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

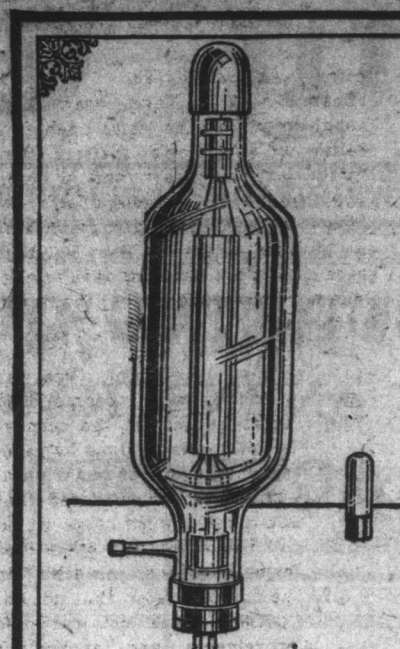
CHAPTER XL.

The mystery was solved at last—what Lloyd Milner had suspected was true. Stephen, his heart beating fast, his hands trembling as he leaned toward her, said softly—"How did it happen?" "It was an accident," she said, in the same feeble manner, her eyes never moving from their fixed gaze at the grave gentle face, so pitying, so compassionate, bent over her. It was that night—You know, the night of the ball. When I reached home, he had sent the servants to bed, and was waiting up for me himself; he had discovered in some way—that I had meant to go with Frank—and—well, had a shocking scene—even now, recalling it, she shuddered through all her feeble frame. "He was bitter and cruel, and I—oh, I had meant to be more patient!—you had said so much." "You had meant to be patient, to be a better wife," Stephen said gently, as she paused; "but—" "But he said such bitter things. He taunted me—he said I had disobeyed him—betrayed him—and—The feebly uttered words died away on the white, parched lips. In intense eagerness, too deep for words, they waited; the room was so still that when the low, faint voice spoke again the words were audible to one and all. "And I—resented it—and said I would go with Frank; and—he threw himself between me and the door—and I snatched up the gun which stood in the library—and we struggled, and—the gun went off—and he—fell!" A long breath, almost a sob, broke from Stephen Daunt. How blind and mad they had all been not to think of this! But for the supposition that she had fled with Frank, they must have thought of it. "I did not want to see—if he was—much hurt," she continued, her voice growing momentarily weaker until it sank to a faint whisper. "I was afraid. I ran up to my room, took off my ball-dress, and put on the dress I had prepared for that other flight, and left the house unseen. I wonder now how I dared," she went on, her blue eyes wandering slowly around the room and finally resting on Stephen's pale, moved face; "but I had got back all my courage and calmness, and I was able to look my peril in the face. I put on the thick veil I had procured for my flight, the close bonnet, the great heavy cloak, and I left the house. It was not snow-

and the scratching of Ernest Lavigne's swift pen as it passed over the paper—the old French woman moved across the room and closed the window. The movement seemed to arouse Sibyl from the semi-stupor into which she had fallen; she opened her languid eyes, and almost simultaneously Monsieur Lavigne rose and approached the bed. "Will you sign it?" he said gently. "Must I?" she asked faintly, shrinking as if with terror. "It cannot hurt you now, Sibyl," Stephen whispered, compassionately; and the dim falling eyes rose slowly to his face. "Nothing can hurt me now," she said slowly; and a faint smile—the wrath of her old imperial smile—flashed over her lips. "Raise me a little!" They raised her, and she took the pen in her trembling, almost helpless fingers, groping feebly for the paper with the left hand. Stephen saw that it bore no wedding ring. "Where—where is it?" she said feebly. "I cannot see; it is dark!" With hands almost as unsteady as her own, Stephen guided her hand, and as she wrote the last letter of names, the pen fell from her nerveless grasp, staining the fair white linen. Monsieur Lavigne gently drew away the paper; and, as the doctor placed his patient upon the pillows, the others turned to leave the room. "Stephen, do not leave me!" she said, groping feebly for his hand. "She would not mind; she was—always pitiful!" And, as the others left the room, Stephen Daunt, pale and moved, resumed his station by the bedside, his heart heavy, notwithstanding his joy at Frank's innocence, for the unhappy woman whose life had been ruined by her own folly, her own sin, and by her mad unreasoning love for himself. If she had sinned, she had suffered. All through the night they watched her—Stephen and the old woman who had been her kindest friend, and who, while Sibyl lay, half in swoon, half in stupor, told Stephen, in a broken husky voice scarcely raised above a whisper, much of Sibyl's wretched story—how she had worked for her bread, singing at the tenth-rate cafe chantant, where alone she felt secure of not meeting any who had known her while at Lambwold or during her own brief season of prosperity; how, even when she was ill and suffering, she had dragged herself thither night after night, fearing lest, if she could continue no longer, she would lack bread to eat; and how her strength had suddenly given way—suddenly and completely. She told him, too, that when she had come among them first, they had thought that she was mad; she shut herself up, venturing out only at dusk, and seemed afraid of every stranger face. And she was so beautiful that they had all pitied her and been kind to her in their small way. And Stephen's heart ached, and his lip quivered as he glanced at the white face on which the lamplight fell, so beautiful even now, and thought of what might have been. Toward dawn Sibyl came slowly out of the stupor which had held her so long, and, moving restlessly, began to talk rapidly; and, though somewhat incoherently, not so much so but that Stephen could understand much of her meaning and could guess much of her past suffering. His slight knowledge of her childhood, of her mother—a French actress—of the English father whom she could not remember, he having died during her childhood; of the aunt, her father's sister, a strict narrow-minded maiden lady who had taken Sibyl at her mother's death and given her the education which had fitted her for the position she had occupied at Lambwold—gave him some clew to the meaning of the broken disjointed words. Now she was with her aunt, rebelling against the strict discipline which was so irksome after the gay careless Bohemian life she had lived with her mother; then she was at Lambwold, or at Rutledge, quarrelling with her husband, wrangling with him about Frank and Stephen himself. Now she was shivering and shrinking in terror from the punishment she so much dreaded, and which had haunted her night and day, and she was begging Stephen to save her from it, and from Sidney, until, utterly exhausted, a deadly faintness overcame her, and she fell back, breathing out her last few moments of life.

(To be continued.)

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SIDE TALKS. By Ruth Cameron.

JUST BE A COPY CAT

"Isn't there any way in which one may acquire a good personality?" That question comes from a Letter Friend. Now "good" is a very broad word. It could mean many things. But I am going to take the liberty of defining it for my Letter Friend. I think she meant a winning personality, a personality that makes people like you. I don't think that question has lain on my desk for several weeks because the answer didn't come to me.

The Answer Came.

Yesterday it came because my mind was focussed on a beautiful beloved personality, by the passing of that personality from the paths of men. As I was thinking of some of the qualities that made that woman beloved, and making up my mind to try to be more like her, this unanswered letter flashed into my mind. Yes, I know of a way to cultivate a winning personality. Pick out some person whom you—in common with many others—love and admire and try to be like him or her. Analyze the attraction. Is it her warm, human sympathy that draws you, her willingness to listen, her real interest in your troubles and joys, her gaiety, her happy outlook on life (I mention these particular qualities because it most often is such as these that endure)? They try to cultivate them.

Find a Pattern.

It is much easier to mold yourself on a living personality than on abstract qualities, much more inspiring and rewarding. I could analyze popularly for you, after a fashion, but I think anyone who wants a winning

Boot and Shoe Beliefs

How many of us, no matter how we pretend to scorn such superstitions, would ask for trouble by placing a pair of boots or shoes upon a table, and how few would risk misfortune by cleaning a new pair of shoes before wearing them? In Scotland the belief still exists that to drop a pair of shoes before they have been worn is a sure portent of bad luck. Immunity can be bought, however, by burning the shoes or by burying them.

That Flame Called Charm.

There is one point that I am tempted not to mention because it has an element of discouragement in it. But I know it would be dishonest to leave it out. And that is that one factor of a winning personality cannot be copied or wholly acquired. It just is. I refer, of course, to that elusive flame called charm. Some people have it and some don't. The spark of it may be buried in you and you may be able to fan it into life. But it isn't a thing that can be copied or produced synthetically.

But for your encouragement, if you are not sure you have charm, take this. If you will make yourself a sympathetic listener you can go quite far without charm as a person who has charm but who is never willing to listen.

Advertisement for Richard Hudner Three Flowers Talcum, featuring an image of the product tin.

WISE POLICY.

Our village grocers, Span and Spick, resort to no unseemly trick to sell their wholesome wares, they tell the truth about their peas, about their prunes and rice and cheese, canned soup, a n d boneless pears.

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