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## The Mystery of Rutledge Hall

OR

### "The Cloud With a Silver Lining"

CHAPTER XIII.

Sidney's wedding-day came in the time of roses. They were all in bloom in the old-fashioned garden at the rear of the Gray Houses, scenting the sweet summer air with their fragrance, brightening it with their fresh loveliness and exquisite coloring, their soft hues of pink and dymask and yellow and spotless white. Never had there been a greater profusion of roses, people said; they bloomed everywhere—in the cottage gardens, in the little latticed windows, in the rosiary at Lambswold, over the pointed porches, in the hedges, and on the hill-tops; everywhere the roses bloomed, save on the face of the young bride-elect when Bessie came in to call her on her wedding morning and found her lying back upon her bed, white and cold and insensible in a deadly swoon.

Bessie's first impulse was to summon assistance, and she had taken a few steps in the direction of the bell, when she paused, and, turning away again, went back slowly to the little white bed, and looked down at the motionless form lying there. Sidney had not been to bed; that was evident, for she still wore the pretty pale blue dressing-gown which Bessie had given her on the night before, when she had left her, at Sidney's wish, to go and assist Dolly, who was spending the night at the Gray House, and who was unused to dispense with the services of a maid. Her hair was falling around her, lying in long golden-brown waves upon the pillows, and the ivory-backed brush with which she had been brushing it lay where it had fallen from the nervous hand.

Bessie glanced round the room anxiously, but there were no other signs of disturbance, the pretty dressing-gown, with its ornaments and knick-knacks, and the candles burnt down into their sockets, were as usual. The

charming old-fashioned room was in its usual order; but one of the windows was partly open, and the curtain pushed back, as if by a hasty hand, which had not time to use it other than roughly.

Going back to the bedside, the old woman lifted the girl's head upon her arm, and moved her into a less constrained position on the bed. As she did so, she became aware that the swoon was less a swoon now than the heavy stupor and faintness succeeding a long insensibility, for a shiver shook the girl's frame as she stirred her, and the heavy eyelids quivered and half raised themselves from the languid eyes, only to fall again the next moment once more, while the hand Bessie touched was cold as marble, and, when she released it again, it fell back upon the bed as heavily and stiffly as marble itself might have fallen.

More alarmed now, Bessie hurriedly brought water, and, lifting her mistress's head, held it to her lips, and then bathed her face and brow with it. Something withheld her from summoning assistance; she would not do so unless she were obliged; she did not wish to give the busy tongues of the household and of Mrs. Arnold food for comment; whatever was the cause of Sidney's swoon, it was nothing they need know, she felt sure; and she redoubled her terrified efforts in her anxiety to do without the help she would otherwise so quickly have obtained.

At last a glimmer of consciousness crept into the marble face lying on Bessie's arm; the heavy lids were slowly raised, and Sidney's great dark eyes opened, and stared up with a strange fixed vacancy of regard at the tender, anxious face bending over her.

"You are better, dearie," the old woman said, gently smoothing away the hair from the girl's white brow, and thinking sorrowfully how like the fair face was to the face of Sidney's mother, as it lay among the soft white satin and flowers which lined her coffin.

"Better?" Sidney pale lips muttered, inquiringly, almost as if Bessie had spoken in some unknown tongue. "Better?"

"Yes; you have been ill, dearie," Bessie said, soothingly; "but you are better now. I will fetch you some tea. Are you well enough to get up?"

Again the strange, puzzled look of inquiry crossed the girl's pale face; then, seeming to understand the question, she faintly muttered an affirmative, and sank back again upon her pillow, turning from the light as if it hurt her.

When Bessie returned with the cup of strong hot tea she deemed the best restoration, she was obliged to lift and support Sidney while she drank it; and it required all her strength to assist her into an arm-chair, thinking that the change of posture would revive her more effectually. But, though the terrible vacant look had somewhat faded, still her face had by no means resumed its ordinary expression, and the slow movements of the little hands, as they put back the heavy falling hair, were tight and fan-

guid to a strange degree, and she was so silent that the power of speech might have been deemed to have left her.

Bessie moved about the room mechanically, settling about her duties in some daisy and distress. What terrible thing had happened? she wondered. That Sidney's prostrate condition was not due solely to bodily illness she felt sure; and what had caused it? There had been no quarrel, she knew. Stephen had spent the previous evening at the Gray House, and that morning a mounted groom had ridden over from Lambswold with a parcel for Sidney and a note, which parcel and note lay upon a table where Bessie had deposited them in her alarm on entering the room. What had happened?

With her head drooping forward on her breast, Sidney watched her as she moved about the room, active and noiseless in her movements, tall and erect in the handsome black silk dress and snazzy beribboned cap she had donned in honor of her darling's wedding-day—an attire which perhaps served to remind the girl of what she seemed to have forgotten; for, as she noticed it, she started a little.

"Bessie," she said abruptly, but in a voice whose accents were like those of one enfeebled by long suffering, "what day is this?"

Bessie turned briskly, trying to disguise her anxiety under an affectation of great cheerfulness.

"What day is this?" repeated Sidney.

"Why, Miss Sidney, dear, have your thoughts wandered to? Have you forgotten what day this is? Surely not! No girl ever forgets on awakening that it is her wedding day."

"Her wedding day?" echoed Sidney, in the same hushed voice; and the slender, drooping frame began to tremble so pitiously that Bessie ran to her and caught her in her arms.

"What has happened, my dearie?" she asked, tenderly. "What has frightened you? Tell your old nurse, my dearie—tell Bessie."

The tender voice and touch moved Sidney as nothing else could have moved her; she clung to the old woman with her little feeble hands, and said faintly:

"Bessie, Bessie!"—and again, in a few moments, "Bessie, Bessie!"

And the old woman, holding the little trembling figure in her strong arms, kissed and fondled her as if she had still been the child who had lain on her breast twenty years before.

"Can't you tell me, dearie? What has happened to distress and frighten you?" she whispered. "Shall I call the doctor, Miss Sidney, or—"

"No, no, no," Sidney called out, in sudden passionate alarm—"do not call any one! There is nothing—What do you mean, Bessie? I was only a little tired, and I had had dreams—yes, I had had dreams—oh, such terrible dreams!"

"But the dreams are over now, my dear," Bessie said, tenderly; "they need not trouble you to-day. Look how brightly the sun is shining for you, Miss Sidney; and, if it is true that 'happy is the bride the sun shines on,' surely your wedded life will be happy, my dear!"

"Happy!" Sidney ejaculated, with a sudden passionate bitterness. "Is any one happy in this world, I wonder? Did you ever know any one who was happy Bessie?"

"I think you ought to be, Miss Sidney," said Bessie, stoutly.

"? Good Heaven—I happy!" the girl cried out, bitterly, leaving her seat and pacing up and down with hurried, uneven steps, her long blue dresses falling around her, her hair tumbling about over her shoulders.

"I wonder if ever a woman on her wedding day felt as I feel? If so, Heaven help her!"

"You must not be ungrateful, Miss Sidney," said Bessie, reproachfully. "No young lady ever had a brighter future in store than you have. If my dear mistress had lived to see this day, she would have said so, I am sure."

"My mother!" returned the young girl, with the same passionate pain and bitterness. "Ah, she was happy, Bessie; she died before she learned how bitter life can be!"

She threw herself upon her knees by the bed, her head on her outstretched arms. For some minutes Bessie left her undisturbed, but the clock striking nine warned her of the lateness of the hour.

"Your bath is ready, Miss Sidney," she suggested, quietly. "It is getting late, and you must have some breakfast before you dress."

Sidney raised her head, wearily.

"Help me up," she said, faintly; and indeed she had need of the assistance, for she could hardly stand.

But the cold water revived her, and she was able to submit to Bessie's operations and to taste the dainty breakfast she brought to her. She was calmer now, but still pale as death, and her movements were weak and languid.

(To be continued.)

### A Gold Cure for China

China's epic of revolution, banditry, rioting and disorder is to be ended, it seems, by the gold treatment, and the gold is to be found by raising China's tariff wall a little higher, if the plans favored by the Government at Washington work out successfully. Whatever others may think about it, the American press believe the plan a good one. The acceptance by the United States, Great Britain, and Japan of China's invitation to a customs conference at Peking next month are indication to the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot and other representative newspapers that "the Chinese outlook has become noticeably brighter." True, we are reminded by the Providence Journal, "It has taken three and a half years for the United States, Belgium, Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands and Portugal to ratify the treaty signed at Washington." But, points out the New York Times, "the day has arrived when the treaty Powers can proceed with whatever joint activity they deem necessary in order to help China out of her present troubles." Practical relief, this paper believes, "must be by way of a tariff conference."

"The main purpose of the October conference," explains the Philadelphia Public Ledger, "is to get for the Peking Government tariff increases sufficient to effect its financial rehabilitation. This would go far toward putting an end to the governmental confusion that has existed in China for more than a decade." The conference hopes to abolish the 11-kn, or provincial taxes, and to accord to China a surtax, increase of from 3-12 per cent. to 7-12 per cent. on certain imports, says the Washington correspondent of the New York Times.

A victory for American diplomacy is seen by the majority of American papers in the ratification by France of the Treaty and the calling of the conference at Peking. In fact notes the Philadelphia Public Ledger, "the tariff conference might have been postponed indefinitely but for the strong attitude assumed by the United States."

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"Tariff revision is urgent, for upon it depends the vigor of the central Government. Since 1842 China has been restricted to a 5 per cent. tariff. The schedule has several times been revised; the rate, never. Since these customs receipts have been mortgaged for indemnities and loans, the administration is in foreign hands. China, in brief, lacks even the shadow of fiscal independence; and one reason why the Peking Government is impotent is its financial starvation. A higher tariff will strengthen the central authorities, help liquidate the debt and benefit certain industries. Hand in hand with it should go abolition of the 11-kn, or provincial imposts. These hinder all trade and give the military governors the chief revenues with which they defy Peking and the forces of law and order."

"If there were no other reason for

co-operative Western action it would lie in the unabated chaos of Chinese affairs. The authority of the central Government has been almost destroyed, and military Governors rule the Provinces to suit themselves. The Peking treasury is notoriously bankrupt. Enterprise throughout much of China is stifled, and capital has drained to the treaty ports as the only safe place of investment. River conservation has been neglected, with the result of dangerous floods; the weak rail system, only some 6,000 miles, is debt-burdened and deteriorating. Banditry has filled whole provinces with a terrorism like that of the medieval condottieri. The opium evil thrives unchecked.

"China is tired of sympathy," asserts the Louisville Post. "What she wants is to be let alone to conduct her own affairs." Already, we read in Washington dispatches, China is making a beginning. She has just created a commission for the consolidation of the financial reorganization of the country. Chief among its problems will be the balancing of the budget and the reorganization of national and local taxation."

"The United States has cleared the way through diplomatic channels, for

is going to claim that it must be allowed to make its own tariff schedule and that the Powers must keep the hands off. If this claim is supported with iron heel, there is a chance for an explosion that may spread along far-flung powder-line into Europe, Asia and America, touching capitals from Tokyo westward to Moscow, Berlin, Paris and Washington.

"China owes money to many of these Powers. That is why they have controlled the collection and thebursement of the Chinese customs revenue ever since 1858, and that is why the majority of them do not want to give up that control now.

"Great Britain, Japan and other Powers are afraid of admitting officially that China is right about its tariff autonomy, for they see a train of power running direct from it toward a pile of explosives known in diplomatic language as extraterritoriality. In plainer words, that means the right for foreigners not to be subject to the laws and courts of China, but to have the right of trial in mixed courts or by their own consular representatives.

"Then the powder-train runs to congestions under which forty-nine cities of China are practically ruled by foreigners while Chinese pay the bulk of the taxes and have no representation.

"Next in the danger-zone would be spheres of influence, where particular nations have special rights of trading. These nations are jealous of each other, and suspicious, too, despite their association under the Nine-Power Treaty.

"The Powers want to safeguard against an explosion to protect themselves. But if they overdo the protection-business, China may explode from spontaneous combustion. In that event, the fat of the Powers would be in the fire.

"New national groupings might result from such an outbreak. The much-dreaded and long-predicted conflict between East and West might be precipitated. In order to avoid that and other possibilities of renewed warfare, that would not be confined in its effects to the East, and that would be costly in trade and in human life, some method must be found that will be acceptable to China and fair to the world at large. It is as vitally interesting to Americans as it is to China that the October conference be guided wisely in reaching its conclusions."

"The big fight at the conference," predicts the Washington News, "will be over China's desire to be left free, like any other nation, to fix its own tariff duties." In the opinion of the Newark News:

"This constitutes one bit of hint in the power magazine at Peking. China

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