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## The Mystery of Rutledge Hall

—OR—  
"The Cloud With a Silver Lining"

CHAPTER VI.

The squire had had more or less reason for the injudiciously spoken remonstrances which he had made to his young wife, for Ashford gossip had coupled her name far more freely with Frank Greville's than they had any grounds for doing; still, although the stone of gossip gathers as it rolls, like a snow-ball, there was no doubt that there was some cause for comment.

Several times in the week Frank Greville might have been met on the road to the Hall, riding his pretty chestnut mare and dressed with even more than his usual care. Whenever Mrs. Rutledge drove into town, he was always at hand by some strange chance or other; and Sibyl had taken a fancy to visit Sidney Arnold often, at whose house it was of course only natural that Frank should be constantly found. Many of Sidney's callers, on being ushered into the charming old drawing-room of the Gray House, had found Mrs. Rutledge there, beautiful and radiant in her costly dark furs, and Frank Greville hovering about her chair. Of course, Sidney was present also—pale as Sibyl, with a wistful look in her velvety dark eyes; but her presence was evidently no constraint on the infatuated young man. The squire himself was looking moody and dissatisfied and ill. It served him right, ancient maidens said, nodding their heads vindictively over their afternoon tea. What need had there for him to choose a wife entirely unsuited to him in every respect, when he might have chosen from a dozen well-born women nearer his own age, yet caetera? He would be sure to suffer for his folly, and he would receive but little compassion. Miss Nell had always been a designing flirt, who, having failed in her endeavors to win Stephen Daunt, had accepted Mr. Rutledge as the next best party, and who ought to be ashamed of her present conduct.

So the busy tongues waged, and, if an echo of their chatter came to Sidney Arnold's ears, she gave no sign that it reached her. She was always bright and gay, very gentle—oh, so gentle!—to Frank, and, if she had lost the pretty imperious manner which had once been so characteristic to her, it was but natural now that she was an engaged young lady. Sidney Arnold, holding back the

curtains from the window of her father's study, thought how redly the lamps in the High Street gleamed through the falling snow, and how pretty the country must look under its white veil, and wondered slightly at her lack of excitement about the ball, and sighed as she dropped the curtains and came back slowly into the room.

She was dressed for the ball, and only waited now for her father, who had been called away to a patient just as they were starting. Last year such contrivances would have seriously annoyed Miss Arnold, who liked to be in good time, knowing how eagerly her appearance was looked for by the best waltzers in Ashford; but on this evening there was no impatience or annoyance on the fair young face on which the light of Dr. Arnold's lamp fell so softly; it looked a little weary and indifferent, yet very lovely. Sidney was dressed in white, with extreme simplicity, but with exquisite taste, and no dress could have been more becoming to her than the soft flowing folds of Indian muslin trimmed with a profusion of costly lace. There was always an affection of simplicity about Miss Arnold's attire, the Ashford gossips said among themselves rather spitefully; but her dresses, however simple, were invariably of such material that they were costly, and they always fitted perfectly and were very becoming.

She had been waiting about a quarter of an hour when her father came in, hurriedly apologized for the delay, and wrapping his daughter in her white cloak, led her out to the carriage.

"I think I must get a chaperon for you, Sidney," he said, with a little laugh, as they drove away. "What do you think?"

Sidney laughed also. "I don't think I want one," she answered. "And we are very happy together, papa, just you and I."

"Yes," he said, ruefully. "But soon there will be only 'I, Sidney, and no 'you,' and then what shall poor 'I' do?"

The distance from the Gray House to the Royal George Hotel, where the Assembly Rooms were, was but short, but many carriages were waiting to deposit their freights, and the doctor's coachman had to wait patiently until his turn came. Looking out,

Sidney glanced at the brilliantly lighted hotel; and in the entrance-hall she saw Frank waiting, flushed, eager, and excited, looking very handsome in his evening-dress, a white camellia in his button-hole.

"I see Frank," Dr. Arnold said, smiling, "waiting impatiently, Sidney, and no doubt anathematizing me."

Sidney smiled faintly—a pale, almost sorrowful smile. She knew for whom Frank was waiting so impatiently, and that just in front of them was Sibyl's well-appointed carriage, the snow resting lightly on the servants' handsome liveries. But she said nothing; nor was there any surprise on her face when their carriage being at last able to drive up to the porch, she found that Frank had disappeared; for her quick glance had seen him go up the wide carpeted staircase beside a tall white-clad figure, whose long glistening train lay heavily upon the red baize which covered the stairs.

"Why, Frank must have grown tired of waiting!" said Dr. Arnold, as he escorted his daughter into the hall. "I am sorry, dear."

"It does not matter, papa," Sidney answered, lingering a little; she did not want to follow that long white train immediately.

"Come, my dear, what are you waiting for? The ladies' room is upstairs."

"Yes, papa. I was just noticing how pretty the lamps look through the snow!"

Lady Eva and Dolly were leaving the ladies' dressing-room as Sidney reached it. With them was Sibyl Rutledge; and, used as the young girl to her beauty, she almost started as her eyes fell upon Sibyl, so wonderfully beautiful did she look in the rich dress of white moire which left her shoulders and arms bare, while the Rutledge diamonds gleamed on her milk-white throat and wrists and in the masses of her golden hair.

"I am a grass-widow to-night," she said, laughing, as she greeted Sidney. "Mr. Rutledge was tired, and would not come, and Lady Eva has been kind enough to take me under her wing."

"Sidney, how white you are!" Dolly whispered, lingering beside her for a moment. "Is anything wrong?"

"No," Sidney answered, simply; and Dolly looked at her wistfully as she joined her mother; and the three ladies swept away. Dolly radiant in fleecy white tulle, with a string of large pearls round her pretty throat.

Never would Sidney Arnold forget that ball and the feeling of dread and terror which possessed her from the moment her eyes rested upon Sibyl's beautiful face. For some few minutes after she entered the ball-room she was like a person moving in a dream; all was confused and bewildering. Mechanically she answered the greetings of her acquaintances, mechanically she handed her programme to the eager young men who thronged around her. In the same dazed manner she glided away when her first partner claimed her. She remembered it all afterward—how she had talked and danced and smiled, as people must do in society, no matter how their hearts may be aching. She remembered the pretty, savily decorated ball-room, the band in a gallery at one end, skillfully concealed in an artistic bower or greenery, the pink-lined lace curtains dividing the cosy flirting nooks and recesses from the ball-room, the soft rustle of the silken skirts, the dreamy waltz-music, the scent of flowers, and the little, swift, untiring satin-shod feet moving so unceasingly over the polished floor. All these things she remembered afterward, although just then she saw them as if they belonged to a dream-world in which she was living.

"Strange thing for the squire to let his wife come here alone to-night!" said one of her partners, as they were resting during a waltz, sitting in a recess from which they had a good view of the ball-room.

"He was tired," Sidney answered, wearily, slowly moving her white fan to and fro.

"Not a very good reason, is it? She is awfully handsome. Every one is talking of her. Greville seems—I beg your pardon, Miss Arnold; I really forgot—" He broke off, coloring hotly in great confusion.

"Don't apologize," Sidney returned, with a smile. "If you were going to say that Frank admires her very much, you are quite right; he does."

(To be continued.)



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### Farming on a Business Basis With Banker's Aid

The California Bankers Association, co-operating with the College of Agriculture, University of California, has prepared a farm accounting system for use in its member banks located in agricultural districts. The bankers do not attempt to encourage the farmer himself to keep his own books with the forms provided, but the banks themselves offer the farmer a complete service. They recognize that, if the farmer is to be able to conduct his farm on the same basis of profitable efficiency as any other line of business, he must have accurate accounting. So the banks have assumed the role of book-keepers for their farmer-customer. A nominal charge is made to the farmer for this service to help defray the actual cost of additional clerical

help that is necessary. In no instance is any bank endeavoring to conduct the service at a profit. In California, which is about 32 per cent. rural, with 280,000 rural families and a total value of farm property estimated at \$3,500,000,000, the bankers have come to the realization that the prosperity of the State is about in direct proportion to the prosperity of the farmer. And in seeking to make the farmer a business man they are doing a highly important work in raising the general level of prosperity throughout the State. Of course, the banker has a selfish purpose in this work, but it is incidental to the broader benefits that accrue. Under the old order of things, the average farmer knew the date upon which his note at the bank would fall due, and the banker knew he would be called upon to extend payment, but when the due date arrived neither the farmer nor the banker

could satisfactorily explain the failure to pay.—Roy Alden in Forbes Magazine (N.Y.)



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### Shipwrecked in a Field!

#### SEA NETHUSELARS.

The Danish ship Fenix, the oldest steamer registered at Lloyd's, was recently destroyed by fire. Built in 1848, she was seventy-seven years old.

Modern ships built of iron or steel are not so long-lived as the old timber-built vessels, and in the Baltic you will find quite a number of small wooden vessels still in use, of which the oldest, the Constance, was built in 1725, and is thus 203 years old.

Sweden has a ship called the Emanuel, built in 1749, which began as a pirate, but now is engaged in carrying lumber. She has been owned by the same family for nearly a century.

In 1919 there was sold at Cardiff the fine old vessel, Good Intent. She is a ketch of about twenty-five tons burden, and was built at Plymouth in 1780. In spite of her great age she fetched £200, which works out at the very respectable figure of £5 per ton.

Another very old ship that was at work a few years ago, and may still be afloat, is the Seal, which was built at Southampton in 1810. In 1823 she was caught in a tremendous storm off Poole and driven ashore right up into a turnip field. She was launched again, and the last that the writer heard of her was that she was sailing from Bideford, Devon, for Durban, in South Africa, a voyage of six thousand miles.

But all the vessels mentioned are babies compared with the Italian ship Anita, which was broken up during the present century at Genoa. She was built in the days of Queen Elizabeth, and for well over three centuries had sailed the world's seas. She was not only the oldest but the slowest ship in existence. No wonder, for her hull was of oak twelve inches thick.

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