

# HESTER, AND A LEGACY

"It is for Muriel to decide," said Lord Lynmouth. "As far as I am concerned, one place is as good as another."  
 "Then my dear Muriel, pray make your choice. One must write to hotels and all that, you know before hand. What is it, Parker?"—addressing a servant in the doorway. "Lady Lexham wants to see me." And she rose and left the room.  
 The two on the sofa were left alone—Lord Lynmouth, was pulling Colley's ears, the faithful Colley having accompanied him as a matter of course in his morning call, and looking down into his loving brown eyes while Lady Muriel was twisting her engagement ring round and round her finger with a very grave face.

"Where shall we go?" she asked presently.  
 "My dear child, as I said just now, wherever you like—you have only to name a place. I haven't the smallest choice myself."  
 "I should have thought," she said slowly, "that you might have liked to take me to some place that you were particularly fond of to show me it."  
 "But there is no place I am particularly fond of."  
 "Surely out of all you have seen there must be one or two you liked better than the rest?"

"I have seen so many and liked so few that I really haven't any choice."  
 "Yet you stayed away all those months because Egypt and India were so interesting."  
 "Ah, Egypt and India are different but they are too far away for our honeymoon. Besides, any way, you wouldn't care for them as I do."  
 "Why not?"

"Oh, well, you wouldn't! It is difficult to explain. I am a native, and I talk to the natives, and I sleep out on the desert for weeks together. It isn't the sort of life for a lady."  
 "I should like anything that you liked."  
 "It is very kind of you to say so, but I don't think you really would if you came to the point."  
 He leaned back, speaking indifferently, and took up a morning paper. Then, as if recollecting something it was scarcely polite to become interested in it while in her presence, he put it down again and said with an effort—

"Well, Muriel, let us decide this wedding tour business, and get it off our minds. I will take you to Egypt, or India, if you like, but the heat at this time of the year—"  
 "Madame Lecoeur, try your wedding gown, my lady!" said Parker in the doorway, and Muriel rose and hurriedly left the room.  
 CHAPTER XXIV.

When the dressmaker had dismissed Lady Augusta sent her niece out for a walk with Lord Lynmouth. She had a thousand things to do, she said, and would be busy all the morning; besides, fresh air was good for Muriel. She had been looking very pale lately.

So the two went for a stroll in the Park and to look at the Row, since it was a lovely summer's day and all the world of fashion would be abroad. There it was, the fashionable world, on horseback, cantering in the shade of the trees, and many among the riders bowed or stopped to speak to the couple on the side path. Again and again Lady Muriel received congratulations on her approaching marriage, and had to smile her replies and look the happy bride. But her face grew paler, and there was a strained look in her eyes that made several of her friends say afterwards they had fancied there was something wrong about the affair and supposed she was not marrying the right man.

"Let us sit down," she said presently, seeing an empty seat. "Aunt Augusta won't expect us just yet." "Are you tired?" he asked, noticing the expression of her face.

"I am rather." She closed her parasol wearily as she sat down and leaning forward, began to prod the dry earth with the ferrule in the manner of one who is nervous and strung up. "Dudley," she began at last, "there is something I want to say to you. I have tried several times, but it must be done—even though things have gone as far as they have."  
 "My dear child, what a serious tone! You quite frighten me!" he said, turning to her with a smile. "What is this awful thing? A confession?"

"Not exactly. It is only that I don't think we are suited—you and I," she said, rushing on her fate and prodding the gravel with an energy worthy of a better cause.

"Not suited? How?" he exclaimed. "We haven't the same ideas, the same tastes, the same sort of minds," she said. "At least, I don't know whether that is it, or whether it is only the love that is wanting. That might make all the difference. Anyway, I feel that I cannot fill your life or even an hour of it. I am really nothing to you and should be only a wife in name!"

Her lips trembled and her voice died away suddenly.

"My dear Muriel," he exclaimed again, "how did you get such an idea? This is really dreadful! You are upsetting yourself for nothing!" "You

cannot possibly believe it!" "I do," she returned firmly, "and what is more, you cannot on your honor deny it!"—and she looked up at him searchingly.  
 "Deny that I am fond of you? Of course I can't! Of course I am fond of you, dear."  
 "Don't try to deceive me," she said in a low voice—"be honest, I am so sure of it myself that nothing could shake me now—not even passionate protestations. I feel it. I cannot fill your life or make you happy!"

"My dear child, you distress me greatly!" he said, and indeed he looked distressed and uncertain how to treat this sudden accusation that was thrust upon him.  
 "That's it!" she exclaimed. "You think of me as a child. I am no companion for you."  
 "If that is all, you will grow older in time, you know," he said, smiling. "But I shall never grow into what you want. It is a different sort of woman, altogether—I don't know what sort—I am not clever enough to be able to imagine, but I know you well enough to know that I am the wrong one. Don't deny it!"—hastily interrupting him as he was about to protest. "What is the use, for I have made up my mind that our engagement must be broken."  
 "That is impossible!" he said.  
 "No—I would do it even if we were actually at the church door! I will not marry you!" she added firmly. "I should be more wretched as your wife than alone and unmarried all my days! I have quite made up my mind!"

He sat looking down in silence for a moment, and the vision of Hester's dear face rose before him and his heart beat high at the thought of her. It was true what Muriel said—he did not love her, and never would. The approaching marriage had seemed to him inevitable, but it had weighed on his mind as a millstone, an incubus from which there was no escaping. The suggestion of regaining his liberty was one that filled him with a sense of relief, but he felt he could not take her at her word—it would be mean, dishonorable, cruel! Yet the thought of marrying one woman, however sweet and pretty she might be, while the image of another reigned supreme in his heart was one from which he shrank, as a sensitive mind like his must do.

She turned and laid her hand gently upon his coat-sleeve.  
 "You came to me when I was ill," she said, "and you saved my life. It is that sufficient. The rest was all a mistake. We can be friends, dear friends, all our lives, if you wish, but I will not marry you! You must be free to win that other woman, whoever she is, and I wish you success!"

She rose with an air of determination, and he rose too.  
 "It cannot be done, Muriel," he said slowly, looking at her with a strange expression. She read it aright—it was a sense of relief, of hope, of longing.  
 "I can be done, and shall!" she answered. "What does it matter about all the presents and trousseau for life? We were making a great mistake, but we have found it out in time."  
 "We! It is only you. I do not consider it a mistake. I hope our marriage may be a very happy one."  
 "There will be no happiness for me if we marry," she said in a low voice. He turned and looked at her quickly.

"You are talking very strangely," he said. "I don't understand. Why didn't you say all this before?"  
 "Because I have only just found out my own mind."  
 "Do you mean that you really wish to break our engagement?"  
 "I do—most thoroughly! The thought of our marriage during the last few days—even weeks—has been making me miserable."  
 "Is there—is there some one else?" he urged.  
 "Not just at present," she replied, with a curious little contraction of her mouth, "but no doubt there will be some day—some one who is more suitable and whom I can better understand."  
 He was not satisfied with these explanations; he tried to reason with her, he even pleaded with all the warmth of which he was capable, but she remained resolute and held to her determination. And, after all, in his own heart he was a sneaking desire that she should carry her way.  
 "If you will not move in the matter I shall tell aunt Augusta myself," she said, as they left the Park for home. "I shall have no time to lose, and I am quite determined. I am very sorry, dear Dudley, but you must try to forgive me, and some day I am sure we shall both be very glad that we found out our mistake before it was too late."  
 "Muriel," he said, gravely, "for whose sake are you doing this—yours or mine?"  
 "For both our sakes, but principally for my own."  
 He could say no more, and so they walked back together to tell Lady Augusta to stop the work in the hands of the dressmakers, milliners, coachbuilders, etc., who were so busily employed in preparations for the wedding. And Lord Lynmouth was aware, in spite of his best efforts of a sense of relief at his liberation, and Lady Muriel's brave spirit was upheld through all the trials of the ensuing days by the conviction that she had sacrificed her own happiness to secure his.

Surely he was a most fortunate man to be loved as Muriel loved him, each of whom was willing to sacrifice all she cared about most for what she believed would be for his ultimate happiness.

CHAPTER XXV  
 If the news of the breaking of Lord Lynmouth's engagement caused satisfaction in some circles, it was clear at least that his mother was extremely vexed about it. She shut herself in to her own rooms for the first few days, and would admit no one but Hester and her maid, Lady Augusta,

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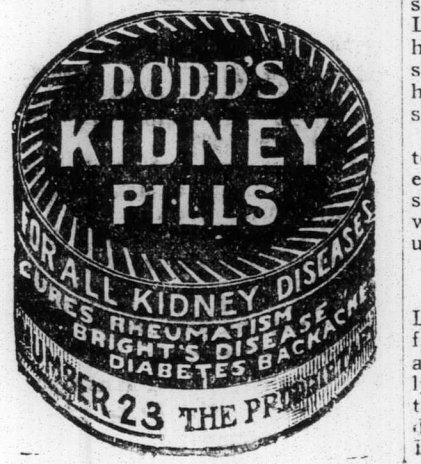
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who had arrived at Dovercourt about the same time and who drove over to see her, was not received, and all visitors to the Chase were told that the ladyship was unwell and confined to the strict seclusion of her own apartments.

There she remained for the first week after her disappointment, sitting sternly silent, wrapped in thought, or engaged in writing long letters, chiefly to her son. He evidently replied to each, for Hester knew his handwriting, and was so constantly in attendance on her ladyship that she was aware of all that went on. Lady Lynmouth never spoke to her on the subject, but she had heard from other sources of the breaking of the engagement, and was afraid that his mother's anger and unyielding temper might lead her to carry out her threat and disinherit him in her will.

In the second week her fears were substantiated. A letter was written to Mr. Broadbent, her lawyer, and he appeared at the Chase the following day in evident answer to her summons. They were closeted together for some hours in the morning room in secret conference, and at the end of that time when her ladyship's bell rang, and Hester went into her, she found her alone with two red spots of excitement burning in her cheeks.  
 "I have had business with my lawyer," she said, as Hester went up to her, "which has fatigued me a good deal. I will now take a walk in the garden before lunch. The air will do me good."  
 As she paced the path, leaning on Hester's arm, still silent, and lost in thought, it was evident that some weighty transaction had been in process, and Hester guessed that it had

been the making of a new will. Her heart was filled with pity for the man who had probably been so unjustly disinherited and whose only fault lay in the fact that he had not loved the girl his mother had wanted him to marry, and as Lady Lynmouth paced beside her in that awful and vindictive silence she longed to speak her mind and plead for the culprit in disgrace. But what would be the use? Would her words have the smallest effect? Would they even receive a hearing? No, she knew they would be looked upon as an impertinent interference, and she must simply let things take their course.

As for her own personal feelings on the subject of the broken engagement she never analyzed them nor allowed herself to consider what they were. She only kept before her the view that Lord Lynmouth had in all probability got over his infatuation for her by this time, and looked upon it, if he thought of it at all, as a passing madness that was best forgotten.

At the end of the second week Mrs. Vavasour arrived from town uninvited, bringing with her trunks that suggested a prolonged stay. She was not cordially received; and if she expected for some hours in the morning room to be treated as a confidante she was disappointed. Lady Lynmouth remained almost entirely in her own rooms, without apology, and the gay Isabel would have died of dullness if she had not disposed of her time in a round of calling and small entertainments.

One evening, at the end of a sultry September day, Mrs. Vavasour went to bed early on her invariable plea of a headache when she found time hang heavily on her hands, and after dinner Hester settled near the lamps and Lady Lynmouth in the drawing-room to read to her as usual; but after a quarter of an hour or so she was interrupted.  
 "It is no good—I cannot attend," said her ladyship. "My thoughts are on other things. Leave me alone for a little while. Or stay—give me my writing-case. I have a letter to write."  
 Hester placed all the necessary writing materials before her, and then, stepping through one of the long, open windows on to the terrace, walked up and down it by herself, thankful for the breathing-space allowed her by being alone.  
 She had much to think of, much that troubled her, not only concerning her own affairs, but also on the subject of the new will which she felt certain Lady Lynmouth had just made. How would it affect Lord Lynmouth, she wondered, and who was the new heir or heiress?  
 It was an oppressively hot night; not a breath stirred; the sky was dark, but now and then illuminated by a flash of blue sheet lightning. Everything was very still. Again that curious sense of coming events was on her; she seemed to hear the tread of Fate and the voice of prophecy telling her that a great chance was coming, that a crisis was at hand. It was impossible to resist this feeling or account for it except by the fact that she had been greatly strung up lately and had silently taken an intense interest in the affairs going on around her.

At length, thinking the letter must be finished and she might be needed, she returned to the open window of the drawing room and was about to enter when her heart seemed suddenly to stop beating and she stood still spellbound.  
 (To be Continued)

Children Cry FOR FLETCHER'S CASTORIA

Austrian Boats Sunk.

Turin, Italy, Sept. 16.—An Ancona despatch to The Stampa says: "The captain of the steamer Concetta reports that he was chased by two Austrian torpedo boat destroyers off the Gargano peninsula. An Italian submarine, which appeared suddenly engaged and sank the torpedo boats."

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