

with a lady who was dressed similarly to Lady Castleton, and his face lengthens considerably.

"It will be best for you to return at once," he says, in tones of intense vexation. "Perhaps Mrs. Cuthbertson will be good enough to go with you."

"Certainly," she answers, and the two men see them into the carriage. Lady Gladys feels strangely puzzled and alarmed. Lord Ellerton looks so grave, and Eric's pleasant face wears a decidedly anxious expression. She does not put her fears into words, and she leans back in the corner of the carriage, miserably anxious and silent, as they drive home.

A vague, intangible dread has taken possession of her, and she implores her companion to come with her to acquaint Lord Castleton with the news of Stella's disappearance.

"Of course, she may come back very soon," she says, though in her heart she feels the fallacy of her words; "but I should be so glad if you would explain to papa for me."

The elder woman shakes her head. "I am afraid she doesn't intend to come back, my dear," she says, kindly, "but I will certainly acquaint your father with the circumstances, if you wish."

As they alight from the carriage, a worn, haggard-looking woman approaches, and peers curiously into their faces; but it is neither of them whom she seeks, and she passes on in a weary dispirited fashion. Had they but known it, here is the cause of Lady Castleton's flight.

Meantime, the fugitive pair are being driven swiftly toward Charing Cross station, en route for Dover and Calais, Paris being their ultimate destination. They reach Dover, and are about to proceed to the landing-stage, when Lord Esdale suddenly clutches his companion's arm, and points with shaking hand to the contents bill of a newspaper, which is displayed upon the railway bookstall.

"Look," he gasps, and Stella, following the direction of his eye in terrified amazement, reads:

#### SPECIAL EDITION. SERIOUS ILLNESS OF THE DUKE OF WINTERTON.

"My father!" he murmurs under his breath. "Can it be possible? I saw him yesterday morning, and he was in perfect health then. Oh, Stella! what is to be done?"

Stella's face darkens. This sudden contretemps is extremely annoying. How provoking that Esdale should have caught sight of that wretched news bill! Now he will insist upon returning home, she supposes.

She turns upon him angrily. "Well, what do you intend to do? I shall go on in any case."

He glances at her imploringly. "Darling, I have no choice in the matter. I am compelled to return to London, but I will join you at the earliest possible moment. You had better go on by this boat, and I will come to you as soon as possible."

Stella demurs, but ultimately is forced to assent to his proposition, and half an hour later the big steamer is bearing her across the Channel, while Esdale is speeding back to London as fast as steam can carry him.

Lord Castleton is furious when he is acquainted with the news of his wife's flight. She has brought disgrace upon a name which has hitherto been stainless, and he determines that he will free himself from her as soon as the law allows.

He rages and storms, and Lady Gladys, who has never before seen her father so terribly angry, is perfectly terrified. To her inexpressible relief, Mrs. Cuthbertson proposes that she should come on a visit to her immediately.

"You know, dear, that you will be unable to go about by yourself, and, of course, it is impossible that you should go to the duchess at present. I will try and persuade your father to let you come."

Lord Castleton proves perfectly amenable, for he feels that he cannot live on in the house where he has lived with Stella, and Mrs. Cuthbertson's proposition presents a simple way out of the difficulty. If Gladys goes to her,



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