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Lord Cecil's Dilemma

—OR—
The Picnic

—in—
Woodall Forest

CHAPTER XXXV.

Then a terrible fear seized upon her. Perhaps the letter had miscarried. Perhaps it had reached other hands. If that were so, the story of her father's crime might burst upon the world at any moment.

She had asked him to come to her, but he did not even reply. She knew that he was at Emden Hall, for Lady Craythorne often gathered news of the Hastings—news brought from Ada's letters. Oh, it was cruel to treat her in this way! He must be full of bitter resentment because the earl had spoiled their lives; so perhaps he did not care to hold further communication with the daughter of a murderer!

All this while my lord had never moved or spoken. Doctors and nurses were in constant attendance upon him. He had to be fed with liquids by artificial means, and the most learned of medical faculty had become interested in a case that was almost without parallel.

Lady Craythorne and Flossie called every day at the abbey to inquire about my lord. They were very curious because Flossie's chances might vastly improve; but the young peer was hardly civil to her, and he was always at the abbey. It must have been a very friendly separation, they argued.

"I heard from Ada yesterday," said Lady Craythorne, a day or two before Christmas day. "She was unable to come home on the fifth, as arranged. Dear Lady Hastings was taken ill, and she cannot get along without Ada. But I have really most extraordinary news—almost too good to be true—some wife of Sir Charles? Well, she turns out to be a myth—there was no wife at all; but" (she lowered her tones, mysteriously) "I rather fancy there soon will be!"

She indulged in a short laugh, and nodded meaningly.

Miss M. Bayington Tells How Cuticura Healed Her Scalp

"I was troubled with a scalp trouble for several weeks. It broke out in pimples and my hair fell out. My head itched and burned a great deal. I tried different remedies without success. I saw Cuticura Soap and Ointment advertised and sent for a free sample which helped me. I purchased more, and after using one cake of Cuticura Soap and one box of Cuticura Ointment I was completely healed." (Signed) Miss Marian Bayington, Franklin, Maine, Feb. 27, 1921.

Keep your skin clear by using Cuticura Soap and Ointment for every-day toilet purposes and Cuticura Talcum to powder and perfume. Bathe with Cuticura Soap and hot water. Before bathing, touch pimples and itching, if any, with Cuticura Ointment. Dry and dust lightly with Cuticura Talcum, a powder of fascinating fragrance.

Prepared by Dr. J. C. Ayer & Co., Lowell, Mass., U.S.A.

"I am breaking confidences, but it does not matter among our friends, does it? But don't mention it for worlds, or I am sure that Ada will never forgive me! Well, she and Sir Charles are engaged. It took place—since, I am so glad. How pale you look, my dear" (to Gladys). "I am sure that you are worrying far too much over your papa's illness. You are killing yourself, child."

She shook out her skirts, and after a little further chatter took her departure.

So this was why Sir Charles had not come to her; this was why he had not replied to her! This was the cruellest blow of all!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Excepting one brief interval, it was many days before Sir Charles knew anything more of the world about him after the bullet plowed into his breast, and he fell bleeding to the floor.

There was a long delay in getting a surgeon to the scene, and but for the coolness and authority of Ada Craythorne it is certain that he would have bled to death while the servants were mismanaging everything.

When the news of the murderous attack upon Sir Charles reached Lady Hastings, she relapsed into a succession of fainting fits, so that the doctor was hampered by a patient who unnerved him by her piteous moans. Like most medical practitioners in country places, Dr. Hart, of Emden, was better qualified to prescribe for the imaginary complaints of old women than to conduct even a simple surgical operation. He was the only doctor at hand, and it was too late to summon another from the nearest large town. Under the circumstances, Sir Charles was permitted to pass within an ace of the land of shades, while Dr. Hart fussed about him, doing nothing.

Finally the wound was bandaged, and it was noon on the following day before he was relieved by a surgeon who knew his business.

In the meantime the young baronet had had a few minutes of lucidness, and his eyes had opened to find Ada Craythorne standing near him, her pale face wet with tears.

He closed them again with a shudder, for the demonic face of Spiers haunted him; he saw the pistol, and the horrible, burning pain, and now he was prostrate, his head in a whirl, and weak as a little child.

"Ada!" he whispered, and the girl thrilled through and through at the sound of her name from his lips. She was at his side in a moment. "Have I been hurt badly? I feel that I must be dying. I am so weak."

"That horrible man shot you," she replied, "but the doctors say that you will recover."

He was quiet for a moment, and she took one of his clammy hands, murmuring:

"Oh, my darling, if you should be taken!"

He hardly comprehended the words, then, but he thought of them long after.

"Ada, has the man escaped?" he whispered.

"Yes. I don't know what they have done, we have been so anxious about you."

"I am glad of that; I do not want one word of the story to get abroad. It was all about that wretched wife of mine, and the scandal would be hard upon my mother. I will depend upon you, little sister. Say it was an accident—anything—will you?"

"You can trust me, Sir Charles." Her voice was hoarse and strained.

"Little sister," he had called her. Hatel words! Hers was no sister's love.

"I should like to see my mother," he said, faintly. "And if I should die, Ada—"

He paused to collect his wandering senses, and saw the passion burning in her eyes.

No, he could not tell her what was on his lips—he could not send his last secret thoughts to Gladys now.

"Tell Lady Hastings to send for my old chum, Herbert Gardner. Do not forget, Miss Craythorne. How shall I ever repay this fond devotion!"

His mind was wandering again, and she pressed passionate kisses on his cold brow, murmuring:

"He will not die—he cannot die!"

She rang for the nurse, and then sent a servant with a telegram directed to Herbert Gardner. The management of the household was practically in her hands, for Lady Hastings could not be disturbed.

Dr. Hart had prescribed a sedative

Windsor Table Salt

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which had lulled her into a deep sleep. Sir Charles had been dosed with the same kind of thing, and the local medico was in terror until the Birmingham physician arrived.

After an examination it was decided not to probe for the bullet for some days. The wound was, not particularly dangerous, but loss of blood had been frightful, and it was doubtful whether the young baronet's system had sufficient vitality left to prolong life.

Ada Craythorne immediately wrote to her mother:

It is impossible for me to return home as arranged. Dear Lady Hastings is very much indisposed, and declares that she cannot spare me at present. Sir Charles has also met with a slight accident, and it appears that I am indispensable to both. You will not mind that, will you, mamma?

She knew that such news should be the most delightful she could send to her anxious and ambitious mother. In making light of the young baronet's condition, she was only obeying the wishes he had expressed to her. He did not want one word to get abroad, or the newspapers would make so much of it. She had warned the servants not to gossip. Sir Charles had declared that the wound he had received was merely the result of an accident, and this story she repeated to all who came in quest of news.

Oh, how she longed now for the hour when she could tell him the story of his freedom—the story that had been stifled, almost on her lips, by his terrible visitor! She hovered near the bedside of the sick man by day and by night. When the bullet had been probed for and found, his deathlike stillness turned to fever, and she it was who moistened his lips, and listened to the murmurings of delirium.

At times he spoke of his unclouded boyhood, then moaned of the curse that was upon him, or called in accents imploring to "Gladys—Gladys!"

(To be continued.)

CHAPTER XXXVII.

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(To be continued.)

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