

Ruled Destiny!

CHAPTER V.
A HARD PUNISHMENT.

It was the box ticket, which, after the manner of forgetful men, he had placed in this conspicuous position. She bent forward and looked at it, then came back to him.

"Are you going to the Crown-brilliant, to-night, Bruce?"
"No," he replied. "I am tired of the Crown-brilliant. They always have twice as many as the rooms will hold; last time I was nearly suffocated."
"Come and dine and spend the evening with us, then," she said.
"I can't, Blanche, to-night; I have an engagement."
"I am sorry," she said, sweetly.
"The horse, my lady," announced the servant.

Lord Norman went for his hat; but Lady Blanche begged him to wait a moment.

"I have forgotten a note I want to write," she said, and in her slow, graceful manner she sat down and wrote a line or two, declining the Crown-brilliant, and on half a sheet of paper scribbled, "Get a box at the opera for to-night."

"I am quite ready now," she said, and as they passed out she handed the note and the paper to the footman.

The park was full as they entered the ring, and hats flew off the men lounging over the rails as the two passed.

They walked and cantered round the ring of tan for an hour, she bowing to the endless string of friends and acquaintances, he noticing no one, then, with a sign, she said:

"You must not stay any longer, Bruce! You want to go to your club for lunch! It is very good of you to have come with me; I know how you hate this kind of thing!" He started slightly.

"Nonsense!" he said, but all the same he turned his horse at once.

As they rode down Eaton place, a man, who had been lounging at the corner smoking a cigar, looked up and stared at them, then, as they came abreast of him, he put up his hand as if to arrange his hat more comfortably, and, in doing so, completely hid his face.

Neither of them saw him, and if Lord Norman had done so, he would not have recognized Oscar Raymond.

It was Floris' first experience of theatre going, and her heart beat fast with curiosity and excitement; but amid it all she could not help noticing the calm, masterful way which Lord Norman escorted them through the crowded entrance in the foyer.

Two attendants ushered them into their box, the overture was just beginning, and dazzled and excited, Floris leaned forward and gazed fixedly at the stage. As she did so a score of opera glasses were leveled at the box, and Lady Betty smiled significantly at Lord Norman.

"I told you so," she whispered.

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leaving back to him. "I knew she would create a sensation! She is the most beautiful girl here, Bruce!"

He frowned, and, as if by accident, drew the outer curtain so that it screened Floris. The opera commenced, and all Floris' eyes and soul were concentrated on the stage.

The sad, miserable story of human frailty and human suffering developed itself, and amid the most intense silence, Nellison sang her great song. As she had finished, a tremendous uproar of applause arose, and Floris, moved beyond herself, raised her bouquet and threw it, with a passionate gesture, at Nellison's feet. It was done on the impulse of the moment; the next she looked round almost with affright, but Lord Norman bent over her with a smile.

"That was nicely done," he said. "See! she is smiling up at you!"
Floris bent over the box and met the great prima donna's smile, and her heart seemed to stand still. Then a huge wave of remorse swept over her, she had thrown away the flowers he had given her.

Almost as if he read the thought he said:
"You could not have applied them to a better use, Miss Carlisle. Besides, they were your own to do as you wished with."

The curtain drew up on the last act, and Floris was bending forward to catch the first notes of the music when, suddenly, some persons entered the box exactly opposite their own. She would not have noticed the fact, but at the moment she saw Lady Betty lean back and catch at Lord Norman's arm, and heard her whisper gently in a startled voice:

"Bruce! Look! There is Blanche!"
Then Floris turned her eyes from the stage to the opposite box, and saw a beautiful face with dark brown velvety eyes fixed, with almost fierce, scornful scrutiny, upon her.

CHAPTER VI.
BEWITCHED.
RIGHT across the magnificent opera-house the two women looked at each other.

The expression of the fierce jealousy which had flamed forth from Lady Blanche's eyes passed and vanished in a moment, and nothing but

a calm, indolent, almost indifferent gaze met Floris' one of frank admiration.

Lord Norman stood behind her chair, calm, impassive, apparently deaf and blind to all around him, with that sang froid which his admirers declared was unique and inimitable. He had seen the flash of jealousy dart across the theater, had seen the hot flush on Floris' face, but for any sign of recognition, he might have been indeed blind. Lady Pendleton, however, looked uneasy at his immovability, and began to fidget and cast glances at the opposite box. Presently she turned her head.

"Hadt' you better go across, Bruce?"

"Presently," he answered, and presently the great scene arrived.

Nellison was in beautiful voice that night and Marguerite's sweet, plaintive, soul-stirring death song rose and filled the house with its wonderful pathetic sweetness.

Gradually, Floris' face grew pale, her lips quivered, the tears gathered in her eyes and trickled slowly, like great diamonds down her cheeks.

Never had she looked more lovely, more heart-moving; and as the bias man of the world watched her, he felt an awful longing to take her in his arms, to bend and kiss the tears from the starlike face; as if his own face went pale under the spell she was, all unconsciously, weaving round him, and the hand resting on the back of the chair, touching her dress, trembled. He could not resist the longing to speak to her, and bent over her, murmuring:

"No, no! Do not! It is not even worth that!"

Without moving her head, Floris turned her eyes toward him, with a half shame-faced smile, and wiped her eyes.

"I am glad, and yet so sorry—so sorry it is over," she murmured, as the curtain fell. "Who could help crying?" And she laughed tremulously.

"You see we have all of us seen it so many times," said Lord Norman in his low voice, which seemed meant to reach her ears alone; "and we get hardened. But I am glad you are enjoying it."

"Enjoying it! I have never been so happy in my life!" exclaimed Floris. A light shone in her eyes for a moment.

"You make me very happy," he said, in a low voice.
Instantly her manner changed, and the old, proud look came into her eyes.

"Are you not going now?" she said, turning to Lady Pendleton.
"Oh, there's a ballet, isn't there, Bruce?" asked Lady Betty. "Please let us stay for the ballet. One always goes home so very miserable after 'Faust' without the ballet."
"By all means," he said; then he got his opera hat, and left the box without a word; and Floris felt that she had wounded him by her cold repulse.

Lady Pendleton shrugged her shoulders.
"At last!" she exclaimed, confidentially. "I thought he was never going. I assure you, my year, I have been most uncomfortable. He ought to have got up and gone round directly she came in."

"Lady Blanche Seymour, do you mean?" asked Floris, indifferently.
"Of course. How well she is looking to-night," said Lady Betty, putting up her opera glasses. "She has got on one of Worth's latest. Certainly I will say that Blanche knows how to dress. I don't know any one who wears diamonds so well. Did you see her look across at us as she came in, my dear?"

"Yes, I saw her look across—yes," Lady Betty laughed with a little malicious enjoyment.

"Blanche and I don't get on very well together, you know. I fancy she thinks I take up too much of Bruce's time. Ridiculous, isn't it? I cannot help his being nice and attentive, can I? I don't think she liked seeing him here with me; she considers that she has the monopoly in poor Bruce. Look! There he is. How handsome he is! Really I don't think there is another man in the house with such a figure and—style, to say nothing of his face."

Floris looked across and saw Lord Bruce standing beside Lady Blanche's chair. He was talking, but not bending over her as he had bent over Floris; and Lady Blanche was speaking to him with her face turned almost completely away.

The orchestra began the overture to the ballet.

"I wonder whether he means to remain there for the rest of the evening!" said Lady Betty, with the pettishness of a spoiled child. "I suppose he will deign to come and see us home?"

The curtain drew up, and Floris turned to the stage and gazed at the magnificent scene spellbound. So enrapt was she that she did not hear the box door open, and it was not until she felt his hand upon her chair that she knew Lord Norman had returned.

"Well!" he said, and if he had been offended he had regained his temper, "not so good as 'Faust'?"

"No, but it is very beautiful! More beautiful than I dreamed it could be!" said Floris. "They seem to float on air; how they must enjoy it!"

"Was she very angry, Bruce?" Floris heard Lady Betty whisper.

"Blanche, do you mean?" he asked, coldly, as if reluctant to answer.

"Yes, of course. I know she was angry, because she smiled at me so sweetly, while you were going round, and avoided us so completely when you got there."

"You have wonderful intuition, Betty," he said, calmly, and turned to Floris instantly.

"Can you make the story out?" he said. "They are dancing an opera, instead of singing it, you know."

"I think I can," said Floris, "but I am not sure."

He drew a chair near to her, and leaning forward, explained the action of the ballet with a patience and earnestness which would have astonished many who knew him, his eyes fixed on her face with grave intentness the while. As he was speaking, there came a knock at the door, and a voice said:

"May I come in, Lady Pendleton?"
Lady Betty started, and uttered a birdlike cry of delight and surprise.
"Why, it is Bertie! Is it you, Bertie?"

"Golly, my lady!" answered the voice, so pleasant and merry a one that Floris turned her head.
"Bruce, open the door!"—exclaimed Lady Betty. "It is Bertie Clifford!"

Lord Norman got up and opened the door, and a young man, a very young man, entered. He was tall and graceful, with fair hair that clustered in curls on his brow; a soft fringe of gold above his upper lip promised a mustache; his eyes were blue, and full of life and joyousness; and his lips were curved in a smile which almost made Floris smile to look at them.

"Why, Bertie, where have you sprung from?" demanded Lady Betty, laughing.
"From Canada," he replied. "Been out there for the big game, you know. How well you are looking! I am so glad to see you! How lucky I dropped in to-night. And Bruce too!" and he released Lady Pendleton's hand at last and took Lord Norman's.

(To be Continued.)

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Should Parsons Fight?

A Noted Free Church Minister Answers The Question.

(By THE REV. B. MEYER, B.A., D.D.)

This question has been propounded for my consideration:—
Suppose a minister and a layman were walking together along a lonely road and were suddenly attacked by footpads, what would be the duty of the minister? Would it not be right for him to say to his companion: "This is not my business; it is not in your sphere to do the fighting, not mine?"

That is the question, and, not for myself alone, but for everyone with an ounce of manhood, I should say that whilst it would be quite within the province of the minister to parley, to remonstrate, to show the wrongness and evil of the robbers' act, if they still persisted, it would surely be his duty, if possible, to arrest them in their wrong-doing, and secure them for the constable, the magistrate, and the court.

Their evil career, if pursued, would bring a world of misery and suffering in its train to weak and hapless persons, and when the law is not there to take its own measures it is the duty of every good and honest man, minister of religion or not, to interfere in the interests of the well-being of the community and bring the wrong-doers to justice. Of course, he would incidentally preserve his own property, but that would be less of a consideration than the welfare of others and the right ordering of society.

The Fight For Right.

If, in the company of the minister and his lay friend, there happened to be a woman and child, whom the footpads roughly handled despite of sex and tender years, the call would be all the more urgent; and if the clerical attire and stock impeded his action, our ministerial friend would not hesitate to put them off, rather than give the marauders the slightest chance of succeeding in their designs of robbery and outrage.

This illustration certainly throws light on the present situation. Hundreds of ministers of religion would be glad to serve at the front without a word of remonstrance or complaint, and their churches would be proud to maintain their families in the meanwhile.

It is realized that this war is not for revenge, or even personal rights, but for the sake of the ordered constitution of the world, the rights of the defenceless and weak, and the safeguarding of woman's virtue and childhood's innocence.

Would not a minister of religion be absolutely unworthy of his position as a teacher and leader of men who should stand quietly whilst the German or Turk treated his wife and girls as they have been treated in Flanders and Armenia? And if he must withstand the brutal violence, to which our enemies have accustomed us, on his own doorstep, is it not right to withstand it before the menace reaches it?

Is it not better to fight in France (Heaven help her!) than in Britain, if we have the choice?

There are thousands of clergymen and ministers in our country who are feeling their anomalous position very keenly, and who would welcome compulsion in order that all difficulties with church authorities might be brushed aside. According to my thinking, the number of Conscientious Objectors among the clergy and the ministers of the Free Churches would not be in greater proportion than among the laity.

After all, the minister is a citizen of two kingdoms, the Kingdom of Christ and the Kingdom of King George. Even if the call were one purely of patriotism, I should still hold that his warrant was sufficient. Many

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