

A Foolish Young Man;

Or, the Belle of the Season.

CHAPTER IX.—(Continued).

"Are we safe?" she asked faintly. "How did we stop? Who—?" She paused abruptly, and both she and Stafford stared at the two men who were standing confronting each other. Sir Stephen was as white as a ghost, and there was a look of absolute terror in his dark eyes. On the face of the other man was an enigmatical smile, which was more bitter than a sneer. "You are all right?" said Stafford; "but I am afraid you were very much frightened." The girl turned to him. "You!" she said, recognizing him. "Did you stop them?" "Yes, it was easy; they had had almost enough," he said. While they were speaking, the two elder men drew apart as if instinctively. "You, Falconer," murmured Sir Stephen, with ashy lips. "Yes," assented the other, drily; "yes, I am here right enough. Which is it to be—friend or foe?" Sir Stephen stood gnawing his lip for a moment, then he turned to Stafford. "Stafford, this—most extraordinary—this is an old friend of mine, Falconer; this is my boy, my son Stafford!"

CHAPTER X.

"A very old friend of your father!" said Mr. Falconer, and his keen eyes looked into Stafford's as he put out his hand. Then he turned to Sir Stephen, whose face had resumed its usual serenity, and was fixed in the smile appropriate to the occasion. Mr. Stafford Orme and I have met before on many occasions. Mr. Stafford Orme is a very old friend of mine, Falconer; this is my boy, my son Stafford!"

At the inn at the other side of the Lake. My daughter, Maude, and I have been resting there for a few hours. Maude," he said to that young lady, who was standing looking on at the group generally, but more particularly under her lids, at Stafford; "this is a very strange meeting between old friends. Sir Stephen Orme and I haven't met for—how long ago is it, Orme?" Sir Stephen shook his head, and raised his thick, dark brows. "Too long for us to go back—especially in the presence of these young people, whom we are always trying to persuade that we are not old. I am delighted to see you, my dear young lady, and I am devoured by curiosity to know how it is that you are here." "Well, we owe it to your son, Mr. Orme here, I should imagine, Sir Stephen," she replied. She had fully recovered her self-possession, and her manner and voice had all the tone of pride and indolence which Stafford had noticed when he met her at the inn. "If he had not stopped the horses, I suppose we should have either been killed or on the way to the nearest hospital. By the way, have you thanked Mr. Orme yet, father?" "Not yet; and I shall find it difficult to do so," said Mr. Falconer. "Mr. Orme is poor return for one's life, Mr. Orme. I hope you were not hurt." He glanced at Stafford's dress-clothes, which were covered with dust on one side, and played a rent in the sleeve of the coat. "Oh, that's all right, sir," returned Stafford, with all an Englishman's dread of a fuss. "They stopped short the moment I got hold of them, and I only slipped and got up directly." "You are not hurt, then, Stafford?" said Sir Stephen. "As I came up I thought I was afraid, that you were smashed up—and I daresay I showed my fear; it's my only boy, Falconer." He looked at his old friend meaningly, and Falconer promptly backed him up. "Well, yes, you looked fairly startled and scared," he said. "But now, if the horses are all right, we may as well get on. We have given you quite trouble enough." "The horses are all right, sir," said the driver. "I've managed to take up the broken trace; it was that that startled them, sir, and they'll be quiet enough now." "Oh, but where are you going?" said Sir Stephen, with hospitable eagerness. "Were you not coming to us at the Villa?" "No, we were going to Keswick," said Mr. Falconer. "My daughter had a fancy for seeing the Lake district, and we are making a kind of tour." "You have no other engagement? I am delighted to hear it," said Sir Stephen. "Oh, I'll take no denial! What do you think I shall part with an old friend so quickly—and after such a—er—sudden and unexpected meeting! Miss Falconer, let me beg you to plead with your father for me!" Mr. Falconer regarded Sir Stephen for a moment curiously, then looked towards his daughter. Her fine eyes rested on Stafford's face, and he could do not less than repeat his father's invitation. "I hope you'll consent, Miss Falconer," he said. "You have no doubt been a little upset by the accident and it is rather late to go on. Pray stay with us!" "Thanks I shall be delighted," she said, with her indolent regal air. By this time, as they went towards the gate, some of the men who had been walking in the garden came up, and Howard's was called out. "Hallo, Stafford! Anything the matter?" "No; nothing whatever," said Stafford promptly; and Sir Stephen seized the opportunity to steer the Falconers through the group. "Some old friends of mine, Mr. Howard; their carriage broke down—fortunately at our very door—this way, Falconer. Stafford, will you give Miss Maude your arm?" "Strange, our meeting again so soon, and under such circumstances," she said. "You must have stopped those horses very luckily. I thought that kind of thing was out of date now and that gentlemen only called the police on such occasions. You are sure you are not hurt? I thought from your father's face you must be. He must be very fond of you to look so scared. He was as white as a ghost." "He is very fond of me, I hope and think," said Stafford. "Candidly, I did not think he would be so alarmed—but I don't know him very well yet—we have been living apart until just recently." "Why, that is my case," she said. "My father and I were strangers until the other day, when he came from abroad—What a beautiful house! It is like a miniature palace. She looked at the Villa and then at Stafford with renewed interest. "I suppose your father is the Sir Stephen Orme of whom one has heard so much? I did not think of it until this moment." Stafford was giving instructions that the Falconers' carriage should be seen to, and was so spared a reply. She stood in the hall looking round with a kind of indolent admiration and surprise, and self-possessed, though the hall was rapidly filling with men from the garden. "You would like to go to your rooms at once," said Sir Stephen, in his serene and courtly voice. "If you should be too tired to come down again to-night I will have some dinner sent up to you—but I hope you

won't be. It would be a great disappointment." "Oh, I am not at all tired," said Miss Falconer, as she followed the housekeeper and the two demure maids up the exquisite staircase. Sir Stephen looked after them with a bland smile, then he turned to Stafford and caught his arm. "Not hurt, my boy?" he said, in a tone of strained anxiety. Stafford was beginning to get tired of the question, and answered rather impatiently. "Not in the least, sir—why should I be? I'll change my things and be down in five minutes!" "Yes, yes!" Sir Stephen still eyed him with barely concealed anxiety. "Strange coincidence, Stafford! I—I haven't seen Ralph Falconer for—four—ever so many years! And he is thrown at my very gate! And they say there is no such thing as Fate!" "Haven't you better go into the drawing-room, sir?" Stafford reminded him. "They'll think something has happened."

"Eh? Yes, yes, of course!" said Sir Stephen, with a little start as if he had been lost in thought; but he waited until he saw Stafford walk up the stairs, without any sign of a limp, before he followed his son's advice. The butler, who was too sharp to need any instructions, quickly served a choice little dinner for the unexpected guests, and Stafford, who had waited in the hall, accompanied them into the dining-hall. Miss Falconer had changed her travelling-dress for a rich evening frock, and the jewels Stafford had noticed were supplemented by some remarkably fine diamonds in time for dinner. "I wish you had come in time for dinner," he said, as he conducted her to her seat. "So do I!" she returned, serenely. "We are giving a great deal of trouble, and we are keeping you from your guests. The maid who waited on me told me that you had a large house party."

"Yes," said Stafford. "It is a kind of house-warming. My father intends settling in England for some time. I settling in England for some time, I think," he added. "And he has built this place." Mr. Falconer looked up from his plate in his alert, watchful way. "Sir Stephen's plans rather uncertain?" he said. "I remember he always used to be rather erratic. Well, it means settling, he's made himself a very cosy nest, he's made himself a magnificent room with a curious smile. "A wonderful man, your father, Mr. Orme!" "Yes?" said Stafford, with a non-committal smile. "Yes, of course, I've heard of his great doings—who hasn't! Did you ever hear him speak of me—we were great friends once?" "No, I don't think I have," replied Stafford. "But as I was telling Miss Falconer, I have not seen very much of him."

"Ah, yes, just so," assented Mr. Falconer, and he went on with his dinner. Stafford had taken a seat at the table and poured out a glass of wine so that they might not hurry; but he felt that he need not have been anxious on that account, for the girl ate her dinner in a most leisurely manner, talking to him in her soft, slow voice, and looking at him from under her half-closed lids. She talked of the scenery, of the quaint inns and hotels they had put up at, of the various inconveniences which she had suffered on the way; then suddenly she raised her lids and looked at him fully and steadily. "I suppose the young lady we saw you with this morning is your sister?" "With all his natural simplicity, Stafford was a man of the world, and he did not redden or look embarrassed by the suddenness of the question and the direct gaze of the luminous eyes. "No," he said. "Neither sister nor brother—only my father. She was a friend."

"Oh, she said. Then after a pause: "She was very pretty." Stafford nodded. Like a flash floated before him the exquisite loveliness of Ida Heron. "Do you think so?" he said, with affected indifference. "Why, yes; don't you?" she retorted. "Oh, yes," he assented; "but I didn't know whether you would; men and women so very seldom agree upon the question of looks. I find that most of the women I think are pretty are contented next door to plain by my lady friends."

"Well, there can't be any doubt as to your friend's good looks," she said. "She made rather a striking, not to say startling, figure perched away on that horse, in the pelting rain. I suppose she is one of your neighbors?" "Yes," replied Stafford, as easily and casually as he could, for the face still floated before him—"yes; but not a very near one. Let me give you some more wine."

"No, thanks, father, haven't you nearly finished? Mr. Orme has kept us company so nicely that we've been tempted to forget that we are keeping him from his guests." She rose, and with a peculiarly sinuous movement of the train of her dress, she swept languidly to the door. Stafford offered her his arm and they entered the drawing-room. Her appearance naturally caused a little sensation, for some of the men had learnt and told the story of Stafford's plucky arrest of the bolting horses, and the people were curious to see the father and daughter who had been rescued, and who had proved to be friends of Sir Stephen. By a sort of tacit understanding, Lady Clansford, who was a good-natured individual, was playing the part of hostess and general chaperon, and Stafford led Miss Falconer up to her.

Before a quarter of an hour had passed Miss Falconer seemed to be quite at home in her novel surroundings; and leaning back in her chair, and slowly fanning herself, received with perfect self-possession the attentions which her beauty, her costly dress, and her still more costly jewels merited. Presently Stafford heard Lady Clansford ask her to sing; and he went to conduct her to the piano. "My music is upstairs in my box—but it does not matter; I will try and remember something," she said. "I wonder what you like?" She raised her eyes to his, as her fingers touched the keys. "The simple ballad would be rather out of place, wouldn't it? Do you know this thing of Wagner's?" As she began to sing, the white petals gradually ceased; and every eye was fixed upon her; for it was evident that she not only had an exquisite voice, but knew how to use it. She sang like an artist, and apparently without the least effort, the liquid notes flowing from her red lips like the white petals of a flower. Stafford was surprised, almost startled, but as he stood beside her, he was thinking, strangely enough, not so much of the singer as of the girl he was going to meet on the morrow. When she had finished, there was a general murmur of applause, and Lady Clansford asked her to sing again. "You have a really wonderful voice, Miss Falconer. I don't think Melba ever sang that better."

"Melba's register is ever so much greater than mine," remarked Miss Falconer, calmly. "No, thanks, I won't sing again. I think I am a little tired." She went back to her seat slowly, her fan moving languidly, as if she were too conscious of the worth of her voice to be affected by the murmurs of applause and admiration; and Stafford, as his eyes followed her, thought she resembled a superb tropical flower of rich and subtle coloring and soft and languorous grace. None of the women would venture to sing after this exhibition, and one of the young men went to the piano and dashed off a semi-comic song which relieved the tension produced by Miss Falconer's magnificent voice and style. Then the women began to glance at the clock and rise and stand about preparatory to going to bed, and presently they went off, humming, talking and laughing, in the hall and in the corridors.

The men drifted into the billiard and smoking-room, and Sir Stephen started a pool. He had been at his very best in the drawing-room, moving about amongst the brilliant company with a word for each and all, and a pleased smile on his handsome face, and a happy, genial brightness in his voice. Once or twice Sir Stephen approached Mr. Falconer, who leant against the wall looking on with the most watchful eyes behind his lids, which, like his daughter's, had a trick of drooping, though with a very different expression.

"Your daughter has a magnificent voice, Falconer," Sir Stephen had said in a congratulatory voice, and Falconer had nodded. "Yes, she's been well taught, I believe," he had responded, laconically; and Sir Stephen had nodded emphatically and moved away.

"Will you play, Falconer?" he asked, when they got to the billiard-room, as Stafford gave out the balls. "You used to play a good game." Falconer shrugged his shoulders. "Haven't played for years; rather look on," he said. "Let me give you a cigar. Try these; they are all right, Stafford says." Stafford gave out the balls, and the lounges and looked at the players and round the handsome room in contemplative silence. Sir Stephen's eye wandered covertly towards him now and again, and once he said to Stafford: "See if Mr. Falconer has some whiskey."

As Stafford went up to Mr. Falconer's corner he saw that Mr. Griffenberg and Baron Wirsch had joined him. The three men were talking in the low confidential tone characteristic of City men when they are discussing the sacred subject of money, and Stafford caught the words—"Sir Stephen"—"South African Railway."

Mr. Falconer looked round sharply as Stafford stood at his elbow. "Eh—Whisky? Oh, yes, thanks, I have some," he said. As Stafford returned to the billiard-room, Falconer nodded after him. "Is the son in this?" he asked, sharply. "Oh no," replied the baron, with a smile. "He knows nothing; he sees too young, too—vat do you say?—too fashionable, frivolous. No, Sir Stephen doesn't bring him in at all. You understand? He is ze ornamental, shleepin' partner, eh?" And he chuckled.

Falconer nodded, and leaning forward continued the conversation in a low voice. Then men went off to bed one by one, and presently only Sir Stephen, Stafford, and Falconer remained; and as the latter rose as if to retire, Sir Stephen laid a hand on his shoulder. "Don't go yet! I should like to have a little chat with you—about old times." Falconer sank into his seat again and took a fresh cigar, and Stafford left them.

(To be continued.)

IN THE TUNNEL.

"My Uncle," writes a Youth's Companion contributor, "had a contract to install a heating and ventilating system in two school buildings out West. I had the supervision of the contract, and I had to see that the plant did its work properly. As the success of the whole system depended on the proper making of the final connection, I decided to do that myself, and not trust it to my helper. "The two buildings were about two thousand feet apart. One was old; the other had just been finished. The boiler rooms and furnaces were situated in the old building. Leading from this building to the new was a tunnel, four feet square, and lined on all sides with concrete. A foot from the floor a network of steam pipes ran the entire length of the tunnel. "A gigantic fan in the boiler room pumped air through the tunnel. In passing over the steam pipes the air became heated, and kept the new building at the proper temperature. "The system was controlled automatically by compressed air. When the temperature in the new building rose too high, the thermostat automatically shut off the fan, and turned cold water into the pipes in the tunnel. When the temperature fell too low, the thermostat started the fan, and turned the steam back into the pipes. "The pipe that carried the compressed air ran through the tunnel, and it was on this pipe that the connection was to be made. "I put on my overalls and jumper and went after my tools. My flash light was missing, so I took a stub of a candle that a plumber had left, and entered the tunnel. "I crawled along until the light from the entrance grew so dim that I had to light my candle. Reaching into my pocket, I discovered that I had only two matches. But I went ahead, assisted by the feeble light from the taper. The connection was exactly in the centre of the tunnel. I reached it in a few minutes, did the work, and started back. "In my haste, I half rose to my feet, and was going along as fast as could be in that crouching attitude could go. Suddenly, without warning, my foot caught in an opening between the pipes, and I fell. My head hit the sharp corner of a reinforcing rod that projected from the concrete wall. The fall knocked me unconscious. I lay there about two hours. "I came to with the consciousness that I was in imminent danger. My head ached. Under me I heard the snapping and creaking of expanding steam pipes. In an instant I realized my danger. Thinking that I had made the necessary connection and had left the tunnel, the Janitor, according to directions, was getting up steam. "I tried to rise, but my ankle was sprained, and I fell back, with a sharp exclamation of pain, on the hot steam pipes. My wound opened afresh, and I could feel the warm blood streaming down over my face. Again I tried

to rise, but the pain was too much for me.

"The heat of the pipes was getting insupportable. They began to burn my hands and legs cruelly. To make matters worse, I was so confused that I had lost all sense of direction.

"Suddenly, in the distance, I heard the grinding of the huge fan. The janitor was just starting it. In a few minutes it would be going at full speed.

"An idea flashed through my dulled brain. I groped over the pipes until I found my candle. I carefully lit my last match and touched it to the candle. The almost imperceptible current had at first no effect on the candle, it was so slight. Almost instantly, however, the tiny flame bent to one side, and showed me plainly the way to safety.

"The pipes were so hot that I could no longer touch them. I tore off my jumper and shirt, and wrapped one round each hand. I began to drag myself along. The pain from my wrenched limb was so intense that I nearly fainted.

"Suddenly I remembered the compressed-air control! If the air-supply pipe were cut off, it would have the same effect on the system as a rise in temperature. The fan would be stopped, and cold water would run through the pipes.

"I made my way painfully back to my tool kit, and found a hammer and cold chisel. Then I found the air pipe, and attacked it as best I could. "The last thing that I can remember is the hiss of the escaping air. I

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fell back unconscious. When I came to I was lying on the janitor's cot in the engine room, and a physician was dressing my wounds and my burns."

He Was Qualified.

"I believe," said the beautiful heiress, "that the happiest marriages are made by opposites." "Just think how poor I am!" argued the young man.

Minister (calling on inmate of prison)—Remember, Mr. Kenney, that stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage. Kenney—Well, they've got me hypnotized then; that's all."



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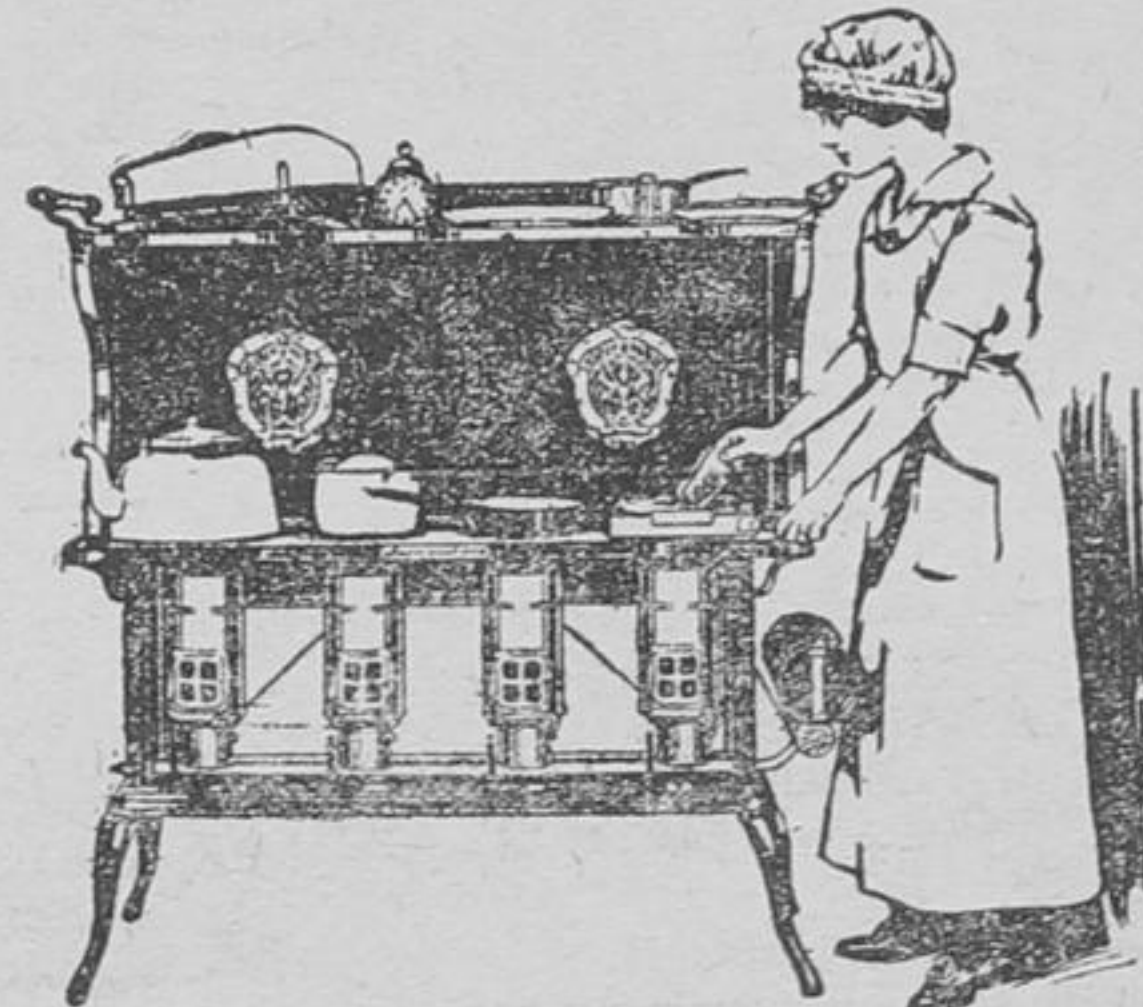
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