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

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Hastings quite expected that his mother would in some way betray that she knew something of the purpose for which Miss Craythorne had asked him for money. A secret with her was impossible, and while trying to convince himself that all curiosity on the subject was dead, he watched her expectantly.

One—two days passed, and things went on in much the same way, except that a little restraint had insensibly arisen between him and his fair guest. He did not care to ask her assistance or advice in matters where the help of a sympathetic woman solved problems that were either beyond him or best clumsily solved. Hitherto he had not hesitated to ask her to accompany him on his rounds over the estate, when bent upon kindly ministrations to old servants. From her hands the gifts of money, of clothing, and warm blankets for the winter came easily and graciously. She had a sweet manner that won the hearts of the poor. But he could ask her no more, and he was quite sure that she avoided him.

Then there was a little annoyance over the mysterious disappearance of one of the servant-women. He remembered seeing the woman the night that she went away. She stood on the lawn and gazed at him strangely while he was engaged with his correspondence. He caught the gleam of her black eyes, and wondered where he had seen them before. When he looked again, she was gone, and he was too busy to think of the matter again until the housekeeper complained that a woman whom she had recently engaged in the capacity of parlor maid was missing.

In her anxiety and fright she came into the breakfast-room without knocking, and Lady Hastings at once connected the girl with the man who had annoyed them two nights earlier. "She was a strange creature at best, my lady," said the housekeeper, "and I could not have kept her on any account, for at times she utterly refused to do anything. When I gave her notice, a week since, she only laughed at me, and said that she had only to speak to Sir Charles to get me dismissed. Only think of that! I think that she must have been a bit crazy."

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ter. "Where did the woman come from?"  
"Well, you see, sir, we had to get new servants in a hurry, and I got this one through a registry office. My lady was quite satisfied, and she seemed a superior sort of a girl. She had a dreadful temper, though, and one day showed me a wedding ring, which she said carried a title with it, and warned me that I should feel her displeasure before long."  
"What nonsense!" laughed Lady Hastings. "I wish that you had reported this to me, Simmons. Such creatures are really dangerous, and I am glad that she is gone, though I hope no harm has come to her."  
"She's too artful for that, my lady," declared Simmons. "And it's my opinion that there's more to be heard of it."  
"That will do," interrupted Sir Charles. "I will make all due inquiries about her to-day."  
His face had turned as white as the cloth before him, for he knew that the woman was his wife. She had stared at him with her burning, black eyes from the lawn. They were the same eyes that he remembered in the registrar's office, when they sought his in one brief flash. They were the eyes that had glared at him from the face of the woman disguised as a fortune-teller! She had been in his house, threatening his servants, and after this sensational disappearance, she would reappear with some show of authority.

He saw Ada Craythorne's sympathetic eyes fixed upon him, a blush upon her cheek, an expression that mystified and annoyed him.  
He left the room with a mumbled excuse, and locked himself away, where he could be left alone to wrestle with the throbbing of his heart. But why this weakness? Why should he care whether she came or not? He had told himself so many times that it could not affect his life. He would not admit her. The law would pardon him for that, but he could not face the exposure; it would kill his mother. He might make terms with the enemy; he might pay her to stay away. So he waited one, two days, and she did not come. No one had heard a word of her since she fled so suddenly, and she might have been forgotten had not a man inquired for her late on the evening of the third day. When he heard that Agnes Maitland had gone, he swore that he did not believe it, and demanded an audience with Sir Charles.

"I will see him," decided Hastings. "Show him into the library. I will be there in a short time."  
The footman departed. He thought that his master looked sterner than so simple a case warranted. In his opinion, the insolent fellow ought to have been kicked out, and given in charge of a policeman.

Sir Charles heard the unwelcome visitor cross the hall, and his blustering tones roused his anger to a white heat. How dared he address the servants? How dared he stamp his feet and rave?  
"He is waiting, Sir Charles," announced the curious footman, "but I think I'd better keep my eye upon him until you are ready."  
"I will not keep him waiting. You may go."

Sir Charles walked into the library, and saw standing before him a big, burly man, with a blotchy, repulsive face. He remembered him at once; it was the fellow he had seen in the office of Ebenezer Lupus, two or three months earlier. If anything, he looked more dissipated now than he did upon that occasion. At any rate, his appearance had in no way improved. There was mud upon his clothing, and the little linen he displayed had not seen soap and water for weeks.

Sir Charles closed the door, and without further preamble, demanded: "Your business, sir?"  
"Have I the great honor of speaking to Sir Charles Hastings?" sneered the man.  
"That is my name."  
"I'm happy to make your acquaintance, trusting that it will lead to mutual business and—"

"You are here," interrupted Sir Charles, haughtily, "making inquiries concerning a person named Agnes Maitland, I believe?"  
"I am," with a significant smirk.  
"Then, all I have to say is that she left my house three days since, without notifying my housekeeper, and further than that we know nothing of her movements."  
"How innocent we are!" chuckled the man, a wicked gleam in his eyes.

"Do you expect me to believe you? Why, I know that every word is a lie."  
"I think that you had better go now," was the quiet rejoinder. "I do not wish to soil my hands by throwing you out."  
"Ha! ha! Do you think I am to be disposed of like this," snarled the fellow. "I'd advise you to be very careful, young man, for in me you see your master. My name, sir, is Spiers—Alfred Spiers—and I am one of your wife's guardians—the sole surviving guardian. I want to know what you have done with her. I want to know why she has been inveigled here, to work as a servant, and then put out of the way. If you don't tell me, I'll take means to make you. She promised to meet me to-night. What have you done with her?"  
He raised his voice almost to a shriek, and his face became purple.  
"I repeat that I know nothing of the woman. I have never spoken to her. I had no knowledge that she was here."  
"You lie! You lie!" roared Spiers. "I am being defrauded—I mean I have lent her money, and she promised to pay me when she became mistress here."  
"I cannot help it. I know nothing about it."  
Hastings knew that anger would be wasted upon this man, and he spoke with a degree of calmness that surprised himself.  
"You know all about it, but I'll be even with the pair of you. You've paid her to go, and I am thrown over like a useless rag! So she fell in love with you at the last, did she? Ha! ha! Mighty funny it is, too. I suppose Lupus has had a hand in this, also! But I tell you to beware, and I give you one chance—Sir Charles Hastings—I give you one chance!"  
His expression was so fierce and demonic that the baronet kept a close watch upon his actions. He believed that the man was mad.  
"Now answer me truthfully, for I swear that your life is in my hands—answer me truthfully, and I will forgive you. Where have you hidden Lucy—the woman you married?"  
"I have not hidden her; I refuse to have anything to do with her," replied Sir Charles.

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