

Ruled Destiny!

CHAPTER XVII.
THE PROOF.

Then with a patience of a red Indian, she held the envelope over the steam, until the warmed part had become moist enough to allow her to open the envelope.

With a smile of satisfaction, she drew out the telegram and read it. And as she read it, her face went pale and grave, and her hand shook till the thin paper trembled like a leaf.

"What shall I do?" she murmured. "It is fortunate or unfortunate, as I choose to make it. If I give it to her now it will spoil all; and yet it is hard to keep it," glancing at the scrawl with hard, glittering eyes. "Bah! I will not give it to her until afterward. It will be time enough, ah, yes, it will be time enough!" and carefully re-closing the envelope, she put it back in her pocket.

The morning passed. How, Floris, lying with a heart torn asunder by conflicting emotions, scarcely knew. All seemed still in the great house. Not one of the guests, excepting herself and Lady Blanche had remained at home; a stiffness like that of a calm before some dreadful storm seemed to lie upon the place; and the pitiless sun that streamed through the blinds fell upon her face with a mocking mercilessness.

At last, when she could lie still no longer, she got up and put on a morning dress, and paced the room.

The great clock chimed the hour of two, and as its echo reverberated through the huge place, the door was opened softly, and Josine entered.

She seemed in a state of suppressed excitement, her thin lips set tightly together, her black, beady eyes gleaming like coals.

"Hush!" she whispered, huskily, and putting up a warning finger, for Floris seemed about to cry out. "Do not speak, mademoiselle, but come with me! She has gone downstairs, and he will be here presently."

Josine stole down the stairs, and Floris following her, in the same half-torpid state, found herself in a small hall outside the conservatory.

She recognized it at once as the spot in which she and Lord Norman had discovered Josine hiding. Another coincidence!

Drawing close to her, Josine put her finger to her lips.

"Hush, mademoiselle! Not a word! And remember your promise! Whatever you see you will not betray yourself—or me!"

Floris made a gesture of assent, and Josine, unlocking a door quietly and stealthily, crossed the conservatory, and drawing Floris into a corner, behind the shrubs, pointed to a small room, which led to the conservatory, and was draped at the opening by curtains, partly drawn aside and looped up.

Floris, with the deepest repugnance—which would have been unendurable but that she believed the whole thing

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to be a farce—looked through the opening, and saw Lady Blanche standing beside a small table.

There was a basket of flowers on the table, and Lady Blanche was making a faint pretense of arranging them, but her whole attitude was eloquent of impatience and deep-rooted anxiety.

At the sight of her Floris drew back with a long breath of fear and doubt.

At every step Josine was making good her words, was producing evidence of the truth of her story!

"Is mademoiselle satisfied so far?" she whispered, close in Floris' ear. "Here is Lady Blanche, as I promised she would be, waiting—waiting for whom? We shall see! Hush!"

As she spoke Floris heard a man's footstep approaching the room from the other side.

Her heart gave a great bound of dread and doubt, then seemed to stand still, for the door opened and Lord Norman, as she thought, entered hurriedly and went up to Lady Blanche.

Floris uttered a cry; for a moment she did not move, she simply stood as if turned to stone, and gazed into the dusky room. Then she staggered and would have fallen but Josine caught her with one hand, and with the other, with all a Frenchwoman's ready wit, dashed her handkerchief in a fountain and held it to Floris' forehead.

As he entered, Lady Blanche started and turned toward him.

"Have you come back? Oh, why did you?" she murmured, and her voice was so low and tremulous that Floris could scarcely catch it.

"Yes, I have come back," she heard him say, huskily, as if he were laboring under great excitement. "I said that I would do so. Why are you so surprised to see me? Did you think I should break my word, Blanche?"

"I hoped you would not come," she faltered.

"And you are not glad to see me? Ah, Blanche, you will not fail me! Think of all I am risking for your sake, my good name and fame, my very honor!—Come, Blanche, tell me that you are steadfast!" and he put his hand on her arm pleadingly.

Lady Blanche shrank slightly. Floris noticed it with a vague wonder.

"Blanche! dear Blanche! there is no time to lose!" he went on, still in the husky voice which Floris scarcely recognized as Bruce's. "The horses are waiting, all is arranged! Why are you not ready? You promised me that you would be ready to start!"

"Bruce, I cannot!" she panted, with a sudden gesture of despair. "I cannot do it. You ask too much. Oh, Bruce! think what all this means. Think of the scandal, and—and think of her. Poor girl! my—my heart bleeds for her! No, Bruce, I cannot do it. I love you, and you know it; but you ask too much! You must marry Floris Carlisle, Bruce! It is too late to draw back now!"

"Too late!" he echoed. "It is not too late! You speak only of yourself and her. You do not think of me. Do you forget that you are bidding me ruin my whole life? That you are sending me to marry a girl I do not love, whom I shall learn to hate? Come, Blanche, I cannot endure this life of deceit any longer! There must be an end to it sooner or later, and this is the best end. The world may talk—let it! You and I don't care for the world; and as to Floris, she will soon learn to forget me. Heaven may send her a better man; it might do that easily enough, goodness knows! Come, Blanche, get your things, every thing is ready."

"No, no, no!" she panted. "I will not, I cannot! Go back, Bruce, go back, and rejoin the party; make any excuse you like for your absence! I will not go with you. I cannot! I was wrong and wicked to promise! But, thank Heaven, it is not too late! Go back, Bruce! We—we—shall always be friends. You—you will be happy with her, poor girl!"

"Is this your last word?" he demanded, drawing back and looking at her, his face still turned from Floris.

"Yes, my last, Bruce," faltered Lady Blanche.

He stood for a moment as if pondering on some way to shake her resolution, then suddenly Lady Blanche seized his arm.

"Bruce! There is some one coming! Go, go at once! If the servants see you here—"

With a smothered oath the man who was so like Lord Norman that even Floris could not in the dim light distinguish between them, seized his hat and whip and strode from the room; and Lady Blanche, almost as if she had suddenly grown suspicious of listeners, glided to the curtains and let them fall over the opening.

"The little comedy—or tragedy—was over.

CHAPTER XVII. F A L S E!

WITH slow, weary steps Floris made her way to her room, Josine following her, and sank exhausted upon the bed.

That there had been any foul play she never suspected for a moment. The resemblance between Oscar Raymond and Lord Norman was so close that it had deceived many of Lord Norman's intimate friends in broad daylight, and the room in which the little comedy had been enacted was but dimly lighted.

"Will mademoiselle permit me to get her a glass of wine?" Josine inquired, in a low voice.

Floris shook her head.

"How soon—can I leave?" she asked, painfully.

Josine pricked up her ears, and glanced at the clock.

"There is the afternoon mail," she said. "But will not mademoiselle wait and see Lady Pendleton?"

"No, no!" responded Floris, with a shudder. "I wish to see no one. I wish to go before they return—at once. Will you"—she hesitated; she hated asking this girl to do anything for her, for she loathed her with a loathing that was unaccountable to her—"will you see if I can do so?"

Josine stole out of the room and went swiftly to Lady Blanche's, and with a slight knock she entered.

Lady Blanche was seated at her table with her proud head bowed in her hands.

Hearing Josine's step, she started and rose up, facing her with angry indignation.

"How dare you come here—" she began, then her voice failed and her eyes drooped before the cool, black ones. "Well!" she asked, gloomily.

Josine smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

Floris, left alone, sat for some minutes in the same half-stupefied condition. At present she could scarcely grasp all that had happened; but with every minute it was growing upon her, and she was learning to realize that her lover, the man she had loved—alas! still loved—had adored, had looked up to as something more than human—was false, unutterably false and base, and that he had been guilty of treachery so vile as to be almost inconceivable.

Like a lost soul thrust from paradise, she groped in the darkness of her misery, and could see no ray of light or hope; all her future lay dark, dark before her!

"If I could sit—how," she murmured—"if I had died last night, before I knew of this! But no, I shall not die, I shall live and suffer—suffer! There will be no forgetfulness for me; all my life I shall carry this sorrow with me; all my life will be embittered by the memory of these few short, happy weeks! Oh, Bruce! Bruce! if you had but left me alone—if you had but had mercy on me. But you had none. Heaven knows I avoided you. I did not, as other women had done, set a snare for your love. A hundred times I fought against it; but you had no mercy; you taught me to love you, and now it is too late to unlearn that lesson. Oh, Bruce, may Heaven forgive you!—may Heaven deal more kindly with you than you have dealt with me!"

And with this prayer in her wounded heart, she rose, and in dull, numb fashion, began mechanically to collect her clothes.

A few minutes afterward Josine came in.

"Ah, that is better!" she said, encouragingly. "Mademoiselle must rest—rest—rest!—But mademoiselle must rest—rest—rest!—But mademoiselle must rest—rest—rest!"

And, with noiseless readiness, she began to fill the large imperial.

Floris sank on to the bed and watched her with listless apathy.

"There!" said Josine, with a gesture of satisfaction. "All is ready! And now"—she left the room and returned almost immediately with a glass of wine—mademoiselle must drink this, just to please poor Josine!" she pleaded, as Floris refused it with a shake of the head. "Ah, but yes, mademoiselle must not count too much on her strength! Supposing she should break down and have to be carried back! Ah, but that would be dreadful!"

Floris stretched out her hand for the glass with a shudder.

Josine watched her as she drank the wine and then, and not till then, drew the telegram from her pocket.

"See, mademoiselle!" she said, smoothly. "This has just come; I hope it is not bad news!"

Floris took it apathetically, and opened it, then started up with a wild cry.

"Heavens, mademoiselle! What is it!" exclaimed Josine, with admirably feigned anxiety.

"My mother!" gasped poor Floris. "My mother is ill—dying!—quick! I must go at once!"

Josine held up her hands, with a French oath, and hurried forward with Floris' jacket and hat.

"Tut! tut! but that is bad news! But it may not be that the poor lady is dying. Oh, mademoiselle makes too much of it; she sees the worst!"

"Read!" panted Floris. "It says 'Come at once! Come at once, and I am hundreds of miles away! Oh, Heaven! what shall I do? What shall I do? Quick! or I shall go mad!'"

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Josine, genuinely anxious, for she dreaded lest some one should return, and a scene be the result. "Yes, yes! but for the love of Heaven, be calm, mademoiselle! It may not be so bad; and think, it was impossible for mademoiselle to leave earlier! Ah, but I am so sorry!"

Floris scarcely heard her. With feverish eagerness she hurried on her things, and made straight for the door.

Josine caught up her own cloak and bonnet, which she had brought in with her.

"And Lady Pendleton—the message?"

"Give her this," panted poor Floris, showing the telegram on the table. "Tell her I will write. And almost like one distraught, she made her way into the hall.

The footmen and hall porter stared at her white face, and hurried to the door. Josine smiling, as she followed, to whisper:

(To be Continued.)



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Assembled once again in Conference, we take the opportunity of addressing you in the name of Jesus Christ, through whom we have received grace and answered the tolls and triumphs of our year, we are reviewing his work, his sweet counsel together, the spirit of dependence upon him with a renewed consecration to his service, we are deliberating upon requirements and possibilities of our beloved Church in the days to come.

"We are living, we are dying a grand and awful time in the face of ages telling living is sublime. Oh! let all the soul within you truth's sake go abroad. Strike! let every nerve and tell on arges, tell for God win."

In the task with which God trusted us, we are confident, you are sharing with us the sorrows, the privileges and abilities, the victories and the cause of our Master as we pray you may share with the day of the great awakening commendation of the Lord's blessed children of my Father, the kingdom prepared from the beginning of the world, this end, then, let us live and it is only in so far as we are full we shall succeed in our life work.

Our sessions are being held in the trying times of a great war, in the shadow of the greatest history surrounding us. The arms, the awful carnage with the office of noble methodists, our earth desolate. We deplore with its horrors, suffering and shed, however much we believe cause is just. The present call for spiritual ideals, liberty, peace and truth. Those were the principles for which Britain first called to arms, and in the small nations of the world placed upon an unassailable position, and a lasting peace is for the world."

We rejoice that Methodism responded to the call of the land that gave it birth, and within the bounds of our life has realized the great presence of our Lord, and his loyal and generous response to the call, placing upon the greatest of his sons. Let us remember, sacrifice is too great, if they can aid not only our Empire, but the kingdom of God.

"For doubts that led us to the trust. For ill to conquer; for the fights. For that strong faith that vanes axe and flame. And gave us Freedom for these, Lord We thank thee, Lord."

The call of the Ministerial brought with it feelings of sorrow, regret, all have not been replied. Two of our brethren transferred to other fields.

Rev. P. R. Matthews, B.A., has handled our most important pulpits, the highest honor he could confer upon him, as field of labour in the Montserrat Conference. Rev. H. Scott, after four years of consistent service to some of the most trying of Newfoundland, goes to the New West and Prince Edward Island Conference. Rev. N. M. Guy, after years of faithful and efficient service to the Nova Scotia Conference. We pray that God's blessing, Spirit's guidance, and the joy vest may be theirs in their new service.

Our Honored Dead. During the year, his death has been raised upon our homes in general all who mourn the loss of loved ones we extend our genuine sympathy and prayers. We particularly call that has come to our "brother Christ."

Our beloved Superintendent, Dr. Carman was small, but great in soul, faith, devotion to Christ's cause, and his administration. He was a true administrator, preacher, patriot, Christian, and after sixty years' service he has been translated to his higher service of the Kingdom. Time is too limited to set forth details of his service in such a way as to show the complete range of influence. We can truly say, "He, being dead, yet speaks."

Dr. Carman's association with Methodism can never be obliterated. Rev. J. W. Baggis, a probationer in the Conference, died of wounds received somewhere upon the fields of France. We have lost a young man as Minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He had been chosen, could have been his day for Ordination, but his call of duty and his love for his life upon the altar of sacrifice. He lives with the many who counted not their lives dear.

The loved ones of our two men, we offer the comfort of the Book, the Holy Spirit and the Retic Christ. "He can give us beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the spirit of heaviness."

The Spiritual State. We have made a survey of the work of the year, and have tabulated facts do not represent the toll, consecration and service rendered, in the Kingdom of God, amongst men. Upon the