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

CHAPTER XXVIII

Any one who had watched Sidney Daunt drive from her own home on that wintry morning would doubtless have seen only a prosperous and happy young matron possessed of all this world's goods in profusion, with nothing in the world to wish for. She lay back in her pretty carriage, letting her groom drive, wrapped in her costly dark furs, a great brass rug over her knees, a Maltese lace veil shading her face, but not concealing its loveliness; and yet, for all her outward seeming, she was a desperate woman, with a desperate purpose in her heart, who envied the poorest cottager's wife who looked out at her and courted as she passed. Young, rich, and beautiful as she was, how gladly would she have changed lots with the poor, hard-worked, ill-clad, ill-fated woman to have possessed her peace of mind!

When they reached the outskirts of Ashford, she told the man to stop, and alighted from the carriage.
"You need not wait," she said, quietly. "I have some business in the town, and shall not need you again."

The groom was too well drilled to show any surprise, however much he felt. He touched his hat and drove away, concluding that his mistress would drive back again with his master on his return home.

Meanwhile Sidney Daunt walked rapidly into the town. The weather was hardly tempting enough to bring any one out of doors who was not obliged to leave his or her friends, and she met but few pedestrians; but even the few she met in the quieter part of the town, through which her errand took her, glanced at the swiftly-moving graceful figure wrapper in costly furs which seemed so unfamiliar in the muddy, slushy streets. Sidney heeded little as she went on swiftly, unhesitatingly, a desperate woman with a desperate purpose at heart.

CHAPTER XXIX

At one of the windows of the first floor of the Excelsior Hotel, a man stood looking out upon the scene before him—not a very interesting one at any time, but now drearier than usual, owing to the slush and mud caused by the melting snow.

The hotel stood in a small square in one of the quieter quarters of the busy little town, a square where a kind of miscellaneous market was held twice a month, where provisions, clothes, boots and shoes, crockery, and

various other necessities of life were sold to the country-folk, who on fine days, mustered pretty strongly.

To-day, however, the market was dull; sellers were cold and cross and sullen, buyers few and far between; rather a saddening, depressing aspect. But the keen dark eyes of the man standing at the hotel window did not need the dullness. It was the habit of those eyes to note everything with quick yet quiet attention; and almost everything possessed some interest for them. Not that they had any special interest in the market; but they were trained to observation, and could not refrain from taking notes.

In appearance the man was short and thin, and dressed in the extreme of fashion. It did not need the package of goods placed in one corner of the sitting-room to prove to the landlord and waiters of the Excelsior Hotel, that he was a commercial traveller. His attire and his manner were quite sufficient to betray his occupation; and they had had no doubt as to it from the time of his arrival in Ashford on the previous evening. He had been very familiar also, and free with his money, and was of an inquisitive turn of mind, asking several questions of the pretty chatty chambermaid as to the rick people of the neighborhood. His merchandise was rich, valuable old lace, he said, and only ladies of fortune and fashion would be likely to purchase from him; indeed he had an appointment in the morning with a lady who lived in the neighborhood, who had been kind enough to say that she would call at the hotel and inspect his goods.

As he stood at the window in his careless contemplative attitude, he seemed neither hurried nor anxious, and totally indifferent to the passage of time; and there was no expression on his face, save one of good-natured interest in the moody holders of stalls in the market and the rare purchasers of articles from them. He showed neither special interest nor recognition as a lady came into the square from a small street on the right and walked swiftly toward the hotel, but something like a gleam of admiration shot into the keen contemplative dark eyes.

But, if the appearance of the lady aroused no surprise in the breast of the man at the hotel window, it caused some excitement among the stall-keepers, for it was a unusual one in

that quiet square. Closely veiled as she was, there were an elegance and a richness in her dress, which, was perfectly simple, which could not fail to strike them, and, as she walked on quickly, there was a refinement, a grace in her gait which would have attracted attention, even without the costly sealskin and furs.

The commercial traveller, or rather G. Hoggood of Scotland Yard—for it was he—turned away from the window, pulled one of his packages from the corner of the room, and was busily unstrapping it upon the table when the chambermaid opened the door and announced:

"A lady for you, sir," and Sidney Daunt, closely veiled, entered.

Mr. Hoggood bowed low, desisting immediately from his occupation, and his visitor inclined her head slightly; then, as the door closed upon the chambermaid, she came forward slowly to the table and threw up her veil. "You wish to see me, Mr. Hoggood?" she said, quietly.

"Yes, madam," he answered; "I have some exquisite specimens of old lace here which I shall be happy to show you."

He spoke in rather a raised tone, and, walking softly across the room, he noiselessly slipped the bolt of the door, then as noiselessly returned to his place by the table.

"It is always best to be on the safe side," he said, quietly, noticing Sidney's glance of surprise. "One never can be quite sure that doors have not ears and eyes."

"True," she returned, briefly.

Glancing at her furtively as he toyed with the straps fastening the goods that he professed to wish to sell, the change in her appearance struck him almost with as much sorrow and surprise as it had Lloyd Milner. Even her swift walk through the cold air had not brought any color to the thin cheeks, any light to the dim eyes, while her manner was characterized by the same composure and entire want of emotion which had struck Lloyd Milner an hour previously.

"Have you any special news to tell me?" she asked, in a low, measured tone, refusing by a gesture the chair that he placed for her, and not raising her eyes to his as she stood by the table, resting her little gloved hand upon it. "That is a superfluous question, after all, since you would not have asked me to meet you here had you not something to communicate."

"You are right, madam," he answered, with some significance in his voice, quiet as it was. "I should not have troubled you had I not wished to see you. I thought," he added, "that you would rather come here than that I should wait upon you at Easthorpe."

"It did not much matter," she said, somewhat wearily. "I preferred coming this morning, however. Have you—have you discovered anything?" she added, leaning heavily against the table as she asked the question.

"What do you wish me to say, madam?" he asked abruptly, looking at her keenly. "Do you wish me to tell you what I have discovered or do you not?"

At the unexpected interrogatory she looked at him suddenly with great questioning eyes full of surprise and fear. Had it not been impossible for her to grow paler than she already was, he would have thought that the colorless cheek had taken a yet more ashen hue. As it was, he hurriedly pushed a chair toward her. She did not take it, but stood facing him, her eyes fixed upon his impassive face; and there was silence between them for some minutes. The detective, with some pity and compassion now upon his quiet face, was the first to break it.

"Mrs. Daunt," he said, gravely, "when I had the honor of my first interview with you, the clearing up of the mystery which surrounds the murder of Mrs. Rutledge was a matter very near your heart. It may be that since that time circumstances have arisen which have altered your wishes. Pray sit down," he added, hastily, seeing that for a moment she swayed backward as if about to fall; but she recovered herself immediately.

"No, no," she said, hurriedly. "I am not ill; but I do not quite understand," she went on, trying to brave it out, although her dread was so great that she could hardly force her white lips to form the words.

"Are you sure you do not understand me, Mrs. Daunt?" he asked, seeing, notwithstanding all her efforts to the agony of dread she was suffering, and pitying her as he had rarely pitied any one in his self-contained eventful life.

(To be continued.)

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TWO BRITISH OFFICERS BITTEN IN NIGERIA ARRIVE IN LONDON.

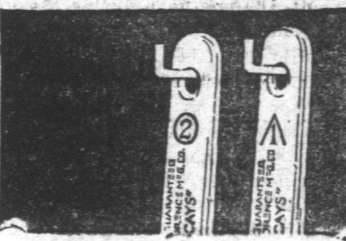
LONDON, Oct. 28.—Capt. Nicholl and Lieut. Cartwright, two British officers, have arrived in London from Calabar, Southern Nigeria, after a race of 4,600 miles against hydrophobia. Both went immediately under advanced treatment according to the Pasteur method, but it will be some time before it can be learned whether the delay incident to the voyage was too great.

The officers were bitten nearly a month ago. The dog, suffering from rabies, appeared at Capt. Nicholl's home and bit him. Lieut. Cartwright went to the assistance of his superior and was bitten in turn.

After such first aid as the station afforded, both men were ordered to London, escorted by friends. The first leg of the journey was a motor trip of 500 miles over very rough roads from Calabar to Lagos. During this trip their luggage lorry plunged into the River Niger and two servants were drowned. The party, without luggage, arrived in Lagos in time to catch the African liner Abinsi.

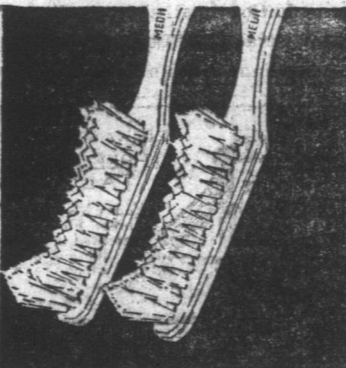
Both officers show the effects of the terrible strain they have been under but the Minister of Health officials who have their eyes on the case are hopeful that they can be saved from the dread disease.

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Dodging the Censur
It is no joke being a census official in Kenya Colony, where, according to recent reports, the natives have objected to the enumeration of the population because they think it is un lucky to count themselves or their wives. In other countries the counting of heads has sometimes presented difficulties. The first Chinese census showed a total population of 28,000,000. It was taken to serve as a basis for the imposition of a poll-tax. Some years later another census was taken, the object this time being to organize the provision of relief in a period of famine. The population had grown to 105,000,000. Probably the most remarkable census ever taken was that of the island of Java, which are contained in Tompkins' "The Book It Gives a Complete and Living picture of the England of that day." It has been described by one author as "your honour can supply thoughts at discretion?"

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