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Lord Cecil's Dilemma

—OR—

The Picnic

—IN—

Woodall Forest

CHAPTER XXVI.

From time to time Sir Charles Hastings read of the movements of Lord Howard in the columns of the Morning Post, and he was gratified to learn that Lady Gladys' fiancé, Lord Cecil Stanhope, was no longer one of the party. He could not resist a grim smile of satisfaction when he reflected upon Lord Cecil's somewhat equivocal position, and he wondered how the young peer could endure it, he wondered how any man could marry a woman who avowed that she detested him, and would be a wife in name only. Of course, it was Lord Cecil's dogged stupidity that made him persist—that made him use the mysterious power that he held over the Earl of Swinford. Thus Sir Charles argued, and confident of the love of Lady Gladys—as confident as he was of his own wondrous love for her—at times his heart would beat with hope—hope that thrilled him like a draught of sweet wine do one athirst. The Earl of Swinford and family had been constantly moving from place to place for weeks. Every town in France that was worth seeing had been visited. Lady Gladys was the supreme autocrat of the party, and, as the family physician had recommended change of scene and change of air, my lord never demurred at any request his daughter might make, while Lord Cecil Stanhope followed humbly in their train. This kind of life was not exactly to his liking, but he tried his best to please Lady Gladys; he wanted to redeem himself in her eyes, and would have been content had she given him one kind word—one approving smile.

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has passed between you and Mr. Collins. I do not know how much he has told you; but pray do not forget that my life is being embittered by one moment's madness. I have been forced to agree to many things to save my good name. Do not make things harder for me to bear."

He looked so dejected that Lord Cecil apologized.

"I love Lady Gladys," he said; "let that be my excuse, and to see that she hates me is maddening. I do not know what power Collins holds over you, but it must be very great. He knows more of me—"

He paused, and bit his lip, for the earl had looked up quickly. For a few minutes there was silence, then the elder man spoke:

"If Gladys dislikes you, Stanhope—if this marriage is to make her more miserable than she is now, I would willingly give up half of my entire wealth, if Collins and you would accept it, and let my child go free!" Lord Cecil made a deprecatory movement, but he did not forget the earl's words.

"I will not give her up yet," he said. "It has been the dream of my life to make Lady Gladys my wife. I will promise not to lose my temper again, and will leave for England tomorrow. Perhaps my presence is irritating to Lady Gladys under the circumstances. I shall tell my man to pack up at once. Good-evening, my lord; I may not see you again until you reach England, and I wish to speak to my future wife to-night. I will promise to be gentle with her."

The two men shook hands, and Lord Cecil left the room in quest of Lady Gladys. He had left her with Lady Marcia half-an-hour before, sitting on a balcony that overlooked one of the breeziest boulevards in the gay city of Brussels.

Gladys did not even turn at his approach, but continued to gaze below at the crowded street, her thoughts in far-away England, her dreams of one midsummer's gladness.

Then she was awakened from her trance by Lady Marcia's tone of surprise: "Going away early to-morrow, Lord Cecil? This is very sudden, is it not?" "Yes; business at home. I have had a letter of importance, and must not delay."

Lady Gladys looked up, and a gleam of relief passed over her face. "You will return soon?" questioned Lady Marcia.

"No. The earl informs me that you will spend Christmas at the abbey, and I shall be one of the first to welcome you home. Until then I shall be busy, two of my favorite horses being ill."

He took a seat beside Gladys, and Lady Marcia left the balcony. "Have you nothing to say to me?" Lord Cecil demanded of his fiancée. "It will be a month at least until we meet again."

"It is a matter of perfect indifference to me whether you remain here or not," Lady Gladys replied, coldly. "I do not believe you!" he retorted, angrily. "I do not believe that it is a matter of indifference to you. You are glad that I am going!"

"I have no wish to enter into any discussion with you, my lord," was the haughty rejoinder. "There can be no question of likes or dislikes between us."

"But, Gladys, do you not see that things cannot go on in this way? You liked me once. If I have ever said or done anything to vex you, it has been done through jealousy."

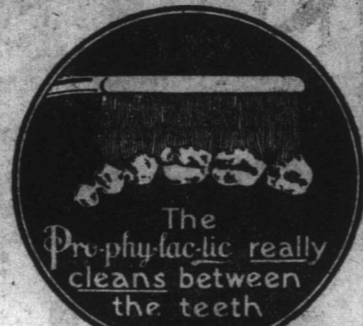
Her lips curled, and she looked at him, a swift flush of scorn in her pansy eyes.

"You are talking nonsense, my lord! I thought that we quite understood each other. I have consented to marry you next year, although I do not like you. I have consented to save my father from disgrace. You are forcing me into a union which is detestable to me, therefore it is folly to pretend that I care whether you go or whether you stay."

"Perhaps you would like me to give you your freedom!" he cried, fiercely. "I repeat that it is a matter of no moment to me. I shall be ready to perform my part of the business contract; but I leave you at the church doors."

She spoke calmly and coldly; and, after gazing at her for a few moments in silence, Lord Cecil strode away without a word. He was white with rage, and there was a settled look of scorn in his face.

The next morning Lord Cecil left for England before his friends had



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Some Card Tricks.

Here are some simple tricks that you can easily manage with a little practice, and that will puzzle any one who is not in the secret. Take six court cards from a pack, you will notice that the margin of one end is a little wider than the other.

Arrange the six cards in a row, all the widest margins being at the top, and then ask someone to turn one of the cards round while you are out of the room, saying that you will detect which has been moved. A careful comparison of the margins will, of course, tell you which is the turned card.

Take twenty-one cards, lay them in three packs, and let someone choose one without telling you what it is; he must only say which pack it is in. You gather up the three packs, putting the one containing the selected card in the middle. Repeat this twice more. Then count out ten of the cards from the pack, and the eleventh will be the one that was chosen.

Get someone to choose a card from

risen, and the Earl of Swinford and family left Brussels the same day for Florence—the city of flowers.

(To be continued.)



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"Daddy," he said, "bring the main force, and I will try to swallow that."

"Billy's face brightened at once."

"Daddy," he said, "bring the main force, and I will try to swallow that."

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