



Ruled BY Destiny!

CHAPTER XXXII
THE BURDEN OF A SIGH.

Their welcome in Grosvenor place was characteristic of Sir Edward.

"How do you do, Miss Carlisle?" he said, holding her hand and looking at her in his grave way, but with a kindly light in his keen, absorbed eyes. "I am very glad to see you back, and I have missed you very much indeed. Bruce is a lucky fellow to have recovered you, a very lucky fellow indeed," and he took and wrung Lord Norman's hand.

After dinner Sir Edward sat over his wine with Lord Norman for a little while, then he rose.

"Going to the house, I suppose?" said Lord Norman.

"N-o, not to-night, I think," answered Sir Edward.

"Not to-night! Why, I thought you had to speak!"

"Y-es, so I had; but I don't think I will go to-night—that is, if I shant be in the way. I don't know what the papers will say; no doubt they'll imagine I've had a domestic bereavement."

It was a great compliment to Floris, and one she was fond of talking about in after-life, when Sir Edward had become the "great statesman of the day."

They spent a quiet, delightful evening, and when the two ladies had gone to their rooms, Lady Betty held Floris at arm's length.

"Ah, my dear, how happy you look!" she said, her eyes full of sympathy very near to tears.

"Do I? I am glad of that," whispered Floris. "For I am very, very happy, dear. Happier, perhaps, for all that has passed. You see, one wants to know what misery is to be able to appreciate, at its full value, such happiness as mine!"

Not many weeks later Bertie returned to England. At a ball, which was attended by Bruce and his intended bride, the traveler met the bridegroom-elect. Explanations followed which satisfied both parties; and if anything were needed to complete Floris' happiness, it was the reunion which followed.

A flurry of excitement, which was of short duration, was occasioned by some news Bertie brought with him from Genoa. While he was stopping at the "Three Keys" Hotel, on his way home to England, a fellow-countryman committed suicide. The only means of identification was a cigar case on which were the initials O. R. Oscar Raymond was recognized as the unfortunate victim when Lord Norman identified the cigar case as the one which he presented to Raymond when they were at college.

Close upon the heels of this news came the announcement of Lady Blanche's engagement to a Parisian, Count d'Ennon. Bruce knew him; an old man, and a bad one.

He could forgive Oscar Raymond, dead by his own hand; he could forgive Josine, with the unhappy life he knew she must lead; but Lady Blanche he could not entirely and completely forgive!

As soon as could be arranged, the wedding, which made Floris Countess of Norman, was celebrated. It was a quiet ceremony, at least that was how Lady Betty described it, though, as Floris said, if hers was a quiet one she pitied the bride who had to endure a grand one.

The date of the wedding had got about; perhaps Lady Betty whispered it in the strictest confidence to a lady friend or two, and the little chapel in the Savoy was grammed.

All Floris' friends were there, the Lynches and Dr. Greene included; and the great duke who was related to Bruce, at his own request, gave the bride away.

Bertie was best man, and not a few of the young ladies who were present cast pensive glances in his direction; but Bertie seemed to think on this, as on all other occasions, that there was only one woman in the world worth thinking of, and as he could not have her, the rest, as Hamlet says, "was silence."

Floris looked very beautiful; indeed the great society paper declared emphatically that she would be the most lovely bride of the season; and Bruce, who had lost his haggard look, was, as Dr. Greene remarked, "as fit as a man could be."

Their honeymoon was spent in that state of bliss which only two such devoted people as Bruce and his bride, the Countess of Norman, can realize. It was indeed a fitting forecast of the happiness which in every way attended them until the end of their days.

THE END.

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CHAPTER I
A GLOOMY DAY.

Since mamma's death, no steps of any kind have been taken with regard to it; and, but for our present urgent need of money—a need that has been created by a long and dangerous illness from which Len is only just beginning to recover—it is probable we should never have thought of it now.

This illness of Leonard's has proved an almost overwhelming calamity for us, for it is not his work alone that has been at a standstill; Addie's earnings have also failed us. During the time of our anxiety she tried in vain to snatch a little time and thought for her writing, and the result is there are no nice, convenient little checks from editors dropping in upon us, now that we need them so badly; while Len's great picture, on which so many hopes were built, and that was to have been ready for the opening of the Royal Academy, stands untouched on the easel; while he daubs away at things that will bring us in a few pounds on which to live.

Not that we are quite without hope of better days. We are still young and sanguine enough to believe in the splendid possibilities of the future! Of course, Addie is to write a novel some day that will take the world by storm; and Len's great picture, when it is finished, is to be the picture of the year; and if I could only manage to do something great myself, how well we might have got along!

"And how it is that I happen to be the one drone in the hive I can't conceive!" I remark, with a sigh of desperation, in the course of that discussion of affairs financial. "Here's Len working away for fame and fortune with his paint and brushes, and Addie turning bottles of ink and quires of manuscript paper into money; and why Mother Nature ever took the trouble to turn me out of hand at all, since she did not see fit to endow me with a single faculty I can manage

to turn to account, I can't conceive!" "There's gratitude for you!" says Len, taking the poker and tapping the big lumps of coal in the old-fashioned open grate until it sends forth a bright, warm glow, that throws our faces and figures into a sort of Rembrandt-like distinctness against the dim background of unlighted room beyond. "If Mother Nature had only treated all her daughters as liberally as she has treated you, Lesley, what a 'dream of fair women' life would have been! You can lay the flattering unction to your soul that you are uncommonly good to look at, if you are good for nothing else. You are very pretty, my dear!"

"Pretty!" I repeat, turning up my nose in supreme disdain—not that it is at all necessary, for, as Len says, it turns up quite enough of its own accord. "What is the use of being pretty, I should like to know? Will my good looks pay the butcher and baker, or buy me new dresses and bonnets, do you suppose?"

"We can't all be geniuses," says Adelaide. "As one star differeth from another, you know, different people different gifts; and yours is among the best, dear—the gift of making every one love you."

"Oh, of course," I reply with a laugh which, but for a desperate effort of self-restraint, might have ended in a miserable little flood of tears. "We are a wonderful family, take us altogether, comprising, as we do, so much brains and beauty among us!—we paint our own pictures, write our own books, and—"

"Blow our own trumpet; and Lesley is trumpeter in chief!" interrupts Len, with one of his quiet, quizzical smiles. But, for all that, it is a little hard that we should be so terribly pressed for money just now, I think, as for the next few days I go on cooking the dinners, keeping the accounts, and looking rather sharply after the coal and other sundries, to the infinite disgust of our landlady, Mrs. Battles—a genteel creature, low of voice, and cat-like in movement, whose very manner seems to act like an irritant upon my nerves and to arouse what I call the discordant elements of my soul.

CHAPTER II
OFF TO DEEPDENE.

"ADDIE," I cry one morning, bursting rather unceremoniously into the room in which my sister, looking pale and tired, sits busy at work at a manuscript-littered table, "I've got far and away the most splendid idea you ever heard of in all your life!"

"Won't it keep, Lesley?" she asked, with a shade of not unnatural impatience at having her ideas thus summarily put to the rout. "I'm very busy just now, you see."

"No," I reply, feeling that I must talk, or explode; "it is much too good to be kept to myself. It is about Deepdene, Adelaide. Suppose we were all to go down there and spend the summer? What do you say to that for a suggestion? Just think of the advantages to be derived from such a scheme! Len could have the chance of air the doctor says he needs; we should save our rent; you would have peace and quietude for your writing. Len for his painting; while I—oh! well, it is quite impossible to say what I might not do—I might improve the fortunes of the family by captivating a rich Devonshire squire and winning a rich husband, perhaps—who knows!"

"But is it practicable, do you think?" Addie inquires, with a look of growing interest, referring to the first part of my suggestion rather than to the last. "Why not? Deepdene is our own. What is to prevent our living in it if we like?" I ask.

"The rats, the drafts, and the damp, I am afraid!" she laughs; "and then, Lesley, have you forgotten the ghost?"

"A little arsenic and good fires would do a great deal toward mitigating the first two evils," I return. "And as to the ghost—oh!—well, I'm willing to take my chance with him, or her—which ever gender that spectral individual belongs to—who, by the way, has monopolized our property quite long enough, I think."

(To be Continued)

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(To be Continued)

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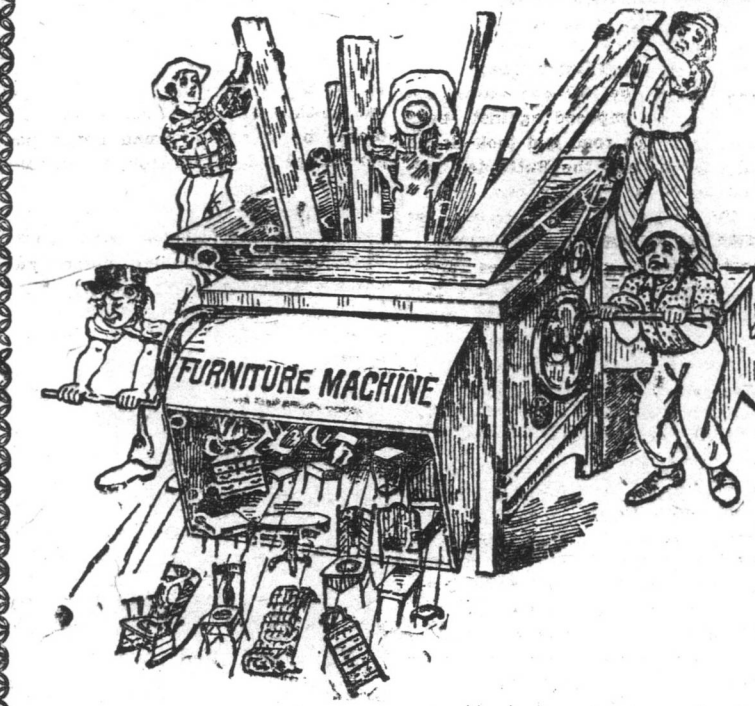
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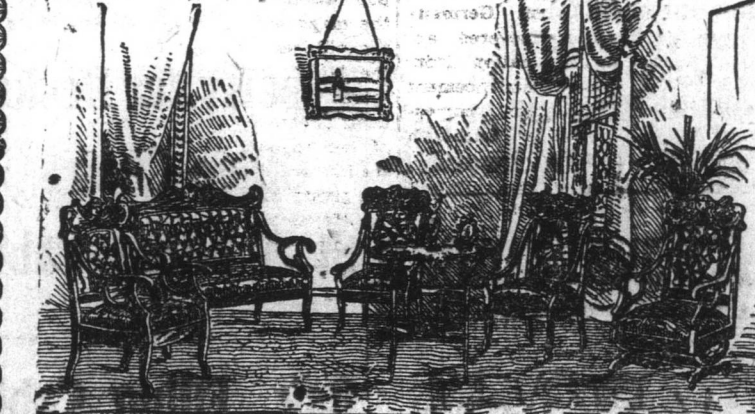
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