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The Mystery of Rutledge Hall

OR
"The Cloud With a Silver Lining"

CHAPTER XVI.

"She does not look very strong," remarked Mr. Milner.

"Oh, she is strong enough! She rarely has anything the matter with her. Stephen," she added, raising her voice as she addressed her brother, "that is not what to Cotley. What are you thinking of?"

Stephen laughed carelessly as he turned his horse's head in another direction, and the color rose slightly in his brown cheek. He had lost himself in reverie, half bitter, and half pleasant, the pleasantness being in the thought of what might have been, the bitterness in the thought of what really was. If Sidney had loved him, how happy, how nearly approaching perfection, their lives might have been! But she did not love him, and it was all a failure.

When he married her, he had hoped that by patient endeavour and tenderness and love he would win that love she had kept from the wreck of her first love affair; he had believed that she was learning to forget Frank Greville; but on his wedding-day this belief had been torn from him, and he possessed instead—or thought he possessed—the certainty that she still believed in, still loved Frank, who he felt was guilty of the hideous crime of which he was accused. Had he not held such a belief, he would have left no stone unturned to prove the innocence of the man whom Sidney loved; even had that innocence parted her from him—Stephen—forever. He loved her well enough, he told himself again and again, to have made her happy at any cost. But, believing, as he did, he had forbidden his wife, out of very pity for her, to make any efforts to prove Frank's innocence. A close inquiry into the matter would probably only result in overwhelming proof of his guilt; and it was better, he thought sadly, for Sidney to mourn for her lost lover and his hard fate than to know that he was unworthy either of her love or of her sorrow. There can be no greater suffering, he knew, than to know the unworthiness of one we love. This, then, was the true reason of the severe and decided prohibition which Sidney resented so

bitterly, and which stood between husband and wife like an iron wall which neither could break down, and which gave color to the terrible suspicions which were about to be implanted in the young wife's heart and almost to shipwreck her whole life.

"I wonder Mrs. Daunt does not hunt!" remarked Lloyd Milner, when they were riding abreast again.

"This is stiff country, you know," Stephen said carelessly. "Sidney is a very good horsewoman; but I am glad she does not care for hunting."

"Has she ever tried it?"

"Yes, once," Stephen said, briefly, recalling the occasion with a keen pang of pain, remembering all that had taken place since then, and how in the dusk of the wintry evening he and Frank Greville had ridden up the street together and seen Sidney's slight girlish form in the window of the front room in the Gray House.

"Did she come to greet that, she has not repeated the experiment?"

"No."
"Then I am surprised she did do so. It is becoming so very general for ladies to hunt."

"Yes, more's the pity!" Stephen answered carelessly. "In my opinion, women are out of place in the hunting-field."

"That is an exploded notion, mon cher."

"I know that. May I ask if you intend Mrs. Milner to hunt?" Daunt inquired, laughing.

The color rose in the young barrister's cheeks.

"Mrs. Milner—if ever there be such a person," he said, laughing—"will not have the chance. She will not be able to afford it."

"Nonsense! We know what big fees Q. C.'s get."
"No doubt. But Q. C.'s are few and far between."

"Here is Cotley," said Dolly, who had been silent for some minutes, and whose cheeks were very pink—possibly from the exercise. "Is it not a charming old house, Mr. Milner?"

"A fine place, decidedly," answered the young man, looking at the rosy cheeks with more interest than at the Big redbrick house which rose above the trees of the park. "We are in good time, Daunt."

"Yes; the meet is in a field to our right."

"No doubt it was the short conversation he had held with Lloyd which brought to Stephen's mind so clearly and vividly that other meet at which Mrs. Rutledge had made her first appearance after her return home, and at which Sidney Arnold had been present, with a knot of violets at her breast and her handsome fiancé by her side. As he rode into the field, he almost expected to see the well-appointed carriage, with its black horses and its beautiful occupant, to meet Frank Greville's mocking glance, to see the unfortunate Squire's angry face, to hear again Sidney's earnest voice—"I do trust you—I do trust you, Stephen"—and to see her pretty drooping figure as she rode away.

The meet was a full one. The weather

was so essentially hunting weather that even the most languid sportsmen had donned their pink. There had been a breakfast at Cotley Hall; and Lady Cotley, a handsome middle-aged woman, as straight a rider and as ardent a votary of Nimrod as her lord himself, rode up to Stephen to reproach him for his non-appearance.

"Why did you not bring your beautiful wife?" she said in her loud cheerful voice. "I believe you are so jealously inclined that you would like to shut her up in a Bluebeard, and deprive us of the pleasure of looking at her. Headache! She has a headache, and you left her at home, when the very best remedy in the world would have been a good straight cross-country gallop! Miss Daunt, why do you let him act the marl jaloux, and why were you not here earlier?"

"We said we would come to the meet, Lady Cotley," Dolly answered, smiling.

"I told Lord de la Poer that you were coming to breakfast, and he has looked as angry as possible ever since. Ah, here he comes!" added her ladyship, gayly, as she turned to greet some other late-comers; and Lord de la Poer came up, raising his hat to Dolly and glancing rather suspiciously at the face and figure of her cavalier, who returned the glance frankly enough, and yet with a quick jealous pang at his heart, for the Earl, leaving his title and rent-roll out of the question, looked as if he might be a dangerous rival.

Eighteen months of foreign travel had bronzed the handsome patrician face and given the tall slim figure a greater breadth of shoulder, so that Lord de la Poer was a decidedly handsome man; but his sojourn in foreign lands, which had so improved his appearance, had not entirely obliterated the impression Dolly Daunt had made upon him at the Hunt ball, at which she had made her debut, and when he returned home he was greatly pleased to find that she was still unwon.

It was true Dolly was not quite in that circle from which the Earl should take his bride; but was not her mother an earl's daughter?

Since his return home Lord de la Poer's attentions had been as marked as his languid manner and natural indifference would allow them to be; and since Sidney's return from her wedding-tour, and Dolly had been her guest at Easthorpe, he had haunted her pretty drawing-room persistently, and had become, as Sidney said some-

times, almost as regular as the institution of afternoon tea itself.

"Good-morning, Miss Daunt. Will you let me have the honor of escorting you to-day?" he said, as Dolly gave him a little gloved hand and a pretty smile of greeting.

"Thank you," the girl answered, laughing; "Nichols is going to have that honor to-day."

"Nichols?" queried his lordship elevating his straight dark brows.

"Yes, Nichols, my brother's groom," exclaimed Dolly, laughing.

"Are you not going to follow?"

"No; I never hunt, you know. Let me introduce Mr. Milner to you," she added rather shyly. "Mr. Milner—Lord de la Poer."

Two stiff bows were made; the earl's dark eyes glanced at the young lawyer's with an expression which seemed to ask, "Who are you, and what are you doing here?" and Lloyd returned the look with perfect calmness and composure.

"Is this your first visit to these parts, Mr.—Mr. Milner?" asked his lordship.

"Oh, no," Milner answered coolly, "not my first by several."

"I have not had the pleasure of meeting you before, have I?"

"No; your lordship has generally been absent from home, I think."

"Ah, probably! Mrs. Daunt is not with you this morning, Miss Daunt?" asked the earl, turning to Dolly again.

"No; Sidney preferred to stay at home."

"Too cruel of her! And you too arrogant to desert us!"

"I should be far too great a coward to do anything else," said Dolly, smiling. "Even now Lady Goffightly is far too frisky for my peace of mind, and too crab-like in her motions. I am afraid I shall not be able to hold her in," she added nervously, glancing appealingly at Lloyd, whose eyes brightened as he leaned forward and put his hand upon her bride.

"I don't think you need fear," he said, smiling, with a tender protectiveness in his tone and manner which was anything but satisfactory to Lord de la Poer. "She is just a little excited, as we all are this morning; she will calm down again directly."

"Perhaps I had better return," she suggested, dubiously.

(To be continued.)



WALKING THE FLOOR

Jinx owed nine dollars at the store, for cans of shrimp and herring; "I'll let the merchant walk the floor," he said, not greatly caring. The country's full of men like Jinx, who owe all kinds of money; their fame grows worse, their credit shrinks, and still they think it funny. Collectors do not make them sore, duns don't disturb their slumbers; they let the merchants walk the floor in sad and weeping numbers. The grocer grimly scans his books, where Jinx's name is written, and says, with sickly smile, "Gadzooks! Again I have been smitten. Oh, once again a chronic beat has worked me for a sucker; I'll soon be driven to the street to pawn my bib and tucker. And now I'll spread the news around, to all my brother dealers, that Jinx is but a barking hound who should be pinched by peelers." He puts the merchant princes wise, throughout the bustling city, and now when Jinx goes forth and buys, he is a thing to pity. He finds it useless to demand, to promise or to wheedle; unless he has the coin in hand he cannot buy a needle. There comes a time to men like this when they're by hard luck swatted, and then how dolefully they miss the credit that's unspotted! They look back on the days of yore when they with mirth decided to let the merchants walk the floor, and credit they derided. They realize that they were blind, their arrogance was shocking; and now it's up to them, they need, to do the weary walking.

WAR GRAVES
BRITAIN INTERRING GERMAN IN PALESTINE.
Officials of the Imperial War Graves Commission, which is maintained by the British taxpayer, are now engaged in interring the bodies of German soldiers in Palestine cemeteries and erecting monuments to them.

"We have to do this under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles," said an official of the Imperial War Graves Commission. "It is laid down that we shall care for and maintain the graves of all German soldiers in our territory, and it is impossible to fulfil that condition unless bodies which lie out on the desert are brought in to a cemetery."

The allegation that in Palestine German firms had been given the contract for erecting memorials to British soldiers was denied.

"The greatest possible care has been taken," said the official, "to ensure that no contract of this kind has been placed in ex-enemy hands. Certificates of nationality have been required from every firm with whom contracts have been placed."

So far as the graves of British soldiers who died in Germany are concerned, the official admitted that they are being cared for by the Imperial War Graves Commission, no being born by the Germans in connection.

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