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The Mystery of Rutledge Hall
—OR—
"The Cloud With a Silver Lining"

CHAPTER XXIV.

Stephen rang the bell before he left the room, and hardly had the door closed after him than Sidney tore open the letter which lay uppermost on her lap, and glanced at it with eager eyes. It ran thus:

"Dr. Anderson will call at East-Porter to-morrow evening at nine o'clock to see Miss Greville. As his stay at Ashford will be very limited, he hopes not to be disappointed of the interview."

For a moment Sidney stared at the note, puzzled and perplexed; then like lightning its meaning flashed upon her, and she began to tremble exceedingly, forgetting the other note in her startled terror.

"Did you ring, ma'am?" Sidney turned round with a start; a servant was waiting at the door; but as her excuse for her husband for remaining down stairs had been once spoken on the spur of the moment, she did not remember that Stephen had rung.

"No," she said, hurriedly, "I did not ring. Stay!" she added, hastily, as he was about to leave the room. "A gentleman—Dr. Anderson—will call here this evening to see Miss Greville. Let him be shown at once into my boudoir, as his time is very limited."

"Yes, ma'am." Sidney dropped the note announcing Dr. Anderson's arrival into the fire, and as she went up stairs, opened the other letter that she had received that evening. It was shorter even than the one she had just destroyed.

"Madam,—Will you kindly meet me at the Excelsion Hotel, Ashford, on Thursday, the 30th inst., at eleven o'clock, a.m.?"

Your obedient servant,
STEPHEN G. HOPGOOD.

Her maid was waiting in her dressing-room, anxious to perform the toilet operations, and with a heavy heart Sidney submitted. Miss Greville was awake, the maid said, as she brushed Sidney's pretty chestnut hair, very nervous and faint still, but quieter than she had been, and Sidney wondered if she dared trust Bessie with her part this evening, half decided that she would do so, and then shuddered at the thought that through any carelessness on the part of the old woman Dr. Anderson's identity might be discovered.

Stephen was just ready to leave his dressing-room, looking very handsome and distinguished in the white Louis XIII. Mousquetaire dress, that he wore, when a timid knock sounded at his door, and he opened it, to see his wife standing there clad in the glittering robes of her fancy dress, looking very beautiful but white as her pure, spotless draperies.

"Stephen," she said, suddenly, speaking as if she were repeating some lesson she had learned, "will you be very disappointed if I do not go with you this evening?"

"If you do not go with me this evening?" he echoed, the expression of eager admiration changing to one of cold displeasure. "What are you ill?"

"No; but Christie seems so ill that I think it is unkind to leave her."

"Do you mean that she is ill enough to be in danger?" he asked, more gently. "Is she worse? Shall I send a carriage for your father?"

"No—oh, no—she is not worse! But—"

Stephen, if you would not mind very much, I should like to stay."

She spoke very earnestly, but she did not raise her eyes to his as she stood before him, he looking down at her gravely.

"Have you considered my father's and my mother's disappointment?" he asked. "Have you remembered that it is really the first entertainment they have given since our return; and that they would feel your absence a great slight? You say that Miss Greville is not worse," he went on; "therefore I must refuse your request, Sidney, unless you have some other special reason."

"I cannot have my wife's eyes red to-night," he said, gently, putting his right arm round her as she stood—his left arm was still in a sling. "I want people to see what a beautiful ice-cream she makes, so white and pure and sweet, although I am afraid—with a little laugh—"I don't want them to know what an ice-cream she is to her husband. You must go, Sidney."

"I cannot," she murmured. "I am not well, I cannot go."

He looked at her keenly for a minute, then drew her into his dressing-room, and dismissing his valet, who was still there, said, gravely:

"Christie, I do not often cross your wishes; but unless you desire seriously to displeas me, unless you desire to show how little regard you have for my wishes, you will go with me."

"You make too much of it," she answered, trying to speak carelessly. "I am not well, Stephen, and I am sure I should disgrace you to-night by a fit of hysterics or by fainting away! Don't urge me to go. Lady Eva will forgive me, if you tell her that Christie is—"

"I will spare you any further excuses," he said, in a tone so cold and stern that she shivered. "Since you became my wife you have shown me clearly enough how irksome the position is to you, and your conduct this evening is only what I might have expected. You need add no further falsehoods to those you have already told me to-night. They cost you nothing but to hear you utter them is as bitter as death to me!"

CHAPTER XXV.

The carriage had driven away over the snow-covered avenue, and Sidney came back slowly from the window whence she had watched it go and threw herself face downward upon her bed, regardless of the costly white draperies which she was crushing, the diamonds gleaming so brightly on her white throat and slender arms.

Stephen was gone. He had left her with a look on his face which she had never seen there before, a look of cold contempt; and, though she stood waiting in the gallery until he came out of his dressing-room again, and had watched him go down stairs in his Louis XIII dress, looking so handsome and grave and proud, he had not spoken to her again. He had passed her by without a word, although her dress had brushed him as he went, and the last words he had uttered to her were those which said that her falsehoods were as bitter as death to him.

When she had heard the carriage

coming round from the stables, she had thrown open the window of her room and leaned out into the cold night-air, regardless of the falling snow which drifted in upon her bare shoulders and arms. There was no moon; but the light from the hall fell upon the waiting vehicle and enabled her to see her husband and Lloyd Miller—the latter in a curious Italian dress which made him look as one in an old picture—get into the carriage and drive away.

The window was so exactly above them that she could have spoken to them without difficulty; but they did not look up; and, having watched them drive away, she went and threw her self upon her bed, leaving the window open, regardless of the drifting snow and keen wind which it admitted into the room.

"It is all over now," she moaned, pressing her burning brow into the cold linen. "He will never love me now—never—never!"

It seemed to the wretched girl, as she lay there, that the last glimmer of hope that some day she would win back her husband's love faded away completely. Never would they be anything but strangers—never, however long they lived together. He would always mistrust her, he would always look upon her as he had looked that evening, with cold contempt.

Fate was against her, she thought wearily. Another night the disguise Frank had adopted would have enabled him to be admitted to his sister without exciting much comment or much interest. The household knew that Miss Greville was ill, and therefore a doctor's visit would have seemed quite natural to them—any other night but that one. And yet he was to come that evening.

She raised herself from the pillow after a time, shivering with cold and damp, and, closing the window hastily, threw off her beautiful dress and crouched before the fire to warm herself. Presently Bessie came in, full of sympathy for Sidney's disappointment—for Sidney had sent down word that Miss Greville seemed too ill to be left—and dressed her young mistress in her black velvet dress, and sympathized with her when she said, hating herself, poor Sidney, for the deception—that she was sorry, Miss Christine was so ill, and that she was anxious—which was true enough—to see the new doctor, who might be able to do her some good.

"Oh, Sidney, have you come at last?" was Christie's reproachful greeting when Sidney went to the boudoir and found her sitting up on her couch, with a fever spot on either cheek and a feverish light in the blue eyes which were usually so dim and faded. "I have been so lonely and frightened. Why did you not come sooner?"

(To be continued.)

Are Modern Men "Soft"?
IF THEY ARE, IT'S THE WOMEN'S FAULT.

(By LORD HEADLEY)

Recently, Mr. Mitchell Hedges, the explorer, criticized the modern young man on the score of "flabbiness," both physical and mental. Here Lord Headley, an authority on boxing and other sports, deals with the question in spirited fashion.

A good deal of nonsense is being talked about the alleged physical and mental degeneracy of our young men; according to some critics the coming generation is lacking in both courage and enterprise.

I think that an examination of facts will show that any such aspersions are unjust. There is no doubt that the war must be held responsible for much freedom between the sexes, and that this freedom was often abused, but I venture to say that only a very small number of our young men have deteriorated, as is suggested.

I hardly think that anyone watching our cricket, football, running, or boxing, athletes will imagine that we are on the downward track.

We seem to have fallen off in the "ring," but this may be only a phase—just a break in our long line of successes. In the old days it was only the Briton who boxed, whereas now representatives of the whole world step into the arena, and he must not be upset or discouraged when a foreigner proves such an apt pupil that he can defeat her now and again. It only shows how well she has shown the way to do it!

Regarding the accusation of want of enterprise, we have before us the examples of thousands of our most promising youths who, feeling that there is no scope here for their energies, go out to the Dominions to swell the ranks of those who will in the future uphold the honour of the British Empire.

Some of the critics of our budding manhood have gone so far as to attribute this so-called degeneracy to the wearing of over-loose trousers.

Those who decry the "brighter" clothing of our young men overlook one important point—the remarkable

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the hardy-Northerners. May I also call attention to the "leg-wear" of the Afghans, Greeks, Albanians, and other tough mountain climbers?

Placing the Blame.

On one respect Mr. Hedges shows great good sense: he objects to the domination of women who are usurping men's work and trying to be men's equals both mentally and physically. I think that many modern young women with their indelicate dressing, cocktail drinking, and outrageously bad manners are doing actual damage to the young men of to-day. Such women cannot make good wives.

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