

# His Little Girl

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Moberly

OUR NEW

SERIAL STORY

"WELL, Helen, all I can say is, I wash my hands of you if you persist in this nonsensical, outrageous scheme. I've always said, and I'll always stick to it, it is not fitting that a lady of your birth and position should work for her living. Ladies of the Stansdale family never have stooped to anything of the kind, and I should have thought you would have had too much respect for your family to wish to bring discredit on its name."

Robert Stansdale, drawn up to his full height, stood before the empty grate in the drawing-room of their suburban villa, looking at his sister Helen with angry and astonished eyes. He had listened with very ill-concealed impatience to her explanations of the reason for wishing to take the step he considered so outrageous, and now he stood staring at her, with a confused sensation that his world, the little world in which he had so long strutted as supreme cock of the walk, was all at once being turned inside out and upside down. Robert Stansdale greatly disliked any disturbance in the small world he had ruled so long, and ruled as he felt, so wisely and well. Since their mother's death, some years earlier, he had been sole arbiter of the fates and lives of his sisters, and he prided himself upon having ordered their lives for them in the most suitable way that could be conceived. Helen's present attitude, the extraordinary line of conduct she was suddenly adopting, was incomprehensible to him; not only did he not understand it, he refused entirely to try to do so. He stood there by the fireplace, an upright, stubborn figure, his grey side whiskers seeming positively to bristle with wrath, his small eyes gleaming angrily as he watched Helen's nervous, yet determined face.

"Why can't you make her see reason?" he questioned suddenly and sharply, turning to look at his other sister, who crouched back in her chair with frightened face, "I don't see where she's got this infernally silly idea from, but if she has got it, can't you shake it out of her?"

"I—I've tried, Robert," Miss Marion faltered, her blue eyes looking deprecatingly into her brother's angry grey eyes, "but, dear Helen will not listen to me, she thinks—"

"She thinks she knows best," Robert interrupted with a sneer, "I suppose she's heard a lot of rubbish about independence and all the rest of it from the silly women you meet here and cackle with over your tea. It ought to be beneath your dignity as a Stansdale to know these people at all, much less to listen to their cacklings."

"The people we know here are very nice in every way, Robert," Helen put in, with a firmness which, as her brother faintly realized, was new to her, "and I have never discussed with any of them the question of a woman's independence. But, for a long time, for a *very* long time," her accents increased in firmness, "I have chafed against my own position here. I have disliked being a burden upon you, and now that, as you told us a few weeks ago, your income is less, I have made up my mind to work."

Robert gave a laugh that was something between a snort and a sneer.

"To work? At your age? A pretty mess you're likely to make of it. An old lady of sixty can't very well begin working, with any chance of success, and I tell you, Helen, I don't intend you to do it."

"But," his sister's blue eyes met his unflinchingly, though she shrank a little at his words, "I intend to do what I wish, Robert, whether you oppose me or not. This is not a new idea of mine. I have wished to do it for years, and hitherto I have submitted to your wishes, against my own better judgment. Now, I am going to follow that judgment. The time has come when I must do as I think best, and live my own individual life."

SOME strange, and hitherto undeveloped courage stirred Helen into her brave speech, but, having made it, she subsided once more and became her normal frightened self, and collapsed into the nearest chair with a nervous glance at her brother's enraged and wrathful countenance.

"Bless my soul," he exclaimed, "our individual

life. My good girl, where in all this world have you picked up expressions of that sort?" and Robert laughed scornfully, "you don't mean to tell me that you are beginning to talk this modern jargon, you—an old woman of sixty? At your time of life you ought to have more sense, and the sooner you make up your mind that I do not intend to countenance your preposterous scheme, the better it will be for you, and for all of us."

His hectoring tone put renewed courage into Helen, and with a sudden flash of resentment in her eyes, she rose to her feet again, and faced her brother with a curious dignity quite foreign to her.

"Robert, I have made up my mind," she said, slowly, "and you will not browbeat me into altering it now. Your scolding me will make no difference to my plans. They are settled. I have arranged to go to Sir Giles Tredman, to take care of his ward; and to-morrow I shall join them at the Metropole Hotel."

"Upon my life," Robert blustered, but Helen put up a hand which, though it trembled a little, had nevertheless an oddly quieting effect upon the angry man.

"EVERYTHING is settled," she went on, her voice growing firmer and more placid with every syllable, I did not tell you anything about it until all the arrangements were irrevocably made, but I am sure I shall be very happy in the work I have chosen; and I thought it would be wiser to begin it at once; especially as you will not make life here very agreeable for me now that I am taking a step of which you disapprove."

"Agreeable to you? No, by jove! I should think not," came the emphatic reply, "you are running counter to everything I most care for, and if you persist I have no wish to make anything agreeable for you any more. Clearly understand, Helen, that if you go now, you go for good and all."

"Oh! Robert," came a tremulous remonstrance from Marion.

"Hold your tongue," her brother exclaimed, sharply, "if Helen chooses to make herself an uncomfortable bed, she must lie on it; and if it doesn't suit her, she can't come whining back here. No! if she is so determined to work, let her work. You and I will jog on alone, or rather—not alone," he added, "for the probability is that I shall use Helen's vacant room to put up a young lady whom I have been asked to befriend."

"A young lady?" Marion cried, breathlessly, "oh! Robert, how can we, how shall we—"

"Do stop, 'oh! Robert, we—we!'" the irascible gentleman exclaimed, "we can, and we shall, do what I choose here. I mean to be master in my own house, let me tell you that, Marion." Robert Stansdale, during his many years of fighting the world in city commercial circles, had lost much of the refinement, and many of the outward signs of birth and breeding which, through all their adversities, had never left his sisters. Contact with many sorts of men had developed in him a species of brusque roughness which he had fostered and encouraged, and he punctuated his sentence now with a short laugh that seemed to hold the concentrated essence of a bullying nature.

"Yes, Robert, I know," Marion gasped out, "but, when you said a young lady, I—wondered—"

"You can stop wondering, then," he interrupted, brutally, "when I was asked to-day if I knew of an English family in this suburb who would take charge of a young German lady, I said I would make enquiries, and try to find out the right family. Now that I find Helen has made up her mind to take this besotted and ridiculous step, I intend to offer a home to the young lady here, in my house. The money her brother means to pay for her will be a great convenience, a *very* great convenience, and you must just make yourself agreeable to her, Marion, and do all you can to give her a pleasant home. I shall write to her uncle to-night."

"But—but—Robert," Marion rose, and came closer to the truculent little man, "surely you will tell us who the young lady is, and what I shall be required to do. I feel, I mean this has come so

suddenly, is such a surprise, I can't understand it."

"You'd better collect all your wits together and try to make it out then," was the cutting retort, "the young lady's name is Muller, Miss Rosa Muller. I have met her uncle, he is in the Diplomatic service, but he is often in the city. He wishes his niece to be with refined English people to learn the language, and to see something of English life. He fancies this suburb, and, being a friend of mine"—here Stansdale preened himself after the fashion of a proud and important peacock, "he asked my advice. I shall write at once to put Helen's room at his niece's disposal."

Bewilderment, dismay, surprise, chased themselves one after another over poor Marion's face, whilst Helen sat speechlessly in her chair, looking from her brother to her sister and back again, in a kind of puzzled stupor.

"Of course, if we must have this young lady," Marion said, tremulously, "I will do my best to make her happy; but, if her uncle is in the Diplomatic service, I can't understand why he wants her to live in a suburb like Stockley. Life here hardly seems to be the kind of life for a girl in that position. I should have thought London, and London society, would—"

"It doesn't matter the value of a brass farthing what you think," Robert answered, with another of his short laughs, "Mr. Muller wishes his niece to come here, and there's an end of it. But I tell you what, Marion, things will have to be nicely done for her. Muller is an important person, there can be no mistake about that; and this girl will have been accustomed to the best, and with what she is going to pay us she can have the best here, and she *must* have it. Muller's an aristocrat to his finger tips, and there is no doubt Miss Rosa will be one too."

"But Robert, do you think Dr. Berners will say it is too much for Marion to have the extra worry of a girl in the house, to—" Mr. Stansdale broke roughly in upon Helen's trembling intervention.

"Dr. Berners' opinion will not be asked. There is no necessity for it. Miss Muller is more likely to be a help than a worry to Marion; Dr. Berners is a very good young fellow, and a gentleman, too, which is more than can be said of a good many of his profession. But I have no idea of letting him interfere with my household arrangements. You women are far too fond of consulting that young man and pinning all your faith in him. Now there's an end of the argument," Robert put up his hand, as he saw Helen open her mouth to speak again, "I shall settle with Muller that his niece can come to us as soon as Helen goes, and what Berners thinks or doesn't think are matters of complete indifference. Understand that!"

## CHAPTER IX.

HUGH BERNERS, the rising young doctor, who was making himself a name and reputation in the large suburb of Stockley, ran down the steps of Mrs. Cardew's house in Cromwell Road, with a pleased smile upon his face. He had enjoyed his afternoon; the At Home had turned out far pleasanter and more amusing than he had expected, and he congratulated himself upon having made a special effort, and given up this afternoon to avail himself of Mrs. Cardew's invitation. He had made the Cardews' acquaintance during the Easter End, which he had spent at the country house of mutual friends, and his host, Mr. Dunn, being a man of much worldly wisdom, had counselled the young physician not to lose sight of the smart widow and her handsome daughter.

"The Cardews know most people worth knowing," Mr. Dunn said, shortly, "at their house you may come across men and women likely to be useful to you, and Miss Cardew's fiancé, Sir Giles Tredman, is worth cultivating, too. Some day he will be a very distinguished personage, if he goes on as he has begun: and his place, by the way, is not so very many miles from Stockley." The advice had remained in Berners' mind, and the afternoon he had just spent in the Cardews' house made him realize that Mr. Dunn's words had been words of wisdom. The men and women who crowded his hostess's drawing-room were precisely the men and women it was well to meet, and one woman's face in particular lingered in his memory, as he walked quickly eastwards en route to his club for dinner. Hugh Berners, in his busy life, had hitherto found little time to bestow much thought upon the other sex; he had worked hard at his profession, allowing little else to absorb his mind or thoughts. He had kept his hands and heart clean, living uprightly and purely, with a boyish simplicity, feeling that one day he would offer the best of himself to the woman he should ask to be his wife. But until now, the

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