


**"STRATHMORE"**



The Paper of **QUALITY.**  
**ROYAL STATIONERY CO.**  
 180 Water Street.

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

CHAPTER IX.  
 I don't mind your flirting with Ada Craythorne, but I do object to your liberties with Lady Gladys Howard. It's just as well to speak plainly, and have done with it! I know that you are in no position to marry any girl."

"I refuse to discuss either Lady Gladys Howard or Miss Craythorne with you," Hastings said, as calmly as he was able. "You are not my keeper, and I doubt your claim upon the affections of the Earl of Swinford's daughter. I have already discovered that your attention to the ladies of this neighborhood have been particularly varied."

"But I am responsible for you," raved Lord Cecil. "I brought you here, and you may be a nobody—a mere adventurer. I only know you as a man fond of horseflesh, and I was a fool to take you among my friends. You must leave my house in the morning."

"Certainly."

"And if you go to the picnic I shall disclaim all knowledge of you to the Earl of Swinford and others. I give you fair warning."

Hastings laughed contemptuously. "After this," he quietly retorted, "I cannot sleep under your roof again. I am not at present enjoying the luxury of a valet, and I request, as a favor, that you will permit your man to pack up my traps, and have them sent to the Swinford Arms Hotel to-night. I will precede them on foot, and engage a room. It is not yet too late."

"I don't want to inconvenience you like that," growled Lord Cecil. "All I request is that you go home to-morrow first thing, and I'll promise to say nothing about you, but make apologies."

"Permit me to alight," responded Sir Charles, feigning a dangerous gleam coming into his eyes, as he pulled the check-string.

The coachman pulled up his horses, and a footman opened the carriage door.

"You will not fail to let my belongings follow to-night, my lord," said Sir Charles, stepping from the vehicle. "The Swinford Arms, remember."

His lordship uttered an oath as he ordered the coachman to drive on. Sir Charles Hastings had spoken to him contemptuously, and the chilling tones cut him like a lash.

"There is some mystery about him," he thought, savagely. "And if he dares

to show up to-morrow, and cross my path, I'll make it my business to find out his antecedents. I don't care what he does with the Craythornes, but he shan't come into my preserves! If he is likely to cause trouble, and Ada's infatuation turns to hate, by Jove, his chance will be small! Somehow, I think I've seen the last of him!"

When he reached the Towers he ordered his valet to send Sir Charles Hastings' trunks to the Swinford Arms forthwith. The carriage would wait while he packed them.

Meanwhile, the young baronet was provided with accommodations, and his last waking thoughts that night were:

"So it was not Lord Stanhope who heard our love rows in the Lady's Bower? Who could it have been? I am sure that I heard some one near us. I am quite positive of that!" He shuddered a little when he remembered the fears of Lady Marcia. He scouted the idea of anything supernatural. "I will see the Earl to-morrow morning," he thought. "And Gladys shall know all. I will not have a secret from her, and then—good Heaven—if I should lose her! No—not that cannot be! She will see that I have not purposely sinned. She will forgive me, and there may be a garden of sunshine and flowers somewhere beyond the black wood and bending skies that hide the future."

CHAPTER X.  
 Lady Craythorne had requested her friends to meet at Swinford Abbey at eleven o'clock. Bearing this in mind, Sir Charles Hastings breakfasted early, and left the Swinford Arms at nine o'clock to walk to the abbey. It was his intention to speak to the Earl about his love for Lady Gladys, and to tell him as much as he dared of the past, and his hopes for the future. He was rather doubtful about the result of the interview, and had never before realized the meaning of fear.

It wanted some fifteen minutes to ten when he was ushered into one of the reception-rooms at the abbey, and his heart beat in his throat when he asked the footman if the Earl was disengaged.

"I don't know, Sir Charles, but I will take in your card at once. My lord was up rather early this morning, and I fancy he is going out."

He left the room, and Sir Charles felt his courage ebbing fast. No, he could not speak that morning. He had not thought over what he ought to say to the Earl, and he could not relinquish Gladys. He would defer the interview. Half a story would be worse than none at all.

He heard the sound of returning footsteps, and was relieved to see that it was only the old servant-man.

"My lord went to town by an early train, Sir Charles," he announced. "His man says his departure was unexpected, and he won't be back till late."

"Thank you," said the baronet, feeling greatly relieved. "I will wait here until Lady Gladys is down. You will let her know that I have arrived."

The footsteps withdrew, and in one minute Lady Gladys appeared, looking radiantly beautiful. He did not hear her soft footfall until she stood before him. Then he sprang up with an exclamation of joy, and she ran into his outstretched arms.

"My darling Gladys," he murmured, pressing kisses upon her shining hair. "This is happiness, indeed."

"Oh, my love, I am so glad that you are here," the girl whispered. "I have had a horrible dream. I dreamed that I had lost you—that you left me without a word, and my heart was desolate. The dream seemed so real that I trembled with fear even after I had awakened. Was I not very silly? What put such nonsense into your

head, sweet one?" he asked, tenderly. "Only my folly," smiled Gladys. "I have been afraid, dear—just a little. I could not help noticing the evil glances that Lord Stanhope directed toward you. He suspects something, and you do not know his malevolent temper." Her manner became earnest, and a shadow came into her eyes.

"You have guessed rightly, my darling," replied Sir Charles. "Lord Cecil and I can never more be friendly. There! do not look frightened. I care nothing for this headstrong young man. He professes to have some claim upon you, and dislikes me for coming in his way. We parted last night, as civilly as could be expected under the circumstances. I am his guest no longer, and shall stand none of his nonsense."

Gladys nestled closer to her lover. "I am very sorry papa has been called away. There is some talk of a railway here, and he is not agreeable to have it near the park. The lawyers sent for him this morning."

"I came early, hoping to see him," Hastings said. "You know what for!" Gladys smiled happily, and her lover told her all that had passed between him and Lord Cecil.

"This need not interfere with our day's pleasure," he concluded. "I do not think that Lord Stanhope will be foolish enough to carry out his childish threats. You have given yourself to me, Gladys. You are mine, forever, and this man will pass from our lives like the passing of a dream!"

"I feel strong and confident now that you are with me, Charles. Last night I felt no fear; I laughed at auntie's stories and odd beliefs, but I did not realize then that I had something to lose—I did not realize how much. Oh, if anything came between us, I could not live!"

"What is that you fear, darling?" he asked, huskily.

"Nothing that is definable. I can give it no name or shape. Forgive me for troubling you—for bringing a cloud upon our love. I am only nervous this morning. I have been thinking of Aunt Marcia's lover, and wondering how she could bear up so bravely all these years. If my lover left me without word or sign, I think that I should just lie down and die!"

"Do you love me so much, then?" He pushed her from him, and was startled by the adoration in her eyes. "If I ever leave you, Gladys, it will only be in obedience to your own wishes."

"And that will be never!"

"If you should think that I am wicked when I lay bare my life before you, will you spurn me? Do you think that there is anything that would kill your love for me?"

He looked at her almost fiercely, and his voice trembled.

"Oh, don't, Charles. You could not be guilty of anything wicked; it is impossible. Don't let us think of these things! Oh, I wish that there were no picnic to-day, and that we might have the golden hours all to ourselves. One more day of perfect bliss!"

"One more day," he continued. "Love is heaven, and heaven is love!" A little later Lady Marcia came in, and she greeted Sir Charles, warmly. "Gladys has told me," she said, simply. "And I am sorry that you were too late to see the Earl—or, rather, that he should have been called. You have my prayer for your future happiness, and if you ever want a friend, think of Aunt Marcia."

"I shall not forget," replied Hastings, tears springing into his eyes. "I shall not be able to speak to Lord Howard for a few days, as I have pressing business at home, and must leave to-night. You will come to Emdem Hall to see my mother, Lady Marcia, and bring Gladys with you? I want you to promise, and I want you to watch carefully over my darling until I can claim her."

(To be continued.)

**BARGAINS-BARGAINS-BARGAINS!**



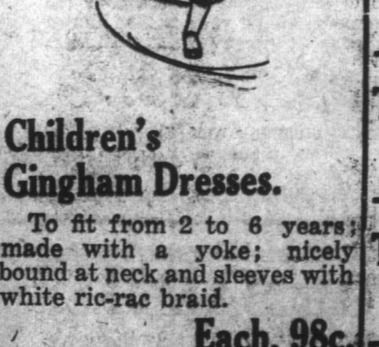
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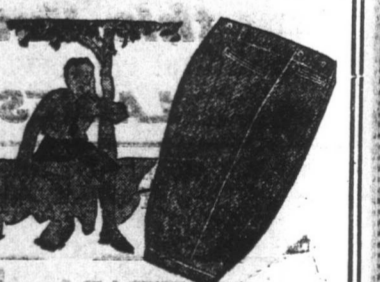
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