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HESTER, AND A LEGACY

"Do you mean that you kept them for me?" "I tried to; every one was asking for them, but I said I was engaged, and kept my program hidden."

But Violet, driving home and doing her best to keep up the fiction of the painful ankle through all her friend's kind inquiries, was conscious that things had not turned out as she fondly hoped they would when she had first put on that lovely new dress three hours before and felt her heart beating high with expectation.

CHAPTER XVII.

Lady August's Dovercourt, who possessed a genuine and warm heart in the direction of all love-affairs, and towards that of her niece's in particular, had taken great interest in arranging "flirtation nooks," as Mrs. Lynmouth called them, and was making her preparations for the ball.

Although planning for the benefit of all dancers who might desire a few moments to themselves, she had one particular coup in her mind's eye when she ordered screens placed beside the divans in the hall or directed the gardeners to group a grove of palms and plants around two low chairs placed in interesting attitudes near together.

"Certainly! Where would you like to sit—over by your chaperon?" "I think not, thank you! It is so hot here, isn't it? Suppose we go into the conservatory? It is so cool in there, and I do so love the smell of flowers, don't you?"

As is often the case, every one filled the flirtation-nooks except those for whom they were expressly prepared. Lord Lynmouth had availed himself of them, it is true, but always with some other lady; Lady Muriel had paid them visits, but always with some other man.

The conservatory, as has been mentioned, was dimly lighted, and there were luxurious divans placed at convenient intervals among the banks of flowers and fruit-bearing trees. One or two couples occupied the first seats they came to, but they found one further along where it was darker and more secluded, and there they sat down, and he opened her fan and allowed her to flutter him in her soft, insinuating way.

They were engaged to each other for the next dances, but when they came she pleaded that her ankle ached and would be mind very much if they rested a little longer. He could not refuse, and so they sat on, hidden by the dark, thick leaves of the camellias and talking together in low voices.

Once his mother passed through the conservatory, leaning on the arm of old General Trotter, while she talked her keen eyes sought around her for the couple who were hidden behind the camellias. When at last she detected them her son's eyes met her steadily, and his look told her that he meant to do as he chose and to flirt with anyone who took his fancy.

But to-night he was allowing himself to be enticed to it by a little unhappy droop about her mouth and a listlessness in the tone of her voice that made his love and longing towards her greater than ever.

Later on in the evening he had another waltz with Violet, and when she had a new plan for engaging his attention. It suited her to turn a little faint in the middle of the waltz and to cling to him for support—it was her ankle, she said, and it had twisted and hurt it. He supported her from the room, and since the conservatory was exactly opposite and she made a sign towards it, he again took her in there.

She had been gazing before her white unseeing eyes, slowly moving the white feathered fan backwards and forwards mechanically, and had forgotten him and her surroundings for the moment, but at his words she turned quickly.

"Nothing is the matter. Of course I am enjoying myself! What an idea. Why I have danced every dance!" "Does that make happiness?" "That is what one comes to a ball for, naturally."

"I should say it depended upon whom one danced with—it does with me. I should like to waltz with you the whole evening, for instance, but I should think it a frightful lag if I had to confine myself to whom shall I say?—well, anybody else in fact."

"Do you like dancing with me?" she asked listlessly. "I don't waltz very well, I am afraid—nothing like Mrs. Laing-Stoner."

"I love dancing with you! Don't you know that, Muriel?" There was a dangerous tenderness in his voice as he leaned nearer her, and in his handsome careworn eyes there was an intensity never seen there except when they rested on her.

"Come," he went on, as she did not answer, "I think you know that in fact."

"I think you know that in fact."

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your heart of hearts, though you won't own it, and it's because I am fond of you—fond as a friend of course—that I know every line of your face and understand its expression. What is it that is troubling you and making you unhappy? Tell me!"

"Don't worry about him, dear," he went on, regardless of her protestations. "He isn't worth it—none of us are! He's a selfish dog, like the rest of us, no doubt, and is after your money into the bargain, I'll wager!"

"No, he isn't!" she exclaimed with quick championship of her hero, falling instantly into the trap as he had intended she should. "He's the very best man that ever lived—generous and honorable and chivalrous and kind!"

He did not smile, as he might have done, he never laughed at her romantic fancies and girlish dreams, though he was apt to sneer at anything approaching sentiment from the mouths of other people.

"I don't know," she answered absently. She was looking away from him, and had evidently not been listening to his last words. Lord Lynmouth, with Violet on his arm, was coming through the hall at that instant. Her eyes were on them, and as her companion watched her he saw the glances and her lips part with a sudden little catch in her breath. The feathers of her fan, too, shared her emotion and were fluttering in a state of distressing agitation.

"Remember," he said presently, "that whatever happens you have always one friend ready to do anything for you, however great or however small it may be. I would go to the other end of the earth for you—if it were just to take a message from you to that other fellow, lucky beggar! Don't be afraid to ask me. It would give me pleasure to serve you—the only real good sort of pleasure there is left in life."

"Thank you," she said in a low voice. Then looking up at him. "You speak as though you were unhappy. I thought you had a splendid sort of life—such lots of excitement and gaiety and going about!" "Oh, I have—everything a man could want! Don't you worry about me, little girl!" he returned, meeting her eyes with a reassuring smile.

But the smile changed into one that was grim as she looked away again, and the handsome worn face was inexpressibly sad as they finished the dance in silence.

(To be Continued)

Dr. W. H. Montague III.

Winnipeg, Sept. 8.—The Evening Telegram says "Dr. W. H. Montague suffered an attack yesterday at his Summer home in Kenora, and is confined to his bed. He was boating with a number of friends when he became seriously ill."

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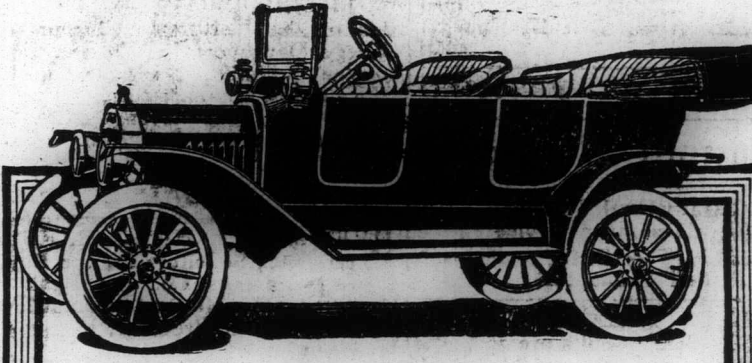
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