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The Mystery of Rutledge Hall

"The Cloud With a Silver Lining"

CHAPTER XLIII

In the short silence which followed there came before Stephen Daunt's eyes the pretty old-fashioned drawing-room of the Gray House, and two fair girls standing by the piano. Dolly's face full of dismay and pain, Sidney's proud and calm changing into startled terror as she stood listening to the words which told her that Sibyl Nell was to be Equire Rutledge's wife. And there sound again in his ears Dolly's words, as the brother and sister drove home together, that Sidney looked as if she had been forced into something against her will, and his own incredulous question—"If it is not for love of Frank she has engaged herself to him, why should she have done so?"

her his arm with the grave courtesy which always characterized his manner to her now; and Agnes followed in the pretty blue draperies which brought out the fairness of her skin and the bright hue of her hair in such perfection; and they drove away in the summer evening, Agnes and Stephen chatting gayly and carelessly, Sidney leaning back in her corner, silent, her pale loveliness chill and cold and pure as untrodden snow.

CHAPTER XLIV

There was a dinner-party at Lambewick that night, a large party, and yet not a formal one, for the guests were to be old friends, who were to assemble and celebrate Frank's restoration to freedom and happiness.

It was a pleasant party, for one and all exerted themselves to make it so. Lady Eva, at the head of the table in her costly laces and rich violet velvet, was happy in the consciousness that she could hold her own even among so many younger beauties. Mr. Daunt was the perfection of a host, and Stephen seconded him well; while Dolly was shyly but completely happy in the thought of her own approaching marriage, which was to take place before the roses were over, and Lloyd was equally radiant in his own way. He had taken Sidney in to dinner, and he was touched by the pathetic effort she made to appear at her ease, and to enter into the cheerfulness and happiness of those around her; and more than once he saw the sweet wistful eyes travel to Stephen's face as he sat at the other side, talking gayly and lightly to his neighbor, a vivacious little lady, the prettiest married flirt in Ashford or its neighborhood.

No allusion to the anniversary had been made by Stephen, and Agnes Burton, the only visitor at Easthorpe then, had not remembered it. Mr. Daunt and Lady Eva had driven over in the afternoon with pretty gifts and kind congratulations; but Stephen had been at the cloth-mills then, and he had said nothing on his return, not even remarking the presents which Sidney was far to shy to bring to his notice. All day long the young wife had felt depressed and miserable, with even more than usual sadness. Only a year married, she thought pitifully, and yet irrevocably parted! Bound to each other for life, and yet as much separated as if an iron wall kept them asunder! Could any misery equal their misery? Sidney wondered.

When the ladies left the table, the men drew up their chairs, and Frank was the hero of the hour. His flight was rather a delicate subject to touch upon, and it was avoided by tacit consent, and he himself was so quiet and grave and grateful that the old friends who knew him so well felt that the suffering he had undergone had not been useless, since he had come out of it purified from vanity and selfishness, even as the dross is removed from gold by fire, and henceforth he would have higher views of life and nobler ambitions than those which had formerly ruled him. They did not linger long over their wine; and Lady Knight's bright eyes flashed a laughing welcome as Stephen entered the room and made his way to a low luxurious chair by her side. Sidney was near them, sitting on a couch beside Christine; and her sad eyes brightened as she saw how Frank found his way to Agnes Burton's side, and bent over her with the old tender smile in his eyes and the gentle deferential manner which had such a charm in the old careless happy days.

(To be continued.)

Lord Wharton's Niece

—AND—

The Heir to Regna Court

CHAPTER I

"No, I think not," said Claire, musingly. "I have been here so long that I feel frightened at the thought of going into the world. I am like the prisoner of the Bastille, who, when they released him, begged them to take him back to his cell." Claire smiled.

"That is my feeling at present. It may pass in time; but for the present I will stay here. I have sent for you to keep me company, Mary. You will not feel it dull or lonely?" Mrs. Lexton laughed.

"My dear Claire, how could I possibly feel dull with you, and in such a place as this? Its beauty and its

grandeur makes me feel very much as Aladdin must have felt when he first saw his palace. I think if I were to remain here twenty years I should find enough to amuse and interest me." Claire laughed.

"And yet you have seen so little of it?" she said. "Would you like to walk round the house, or are you too tired?"

Mrs. Lexton rose instantly. "It is what I am dying to do," she said, as she caught up her bonnet. They went down the broad staircase, and into the hall. Claire waved her hand slightly.

"Family portraits," she said. "That is Lord Wharton."

Mrs. Lexton gazed with awe at the grim, stern face.

"It is the last on the line," she said; "are there no other?"

She spoke almost in a whisper as if she were in church, for the stained windows gave a dim, religious light to the vast place, and the vaulted roof resembled that of a cathedral.

"There are no others after his," said Claire.

She pointed out the tattered flags hanging from the roof, the men in armor, and the ancient weapons arranged in quaint patterns upon the paneled walls, and then she drew her companion through the wide doorway into the open air.

The stood upon the terrace for a moment or two, while Mrs. Lexton looked at the logs and noble facade in silent amazement.

"I've read of such places, and seen pictures of them, Claire," she said; "but I have never imagined any place like this."

said Claire, absently. "But let us come into the garden."

They crossed the lawn, Mrs. Lexton marvelling at every step, and following a winding path through the trees, mounted to the cliff, to a spot from which the trees had been cleared, and from which they could obtain a panoramic view of the sea, the coast line, and the fields and woods of Court Regna stretching far inland. Mrs. Lexton looked round for a time in speechless admiration; then a cluster of houses built in a cleft of the rocks which formed a narrow valley running steeply to the sea, caught her eye, and she exclaimed:

"There is a village there, Claire. What is it?"

"That is Regna," said Claire. "It is a very famous place. There is no other village in England like it. There is just one street, as you see, and it is so steep that the carriage can go down it; most of the roadway is composed of steps. Those little dots you see moving up it are donkeys, bringing up fish from the boats which lie inside the harbor. Do you see the little pier?"

Mrs. Lexton drew a long breath of appreciation and delight.

"It is wonderful," she said. "It is like a picture."

"A great many pictures have been made of it," said Claire. "Artists come from all parts of the world to paint it. There is not a cottage or a nook in it that has not been put on canvas. Regna is one of the show places, and in the season hundreds of excursionists flock in to it. They come by coach from Thraxton, which is about fourteen miles away, or by steamer. The narrow street is sometimes so crowded that one can scarcely pass. That is in the season, of course; at other times it is as quiet and deserted as any other English village."

"To whom does it belong?" asked Mrs. Lexton.

"To Lord Wharton—I mean, to me," (To be continued.)



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