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The Mystery of Rutledge Hall

— OR —

"The Cloud With a Silver Lining"

CHAPTER V.

"The present circumstances are somewhat unusual," he resumed after a moment's consideration. "You, Sibyl, have been raised from a position of dependence and inferiority—you yourself owned it to me before your marriage, so you cannot be offended at my words—to one of some distinction; and I dare say you are hardly to blame in not knowing that Mrs. Rutledge must pursue a very different course of conduct from that followed by Miss Neil, who, notwithstanding her beauty, was, comparatively speaking, a very insignificant person, and who, from her very insignificance, possessed a liberty she must be content now to forfeit."

"Will you be more explicit?" she said, calmly, rising, and drawing herself up to her full height, no change in her proud face, save in her eyes, which were full of anger and dislike now—dislike for the man whom she had sworn at the altar to love, honor, and obey, to whom she had sold herself, thinking that the sale would be for her benefit—sold herself basely, shamefully bartering her beauty for his wealth.

"You might have spared me any further explanations, Sibyl," he replied, in some embarrassment, for he was too true a gentleman, under his gloomy manner, willingly to put into words the suspicions which were tormenting him. "But, since you wish me to be more explicit, I will ask you not to encourage the attentions either of Frank Greville the younger or Stephen Daunt, who are both of them constant and frequent visitors here. I have already spoken to you on this subject."

"You complained to me once that Mr. Frank Greville did not treat you with the respect due—to your age, I suppose you meant. I spoke to him, and he apologized to you readily and fully. Why should I not receive him, then? He has not offended you again, I presume?"

"The difference between Frank Greville's position and mine is sufficiently well marked to give me a strong claim to a respectful manner from him. His father and I have been a excellent terms for many years."

"Birds of a feather!" Sibyl sneered, with her mocking laugh.

"And Mr. Greville himself has never presumed upon his position of confidential adviser to my family. There is a great difference between a country lawyer, however high he may stand in his profession, and a gentleman of my position, and I should discourage any intimacy on that ground alone, if I had no other reason for doing so; but you yourself must see the impropriety of frequent intercourse with a young man who aspired, or who is supposed to have aspired, to the honor of your hand."

Again the little mocking laugh broke from Sibyl's lips.

"His engagement to Miss Arnold after a long period of devotion is sufficient contradiction of that report; and, as his fiancee is—is"—she had some difficulty in bringing out the words—"a friend of mine, I can see no impropriety in his visits here. The difference in your positions exists chiefly in your imagination, since Mr. Greville's family is an old one; and he is much esteemed in Ashford."

"Be that as it may," he answered, his forbearance giving way before her continued disdain, "his visits here at all hours must cease. He shall not be at home here, insolent, ill-bred coxcomb!"

"I have seen no want of civility or good breeding in Mr. Greville," she rejoined, coolly. "On the contrary, I should certainly imagine him to be too much of a gentleman to taunt a woman he had married with her former dependence and poverty," she added, looking fully at her husband as she stood facing him, tall and proud and beautiful, a strange contrast in her youth and beauty to the man opposite to her, who at his best had never been handsome, and who now in his passion lost all the dignity and self-regard which might have given him some claim to respect in his young wife's eyes.

"You are probably not such a good judge of good breeding as you suppose," he said, furiously. "But even if Mr. Frank Greville's politeness were beyond question, I will not have him here on intimate terms. I am not accustomed, as I have said, to make friends among the lower classes."

Sibyl Rutledge's laugh rang clearly through the fire-lit room, a laugh almost merry, but with a touch of bitterness in its merriment. The squire ground his teeth together in almost irrepressible anger; but, before he could speak his wife said, languidly:

"Had you not better tell him so the next time he comes? Miss Arnold is coming this afternoon, and I dare say he will accompany her; and there is no time like the present, you know. It is a pity that Mr. Stephen Daunt will not be here. Pray, may I inquire what reason you will give for refusing to receive him, also?"

"I think you will hardly force me to speak plainly," he replied, mastering his anger by a strong effort. "Mr. Daunt had, through the laxity of country society, obtained the entree here before I had the honor of meeting you. His father's position is one of unquestionable influence; his mother, before her marriage, was received in the highest society. Against the young man himself I have nothing to say, except that I disapprove of his visits here and his attentions to you."

The beautiful face turned toward him was white as death now, the red lips were set and firm, and the white hand which had been hanging by her side caught at the soft rich folds of velvet and crumpled them in the long jeweled fingers. Perhaps her silence, perhaps something in her face, a look perhaps in the beautiful eyes which had not been there a minute before, made the squire's anger lessen a little.

"Mr. Stephen Daunt is so infinitely superior in every respect to young Greville," he said, in some embarrassment; but she interrupted him sharply:

"He is richer, you mean."

"My words have no such meaning," he said sharply. "You willfully misunderstood me, Sibyl. I mean that, although you do not seem to appreciate Mr. Stephen Daunt as well as Mr. Frank Greville, I——"

She turned to him fiercely.

"You are mistaken," she cried. "I appreciate Mr. Stephen Daunt so highly that, had the choice been offered me, I would rather have been Stephen Daunt's slave than your wife!"

The passionate words fell from her lips with a clear sharp intonation; but before Mr. Rutledge could reply—for they had startled him extremely—he saw his wife's face change, and he turned hastily. Two young ladies had entered the room, and the door was just closing upon the retreating figure of the servant who had announced them, and his wife was welcoming them with outstretched hands and graceful words of greeting.

"How do you do, Miss Greville? I am charmed to see you, Miss Arnold! It is so good of you to take pity upon me on such a dreary day. Squire, you know these young ladies, I think; do you not?"

The squire could not recover his equanimity so easily; but he managed to utter a few words before he left the room, wondering uneasily whether the girls had overheard any of the stormy conversation which they had interrupted.

Sibyl Rutledge knew by one glance at Sidney's face that she had overheard the words, and a swift sudden gleam of mockery came into her eyes as she made the girls draw near the fire and rang for tea, settling herself in her cushioned arm-chair again, and chatting away in her clear metallic voice lightly and carelessly, without a trace of the passion and scorn she had evinced toward her husband so short a time before.

"Shall we have some more light?" she said, languidly, when tea had been brought in. "I like the fire-light, if you do. You do? Then you need not bring any lights, Johnson."

Christine Greville, a fair pretty girl, with much of her brother's beauty and with the same expression of weakness and indecision about her mouth and chin which so gravely marred his face, was chatting gayly also as she sipped her tea, and the topic was the approaching Hunt ball, always a very gay affair, and one of the events of the year at Ashford; and in this festivity Sibyl was, or professed herself to be, greatly interested.

"It will be my first appearance in public at Ashford," she said, laughingly. "Dinner parties do not count, you know. I want to make a triumphal appearance, and it must be at a ball. Ah, Mr. Greville"—holding out her hand to Frank, as he entered, with a quick charming smile—"I thought you would find your way here this afternoon! Mr. Daunt, why is not Dolly with you?"

(To be continued).

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Fads and Fashions

Keep in mind the fact that the new trend of fashion is the circular back flounce.

A good color scheme for the fall ensemble would be beige or rust with wood brown.

Collars and cuffs of raccoon or badger are used on the roughly woven sports coats.

The flounce on a wedding gown may appropriately be a sectional affair of lace.

Buckles give interest to the smartly simple fall pumps and one-strap slippers.

With the new borders, crosswise designs and plaids, fall frocks are simply tailored.

Skirt flounces may be plaited, sectional or circular—or merely soft, gathered apron.

The coat and dress of the ensemble may be in two distinct shades of the same color.

The more elaborate ensemble suits for fall have collars, cuffs and bandings of fur.

Be sure that your accessories emphasize and offset the completeness of your ensemble.

For informal evening wear this fall the simple crepe or Georgette frock will be ideal.

With school days approaching the jersey frock—one or two-piece style—is in demand.

Bishop purple, royal blue and turquoise are used to give dash to the black frocks.

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