

LYDIA'S CHOICE

Lydia could not help wondering why on earth Addenbrooke should be so anxious to marry her.

She was standing at the window, her eyes mechanically following the familiar, insignificant figure of the professor as he plodded down the gravel walk to the gate; and when he had passed from view she sat down in the nearest chair and continued her reflections.

And yet she had been aware of Addenbrooke's devotion from the days of the good but obstinate little boy, with a taste for chemical experiments, to those of the modest young man, who lurked unobtrusively in doorways for the purpose of saying good night to her, and was always at hand to fill up vacancies.

She had given him no answer, but she knew by now what her answer would be. The door opened and Mrs. Grey, her mother, came into the room.

These two women lived together without profit or pleasure to either. Mrs. Grey was capable of making sacrifices, but she lacked the priceless gift of home making; while Lydia, on her part, chafed beneath the restrictions of a relationship in which neither filial nor affection bore a part.

"So it was to be Johnny Addenbrooke after all," reflected Mrs. Grey; "a Gower street professor of no particular distinction. Well, Lydia was getting on, and if a girl means to marry she had better manage to do so before she is 25. And there had been nothing, it seemed, in that affair with young Fleming?"

"By the way, Lydia, Fleming has come back. You remember Lawrence Fleming? They are making quite a liop of him on account of his new book. He is just the sort of man to enjoy being lionized."

"I expect that he will be turning up at my rooms in the course of a day or two. He left a portmanteau with my landlady before he sailed. Good night, my own dear girl." And he held out both his hands.

Lydia looked at him sharply with rising vexation. She had found out long ago that subtle hints were quite thrown away upon Johnny; but surely, surely he must know the truth. Either he was the most consummate actor or the densest person living.

It was impossible to entertain seriously the idea of Addenbrooke as a consummate actor. Addenbrooke had rooms in Gower street—a sitting room and a bedroom, divided by folding doors. The whole apartment had begun life as what house agents call a spacious drawing room, and bore yet the marks of its former state of existence.

"That's enough, said Addenbrooke, in a low voice, "be a brute. Let us hear no more about him."

"There is nothing more to hear," she answered, with bitterness. "This is the end of my story. A week later I heard he had gone abroad."

Addenbrooke put his arm about Lydia and, drawing her head to his shoulder, stroked her hair backward with his kind hand.

Her recital had pained him. He knew the perfidy of his sex, but this particular offender had gone beyond all recognized limits; limits which, in his own person, Johnny had always refused to recognize.

The thought of the misery inflicted on his proud, sensitive, passionate Lydia made him sick with anger and speechless with sympathy. He rose at last, and, buttoning up his coat, tried to speak in tones of reassuring cheerfulness.

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Lydia looked at him, speechless, and he went on; "I expect that he will be turning up at my rooms in the course of a day or two. He left a portmanteau with my landlady before he sailed. Good night, my own dear girl." And he held out both his hands.

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The mantelpiece, which now supported a host of bottles, variously shaped and filled, was of white marble, heavily carved, summed up to the imaginative mind visions of gilt clocks and candlesticks under glass shades.

The walls, hung with white watered paper, were divided into panels by stripes of gold heading, and from the ceiling a shrouded chandelier depended from a twelfth cake-like decoration in white and gold plaster.

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Addenbrooke had drawn his writing table, with the lamp on it, close to the fire, and had settled down to a long night's work. It was the evening following Lydia's confession, and he was too busy to get up to St. John's Wood. He sighed at the thought of this, then plunged into the pile of papers, which not only covered the table, but overflowed into several neighboring chairs.

He had not been long at work when the door was flung open and a man entered the room.

"Still in these gilded halls, Johnny?" said a voice, which was not quite so drawling nor so full of quiet humor as the speaker seemed to intend.

"Fleming, by all that's wonderful!" cried Addenbrooke, rising with extended hand.

The newcomer was a large, heavily built young man with dark hair and a complexion originally florid, burnt crimson by the African sun.

He was distinctly handsome, though the lower part of the face was a trifle heavy and there was a lack of finish about the ears and nostrils.

"Sit down," said Addenbrooke, clearing a chair and resuming his own seat. "Examinations, are you?" Fleming flicked with his larger finger at the papers on the desk. "It's not your own exams. It's other people's, poor old Johnny!"

Fleming had the greatest contempt for examinations, in which indeed, he had conspicuously failed to distinguish himself; the less brilliant Addenbrooke having a commonplace knack of getting into the first class, which is often the way with your dull, plodding fellows.

These two men had been friends, after a fashion, since their first term at the university. In those days Fleming had been a raw, unshapely, soft-bodied, and somewhat awkward-looking fellow, but now he was a young man, well set up, and a thoroughly accomplished scholar.

"My dear," he answered gently, "tell me nothing which distresses you. I don't want to know. I know you have been very happy, but one day, I assure you, you are going to be happier than ever."

She smiled half sadly. "Johnny, let me tell you, you have heard, you will want to go away from me—from a woman who has been so cruelly humiliated."

He laughed, drawing closer to her in the delight. "Since that's it, Lydia, perhaps you'd better tell me."

He saw that she would never rest till she had disburdened her mind of the old, unhappy things, about which personally he had small desire to learn.

They were so infinitely touching these poor women and their love stories; their anxious interpretation of looks and words and smiles; their pathetic, careful gathering up of crumbs so carelessly scattered.

So Lydia, with half averted face, began her story in the strange, uncertain voice which, from his boyhood upward, had had power to thrill John Addenbrooke to the inmost depths of his being.

"It is nearly a year ago," she began "at the Meades' place in Warwickshire, I arrived on March the 28 and stayed a week. It began from the beginning. When I walked into the drawing room, where he was standing by the tea table, it seemed that I had walked into a new and strange and wonderful world. I lived in that world for a week, and it was like a lie—every one else accepted the situation. That I no more questioned it than I questioned the rising of the sun. The day came when I was to go, and he had said nothing definite to me. I, living in my fool's paradise, was neither surprised nor afraid. At last, an hour before I left, he took me in his arms, yes, Johnny, yes—he took me in his arms and kissed my lips, and told me that he would follow me the next day."

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BORN. Truro June 9, to the wife of Daniel Holmes, a son. Truro, June 20, to the wife of Nelson Blos, a son. Truro, June 21, to the wife of W. F. Liston, a son. Halifax, June 18, to the wife of Charles S. Barry, a son.

DIED. St. John, June 23, Patrick Barry, 68. St. John, June 20, George Cotter, 20. St. John, June 23, Patrick Barry, 68. Halifax, June 23, George Brittain, 51. Stellarton, June 14, David Cullen, 61.

MARRIED. Halifax, June 19, Michael Kline to Alice Wash. Macan, June 11, by Rev. Mr. Davis, Neil Barclay to Nellie E. Ripley.

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