

# THE CHARITY GIRL

By EFFIE A. ROWLANDS

## CHAPTER XXIII.

As Audrey gave that cry and turned, Sheila Fraser and the man with her looked keenly after her.

"Quick," Sheila muttered, hoarsely. "She has seen, she believes it all! Make haste, go after her. You must stop her in case he has come and she should meet him! Quick! Give me that domino! I can hide it under mine!"

Beverley Rochfort—for it was he—hurriedly threw off the gray cloak, and without a word strode after Audrey.

It was against Beverley Rochfort's form that she stumbled in her blindness and weakness, and in his arms she rested as she lay insensible. Beverley paused only for a moment, then glancing to right and left he picked up his burden and went quickly through the trees to the rustic house near where Audrey had seen what she supposed to be her husband clasping Sheila Fraser in his arms. Reaching this, Beverley removed the mask from the lovely face that was white and cold, as though death itself was printed on it, placed the girl's senseless form in one of the long, cushioned garden chairs, and then stood with folded arms surveying her.

"After to-night your pride will be humbled," he said to himself, "and that husband of yours will find out what it is to have made an enemy of me."

Then, stooping, he kissed Audrey's unconscious lips passionately, fiercely, many times; but so deep and swift had been the blow struck to her young heart that not even at this degradation did nature awake to protect and repel.

"It must be time now," he muttered, and he laughed softly to himself as he closed the door of the garden house and turned the key in the lock.

"I have you safe now, my lady!" he said, as he put the key in a pocket of his domino and hurried away.

He had not gone far into the crowd of dancers and promenaders before he became aware of a form close beyond him which, if he had not known so well to the contrary, he could have sworn was Audrey herself. There was the black and silver domino, the white satin skirts peeping below, and the dainty black lace mask; the hood arranged exactly as Audrey's had been.

"It is excellent, upon my word, Sheila is clever when she likes to be," he said to himself with much deliberation.

He was standing close beside Lady Daleswater; he knew her by her hard mouth and chin, even if Sheila had not carefully taught him all the colors of the dominoes who were necessary to the little drama they were enacting to-night. With Gladys, there were Mrs. Fairfax and several women whom he knew were all jealous and envious of Audrey—enemies, every one. He moved up to Mrs. Fairfax.

"Can you tell me who that black and silver domino is?" he asked, sinking his voice.

"Oh, that is Lady John Glendurwood. She seems to be enjoying herself, does she not?"

"She does indeed," Beverley answered. Behind his mask he frowned. This supposititious Audrey was acting a little too much, in his opinion, flirting and laughing in the most outrageous manner.

"Sheila must give her a hint, she mustn't stay too long. Glendurwood might arrive at any moment."

Fortunately for him, Sheila came up to him then, and she readily saw the wisdom of his words.

Going up to the woman disguised as Audrey, who was none other than Murray, the discharged lady's maid, she made some sort of excuse and walked away with her and her partner just as Jack Glendurwood, in his gray domino and mask, came up to where his sister was standing.

"Halloo, Gladys!" he said, laughingly. "Guessed you easily enough, you see. Where's Audrey?"

"Your wife is just leaving the ball room with Miss Fraser."

Jack glanced down to the other end, and just caught a glimpse of a black and silver domino leaning rather heavily on the arm of some man.

"Who is the man, I wonder?" he thought to himself, and he was just rushing off after them when Lady Daleswater stopped him.

"Jack, give me your arm; this room is so hot, and—I want to speak to you."

Lady Daleswater was unconsciously aiding Sheila's drama, though, apart from her own desire to speak out strongly on Audrey's extraordinary behavior, Miss Fraser had asked her to keep her brother engaged as long as she could when he arrived. With a grimace Jack agreed.

"It is rather hot; and I am not in the best of tempers," he said, frankly. "I have driven all the way to Beignton and back to see Benson, and then found that there was a mistake—he had gone to London. His secretary swore that no telegram had been sent to me; but, of course, he had to change his tune when I pulled it out of my pocket and showed the message to him. Then he wanted to say it was some hoax; but who on earth would want to hoax me?"

"Strange things happen sometimes," Lady Daleswater said, curiously.

"Yes, and from all accounts they happen sometimes at masked balls," laughed Jack. "Even the short time I have been here I have heard nothing but gossip about the way some woman has been behaving, quite scandalizing the old ladies by her outrageous flirting. Have you seen her, Gladys? Do you know her?"

Lady Daleswater removed her mask with a jerk, and then stared straight into her brother's eyes.

"Yes, I have seen her, and I do know her," she said, very slowly. "To my utterable shame I say it, Jack, for that woman was none other than your wife."

"What?" Jack recoiled as though he had been struck, then rearing his head proudly, "How dare you say any such thing, Gladys? How dare you throw shame and discredit on a pure, sweet girl who has never done you a moment's harm, who has nothing but good, gentle thoughts for you and yours? How dare you?"

"Because it is the truth! Yes, the truth," repeated the countess, curtly. "Had you been here but a few moments ago you would have seen her with your own eyes! You would not have given me the lie in this way! I say again, Jack, that it is your wife who has disgraced herself and us this night, who has made herself the gossip and the scandal of the place for months to come."

"Gladys, I will not listen to you." Jack had torn off his mask; his face had grown as white as ashes. "From to-night, though you are my sister, I will never speak to you again for traducing my wife's name. I thought you hard and cruel, but I thought also that, with all your faults, you had an honorable nature. I shall find Audrey, and take her home. This is no place for her."

Jack was turning abruptly, when a soft exclamation beside him and a hand on his arm stopped him.

"Lord John, and without your mask? Oh! I cannot allow this, it is against all rules."

It was Sheila who spoke.

"Have you seen my wife, Sheila?" Jack asked, hurriedly. He replaced his mask as he spoke.

"I left her a few moments ago. She was with Mr. Rochfort. Shall we go and find her?"

Sheila put her hand on his arm, and Jack moved away with her without another word to his sister.

"Where did you say you had seen Audrey?" Jack asked, harshly.

Sheila's eyes, shining hard and clear through her mask, were going quickly round. Where was Alice Fairfax? She should be at hand now to give the cue for the last act in the comedy that for two hearts this night would be bitter tragedy.

Before she had time to grow angry a pale-pink domino fluttered up to them; the owner gave a girlish giggle.

"Sheila, is it you? Yes, I see it is. Such fun! I have just seen the loveliest bit of spooning you ever saw. That very proper Lady John Glendurwood and—who do you think?—why, Beverley Rochfort! Oh, I assure you they were going on like anything. They have gone to the old summer house, and—"

Sheila checked her accomplice with so well-acted an air of anger as to astonish Miss Fairfax.

"Alice, how dare you! What are you saying, my dear child? You must not; it is very wrong!"

Miss Fairfax pretended to lose her temper. Really she had been an invaluable ally, and took as much delight in sharing in this wicked plot as though she were joining in the purest and best work on earth.

"I am only telling you the truth! If you don't believe me, go and see for yourself! I, for one, am not surprised, after the way she has gone on to-night," and with that Miss Fairfax founced her pink domino out of sight.

Jack Glendurwood had made no sign; not even the smallest exclamation crossed his lips. He stood erect and still, like a statue of stone, as they were alone again. Then suddenly he turned to Sheila.

"Where is this summer house she speaks of? Is it the old one I know?"

Sheila bit her lip. She had never heard anything so terrible as the sound of his voice, the passionate constraint, the hollowness of acute misery.

"My dear Jack," she said, laughing nervously, "you surely do not mean to say you take any notice of that foolish girl's—"

"Will you answer me?" Jack replied, fiercely.

For one moment Sheila's heart failed her. She began to see her work in its full vileness and sin. What if she had gone too far? What if he should murder Audrey when he saw her? There was a sound in his voice that spoke of rage ungovernable and mad pride.

"Do not take any notice of such gossip, Jack," she said hurriedly.

All the answer he gave was to begin to walk out into the grounds, and Sheila, nervously for the last, threw herself before him.

"No, Jack," she said in low, choked tones, "you shall not go!"

"What do you mean?" His face, from which he had torn away the mask, was almost savage in its anger and horrible fear. "Do you know what you are saying? Why must I not go and seek my wife? Am I not the proper person to do so? Answer me this, Sheila Fraser, why do you stop me? Do you fear what I shall see and hear?"

"Yes," she said, swiftly, "I fear—for you, Jack."

"Then be assured, Sheila, I shall not be harmed. Lead me to this summer house, that I may know the worst."

Sheila tried to look imploringly at him, but he simply repeated the command, and, turning at length she obeyed him.

When they were close to the small rustic building she stopped.

"Go on alone," she said, and without another word Jack strode down the path.

With a gasp of fear, Sheila followed him. What would he do, what would he do? Cold as ice, yet burning with fever so terrible that it almost choked him, Jack passed down the path. His brain was on fire.

Audrey was there—Audrey, his pure love, his darling, his wife! On all sides she had been discussed, none had spoken kindly. What was this awful thing that had come upon them?

As he reached the door of the summer house he was trembling in every limb. His lips opened to call her name, then closed with a fierce curse. Another man was speaking it passionately, wildly.

"Audrey, my love, my love, my darling!"

With his strong right hand Jack struck back the door and stood there, in the dim light—a tall, avenging angel.

Audrey, with one hand pressed against the wall, was standing before him. At her feet knelt Beverley Rochfort, clasping the other hand, and kissing it as he poured out his vows of love. As Jack appeared before them, Audrey gave one great cry.

"Jack! Jack! Thank heaven you have come!"

Beverley Rochfort rose to his feet with a low laugh. He was no coward, like Sheila. He rather hoped there would be some excitement now.

Jack was silent scarcely a moment; he never even glanced at the man; he looked straight at his wife.

"The carriage is waiting for you, Lady John," he said in a voice which Audrey had never heard from his lips before; "it is time for you to return to your home."

Audrey looked at her husband out of her great, blue eyes, all distraught as they were. For the moment she had forgotten his treachery at joy in his coming. Now, as with one heavy blow, it all returned to her. The end had surely come when he could speak to her like this, and how terrible was the way in which he stared at her. She had not strength to move a limb or utter a sound.

"I request that you accompany me to the carriage at once," Jack said, this time quite fiercely.

Audrey drew her domino about her. Vaguely she felt that, had as the horizon of her life had looked a short hour ago, it was doubly worse now. She did not comprehend Jack's manner, but it hurt her to the quick. That he should speak to her like this, and before that odious, horrible man! She put out both her hands. Fear of Beverley drove away her jealous pangs.

"Yes, yes; take me home. I am ready to go. I entreat you to take me!"

Jack stood on one side for her to pass, and as he faced Beverley Rochfort alone for an instant, he said, very quietly:

"Either your life or mine answers for this night's work. You understand?"

"Perfectly," smiled Beverley, but he frowned the next moment.

A duel! This was not what he had anticipated. Audrey did not catch the hurried words, and, as she walked away beside her husband, she was too deeply miserable to think of anything but that a cloud had fallen on her life; that Jack's love had gone from her, and she was the most wretched girl on earth.

(To be continued.)

### "The Strangling Fig."

Visitors to Mexico and other tropical countries often hear their attention called to "the strangling fig"—a tree that commences its growth as an epiphyte (that is, one form of plant life that grows perched on another) far up on the trunk or among the branches of another tree, usually on a palmetto or some of the kinds of palms. The roots of the strangling tree extend downward around the host tree to the ground, gradually joining together, making a tube-like mass of roots sometimes as much as six feet or more in diameter.

When the attacked tree is a palm, death to it is caused not so much by the binding around the trunk as by shading out its branches by the attacking tree.

When the attacked tree is an exogen (that is, one with wood and bark) the attacking roots bind so tightly as to cause a stoppage of the flow of sap. As the sap of a tree is really its food (changed by the leaves so that it can be used) and the flow of the food is thus stopped, the attacked tree is really "starved" to death. So death to the attacked tree is caused either by smothering or by starvation or by both.

The peculiar manner in which the flattened roots extend down and around the tree, give them the appearance of some thick, slow-flowing material running down the tree.—St. Nicholas.

### There Are Others.

"Mrs. Snooper is the most gossip woman I know. She can't keep a secret."

"Is that so?"

"Yes; she told me a lot of things in confidence yesterday that she promised different people she wouldn't tell."

"She didn't, really?"

"Yes, she did. Want to hear them?"—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

### Easy for Him.

"What brushy eyelashes Mr. Swags has!"

"Um. That's the reason he gives such sweeping glances."—Detroit Free Press.

### Where He Falls Down.

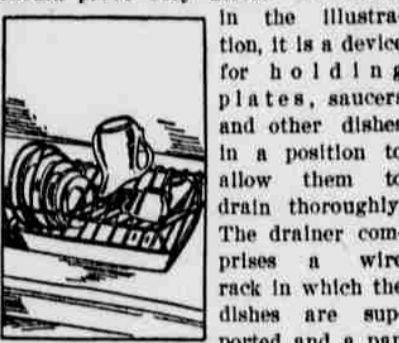
Miffkins—Pennington seems to be quite a prolific writer.

Biffkins—Yes; but unfortunately he isn't quite a prolific thinker.



### Dish Drainer.

Among the recent inventions for household use is a dish drainer, which should prove very useful. As shown in the illustration, it is a device for holding plates, saucers and other dishes in a position to allow them to drain thoroughly.



The drainer comprises a wire rack in which the dishes are supported and a pan to catch the drip.

Diagonally across the frame are span wires, a considerable number of dishes being thus accommodated in a comparatively small space. As the span wires touch the dishes only in one spot, there is nothing to prevent thorough cleansing, the drainage being perfect. The dishes may be washed or partially washed before being inserted in the rack, or, as some prefer, they can be placed in the rack exactly as they come from the table and then cleansed by pouring boiling water over them.

Pickled Trout.

Clean the fish and boil in salted water, then drain, wipe dry and set aside until very cold. Make a pickle of two quarts of vinegar, a dozen blades of mace, the same number of white peppers and cloves, two teaspoonfuls of mustard, three tablespoonfuls of white sugar and a pint of the water in which the fish was boiled. Boil all this liquid once, then skim it. Cut the fish into pieces of uniform size. Let the liquid get cold; put back on the stove and when it boils drop the fish and take from the fire. Pack in jars filled to overflowing with the spiced vinegar, seal tightly and put in a cool place.

Hard Soap.

Put together four gallons of boiling water, six pounds of washing soda and three pounds of unslaked lime. Set aside until clear, then drain off and put over the fire with six pounds of pure fat. Boil for about two hours, or until it begins to harden, thinning, when necessary, with the water that you have drained off, adding it when there is danger of the soap boiling over. Try a little in a saucer and when thick enough throw in a handful of salt and remove from the fire. Pour into a wet tub, and stand aside to harden, then cut into bars.

Tapoca and Banana Sponge.

Sprinkle half a cup of tapoca and two-thirds of a cup of sugar into one pint of boiling water, add half a teaspoonful of salt, and cook in a double boiler, stirring occasionally. When the tapoca is transparent add the juice of two lemons and the whites of two eggs, beaten until stiff. Spread over sliced bananas and serve with cream and sugar, or with a cold-bolled custard previously made. This dish may be made with canned peaches or quinces, using the juice of the fruit instead of water.

Banana Salad.

Have the bananas very cold. Cut them into small pieces and mix with a dressing made of two teaspoonfuls of salad oil, one teaspoonful of vinegar, one teaspoonful of lemon juice and a quarter of a teaspoonful each of salt and white pepper. Fill the banana skins and set over lettuce leaves. Sprinkle a few halves of English walnuts and a little chopped parsley over the top of the salad and serve immediately.

Cream of Corn Soup.

Simmer one can of corn in three cups of water for an hour. Then press through a sieve. Thicken three cups of scalded milk with one tablespoonful each of butter and flour, add it to the corn pulp and season to taste, with salt and pepper. Let it get very hot, stir in half a cupful of cream, remove from the fire and add a beaten egg just before serving. If the cream is whipped it is more delicate.

Chocolate Almond Delight.

Dissolve one package of raspberry gelatin in a full pint of boiling water. Strain when it begins to harden and press in one-half pound of chocolate almonds. When firm serve in college ice glasses, with a spoonful of whipped cream over each glass and an almond on the center of each.

Spanish Cream.

One-half box of gelatin, one quart of milk, the yolks of three eggs, one small cup of sugar. Soak the gelatin in the milk for an hour, then put it on the fire and stir well as it heats. Add to milk and heat to the boiling point, stirring all the time. Strain with a mold and flavor with vanilla.

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