

# A Hazard of Hearts

By ALIX JOHN

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## CHAPTER XIII.

The bright frost 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 piece of water in the country side. Stewart and his wife were soon skating down 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 them at home, but she did not stay at night, of late, indeed had often passed 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 admiring comments followed her movements, for she had from childhood been a sister of the rink.

Miss Hartigan's premonitions of cramp and jet bristles were ostentatiously than usual, and it was with her most widened smile that she turned to Mathilde. "I did not know that you were leaving or 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 in local politics with Norman.

"Oh, if you call that mourning!" flora responded with a piping smile.

But the little pin-pricks had no power over Mathilde. 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 that one.

The lake in that afternoon's sheltered dell was a bright scene that afternoon. Several parties arrived in carriages, and Mathilde and Stewart had necessarily to play the hostess, for the house was the lone survivor. 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 landing.

Although these two skated well, and knew that they looked well in their skates, there was none of the animation of the scene on that faces as they loitered toward the landing.

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 James Stewart?"

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

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

"Don't look so miserable," Mathilde laughed, with a touch of compunction: "I am not trying to look as though I were telling you anything startling. Don't 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, tell me what is the matter?" Hudson urged anxiously.

"It 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—least, she could give it a trial. She would 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 study 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. "Virginia," she gasped, "do you mean it? I—impetuously she threw her arms about her sister's neck—"I was such a horrid pig!" she cried.

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

A Long Farewell.

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

"But say it were 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 us and all the money. Fancy the wrath of the pious Flora!"

Nellie laughed with real enjoyment, and Norman went on.

"My only hope lies in her betraying herself in talk. Only leave 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 dining with her, and at Flora's pins spouting with that gaunt person of hers. She's going to marry him, you know."

"Is she? Whether she gets him or not, only I am certain of it."

"But where did she come from, then?"

"I think—mind you, I only think—that 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?"

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