

A Hazard of Hearts

By ALIX JOHN

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CHAPTER XIII.

The bright frosty weather holding on, there was a sudden excitement of skating. The lake in the park was pronounced safe, and Stewart sent the tidings to the neighboring houses, as it was the largest place of water in the country side. Stewart, however, had no intention of skating on the bank and refreshments there. It was the first stir of life about the place since the death of the eldest son, and although the widow looked patiently resigned, and ostentatiously retired into seclusion, everyone else, household and servants, seemed relieved and pleased.

Mathilde would have welcomed anything that brought action and kept thought at bay. She had not slept much at night of late, indeed had often paced the floor until the small hours; but if wakefulness had left dark lines under her eyes, they only seemed to accentuate her beauty.

She wore a tight-fitting dress of gray velvet corduroy, edged with dark fur, and admiringly followed her movements, for she had from childhood been a show skater of the Montreal rink.

Mrs. Herbert's paraphernalia of crape and felt bristled more ostentatiously than usual, and it was with her most widened smile that she turned to Mathilde. "I did not know that you were leaving off your mourning so soon."

Mathilde stared in rather a bewildered way. Her thoughts had flown to her dead father and to the autumn days of sorrow, not taking in the idea of either the dead child or of her husband's bereavement.

"I have not left off my mourning," she said, rather indignantly. "It was I who persuaded her to get that dress. I hate to see her always in black." Stewart came promptly to the rescue, although he had apparently been deep in local politics with Norman.

"Oh, if you call that mourning!" Flora responded with a plying smile. "But these little pinkies had no power over Mathilde now. The only bitterness was in the remembrance how Stewart had come in when she was looking over the tailor's patterns, and had insisted on the choice of the color."

The lake in its sheltered dell was a bright scene that afternoon. Several parties arrived in carriages, and Mathilde and Stewart had necessarily to play the host together, an outward bound over the inward discord. Young and prosperous, welcoming others to their future kingdom, many a one that day admired the couple and many a one envied them.

"The exiled prince welcomed back to his own," Norman Stewart said in a low voice to his cousin Nellie, as they skated about at the further end of the lake, watching the groups near the skating rink.

Although these two skated well, and knew that they looked well on skates, there was none of the animation of the scene on their faces as they lolled there together, waiting about idly in long curves.

"They have everything their own way. What is the good of our thinking that there is something queer about her, when they both have the same?"

"I'm not easily led to you, and might as well write to know when I can go to the Harpers."

"You must not leave before I do," he said, with calm assurance. "When you brought me here, I thought you and Flora's idea of some mystery very far-fetched; but now I am sure that it is so."

"But what could it be that would matter? They must be married," she interrupted pettishly.

Scarcely heeding her, he went on. "I can guess at nothing, though several times during the past week I have felt as though on the point of putting my finger on the mystery. The one thing that I am certain of is that she never was on that ranch of his."

"Why?"

"I couldn't give any definite reason, only I am certain of it."

"But where did she come from, then?"

"I think—mind you, I only think—she is some divorcee, an Englishwoman of rank perhaps, whom he has picked up in New York or Montreal."

"But the missionary, and the wife and child."

"That's all some mistake. The child, I am sure, never existed."

"But say it was so; how would it benefit us?"

"Only by our bringing out some scandal that would set Sir James against them, and make him prefer to leave you and me the money. Fancy the wrath of the good Flora!"

Nellie laughed with real enjoyment, and Norman went on.

"My only hope lies in her betraying herself talk. Only I don't like her to me."

"Well, haven't I left her to you?" she answered with fresh pettishness. "You must confess that it's rather hard on me looking at you flirting with her, and at Flora's pious sniping with that garrison of hers. She's going to marry him, you know."

"Is she? Whether she gets it or not?"

"Oh, yes. She has plenty anyway of her own. Greedy creature! How she loves money!"

Charlie Hudson, her adorer of the St. Lawrence. Now were the skies about to open and let public discomfiture be sealed? Swiftly the mad impulse crossed her brain to fling off her skates and rush away—anywhere out of the reach of the critical eyes which seemed to encircle her on every side.

Mathilde's second and truer impulse was the one on which she acted, and a few long strokes took her to her husband's side just as he greeted them. She would fall fighting, and if she left him to-morrow, he would have no cause to deplore her memory. The girls knew slightly—bright, jolly country girls, without too deep a perception of families, and with brothers of the same type.

Her greeting to them was cordial but hurried.

"So glad to see you! Brought your skates?"

She had not even time to exchange one glance with Stewart, who was overbearing Hudson with effusion that left no room for words on his part. Apparently, though, he had expected no more, simply staring in mute amazement at Mathilde.

Swiftly she bore down upon him with outstretched hand.

"What a wonderful meeting! Who would have expected us to come across each other like this? Isn't it fun?"

With every sense on the alert, she was aware while speaking that Stewart was tracing the others towards a bench to put on their skates, and a forlorn hope braced her to effort. With courage the position might yet be retrieved, and that she felt plenty at command.

"You must lose a moment, the days are so short," she heard Stewart noisily insisting.

The amazement cleared from the boy's face into pure delight.

"Miss Thorne?" he gasped. "What luck to find you here! I didn't even know that Stewart was the right man until I saw him here. And you are staying with his Canadian wife, I suppose. They talk a lot about her, deprecating over, and that was what puzzled me."

Mathilde's face paled and flushed, and she looked wildly round. Norman Stewart was the only one with possible hope of distance, and he, stooping down to readjust his skates, may not have heard.

"Hush," she said in a low voice. "Put on your skates, and come up to the other end of the lake with me. I have a secret to trust to you."

Hudson staring into her set, strained face, saw something there which compelled him to silent obedience. From the group where the newcomers were being refreshed with various hot drinks, James Stewart called to Norman, who slowly skated off, and the two were left alone.

"Please, tell me what is the matter?" Hudson urged anxiously.

"Don't look so miserable," Mathilde laughed, with a touch of compunction; "and try not to look as though I were telling you anything startling. But you know that I am your hostess, Mrs. James Stewart?"

The boy groaned; for the dream that he had dreamed still hovered around him, and such an awakening was bitter exceedingly.

"Please don't look as though any thing were happening," she urged. "Otherwise you may do me serious harm."

He was thoroughbred, and answered to the touch.

"Tell me what you want," he said hoarsely, "and I will do it."

"I know that you can help me," Mathilde went on, speaking rapidly. "All the time they were skating towards the loneliest corner of the lake."

"These people here all think—must go on thinking—that I have been married five years and lived in the Northwest. I think that no one heard you call me Miss Thorne. You must be careful to have only known me as Mrs. Stewart; in fact, the less you speak or know of me the better."

They had paused, facing each other, hidden from everyone by a jutting point of reeds and bushes. His face had grown paler still.

"I don't understand," he began in a troubled fashion.

"That's it," she interrupted. "You can never understand, but you must help me without understanding."

"I would do much to help you," he said simply. "But if there is any wrong to you in all this, I will not help it on."

"You mean," and there was a deep flush on her face, "that you think I am not really married?"

He started horror-struck.

"Good Heavens, no! How could I think such a thing of you? But something wrong there must be somewhere."

"There is no wrong to me," she answered firmly. "I am wronging no one, not even myself. Does that content you?"

"I suppose it must," he agreed slowly; "but you must trust me no more than this. Think how wretched I should be about you," he urged.

"You had better forget that you have ever seen me," she answered idly.

"In this case I think they might be."

She did not answer, for she was watching Miss Fearon, who had joined the group where the Misses Kiddle and Hudson stood by the fire, quailing muffled claret. The sight made her uneasy, and yet it was a dubious relief to see her husband skate up to them and lead his cousin away.

A cold sense of utter desolation crept around her heart, and she had to control the impulse to see one more kind glance from the loyal-hearted boy. Well, she would still be faithful to her bargain, though her husband's trust rang ever through her brain. Then—well, then, she knew of a remote Breton village, where she would be hidden from all whom she had ever known—where she would see no one save artists and peasants.

She started from her thoughts to find Norman's keen, gray eyes fixed on her face, eyes which were his strongest resemblance to his cousin James.

"Your young friend seems very devoted to Miss Kiddle," he said.

"Yes, they came together, you know."

"I saw them, and I saw the rapture with which he greeted you."

She could not detect any significance in his words.

"He crossed with us a month ago," she answered carelessly. "He is a nice boy, and used to tag for me perpetually."

"But apparently you had not even told him where you were going?"

"I suppose not, although I certainly thought that Jean had done so. In the hurry at the end one sometimes does not even say good-bye."

She was growing more uneasy at this persistence, although knowing that it might be casual, but fortunately interrupted by the most commonplace sentences with a laugh that is as artificial as your back puffs.

If you do this, stop it. This noise, which is a giggle in girls, an insane laugh in women, is the result of pure thoughtlessness.

The low, hoarse sound, given to man alone, called laughter, should be used only to express mirth. When it is not spontaneous it is not laughter, and the men who write dictionaries should give it another name. Giggle is the only substitute so far, but it does not designate that insipid, harmless sound that hundreds of women permit themselves.

THE CROSS-WAYS.

Time Comes When the Older Sister Must Step Aside.

Sibyl, her pretty girlish face angry and mutinous, dashed from the room, slamming the door behind her. In the silence that followed, her last words still seemed to echo.

"It isn't fair—just because you're the oldest and have always had things, that we should never have anything. It's our turn. How would you have liked it when you were eighteen? You've had your good times. It's just downright selfish of you not to let us have ours, and I'm going to say it out for once, so now!"

"Miss Thorne," he drew a long breath. It had been "said out" unquestionably. Going to the door, she turned the key. It had been coming for a long time—some such crisis as this; now that it had come, she was going to face it without flinching. She seated herself steadily in the glass. Yes, it was true—she was not so pretty as she had been; the first girlish bloom was gone—gone to Sibyl and Evelyn.

"Point one," she said, slowly. "Virginia Crane, you are jealous of your little sisters."

"Point two. Sibyl is right. You have had your good times, and it is their turn."

"Point three. Something must be done at once. What shall it be?"

There was a long silence after the third point. Virginia was thinking. There were several things she might do. She could go abroad with the Clarendons. She thought that over a while, and then put it aside. "I won't shirk," she declared. She could take up settlement work, for instance. That, too, she rejected.

"I wouldn't," she said, with grim humor, "be fair to the poor. They have enough to bear without having to help out the poor rich."

There remained one way, a very distasteful one, but she could do it—at least, she could give it a trial. She should study the art of being an older sister. It would not be easy for her to step aside gracefully, not half so easy as for some girls; but she could try; she could study it as she had studied over her music. For an hour she sat there, thinking it out. Then she opened her door.

"Sibyl!" she called.

Sibyl, half-ashamed and half-defiant, came hesitatingly.

"I've changed my mind about the concert," Virginia said. "You are right—it is your turn. I'll stay and entertain Aunt Gracia. And would you like to wear my string of pearls to your party?"

Sibyl stared in bewilderment, the color flooding her face. "Oh Virginia," she gasped, "do you mean it? I—"

Impetuously she threw her arms about her sister's neck—"It's such a horrid pig!" she cried.

And suddenly to Virginia there came a strange thought. Suppose in the "good times" she was missing the joy of being a sister!—Youth's Companion.

A LONG FAREWELL.

Suppress That Nervous Laugh.

A musical laugh is a rare gift; a hearty one is infectious; but if you are incapable of either, suppress a laugh that means nothing. The woman who really laughs is a joy to those around her. It may not possess a pitch that delights a musician's ear; it may have infectious little notes that do not stand for harmony; but if it is real and joyous, it will make all those who hear it smile.

The laugh that is annoying is the one without meaning. It is a nervous ripple that is often used as a period or an exclamation point. It is placed at the ending of every sentence, and takes from the spoken word any meaning or emphasis it might have. Many women who do it are not conscious of it. They are far from silly women. They have poise and sense, and are not easily confused as one would judge by the futile laughter they give after their sentences. If this idea impresses you at all, watch your own style of talking when outside the family circle and intimate friends. You may not be given to laughter, but again you may find that you unconsciously punctuate your most commonplace sentences with a laugh that is as artificial as your back puffs.

If you do this, stop it. This noise, which is a giggle in girls, an insane laugh in women, is the result of pure thoughtlessness.

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FOR AND ABOUT WOMEN

THREE LATE STYLES.



Rose Beaver Hat with a Scarf of Satin and Marabout, a Scarf and Muff of Gray Chiffon and Ermine, and a Hat and Muff of Pleated Rose Silk and Fur.

It deserves consideration. It is perfectly possible that women may have the largest rights where they have the smallest reverence. And if this reverence of men for women be really lacking, it is certain that the respect of women for men will fall also. And when the relation between men and women shall be thus degraded, nothing can save the whole fabric of life from a process of swift deterioration. —Chicago Examiner.

Fads and Fancies in Dress

The cuirass has suddenly become a fitted garment of silk elastic, smooth as a glove from neck to wrist and hip line.

The newest sleeveless coat is cut out generously under the arms and the sides are held together by cords instead of bands and straps.

The fichu of Marie Antoinette folds round the shoulder, forms a sleeve, crosses in front and ties at the back, concealing much of the figure.

The outline of the Watteau plait gives almost a familiar sight. It is belted in or allowed to fall loosely, according to the gown and the occasion.

Some charming old-world frocks are carried out in soft colorings, shot with three or four pale colorings, such, for instance, as mauve, pink and periwinkle blue.

Leather hats promise to be particularly popular with the traveler. They are to be had in patent leather as well as suede, and in a wide range of shapes and colors.

The modified kimono, which is the old wrapper with a Japanese touch in the sleeve and banded edge around the neck and downward, remains a favorite for bedroom wear.

The center parting of the hair with the wide Racamier chignon and wide puffs at the sides comport well with the big millinery of the day. Women with small, delicate features find it especially becoming.

Sashes worn with the cuirass gown of the moyen age are fastened so that their flat folds lie close upon the lower edge of the cuirass, while the bow, at the right of the center back, falls among the lower plaits of the skirt.

In keeping the table linen that is not in daily use many a housekeeper is annoyed to find that it has yellowed badly and must be washed again before it can go on the table again.

This can be overcome if, after being laundered, the cloths and napkins are carefully wrapped in deep blue paper or in a sheet that has been heavily blueed.

To Launder Tan Shades.

To prevent the delicate shades of tan and brown from fading when washed, wash them in water to which has been added a quart of black pepper tea, made by pouring a quart of boiling water over one-half pound of ground black pepper and allowing this to stand until the pepper settles, then strain.

Matting Is Effective.

When the floor is in poor condition and must be covered, if there are no rugs for it, entirely plain matting is not to be despised. It wears better than many of the "fillings," that show soil as well as every particle of dust. When it becomes necessary to cleanse the matting it should be done with salt water, instead of soap.

Umbrella Rib Knitting Needles.

Old umbrella ribs make splendid knitting needles, far stronger than you can buy in the stores. Break the rib the desired length and file the ends to a point on a stone. These needles are especially good for plain matting of city ribbons, sweaters and wide scarfs, where extra long needles make the knitting so much easier.

Mending with Machine.

Table linen and tears in clothing can be darned better and in one-tenth the time it takes to do it by hand. If the darn is entirely plain matting is not to be despised. It wears better than many of the "fillings," that show soil as well as every particle of dust. When it becomes necessary to cleanse the matting it should be done with salt water, instead of soap.

Gloves with Circles.

Great Crops in Western Canada

Canadian Correspondence.

During the early days in the growth of the crop in Western Canada, as well as throughout the ripening and harvesting period, there is yearly growing an increasing interest throughout the United States, as to the probable results when harvest is completed. These mean much to the thousands of Americans who have made their home in some one of the three Provinces that form that vast agricultural domain, and is of considerable interest to the friends they have left behind them.

The year 1900 is no disappointment. It will bring comfort and happiness, wealth and luxury to those who are following agriculture as a pursuit in the country now occupying so much of the attention of the world—the continent in particular. Reports from the grain fields warrant the note of optimism that has been so prominent during the past few months. The crops of wheat, oats and barley have been har-

vested and it is now safe to speak of results. Throughout the entire grain-growing area of 320,000 square miles there has been a uniform production and a high average. Careful estimates place the yield of spring wheat at 30 bushels per acre, winter wheat at over 40 bushels and oats exceed 50 bushels per acre.

The wheat of all can be supplied, some want one kind and some another and they can all be suited. The man who wants to put in his steam plow and force the energies of the soil into immediate production can be suited, and so can the man who wishes large tracts for the same purposes, and at the same time enjoy the companionship of the timber. The man who wants to have a hundred mile square of wheat, without a break. A writer says: "We were driven west and north of Moose Jaw through 25 miles of dead ripe wheat, acres of stocks and well-worked summer-fallows. One of these fields would yield 40 bushels to the acre, and another man had oats that would yield 90 or 100 bushels to the acre. In this district wheat will average to 35 bushels. The conditions were never better and throughout the district the people are assured of a most prosperous year. In the Melfort district the 120,000 acres of wheat, the 120,000 acres of oats and the 120,000 acres of barley, will yield 35 bushels to the acre, and another man had oats that would yield 90 or 100 bushels to the acre. In this district wheat will average to 35 bushels. The conditions were never better and throughout the district the people are assured of a most prosperous year. In the Melfort district the 120,000 acres of wheat, the 120,000 acres of oats and the 120,000 acres of barley, will yield 35 bushels to the acre, and another man had oats that would yield 90 or 100 bushels to the acre. In this district wheat will average to 35 bushels. The conditions were never better and throughout the district the people are assured of a most prosperous year. In the Melfort district the 120,000 acres of wheat, the 120,000 acres of oats and the 120,000 acres of barley, will yield 35 bushels to the acre, and another man had oats that would yield 90 or 100 bushels to the acre. 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