

'Not a bit'—laughing. 'I enjoyed myself too much.'

'Indeed!' A disagreeable curve appeared on Miss Wyndham's thin lips. 'I enjoyed myself, too,' she said; 'but that fact does not prevent my being tired. Have you heard my news?'—smiling.

She kept her lynx eyes on Molly's face. She did not wish to miss a

ment. I can't tell you how pleased I am to hear about it. I congratulate you heartily. Lewis Pleydell is such a charming man, and—why, here he is, so that I shall be able to congratulate him too in person!

Her tone was a little reckless, and a hard light burnt in her eyes as she saw Pleydell standing at the door. He had deceived her; he had only



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single expression. For the last half-hour she had been ruminating how best to impart the intelligence, and now her moment of triumph had come.

'News?' repeated Molly brightly. 'Have you any news? That will be very nice, for the day after a dance always falls very flat, doesn't it?'

To Myra's annoyance she took a seat with her back to the light, and leant forward in a listening attitude. 'There is not much to tell,' said Myra languidly, drawing her words out, 'except that Lewis Pleydell and I are engaged.'

There was a sudden silence, and then Molly somewhat vaguely repeated the words: 'You and Lewis Pleydell engaged?' she cried mechanically.

Myra smiled maliciously. She could see, in spite of the want of light, the deadly pallor that overspread the girl's face.

Lewis had flirted a great deal too much with Molly Clifford; it was meet and right that she should have her revenge, and the girl should suffer now.

'Yes,' she said carelessly, 'he proposed last night, and I accepted him. I don't suppose—with a short laugh—that it will be much of a surprise to anyone; they must have seen it coming on. You expected it, did you not?'

'Yes,' said Molly, so composedly that the other was disappointed. 'There was not much disguise, was there, about the state of either of your feelings?'

Myra looked up sharply. She felt as if the tables were being turned upon her. 'How white you look,' Miss Clifford! she said, with a sneer. 'What can be the matter with you? You are not going to faint, I hope?'

With a huge effort, Molly pulled herself together. There was a singing in her ears; she felt as if her heart had been broken by a sudden blow. A deep weight of agony seemed to be holding her down; but she must not let her enemy triumph! She would not give way before her; and he— he should never think for one moment that she cared. Pride came to her rescue, and strengthened her, so that her voice was calm and steady when she answered. She even managed to give a little laugh.

'I am quite well, thanks,' she said. 'I dare say my face is pale. Late hours tell on one, even if one does not feel tired. But about your engage-

played with her; he had broken her heart; but— he should never know it!

He cut but a poor figure on his entrance. His eyes wandered from one girl to the other, and he thought he understood the situation. A sheepish, half-shamed look came to his face as he glanced at Molly—Molly, who was looking more than usually beautiful under the excitement of the moment. Ah! why had Fate decreed she should be poor?

He must explain it all to the girl afterwards—tell her how absolutely necessary money was to him at the present moment, and she would sympathise and not judge him too harshly. Her love for him would make her understand.

'I have been telling Miss Clifford of our engagement,' broke in Myra, in somewhat acid tones. She had seen the glance of admiration spring to her fiancé's eyes as they rested upon Molly. 'She said she was delighted to hear it.'

'And so I am,' cried Molly, 'and I congratulate you both.'

The reproachful expression of Pleydell's eyes stung her to the quick. Did he suspect she was acting?

A terrible feeling of despair seemed to be overwhelming her, and she felt inclined to cry out in her misery; and then suddenly across the darkness of her thoughts a voice came back to her—a voice strong and tender, that had spoken to her only last night:

'If you are ever in trouble, let me know—let me help you if I can.'

Quick as thought a daring idea crossed her mind. She had no time to think of results and consequences. Her one feeling was to save her pride, and not to allow Lewis Pleydell to think she cared for him.

'The Alton Court dance is responsible for a good deal,' she said, after a scarcely noticeable pause, her eyes gleaming and shooting defiance at the man who had won her love only to cast it away. 'Two engagements in one night! I want your congratulations now. Did you hear that I am to be married too?'

Myra turned on her with a look of baffled spite. Would she not be able to triumph, after

Myra turned on her with a look of baffled spite. Would she not be able to triumph, after all? Was it possible that she had been mistaken in Miss Clifford's feelings?

'This is indeed a surprise,' she said, with a sardonic smile.

'May we ask who is the lucky man?' She bit her lip with anger as she witnessed the grey pallor which had overspread her fiancé's face. He looked as if he had received a blow, and he could not trust himself to speak.

How he must have loved the little spitfire to take her news like that! She felt as if Molly had snatched her weapon from her and plunged it into her—Myra's—bosom.

And Molly noticed his pallor too, and rejoiced—rejoiced with all the spite of wounded love. She rose from her chair with a light laugh.

'I am engaged to Sir Daryl Harcourt,' she said recklessly, 'and we are to be married very soon!' And then she went out of the room and left the two together.

III.

The men had just returned from their shooting. Sir Daryl Harcourt had entered the hall and given his gun to his man, when he was startled by a light touch on the arm.

There was a hubbub going on around—the whole day's shooting was being gone over again. Sir Daryl stopped abruptly in his conversation and looked down.

He was surprised to see Molly Clifford standing by him, and his tired eyes brightened at the sight. But what was the matter? This was not the usually brilliant Molly he knew so well, with this pale face and great sad eyes.

'I want to talk to you at once,' she whispered. 'Will you come with me into the conservatory? We shall be undisturbed there.'

He followed her slight figure immediately, and wondered at her agitation as she stood and faced him under the shelter of a large palm.

'I—I have done something,' she began falteringly, 'something you will not like—it was on the impulse of the moment, and—and I want to ask you a great favour.'

'My dear Miss Clifford,' Sir Daryl answered earnestly, 'you know noth-

ing would give me more pleasure than to be able to help you in any way—I told you so last night.'

She put out her hands with a little deprecating gesture. 'It is more—a great deal more than you think—but I—I have had some trouble—' She broke off, for she could not trust her voice; but Sir Daryl's eyes shone strangely. That she could turn to him to help her in her sorrow! Ah, surely it meant that her heart was not quite indifferent to him?

'Tell me all about it,' he said gently. 'You know you can trust me.'

'It is so difficult to tell,' she said, in a hard, dry voice. 'A man—I thought he loved me—indeed, he told me so, only last night, and yet this morning his engagement with another girl was announced.' She stopped her hurried flow of words to moisten her lips, and then looked straight up to him. 'I am proud,' she cried. 'And when they told me of it—for they told me themselves—I would not let them think I cared, so to show them how indifferent I was I told them I also was engaged—and engaged to you!'

She paused, wondering even in her own misery, what it could be that altered her appearance so. Was he so angry, and would he, alas! deny her statement?

For all the light had died out of his eyes, and a sort of greyness had overspread his face.

'You said you were engaged to me?' he repeated slowly. 'What do you want me to do?'

'I want you to corroborate my statement. Ah, Sir Daryl, it need only be for a little time. If you will just pretend to be engaged to me, just to show him—we can break it off afterwards. Will you do this for just a little time?'

Her words were hot and eager, and she laid her hand on his arm in feverish pleading, but he shook it off hastily, and turning from her seemed unable to answer.

A cold fear took possession of Molly.

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