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Her hair shone gloriously in the sunlight that fell chequered through the overarching trees.

"I want to talk to you seriously, Lord Wyverton," she said.

"I am quite serious," he assured her. There followed a brief silence. Molly's eyes travelled beyond him and rested upon the plodding horses in the hay-field.

"I have heard," she said at length, "that men and women in your position don't always marry for love."

Wyverton's eyes grew together into a single, hard, uncompromising line. "I suppose there are such people to be found in every class," he said.

Molly's eyes returned from the hay-field and met his look steadily. "I like you best when you don't frown," she said. "I am not trying to insult you."

His brows relaxed but he did not smile. "I am sure of that," he said, courteously. "Please continue."

Molly leaned slightly forward. "I think one should be honest at all times," she said, "at whatever cost."

Lord Wyverton, Phyllis isn't in love with you at all. She cares for Jim Freeman, the doctor's assistant—an awfully nice boy; and he cares for her. But, you see, you are rich, and we are so frightfully poor; and mother is often ill, chiefly because there isn't enough to provide her with what she needs. And so Phyllis felt it would be almost wicked to refuse your offer. Perhaps you won't understand, but I hope you will try. If it weren't for Jim, I would never have told you. As it is—I have been wondering—

She broke off abruptly and suddenly covered her face with her two hands in a stillness so tense that the man beside her marvelled.

He moved close to her. He was rather pale, but by no means discomposed.

"Yes?" he said. "Go on, please. I want you to finish."

There was authority in his voice, but Molly sat in unbroken silence.

He waited for several moments, then laid a perfectly steady hand on her knee.

"You have been wondering—" he said.

She did not raise her head. As if under compulsion, she answered him with her face still hidden.

"I have dared to wonder if—perhaps—you would take me—instead. I am not in love with anybody else, and I never would be. If you are in love with Phyllis, I won't go on. But if it is just beauty you care for, I am no worse-looking than she is. And I should do my best to please you."

The low voice sank. Molly's habitual self-possession had wholly deserted her at this critical moment. She was painfully conscious of the quiet hand on her knee. It seemed to press upon her with a weight that was almost intolerable.

The silence that followed was terrible to her. She wondered afterwards how she sat through it.

Then at last he moved and took her by the wrists. "Will you look at me?" he said.

His voice sent a quiver through her. She had never felt so desperately scared and ashamed in all her healthy young life. Yet she yielded to the insistence of his touch and tone, and met the searching scrutiny of his eyes with all her courage. He was not angry, she saw; nor was he contemptuous. More than that she could not read. She lowered her eyes and waited. Her pulses throbbed wildly, but still she kept herself from trembling.

"Is this a definite offer?" he asked at last.

"Yes," she answered. Her voice was very low, but it was steady.

He waited a second, and she felt the mastery of the eyes she could not meet.

"Forgive me," he said, then; "but are you actually in earnest?"

"Yes," she said again, and marvelled at her own daring.

His hold tightened upon her wrists. "You are a very brave girl," he said.

There was a baffling note in his tone, and she glanced up involuntarily. To her intense relief she saw the quizzical, kindly look in his eyes again.

ground. Behind the landlady's broad back she also executed a village bob.

"I had to come with the eggs. We supply Mrs. Richards with eggs. And it seemed unneighborly to go away without seeing your lordship," she said.

She looked at him with wonderful eyes that met his own with unreserved directness. He told himself as he shook hands that this girl was a great beauty, and would be a magnificent woman some day.

"I am pleased to see you," he said, with quiet courtesy. "It was kind of you to look me up. Will you come into the garden?"

"I haven't much time to spare," said Molly. "It's my cake morning. You are coming round to the Vicarage, aren't you? Can't we walk together?"

"Certainly," he replied at once. "If you think I shall not be too early a visitor."

Molly's lips parted in a little smile.

"We begin our day at six," she said.

"What energy!" he commented. "I am only energetic when on a holiday."

"You're on business now, then?" queried Molly.

He looked at her keenly as they passed out upon the sunlit road. "I think you know what my business is," he said.

She did not respond. "I'll take you through the fields," she said. "It's a short cut. Don't you want to smoke?"

There was something in her manner that struck him as not altogether natural. He pondered over it as he lighted a cigarette.

"They are cutting the grass in the church fields," said Molly. "Don't you hear?"

Through the slumberous summer air came the whir of the machine. It was June.

"It's the laziest sound on earth," said Wyverton.

Molly turned off the road to a stile. "You ought to take a holiday," she said, as she mounted it.

He vaulted the railing beside it and gave her his hand. "I'm not altogether a drone, Miss Neville," he said.

Molly seated herself on the top bar and surveyed him. "Of course not," she said. "You are here on business, aren't you?"

Wyverton's extended hand fell to his side. "Now what is it you want to say to me?" he asked her, quietly.

Molly's hands were clasped in her lap. They did not tremble, but they gripped one another rather tightly.

"I want to say a good many things," she said, after a moment.

Lord Wyverton smiled suddenly. He had meeting brows, but his smile was reassuring.

"Yes?" he said. "About your sister?"

"Partly," said Molly. She put up an impatient hand and removed her hat.