

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

CHAPTER XIII

An old waiter hurrying past the door of the bower with a tray of cocktails, shot a glance inside and smiled to see a handsome young man sitting very close to a girl in a blue afternoon dress. Quite brazenly this clean-cut young fellow had his arm about the girl and she with her head resting upon his shoulder, her mouth very close to his ear.

But the passing waiter failed to note that the young man's smile was fixed, mechanical one, which was not surprising, since at that moment Lolita was whispering not under thoughts but a tale so horrible it staggered the imagination.

"Never, beloved," she was whispering, "have I told this before—how I trust you? It would mean death for me and mine were it betrayed."

"Then Somoniev, a lieutenant of his name Bobkine who passes my cousin, Ernst von Bradensee, a decorated mother buried to her neck the pig sty—after that the swine are let loose."

The slender fingers between Ian's own palms seemed to grow chill, through the consuming passion that had seized him, Ian struggled to see clearly. . . . Was this all a carefully calculated appeal for sympathy? Or was it the truth? He could not decide.

After that they set fire to the place, and shot my father and my only brother who were coming back from the war, after taking them up against the dairy girl, Olushka, little Feodor and I were forced to watch; then they dragged us away to Moscow.

At first I refused to do anything was told. I was only a child—thirteen or so. But when Samoniev threatened to torture my even younger brother and sister, I agreed to serve them for ten years."

The head on Ian's shoulder reddened a little and the scent of chideef Noires flared at his nose. "That was in the winter of '21—at the end of ten years Bobkine swore to release me, together with my brother and sister;

they are still in Russia." "So they're being kept as hostages?" "Yes. Tonight they are prisoners at Podolsk on the Polish-Soviet border." "And when they cross?" The girl drew a deep, shuddering breath. "Tonight or never. Bobkine forces me on—but wait. For several years I was held in Moscow where my gift for languages was useful to the OGPU. It was hell, but I had to save Olushka and Feodor and it was better than the shame of playing the international adventuress.

"A year ago I was ordered to assume my mother's title—she was Grafin von Waldeck before her marriage. I was sent to claim her very valuable estate in Austria. Everywhere I went Bobkine was always with me. Re-established, he forced me to—this wretched game. At his command I was forced to flirt, to entangle certain attaches, poor souls! Their blood is on my head—"

She bent on him a deliberate, searching glance, as Ian cried incredulously. "But this devil Bobkine. He can't be that jolly pink and white little fellow I saw at dinner last night."

For answer Lolita twitched aside her wide sleeves to expose the red marks he had seen earlier that day. "No?" she whispered and her eyes were like blue ice. "Last night he did this—when I refused to ask your friend Leonard for a copy of a certain treaty."

At the sight of that tender white shoulder marred by the atrocious red mark, Ian felt his painfully regained self-control slipping!

"Ye gods!" he growled, "just let me get at that!"

"No, no," she panted, wide-eyed with fear. "You see my despair? If the Commissar at Podolsk does not hear favorably from Bobkine tonight, Olushka and Feodor will die such a death as would make a Siberian wolf shed tears of pity."

"And if he hears that all is well?" demanded Ian, very thoughtful.

The expression on that lovely fear-haunted face became lit with an ecstatic joy. "Then my sister and brother cross the border and are safe. Bobkine has his faults—a million of them, but he keeps his word."

"Well," inquired Ian cautiously, "did you get the treaty?"

Jerkily, the girl's head in its broad-brimmed leghorn hat inclined and she stared at Ian with eyes that were wholly tragic.

"Yes, and no. I will tell you everything mon cher. Last night for the reason I have told, I tempted your friend, promised him everything and—and—" she shot him a sudden, shrewd look, "but I am sure that you know—you are here to recover the stolen treaty—"

"Yes," admitted Ian, and immediately cursed his precipitation. "Later, I have an offer to make—but now, I am only interested in helping you." And there was to his words the ring of truth.

"Do you really mean that?" she inquired very quietly and with evident relief.

"Yes. Do I understand that your period of service to the Soviets ends with the matter of this treaty?"

"That is right," she murmured and her hands closed spasmodically. "You, who have always been free, cannot know what freedom means. As for me, I—I have been a slave, worse than a slave, since to the world I have seemed to be my own mistress. No one blames a slave for doing vile things; everyone

knows the choice of conduct is not his or hers—"

Ian straightened, offered this companion a cigarette from his silver case and, when she shook her head, lit one with great care. He wanted time to think. The key to success lay near at hand. A bit of cleverness and he might win. A bit of carelessness and dark tragedy was at hand. Dare he trust Lolita? He loved her—in any case he had to have her. Why then, why not gamble on her honesty? Trust to courage and resource if a chance came to win—otherwise, he'd have Lolita, take her if he had to by sheer force.

"Look here," he said and his eyes shone with a devotion that drew roses to Lolita's cheek that were not paler than the roses twining about the bower. "I will do anything you ask. Perhaps we can work this out—"

The girl shifted sidewise on the seat to study him with frank deliberation.

"Ian, my beloved," said she at last, "I believe you are telling me the truth, that you really do love me in spite of the strange, unhappy way we have met. And I—I love—will love you to last hour of my life. So . . ."

"Let us arrange things this way—you will bring the second part of Treaty X-2 to Number 73 Kerrepsi Ut tonight—" She beheld his features darken and went on a little breathlessly, "so that Bobkine will send the telegram to Podolsk. Once it has been sent I will help you any way I can to recover the whole treaty—to kill Bobkine, anything."

"You must plan how the recovery is to be made and then tell me my part." The daring of her suggestion amazed him—everything would be easy if—she were to be trusted.

"All right," he said, "I'll bring the second half—"

"Be sure it is the real one," she urged. "Bobkine is very clever, he would detect a fraud in an instant and then," Lolita's face stiffened, "he would not send that wire to Podolsk. You see what a terrible blow it was that Leonard was sent to Paris? I hated to lie to him so and tell him that I loved him, but at worst, it was his career against three lives—Olushka's, Feodor's and mine—for Bobkine would not hesitate to kill me were he to suspect treachery."

Ian, for the third time that afternoon, drew her close and kissed her. "My darling," he said, "you may rely that I shall come to the Kerrepsi Ut tonight at nine o'clock. With me I will bring the second half of Treaty X-2."

Clad in a dark blue business suit, Ian Gray halted before the door of Number 73 Kerrepsi Ut and drew a long breath. The next hour, he sensed, would be reasonably full of excitement. The whole affair was strictly up to him—too bad he dared not enlist the help of one or two friends, but the theft of a treaty was something to be kept utterly secret. Now that he was away from the magic of Lolita's charm he could think clearly; he'd simply have to watch for his chance and act quickly, without hesitation.

What a mad gamble this was—if Lolita had lied, tricked him, he was doubly lost, for now he had the second half of Treaty X-2 under his arm.

If it was a lie, all that talk about Feodor, Olushka and the telegram, it was clever—yet there was a chance that, with a gun thrust into his jolly pink face, Comrade Bobkine could be persuaded to return treaty and copies—even a red rabble-rouser didn't like to die.

But what would he do when Lolita was present? He wondered. Under her spell he doubted whether he could act at the right time should she wish otherwise.

Never had he felt so uncertain of himself. Hell! There was no use pondering any more. He'd go ahead and hope for the best.

His hand, brown hand closed tighter on the handle of the brief case and he shifted the cone-shaped bundle which contained two dozen gorgeous roses to his left arm, before reaching for the bell. As he stood there a sudden sense of un-

business came over him and he stared over his shoulder at the park opposite. There was a lot of tangled shrubbery there, but—just then the door was opened by a footman who stood a good six feet tall. He was as Russian as caviar and vodka, from his large feet to the stiff white bristles on his conical skull, but he spoke in German.

"Bitte herin kommen." The ponderous wrought iron and plate glass door swung back and the campaign began.

The big caller realized his pulses were hammering wildly when he laid his soft gray hat on a graceful Louis XVI console and, still carrying the brief case and the gift of roses, followed the footman up a broad flight of stairs, so thickly carpeted as to be absolutely silent.

"Monsieur Ian Gray," announced the footman and Ian once more was ushered into the little sitting room he had previously seen.

A single lamp—a beautiful piece in the modern manner—lit the room from its place beside a broad flame-colored velvet settee that was strewn with cushions of various sizes and shapes. On it he was glad none of those idiotic, long-legged dolls beloved of women afflicted with adult infantilism.

At one of the settees on a small glass topped table stood several liquor bottles and, by a delicate touch of tact, three instead of two glasses. The orchids he had presented that afternoon shone delicately white in a low silver vase just where the light would strike them to best advantage.

"Um," he thought, "somebody's been places and knows how to do things."

A little uneasily he seated him-

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come," she murmured. Then said in slightly louder tones, "Dieu, but you're a typical American—why do you bring your heavy business matters to my home? Alles put your business affairs away—out on the hall table. They will be quite safe there."

Without hesitation he obeyed, then closed the hall door. Vogue la galere! The battle was on!

To be Continued)

IN FULL COLOR

"The Course of True Love," a collection of delightful sketches, by the noted English artist, Alastair K. Macdonald, with verses by Phyllis McGinley, well-known poet. Don't miss this feature in the January 11th issue of

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NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING OF STOCKHOLDERS OF THE HAYWOOD HOME BUILDING AND LOAN ASSOCIATION.

Pursuant to statute and the By-laws of the Haywood Home Building and Loan Association, notice is hereby given that the annual meeting of the Stockholders of the Association will be held at the office said Association, Main Street, Waynesville, N. C., on the third day in January, it being January 20th, 1942, at 7:30 o'clock p. m. for the purpose of electing officers, reporting progress and conducting such other business as may properly come before said meeting.

This January 2nd, 1942.

L. N. DAVIS, Secretary.

No. 1147—Jan. 8-15.

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NOTICE OF SUMMONS

NORTH CAROLINA, HAYWOOD COUNTY.

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT.

BEFORE THE CLERK.

RILLIA HARRIS

Vs.

DECATOR HARRIS

The defendant in the above entitled action will take notice that an action as above has been commenced in the Superior Court of Haywood County, North Carolina for the purpose of securing an absolute divorce from the defendant upon statutory grounds.

And said defendant will further take notice that he is required to appear before the Clerk of the Court of said County at the Court House in Waynesville, North Carolina, on the 30th day of January, 1942, and answer or demur to the complaint, filed in said cause or the plaintiff will apply to the Court for the relief demanded in said complaint.

C. H. LEATHERWOOD, Clerk of Haywood County.

No. 1146—Jan. 8-15-22-29.

TAX LISTING

List Your Property Give In Your Poll IN JANUARY

All property owners and taxpayers in Haywood County are required to return to the list Takers for Taxation for the year 1942 all the Real Estate, Personal Property, etc., which each shall own on the First day of January.

All male persons between the ages of 21 and 50 are required to list their polls during the same time.

All persons who own property and fail to list it and all who are liable for poll tax and fail to give themselves in will be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor.

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|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Clyde Mrs. Clifford Brown | Iron Duff Horace Bryson |
| Beaverdam— | Pigeon Gay Burnett |
| . . . Mrs. James Henderson, Jr. | Waynesville J. S. Black |
| Crabtree Clinton McElroy | White Oak . Mrs. W. H. Williams |
| Cataloochee Ed White | Fines Creek Cauley Rogers |
| Jonathan Grady Howell | Cecil Ned Moody |
| Ivy Hill Mark V. Howell | East Fork Ken Burnett |

Haywood County Board Of Commissioners