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## The Lash of Circumstance

— BY — Harry Irving Greene

Author of "Yosonde of the Wilderness"

Supplied Exclusively in Canada by The British & Colonial Press Service, Limited.

### CHAPTER IV.

It is now necessary that I take one step backward in my relation of this mysterious occurrence. I must go back to some time before the commission of the burglary and the entry of LeDuc upon the scene, in order that you may have all the facts presented to you as they were to that detective who he took hold of the case. However, when he took this new start I think I can proceed chronologically to the end of the case, detailing events in the order in which they happened. I am now beginning a few months before the robbery:

It was at this period of my life that I was cast under a spell. Helplessly and blindly I fell in love with a woman whose beauty was so aggressive that no mortal man could ignore it, while to attempt to describe it would be almost to insult it. I was about twenty-five then and she was about four years older. My acquaintance with her began through the irascible Bruce.

I had dropped into the blue room of the Imperial for a bottle of ale and a cigar after the theatre, when I ran into my cousin's arms. He beamed upon me.

"Delighted, old fellow. Just in time. Come—I want to introduce you." He grasped my hand with the grip of a wrestler. Now, you have to exercise a little discretion before agreeing to meet Bruce's friends, and I glanced around furtively. You can never tell whether the next minute you will be shaking hands with the Chinese ambassador or the latest popular pugilist, so as the latter gentleman would express it, I sparrred a moment for wind.

"To whom?" I inquired. He nodded toward a nearby table at which sat two women and a man.

"To Dick Edwards—but I guess you know him already—and the two ladies. But especially to Mrs. Dace. If you want good company, you need not go any further, for you won't find any better anywhere." I asked him whom the especial Mrs. Dace might be, and he laughed with what I thought was a faint undercurrent of significance beneath it.

"Oh, I haven't time to tell. Widow of somebody who died somehow, which is enough to know all at once. Main thing is she is as beautiful as a Main thing is she is as beautiful as a hour and gracious as an empress, but wise, my boy, wise, wise. Also, apparently is a person of some means, amount of means represented by an X, means problem in higher mathematics very difficult of solution. But remember this: if you begin to feel sentimental when you look at her, remember that life is only a joke, and laugh at yourself; but when it comes to a serious proposition, and stay sober. Come on, now." In another moment he was introducing me.

"Mrs. Dace and Miss Lydton—Mr. Halliday. Cousin of mine through no fault of his, but nevertheless highly recommended by me. I believe you have met him, Dick, and will confirm my place and round out your party. Good-night, all," and he was gone.

I took my chair with a quick mental inventory of my new acquaintances. Miss Lydton was tall, waspy and good-looking in an indolent blonde way; Edwards was a prosperous-looking man of about thirty-five. Mrs. Dace positively startling. From a purely physical standpoint her beauty was gorgeous. But so wonderfully complex was it that it could no more be analyzed by one glance than can a painted masterpiece. While its general effect was to cause a gasp of delight at first sight, when you looked again you saw that its perfection was the result of exquisite blending many tints into an incomparable whole. Never had I seen a mouth so bewitching, lips so rich or smile so dazzling. Her hair was wonderfully arched, her eyes royal blue and bordered by long lashes that screened them as ferns shade deep forest pools. She was wonderful. Fascinated by her beauty for a moment, I sat silently as she calmly surveyed me, one perfect hand idly toying with a small gold purse that lay upon the table. Then, far down in the sea depths of her blue eyes I saw faint amusement gathering, and I drew myself together with a start. Edwards was explaining:

"You see, we had arranged for a theatre party, and there were to be four of us. Then at the last hour Mrs. Dace's escort became slightly indisposed, and she came down alone and met Miss Lydton and myself. We are now about to have something to eat, and possibly a wee bit to drink. I happened to see your cousin Bruce, and hailed him to join us, but it seems he has an excuse. Then, he providentially happened to spy you and impressed you into his place to complete the party. So everybody is happy once more."

While I am no such a gabbler as Bruce, I think I can hold my own in any fairly well regulated conversation. I rose to the occasion. The wine oiled my tongue, and Mrs. Dace's little applauding laughs and nods of approval spurred my wit. Edwards seemed content to remain comparatively quiet; Mrs. Dace, and without effort I held the floor; I had read considerably, and the pigeon holes of my memory were well stocked with the aphorisms of the sages. Through the simple effort of recollection I became philosopher, theologian, poet. To the soft patter of their applause I even soared to original heights. In the parlance of the stage, I meant:

fact, when one o'clock came and with it the intimation from Mrs. Dace that she must depart, it was only after a little sigh that reached my ears alone, and a flash from her wonderful eyes that quickly hid themselves behind the screening lashes as I looked deep into them. Of the perpendicular bill I paid my half without a pang, secretly philosophized "let allow us to be in that the gods won't allow us to be in their debt, and when man wines and their debt, and when man must pay for it dines with woman he must pay for it with the glistening jewels of his brow. We prepared to depart.

"Mrs. Dace lives at the Arcadia, which is not more than a mile from your step house. You can take her there, step back in your carriage and let her go in another direction, and leave you to your pleasant homeward ride. Of course we must all meet again. It will require another evening to talk this one over."

We bade them good-night, and hailed a carriage. I assisted my companion into it. The rather long ride toward still lingers in my mind as a pleasant dream. The gentle swaying of the carriage as the boulevard rolled noiselessly over the boulevard lulled us into half confidences. She lulled us into a few things about her, she lulled us into a few things about her. Her husband, an Englishman, had been in some diplomatic service in the Orient, and a died a year before, and she had now come back to her and she had now come back to her and she had now come back to her. Unreservedly, she seemed to accept me as a thorough man of the world, and even did me the flattery to repeat some of the witticisms of the evening and laugh over them for a moment. The second time. When I say that I was charmed I think I have expressed it.

In front of the formidable entrance to the building where she resided I have felt her out. But now I'll tell

fact. If you expect to hold a prin- cess, you have got to be a prince of good fellows yourself and go out and buy her a castle every few days. Furthermore, in this case, you are going to run up against a real dragon." I smiled.

"Dragons always get the worst of it in the story books; fire, smoke and all," I returned with a touch of sarcasm. But Bruce seemed very much in earnest.

"Well, you won't find this one any fairy tale beast that you can chop up with a tin sword. He is an up-to-date, high-gear, sixty horsepower, mile-a-minute juggernaut, and you had better keep out of his way or you'll get smashed."

"And the dragon is, who?" "Richard Mackay, boodier prince and political boss, who was indicted and the grand jury in connection with that thirty-million dollar franchise that grabbed the city; and who by some means, unknown to me, escaped the cell that he ought to garnish," he shot over his shoulder as he turned away. "Thank you, ever so much," I retorted.

Continued next week

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