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HESTER, AND A LEGACY

"Not seriously. I told myself often that I must marry a girl with money, but I don't think I should have been quite cad enough to do it for that reason alone."

Another silence, during which the Towers lodge came in sight, and they reached the little gate that led into the grounds and through a side shrubbery.

"Well, Trix?" he said. She looked up.

"You don't love me—I knew that all along—and I am thankful that you are truthful on that point. I suppose there is some one else you care for?"

"Yes, there is some one else I love, and have loved for years, but it's no go. She doesn't care for me at all, and I wouldn't marry her if she did."

"You wouldn't marry her? Why not?"—in surprise.

"Because I'm not sure enough of myself, and I'd die rather than bring trouble on her."

"Yet you'd risk bringing trouble on me?"

"You are different. She's a baby of a thing, and it would kill her. You are strong—stronger than I am, and if you were once my friend—you'd give me the sort of help I need."

"You don't hold out much inducement to any woman, when I am, and she exclaimed bitterly.

"No! I'm putting things in a bad light, I know. I don't expect you to accept me. I only tell you what I want."

"And you want me?"

"Yes—badly. There is not the smallest shadow of doubt but that I shall go to the dogs without you."

"And with me, what then?"

"Why, then I believe you will find your bad bargain turn out better than you think, for if you love me you will be able to do what you like with me."

They had reached the thick part of the shrubbery by now, and without more ado he put his arm around her waist and kissed her.

"Come, dear, say 'Yes,'" he said persuasively.

The tears came into her eyes, and she hid her face for a moment on his shoulder.

"It is very weak of me, and I dare say it will turn out very badly for us both, but I will take the risk. I love you, you see, which makes such a difference."

And so this very one-sided bargain was concluded. When the engagement was made known to the neighborhood was extreme, but of all the people who were most astonished at the engagement, perhaps none more so than Harry and Trix themselves.

CHAPTER XXI.
Mrs. Cox's sale of work was to extend over two days in the third week in June, and all concerned at the bazaar were well pleased for an out-of-door fete.

The day before the bazaar was to open the scene in the park near the lake was a busy one. Carpenters were at work on a stage for the tableaux vivants, the stalls were being arranged, gardeners were bringing trucks loaded with flowering plants for their decoration.

During the afternoon Lady Lynn came down to the scene of action and looked on at the busybodies through her long-handled eyeglasses. Mrs. Cox, in a violet silk dress, with her face crimson with heat, would gladly have embraced this opportunity of improving her acquaintance with her ladyship, but found her advances repelled with polite decision, which was foolish, Mrs. Cox thought, considering the nearness of the relationship that was so soon to be theirs.

Since Trix's engagement to Harry Vereker she had felt no doubts whatever as to the Lynn's one coming and had settled in her own mind that the two girls should be married on the same day and have such a joint wedding that the county had never seen before.

The world were invited in to lunch at the Chase, and after lunch Lord Lynn offered his services in their behalf. Tea also was served with Violet Langworthy, and Lily Cox and Lord Lynn both felt that the day was a red-letter one.

On leaving the drawing-room after tea Miss Langworthy was seized with an overwhelming desire to look at the "lovely conservatory," and turned appealing eyes on the son of the house. Lord Lynn naturally volunteered to show it to her, and their progress through it was a slow one, as she had a separate enthusiasm for every bud and flower she came across.

It seemed so dreadful, she thought, that all these lovely flowers should be cut for the sale—so sad to think of their drooping and fading in the heat! How cruel it seemed! Were they indeed all going to be sacrificed? Even that exquisite rose—touching it with a taper finger as she spoke. She adored roses, and nothing gave her quite such an exquisite pleasure as their scent, their shape, and their rich and delicate colouring.

What could Lord Lynn mean to do by cutting it for her, when cut, what could possibly be her greater astonishment? She had of course never dreamed of his doing such a thing, or she wouldn't have uttered a word! No, she couldn't think of cutting it, but since she pressed it so urgently and had actually cut it for her, she supposed she must.

And she did, with becoming blushes and soft smiles and repeated thanks. It was at this moment that Lady Lynn passed through the far-her end of the conservatory with one or two visitors. Her keen eyes caught the tableau at once, and, though she could not hear the words that were passing between them, she interpreted the meaning of their attitude well enough. She was presently beseeching her to accept a flower, she was hesitating with blushes. It was all clear enough, but Lady Lynn made no sign of the anger that filled her heart, and, passing on, spoke in praise of a new and rare orchid that had lately been added to her stock.



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held two? No, she would not, thank you! She could see the moonlight from the shore, and she hadn't the slightest desire to try the little boats. Would she come and sit with him for a minute in the—

In the midst of his sentence she turned away, offering help to a lady who was fanning round her stall, and from that moment her attention was entirely occupied by the lady in question, and her back was turned on him resolutely.

It was an act of deliberate rudeness, but he never knew how much it cost her to do it.

At the end of the day Hester went to bed worn in body and mind, feeling as though another day such as that had been would kill her.

It was on the next day in the afternoon, that the gentlemen's lower-stall was to open, and great was the excitement it caused. Lily Cox, dressed as Polly, in short skirts of many colors, and hung at every point with jingling bells, was in her element in charge of it, and brisk was the trade she drove among the men who crowded round it. There was only one drop of bitterness in her cup of happiness, and that lay in the fact that the afternoon was waning and Lord Lynn had not yet come to buy a buttonhole. She saw him standing about and talking to first one person and then another, investing in pincushions and first screens, and worsted slippers and all the other specialties of the city with which one is afflicted at bazaars, but still his coat remained undecorated and he did not approach her stall.

It was apparent that Lord Lynn was shy and needed encouragement—she would give it to him.

As he stood near the stall, talking to a group of ladies, she called to him.

"Lord Lynn," she cried, "if you don't make haste there will be nothing left! I have been selling like mad, and all the best are gone! Aren't you going to buy a buttonhole?"

He stood before the stall and looked over its most covered surface at the few remaining flowers, with apparent dissatisfaction.

"Yes, I suppose I must have to," he said, "but as you say there is nothing very nice left!"

"Look at this, then,"—triumphantly producing a rare orchid from some secret store beneath the stall. "I kept it for you—I kept it on purpose! How wasn't it good of me? Aren't you grateful to me?"

He professed gratitude, and asked her what he might have the privilege of paying the rare orchid having been obtained by the way from his own hothouse. She named a high price, which was immediately forthcoming, and the flower was handed over.

"You must make some lady pin it on for you—that is the rule," she said. "Do tell me whom you are going to ask! I won't tell, I promise!"—and she looked up at him with a coquettish turn of the head that set all the bells on her cap jingling.

"I don't suppose I shall ask anybody," he said indifferently. "That sort of thing is not much in my line. I only bought it for the good of the bazaar, you know."

"Now I tell that really unkind. Besides, you've got to keep to the rules—we sha'n't let him off, shall we, mamma?"

Mrs. Cox, who was sitting behind the stall fanning her purple face with an impromptu fan, came to the rescue. "You pin it for him, Lily," she said. "You've had so much practice already with the way all the gentlemen have been plaguing you do their tails that expect you've got the proper knack."

"Shall I?" said Lily, looking up at him with another jingling of bells. "There isn't it awfully good of me? I haven't offered to do as much for anybody else."

She put out her hand to take the flower, but Lord Lynn kept it in his, and, drawing himself up, he said quietly:

"You are extremely kind, but I am not sure that there is not a lady I mean to ask if one must indeed keep to the rules."

"Oh, there is some one, is there?" said Lily blankly. "Then, turning back to her stall, "Miss Langworthy, I suppose?"

"No! I was thinking of my mother," he said, with a smile, as he moved away.

"Yes, no doubt it is Lady Lynn, my dear," said Mrs. Cox consoilingly to her daughter, as soon as he was out of hearing. "He's just the sort of man to go and do a thing like that!"

"No, it isn't. It's that designing Violet Langworthy," returned Lily viciously. "He's awfully gone on her. You know how he behaved at the Do-very-curl ball. We heard of it from every one."

"She hasn't any money," urged Mrs. Cox, "and he must marry money."

"Well, whether he marries her or not, he's going to ask her to pin in that orchid!" exclaimed Lily. "I hate that girl!"

"Let her pin in the orchid, as long as he doesn't marry her, my dear," said her practical mother. "It's the marrying that matters—not the orchid."

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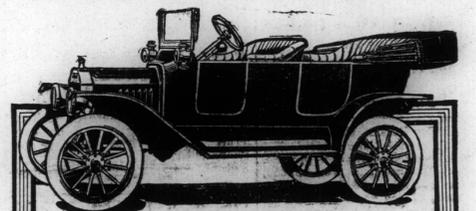
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