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THE LION IN THE PATH

(From the Publisher's advanced sheets.)

CHAPTER XXXVI. THE EARL'S PROPOSAL TO HIS DAUGHTER.

THE events described in recent chapters stimulated the Earl of Bridgeminster into fresh action. Unable as yet to do anything directly against Lord Langton—who, he had no sort of doubt, was the diamond merchant—he directed all his efforts to the influencing Lady Hermia.

It is true, he waited just a day or two to let the shock of her danger pass off—if, indeed, the Dark Lady and his daughter were the same, as he now felt assured since Earnshaw's discovery—and being himself, in the meantime, glad to escape all chances of discussing so terrible a contingency.

But when he fancied he might venture to open the subject near to his heart—or what he con-

ceived to be his heart, meaning his interests—he called his daughter to him one morning after breakfast, and requested her to walk with him in the park.

A quiet glance from Lady Hermia's eyes towards the earl's face told him she perfectly understood the significance of the invitation. It told him more—that he had probably better for the present be quiet.

But then he felt that, if he did remain quiet, the whole strength of his present position must in all probability soon pass away. Was it likely that, if Lord Langton and Lady Hermia met many times more, there would be the least probability of his obtaining a final separation? No. He was determined they should never meet again.

That was the only safe solution.

Lady Hermia's face was threatening, it is true; but the earl was a man accustomed to make difficulties bend before him, and not himself to let them make him stoop.

They walked on, and, for a time, seemed to have no object whatever in their walk, beyond gazing with lack-lustre eyes on the grass beneath

their feet, on the great beeches on either hand, and on the soft sky, dappled over with fleecy clouds, saying, the while, not a single word.

"Hermia!" said the earl, at last, and his daughter knew the tone only too well as one that always implied that, whatever patience he might exhibit in explanations, his mind was not in the least degree unsettled as to his aim or his absoluteness of will.

"Yes, sir?" said the daughter, and the earl could not but recognise a tone thoroughly responsive to his own—one suggesting a state of mind perhaps even more prepared to be gentle in expostulation, but equally immovable at the last.

"Sir Charles leaves us to-morrow."

"Does he?"

"He does. And I am sorry to say that I perceive, under his fixed silence to me, a feeling that you do not receive him with your old kindness."

"I can do so, if Sir Charles pleases."

"How is that?"

"By ceasing to suggest unpleasant thoughts



"Paul, Paul! This to a woman!"