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ALL FOR A RING.

LAURA, Laura, child!"

A young girl, lovely as the morning, disengaged herself from the laughing group about her, to reply to the lady who called her.

"Well, auntie?" she said, with a backward toss of the softest, brightest curls, and a look of saucy defiance out of arch hazel-brown eyes.

"What was that I heard you say just now?" Laura coloured, but looked saucy still, and laughed. "I don't care," she said, pouting very becomingly the next moment; "I do like Frank Thorley, although he is papa's clerk. I shouldn't have said so, only Ellen Richmond was making fun of what she calls his assurance in dancing with me so often to night."

"I wouldn't dance with him again, my dear."

"Why not, pray?" she exclaimed, elevating her graceful eyebrows.

"Because you are a very pretty girl, and he is a very handsome, impressionable young man. You may do him much harm."

"I?"

"Such flattering preference as you are evincing for young Thorley's society, is enough to turn any young man's head: and coming from a girl in your position, to a man in his, is calculated to do harm. Take my advice, he already sees no one in the room but you. Lavish your wiferies on some one less liable to lose his wits in consequence of them."

Laura turned away from her aunt a little pettishly, and stole from under her thick lashes a furtive glance in young Thorley's direction. He was indeed watching her, with his heart in his handsome eyes; and the vain little beauty flushed with pleasure.

It was not long before Frank Thorley asked her to dance with him again.

"He is so handsome and graceful, and so entertaining," Laura mused, during the instant's hesitation before she put her little white gloved hand in his, "I will dance with him—there."

And away she floated in airy circles.

"It can't do any harm," she continued, with some inward misgiving, as her eyes met auntie's mildly disapproving look, or fell beneath the impassioned and almost too frankly admiring glance of her companion; "of course he knows I am particularly kind to him, because he's papa's clerk; and he can't be so ridiculous as to fall in love with me really, and it isn't likely we shall ever be together this way again."

Miss Laura, however, was mistaken in her calculations. She had indulged a momentary whim, and had insisted upon his attending her party.

As a consequence, somebody else invited him, and then somebody else, and he was so handsome and entertaining—such a graceful addition to any circle—that before the winter was over he had become very popular, and received more invitations than he was able to accept. Laura was surprised, but secretly pleased at this, and at the continuance of his undisguised and almost romantic devotion to herself. Laura accepted this devotion with occasional reluctance, occasional misgiving as to where it was to end; but she liked it too well to lose, and was perhaps more interested at heart than she realized herself.

Imagine her consternation, when Frank Thorley asked her to marry him!

"I—I'm sorry, Frank," she murmured, almost incoherently, as she dropped into a seat.

Thorley's eyes flashed momentarily.

"You've done a wicked thing, Miss Laura Lyle," he said. "If ever woman led man to believe she loved him, you did me."

Laura stopped him there with a haughty gesture, and an angry—"You forget yourself, Mr. Thorley," and she swept imperially past him, back to the drawing-room she had quitted a moment before on his arm.

Mr. Vincent Lyle was at the head of one of the oldest firms in the city. He was a man of sterling integrity and uprightness himself, and sternly severe upon any dereliction in another. His clerks were all liberally paid; and a young man who could obtain a situation, be it ever so subordinate, with Lyle and Co., was considered

to have secured an uncommonly good start in life. Dishonesty or unfaithfulness among the clerks of the firm was rare; partly because of the discrimination exercised in engaging them, partly because of the severe and summary reckoning exacted from the few offenders.

Mr. Vincent Lyle was not inclined therefore to deal leniently with the author of some small but daring speculation that had been going on of late. Woe to the guilty one, when he discovered him; and from the searching investigation he was making, he was likely to do that soon. The matter worried him so long as it baffled him; and he was sitting in his luxurious library at home, pondering it, when Frank Thorley sent in a note to him.

The merchant started, as he read, muttering, "Sharp fellow, Thorley. I wasn't deceived in him! Show him up, John."

Mr. Lyle shook hands with him warmly when he came in; but Thorley seemed strangely reluctant, and not noticing the seat the merchant offered him, remained standing on the hearth opposite, his face pale and his eyes in an unwonted glitter.

"Glad to see you, Thorley, glad to see you. Shan't forget it if you can give me any clue to the author of this scandalous business," Lyle said.

"Behold him," Frank said, getting whiter yet.

Mr. Lyle stared.

"It was I who stole your money," Frank repeated, with a half desperate emphasis on the obnoxious word in the sentence.

Mr. Lyle stared incredulously a few moments still, before he could realize the stupendousness of the fact. He was terribly angry then. The very fact that he had been so ready to vouch for young Thorley, made his unfaithfulness doubly culpable. He remembered suddenly the gay life the young man had been leading of late, vague rumors of which had reached his ears, and said sternly, as soon as he could master his voice enough. "If you come here, thinking to move me to thoughts of clemency, you will find yourself mistaken."

"Not for myself, Mr. Lyle," he said, at last, speaking with difficulty; "but for my mother's sake, I do ask your clemency; not to retain me in your employment, but to give me a chance to begin again somewhere else."

"And serve some one else as you have me?" the merchant exclaimed, with ironical anger; it is rather late to think of your mother, young man."

"I know it, sir. If I had suffered no other love to enter my heart but love for her, I should not stand here the guilty wretch I am to-night. Yet for her sake, spare me. I am her only son—her only support. If you expose me, you strike her to the heart."

Mr. Lyle made an impatient movement. "I tell you, you should have thought of this before. It is too late now; you have had your chance, and abused it wickedly. You must take the consequences."

Thorley was trembling, and he could hardly stand.

"Mr. Lyle," he said, huskily, "do you know how old I am? I am nineteen, sir, and I never touched a farthing that was not my own before."

"It is time to end this," Mr. Lyle said, rising and approaching the bell.

"Wait one moment, sir," Frank Thorley said, passing between him and the bell-pull; and his desperate, anguishing look stayed Mr. Lyle an instant; "shall I tell you who tempted me to do this—whose beautiful face came between me and right, and lured me on to my ruin? As you hope for mercy, hereafter, sir, hear me! Hear how I came to fall, and then refuse to be merciful, if you can."

"I am listening," said the merchant.

"I never saw London till two years ago, and you yourself have commended me for withstanding its temptations. You know, sir, that I neither drink nor gamble. The smallness of the amount I have taken must prove that your money was not spent in that way. You have been pleased to be very kind to me, sir. Do you remember urging upon me the acceptance of an invitation to a party given by your daughter? I was reluctant, but I went, and from that hour