

# HESTER, AND A LEGACY

(Continued From Page 7)

He had stopped and was waiting for her to say whatever it was she wanted to say. She could tell that, though she had not the courage to raise her eyes from the ground. A painful silence ensued, which she felt she could not break, as she stood there, to her dismay, she felt two big tears overflow her eyes and run down her pale cheeks.

"I wanted to tell you," she began brokenly, "how very unhappy I am about this dreadful will. I had no idea—"

A sob put an end to this sentence too, and the tears streamed down her cheeks. He made not the smallest reply, but stood waiting for whatever she might be coming.

"I want you to believe that I knew nothing about it," she added at last, raising her tear-laden eyes to his. "Oh you cannot think so badly of me as to suppose—"

Again she broke off, and this time, without waiting for anything further he turned on his heel and left her without ceremony, without a word. A moment afterwards she heard a door bang, and realized that he had refused to listen to her explanations, and treated her with such scant courtesy that nothing short of absolute dislike could have prompted such behaviour. This is what she told herself and the agony of it was worse than anything that had gone before.

That same afternoon Lord Lynnmoor chanced to come across Doctor Turner in the village. For a few minutes they walked up and down in an unfrequented byway.

"There is one thing I wanted to ask you," said Lord Lynnmoor. "Were you perfectly satisfied as to the cause of my mother's death by a natural one? Were you entirely in agreement with the other doctors about it?"

"There was certainly conclusive evidence of disease of the heart," replied Doctor Turner.

"Quite sufficient to account for death?"

"Quite sufficient."

They paced the sunny path a while in silence, Lord Lynnmoor with his eyes on the ground. Then he spoke again.

"Would it have been possible that a narcotic could have hastened her death in any way?"

"There was no evidence of a narcotic having been taken," Dr. Turner turned and looked at Lord Lynnmoor. "I hope, my lord, you have no suspicions—no doubts as to—as to—"

"Oh, none whatever," Lord Lynnmoor replied hastily. "I merely wished to understand the case. You have no suspicion yourself, I presume?"

"No, as I said before, the actual disease of the heart was quite enough to account for her ladyship's death. Lord Lynnmoor turned the subject and soon after parted from him and rode slowly home—a dark, brooding cloud—on his brow.

That afternoon he took it into his head to examine those of the servants who had been chiefly connected with the circumstances preceding his mother's death.

Accordingly he took possession of the library and called in the servants one by one. The first who was interviewed were Mathews and Mrs. Williams—old, respectable family servants who could tell Lord Lynnmoor very little with which he was not already acquainted and nothing of importance.

Fanny Payne, Lady Lynnmoor's maid, next entered the room, but she was in such a state of abject terror that she was almost incapable of answering his questions, and he dismissed her hastily a few moments later when she suddenly burst into tears. She was a young girl and rather pretty, and perhaps in consequence of these two facts he did not put a harsh construction on her foolish fright of him.

Mrs. Vavasour's maid, Kate, was a very different sort of person—a bright, dark-eyed, pert girl, who gave her information without hesitation. She had met Fanny on the stairs on the morning of the 28th, she said, looking like a ghost, with her face as white as a sheet, and she had clutched hold of her arm and told her that her ladyship looked very strange and wouldn't move. She had got a cup of coffee in her hand, and was spilling it all down her dress. She had told the girl to come back with her and see what was the matter, but she had said she did not dare, and so she went up alone. She found a ladyship lying apparently dead. She took hold of her arm and shook her, but without the slightest effect. She then called Miss Phillips, who slept in the adjoining room. She came at once in her dressing gown, looked at Lady Lynnmoor, and said at once that she was dead. Then she rang the bell and the whole house was aroused.

Lord Lynnmoor hesitated a moment then he said, rather evading than seeking the girl's eyes—

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"Did Miss Phillips appear upset—show much agitation?"

"I really can't say, my lord, I was so upset myself that I hardly noticed her. She gave her orders very quiet and decided, as far as I remember. But the night before she was not at all like herself."

"The night before?" he repeated, looking up with a sudden startled expression in his eyes. "What do you mean? When did you see her?"

"It must have been past twelve at night, my lord, and my mistress, Mrs. Vavasour sent me to Miss Phillips to get some croosote for her toothache, which was very bad, and—"

"Why did she send you to Miss Phillips?"

"Because the medicine-chest is kept in her ladyship's dressingroom, and Miss Phillips could get at it easier than any one else."

"Well?"

"I went to Miss Phillips's door and tapped twice before she opened it, and then I couldn't help being struck with how she looked. I thought it strange then, and I've thought it strange ever since, for when she came to the door I saw at once as there was something up—her eyes were shining most brilliant, and her hair was rough, and her cheeks quite flushed—for she's generally so pale-like—and I think she'd been crying."

"I asked her for the croosote, and she told me to wait there while she got it, and when she gave it to me she said as she hoped my mistress would soon be better, but I thought her voice sounded odd, and her hands were trembling when she gave me the bottle."

"Would she have to go through Lady Lynnmoor's room to get to the medicine-chest?"

"Yes, my lord, it is kept in the dressing-room."

"Did you go into Miss Phillips's room?"

"No, my lord, I waited on the landing, and she shut the door while she went to get it."

"This was all the information that could be gathered from Mrs. Vavasour's maid, and Lord Lynnmoor dismissed her. As she was leaving the room he said suddenly—

"Do you know where Miss Phillips is?"

"The first part of the afternoon she was with my mistress, my lord, but I think she's in her own room now."

"Will you tell her that she is quite all right, should be glad to speak with her a few minutes?"

"Yes, my lord," replied the girl, and she went away to give Hester his lordship's message.

### CHAPTER XXX

When Lord Lynnmoor was left alone, after giving his message to the girl Payne that he desired to have an interview with Hester Phillips, he went over to the fireplace and stood there leaning against the mantelpiece, staring across the room with unseeing eyes, lost in thought.

Ten minutes, a quarter of an hour ticked away on the face of the clock, and still Hester had not made her appearance. He was getting impatient; twice he stretched his hand towards the bell rope, but withdrew it on second thoughts. At last he heard her at the door and, turning

his back, pretended to be unaware of her presence.

"Did you want to speak to me?" she asked at the open door.

"If you will be good enough to spare the time," he replied, half turning round, but yet not looking at her.

"Certainly! I am sorry I kept you waiting, but I was detained."

"Don't mention it," he said formally.

She closed the door and came forward in the shadowy room.

"Please sit down," he said, indicating a chair, and she sat down obediently and waited for him to speak. Apparently he found it difficult to begin, for several minutes elapsed before he altered his position or broke the silence. He remained standing with his elbow on the mantelpiece and his face turned away from her and in the shadow. She, however, showed no signs of impatience, but sat with her hands in her lap, now and then looking anxiously at the profile of the face that she could not actually see.

"Miss Phillips, you know more about this affair than you choose to say," he said at last suddenly.

"I never mind upon what grounds I may have. Am I right?"

"Indeed?" she said, with self-possession, "you make the assertion very decidedly, but I don't know upon what grounds."

"Never mind upon what grounds I may have. Am I right?"

"If you were right I should not be likely to admit it."

"Why not?"

"I had motives for concealing anything that would of course be very strong ones, and I should do it at all costs."

"At all costs? Do you know that you run—rather ran—a tremendous risk in concealing any facts in connection with my mother's death?"

"That may be."

"And I cannot imagine any reason strong enough—except one—to keep you silent?"

"What is that reason?" she asked, after a little pause.

"He did not reply, and as he stood looking at her from the shadow there was a hazardous anxiety in his face that made him appear ten years older than he had done a few days before."

"Can't you tell me the truth?" he asked with entreaty in his voice. "Is not anything better than concealing things? For my own part I could bear any fate rather than the weight of a secret—a living falsehood!"

"She was silent, but her eyes had dropped and her hands were clasped tightly on her lap. He saw that she was agitated, and his own agitation grew stronger."

"Can't you tell me?" he went on. "Have you no reasons for thinking that perhaps the doctors were mistaken in their verdict and that the death was not entirely natural?"

"I am only too thankful to believe what the doctors said—that she died from disease of the heart," she replied in a low voice.

(To Be Continued)

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