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CHAPTER X. The Masked Ball

Inside the Larches there was a stir-Carriage after carriage had wound

slowly along the drive and deposited their occupants before the ornamented portico. Gay chattering, hardsomelyclad women stood in little groups of twos and threes on the crimson cloth spread over the flight of wide granite

A few paces above, just where the firelight caught and mingled with the moon-beams, two gentlemen waited, each holding a flimsy black silk mask between their white-gloved fingers. Now and again they exchanged smiling civilities, and appeared vastly entertained by watching the animation of the women below them, and listenir ; to the curious palpitating babel of voices, mixed with peals of largater, the grinding and crunching of wheels, the rustle of stiff brocade, and the frou-frou of silken gowns.

New Pumps, Pump Re- the elder man said, as a plain, but elegant dark green barouche and pair came between the double row of Chinese lanterns and draw up in front justed it.

We thought we should pass you on the the tiny gilt-edged card, pencil, tassels road. We looked out for you all the and all, were swallowed by the broad way. Pity you two couldn't have expanse of a lavender kid palm. squeezed in. Never mind, give me "Come, I say, Farley," he exclaimed, your arm, Hubert, and Mr. Farley will studying it with some amusemen take Judith. I feel as excued as a "This kind of thing attracts comment. listen! I'm sure that's Dan Godfrey's the dancers are masked." orchestral band from town."

charming widow a pretty penny."

with a pressure on the plum p arm un- have a smoke outside with me." der his. "I wonder what these mudowner to hang up his hat in."

on Paul Farley's arm. Her cheeks your existence." were flushed to a lovely carmine and excitement had shaded her viole

he makes her an offer of marriage only a myth." every time they meet, and the panto- "I'm afraid you are a little hard on connection with Weyberne." awenty years."

truer the love but perhaps to-night erly."

Hargrave. Moreover, I promised Mr. Pelham I would look after you."

"What is father waiting for?" she side. asked, turning back and compelling "I should like to dance the fifteenth mented there is no fear I shall weary him to retrace a few steps.

"Go on, you two," Sir Thomas dance," he added politely. o the cloak-room.'

were hidden by huge branches of the over her head. the great greenish, yellow solitary "She's fooling thee." blossoms hung as if weighted by their then burst into marvellous trills of song, as if their little hearts would break with the joy of it all, until from ing in among the motley throng. behind the curtained gallery came the

on the heavily perfumed air. ture responding a hundredfold to the ecstasy, and thus they waltzed on in delicate haunting witchery of the slow, rythmical motion, neither carscene. A quiver of the little hand on ing to break the silence, and Paul loth his arm brought his soaring thoughts to disturb the wrapt look in her eyes. earthward, and he turned to find Ju- "Do you like Mrs. Wycherly?" she

and one hand pressed over his heart. ing space beneath the temporary band-"You are cold," he said, drawing her stand. further into the room. "Shall we "I can't say that I do," he said, waltz this? The next time I cance it guardedly.

"The room is warm enough," she fatal gift of beauty." said, a catch in her voice; "it's the overpowering scent of all this pro- Miss Fleming is the more beautiful. fusion of flowers that's chilled me. I don't know why, but a heavy suffocating perfume of rare blooms always brings death to my mind. And the band, too, it's beautiful, it's inspiring,

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and fills one with a strange exulta tion, yet it makes me feel as if I were crying-crying inwardly."

"Nerves," he said, soothingly, slipping an arm around her waist while she gathered the folds of her chiffon skirts into her hand. "I have much the same feeling on occasions when my beauty-loving nature has been probed and my whole being stirred to its lowest depths. But it's not wise to allow one's self to be haunted by evil forebodings, else one would be for ever stitching one's own shroud. We ought to remember, Miss Hargrave, that our past is dead, but our future is not yet born. We-"

A strong, firm hand gripped his shoulder and twisted him around.

yours, Judith?" Felix demanded, towyou to be the only unmasked couple | much good fortune. in the room."

said, with a laugh and a shrug. "May back, bowed, and left her in the care see Miss Fleming's programme?" he asked, looking at her while he ad-

She took the little piece of pink JNO. SCHULTZ or myself at the shop Miss Primrose popped her head out pasteboard from the bosom of her of the window and addressed them ex- gown, and he scribbled his initials against a most every other dance, "Are we late? Oh, there's a crowd handing it back with a graceful bow. now going in! Have you been here The Squire's long intercepting arm long? You must have walked quickly, came across his sister's shoulder, and

girl at her first ball. Good gracious. "Not necessarily, Mr. Fleming, when

"Perhaps not, but I imagine a bail-"Yes it is; came down by the same room reputation lies in a diversity of train as I did this afternoon," Hubert | partners, and we'll lean to the safer Graham said, tucking her arm under side," he answered quietly, drawing a his. "I expect this fling will cost our pencil through a few of the "F. P.'s" and inserting his own name on the "Still, she's rich, isn't she, Hubert?" same line. "Besides, Farley, I want "Fairly so," the barrister replied, you to forego a caper or two later and

"Oh, the abominable selfishness of dle-headed county magnates are think- men!" exclaimed a sweet, childish You look a hundred per cent better sponded, throwing away three-quaring about to pass over such a prize. treble at the Squire's elbow. "It's too than when I first saw you. The counters of a choice cigar among the long Here's a palace, Patricia," he added, bad, Mr. Fleming, to entice away the try suits you." as they disappeared behind a velvet younger dancing men, and, after all, portiere, "for an impecunious land you see the allurement merely ends in smoke. I do believe your pipe is Judith Hargrave put a timid hand paramount throughout every phase of emphatically. "At all events," he

eyes to the color of the sapphires drawing her programme from her siderably increased my enjoyment all unwritten equine laws, I keep my sparkling beneath her gossamer silk course, you understand my wife stands | er, more interested in my daily avoca- dear boy, and watch the widow's

asked, laughing; "that's how she ap- dainty moue; "you often quote her, ish prayer with me lately, perhaps a "Thanks," he said, hurriedly, "I propriates and treats Mr. Graham Mr. Fleming, nevertheless, it's a bless- selfish one, too, that nothing may must be politely civil of course, but directly he comes down. Gossip says ed accident for Mrs. Felix that she's come between us, not even a slice of I'll take care to keep the golden

mime has been going on for the last a helpless, inoffensive bachelor," he said , good naturedly, "but I must be tops, and the moon turned a radiant "Indeed," he said, amused. "I've content to hope the rest of your sex heard the longer the courting the don't share your opinion, Mrs. Wych- ly-moving figures. Paul took a timid voice.

der if I may have the pleasure of this on to Paul, and looked admiringly ful nature of the man, invigorating you within the next few minutes." time I shall dance with you as Miss two girls, and glided swan-like, al- he said "my nature is a reserved one. grounds.

with you, if I may, Mr. Farley," she of it." "The Flemings," he said. "Doesn't said in a pretty unassuming way, with "So-called friends, those who are not he squire look gigantic in that cloak." wide beseeching, innocent eyes; "it's actually one's enemies, are as plenti-Sir Thomas's head was protected a country—a sort of barn dance; it ful as flies in summer," Felix said,

shouted in his hearty homely fashion, "Oh, I'll be pleased, you know I strength about it." addressing his secretary. "We'll will," she answered with a wonderful "It's built," Paul answered, laying wait while Fleming takes the wraps sweeping upward look that even the a tender pressure on the Squire's arm, disfiguring mask could not detract or "on one of the soundest and bravest They went on obediently, arm-in- hide, "but you mustn't mind if you hearts that ever breathed." Paul pulled aside the heavy find I am in great request, because Felix laughed and squeezed the rimson portière, and they stood en- the majority of the men feel called small white nervous hand.

com. It as a veritable fairyland of He bowed, and without a sound she You were a flatterer from the first, colored lights, exotic plants, and lux- was gone, her soft diaphanous gown I believe you will always be-not uriant, wealth of English and foreign lost among the whirl of dancers. For fickle ,but fine and French; and yet, hot-house flowers. The lofty ceiling the second time Paul placed his arm Paul, I wouldn't have one trait in your was painted a turquoise blue, sprin- around Judith Hargrave's waist when character otherwise than it is." kled with silver stars, and the walls his eyes met those of the squire's

magnolia tree. The thick, green foli- "Trust her not," he said, facetious- tween man and man is another matter. age shimmered in the subdued light; ly, with a low laugh of enjoyment.

"Vessets targe may venture more, beauty, expanding and exhaling big but little boats should keep near the breaths of subtle fragrance through shore," he responded in the same light the warmth. Invisible birds twittered, tone. "I'm only a little cockleshell of a boat and I mean to hug the land." and they moved away gradually, drift-

"Die Wacht am Rhein now," he strain of one of Strauss's waltzes, whispered, as they swayed to the rise throbbing, palpitating, and vibrating and fall of the voluptuous music. She nodded as if she were afraid words Paul stood enwrapt, his artistic na- would dissolve this one last dream of dith pale, her eyes black with feeling, asked when they stopped for a breath-

will be at your wedding, you know." I wonder at that; she has such a

"Just so, but to my mind your friend You can't compare them. Miss Agnes is a bright, fresh, lovely English girl, while the other strikes one as having obtained her diabolical beauty by means of sorcery by the assistance of

Familian, or some such devilry." "You like Agnes Fleming?"

"I more than like her; I-" "Love at first sight," she said, laughing to hide the quiver of her lips. "I would rather you married

Agnes than Rowena Wycherly." "Well, between you and me, Miss Hargrave, I don't wish to marry either. I don't wish to marry anyone. I simply want the women to leave me severely alone, to boycott me, to send me to Coventry, to tabboo me, to hate the sight of me, to do, in fact, anything that will serve to let me go my

own way unmolested." A sudden flush overspread her face and neck. She laughed nervously.

"Living under the same roof so many weeks." he said remorsefully, "we understand one another. We are too old and intimate friends to dream of taking an unpremeditated random shot to ourselves. It's a comfort sometimes to unburden one's mind where one is sure of a sympathetic listener. Come, one more turn and then I will give that fellow over there with the monocle a chance."

She glanced up at him, and thought he was stouter, comlier, more at his ease than when he first made his appearance at Weyberne Hall. His smooth-shaven face had filled out, his wonderful eyes had lost the harrassed expression which she noticed spring into them upon the slightest provocation. He was dark, handsome, clever, "Where's your mask, Farley, and interesting, all that her foolish heart desired, yet fate persisted in pushing ering above them, his eyes sparkling | Anthony to the fore, and the world through the apertures in the conceal- | marvelled she was not more elated, ing silk. "My friends, I can't permit | more distracted, and spoilt, with so

She was sick at heart, tears of chag-"Mon Dieu! I forgot the rag," Paul rin stood in her eyes as he led her of the Hargrave party.

Paul danced with a will. He went through a succession of square and round dances with scarcely a break between, until Felix dragged him into the conservatory for a rest, and eventually out into the beautiful grounds illuminated by thousands of fairy lamps, where a great, golden moon shone serenely through the branches of the larches, and the illusive will-o'the-wisps glowed and vanished in the distant marshes.

The night air was chilly, but it seemed doubly pure and sweet after the heated atmosphere they had left | behind. Their brisk footsteps fell silently on the dewy grass, and the cold starlight streamed across the shining turf like a spilt silver liquid. "What a glorious thing youth is!" Felix said, offering his cigar case. "Upon my soul, I quite envied your nimbleness."

"I can afford to be active; I've not an ounce of adipose fiesh to hinder stopping midway when she recognized

gularly happy here."

tions, and altogether a happier man. manoeuvres." "Did you see Patty Primrose?" she "Your wife," she repeated, wit ha It's been a sort of unuttered heathen- Paul gripped his wrist. roaring good luck, if it's to sever your mean."

> The wind sighed among the pine face full upon the men's black, swift- she said with a half sob in her childish glance from beneath his eyelids at his

most imperceptibly, round to Paul's I am slow in learning the worth of a

by a black velvet cap, and Lady Har- will be such fun, a regular romp." looking away over the misty upland; rave had drawn her domino in folds "Certainly," he said, but I have put "but I fancy the feeling between us my dame down for more than one has grown upon a foundation having more than a suspicion of firmness and

ranced on the threshold of the ball- upon to do the civil in my own house." "Why don't you say two hearts?

"In love, Cupid is painted blind," Paul said smiling, "but friendship be-Do you suppose," he asked, the smile developing into a gentle laugh, "do you think David could see the faults

as well as the virtues of Jonathan?" "Yes," Felix said, taking the question into grave earnest consideration; "a man may render you a great many services at times and you may entertain a heart full of gratitude towards him, but unless you feel his character agrees with your own you will never call him 'friend,' not in the best and truest sense of the word. Friendship is made up of trifling matters, and in a close, intimate fellowship a coarse nature veneered to suit some social niche would grind and grate one's susceptibilities, one's finer feelings. The result would be inevitable: a settling blight and the bloom gone from the attachment, the gilt from the prized gingerbread."

He took a pull at his cigar and blew incited to do some strange, wild, a vigorous whiff of smoke in the air, wicked thing. in illustration of the fleeting of all

transient material things. In the silence that followed some thing floated towards them resembing at first sight a white wave of mist, but in reality and upon closer ped in the cloudy folds of silver gauze ness, and soon restores the parts silk underskirt.

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"Our dance Mr. Farley," she called, the Squire.

"No, you are in capital condition. "Coming, Mrs. Wycherly," he rewet grass.

"I suppose so; moreover, I am sin- "Be careful," Felix whispered, a sudden alertness in his keen grey eyes, "That's good hearing," Felix said, "that woman means mischief."

"How? What mischief can she do?" added, in a strangely moved tone, "I : "Heaven alone knows," he said, "but "I am wedded to my pipe, Mrs. know that your advent has made no when my mare lays back her ears and Wycherly," he said pleasantly, gently end of difference to me. It has con- snuffs the air in feminine defiance of grasp, and writing on it, "and, of and love of life I feel younger bright- weather eye open. Keep your head,

Paul offered Mrs. Wycherly his arm, and led her back to the house. "I thought you had forgotten me,"

"Oh, dear me, no," he answered. will witness the last appeal. I won- He laughed, passed her programme companion. The honest simple, trust- "I should have been back hunting for

first waltz with you, Miss Judith?" down at her waving mass of corn- and wholesome as the air he breathed, On the carpeted steps_they met a But I am an engaged girl, Mr. Far- colored hair. She seemed to resent or the balsam in the pines, seemed to stalwart sheepish-looking man in the unruffled, easy, open gaze, and dip down into his heart, and touched lemon-yellow livery. He glanced at "That's the reason I want to make shot a venomous glance at him be- an as yet unexplored, unknown region. them out of the corner of his eye, and sure of you. This will be the last fore she turned and smiled upon the . am shy of too much openness," passed quickly on out into the

"Why, surely, that's the man Denfriend, but once the affection is ce- ham!" he exclaimed, puzzled. "I thought he worked for Mr. Fleming?"

> "So he does," she laughed, enjoying his surprise in an arched, pretty way. 'I wanted a great deal of extra help to-night, and the man said he could manage. If he gives me satisfaction I shall keep him altogether. He is going to be married to an old servant of mine, and wants to better his condition. We won't dance this, Mr. Farley," she said, in a different tone, dismissing the subject of Denham with fine aplomb, "it's boisterous and fatiguing, and I've danced continuously-besides, I want to show you my

house and some of my pretty things."

He acquiesced with a good grace, though he would have much preferred to return to the ball-room, or to have wandered with his beautiful hostess among the numerous company promenading the cool decorated corridors. He ascended the winding oak staircase in obedience to the guiding pressure on his arm, and when they reached the spacious landing, where, despite the glittering chandelier of wax candles, the moonlight shone through the windows and fell aslant the polished boards, he looked around involuntarily for the door against which the Squire and Rose Pilgrim had listened on the night of little Guy Wycherly's punishment. She was doing her utmost to interest him with a woman of the world's intuitive tact and native poetry. She had an undulating, and at times an irregular, even sharp, movement with her, indicating the restless vivacity of her spirits, which this evening seemed doubly indefatigable, because her sprightliness played upon his nerves and excited an unreasoning disquietude. He had a superstitious, uncanny feeling that the woman with the demon beauty hanging on his arm was in an occult, supernatural manner being

Continued on page 7.

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