

Lorrie

--- OR ---
Hollow Gold

"Most of us wish that. But, unfortunately, our permission is not asked. But having been born, we have to make the best of it. Permit me to tell you, my dear Guy, that by marrying this no doubt estimable young lady, you will make the very worst of it."

"If you could see her!" said poor Guy. "I should fall in love with her myself, no doubt, therefore I had better not risk it. My dear Guy, I am quite prepared to take it for granted that the young lady is all that is beautiful and accomplished and virtuous—a paragon of elegance and a marvel of Nature, but if she were Venus and Minerva combined in one, I should still say that you had far better throw yourself out of the window and make a picturesque end than destroy the remainder of your life by marrying her."

"You refuse your consent, sir?" "If you insist upon giving your formal reply, Guy, I absolutely and emphatically refuse my consent! But I do not forget that you are your own master. You are free to marry, whomsoever you please, and as you seem to be susceptible, I ought, perhaps to be grateful that you have not insisted upon presenting me with some shoppier or dairymaid for a daughter-in-law and future Countess of Latcham. I refuse my consent but I am too much of a man to pretend to expect that that will influence you! Marry the young lady if you will, but permit me to inform you that in gaining a wife, you will sustain the loss of a father."

"You will disown me?" "Is that what you mean, sir?" said Guy, breathing hard. "I mean that I will no longer call my son the man who selfishly perfected his own gratification to the detriment of his father's peace of mind and let the whole thing tumble about your ears. As for me, I can die as comfortably in a bedroom in some foreign watering place as here at Latcham. But you are a father, and you are a man of honor. For Heaven's sake! Father, every word you speak stabs me! What shall I do, what shall I do? Oh, Lorrie! Lorrie!" and he covered his face with his hands and groaned.

"Is your poor boy?" he said, gravely. "Is your poor boy as this? But think, Guy!" "Think! I can only think of her!" and with a groan he fell to pacing up and down again.

"Guy! When I was about your age I had a trouble of this sort. She was the daughter of my college tutor. She was scarcely more than a child—can see her now? They said that there were no bluer eyes in the world. I have a lock of her hair somewhere. I saw it a few days ago in some old box. Guy, I loved her as deeply as you love this Miss Dolores. It was a very bad attack indeed. And I wanted to marry her. Your grandfather heard of it, Heaven knows how I came to true friend, suppose, who saw that I was going to make an idiot of myself and commit social suicide, may have written to him. He came down, and there was a scene. It was a worse scene than we have had to-day. Guy, for my father had a sharper tongue than I have, and did not spare me. I stood out for a day, and then—gave in. Fully persuaded that I had lost all that made life worth the living. He pulled and looked dreamily at the flickering flame in which doubtless shone the vision of the blue-eyed golden-haired tutor's daughter of long ago.

"But I found that my heart was still sound, and that, after all, life is a game with a good many points and though one may lose one or two, the game itself is not always lost. I did not forget Lily! No! I don't suppose men forget—I don't suppose they will forget your Miss Dolores, my dear Guy!—but I found life worth living, though I had not made her the Countess of Latcham and thereby brought the house to smash."

"He natted again. "I think she married a man on the Stock Exchange—I really forget though. I know that I didn't know her fifteen years afterward. She had grown fat, and was the mother of eight children! I tell you this, to show you that I have been through the fire myself, and know how it burns. Of course," he added with a smile, "I am aware that your attack is very much worse than mine could have been. We all think that we are the first that ever really loved. But, Guy, do you think I should have been happier if I had married the tutor's daughter instead of your mother who was a Molyneux, don't you think?"

"The moral is— "I think I will go now, sir," said Guy. "Wait one moment, please," said the earl. Then he thought for a second or two before he went on. "Guy, I imagine you will admit that you owe me something? I have not been a particularly harsh or unfeeling father. I have never interfered with you unless I was compelled. You have had your own way in most things. Even in the matter of money you have had—forgive me mentioning it—as much as I have, comparatively speaking. At the end, I suppose! Will you, taking all this into consideration, grant me one favor—make me one promise?"

"Guy who had shaded his face with his hands while his father had been speaking, looked up quickly and apprehensively. "No, I am not going to ask you to give Miss Dolores up here and now, but I am going to ask you to do this: I want here with me for a month. It is not much to ask. Just a month! Of course, that comprises the understanding that you do not write to her beyond one short note to-night, stating that you are compelled to go abroad. Is this too much to ask, do you think?"

"Guy hesitated. Leave Lorrie for a month! Not to write to her! "You have known this young lady

a few days, weeks, I, your father, and not a particularly harsh one, asking you to remain away from her for a month, and you hesitate! My boy, you will do as you wish, sir."

"The stars in their courses" were fighting against Lorrie!

"Greta," says Jack, slowly, and with an air of judicial gravity, "I fear that Lorrie is about to have the measles. It is the third morning after the races; the rector has gone to his study, and Greta and Lorrie and Jack are "mooing" away the usual five minutes during which they always sit talking over the last cup of coffee.

"Good gracious, Jack! What makes you say that?" Lorrie flushes and eyes him angrily. "Why do I think that Lorrie is going to have the measles?" he answers, keeping his gaze upon the bewitching face with provoking steadiness. "Because the dear child displays all the premonitory symptoms. Her appetite for the last two days has been on the decline; this morning I perceive that it has disappeared altogether—a sure sign of coming measles troubles. Then she has grown irregularly silent and thoughtful—nervous signs, or perhaps softening of the brain. Then, haven't you noticed that the poor girl spends her time in smiling to herself, and growing red and white by turns?"

All signs of the dreaded measles, Lorrie confesses that you have got spots on your arm, you had at once, if it is a respectable infant, and let us send for Dr. Cox!" Greta laughed, again, and Lorrie tries to job it, but it is rather a feeble attempt.

"You don't really feel ill, do you, Lorrie? It's all nonsense about the measles, of course, because you've had them."

"I never felt better in my life. What is the use of paying my attention to Jack's idiocy?" "I beg your pardon, do I understand that you deny the unwelcome, the occasional smiling, the intermittent flushing?" "Jack, you are—really don't know what to call you. Why is it that the male species of the human race, when young, should be such a terrible nuisance? Why don't you go to another or fish—go over to the Arsenal barracks, for instance? Anything but worry us!"

"I'm going to shoot a fish. I'd go over to the barracks, but that Guy is away."

"Lord Kendale away!" says Greta. Lorrie turns swiftly to the window just in time to conceal the sudden crimson which rises to her face from Jack's keen eyes.

"I left three days ago. Did you know it?" "How should we know it?" "Oh, ah, I forgot!" He wrote me a short note and sent a polite message for you! I forgot all about it."

Lorrie's heart beats fast. "Of course, there is only one thing you don't forget—your dinner! And what was the message, pray?" "She tries to speak indifferently, but her face, turned away from them, is still hoisting the red flag.

"Oh, nothing of importance or I should have given it to you, some thing about catching a cold, I think. Seen my nice Greta?" and he goes out whistling. Lorrie watches him as he comes outside, and leans out of the window. "Where has Lord Kendale gone to, Jack? I hope he'll remember my gloves!" "Oh, he'll remember them fast enough! He has gone to his father's—Latcham."

and loveliest little woman in all the world! But it can't be helped, it was either this or "good-bye" to the old dad forever! Tell me if I have done right, dearest! Write me a long letter. It will be all right at the end of the month, for whether he consents or not, the living here is not such a good-for-nothing job, if it is until death. Don't forget me, my darling."

"Your lover, Guy." "P.S.—Send me a photo of yourself this time. Hope you'll be able to read this scrawl, writing is not my line. I wish to Heaven I could tell you all about it."

"Oh, Guy, Guy!" she cries, softly straining the letter in her own clasp. "Don't forget me! Don't cease to love me! Just for thirty-one days!" "The cry is still on her lips when she harts a footstep behind her. In an instant the letter has disappeared from her pocket, and she turns, trembling but calm.

"It is Seymour Melford. "Good-morning, Meditating among the toms!" "Yes, Seymour Melford, shortly. "I was coming to the rectory. Is Mr. Latimer in?" "Yes," answers Lorrie again. "I think so."

"Perhaps you will let me accompany you then?" he says, appealing. "I'm going to the village. You'll find my father in his study."

Melford watches her with a bitter smile in place of the pleasant smile, until her slight, graceful figure has disappeared then slowly and daintily picking his way, like a cat, over the damp grass, goes up to the rectory. The rector sees him as he passes the study door, and opening it, calls to him, and says, "I'm rather early for a morning call, but I may describe my visit as one of business."

"I am very pleased to see you. Will you take a seat? I hope your business is of an agreeable nature. As a rector when I hear the word I experience an unpleasant chill."

"You shall judge for yourself. I came to you about the new schools. As you see, the proposed new schools, you mean, Seymour. I am afraid they will remain the 'proposed' schools for a long time. Yes! I ventured to ask your father for some assistance in carrying out the alterations. The present buildings are in a terrible state, quite beyond repairing; even if they were large enough, I want new schools very badly—very badly, indeed."

"I suppose so." "It would not seem a large sum to you, no doubt, but it is a great deal of money to us. It is a poor parish, Mr. Melford, and I fear the rector is not very speaking, as poor as his people."

"What is the estimate?" asks Seymour. "Four hundred pounds," replies the rector. "The plan is a very plain one of four—"

"Say four hundred and fifty, there are always unlooked for expenses." "Yes, yes, four hundred and fifty! And that is a large sum for Carshill, and that is a large sum for the poor children who have buildings are in a terrible state, quite beyond repairing; even if they were large enough, I want new schools very badly—very badly, indeed."

I hope to be as rich, Mr. Latimer." "Dear me, this is very interesting. But you are speaking to a man, Mr. Seymour, whose hands are bound. I could not stretch them out to grasp the most golden of apples. I am too poor to speculate. As you are so doubt aware, the living here is not such a good-for-nothing job, if it were not for a small income which I derive from some private money, we should be in a very hard case indeed."

"Mr. Latimer, I am going to say to you that I should not say to think to any other man in the world. We men of business are very reserved, you know, we have our secrets, and we do not disclose them to men outside our profession, if I may call it so."

"I can quite understand that," the rector says. "We gain information in various ways, which we turn to account for our own profit. Other men outside our profession, and in consequence bear the losses, which you mentioned. They are the losers, we are the winners. Now, Mr. Latimer, may I ask you a question which I fear you may think too intrusive?"

"Not at all, not at all!" murmurs the rector. "I am very curious to know the amount of your private fortune, and how much you derive from it."

"With pleasure. It is a very small fortune, Mr. Melford. A little under five thousand pounds, and the income I receive from it is just two hundred and fifty pounds a year."

"Just as I expected, sir. Now, Mr. Melford, who has been standing in the room, thinking over Mr. Seymour Melford's generous gift, nods her head.

"Most excellent," repeats the rector. "I had no idea that he possessed so many—many fair qualities. I hope we shall see more of him for the future than we have done."

"If we do I think we shall be paying rather dearly for the school money, pupse."

"What do you say, my dear?" he says. "I think the school ought to be grateful to you, Mr. Melford, if we are going to make a name for the house of him."

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hands them to him with a flushed face and excited manner. "Is there anything else?" "Nothing else except to count your profits in a month's time, my dear sir."

As he puts the paper in his pocket the door opens and Lorrie enters. She is short at sight of Seymour Melford.

"I thought you were alone, papa," she says. "Old Mrs. Hopkins wants to see you!" "Yes, my dear, yes, yes," says the rector.

"What is the matter papa? Has anything happened?" "No, no, nothing, my dear. Yes," he adds, remembering the generous gift of the school money. "Mr. Seymour has been so very kind as to give me the whole of the money for the schools. The whole of the money, Lorrie."

"How kind of you! Why—the whole of the money? How rich you are!" "The rector gives me more credit than I deserve, Miss Lorrie, he forgets to mention that my father subscribed a portion of the sum."

"Yes," says Seymour Melford, "the rector gives the remainder, Lorrie, it is not generous of him?" "Yes, it is," says Lorrie, looking at him with more kindness than she has ever bestowed upon him before.

"Very generous?" and acting upon the impulse of the moment she holds out her hand. "I little thought that I should be so richly repaid for my good-morning!" and she utters a "Good-morning" and exits out the door.

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"Oh! And who is the wrong person?" "A young lady—possessed of course of every virtue and all the graces—the daughter of a needy person."

"What is her name?" "Dorothy—no, Dolores Latimer." "Never heard of it."

"Nor I, until it was my misfortune to hear it from Guy."

"And is she the wrong person?" "Can you ask it, my dear lady, knowing the condition of Latcham as you do?"

"She's very pretty, of course?" "Of course!" assented the earl, with a sarcastic smile.

"And who is the right person?" "An ordinary man would have hemmed and hawed, and hesitated. The earl, knowing his lady, answered at once."

"A certain Miss Melford?" "Never heard of her!" said Lady Farnham.

"I dare say not. She is the daughter of a parvenu, a man who made money—I forgot how. He is in Parliament, he is worth a million."

"I see," said Lady Farnham, "Well—after a pause—"what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to ask her to stay here for a few weeks," said the earl. Lady Farnham raised her brows.

"What on earth shall I do with her?" she demanded, not unreasonably. "What is she like?" "Pretty, charming, well taught," said the earl. "You need not be afraid, my dear lady, she may bore you."

"They have been trotting up and down for nearly an hour now."

"The new schoolhouse, politics, or some other of the many topics. They must be inexhaustible then," reports Lorrie. "For Mr. Melford seems to spend all his spare time here. He was here yesterday, and the day before, and the day before that, and he and pupse always go off to the study together, or stroll the garden, talk, talking. Yesterday afternoon I saw them with their heads together over some paper."

"The plan of the school?" "No, it wasn't," says Lorrie. "I know that a mile off. It was some printed paper."

"I don't know what it was, I'm sure. It is very nice of Mr. Melford to amuse papa."

"Very nice!" assents Lorrie grimly. "Papa hasn't too much company, and he is always glad to see him."

"Yes, I wonder Mr. Melford does not live here!" remarks Lorrie, not very amiably. "It would be very pleasant, he is always so agreeable and well-informed."

"He is our Admirable Critchton; but all the same, I'm glad he doesn't take up his abode at the rectory."

"I dare say he feels rather dull at the Pines now Diana is away," says Greta.

"If we owe the pleasure of his society to Diana's absence, I, for one, shall welcome her return with enthusiasm," remarks Lorrie. "I can't conceive why you dislike Seymour Melford so much?" she says.

Lorrie makes an impatient gesture with her hand, which screens her face from the fire. "I do not like you, Dr. Fell, the reason why I cannot tell; but I do not like Dr. Fell! I don't like Seymour Melford, and I'm afraid I shan't go to like him."

"I am sure he is most attentive to you."

"I know he is. He is always dancing about me with a chair or a glass or something or other. I am afraid to drop my scissors or lay down a book, for if I do he is sure to pounce upon it and hand it up, as if he had nothing better to do than pick up the articles I shed."