

# RIGHTED AT LAST

BY MARY CECIL HAY

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

Sir Philip Somerson had, for the first two minutes, wondered over his wife's change of plan, but her motive had then dawned upon him, and he took Phoebe under his protection, in his courtly, genial way.

When she and Honor were left alone together, Lady Somerson, moved by some uncontrollable impulse, put her arms about the girl who, though so rich and idolized, was young and motherless. Then she kissed her softly, and began to chat in a tone which seemed quite easy in its intense kindness.

"Now, Honor, darling, you and I are going to have a quiet enjoyable time, but I am so liberally endowed with that essentially feminine virtue which laid Eden waste, that I must take one step before I can experience any peace of mind, dearer than all." First of all, I ring for tea; no two women ever did sit down to spend a few hours together without requiring tea, did they? But I am ringing for another purpose, too, for I want to send a message of inquiry to Jermyn street."

She did not glance toward Honor either as she spoke or while she gave the message to the footman, but, when she did look, she fancied there was more of relief upon the girl's face than surprise.

"Yes," she continued, standing at the tea-table, as the door closed behind the servant, "I must satisfy my womanly inquisitiveness, and I do not expect one of my sex to blame me—remember that, my dear."

A whole hour passed before the man returned with his tidings, and that hour the two friends spent pleasantly, as two friends can spend an hour in ease and confidence, when no guile secret or mist of suspicion and distrust hovers between them.

"What is it?" The servant had returned, and Lady Somerson turned her head lazily, as it seemed, for his message; yet she need hardly have schooled her face, for Honor's eyes—lustrous in their great and speechless anxiety—were fixed only upon the possible bearer of a message from Royden Keith.

"I saw Mr. Pierce, my lady, as you wished. He was very anxious. He had sent off one of Mr. Keith's grooms to Westleigh Towers to inquire if his master was there, and another to Kinburn; he himself was just coming here to see Sir Philip—even late as it is. He is alarmed, I think, my lady, about his master."

"What do you mean? What did he say exactly?" "He said, my lady, that last night, just as Mr. Keith was going to start to Kensington, to Miss Craven's ball, a message was brought him, which was to be delivered specially and privately to himself, and so which, of course, Mr. Pierce did not hear. He said, my lady, that this message must have changed all his master's plans, for he went out at once with the messenger, never mentioning where he was going, or when he should return. The messenger was a woman, my lady, which Mr. Pierce thought very curious and suspicious; and he is sure his master intended to return directly, because he only put an overcoat on, and went as he was, in full dress. Yet he did not return, my lady—he never has returned."

## CHAPTER XXXI.

In the pretty blue sitting-room, to which only a very few of Miss Craven's friends ever penetrated, Phoebe Owen sat next morning, looking out upon the pressers-by, yet without criticizing or studying their dress, as it had been her wont to do. In fact, she only looked down upon them by force of habit, and hardly saw them as she did so. There lay a new novel on the window-seat beside her, but for almost an hour its

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pages had not been turned.

Phoebe was thinking. It was a new art she had acquired, and it sat rather unfamiliarly upon her, but still the power lent her fair Dutch face a charm which it had never possessed while her thought had been concentrated on her own shallow plans. Phoebe could feel now how those old years had been wasted; and while she felt, as she often did, that the evil could never be undone, she was unconsciously undoing it. That regret of her own selfish and useless girlhood had only fluttered regretfully through her thoughts to-day, for they had been centered in loving anxiety upon her cousin.

"I cannot understand it," she mused, leaning her head upon one plump hand, "I wish I could, and I wish I could help her; while she, even in her own anxiety, seems helping us all. She never even pretended to go to bed last night—this morning, I mean, for I was late returning, though Honor had promised to wait for me at Lady Somerson's. I went to bed and fell asleep at once, never guessing that Honor was not in bed, too. And her maid says she changed her dress, and sat quite still in her own room, reading and thinking, until it was possible to send for Mr. Stafford. Does she really think that he can explain this mysterious disappearance of Mr. Keith? Why should it alarm her—for that it does I am quite sure, though she smiles and only says, 'Perhaps he was called suddenly abroad.' As if that were possible and his valet not even know it. How I wish Honor or would come in here! She said she would, so I will wait, but she is a long time. Mr. Stafford has been here an hour or more. I wish she would come; but I wish, above all things, that I could help her."

And the wish was earnest and unselfish, as few of Phoebe's wishes had ever been before, and she had little idea—as she mused of the change in Honor—of the still greater, though so different change in herself.

"Yes, I will wait, because Honor said she would come." And for the twentieth time she took up her book to read, while her eyes were raised to the door every minute, and her ears were open for the sound of a light footfall.

Phoebe had said truly that the lawyer had been for more than an hour closeted with Honor, but even when he rose to go, he had not dispelled the puzzled sadness on her face, and had gathered a great concern on his own.

"It is too long ago, Miss Craven," he said, again and again, most regretfully. "Except in the very improbable case of a confession from a possible murderer, no clue to hang suspicion on another can arise now. I have done all that can be done, so far as I may say so, but I have not met with the faintest shadow of success, and I fear I must add that I do not expect ever to do so."

"You will not cease this effort you are making?" urged Phoebe. "I will not, indeed," he answered, with gentle cordiality, pained to say what he thought such futile earnestness, knowing that, in spite of his great anxiety to serve her, he was powerless to do so in this matter.

"I know you will not; I know you are very kind," she said, wistfully and humbly enough to show that it was possible to be young and beautiful and wealthy, yet to have the longing of the heart unsatisfied; "and I feel that it will be possible—only so very hard—to prove at last the innocence of Gabriel Myddleton, my cousin."

With a new earnestness in his gaze, the old lawyer looked down upon his client.

"It would be wiser, my dear Miss Craven, to let the matter rest. But as you evidently think otherwise," he added, changing his tone when he saw her eyes sadden, "I will think otherwise as far as I can—at any rate, we will do all that is possible. One of my clerks is at Abbotsmoor now, but, as I told you, his searches and inquiries seem utterly unavailing."

She thanked him for all his help and promises, and he made a kind, vain effort to cheer her; then he went away, with his thoughts so full of the sad young face and earnest voice that he started from his long reverie in surprise to find that he had been driven two miles beyond his office door.

Left alone again, Honor tried to draw her thought away from this haunting subject.

"I will go to Phoebe," she said, and yet she lingered in her solitude, struggling with her restlessness and uneasiness.

"You know whom alone I could ever ask to be my wife; and knowing this, you understand what a lonely life mine will be."

The words came back to her just as Royden had uttered them at Westleigh Towers nearly two years before, and she could not shake off their memory. She sat down to the piano and began to play, hoping that the cords might silence these words, but somehow they fitted to them all. Suddenly she rose with a sigh of pain, for her hands and thoughts—straying after melodies she knew—had unconsciously fallen upon the sad but exquisite funeral music

of "Lucia di Lammermoor," and its pathos and tenderness were more than she could bear just now.

Covering her face with her hands, she tried to shame away these haunting thoughts of Royden. She tried to bring him before her as man who lived with a false character, under a false name and false pretences, but he would not live so in her mind even for one minute, and she knew that, under all her pain for him, most strong and steadfast was the longing to see him.

"I will go to Marie," she said at last, rising and pushing her hair from her white face; "she will wonder why I have not been."

Marie Verrien rose from her work when Honor entered the neat and pretty little room, and moved to meet her. This she did each day now, to show, in eager gratitude, how her strength was truly—though very gradually—returning to her, in her new life of ease and abundance.

"A little farther again to-day, Marie," said Honor, her own sorrows set aside, as they always were, beside the sorrow and the joy of others. "It is wonderful; you will walk down-stairs soon."

"It is a little farther to-day, Miss Craven," said the lame girl, looking proudly back along the few yards she had walked. "I have grown frightened, wondering why you did not come, and that made me walk farther, being so rejoiced to see you coming in."

(To be continued.)

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## JUNE MAGAZINES

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The transfer books will be closed from the 18th June to the 3rd July next, both days inclusive.

By order of Board. J. M. DAVISON, Cashier.

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24 "	" " " "	20 "	
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50 "	" " " "	30 "	
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50 "	Glass " " "	35 "	
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