

Lord Cecil's Dilemma

The Picnic

Woodall Forest

CHAPTER XV.

No! I will work. My mission is to recover what is gone! I will devote my life to it if necessary, and you need never fear of being homeless, mother."

Lady Hastings subsided into tears. She was disappointed—hopeless. She knew that his brave words were but the beginning of youthful ignorance.

"If my home is sold over my head, I shall die," she sobbed. "Oh, my son, you do not know in what peril I stand. I had no legal right to sign away any portion of the estate until you were twenty-five years old, and with your consent. Lawyer Caddick has discovered this, and knows that the executors of my father's will are all powerful. He threatens that he will prosecute me if the money is not repaid. You will not see me a felon—you will not let your mother die in—"

"Oh, Heaven," ejaculated Sir Charles. "I had no knowledge of this. I have been kept in utter darkness. What am I to do?"

He paced the room, a terrible fear in his heart. It was his duty to shield his mother, at any cost.

"Has this Caddick—this lawyer—made any proposals?" he demanded, suddenly. "Has he any precious schemes of his own?"

"He was here a week before you came home, and wanted to see you," was the evasive answer. "He will come again the first of next month. He says that he cannot wait after that time for some kind of a settlement."

"For some kind of a settlement?" echoed Sir Charles. "The man wants his pound of flesh, I suppose. He has been misled, and fears to lose all. I can see why he is afraid. He has advanced his money upon what he cannot seize."

He laughed harshly. "His threats may be idle, but they are well founded. He shall have his money, if every stick and stone has to be sold."

"But you forget," wailed his mother. "We have not power to sell for two years—until you are five-and-twenty. He will not wait until then. He is a hard, cruel man; he says that I may die in the meantime—that a hundred things may happen; and that he will not wait. I begged him to be lenient toward me. I even went down on my knees to him—to this cold-hearted man; but he would not listen—he would see you, and you should determine what was to be done."

Sir Charles took his unhappy mother in his arms, and soothed her. "If it rests with me, then you shall be plucked from all danger, mother," he said. "There is nothing I would not do to ease your heart. I see why you have grown so old of late—my poor mother!"

She sobbed hysterically on his breast for a little while, but was relieved to know that her terrible secret was a secret no longer.

"I will not wait until the first of next month," he said. "I will not wait one day for Lawyer Caddick. I will see him to-morrow, and if it be possible to settle with him, even to the impelling of my immortal soul, I swear that it shall be done, for your sake, mother! I swear that I will not leave him until it is done. I have po-

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one else to live for. I am not like other men. I am a thing to be avoided. I am outside the pale even of ordinary civilization, because of some doubt upon my father's name. I can never enjoy the privilege and rights of ordinary mankind; and I do not care—I do not care. At first I was shocked, but now I am glad that I know the worst. The fault is not yours—the misfortune is. Circumstances have chased us relentlessly, but a man's iron hand and determined will can even change their cruel course at times. This load of fear shall be snatched away, mother; I will settle with the man to-morrow, no matter what his terms may be!"

CHAPTER XVI.

Sir Charles had never seen Mr. Jabez Caddick, the lawyer. He was not quite sure that he had ever heard his name before. He knew that his mother had employed a new solicitor, because the old firm, who had represented the family for fifty years, was too expensive. She objected to the people because they were associated with the past. This was what she had told her son in a casual way; but Lady Hastings was not always truthful. She wanted ready money; and when Steele & Trauter explained that it would be impossible to raise another loan without the concurrence of the executors, she found that she had no further use for them. She dared not approach the executors, having already violated the terms of the will.

Mr. Jabez Caddick was flattered by the patronage of so distinguished a client. He was a lawyer of the old school—wily, cunning and unscrupulous. The flourishing business of which he was principal had first known him as office boy, fresh from a founding asylum. He was even without a name, and adopted that of his employer. He finally became managing clerk, married a girl who could barely write her name—for the little money she possessed was taken into partnership, and was now the sole surviving member of a firm which had become rich by legal trickery. He advanced Lady Hastings various sums of money at an exorbitant rate of interest, until she was indebted to him to the extent of many thousands of pounds. She was unable to pay even the interest; she was unable to meet current expenses even, had the ability of Lawyer Caddick been discharged. She had obtained the money from him, he asserted, by fraud, and

there was only one way in which she could be saved from the convict settlements. He had carefully sifted the history of the family, and had seen the young heir to the incumbered estates during one of his vacations. His mind was quickly made up. He was ambitious, and made proposals that at first startled Lady Hastings. Then she saw a rift in the cloud that threatened her, and she gave the lawyer hope that his project might be realized. She would speak to her son, and he should decide.

But Lady Hastings said never a word to the young man until goaded by the fierce letters of Caddick, and then she only told half the story. It was sorrowful enough—it was humiliating enough in all truth, but the worst had yet to come.

Sir Charles left home the next morning to visit Lawyer Caddick, and to save his mother at any cost.

It was not a long journey—some twenty miles—and Steele & Trauter, the old solicitors, had an office in the same town. He called upon them first, and was rather coldly received. Then he explained his trouble, and the senior partner thawed a little. He blamed Lady Hastings in unmeasured terms for dealing with a rascal like Caddick, but they really could not help her. She was completely in Caddick's power.

"You might charge him with conspiracy," said the lawyer, gravely; "but I do not think that it will help Lady Hastings. Make the best terms possible, and let us know what they are."

"I knew no word of this until yesterday," Sir Charles said. "I want you to advise me in the future. I may get out of the trouble with clean hands." He left the office of Steele & Trauter, and walked quickly in the direction of Colleshill street, a much cheaper quarter of the town of Birmingham. At length he stood before a dingy-looking, red-brick building, with low, squatty-looking windows, and a narrow doorway with blackness beyond. He could not help comparing the office and surroundings of Jabez Caddick with those of Steele & Trauter, and wondered how his mother had ever summoned up courage to enter a den like this.

The window on the ground floor was frosted inside, so that none of the outer world might see anything of the mysteries within. On the glass the words, "Jabez Caddick, Solicitor, Commissioner for Oaths," were painted in ugly black letters. Yes; this

was the office of the man who had it in his power to ruin them forever. Sir Charles stepped over the dirty doorstep, and groped about for a bell or knocker. A rickety door was suddenly snatched open, and a boy with a bundle of pink summons sheets darted out. He glanced at Sir Charles Hastings, a grin on his precocious, impish face, saying:

"This is the way into Lawyer Caddick's, sir, if you are looking for it." "Thank you," replied the young baronet, with a shudder. This imp quickly recognised another victim.

He entered the foul-smelling, grimy outer office, and a shabby old man with hawk-like eyes and nose demanded his business.

"Is Mr. Caddick within?" asked Sir Charles, handing the clerk his card.

"Yes, but he is very busy. Will you take a seat?" He pointed to a chair with a broken back, and the young man saw that nearly a dozen wretched-looking people of both sexes were waiting for an interview.

In one minute the old hawk returned and announced that Mr. Caddick would see him immediately. He then told the people waiting to come some other time.

There was the sound of an electric bell from the inner office, and the hawk promptly conducted Sir Charles through a passage with double green glass doors, and he was in the presence of Mr. Jabez Caddick. (To be continued.)

Fashions and Fads.

The smartest sport oxfords have contrasting saddles. Plated grilles are seen on some of the newest frocks.

Paris touches up its black gowns with a dash of color.

Striped silk jersey makes a charming cape and hat.

Henna-colored flowers girdle a frock of pale yellow linen.

Long black silk kid gloves are worn by the well-dressed woman.

"Wrap-around" skirts of wool sponge are slightly fringed.

Black and white seems the smartest combination in millinery.

Black and white silk mantillas are worn with summer frocks.

Moir's seems to have been adopted for fashionists in the draped dress.

Slip-on awesters have adopted the fashionable bateau neckline.

Dresses of cotton sponge are worn with coats or capes to match.

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