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## CHAPTER X. THE STRANGER'S TRAP.

"I am a stranger to your ladyship, and my name would not enlighten you as to my identity. Just now, you called me by Lord Norman's name. Let me be known, for the present, as an individual who happens to bear a strong resemblance to his lordship. Your ladyship will be surprised to hear that I have been seeking for an opportunity to speak to you for some days past."

Lady Blanche was surprised, and for the life of her she could not keep her astonishment from showing itself in her face.

"I have watched, followed you night and day for days past, ever since I first saw you leaving the Duchess of Cliefden's party a week ago. I, too, have been an eye-witness of the love-passion between Lord Norman and Miss Carlisle, and I am as desirous of spoiling his lordship's felicity as you can be."

"Why?" demanded Lady Blanche, her breath coming fast. The quiet, self-assured manner, the easy, self-reliant voice were telling upon her, impressing her strongly and strangely.

He smiled.

"To answer that question would be to go into too long a story for the place and time, my lady," he said. "Let it go, if you please, that I am willing to bask in Lord Norman's happiness for reasons of my own. Listen to me, Lady Blanche! This young girl comes between you and the man you love. I offer to separate them; to remove the obstacle! Will you accept my offer?"

"You cannot do it," she said, in a low, quivering voice. "You do not know him."

"Do not? I know him well enough to count upon him for his assistance," he said. "Yes or no, my lady. Put aside the reluctance you feel to accepting the help of a stranger, who appears in this unexpected—romantic—

if you will—fashion, and await yourself of my services."

Lady Blanche was silent for a moment.

The music had ceased, the sound of laughter and many light-hearted voices came confusedly through the silence. She fancied she could hear Lord Bruce's deep voice, as he bent over Floris; fancied she could see her eyes alight with the new passion of love. Her heart beat wildly; her brain whirled; she put up her hand to her white brow, with a gesture of desperate resolve, and turned upon the man almost fiercely:

"Do what you promise, and claim what reward you will!" she breathed. He let his arms fall to his side, as if he had anticipated the result, and his manner changed instantly from the cool, impassibility it had hitherto displayed, to an acute alertness.

"Your ladyship has decided wisely. As to reward—Yes. I shall claim it when the time comes."

Lady Blanche made her way back to the ballroom, and found her father yawning himself awake in one of the anterooms. When she declared that she was ready to go, the poor old earl quite brightened up with gratitude.

"Really! And the ball half over! 'Pon my word, you are growing sensible, Blanche. Lord! how I hate these affairs! If I had known what I should have to go through taking charge of you, Blanche, I should have married again, I should indeed!"

"Perhaps it would have been better if you had," she murmured, sadly, as she sank into a corner of the carriage. Perhaps if her mother had lived, or some woman had taken her dead mother's place, she, Blanche, would not have fallen into the trap set for her by this stranger.

"Where is Bruce all the evening?" asked Lord Seymour, with an awful gasp. "He hasn't been near me, and he usually comes and have a chat."

"I do not know. Do not speak to me of Bruce!" she said, bitterly. The old man laughed.

"You and Bruce have quarreled again! Never mind, you will make it up to-morrow, as usual."

A bitter smile crossed her white face.

"Yes," she said, almost to herself; "we shall make it up again."

## CHAPTER XI. GLAD TIDINGS.

HOW time fled! Whether the band played square dances or round, whether she was on her head or her heels for the remainder of that wonderful night, Floris did not know.

She only knew that Bruce, her sweetheart—how pretty a word it is, though fashion has decreed it out of date—was continually at her side, whispering passionate love in her ears, pressing her hand, even venturing to kiss her hair when he could do so unobserved.

He would have danced all the remaining dances with her, if she would have allowed him, setting at defiance the fury of her engaged partners; but Floris insisted upon his going off and doing his duty elsewhere, and it was half with amusement, half weight, that she watched him going through the business of a waltz with some other young lady, with his eyes straying, wistfully, hungrily toward herself.

At last Lady Betty grew tired, not

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however, before the ball was nearly over, and at the end of a waltz—during which Floris had been responding with "Yeses" and "Noes" to her partner's observations, without knowing in the least what he was talking about—she found herself, touched upon the arm by Lady Betty's fan, all the worse for wear by this time.

"I think we'll go now, my dear," she said, then she looked at Floris' face, radiant—say rather, softly glowing—with happiness, with a stare of astonishment. "By the way, how many times have you danced with Lord Norman?"

A crimson flush flooded Floris' face and she bent down to arrange her cloak.

"Oh, not many, Lady Pendleton," she replied.

"Oh, not many!" echoed Lady Betty, with a laugh. "Why, I have seen you dancing with him four times! No wonder Blanche went so early."

A spasm of pain ran through Floris' heart, but she fought against it. What did it matter, this coupling of his name with Lady Blanche's, while she, Floris, was his chosen love, his future wife? All the same, Lady Betty's bantering speech hurt her.

At the moment, however, she heard a voice at her elbow that dispelled all pain.

"Here you are!" he said. "Going? So am I. Come on, Betty. Miss Carlisle, let me put that cloak closer around your neck," and his fingers strayed to her ear, and he pressed it caressingly.

"Look here, Betty, I'm fearfully hungry," he said, as they reached the hall, and footmen were calling for Lady Pendleton's carriage. "Too hungry for grilled bones, which is all I should get at the club. Let me come home with you?"

"Will you?" exclaimed Lady Betty, delightedly. "But I'm afraid there won't be much to eat, Bruce."

"I don't care! I'll take my chance. I am hungry enough to eat anything—Miss Carlisle even!" and he pressed Floris' arm.

"That would be carrying your attentions a little too far, Bruce," said Lady Betty, mischievously. "Can you squeeze yourself in the brougham, do you think?"

"If I could unscrew my legs," he said, laughing. "I'll get up beside John," and he put them in, and climbed on the box.

The supper was laid in a few very minutes in the breakfast room, that being, as Lady Betty remarked, the costliest room in the house, and Lord Norman, with a lady on each arm, led them in.

"Edward has gone to bed!" cried Lady Betty. "His speech was a great success."

"Here's the premiership to him!" exclaimed Lord Norman, raising his champagne glass, his eyes alight with happiness as they rested on Floris' downcast face. "I wish everybody joy and success to-night," he added. "Betty, this is an admirable fowl, let me give you a wing. Flo—Miss Carlisle," with mock ceremony, "can I assist you to some more galantine? Betty, I think I shall stipulate for the future that you give us supper in this cosy little room after every outing."

"I shall be delighted, Bruce, if you will undertake to be always in this humor. What is the matter with you to-night? You are like a boy. You remind me of Bertie. By the way, where did he vanish to? Bruce, do you think you really ought to have any more champagne?" with mock gravity.

"I don't know. I am not so sure that I ought," he retorted. "Champagne to a man in my frame of mind, Betty, is like oil on fire."

"What is the matter with you?" de-

manded Lady Betty, staring at his handsome face, more joyous than she had seen it since he was a boy home for the holidays.

"Shall I tell you?" he said. "Shall I tell her, Miss Carlisle?" and he leaned across and smiled into Floris' eyes, which drooped instantly.

"Why do you ask her?" demanded Lady Betty. "How can it possibly concern her?"

He leaned back in his chair and laughed, not loudly, but with pure, unrestrained, mirthful happiness.

"No, of course not! How can I concern her, eh, Miss Carlisle?"

"I think I will go now," said Floris, rising.

He rose, too, and stood beside her, detaching her with a light yet firm grasp.

"Not yet, Floris!"

"Floris!" exclaimed Lady Betty, startled.

"Yes, Floris!" he said; "no longer Miss Carlisle to me. Betty, Floris has promised to be my wife; that is what makes me in such good spirits to-night. My wife, do you hear?"

Lady Betty gasped and stared. "Not a word of congratulation!" went on Lord Bruce, enjoying her amazement. "Cannot you find a word my dear Betty? Or, perhaps, you disapprove? I forgot that Miss Carlisle is under your charge. I ought to have asked your permission and your blessing. Pardon me. It is not too late. Floris, will I kneel to her in orthodox fashion?" and he put his arm around her waist and drew her to him.

Lady Betty rose, pushing back her chair, and found her voice at last.

"Bruce, is this true?" she exclaimed, delightedly.

"Does it look like acting?" he demanded. "Floris, she cannot believe it. She cannot understand what I have done to deserve so much happiness."

(To be Continued.)

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## LONDON

LONDON, May 18th, 1918.  
LONDON AND THE AMERICAN SOLDIERS.

During the war Londoners have had several bursts of enthusiasm. These have generally been in connection with the arrival in this country of overseas soldiers. The Canadians were cordially welcomed and so also were the South Africans and the Australians each in turn. The experience in every case was much the same. First a few scattered soldiers in these categories were seen about the streets and gazed at curiously and diffidently, and then came some sort of demonstration when the great crowd showed as much enthusiasm as a London crowd perhaps ever does in war matters. Then when branch after branch of these overseas soldiers went into the fighting line and stories of their bravery and fine fighting qualities became current still more enthusiasm was evoked. Now after a long period of heralding we have the coming of the United States soldier, the Sammy. London has been looking for him for a long time and some of the earlier boys went right through to the fighting line without passing through the British Metropolis. Of late, however, they have been seen about the streets looking at first to the Londoner's untutored eye very like the other overseas soldiers but picked out at last by the "U.S." in their tunic collars. Last Saturday was the occasion of a special review of these boys, who proceeded by a march through some of London's chief thoroughfares to Buckingham Palace. Great crowds turned out and the spirit of goodwill, amity and unity seemed stronger than ever.

## QUEEN ALEXANDRA'S SISTER CAPTURED!

According to a report from Berlin the ex-Czar's mother, the Empress Dagmar, Queen Alexandra's sister, is a prisoner in German hands. This unfortunate lady is in her seventy-first year, and has had a lifetime of tragic experiences. Two months ago she was in such destitution that she applied to the Revolutionary Council for assistance. Her movements since her son's deposition have been unknown to the world at large. For many years she held aloof from the Russian Court, where she once held sway, but it is believed that immediately prior to the Czar's abdication she often sent him unheeded warnings of the coming perils in store for him.

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