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F. M. O'Leary, Muir Bldg., St. John's.  
July 26, w.f.m.t.

## Lord Cecil's Dilemma

—OR—  
The Picnic

### Woodall Forest

CHAPTER XXXII.  
The letter that Ada Craythorne had been so careful to post with her own hands was addressed to her mother, Lady Craythorne, and ran as follows:

Dearest Mamma—I cannot come home so soon as you suggest, but will not stay longer than December 5. Lady Hastings declares that she cannot spare me, and it is only by representing that I have most important engagements to fulfill that she consents to part with me even then. I am having a most enjoyable time of it, because there are plenty of nice people here who drop in every day to drink tea and chat. In the morning we either drive or ride, and I have been of great use to Sir Charles in helping him to plan his cottage improvements.

We are all looking forward to a grand time after Christmas—and there is but one element of doubt and discord—the existence or not of the wretched creature who calls herself Sir Charles' wife. For my part, I wish she would—and hope that she will be so horrid that Sir Charles will at once move for a divorce! I suppose the Howards will soon be at the Abbey again with Lord Cecil in their train? Funny to leave England while the weather was glorious, and return in the cold and fog.

Your affectionate daughter,  
ADA.

Miss Craythorne sat thinking of that letter, among other things, long

after the household had retired to rest. How forcibly she was reminded of one portion of it! She had fervently wished for Sir Charles' wife to appear. She had hoped that she would be a horrid creature in every sense. One part of her wish had been answered, and to-morrow she would see if the woman was pretty or repulsive. She could only remember that she had a pair of sparkling black eyes. Then her thoughts took a pleasanter turn. She had brought the young baronet to a partial confession—he had confessed that he could hardly do without her—and she felt that he would have taken her in his arms but for one thing.

"He has cared for me since the first day we met," she thought, with a thrill of exultance, "and when he avoided me for Lady Gladys Howard it was only the knowledge of his unhappy position that took him from my side. It caused me agony then; it is joy to me now!"

She had turned out the light, and was sitting in the glow of a cherry fire. The stillness of death seemed to be everywhere, only broken by the heavy breathing of her maid, who was asleep in the next room.

Unconsciously, Miss Craythorne became drowsy, and was gradually falling into a sleepy dream, when she clearly heard a step underneath the window. She started up, and remembered that she had opened the window a little way, because the room was oppressively warm.

Was it a mistake? No. There was another footfall and the noise of cracking twigs. Whoever the person might be, he made no effort to step softly.

It might be Sir Charles, but she had never heard that he was fond of strolling about at midnight. This thought was quickly dispelled by the sound of an oath, and, peering cautiously below, she recognized the burly form of the man she had met in the lane, and he reeled about as though intoxicated, finally falling with a thud to the earth, and, after muttering a variety of threats, fell asleep.

For two hours or more Ada listened to his stentorian breathing. She dared not lie down, lest he had come to do some harm to Sir Charles. It was evident that he had spent a portion of the five pounds the woman had given to him, and that drink had magnified the wrongs under which he was suffering.

She gently closed her window, and waited, with every sense alert, but he slept on steadily, and she knew no more until awakened by her maid just as daylight was breaking.

"How stupid of me to go to sleep here!" she said. "Have you been up very long, Annette?"

"About an hour, miss."

"You have not heard any disturbance in the house—anything unusual, I mean?"

"Oh, no, miss!" replied Annette, opening her eyes in surprise.

"I must have been dreaming foolish dreams," laughed Miss Craythorne. "You can leave me, Annette; I will dress myself."

As soon as the maid was gone she opened her window and looked below. There was no one there, and she wondered for a moment if the man was merely an ogre of her slumbering brain. The thought was immediately dismissed. She had seen him distinctly; she had heard his drunken threats, and trembled with fear while he slept off the stupor that held his senses.

At the breakfast table Sir Charles remarked that she was pale, and Miss Craythorne smiled back at him saucily.

"I am ashamed to tell you that I slept very badly," she replied, "because I tried to turn amateur detective."

"Good gracious, child, what are you talking about?" asked Lady Hastings. "I fancied that I heard footsteps under my window, and, instead of acting rationally, I sat listening for burglars, half through the night. Wasn't that ridiculous?"

Sir Charles looked at her gravely. "There must be some grounds for your fears, Miss Craythorne," he said. "I am sure that you would not act ridiculously."

He looked at her seriously, and she regretted that she had mentioned the matter.

"I wish that you had alarmed the servants," he continued. "Pray do not think that I am making any unnecessary fuss about this, Miss Craythorne, because I have been warned of some fellow wandering about the village and asking questions concerning my business. Excuse me a few minutes while I examine the ground under your chamber window."

He left the room, and came back after a very short absence, with a look of annoyance on his face.

"I cannot understand," he said. "You were not mistaken, Miss Craythorne, and whoever the fellow was, he went to no trouble to hide that he was trespassing. He left a pipe and a box of matches behind him. I am surprised that the dogs gave no warning. I will have the place watched by the police."

"I thought that I heard him tumbling about," confessed Ada. "And I do not believe it was a burglar. Possibly a drunken tramp."

"This is not a haven for such people," the young baronet declared, "and I will put a stop to it. I am so sorry that you have been annoyed and frightened."

He spoke to her so tenderly that she flashed upon him a glance that haunted him for weeks.

While Sir Charles went about as usual morning business, Miss Craythorne begged that Lady Hastings would excuse her for a short time, as she wished to assist Annette in arranging her wardrobe.

(To be continued.)

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July 26, m. w. f.