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HESTER, AND A LEGACY

"My dear Isabel, there is nothing
to frighten you," he said reassur-
ingly.
"Oh, but there is! You haven't
heard, then? You can't know!" she
persisted, looking up into his face
with her blue eyes full of horror.
"They say that it is murder!" She
shrank back as she uttered the word
and covered her face with her hands.
"Who says so?" he demanded al-
most fiercely.

"The servants—some one—I don't
know who, but I heard it!" she mur-
mured between her sobs. "Oh, Dud-
ley, how dreadful. It can't be true,
can it?"

He left her abruptly and strode over
to the three men who were stand-
ing by the table.

"What was the cause of my moth-
er's death?" he asked, narrowly ob-
serving their faces with his penetrat-
ing dark eyes.

The lawyer turned aside as though
relieved that this was none of his
business, and Doctor Turner left it
to the London physician to speak
their joint opinion.

"We were waiting for you, before
making the necessary arrangements.
I am afraid there must be an inquest
and probably a post-mortem exami-
nation. There is no apparent cause for
Lady Lymouth's death that we can
ascertain."

Lord Lymouth's face was so ashy
in its pallor that it looked almost
ghastly.

"I had no idea—I did not know!"
he ejaculated brokenly. "It is hor-
rible—horrible."

He turned away and walked to the
other end of the room; the doctors
meanwhile remained silent in respect
for the agitation of the bereaved son.
When he returned his manner was
more composed.

"Surely you have arrived at a hasty
conclusion? My mother suffered with
heart; she often had attacks. Surely
that may account—"

"Her ladyship's heart was weak,
but I believe there was no real dis-
ease," replied Dr. Turner. "How-
ever, of course, that could be ascer-
tained."

"Of course," he replied hurriedly.
"Yes, I suppose it must be, but it
is most painful—most painful!"

Dr. Morgan begged a few minutes
private conversation with Lord Lyn-
mouth before his return to town, and
they withdrew into an ante-room to-
gether; the lawyer also left the din-
ing room.

Half an hour afterwards the physi-
cian left for the night, and Lord
Lymouth returned to the dining
room. Mrs. Vavasour was still cry-
ing hysterically, and Doctor Turner, who
had said "Good-bye" some time ago,
but did not like to leave her in her
present condition, was administering
wine.

"I really must go, my lord," he
said as Lord Lymouth entered. "If
you will see to Mrs. Vavasour. She
had better go to bed. Where is he-
maid? Where is Miss Phillips? I won-
der?"

At that instant Hester appeared at
the open window, where she stood
for a moment looking into the room.
All three turned and looked at her.
She was very pale and her dark hair
was somewhat loosened by the soft
wind. Behind her lay the moonlit sky
and drifting clouds. Lord Lymouth
rose and stood in silence as she en-
tered. They merely bowed to each
other stiffly.

"Ah, there you are, Miss Phillips!
We were just enquiring for you,"
said Doctor Turner. "Would you be
kind enough to take Mrs. Vavasour
under your charge? I'm afraid she is
very much upset."

Hester went over to her immedi-
ately, and took her hand.

"Come with me," she said, and she
led the sobbing Mrs. Vavasour un-
resistingly from the room.

"I like that girl," said the Doctor
when they were all gone. "I have
seen a great deal of her in one way
and another since she first came here,
and I have learned to admire her. She
is so conscientious and trustworthy.
There is a good deal of character be-
neath that quiet exterior, and—"

"It does not interest me to discuss
Miss Phillips' character," said Lord
Lymouth with sudden haughtiness.

"There are many subjects of more
importance at the present time, I
should have thought."

Dr. Turner was slightly dismayed
at the effect of his apparently harm-
less remark, which he had forced
himself to utter because he was rathe-
r ashamed of his uncomfortable sen-
sations regarding her in the morning,
but he hastened to drop the subject
of the companion as it appeared to be
such a distasteful one, and they sat
down together at the table.

When he left, Lord Lymouth still
sat at the table buried in thought,
with his head on his hands. And
there Hester found him when she
came down to get a glass of wine
for Mrs. Vavasour.

He rose of course when she entered
the room, but neither spoke to the
other. She went over to the table
and poured out the wine with an un-
steady hand. As she did so she raised
her eyes to his and found that he was
regarding her intently. There was
something so wild, so haggard, so un-
terribly miserable in his handsome face
that her heart was filled with a sud-
den flood of womanly pity.

"You have had nothing to eat," she
said, looking at the remains of the
meal which had been on the table all
the evening. "Let me ring and get
you something."

"No," he said, in a low voice, "I
cannot eat to-night."

She turned to leave the room, but
he came forward.

"It is you who ought to have the
wine," he said; "you are as white as

a sheet." He poured out another
glass of port. "Drink this!" he said
firmly.

If her hand had been unsteady, his
shook so that he spilt the wine on
the table and was forced to put down
the decanter. He flung it rather than
put it down, and thrusting his hands
deep into his trouser pockets, strode
over to the window and out on to the
terrace, where he disappeared in the
darkness.

Hester took up the glass for the
third time and left the room, but
it was half an hour or so before Mrs.
Vavasour received it, and then, had
that lady been a close observer, she
might have noticed that the girl who
was trying to soothe and cheer her
bore signs in her face of a deeper agi-
tation and distress than any from
which she herself was suffering.

In spite of persuasion, Hester in-
sisted upon sleeping in her own room
as usual, though it opened into the
dead woman's chamber. Whether she
slept there as calmly as she would
have done in another room it is im-
possible to say. It is only certain
that she did not sleep.

The next day broke cold and wet.
A sleet came driving over the hills
into the valley and enveloped the
Chase in mist.

In the morning room a wood fire
was lighted at Hester Philip's sug-
gestion, not so much to give warmth
as to cheer the chilled hearts of those
over whom the depression of Lady
Lymouth's death was hanging.

Lord Lymouth came in to snatch
a brief breakfast, at which Hester
presided. Mr. Broadbent dropped in
to lunch, and Mrs. Vavasour took up
her abode there for the day, huddling
over the fire and drawing largely on
Hester's stock of patience with her
tearful complaints.

In the afternoon Mr. Broadbent
took possession of the darkened lib-
rary, and by the light of the two tall
silver candlesticks sat looking through
the bundles of papers and legal docu-
ments before him, interrupted now
and then by Lord Lymouth, who
wandered restlessly in and out, some-
times aimlessly turning over the
letters in his mother's cabinet, and
at others simply staring in moody
silence from the window, the blind
of which he pulled aside.

As he stood there staring out on
the wet terrace, as Mr. Broadbent
sat at the desk poring over and
arranging in legal order the papers
before him, the door softly opened
and Hester appeared on the thresh-
old. She hesitated on seeing Lord
Lymouth in the window and seem-
ed about to turn away, but on second
thoughts entered with an air of de-
cision and went up to the lawyer,
who rose at her approach.

"Can I speak to you for a mo-
ment?" she asked.

"Certainly," he replied bowing for-
mally.

"Alone, I mean," she said, with a
slight glance in the direction of the
window.

Mr. Broadbent coughed and hesi-
tated what to do. He was morally and
physically unable to turn a nobleman
out of his own room, and the request of
a paid dependent, and yet he scarcely
liked to refuse the request of this
girl, who was most evidently a lady,
in spite of her anomalous position at
the Chase. But Lord Lymouth saved
him the trouble of deciding this de-
licate matter. He had apparently heard
the request, and now turned from the
window saying stiffly—

"I should be sorry to intrude in any
way on Miss Phillips' private inter-
views"—and he strode for the door.
But Hester stopped him.

"I would rather speak to Mr. Broad-
bent another time," she said hurriedly.
"I merely wish to know when he will
be at liberty."

"At any rate, I will be no restraint
on the arrangement you may choose
to make," he answered, and he left the
room without waiting for her to speak
again.

She did not attempt to detain him;
she merely followed him with her
eyes till he had disappeared and then
turned back to the lawyer.

"I wanted to know," she began, as
soon as they were alone, "if the time
is fixed for the formal reading of Lady
Lymouth's will?"

"On the day of the funeral, an hour
or two after the ceremony," replied
the lawyer.

"And the funeral is to be on Fri-
day?"

"That, I believe, is the day decided
upon."

She came a step nearer and, lean-
ing one hand on the desk and look-
ing down, said in a low voice—
"Lady Lymouth made a new will
a few days before her death. I sup-
pose you know what it contains?"

"Why should you suppose that her
ladyship made a new will just before
her death?" inquired Mr. Broadbent,
with legal caution.

Hester raised her eyes to his.
"Because she told me so."

"Humph!" ejaculated the lawyer.
Then, after a moment's silence—"And,
supposing my dear young lady, she
did as you say, what then?"

"I believe that I play a very im-
portant part in it," she continued, "and
want to know if I can give up my
claim altogether and let the former
will stand."

With a nervous movement she took
up a paper-knife and threw it down
again without knowing what she was
doing.

"Can I?" she went on, looking up
again, as he did not speak. "Please
say I can!"

He smiled at the childishness of her

entreaty, but immediately reassumed
his legal gravity.

"It is not customary," he said, "to
discuss a will before it has been offi-
cially read, a proceeding that is to take
place on Friday, as you know. On
that occasion I shall be pleased to
give all information you may require.
At present I must ask you to wait."

But that is just what I wished to
avoid. I wanted, if possible, to have
the former will read instead of the
one that was made on Monday night."

"That is impossible. The late Lady
Lymouth's will, as it stands, must be
proclaimed in a public manner. After
that other steps may be taken by the
heir or heirs, but till the will has been
read nothing can be done."

Hester's self-control gave way, and
she seemed on the point of breaking
into hysterical sobbing.

"I cannot and will not be brought
into that wicked will!" she exclaimed.
"Mr. Broadbent, you must burn it."
Where is it?—hurriedly turning over
the papers on the table. "I will burn
it myself if I can find it. Is it here?"

Is it—
The lawyer suddenly laid his hand
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