

FORTUNE FAVORS THE BRAVE; OR, A LOOK INTO THE PAST

CHAPTER VII.—(Cont'd)

Derrick muttered something not complimentary to the newcomer, but the next instant he was exchanging a warm handclasp with Sir Humphrey; while Nancy, scarcely knowing what she said, hurried away to coax some red roses from Mr. Murdock, the autocratic head gardener of Ripstone Hall.

"Well, Derry, my boy, and so your mother is coming down today? God bless me, what years since I have seen Anne! We must make her as comfortable as we can, you know, but I am afraid she will find it very quiet."

"Don't you worry about her, Uncle Humphrey; rest assured my mother will have the best of everything, wherever she may be."

Darnley spoke dryly, though not unaffectedly; but had Sir Humphrey been more observant, he must have noticed that there was an air of suppressed excitement about his nephew, and that Mr. Darnley's gray eyes were fixed persistently in one direction.

"What are you going to do—meet your mother? Oh! well, I suppose I ought to go too. Yes—yes, my boy, I must treat Anne with all due respect, so we had better be off at once; not that way, this is the nearest to the stables."

But Derrick Darnley, muttering something about returning is a moment, rushed down a side path after that slender, blue-robed figure, leaving Sir Humphrey a little amazed, but not at all enlightened.

A few strides brought the young man up to Nancy's side; he had no chance of speaking to her privately, for just in front of them stood the mighty Mr. Murdock himself. His back was, fortunately, turned to them, however, and, by a clever movement, Darnley got that red umbrella at a convenient angle.

"Nancy," he said, in eager haste, "I must speak to you when I come back—I must, my darling! I—I cannot wait any longer! Oh! you understand me, my dearest, do you not? Yes, I read it in your eyes—those exquisite, maddening eyes! I love you—I love you, Nancy, my own, my darling one!"—and, as the soft, eager words died away, he stooped and touched her half-parted lips. "Meet me by the lower lake this afternoon about seven. You can slip away from the crowd easily," he murmured, in low, tender tones. "My love—my darling you will not fail me!"

Once again his lips pressed hers, and then, before she realized that it was no heavenly dream, he had disappeared, and Mr. Murdock was at her elbow with the roses she required.

It had been a freak of Dorothy's that she and Nancy should be dressed exactly alike at the tennis tournament; and, despite our heroine's expostulations and gentle resistance, this desire was carried out.

The dresses chosen were both of Parisian make, being a delicate shade of pink silk, draped with the finest lawn, and trimmed with Valenciennes lace; a large shady hat, with a bunch of the most natural-looking pink roses, was sent to be worn with each of these dresses, and the two girls also carried the most exquisite pink sunshades. The effect was indescribably charming, both to Dorothy's golden hair and fair loveliness, and Nancy's russet locks and cream-white skin.

"Yes, it is very beautiful, dear, and I must confess I look nice," Nancy said, as Dorothy led her to the long mirror in triumph; and showed her her own reflection; "but I don't feel happy in it. I am not you, dear, nor am I your sister. I have no right to this splendor. After all, I am only a bird in borrowed plumes, and some—"

But here Dorothy Leicester placed her hand over her rebellious lips, and then silenced them with a kiss.

"You dare to talk like that, Nancy! You dare! My sister!—my dear, darling sister! I mean to let all the world know you as you really are." She kissed the trembling lips again. "You love me, Nancy?" she asked.

"Love you!" repeated Nancy, with deepest emotion. "Oh, my

dearest! how can you ask me such a question? Love you? There is nothing on this earth I would not do for you, Dorothy!"

"Then you will oblige me by refraining from talking in the future as you have talked this morning. There"—with another kiss—"now we will never mention the subject again. Look at ourselves, Nancy. Don't we look too sweet for words?"

"There will be no one to compare with you, dear," Nancy said, softly.

"Except you; and I am not jealous of you."

Dorothy slipped her hand from Nancy's arm, and went to the window.

"There go Aunt Anne and Derry. I wonder if he will like these dresses, Nancy? He is a great authority on dress, you know."

There was a pretty tinge of pink on Dorothy's cheeks, but Nancy had grown rosy red.

She only dimly heard Dorothy talking; her mind was back in the rose garden. She saw those two dark-gray eyes, drawing, as it were, her very soul through her own blue ones. She felt only the indescribable enthrallment of his presence, his touch on her lips. All else was forgotten—buried in this blissful ecstasy.

Dorothy's pathetic eagerness to please her cousin was completely lost. She knew nothing, saw nothing, heard nothing, but Derry—Derry's love, his passionate, tender voice, murmuring his words of love in her ear.

"There, now we are ready. Come along, Nancy; we must go down. I have to introduce you to Aunt Anne and everybody. I wanted you to meet her this morning, but I could not find you. What did you do with yourself, pray, mademoiselle?"

"I went into the village. I wanted to see Mrs. Wortley."

Nancy's voice was low and hurried; it sounded strange in her own ears.

"Naughty girl! If I had only known it, what a scolding you would have had! No wonder I thought you looking pale just now."

"Oh, Dolly!"

And Nancy belied that accusation by blushing deeply again.

And then she followed Dorothy downstairs, and out on the lawn.

"And who are these, pray?" inquired Mrs. Darnley of her son, as she beheld the two dainty forms approaching.

"Don't you recognize Dorothy?"

"Ah! so it is; but the other?"

Mrs. Darnley put up her gold eyeglasses and surveyed Nancy through them carefully. "Surely, that is not Gladys Leicester's girl, Derrick?"

"That is Miss Hamilton."

Derry said it very hurriedly, but his voice would thrill.

"Miss Hamilton!" Mrs. Darnley dropped her glass. "My dear Derrick, what a lamentable thing! I quite agree with Lady Merefield, Humphrey should be confined in a lunatic asylum. Did any one ever hear of such utter madness? And to carry it to this pitch! An unknown girl, coming from the gutter, to be decked out identically with Dorothy, as if she were, in very truth, her sister! Oh, I must speak to Humphrey without delay!"

"Do you think it womanly, or just, mother, to condemn an innocent girl in this harsh and unmerciful way?"

Mrs. Darnley looked at her son's face with its drawn brows and hot flush of anger.

"Humphrey is not the only madman, apparently," she observed, coldly, and with that she sailed majestically away, just as Dorothy and Nancy were approaching her.

"Where is Aunt Anne going?"

"I want to introduce Nancy to her," Dorothy said, as they reached Mr. Darnley's side.

"She has forgotten to greet Lady Merefield," he answered, quickly, feeling a desperate longing to crush Nancy in his arms, and so defy his mother and all the world.

Dorothy frowned slightly.

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"Well, there is plenty of time, Nancy," she observed. "Aunt Anne is going to stay here some time, so papa tells me."

There was not an excess of pleasure about Miss Leicester as she remarked this, a fact which Darnley noticed at once.

Nancy, fortunately, saw nothing wrong. She was so enveloped in the wonderful, the delicious sensations that had lingered with her ever since the early morning, and now deepened as she stood in her lover's presence again, that her usually keen perception was dull to the fact that Mrs. Darnley had moved away purposely to avoid her, and treated her with a want of courtesy that was making Derry's blood boil; but as Nancy did not dare lift her eyes to his face, his contracted brow and vexed look were lost on her.

"Nancy, we must separate," Dorothy said, as carriage load after carriage load drove up to the entrance and deposited groups of delicately attired ladies on the lawn.

"I must stay here. Will you go to the tents? Papa will present you to every one you do not know already. Darnley, you will stay with me, won't you?"

Mr. Darnley had made half a movement to accompany Nancy, but he was obliged to stop at his cousin's request.

"Here comes Merefield, fully prepared to follow you about like a dog all the day," he said, languidly, his eyes dwelling on the vanishing form that was dearer to him than his life. "You must be kind to him to-day, Dolly."

"I am always kind to him," Dolly retorted; "but he is such a bore."

"Few women consider it a bore to be loved."

"It depends on who loves them," Dorothy replied, softly, a tiny blush coming to her cheeks; then, very hurriedly, just as she went to meet her guests, "Derry, Aunt Anne means to be nasty about Nancy, and I won't stand it. I give you fair warning that I shall be very disagreeable if she is rude to Nancy—she is very dear to me."

"And if she is dear to Dorothy, what is she to me?" communed Darnley with himself, as he stood for an instant alone. "My darling! there seems some marvellous fascination about her—she seems to have bewitched me. I feel as though I could fold her in my arms now and carry her away from everybody. There is nothing I would not do for her; she will find me her knight as well as her lover. If any one dare to insult her, they must answer to me—even if it be my own mother."

His eyes went to that mother's form as she stood haughty, regally tall and handsome; he knew that if Anne Darnley loved any one on earth she loved him; that if any human creature could strike a spark of womanly feeling and warmth from the cold, proud, worldly heart, he alone was that person; yet his own heart failed him. He thought of Nancy, and re-

called his mother's hard, angry face as she discussed what she was pleased to term Sir Humphrey's madness about this girl.

"There will be a fight," he said to himself, with half a sigh—"there must be a fight; but I shall conquer. And what if I do not? Why need I care? I have my darling—her love is all I ask; for with her by my side I can face the world, poverty, hard work, I care not what!"

And then he roused himself to go among the chattering, laughing girls, all eager for the tennis affray, and paid his court to the dowagers with all his usual grace of manner.

The Misses Chester were in exuberant spirits, rushing about, clad in scanty white flannel garments, with extraordinary caps on their heads, and useful, though by no means ornamental, shoes on their large feet.

Lady Burton surveyed her progeny with much maternal pride.

"How devoted Lord Merefield is to my dear Ella! Do you observe them?" she remarked to Mrs. Darnley, totally blind to the fact that poor Lord Merefield was being towed about—there is no other word for it—by the energetic Ella, his face looking as sullen and cloudy as the proverbial thunderstorm.

Mrs. Darnley smiled with a scarcely concealed sneer.

"It is a pity," she said, laconically, "that Merefield has nothing with which to support his proud old title. His father might have left him at least a pretence of an income; as it is, he must marry money!"

But Lady Burton was impervious to the broad hint—money or no, he possessed a coronet, and that was

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everything to her. "I suppose we shall see dear Mr. Crawshaw here," she remarked next, sweeping the fast-swelling through with her eyeglasses in search of the millionaire. Mrs. Darnley frowned. "Surely they do not admit the man here on such terms of intimacy!" she protested. (To be continued.)

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