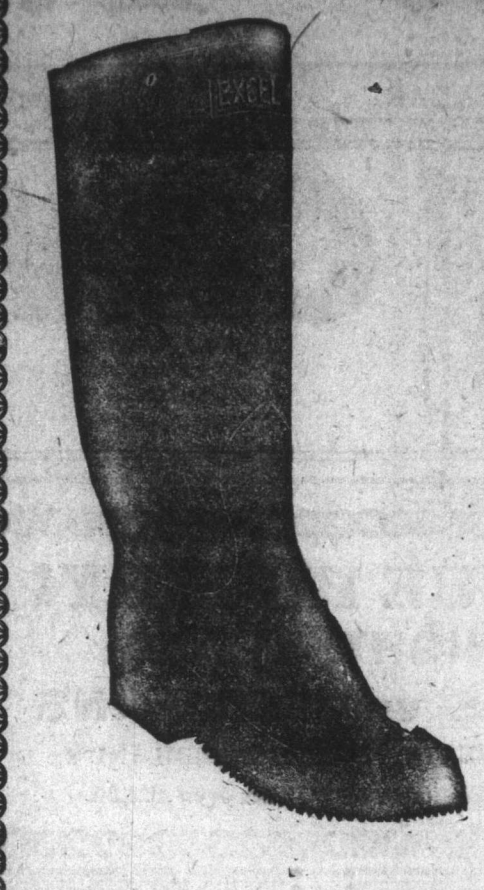
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