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At the Mouth of the Treacherous Pit
STORY OF LOVE, INTRIGUE AND REVENGE

CHAPTER XII

Not a word more did he say. While her head was bent in bitter sorrow he would not remind her of the past. It was to him as though she were in a sanctuary where no profane thoughts must follow her.

During all these long months he had heard continually from Lola. He did not answer each letter; he merely wrote when politeness required it. He never liked to think about the scene that had taken place between himself and Lola; the glances of her rich, dark beauty, the passion in her face and voice, the intense love for him expressed in her whole demeanor had impressed him as was only natural, and he had in some measure been thrown off his guard. Recalling the scene now, her conduct appeared to him bold and unbecoming. He could not but regret also the solemn pledge of friendship that had been almost wrung from him. It had been given originally against his better judgment, and it was against his better judgment now that the friendship continued.

Sir Karl had decided what his plans should be. He would finish his Continental tour; he would not return to England until Lord Rhysworth had been dead at least fifteen months; but when he did go, he would do his best to win the only woman he loved on earth.

It was the fact of Sir Karl's continued absence, almost more than any other, which gave Lola such hope. She knew so little of his character

that she said to herself, if he had really loved Dolores, he would have returned post-haste when he knew that she was free, he would not have allowed a whole year to elapse before he came home. Surely it was a sign that he was not in love with Lady Rhysworth. She determined to make matters clear to Dolores by dropping hints to her that she considered Sir Karl belonged to herself. This she had done frequently, though they were all vague, mysterious hints, unsubstantial as the hopes they rested on. She had gone over to Deeping Hurst on that bright morning because she had received a note from Sir Karl. She had written, asking him, if he returned by way of Genoa, to execute some trifling commission for her; and he had replied, saying that he should take quite another route, but hoped to be back in England in a few weeks. By return of post she wrote to remind him of his promise that he would see her before any one else on his arrival. Sir Karl tore that letter into shreds; if he kept his promise, Lola would not gain any advantage by it.

CHAPTER XIII

Sir Karl had not given the date of his return, nor could Lola guess when it would be. She was watching for it impatiently. At last she thought of an ingenious device. She persuaded one of madame's servants to go over to Scarsdale on some pretext, and while there to ascertain the precise day that Sir Karl was expected

home. It was cleverly managed. Her messenger told her that he was to return on the third of July; and, from the moment Lola heard the news until he stood before her, those words never left her—"The third of July." On that day all her sorrows were to end, and the Paradise on earth for which she had been waiting was to begin.

The third of July had come at last; and, when Lola rose in the morning and opened her window, letting in the balmy air, her heart beat with happiness. Well might the birds sing joyously, well might the green earth look its fairest; he was coming who would make all things bright to her. She resolved, lest she should miss him, not to leave home that day at least. He might come in the morning, at noon, or at night; but let him come when he would, she must be there. She would not for all the treasures on earth miss the first look into his face, the first sound of his voice. She had longed for his presence all these months, and now she was to see him.

In vain, during that lovely, sunlit day, did Madame de Ferras beg that Lola would either drive out or walk out with her; the girl was resolute; she would not have risked missing Sir Karl to have been made a queen. She could not plead headache, for she looked so well and happy. All that she could answer was—

"I am not inclined to go out today, mamma. Will you excuse me?"

"There is no fear," she said to herself; "he could never hesitate between Lady Rhysworth and myself—no man could. Setting aside the fact that I love him, and that my great love must win some return, he could never prefer her to me."

Madame de Ferras guessed a little of the truth when she saw her daughter's face suddenly grow deathly pale. It was at the sound of car-

riage-wheels, followed by a loud peal at the hall bell.

"Who can that be?" cried madame. Lola had said something in a vague way about Sir Karl's return, but had not told her the date.

"Surely," said madame. "It cannot be Sir Karl!"

One glance at Lola was a revelation to her. Now she could see why her daughter had refused one lover after another, why, in the very springtime of her loveliness, she had cared apparently for no one; it was all because she loved Sir Karl. Madame felt a thrill of terror. What if Sir Karl did not return that day? Before she had time to say more, before she had recovered from her surprise, or Lola from her emotion, the young baronet was announced. He came in, looking handsomer than ever. The warm suns of France and Italy had bronzed his face, and he was altogether greatly improved. Madame de Ferras, as she looked at him, owned that it was no wonder her daughter was infatuated with him but Sir Karl and madame herself were both startled when Lola went forward to greet him. They had never seen anything like her face then, and probably never would again—the mingled pleasure and pain, the happiness, the expectation, the fear.

She could not speak to him; but she went forward with outstretched hands. Madame watched the whole scene with tremulous anxiety. She saw that her daughter loved Sir Karl, but she was by no means so sure of the state of his feelings. She saw nothing but simple pleasure in his face—there was no light of love in the frank blue eyes.

"I am very pleased," he said, "to see you once more, madame, and you, Miss de Ferras."

There was no rapture in his voice or manner. He looked, as he said, pleased, and nothing more.

Little by little the color came to Lola's face again and words to her lips.

"I cannot tell you how pleased I am to see you, Sir Karl," she replied. "You must stay for dinner—it will be ready in ten minutes."

"Yes, do, Sir Karl," said madame. "It will be like old times to have you with us again."

But he had intended to go over to Deeping Hurst that night, and he hesitated. It was still broad daylight yet, if he remained here he would not have time to go.

Lola looked at him imploringly.

"Surely," she said, "you could never think of leaving us to-night; it would be too unkind."

"I did not come prepared to stay," he answered, still half hesitatingly. "I have been travelling all night and all day, and my dress is unsuited for ladies' company."

"We will excuse all that," returned Lola, quickly. "There is no need even to mention it. Let me ring and order your horses to be taken to the stables. You will not refuse me, I am sure."

"It is very kind of you, but—"

"But me no buts!" laughed Lola. "Now you must consent. I have heard you say that a line from Shakespeare would reconcile you to anything."

He laughed, and with the laugh yielded. It was pleasant to be welcomed so warmly by those two graceful women, to be made to feel that he had brought brightness and happiness with him, to know that their delight at seeing him was perfectly genuine. It was more, like coming home than going to Scarsdale would be; so he yielded to the temptation of the impulse, and remained.

Madame, noting her daughter's delight, felt her heart sink. She could see that Sir Karl did not care for her except as a friend; and it dawned upon her that an unfortunate love affair would be the one thing in this world which would be most harmful to Lola.

They had a pleasant dinner. Madame ordered some of her choicest wines to be brought; the viands were recherche, the fruit was delicious. Afterward all three repaired to the drawing-room. The long windows opened on to the lawn, the turf of which was smooth as velvet. The room itself was filled with the perfume of odoriferous flowers and sweet with the breath of the summer wind.

(To be continued.)

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Sec. Council of Higher Education.
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