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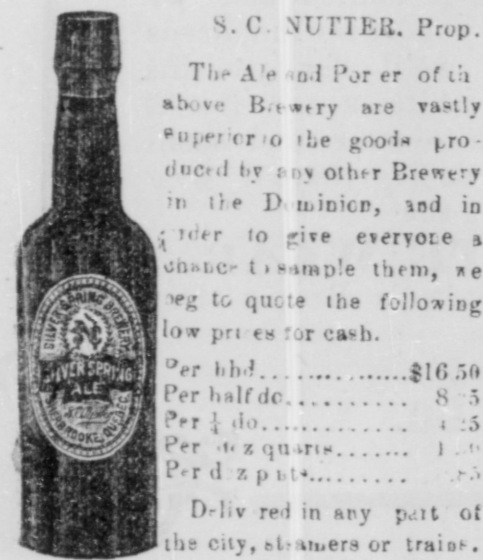
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BY MARY CECIL HAY

Author of "The Arundel Motto," "Nora's Love Test," "Back to the Old Home," Etc.

(Continued.)

"You don't say if you know him better than I do, if so well. Then, how dare you speak of him so?" Jane fixed her eyes upon the girl, in stolid astonishment; but Lawrence rose, and paced the room in wrath.

"Your ideas are utterly childish, Honor," he said, trying in vain to suppress the anger of his tones. "He has deceived you just as he has deceived every one else."

"That's a falsehood, Lawrence," she retorted, quietly.

"It is not a falsehood," he returned, losing all control over himself. "He is here under false pretences. You are credulous, and fancy him the honorable man he would appear. I know him to be the very reverse."

"I know him as an honorable man," the girl said, steadily; but she knew full well in what a different tone she would have asserted this before that night.

"You will see," muttered Lawrence, savagely. "I shall have evidence to prove it soon, and I can assert it anywhere."

"You ought not to have asserted it here, to us, unless you had evidence to prove it," she remarked; but the unaccountable now was an effort to her.

"I will have my proof before I tell everything, even to you," said Mr. Haughton, pausing before her. "My news will stagger you, I dare say, but you will know then, as I do, that he is not an honorable man."

"I hope," observed Honor, smiling coldly, "that in this search for proof of a man's dishonor you have the inestimable advantage of Mr. Slimp's assistance."

"By heaven!" "Hush, Lawrence," pleaded the girl, grave and gentle again. "When you utter that word so heedlessly, I am afraid to think how needless your thought of it must be."

"What do you think Honor?" put in Phoebe, hastening to drown this speech, lest it should offend her guardian. "Mr. Stafford brought us definite news to-day; we are to meet Lady Lawrence in her London house on the first of December. Don't you feel excited, Honor?"

"This fuss will hinder me in collecting my proofs," observed Mr. Haughton, "but the short delay will not signify."

"Did you walk over and see Mrs. Disbrow this afternoon, Phoebe?"

"No." "Oh—and you promised me! She has been alone almost all day!"

"And if she has," remarked Jane, "it does not oblige you both to become her slaves. Phoebe is idle enough, Honor, without your teaching her to be more so. How is that? You have two handkerchiefs in your hand. What silly extravagance to carry two at a time."

"I did not know I had two," said Honor, good-humoredly. "Have I taken up one of yours since I came in?"

"Mrs. Payte gave you one when we stopped at the cottage," remarked Lawrence. "She said she found it at Westleigh Towers, and it had your name upon it; don't you recollect her saying so?"

"Then the other, I suppose—" began Honor. But then she stopped suddenly, with a burning color in her cheeks. The handkerchief she held was the one she had picked up in the gallery at Westleigh, just after leaving that room where she had seen a lady standing alone beside the fire; and now her eyes had fallen upon a name embroidered dimly across the corner—"ALICE."

"I have brought this one by mistake," she said, putting it back into her pocket; while the color faded from her cheeks, and left her face, for one moment, white even to the lips. "I was very careless."

"Trent's, I suppose," grumbled Lawrence.

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bled Miss Haughton. It is a stupid habit of hers to drop handkerchiefs about. Mind you send it back, Honor."

"But, in spite of this order, when Honor at last found herself alone in her own room, she locked the handkerchief safely away."

"It will be better so," she said to herself, with a puzzled thoughtfulness on her face; "better so than have to tell what I saw. It will be quite safe, and no one will ever know."

CHAPTER XVI.

The day was rapidly approaching on which old Myddelton's relatives were to meet Lady Lawrence in London, and the excitement among them was general, though very differently betrayed. Mr. Stafford—Lady Lawrence's lawyer—had been again in Stratton, to complete his arrangements for the meeting, and Theodora had made much of him at Deergrove. This excitement helped Miss Trent to bear the absence of Royden Keith, whom she had not seen since the day she spent at Westleigh Towers. Phoebe's effervescence knew no bounds when she discussed Lady Lawrence and her will; and Mr. Haughton himself could not quite hide or subdue his mingled curiosity and expectation.

"In the midst of all this to-do," remarked Mrs. Payte, rousing herself from a nap by the fire, when Honor, one day, walked softly into Mrs. Disbrow's sick-room, "I only wonder you waste your time and energy here. Selina does very well without you, child; and you ought to be rehearsing what your behavior in London shall be—as the others are."

With only a quiet smile and nod, Honor passed on to the bedside, and took her seat beside it; talking to the invalid for a time, undisturbed—much to her surprise—by the restless little old lady at the fire.

"How do the preparations go on for this grand event, Honor?" inquired Mrs. Payte, at last, unable to keep a longer silence. "There is but a fortnight, you know."

In her low, pleasant voice, Honor told a few particulars which she thought would amuse the sick lady, but they evidently did not satisfy the healthy one—being totally devoid of malice and even ridicule.

"Did Mr. Stafford help you at all, by warning you of any of Lady Lawrence's eccentricities or hobbies?"

"A little," laughed Honor. "He advised us all to dress very simply and quietly, as she is particularly neat in her taste; and he advised Lawrence and Hervey to be genial and unaffected."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Payte, with a chuckle of enjoyment, "that's good! So thoroughly against nature, eh? How will Theodora Trent bear to dress simply, and Phoebe quietly? And how can Mr. and Miss Haughton be genial and Captain Trent unaffected? I should like to be in the green-room when you all dress for the stage. What shall you do?"

"? Nothing. Mrs. Payte, why should I?"

"Because you'll be a goose, if you don't."

"Then I shall be a goose," said Honor, laughing. "Don't you think Lady Lawrence would rather see us as we are than acting for the occasion?"

"What will she know about the acting? Her lawyer won't tell her he has put you on your guard, never fear. Take advantage of his help, child, and act and dress as he proposes."

"No," said Honor, shaking her head, firmly. "For he did not tell it as a message to us. She expects us all to be natural before her."

"But what does that matter?" insisted the old lady in rising wrath. "It gave you the gratuitous benefit of his experience; never mind whether it is treachery on his part or not—take the benefit. If you don't, you will lose your chance."

"It is better that I should lose it by being known as I am than gain it by being thought what I am not," said Honor, as she smoothed the pillows by the restless head beside her.

"Well, I don't happen to think so," grumbled Mrs. Payte, noisily poking the fire; "but you must please yourself, I suppose. What dress shall you wear? Not that new gray one, with the crimson slashing all about it?"

"Yes," laughed Honor. "That is my best dress, Mrs. Payte; and as you know—if I must own such a humiliating fact—I am rather proud of it."

"You learned the style from a picture, I should fancy?"

"Yes," said the girl, blushing under the shrewd glance of the old lady turned so suddenly upon her; "it was a picture that you and I saw—that we all saw—at Westleigh Towers; but it is quite near enough to fashion not to look odd."

"Odd!" echoed Mrs. Payte, with a curious little grunt. "I think you look particularly odd in it; and, as for fashion, just cover yourself with fustians from top to toe—no matter where you put them—and you are sure to be in the fashion. But what about the others? It is more in their nature to dress

smudgy than yours. Will they put it?"

"Yes."

"Then you will have a double disadvantage by comparison with them. See what a silly baby you are, rushing headlong against your own interests. Never mind whether you like the old woman. Why, bless me, her individuality is sunk; she represents more than a million of money—think of it! By the way, how is your guardian feeling just now toward Mr. Keith?"

The sick lady, on whose hand Honor lay, felt the start it gave, and wondered a little, as she lay calm in her weakness.

"He—he—"

"I know," put in Mrs. Payte, brusquely, "he gave me a hint of it one day, unconsciously. He thinks Royden Keith is a man not to be trusted."

"He thinks," said Honor, the low, startled voice giving words at last to the horrible conviction of Lawrence's meaning, which had stolen upon her, "that Mr. Keith has at some time committed an act which—proves him not what he seems to be."

"When?"

"I do not know."

"Well, I do, then. It was 'in the reign of Queen Dick.' All those likely things occurred in her reign, and when you find it in your English history, we will discuss its events, but not till then."

(To be continued.)

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