

# Lord Cecil's Dilemma

—OR—  
The Picnic

## Woodall Forest

CHAPTER XXI.

"You are but a changeling," went on the steward, calmly, "and the rightful heir lives. You will now see why I have been so anxious to place you in a secure position. As the husband of Lady Gladys Howard, come what may, you will be safe, and I shall not have schemed for you in vain. Even the wolf takes care of its own."

Lord Cecil sprang erect, and regarded Collins half in doubt, half in fear.

"No, no!" he gasped; "this cannot be! Proof, proof!"

That will be forthcoming when needed. Perhaps too soon. Your only safeguard at present is to obey me."

A servant interrupted them, and Collins departed—the young man's savage tones ringing in his ears as he poured a torrent of wrath at the unlucky menial.

"I did not intend telling him so soon," muttered the steward. "I might never have told him at all; but it is best for him to know. It is a heavy weight to bear! He is full of caprice as a woman, and from the moment Lady Gladys was his own her value began to diminish in his eyes. How little he dreams that she is his cousin."

Collins had an audience with the Earl that evening. He could not wait until next June.

"Are these the wishes of Lord Cecil?" demanded the earl.

"They are wishes, and Lord Cecil will object to nothing that I propose," said Collins.

"I cannot interfere," decided the earl.

"You refuse to speak to Lady Gladys?"

"Most decidedly."

"Then I will."

My lord's eyes flashed with their old fire.

"You do so at your peril, Mr. Collins." He always prefixed "Mr." to the steward's name now. "I have told my laughter everything. Nothing that you can say will further damage me in her eyes. If you dare address one word to her, sir, I swear that she shall not see Lord Cecil, and you may do your worst! My child shall not be tortured further. Now go, you unnaturaloundrel!"

He pointed to the door, and Collins led to be content with one venetian blind in reply. He was abashed and baffled. If he went too far, he might be buried in the ruins he was able to bring about others. After this there was nothing more said about hastening the marriage between Lord Cecil Stanhope and Lady Gladys Howard.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The dearest, truest friend that Sir Charles Hastings possessed in the whole world was Herbert Gardner. For years they had been chums at college, and there was hardly an action, or a thought, that one withheld from the other.

Sir Charles had confided to his friend the story of the shadow that had oppressed them for so long—the shadow that had killed his father—



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and driven his mother into seclusion. Only to Herbert Gardner did he willingly utter one word of this, for he knew that he could trust him, and there is sweet relief in earnest human sympathy. He craved for no man's pity, and had endured the contemptuous smiles of the thoughtless until his heart had been filled with bitterness.

The two young students had exchanged confidences. Of himself Herbert Gardner knew little or nothing, and there were times when his cheek burned with the fear of shame. When he heard others speak of their parents and friends he shrank away. When he was questioned as to who and what he was, he could say nothing, and at last came to be regarded with suspicion by the aristocratic snobs, who considered it a disgraceful fiction that they should be forced to breathe the same atmosphere as a nobody—a fellow who never mentioned father or mother—who perhaps had no rightful claim to the plebeian name he bore.

Sir Charles Hastings, who inherited something of his father's broad views of life, strongly resented the cruel persecution to which Herbert Gardner was subjected. The last of an ancient line himself, he firmly believed that "Kind hearts are more than coronets, And simple faith than Norman blood," and constituted himself the champion of Herbert Gardner.

There were few who dared to sneer openly before Hastings. He was known to be good-natured and kind-hearted to a fault; but he was quick to resent an insult, and was the hardest-hitting man in the college.

Herbert Gardner's origin was a mystery to himself. He appeared to have not one relative in the wide world. His earliest remembrances were of a kindly woman's face, a humble home, a large garden where he played with other children; a picturesque old house in a country village, with a shop in the front room. He lived here with an old couple, who cared for him lovingly. He was then sent away to a big school, where he remained for a long time. The old shopkeeper and his wife died, and he could not tell where the village was situated, or even its name.

He lived at the school until he was old enough to be sent to Eton, and from Eton to Cambridge.

But where did the money come from? He had nothing to waste, but all his wants were supplied. Some

pledged barrister now), you will serve her with a citation, as a preliminary to proceedings in the divorce court. I know that you will shudder at the idea of raking out the family closet, and washing the dirty linen in public, but it is not a tithe so awful in reality as it appears on the surface, and the creature has no defense, if the newspaper reports speak truly. At any rate, you cannot acknowledge her, or even admit her to your hearth and home, or you will condone the offense. It is a terrible position for you, old man, and I await particulars with anxiety. I beg you to put the matter in the hands of your family lawyers.

Your faithful friend,  
HERBERT GARDNER.

To this Sir Charles replied promptly:

DEAR BERT—The papers know more of my wife's movements than I do. So far I have neither seen nor heard from her, though I know that she is not far away. It may be that she does not intend to trouble me, and I pray to Heaven that it is so. If she does, as in a quarrel, if your letter is legally sound. Of course, I can never acknowledge her, and I dare not expose my mother's folly to the eyes of the world by dragging our troubles into court. Somehow, I dread the worst, for the newspaper announcements can emanate from one source only—my wife! I will run up to the metropolis next week for a day or two, and have a chat with you.

CHARLEY.

He posted his reply to Herbert Gardner, then searched the papers for the story of his own misery. It is strange that we rarely notice that which concerns us most until it is pointed out to us. Sir Charles had not even seen the briefest report, and when he read the miserable scandal, his cheek paled. He was more than ever convinced that the information had been supplied by the wretched woman who claimed his name; and that in itself was proof that she intended assuming her rights. His mother must not know of this. Her life was already cankering with remorse. He was folding the paper, ready to hide it away, when his eyes fell upon the announcement of Lady Gladys' engagement to Lord Cecil Stanhope, and a bitter cry escaped him. He could scarcely believe the awful words.

"My Gladys—my darling!" he murmured, "to that man! No—no, it cannot be!"

(To be continued)

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## A Bit of Hypnotic Illusion.

Without the walls of the Mongolian yurt the wind whistled and drove the frozen snow sharply against the stretched felt. Through the roar of the wind came the sound of many voices in mingled shouting, wailing and laughter. I felt that in such surroundings it would be difficult to dumfound a wanderer nomad with miracles. This thought had scarcely time to flash through my mind before Tushegoun Lama suddenly raised his head, looked sharply at me and said: "There is very much unknown in Nature and skill in using the unknown produces the miracle; but the power is given to few. I want to prove it to you."

He stood up, pushed back his sleeves, seized his knife and strode across to the shepherd. "Michik, stand up!" he ordered.

When the shepherd had risen, the Lama quickly unbuttoned the man's coat and bared his chest. Suddenly struck his knife into the shepherd's chest. The Mongol fell, all covered with blood, a splash of which I noticed on the yellow silk of the Lama's coat. "What have you done?" I exclaimed.

"Be still," he whispered.

With a few strokes of the knife, he opened the Mongol's chest, and more blood appeared to flow, and the face of the shepherd was quite calm. He was lying with his eyes closed and appeared to be in deep and quiet sleep. As the Lama began to open his abdomen, I shut my eyes in fear and horror. When I opened them a little later, I was still more astonished at seeing the shepherd with his coat still open and his breast normal, quietly sleeping on his side, and Tushegoun Lama sitting peacefully by the brazier, smoking his pipe and looking into the fire in deep thought.

"It is wonderful!" I confessed. "I have never seen anything like this!"

"About what are you speaking?" asked the Lama.

"About your demonstration or 'miracle,' as you call it," I answered.

"I never said anything like that," he replied coldly.

"Afterwards he added: 'What has happened to you this evening is a futile demonstration. You Europeans will not recognize that we dark-minded nomads possess the powers of mysterious science. If you could only see the miracles and powers of the Most Holy Tashi Lama, when at his command the lamps and candles before the ancient statue of Buddha light themselves and when the images of the gods begin to speak and prophesy!'—From Black Magic of Mongolia, in 'Asia' Magazine.



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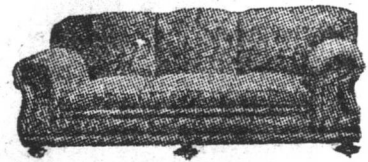
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