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The Mystery of Rutledge Hall

"The Cloud With a Silver Lining"

CHAPTER XXVI.

"I will tell you all, and, if you can find room for pity in your heart for my madness, pity me. I have suffered enough. Heaven knows for my folly!"

In the momentary silence which followed, the two women watched him with eager eyes; his own looked into the fire, avoiding their gaze.

"It was not all my fault," he said, unsteadily. "It is but adding to my cowardice to lay the blame on her; but I can say with truth that she encouraged me greatly in the foolish idiotic passion I had conceived for her. I could not tell then that she was only playing with me to excite another's jealousy, another whom she did love. I do not mean the man she married," he went on, contemptuously, "since the man she loved either did not return her passion or did not do so—as I think—until it was too late. You know much of what passed after her engagement and marriage. You, Sidney, in your heavenly pity, had given me a new hope to save me from despair; but, when she returned, her fatal beauty resumed all its power over me."

She told me that she was unhappy with the man she had married, that he tormented her with his jealousy, with his meanness, with his reproaches. My sympathy for her increased my passion. I asked her to fly with me—Sidney, do not look at me—I cannot meet your innocent eyes when I recall my treachery to you—and on that terrible night I had almost won her consent, when Daunt stepped in between us and induced her to go home. She was excited and hysterical; but his influence over her was paramount. They—I mean she—went home. I followed in my madness. When I reached Rutledge Hall, having walked through the falling snow, I found the hall door ajar. I went in; all was quiet and still. Light came from the library. I opened the door and saw—him—there—lying dead—my gun, which I had forgotten when calling on his wife the previous day, on the floor beside him. For a minute I stood spell-bound with terror; then, like a flash of lightning the thought of my own danger came across me, and I fled away like one already pursued. I got home to my father's; the



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servants were in bed; he and Christie were at the hall. I got my great-coat and a hat—I had money with me, and I walked that night to Hayton—no one would recognize me there, I knew—and I caught the early train to London."

"You did not see her then?" Sidney said, as he paused.

"No."

"And you saw no one—nothing to give you a clue to the person who had done the dreadful deed?"

"No," he answered, abruptly; and again, after a moment's pause, he repeated the words: "No, I saw no one."

There was a short silence; then Sidney rose, with a long sigh.

"It is very strange," she said, sadly. "Will the mystery ever be cleared, I wonder?"

"It is best not," he remarked, earnestly. "Do not try to solve it, Sidney. Your generosity has made my life so much less hard than there is no need to cause suffering to others. Think, dear," he added, taking her hands and looking at her earnestly and sorrowfully, with a great tenderness in his eyes, "the guilty person might—who knows?—have a sister, a wife even, who would suffer for his guilt as Christie has suffered, and their suffering could not give her back her happiness—could not blot out those dreadful months or restore her health again. Let him go now; and, when I have made—through your kindness always—a home for her in a sunnier land than this, she will come to me, and we shall be happy together, my poor sister and I."

Tears rose thickly in the sweet dark eyes raised to his with some wonder in their depths. Could this man, speaking so patiently, so nobly, with such self-denial, be the petulant, passionate, selfish Frank who had always taken his own pleasure and gone his own way lightly and thoughtlessly?

"Frank," she said, softly, "I almost think that some day we shall be thankful for your suffering, since you have made it a stepping-stone to nobility. But you must let us do our best to clear you, nevertheless, for Christie's sake."

"Do nothing—do nothing," he begged, with an earnestness which could not fail to impress her. "Do nothing, Sidney; let it rest, dear."

She let her eyes dwell upon his face for some minutes in silence, then gently released her hands from his clasp.

"I will go into the gallery," she said, "and wait there. Frank, how long can you stay?"

"Only until ten o'clock; the train—the mail, you know—leaves at eleven, and the roads are heavy."

"I will come back, then," she said, smiling as she passed out of the room, and, closing the door carefully behind her, left them together.

Sidney's boudoir opened into the gallery which ran all round the second story of the house, and on to which all the principal apartments opened. It was carpeted with Eastern-looking carpets, which matched the portiere screening the doors; between these were a few good pictures on which the softly shaded light fell, and there were some cushioned seats and a few quaint, high-backed chairs placed here and there. Sidney sat down in one of these and rested her head on her hand.

She was quite alone and the stillness was intense; it was the servants' supper-hour, and there was no one about, either in the hall below or in the gallery, no one to see how wearily

drooped the head of the young mistress of this pretty home, or to hear the long heavy sigh which came from her lips.

For some minutes she sat there perfectly still, then, rising suddenly, began to pace up and down one side of the gallery with hurried, uneven, irregular steps.

What did Frank mean by that look with which he had regarded her, she wondered—that strange indefinable look of compassion and of pity? Why should he pity her? After a time, when the keen pain of knowing herself unloved should have left her—it could not last forever, it must, surely it must wear itself out at last—she would be very happy in her beautiful home with all the luxuries and pleasures she could now command. Why did she need pity? What strange idea was it which possessed him that it would be well for her if his innocence was not proved, if he should still be under the ban of guilt? It was very strange and mysterious and incomprehensible—at least it was incomprehensible to her.

She tried to dismiss the thought, but it haunted her with a strange persistency; she could not forget the compassion in Frank's sorrowful blue eyes, the pity in his earnest lowered tone. She tried to think of the change for the better which sorrow had made, of his unselfish self-denying thought for the relatives of the man who was really guilty of the crime of which he had been accused, and for which he suffered, but Frank's compassionate look always came before her, his pitying tone sounded continually in her ears.

It was strange too that Frank should have been so upset at the knowledge that she had employed a detective to inquire into the matter; although his own misery might have made him indifferent and anxious only for rest and peace and comfort, he should consider his sister, who was dying under the load of shame. Ah, it was a pity that he should go abroad yet, a great pity—for soon, perhaps immediately—the detective would not have written to her, surely, unless he had something to tell her. She must try and induce him—Frank—to wait for another ship; his disguise was so perfect, there could be no danger of recognition since his father had travelled in the same carriage with him for twenty minutes. Ah, what terrible minutes those must have been!

Then her thoughts wandered away to Stephen at Lambwood. Was he still angry with her? Were Mr. Daunt and Lady Eva very much annoyed? What excuse had Stephen made for her non-appearance? Would people wonder and make comments about it? It was all so unfortunate.

A clock striking ten in the hall beneath made her start from her reverie and hasten toward the boudoir.

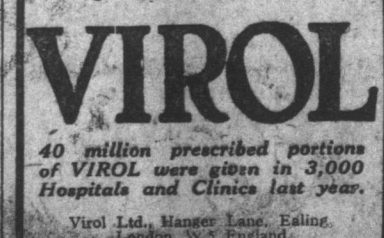


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"It is a pity," she murmured, softly; "they may never meet again. I may give them a few minutes; ever a fly-horse would get to the station in less than an hour." Then, remembering the heavy snow and Frank's anxiety to go away the same night from Ashford, she pushed aside the curtain, opened the door softly, and, entering the room, closed it noiselessly behind her.

Her light footstep and soft unrustling velvet dress made no sound on the carpet, and neither brother nor sister noticed her entrance. Christie was kneeling by Frank, who sat on a low chair by the fire; his arm was round her slight form in its loose warm wrapper; her face, white as death, but intent and eager, intensely alive for all its pallor, was raised to his; her eyes, glittering with fever and excitement, were fixed upon his face; her lips were parted in her close attention. The intense eagerness on the haggard face struck Sidney with a curious pang and arrested her steps as she was about to advance into the room; then, as she paused, Frank's words—he had been speaking as she opened the door—held her spell-bound where she stood. Five minutes after-ward she understood what had bewildered her, she knew what Frank's pity and compassion meant.

As she stood motionless just by the door, one hand unconsciously grasping the silken curtains for support, it seemed to Sidney Daunt that the words she heard turned her to stone. She could not move or speak, all feeling seemed to have left her in the overwhelming horror of a great agony, an agony beside which all she had hitherto suffered was but as a pin-prick compared with a mortal wound.

(To be continued.)

Gratitude to Britain

Rome Piccolo: The French are quite right in stating that it is absurd to pay the Americans more than they are going to get from Germany. The Italians themselves must also keep this principle sacrosanct. When the question arose of making Germany pay reparations, the Americans and British, seized with pity for the German people, invented the Dawes plan to put Germany on her feet once more. On the other hand, when the question arose concerning Allied nations who had shed oceans of blood for the common cause, the Anglo-Saxons became so fifty-hearted that they could see no connection between reparations and debts.

The children should be allowed to have a closet or drawer in which to store all their "dress-up" clothes. Be sure that all your family go to the dentist at once every three months to have their teeth looked over,

Glasses Latest Craze for Women

CELLULOID RIMS OF EVERY COLOR.

PARIS, Oct. 1.—(A.P.)—Dame fashion's latest vagary, in this Europe's "city of fashions" has been to set all the women to wearing spectacles. The pretty eyes of the 1925 Parisienne are no weaker than those of 1924, but the celluloid frames of the eyeglasses, made in many varieties of color, are novel and chic, when they match her dress.

A Paris optician in the Rue Rivoli displays in his window, a large tray filled with celluloid frames in mauve, green, beige, blue, rose, and in fact, almost any conceivable hue that might be required to harmonize with Mademoiselle's suit or frock.

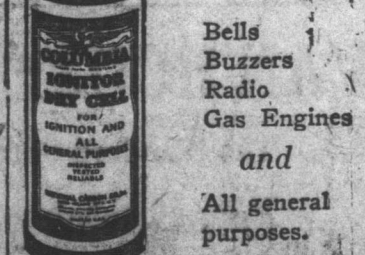
"I sell about 100 pairs of spectacles with plain glasses, through which anyone can see every day," said the optician. "The correct thing is to have the frames made in colors to match the dress."

With slippers of silver brocade are worn stockings of shell chiffon with touches of hand embroidery on their Jacquard lace design.

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Just Folks.

By EDGAR GUEST.

WHEN NELL GETS ME ALONE.

You might think as you see us together at tea Or whatever the public occasion might be, That my wife has complete admiration for me.

You might fancy when noting the smile on her face As I make some remark to the throng in the place That she thinks me a marvel of conduct and grace.

And perhaps you may think as together we cling And she shares in the laugh at the old jokes I spring That to her way of thinking I've done the right thing.

But don't be deceived, by her smile or her tone, For never in public her anguish is shown, She tells me my faults when she gets me alone.

Those brown eyes of hers all my shortcomings see, And shudder to note what a boob I can be! Though she hides it from you, she explains it to me.

No man to his wife is a hero, full-grown, Complete admiration no husband has known, For she tells me the truth when she gets me alone.

Communists' Arrest Embarrasses Home Sec'y

LONDON, Oct. 16.—The arrest of British Communists here has had a strange sequel, which may prove embarrassing for Sir. Joynson-Hicks, the Home Secretary. The night after the first batch was taken into custody, Hicks, speaking in Hounslow before the Dramatic Society there said:—

"I believe that the greater part of my audience here will be pleased to hear that warrants have been issued to-day, and in the majority of cases they have been executed, for a number of the most notorious Communists."

This is described by both Labor and Liberal members as an outrageous statement, while some doubt arises as to whether it does not actually comprise contempt of court. Many members threaten to raise the question in the Commons and if they do, Sir Joynson-Hicks will find it very difficult to explain.

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What Would Happen if Men Were Created Equal

One hardly gets astray in saying that, in so far as there can be a single cause for the wastefulness of human progress, it proceeds from the fact that men were not created equal. If such could possibly have been the case when once the human race had come into existence, if variation had been abolished, if the first dawn of human consciousness, man's affairs would have taken on a standardized routine worthy of the ant-hill and just as deadly. There would have been no Moogs, no Pericles, no Newton, no Napoleon, no Pasteur. With all men of one type, with thought and action on a common level, it would have mattered little whether one were warrior, statesman, scientist or artist. Distribution of tasks might have been by lot. When toga or tool fell, it would have been grasped by the hand of an equally stupid successor. Environment would have ruled supreme, and men would have been no longer men but helpless automata. Retrogression unthinkable, progress impossible! No waves in the curve of human affairs; instead, a straight line, level as the Dead Sea, changing only as a shoreline changes by the physical forces of inanimate nature!

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