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The Day of Reckoning.

By Howard Goodwill.



ORD CASTLETON glan- | ces around the drawingroom with an expression of decided annoyance as he comes in. It is a dull December afternoon, and already the brief daylight is begining to fade. His daughter—Lady Gladys Monckton—is sitting in the glow of the firelight, her hands idly folded in her lap, and her big, grey eyes gazing wistfully in-

to the heart of the fire. "Where is your stepmother?" he asks, his tones expressing keen displeasure.

Gladys looks up languidly. "She is in her boudoir with Mr.

Seaforth, I believe." Lord Castleton turns away with a barely suppressed exclamation of annoyance, but at this moment Lady

Castleton herself enters the room. She is a tall, graceful woman, with well cut features and dark brilliant eyes. She might be any age between twenty and thirty-five, although per-haps the rich material which she invariably selects for her attire adds to, rather than detracts from, her apparent age. She has a low, caressing voice, and her smile is dangerously sweet. Altogether she is accounted a singularly fascinating woman, but there is a hard glitter in her eyes at times which belies her usual expression of smiling suavity, and which bodes no good for those who attempt to thwart her ladyship.

She is accompanied by a man of medium height, with a good-looking somewhat expressionless face. George Seaforth is supposed to be a suitor for the hand of Lady Gladys, though the barely disguised antipathy with which the girl treats him does not induce him to cease his visits. Lord Castleton is far too proud to evince jealousy where his young wife is concerned, but he is none too well pleased to frequently discover Seaforth in Stella's boudoir, while Gladys is left to her own devices in the drawing-room.

His greeting of the visitor is cold in the extreme, as the latter advances toward him with hand outstretched. "How do you do?" he says, curtly, then, crossing the room, he seats himself by his wife's side, a disturbed ex-

pression on his face. Stella smiles archly up at him and lays a caressing hand upon his shoulder. "What a long time you have been away, dear. Were you detained? I

thought you were never coming back.' "I did not expect to return until about five o'clock," he answers moodily, "and at any rate you have had company to console you during my absence," with a displeased glance towards Seaforth.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Seaforth has brought us some tickets for Duse's perform-

Lord Castleton rises and walks over to the mantlepiece. There he turns and regards Seaforth with cold displeasure.

"I regret I have already made an engagement for this evening," he says decidedly, "so that it will be impossible for you to accept Mr. Seaforth's kind invitation. Lady Castleton frowns. She is not

accustomed to having her plans thwarted by the usually indulgent husband, to whom she has only been married a few months.

She darts a glance of keenest resentment toward him.

"But that need not deter us from accepting," she answers, petulantly. "Gladys and I can surely go under Mr. Seaforth's escort?"

Lord Castleton glances at his daugh-

"Do you care to go, Gladys?"
"No thank you, papa," she replies. 'I have already made an engagement

for this evening. I promised to spend a few hours with Lady Telfer." Lady Castleton's face wears an evil expression as she darts a quick glance at her stepdaughter. Her resentment

is swiftly subdued, however, and she says in her usual velvety tones:
"I think you might have consulted me, Gladys, before entering into any engagement. You will be unable to fulfil your promise upon this oc-

Lady Gladys makes no reply, though her beautiful face wears a weary, strained expression that has grown familiar to it during the last few months, ever since her father had married this unknown woman of whose antecedents no one seems cognizant, save that prior to her marriage she had occupied the position of companion to a cantankerous old maid.

Gladys endeavors at all costs to keep the peace with her stepmother, though the two women have nothing at all in common, and derive not the least pleasure from one another's society. Already the girl is beginning to tire of her enforced submission to her stepmother's whims, but for her father's sake she endeavors to avoid an open breach, and on this occasion she is quite prepared to forego her projected visit; but Lord Castleton takes up the cudgels on his daughter's

behalf with unusual warmth. 'Pardon me, Stella, Gadys will keep he engagement she has made. Lady Telfer is her godmother, and far too influential a person to be neglected. I regret that we shall be unable to avail ourselves of your kindness, Mr.

Her ladyship bites her lip and her eyes gleam dangerously for a moment. She would dearly love to defy her husband's authority and announce her intention of accompanying George Seaforth to the theater; but convention must be observed, and she has I

sition to which she has so recently attained, so she contrives to subdue her rising anger, and turns with a smile to greet some visitors who are at that moment shown into the room.

Among them is the Duchess of Winterton, who is a social luminary of no mean order, and Stella colors with gratified pride, for her grace is recognized as a powerful factor in society, and her patronage tells heavily in favor to any aspirant for social success. The great lady's demeanor toward her hostess is, however, frigid in the extreme, and she makes no secret of the fact that her visit is paid to Gladys rather than to her stepmother, to whom she is coldly courteous and nothing more.

This was galling in the extreme to a woman of Lady Castleton's temper-ament. She had set herself to cultivate the best society, and it was anneying to be met by so chilly a reception at the outset.

Gladys greets her with evident pleasure, and the two are soon chatting gaily, while Lady Castleton finds herself somewhat neglected. Her grace issues a warm invitation

to Gladys to visit her at Winterton House, and expresses a hope that Lord and Lady Castleton will dine with her during their daughter's stay. George Seaforth takes his leave immediately after the duchess's depart-ure, and Gladys quits the room to prepare for dinner.

Lady Castleton looks after her young stepdaughter's graceful figure with a glance of ill-concealed annoyance.

"Apparently Gladys is a highly important young person," she says, with a sneer. "The duchess appeared to barely recognize my existence."

"Don't talk nonsense, my dear," answers his lordship, somewhat testily, "the duchess has known Gladys since her babyhood, and she was an intimate friend of my late wife's; it is perfectly natural that she should interest herself in her daughter. I think you are making a great mistake in seeking to quarrel with Gladys. She is quite prepared to treat you with

frendliness, but you incessantly at-tempt to annoy her."
"Frendliness!" echoes Lady Castleton, with a derisive laugh. "She looks upon me as an interloper, and is at no pains to conceal her aversion to me. If I were not to assert myself sometimes-

Lord Castleton waves his hand impatiently. "There, there, Stella, that will do. If you cannot agree with Gladys I am convinced it is not her fault. I always find her amiable

enough myself.' Whereupon her ladyship breaks into a storm of weeping, which it takes his lordship some time to soothe, and at length he quits the room with a Already he is beginning to ask him- her self-control.

ance tonight. Will it not be delight- | no mind to relinquish the social po- | self whether his marriage is a mistake, for the new Lady Castleton is both impervious and extravagant, though he is still sufficiently under the spell of her beauty to be unable to gauge the true depths of her character.

The following afternoon Lady Castleton is driving in the Row with her smart victoria and pair of dantily stepping chestnuts. The air is mild for the time of year, although the wind is somewhat keen, and her ladyship leans back gracefully, enjoying to the full the evident interest her appearance excites. She bows to one or two people who she knows, and George Seaforth and one or two other men come up to speak to her when her dainty little equipage is drawn up by the rails for a few moments.

Her husband and stepdaughter are riding together, and as they canter past she turns to cast an envious glance at Gladys' girlish figure. The sun gleams upon her bright hair, which is gathered into a simple knot beneath her small riding hat, and turns it into gold, and intensifying the delicate purity of her complexion. Though Stella does not like the girl she is forced to admit that she is extremely beautiful.

After a few moments' conversation with Seaforth, she gives the signal to be driven home, and bows a graceful adieu to her cavaliers.

Just before she reaches her own door her glance falls upon a shabbilydressed woman who is threading her way wearily along, glancing neither to the right nor left, as she walks listlessly on; but Lady Castleton's cheeks are blanched with a sudden terror as she catches sight of the bent, dejected figure, and her eyes grow wide with Hastily she averts her gaze, iear. shrinking back in overwhelming dread lest the strange woman may have seen and recognized her. Apparently she is totally unconscious of the elegantlydressed lady who is driven past, but Stella's heart almost seems to cease beating until the danger is passed.

When she reaches her own door she springs out and up the steps. Entering the dining-room she sinks into a chair as though completely exhausted, and her maid who appears at that moment is alarmed at the ashy pallor of her face. Her pale lips can scarcely frame words, but the maid rightly interprets her request for brandy, which she administers, and in a few moments the color begins to creep back slowly into her mistress's pallid cheeks.

"It is nothing, Robson," she says, a few moments later, when the fierce pain at her heart had somewhat abated. "I am all right now, you needn't say anything about it to his lordship. I am subject to these at-

tacks, but they soon pass.' She rises to her feet, though with evident effort, and slowly ascends the wide staircase to her own rooms; but her hands are clenched tightly and her sigh, sorely disturbed and ill at ease. lips set with the endeavor to retain