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**Lord Cecil's
Dilemma**
—OR—
The Picnic
—or—
Woodall Forest

CHAPTER XXXVII.

It was a bitter, a humiliating task that she had set herself, and now that she was free from interruption, she shuddered with fear. If the letter were traced to her, it would be a terrible thing! She would destroy it at once—she would not read it. The contents could not affect her in any way if they were never made known, therefore, why should she wish to learn what was written? Of what value would it be to her to read the words of one whom she had now reason to hate?

She held the sealed envelope toward the fire, but withdrew it suddenly, for there was the sound of a footfall without and a timid knock at the door.

"Who is there?" demanded the frightened girl.

"It is only nurse, Miss Craythorne," was the reply, in tremulous tones, "I wish to speak to you, miss, when you can spare me a few minutes. Shall I come back again presently?"

By a great effort, Ada tried to stifle the mad beating of her heart, and replied, steadily:

"Oh, no, nurse; you can come in now. One moment, and I will open the door."

Once more she hid the fatal letter; then admitted the old woman, whose agitated manner and gray-looking face rather alarmed her.

"Sir Charles?" she gasped.

"It is the same, miss; it is not that—it is not that. I want you to be my friend if you will. I am an old woman, and have no friends."

She began to weep and wring her hands, while Ada watched her curiously and pityingly.

"Tell me what is wrong, nurse, and I will try to help you," she said. "I will be your friend."

The old woman regarded her earnestly, then muttered:

"It may be fate—it may be fate!" Then she added: "Did I hear you call the gentleman who called this morning Mr. Gardner, miss?"

Her tones were so tremulous, and yet there was so great an undercurrent of anxiety in them that Miss Craythorne was startled.

"Mr. Herbert Gardner is the gentleman's name, nurse; but, really, it is not the correct thing for you to discuss Lady Hastings' guest in this way."

"He is an old friend of the family, there! I can say no more, unless you give me good reason. Why do you not go to Lady Hastings?"

"No, no, miss! I am satisfied with what you have told me. I will not say any more if it does not please you."

She half turned to the door, but Ada intercepted her. She could see that there was something on her mind—something that half crazed her senses.

"Do not mistake me, nurse. Tell me your trouble, and I will help you if it is in my power to do so. What has Mr. Gardner to do so. What has Mr. Gardner to do with you?"

"Oh, dearie, I am afraid to tell you; I am a wicked woman, and all my wickedness has been in vain. I am to end my days in prison—I am nearly seventy years of age, and must die in jail."

Miss Craythorne gazed at her, keenly, and saw that there was anguish in the woman's eyes, terror in her tone.

"I cannot give you advice," she said, "unless I know the nature of your trouble. You cannot mean that you have committed any great sin!"

She paled at her own words. Was she not guilty of a great crime? Was not the theft of a letter one of the meanest of sins? Could his old woman's crime be as here? She was anxious to learn now.

"I must tell somebody—I must appeal to somebody who will be kind to me," said the nurse, "or I shall go mad. I come to you, miss, because you people are near to Swinford—you belong to the place, and you know the person whom I have wronged. Promise me that you will intercede for me; promise me that you will not send an old woman put in prison."

"I will do all I can for you, nurse."

The old woman was too agitated to speak for a few minutes; then she went on:

"I will trust you, and I will tell you all in a few words. The instant I saw Mr. Gardner I knew it was him—yes, before I had heard his name. Why, he is the living image of his mother—Lady Stanhope."

"Lady Stanhope?" ejaculated Ada, with a violent start. "Surely you are not—"

"Do not interrupt me, miss, or my heart will fall me. I'm trusting to you to help me. Mr. Gardner is Lady Stanhope's only child; the other one, the one who calls himself Lord Cecil, is the son of Mr. Collins, the Earl of Swinford's steward."

"It's true enough. I changed them at the investigation of Mr. Collins. Everything favored his plan, for the children were born within an hour of each other, and Lady Stanhope was unconscious for days. I was Lady Stanhope's nurse, and Collins tempted me with money. I could never have done it, miss, only my husband was dying of consumption before my eyes, and there was but one cure for him—a long sea voyage. He was all I had in the world, and I felt that I could commit any sin to save his life. I wanted money to send him away, and then Collins came and offered me enough to keep us both together across the seas somewhere, where my loved husband would take a fresh lease of life. I took the money, and he knew nothing about it. God help me! He died within a month, and I could not draw back. I took the child that was supposed to belong to Collins away with me, and I have spent every shilling that Collins has paid me upon him. He does not know me, he has never seen me, he never dreams how he has been wronged. For a long time I have resolved to speak, but the steward will not let me. He says that it will be imprisonment for life; that no good can come of it. I am a wretched, sinful woman, but I feel better now that the horrible secret is told!"

"You have done right," Ada said, gently, though she had listened with distended eyes to the nurse's confession. "I do not think that you have anything very bad to fear. Mr. Gardner is the sufferer, and I know that he is not only just, but kind."

The old woman broke down now, and wept bitterly, and the tears brought her great relief.

"I could die in peace now," she murmured. "I could die in peace now that I have set this matter straight. Shall I go away from this house at once, and leave you to tell him? I could not face him—I could not bear to do that."

"No, you must not leave your patient, and we will keep the secret until Sir Charles is out of danger. It will not hurt any one by being kept

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Lord Esher's Disclosures

Lord Esher's book "The Pomp of Power," though wrong-headed in its contempt for the civil or political power in warfare, has proven important not only because of its own revelations, but those which it has elicited from others. It has impelled Lord Beaverbrook, who was the chief agent in the formation of the Asquith-Bonar Law Coalition of 1915 to make revelations too. Lord Esher cherishes a special dislike for Beaverbrook and for his course in surrounding himself with Canadians when placed in charge of the Ministry of Information. Among the secrets that Beaverbrook has disclosed is that it was so much the shell campaign of Lord French, which brought about re-construction and coalition, as differences between Winston Churchill, at that time First Lord of the Admiralty, and Lord Fisher, First Sea-Lord. Bonar-Law learned through an anonymous letter that Fisher was about to resign and at once went to see Lloyd George to find out if this were true. On confirmation, he and Lloyd George walked over to see Asquith and suggested a Coalition in order to reassure the public—an offer which was gratefully accepted. As A. A. Baumann ("A Truthful Tory") points out in "Truth," this was as it should have been at the outset of the war. In July 1914 the Asquith cabinet had temporized for days on the question of whether Britain should support France in the event of war, and only decided on action after Bonar-Law and Lord Lansdowne in a joint communication written in behalf of the Unionist party pledged support of the opposition to any war measures the Government might adopt. Bonar-Law seems to have been the real man of the hour, though he modestly effaced himself for months.

It may be that Lord Esher had not read the books of Hindenburg and Ludendorff when he wrote "The Pomp of Power" for he seems to assume that the attrition policy of Joffre, Robertson and Haig accomplished little, whereas the Germans reluctantly admit that it accomplished a great deal. But in the latter period of the war brought to the front soldiers like Foch and Pétain, Wilson and Byng, who had more dash and initiative and accomplished results that the war of attrition could not have brought about.

In his commentary on Lord Esher's book Mr. Baumann asks, "By the way, can a country be called civilized which objects to entrusting the command to a general because he is known to be a bad Frenchman?" Yet this is what happened in France, when British on the urgent advice of Sir Henry Wilson suggested Foch for the supreme command. Incredible as it appears an influential party in the French Chamber wished to give the chief command to General Sarrail—an utter failure at Salonica—because he was supposed to be a sounder Republican than Foch. Clemenceau was so far impressed by the arguments of his anti-clerical friends, that he actually offered the supreme command to Sarrail. The latter refused to accept, save on one condition, the release of his old political leader and the head of the Anglophobes of France, Caillaux. This was too much for Clemenceau, who shortly retired Sarrail from his command. It is well that it was, for Britain would never have consented to place her armies under the command of an incompetent political general like Sarrail. New light is thrown on Caillaux, by Lord Esher. He was not an active traitor but at the time the war broke out a pro-German, who stuck to his theory that an alliance with Germany against Britain was the true policy for France. The charges that he tried to assist Germany after the outbreak of the war are regarded as unfounded.

It will be many a long day before we know the whole truth about the war; but these disclosures show how little contemporary humanity knows about the small and concealed events which shape their history.—Saturday Night, Toronto.

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