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that was almost plaintive, and her eyes were misery.

"If I have disappointed you, Miss Craythorne," replied Sir Charles, "I shall never forgive myself. I can assure you that I have only just remembered that there was some suggestion that we—"

"Please say no more," murmured Miss Craythorne, her splendid eyes eloquent with emotion; "I am sure that it was my fault. I thought you understood, and I have been waiting for you! Still, if you have enjoyed yourself, I am satisfied!"

Hastings felt so annoyed with himself that he did not know how to reply, and Miss Craythorne was too clever a diplomat to continue the subject further now. Instead she went on rapidly:

"Mamma is organizing a picnic for to-morrow in Woodall Forest. It will be simply delightful, and we must make as much of the summer weather as we possibly can. You must consent to go, Sir Charles. Please promise me. Mamma will ask you by and by."

"I promise," Hastings said, readily. His thoughts went back to Gladys. Of course Gladys would be one of the party.

"Do you hear this, Lady Marcia?" he asked. "As I have promised to go to Woodall Forest to-morrow, you must be there."

"I have not yet been asked," was the smiling rejoinder.

"You will not be forgotten," laughed Ada Craythorne. "See, mamma is calling this way now! The one question that agitates her soul is where we shall start from, our own place or that of somebody else."

However, it did not take Lady Craythorne long to arrange matters to her own satisfaction, and when Lady Gladys appeared, half an hour later, to wish the visitors good-night, the whole thing was done.

"We will all meet here at eleven o'clock," she said, in conclusion.

"Lady Marcia has accepted for you, dear the carriages, excepting my own. I leave for the gentlemen to arrange. Everything else shall have my attention, so no one need give the refreshments a thought!"

Lord Cecil had met Gladys as she entered the room, and showed no disposition to leave her side and every one had gone. His manner was agitated many degrees beyond his normal state, and it was impossible for Gladys to steal away from him until his carriage was announced, and then it was too late, for Sir Charles had to accompany him.

He pressed her hand warmly, and whispered "To-morrow!" then amid a chorus of good-nights, the whole of the guests were driven away, keeping up a fire of merry chatter as they went—albeit every heart had its secret schemes and anxiety.

At the lodge gates the carriages parted company, and Lord Cecil offered Sir Charles a cigar, saying: "There did not appear to be much of the unsanctified about you to-night, Hastings. I had no idea when I invited you down here that you were a veritable Diogenes. Took pity upon you because of your lachrymose expression, little dreaming that I should launch you into so much gayety and conquest of ladies fair."

He laughed unpleasantly, and Hastings looked at him sharply.

"Stanhope, I hardly understand you," he frowned.

"No? I don't suppose it suits you! His manner was somewhat insolent.

"Now don't ape the innocent, my dear fellow, when your conduct is apparent to everybody who has eyes to see!"

(To be continued.)

"I shall call upon the earl before lunch to-morrow!" He lowered his voice. "Gladys will tell you why."

A glad light shone in his eyes for a moment; then he heard Ada Craythorne's voice behind him, and a feeling of contrition passed through his heart, for he remembered that he had tacitly agreed to be her companion in the moonlight stroll.

"Have you been out, Miss Craythorne?" he asked. The role of hypocrite did not sit well upon him, and he reddened slightly, adding: "Lady Gladys and I have had a most enjoyable walk."

He could not have uttered a more unfortunate speech, and Miss Craythorne's black eyes flashed indignantly, though her tones were cold and measured.

"I am pleased to hear it, Sir Charles." She turned haughtily from him, biting her lips with mortification. For a minute love and rage struggled for the mastery; then she continued, softly: "Did you quite forget me?"

Her voice had sunk to a whisper

Lord Cecil's Dilemma

—OR—

The Picnic Woodall Forest

CHAPTER VIII.

He heard a rustling of the leaves about them, and an icy hand seemed to close about his heart. One moment he would have given worlds never to have set eyes upon Gladys Howard, the next he gazed upon her in frenzied delight.

"I shall never forgive myself for that," she murmured. "Oh, Charles, it was a horrid mistake. I gave him those flowers!" He started. "I gave them to him because he insinuated something that was not nice, but I took them back from him. I have them now! I shall keep them until I die! The first sweet offering of Love!"

Hastings never forgot that blissful moment. There was the happiness of eternity crowded into the space of an instant! He clasped her to his heart. He felt her soft bosom heaving against his own. He felt that he could brave the anger of Heaven, of man, for her dear sake.

Again that mysterious rustling, and he started like a nervous child. Gladys told him that it was only a bird—or a rabbit. She was so happy that she had no fear. She could have no fear when by his side. Was it too deep, too sweet to last?

The clocks tolled the hour of ten, and Lady Gladys started up.

"We must return to the house, dear. Papa and Aunt Marcia will be wondering what has happened of us. We have been here nearly a whole hour!"

With their left hands clasped, and his right arm about her waist, they returned through the White Lady's Walk, and were relieved to find that no one had apparently missed them. The night was so warm and beautiful that all were under its spell.

"One kiss more," said Sir Charles. "It may be the last!" He attempted to speak jestingly, but it struck a chill

through Gladys' heart, and she whispered:

"Don't, my love, don't! I have been brave until now. I have laughed at the legend of the White Lady—but, oh, if it should mean anything evil for us!"

They returned slowly to the lawn, where the earl was strolling with Lady Craythorne and Floesie. Lady Marcia and Mrs. Nixey were indoors with the vicar.

"I cannot face them yet," Gladys whispered, her cheeks burning with telltale blushes. "I dread the inquisitive eyes of Lady Craythorne, and I would not meet Lord Cecil for worlds!"

"Good-night, sweetheart," he replied, softly pressing her hand. "I will see you to-morrow before I go home. I will come in the morning. I cannot stay longer at Stanhope Towers."

One look of love from her beautiful eyes, and she fitted indoors to her own room, while Sir Charles sought Lady Marcia, little dreaming that the enraged Lord Cecil was watching them both.

"I will soon put an end to this," he muttered, "if the story told me by Mr. Julius Andrews is true. Idiot that I was to bring the fellow here!"

Meanwhile, Lady Marcia welcomed Sir Charles with that rare smile of hers. She loved him for his uncle's sake. She loved him because he was so like the lover she had lost.

"Where is Gladys?" she asked.

"Gone to her apartments, I believe," he replied. "We have had a delightful walk, and—Lady Marcia—" He stammered a little. "I have heard the legend of the White Lady's Bower!"

"Oh, say that you have not been there!" she cried. Her lips had grown white, and her hands trembled.

"Gladys could not have been so foolish—so wilful!"

CHAPTER IX.

"Surely, Lady Marcia, you cannot attach any great importance to a foolish legend?" said Sir Charles, reassuringly. "Lady Gladys has told me something of the story, and she treats it as such stories should be treated. She is merely amused by it, and regards it as an idle superstition only worthy of credence by the most ignorant of people."

But while he was saying this, he was conscious of an icy chill running through his veins, and he continued, in answer to Lady Marcia's troubled, yet questioning gaze:

"I shall call upon the earl before lunch to-morrow!" He lowered his voice. "Gladys will tell you why."

A glad light shone in his eyes for a moment; then he heard Ada Craythorne's voice behind him, and a feeling of contrition passed through his heart, for he remembered that he had tacitly agreed to be her companion in the moonlight stroll.

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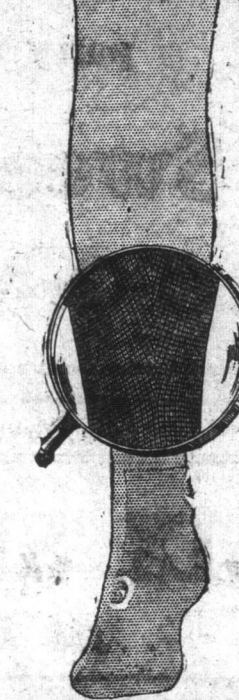
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