

# Ruled BY Destiny!

CHAPTER X.  
THE STRANGER'S TRAP.

"And you love me!" he said, in an amazed whisper. "Why, Floris, it is almost past belief."

"Is it?" with a little shy glance and a fleeting smile that made him long to catch her to his heart.

"Yes! I always thought you hated me!"

"Yes?"

"Yes! We never met but we quarreled. I never spoke a civil word to you but you froze me on the spot."

"Did I?" with a smile.

"That you did! There were times when after you had sent me away, with an icy glance or a word of contempt, that I felt too ashamed and humiliated to live! Why, what made you change so, Floris? Tell me; I am curious!"

"I have not changed!" with a stare of amazement and delight.

"No!" shaking her head, and turning her eyes shamefacedly from his ardent gaze. "No, I have not changed. Will you not look away from me, Bruce? You fill me with shame—I loved you from the very first."

"Great Heaven!" he murmured, in a rapture. "From the first. Not from the first, Floris?"

"Yes," she said, making her confession with averted eyes and burning cheeks; "I think I loved you the first night I saw you. You, you told me that you loved me, remember."

"Yes, I did! Not knowing you were you! But you—you were pride and scorn and hauteur combined."

"She shook her head.

"Great Heaven, what addresses women are! And—and—all the time!"

"Yes," she admitted, and the admission was sweet. "All the time, Bruce, I fought against it. I told myself that I ought to hate you. I almost prayed that I might learn to do so. But it was no use."

He did not speak. His was a joy too deep for words.

"And when I felt it was of no use, why, with a sudden start, 'I was likely to die with shame when I remembered that perhaps you were already engaged, that—that Lady Blanche—"

He bit his lips, but his eyes met hers unflinchingly; the arched opposite them, behind which Lady Blanche stood, stirred and rustled as she pressed forward, straining her tortured ears to catch the response.

"Lady Blanche," he said, gravely, almost coldly. "Yes, I know; Floris, you had nothing to fear, you were misled. There was never anything tangible between us. I never loved her, never could have loved her. And if at any time there had been anything in my heart to her warmer than friendship, it would have vanished at your presence, dearest."

"Awful words for that stricken woman to hear.

No wonder she turned white to the lips and staggered back, grasping a tree to keep herself from falling.

No wonder that, possessed by the demon of jealousy, and the fire of unrequited love, she was compelled to press her hand to her lips till the teeth closed on them, to prevent the cry of despair and anguish that rose from her heart.

"Oh, I am glad," said Floris, with a little sigh. "I could not have shared your love. I could not have borne to think that I had only got it second hand. You see, with a little piteous smile that was very near tears, 'I am so proud.'"

He bent till his lips touched her beautiful hair.

"By heavens, I think I love you all the more for being so," he answered. "I would not have you altered by a hair's breadth, my darling. I think you perfect, bodily and mentally."

"Why I dream even, don't laugh, of your very dresses. To-night you look like a vision of cold, pure ice, you see. Proud. So you shall be. Be as proud as you like, so that you are not too proud to let me love you. And, I, too; I am proud. But I am a bad lot altogether, my poor darling. Heaven grant I may be able to conceal it from you."

She smiled trustingly enough.

"I will take you as you are, Bruce," she murmured.

"I am proud, too, little one," he said, very thoughtfully, "and a monster of jealousy."

She laughed softly.

"Are you? How much alike we are. My pride is only outdone by my jealousy. I warn you, Bruce, I shall grudge every smile you bestow on other women. I shall want all your soft speeches."

He laughed grimly.

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"I was never wont to smile much, or very rich in soft speeches, my darling, but what I have in stock shall be reserved for you. Ah, you know well how wholly and entirely I am yours, bound body and soul to your chariot wheel, so much your slave that there is not another woman in the world that is worth a thought to me."

She put up her hand with a little naive caress, and laid it against his cheek.

"Ah, how happy I am," she murmured, so low, and yet so distinct that it reached the hidden woman opposite

them, and went to her heart like the stab of a knife.

Then Floris started.

"We must go. Why, how late it must be."

He laughed.

"It is not late. What does it matter? Who cares?"

"Oh, but I must, sir. Lady Pendleton, my mistress, has forgotten me, and I must find her."

He laughed with grim delight.

"Lady Betty, your mistress. Ha, ha! How surprised she will be, and yet, I don't know, I have caught her looking at me once or twice with that cock-sparrow expression in her eyes which makes her look so knowing. She will be delighted. Must we go? Let me put your cloak around you. Happy cloak. What a pretty one. What made you think of that dress, and its edging of swansdown? My beautiful angel," and he took her bodily and boldly in his arms.

"Oh, take care," she murmured, blushing, and looking around fearfully. "Some one will see us."

"Who cares? And to think that only this morning you snubbed me. Actually refused to sell me the flower from your bosom."

She blushed.

"Do you care to have it now?" she asked, quietly.

"Care? Give me a chance of getting it," he retorted.

She took the crushed and withered rose from within her dress and held it out to him.

Then, as with a cry of delight, he eagerly stretched out his hand, she whipped hers behind her.

"Give me something in exchange, Mr. Bruce."

He laughed, his short curt laugh.

"Take all I have," he said, then he glanced down and about him. He wore no rings, no trinket he could depend himself of.

"Give me that flower in your coat," said Floris.

"Ah, yes," he assented, entirely forgetful of the woman who only that morning made him promise to wear it, who pinned it in his coat with loving hands. "Here you are. Give me my rose," and he took it from her, and with all a boy's love and a man's passion, kissed it before he hid it in an inner pocket.

And so they passed out, arm in arm, heart to heart.

For a moment Lady Blanche stood leaning against the palm, her face white as death, her hands clutched at her side.

Death. She had died a thousand deaths in that last ten minutes.

Hope, joy, the future, all were dead, and from their ashes had sprung the demons of hate and jealousy.

Without a cry she sank on to a seat, and sat staring in front of her with clasped hands.

And she had lost him. Lost the man she loved more than life. And she had so nearly won him; a week, a few days ago, he was almost hers.

The world had linked their names together. It wanted but the word to make him hers irrevocably.

And now she had lost him. And why? Because of this chit of a country girl, this girl with the round face and the gray eyes, this servant of Lady Betty's?

Oh, Heaven, it was hard to bear! Hard, hard! And he had told this girl that he had never loved, nev-

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er could love Blanche.

"Ah, it was hard to bear, too hard. She could not."

"I will not," she murmured, huskily; "I will not. There must be some way of stopping him, of balking her. She has caught him with her doll's face, with her pretended modesty and shyness. He must be saved! He shall not marry her; I mean it! But how can I prevent it? How? how? Oh, if there was some one to help me, some one I could depend on."

She looked around wildly. "I am only a woman, a wronged, insulted, helpless woman. If there were only some one who could help me."

As if in answer to her prayer, a voice from behind her said, in a quiet, almost sarcastic tone:

"I will help you!"

Lady Blanche started, and turning her white face over her shoulder, she saw a man standing half-hidden behind the ferns.

"I will help you!"

Lady Blanche started quickly, as if the words had sprung from the lips of the familiar demon, the demon jealousy, that at that moment was reigning paramount in her bosom.

She started even more violently as she looked at the man who had spoken, for it seemed as if the shadow of Lord Norman had sprung up beside her.

She even murmured his name. "Bruce!"

The man smiled sardonically, and shook his head.

"No, my lady, I am not Lord Norman," he said, calmly, with an ease that was almost insolent.

Lady Blanche looked again at him. The likeness to Lord Norman was extraordinary; had this man been dressed in an evening suit he might have walked into the ballroom and been mistaken by all but the closest observer for the earl.

"Did you speak to me?" she demanded, in the cold, hard voice which had struck a chill to many an inferior.

"I did, my lady, I heard your appeal for help, and—I answered it."

"Who are you?"

(To be continued.)

An excellent "main dish" may be made of fish, potatoes and parsley baked.

The rough war breads are undoubtedly wholesomer than all-white bread.

Rice pudding makes a nice dessert for Sunday, and it can be made on Saturday.

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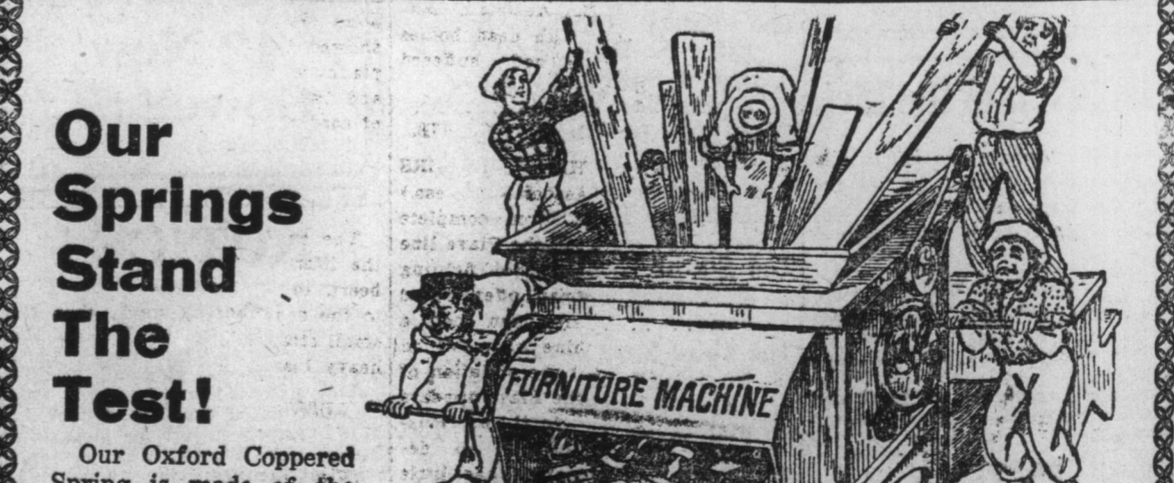
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# BATTLE CONTINUING BITTERLY

ROME, June 20.—From the Montello to the sea the battle of the Piave River is continuing bitterly without pause, the Italian war office announces to-day. Last night the Italians forced the invaders to withdraw from the invaders to the Monte Bellune railway. More than 1,200 Austrian prisoners were taken and numerous machine guns were captured. The Austrians yesterday afternoon, says the report, launched a fresh attack on the Piave with strong forces and succeeded at first in gaining some ground in front of Zenson. Later our reserves were brought up and forced the enemy to retire. French troops on the Asiago Plateau stormed enemy positions at Bertigo and Pennar. The Italian troops succeeded in capturing Oestlunga, the statement adds.

# COUNTER ATTACKING.

LONDON, June 20.—By counter attacking all along the Piave, the Italians have gained further ground on the Montello Plateau, in the northern sector of the river front, and have also made headway southeast of this ridge, says the Evening Standard to-day.

# AUSTRIAN DIFFICULTIES.

ITALIAN ARMY HEADQUARTERS, June 19. (By the Associated Press.)—For forty-eight hours the Piave overflowing its banks has destroyed several pontoon bridges constructed by the Austrians at Intestada and also at Sandonna di Piave. This has increased the difficulty of the Austrians in their rear communications, affecting the transportation of artillery, ammunition, food and fresh troops. It is stated that the Austrians fighting south of the Piave River continue to implore help and also that two of their divisions have been greatly reduced by losses.

# A HUNGER OFFENSIVE.

ITALIAN HEADQUARTERS, June 19.—That Austria's drive against Italy is positively a hunger offensive, has been proved by new orders and addresses found upon prisoners. These were signed by officers ranging from Field Marshal von Hoetzendorf down to regimental commanders. One which was issued by the commander of the famous regiment bearing the name of Archduke Charles, says: "Soldiers, remember the spoils we got last fall from the Italians—the sheep, cattle, stores and warehouses full of good clothes and groceries, stores full of wine, canned goods, flour and sugar. Think of your family, think of the white bread you may win for all." The correspondent has visited groups of hundreds of prisoners, all of whom are thin and weak. They said they had little food for the past month and spoke with horror of the winter months they had passed. A sample of their black bread showed that it was made of rye, straw and potatoes. Many of the prisoners had strong well spiked shoes, but these



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# And the Worst is Yet to Come

