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## HESTER, AND A LEGACY

On the third morning the answer came—the conditions were accepted. Lord Lynnouth did not write to her again as she had half expected that he would, and she only heard through the lawyers that he had agreed to do what she had suggested. Whatever feelings of resentment, pride, and unrequited love rose up and possessed her at this moment of what seemed to her but common courtesy, they were not allowed to appear on the surface, and she talked and laughed with Nancy, and entered into all the arrangements for moving into the country with apparently as keen an interest as if she had been the heart-whole, happy girl she pretended to be.

Mrs. Vavasour also wrote urging her to accept the offer she had made at Lynnouth Chase, since she intended to winter abroad. Mrs. Philips saw no objection to her daughter taking the post. And, as for Hester, since she still meant to work for her living she felt that the companionship to Mrs. Vavasour, thankless as it would be, was to be handsomely paid, and that the complete change of scene in other lands would be the best thing for her much-tried health and spirits. So that at the end of three weeks she joined that lady in London and they travelled together to Rome, where Mrs. Vavasour meant to spend the greater part of the winter.

Through all the change of scene and surroundings of the next six months Hester did her best to forget Lord Lynnouth and get over the infatuation that had possessed her. She succeeded to some extent—that is to say, the first acute pangs of the "madly" being over, she settled down to the fact that he had gone out of her life for ever, and made the best of the things as they were. She did not always succeed, it is true; there were moments when the old longing rose up and her heart ached as sorely as ever. But she got through them some how, and took up the burden of her life again with a quiet courage that slowly but surely added strength to her whole character.

They were back in London for the season next spring, and Hester had begun to wonder whether it was wise for her to remain with Mrs. Vavasour, now that there was a chance of meeting Lord Lynnouth. By means of a little skilful questioning she succeeded in dragging from his cousin the information that he was "in Egypt or somewhere" and he stayed so long, comparatively at ease on that point she settled down until the danger should threaten her more nearly.

One afternoon Mrs. Vavasour's bell rang sharply and Hester rose from her letter-writing and went into her room. She found her reclining on a couch near the open window of her bedroom, through which came the roar and rattle of London streets. She was dressed in her morning gown, and was supported by a pillow and soft silk cushions of artistic colors. On a table at her side stood smelling-salts, a bowl of rice and some grapes. It was evident that the lady was in severe suffering on the day in question. She opened her eyes slightly as Hester entered the room, and said in a faint voice—

They passed on up the Row, and Hester turned back and made her way to a seat in the shade of the trees. She sat down on the seat and stared across the grass to the water in the distance, where groups of little children, in charge of their nursemaids, were sailing boats and feeding the ducks. But she saw nothing of the green stretch before her; her mind was revolving between two pictures—the one she had just seen of the riders in the Row, and the other of Lord Lynnouth's words and actions when she had seen him last eight months ago. Yes, it was only eight months since they had met, yet it might have been eight years, so long the time had seemed and so much had been crowded into it. During the whole of the eight months she had day by day and hour by hour drilled her memories into oblivion, and now in a moment the hard work of all those days and hours was swept away.

A glance at the well-remembered features had brought back all the old intensity of feeling—resentment, jealousy, pain, and whatever else may have lurked in her heart under protest. The years of her life at Lynnouth were a month back into her mind with a vividness that was painful. She was not cured, that was evident; and, unless she wished the "madly" to return in full force, she must put herself out of the way of these chance views of him and of an even more dangerous meeting. Mrs. Vavasour was his cousin, and although he was not particularly attached to her society, a meeting was possible at any time, and she must no longer safely "in Egypt or somewhere," but in London, Hester made up her mind that she must leave her present situation as soon as she could.

When she rose to go home she felt as tired as if she had been walking for many miles. She went slowly, with a dull, dead weight at her heart; the sunshine no longer seemed lovely in her eyes, but effusive in its intense glare, and the gaiety of the people was a mockery in the midst of the sadness of life. When she got back home she found Mrs. Vavasour wide awake and apparently perfectly recovered.

"Who do you think has been here?" she exclaimed, anxiously waiting for a reply. "My cousin Dudley! He looks so well, so sunburnt and handsome! He is just back from Egypt for the wedding. I am so glad he is going too; I was afraid he would not be back for it. And he stayed so long—quite an hour, I think. What made you so late? I thought you would have been back hours ago."

"It was such a lovely afternoon that I was tempted to sit down in the Park a little while. I thought you would not want me as you were so busy." "I should have preferred to have you here. But now you are back, you may as well begin to pack at once. What did Madame Victorie say about my dress?"

Hester gave all information and began to fold and pack as directed. "Do you think you could do without me at Woodville during the wedding?" she said suddenly and abruptly, as she folded a long silk gown into precise folds. "I don't think I shall be needed at all, and I should be very glad to go home for a few days."

"What an idea!" exclaimed Mrs. Vavasour. "I could not possibly do without you now that I no longer have Kate. I wouldn't travel alone with Elsie for worlds! She would make the stupidest mistakes, and I doubt if we should ever arrive at all. The luggage would be lost for me. I know, and then when I left again she would pack abominably and all my things would look like rags. No, I cannot possibly do without you. If Kate had been with me it would have been different. Besides, Lady Montague especially mentioned you, and said that I could bring you if I liked, as she had room for everybody."

Hester's lips compressed themselves just as she felt a self-restraint as she bent over the trunk. "My invalid sister is not well," she said, "and I thought you might spare me while you are at Woodville." "No, I really cannot. I want you more there than at home. It is most unreasonable to think of such a thing," exclaimed Mrs. Vavasour fretfully. "As for your sister, she is always ill, and I don't suppose she is any worse than usual." And she ran on with a long string of reasons, reproaches, and lamentations.

Hester made no further objections, since she had learned to submit to fate, or rather to other people's wishes. Besides, she felt that it would be rather inconsiderate to upset Mrs. Vavasour's arrangements by leaving at a moment's notice, and that therefore this dreaded week at Woodville was inevitable.

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open, and Hester could see in it a faint resemblance to Lynnouth Hall. As they drove up to the door they passed a man and a girl in a pretty summer dress chatting together on a seat among the trees at the side of the avenue; another couple was sauntering across the lawn, a third was just emerging from one of the ground floor windows, a fourth was disappearing in the direction of the lake. The mischief and heart-breaking that were sure to be going on among them all were pitiful to think of, but, judging merely by appearances, it all looked nice and inviting enough.

Old Lady Montague came out into the hall to welcome the new-comers and spoke very kindly to Hester. "I am so glad you have come, Miss Philips," she said. "I wanted particularly to number you among my guests. I can never forget how kind you were to my poor sister, Lady Lynnouth."

Hester was considerably astonished at this unexpected show of hospitality and would have been still more so had she known that it had been offered her chiefly at Lord Lynnouth's instigation. "He was glad that Miss Philips was coming, he had told his aunt, as he hoped she would have an opportunity of showing her some of the respect and admiration he felt for her; she had behaved as few women would have done over that unpleasant affair of the will; it was indeed owing to her generosity that he possessed Lynnouth Chase at all, and considering all things, might it not be as well if he took her into dinner once or twice? It would be a little attention on his part which he was sure she would feel that Miss Philips deserved."

(To be Continued)

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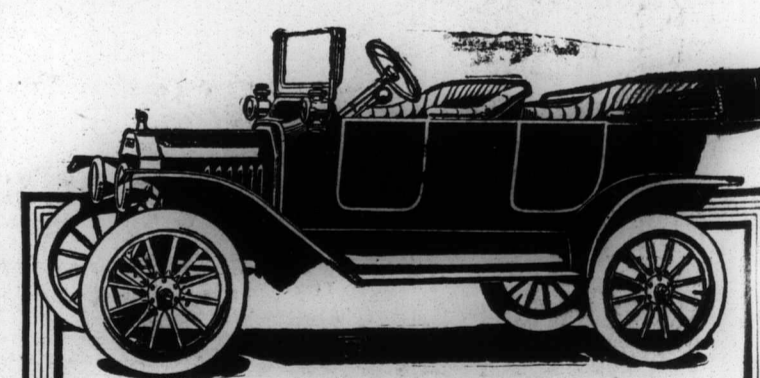
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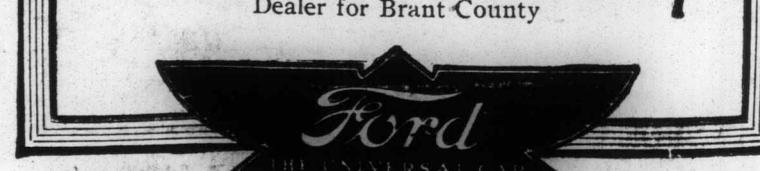
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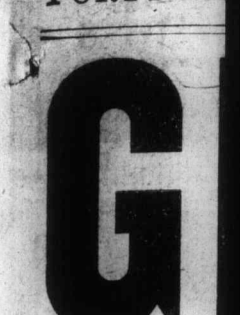
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LA EDIT

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