

"BLACK ORCHIDS" by F. V. W. MASON

SYNOPSIS

First Secretary to the Minister to Austria and Leonard Holt, are sitting in the famous Hotel Dunaway when the conversation turns to the Countess Lolita. Several broken hearts are attributed to Lolita and one fatal duel was fought on account of her. Leonard cannot stand the Countess and comes to Lolita. He wonders as he looks at her how she can be so beautiful and so wicked. He is interested in her as a Hungarian minister. Leonard borrows \$1000 from her and she tells him that she has a man with a such large sum of money. He is ready for dinner at the Ministry, Ian awaits in the car. After a short while, a beautiful woman he never saw before. Unobserved from his car he sees her cry. From the car he calls "Lolita," and she turns, the girl goes in. Ian sees her surrounded by gallants and asks for her. He is stunned to find that she is the notorious Countess Lolita.

CHAPTER IV

As he saw his mounting color he knew that the row of miniatures and decorations glinted on his left lapel of his dress suit. "A great honor," he managed to articulate. "to meet the Countess von Waldeck." For the first time their eyes met and he saw the Countess's eyes. Ian was conscious of a certain exhilaration. What the Countess said was clear and tranquil blue.

He was English or an American, he stated softly. "Dieu, I am of it; else by now you have made a dozen gallants of which mean nothing and are so terribly."

He stammered, and cursed under his uncertainty. Damn it, Gray, was an embarrassed school boy speaking in public for the first time. "I am at the Ministry."

Her lips formed a perfect, neat circle, then her face lit. "Have it—you must be Ian."

EXECUTRIX NOTICE
I am qualified as Executrix of the estate of O. T. Alexander, deceased, late of Haywood County, Carolina, this is to notify all persons having claims against the said deceased to exhibit the same to the undersigned at Waynesville, North Carolina, on or before the 1st day of October, 1942. Notice will be pleaded in their recovery. All persons having claims against the said estate will please exhibit the same to the undersigned on or before the 1st day of Oct., 1941. Anna Katherine Alexander, Executrix of the Estate of O. T. Alexander, deceased.

ARK THEATRE
WAYNESVILLE, N. C.
THURSDAY-FRIDAY
The Parachute Battalion
Robert Preston and Nancy Kelly.

SATURDAY
"Sheriff Of Tombstone"
Roy Rogers and Gabby Hayes.

OWL SHOW
The Blonde From Singapore
With Florence Rice.

SUNDAY
"New Wine"
Liona Maasey and Allan Curtis.

MONDAY-TUESDAY
"Sundown"
A cast of thousands and a world-wide scope.

WEDNESDAY
"Mercy Island"
Ray Middleton and Gloria Dixon.

that friend of whom Leonard Holt tells me so much."

"Leonard talks too much—it's a failing he has. I—I hope he hasn't been telling tales out of school."

Laughing lightly the girl in the Lauvis ball gown held up a slender blue veined forefinger and tilted her blonde head just a little to one side.

"Is this a guilty conscience, Monsieur? But I will set your fears at rest. Monsieur Holt has painted you as the beau sabreur par excellence—a sort of modern Bayard."

"Lord forgive him for those lies," laughed Ian and drew breath to further pursue the conversation when a new contingent of guests arrived.

Among them were the gay Captain d'Armonot and, as sharp a contrast as might be found, Major Harris. When they beheld him standing somewhat dazed on the outskirts of the throng hemming in the fragile beauty of Countess von Waldeck, they both treated him to a mocking lift of the eyebrows.

"Cre nom de Dieu"—you waste no time!" cried Captain d'Armonot, very dark and picturesque in his artillery dress uniform of black and red. "Remember about the fools who rushed?"

"Duceed stunning girl. Singular purity of face and form. Eh what? Doesn't look a bit like the siren I've heard about—more like some nice girl who's just put up her hair and let down her skirts. Refreshingly fresh, eh what?"

Ian noted that even the usually somber eyes of the big boned Welshman lit when, for a moment, the throng of those pleading for introduction parted to afford a glimpse of that laughing girl whom the other young women were undoubtedly beginning to hate from the bottom of their souls.

Gradually the babble of voices grew louder as fresh contingents of guests arrived to be greeted by His Excellency, Baron von Satzmar, the decorous, white haired host, the lean old aristocrat which Ian felt, as he looked morosely on, belonged rather to the vanished glories of the duel empire, than to the shabby little republic he now represented.

Just one item remained to jar the big First Secretary already shaken equilibrium. Among the very last guests to arrive was Leonard Holt.

He, after making hurried respects to Baron von Satzmar, but oblivious of everything else, made his way straight to the side of Countess von Waldeck who, as Ian noticed with sharp misgivings, received him with an almost possessive enthusiasm and called him "dear boy" or something very like it.

Well, schooled in human nature, Ian's eyes sought a group of liberally bejeweled dowagers who, like superannuated Pekinesses, sat staring at the company through their lorgnettes with hard, bright eyes. Immediately white tiara crowned heads joined by twos and threes.

"Um," thought Ian bitterly. "And when they got finished—poor Ilya will have been pitied to death."

He rather wondered what the proud old Baron Zichonyi would do and say if or rather when these whispers ever reached his ears. The Baron could not in any sense be described as a man of easy-going disposition, and Ian heaved a long, troubled sigh as a pair of uniformed

footmen threw back the door of the dining room to reveal a resplendent blaze of silver, napery and cut glass.

The dinner proved an unhappy one for Ian. As a dinner partner he drew Senorita Martela, an Argentine damsel who possessed enormous eyes and an apparently irrefragable desire to make a conquest of him. In vain Ian attempted to ward off her leads with his usually effective stock of witticisms, cynicisms and epigrams, while feasting his eyes on that almost ethereal personality across the table. To his deep dismay he noted that by evil chance or deep plotting Leonard had secured the place at Lolita von Waldeck's left. There he sat apparently unable to tear his eyes away from that perfectly moulded form in white, though she, with a conscious effort at preserving appearances, constantly diverted her attention to the utterly captivated white-haired Spanish minister on her right.

While returning automatic replies to Senorita Martela's not wholly discreet and incessant flow of banter, Ian found time to study the distinguished middle aged gentleman who appeared to be Lolita's escort. There was a peculiar upward tilt to that much decorated nobleman's dark and very clear eyes that suggested a strain of Magyar or Slavic blood in his makeup and prompted conjecture as to Count von Bradensee's antecedents. The Count's round, almost hairless face was set with a glimmering monocle and bore the jolliest of wrinkles about the corners of eyes and mouth; yet there were certain lines in that pink white face that ought not to have been there. Ian decided that Count von Bradensee was nearing sixty, for the last of his hair that struggled to survive like a stricken line of infantry on the field of a disastrous battle, was deeply gray. A curious little man he was—and not without dignity for all his continual outbursts of laughter. Across his shirt bosom Lolita's escort wore the yellow and red ribbon of the Bavarian Order of Saint Hubert and just below his smartly cut white tie sparkled the

cross of a commander in the French Legion d'Honneur.

Count von Bradensee was apparently a good natured bon vivant, for he sat there listening politely to the flow of inconsequential gossip tumbling from the Belgian minister's breathless and fat little wife like coal from a chute.

Ian frowned. Good Lord, but Leonard was making a complete ass of himself tonight! Wasn't like him, either. He'd have to take the boy in hand when they got home. Ilya, poor child, would be completely miserable.

"Really Monsieur, you are scarcely flattering," he heard the rather sharp voice of Senorita Martela saying on edged banter. "You have not taken your eyes from the Countess von Waldeck in five minutes. Do you think she is so very pretty?"

"Eh?" Oh no, she's too blonde, too brittle." Stock answer number three to brunettes. What a bore all this diplomatic business was. Had the Argentine charmer been a blonde he knew he would have said, "Oh no; dark people depress me, and Miss So-and-So, although she

is beautiful, is most distressingly dark."

He barely tasted the delicious consommé, toyed with his soufflé devolaille and felt increasingly annoyed at himself. Why the deuce did he find himself looking once more at Lolita von Waldeck? He swiftly analyzed the impulse. It intrigued him to reconcile her faintly sinister reputation, with that singular gracious and wholesome looking young girl. Moreover, he wanted to know why the this-and-that Lolita von Waldeck had cried so bitterly to himself in the conservatory? Why did she apparently resent her escort—and what was he to her? The fellow looked harmless enough.

Deliberately he tore his eyes away from those almost elfinly delicate features and it was then that he noted for the first time, seated at the far end of the table a bearded officer who wore the elaborate, gold-slashed green uniform of the Bulgarian Royal Guards. The expression on the Bulgar's wolfishly lean face was hard as basalt, and there was a glitter in his jet eyes that

SCOTT'S SCRAP BOOK By R. J. SCOTT

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ALEXANDER DUMAS, THE CELEBRATED FRENCH AUTHOR OF SUCH BOOKS AS "THE THREE MUSKETEERS" AND "THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO" WAS NOTED AS AN EPIGURE - HIS LAST BOOK WAS A COOKBOOK!

SOUTH AMERICA'S LARGEST MAMMALS, THE GOO-FOUNDING APIS, COME ASHORE ONLY AT NIGHT

Eileen Massie Is Student At Pasadena Playhouse In California

Miss Eileen Massie, talented daughter of Mr. and Mrs. J. E. instantly challenged Ian's attention. On following the line of the Bulgarian's gaze, the uneasy First Secretary realized, with a sense of shock, that this dangerously hostile glance was bent on Leonard Holt who, like the infatuated pup he was, was at that moment whispering some amusing nonsense into the invisible emerald decked ear of Lolita von Waldeck.

The irrepressible Argentine was gushing something about polo. What did he think?

"Yes, yes," murmured Ian aloud. "These Argentinians put on deuced good showing on Long Island last year. I'll never forget how Lewis Leacy, etc., played—knocked the ball half the length of the field—"

And so on and on.

But while he talked his attention was upon that bearded Bulgarian officer, for between that individual's purely automatic smiles, there was to be glimpsed a cruel, tight expression about his narrow lips. That Bulgar undoubtedly was pretty mad about something and didn't seem possessed of self-control in any quantity.

By the time the coffee and liquors were served, Ian found himself wondering what to do. Never in his career in the Foreign Service had he ever been so thoroughly at a loss. His own feelings defied analysis.

In spite of everything, he could not fight off the overwhelming magnetism of that dazzling young woman who had furnished the topic of conversation during the cocktail hour. If indeed she were a professional heart-breaker, she was, without doubt, the most deceivingly innocent-appearing one he had ever beheld.

"Wouldn't mind seeing for myself," he thought and followed the sway of her white shoulders as, with the ladies from the dining room, she betook herself to the green and gold saloon. Ian managed a distressed expression when the Senorita Martela reluctantly abandoned him with a provocative smile and whispered, "Mas tarde."

(To Be Continued)

Well Known Artist To Make Films Of National Park

Randolph Coats, well known artist and lecturer, of Indianapolis, was a guest during the week at Catalochee Ranch. This was the first of several trips into this section that the artist will make.

He is planning to film scenes in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park for a film-lecture that he contemplates on this section.

Mr. Coats is also a well known portrait painter, having painted many celebrities throughout this country. His pictures have been shown in all the main art centers of this country and in Paris. Many of his works are owned by art museums, while others have been purchased for public buildings.

Massie, is now a student at the Pasadena Playhouse in Pasadena, Calif.

Miss Massie is completing her course in dramatic art which she started at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York City. She has made one appearance in a play this fall at the playhouse.

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