

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

CHAPTER I

On a certain terrace of the famous hotel Duna-Palota, where at tea time smart women show off stupid dogs and forget even stupider husbands, three uniformed officers and two civilians sat drinking cocktails about a table which commanded an excellent view of the swiftly flowing Danube.

It was that hour when the setting sun was gilding the age-old Gothic spires of Buda, and tinting with red the roofs of the empty Hapsburg palaces on the heights. Passing beyond these relics of imperial grandeur it cast oblique golden rays through the fresh leafed chestnuts to touch the gold braid on Count Alexander Exler's green uniform with a brush of fire. It drew sparkling high lights from the slender cocktail glasses, from silver scattered in disorder among the ash trays and made a brave brilliance among the decorations decking the horizon blue chest of Captain Robert d'Armonot, military attache at the French Ministry.

Though the terrace was becoming deserted, the group about that particular table apparently had no intention of leaving their half-finished cocktails.

Ian Gray, First Secretary to his Excellency, the American Minister, sipped the last of his Clover Club almost lazily, then drawled:

"Oh, you idiots and your eternal drivel about pretty women. I could forgive you if you didn't always exaggerate. You're always promising to produce Venus herself and all I find is Lilith or Mademoiselle Nitouche."

"So?" Captain d'Armonot's slender black brows shot upwards in a quizzical grin. "Mon Dieu, but you are base. There's no satisfying you—"

Across the table from the other civilian sat a blonde young man well built and with eyes that were sensitive and softly blue. His was a well-shaped, but none to forceful a mouth, and chin. He raised his glass and said with a casualness that was at once noticeable.

"In that case—here's to the hour Ian Gray meets the all conquering and, captivating Lolita! I'll bet she'd make even our fed-up and

thrill-seeking Ian sit up, bark for a biscuit, roll over and play dead."

"I fancy not," drawled the fourth member of the party, a long-limbed Englishman who, on the lapels of his perfectly fitting khaki uniform, wore the metal dragon insignia of the Welsh Fusiliers. "Despite all Ian's careful camouflage about being a jaded roue of a heart breaker, I've an idea he's still very much the rock-bound puritan at heart."

A slow tide of color swept into the clean-shaven lean cheeks of the man called Ian Gray, and lit a deep set half moon scar on the point of a jaw that was strong without being obstinate or sullen. Like an amiable bear he settled his broad six feet of brown clad body back into a wholly inadequate looking wicker chair as a ripple of laughter arose from the table and Count Exler threw back his head to address a stalling in a tree overhead.

"A rock-bound puritan! There is a story for you, little bird." He chuckled until the gold epaulettes on his shoulders winked in the sunlight like a thousand bright eyes. "A rock-bound puritan. Herr lieber Gott! What would Manciz, Ilon and—"

"Allez! Have you no shame?" reproved Captain d'Armonot over his golden brown Martini. "Why recite the decalogue of the wretched fellow's affaires du coeur?"

"Nevertheless," insisted Major Harris, the dark-haired Welshman, "I know our little Ian."

"Ah, but you won't if he meets the ravishing Lolita," persisted Count Exler. "She is charming, and a little dangerous, eh Leonard, my brave?"

The young man in the rather shiny, dark-blue civilian suit looked up, flushing a little. "Oh go to the devil, Roberte—she—will, I've found she isn't a bit as rumor describes here."

"Eh?" Ian Gray leaned forward, his even white teeth glimmering in a wholly American grin. "What's up for this international heart-breaker?"

The other glanced up, a sudden severity in his pale blue eyes. "Oh shut up, Soldat! You're like all the rest." He leaned forward, eager as a school-boy. "I tell you the Countess Lolita has been lied about—she's sweet, absolutely unaffected, and charming. I—I'd stake my life on it."

An uncomfortable silence crept over the table, as Captain d'Armonot stopped laughing to put down his cocktail glass rather suddenly. He leaned forward and his brown face was troubled.

"Ecoutez, mon ami, take a word from one who knows. The Countess Lolita is charming, no doubt, and very beautiful, but also unlucky to know. Eh, Alexander?" He shot a shrewd glance at the Hungarian officer, who, very dashing in his black froged pale green uniform, was staring fixedly out over the Danube.

His dark head inclined. "Igen di Valasto might tell you some interesting things, Leonard, but unfortunately he blew out his brains in Vienna last month—at the far end of the Prater, I believe."

Ian Gray was still smiling, but into his eyes had crept a gleam of anxiety. That was quite an outburst of the usually unemotional Leonard Holt—especially since he was very definitely and, presumably, happily engaged to the beautiful Ilya Zicheonyia, only daughter of a very prominent Minister in the affairs of the kingless kingdom of Hungary.

"Now that you speak of it," nodded Major Harris deliberately, "seems to me that's the same charming little lady who kicked up a bobby in Bucharest. Quite turned the diplomatic corps on their respected ears, don't you know? As My American cousins Ian and Leonard would say, she 'vamped' one of our under-secretaries into all kinds of foolish indiscretions. What the ultimate one was, I don't know, but she dropped poor Willoughby like a hot penny after she'd made a complete damn fool of him. There must have been something more serious to it all, else there's no accounting for the way he suddenly dropped out of sight. It's all very well to laugh and joke about these things, but there is no point in deliberately putting one's head into a noose."

A slight chill made Ian shiver and he suddenly noted that the sun had disappeared behind the palaces on the hill across the river.

"There are other rumors, too," commenced d'Armonot thoughtfully. "We in the government are well informed. So I state on good authority that the Countess von Walddeck brought about a certain stupid, but fatal duel—"

There sounded a tinkle of broken glass as Leonard Holt upset his cocktail glass and jumped to his feet, his sensitive features stiffened and flooded with angry color. With an apparent effort he restrained a torrent of words and said:

"Oh, shut up! You're talking like malicious old women. You know nothing about the real Lolita—she, she's pure and good!" Like bayonets, his pale blue eyes thrust at the startled but half amused group. "Do you understand? I won't listen to such talk. Lolita couldn't do such things and I—I'm damned if I'll stand for it."

Ian got up quickly and, towering over the slighter figure like a benevolent giant, placed a soothing hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Take it easy, Len," he advised. "You're getting warmed up about nothing. What's it to you anyway? She doesn't mean anything to your young life."

But did she? With an unpleasant sense of surprise Ian found himself recalling a dozen little incidents that had occurred during the past two weeks. Why, for instance,

SCOTT'S SCRAP BOOK

By R. J. SCOTT



NATIVES OF THE BASKINZ DESERT—TURKISHAN—OBTAIN DRINKING WATER OUT OF APPARENTLY DRY SAND—POROUS JARS BURIED IN THE SAND FILL WITH SUBSOIL DEW

CARBON DIOXIDE GAS MAKES WARPLANES COMPLETELY FREE OF THE DANGER OF FIRE OR EXPLOSION FROM BOMB QUINERY

had Leonard Holt spent so much time out? Rarely did he come in before one or two o'clock? Then again he would sit for long hours in the joint apartment staring fixedly into space; also his recent work at the Ministry had been so decidedly poor that even Mr. King, the minister, had remarked upon it.

The shorter man turned, half resentful, then his expression softened.

"Of course," he muttered, dropping his eyes, "you're right. But I don't like to hear an innocent woman slandered."

It was then that Captain d'Armonot, with the infinite tact of his race, threw himself into the breach.

"Voyons," he cried lightly. "Miracles will never cease if we become serious. Ho, Francois," he hailed

the maitre d'hotel, "some fresh cocktails, please." And then he said, turning to Harris. "After that, we must be on our way. You're going to old Baron von Satzmar's dinner tonight—no?"

The Welshman's narrow black head inclined and he made a wry face. "Yes, worse luck. I suppose there'll be the usual array of fat, bejeweled dowagers and medal-clanking diplomats on hand and—"

He broke off short to witness with approval the arrival of more cocktails. Promptly the sense of strain departed.

(To be Continued)

During the past ten years an average of 2,388,000 motor vehicles annually have been scrapped.

Letters To The Editor

Editor Waynesville Mountaineer, Waynesville, N. C.:

Dear Sir:— Finding myself unable to obtain official proof or verification of my age I'm writing you hoping that you can help me (via The Mountaineer) to reach some of the old timers living along Allen's Creek who can aid me in establishing my age. If I do this by the time I become 65 years old I will be eligible to draw the California old age pension.

My parents (now dead) always said I was born November 14, 1876, remained in Haywood county until May 15, 1899 when I joined my brothers, Charlie and Noah, in Galveston, Texas. We three survived the Galveston flood of 1900 and helped rebuild Galveston ere I went to Denver, Colorado, early in 1902.

After staying in Denver over two years, I went to Seattle, Washington, via Butte, Montana and remained in the Puget Sound section almost 12 years before going North to Vancouver, British Columbia, where Jessie McGillivray, a native of Glasgow, Scotland and I were married.

We made our home in Seattle for the next year or so, then we migrated to San Francisco in 1920. I've been here at 3278 18th Street since 1920.

There may be some difficulty in recalling George D. Harrison as I was known along Allen's Creek as Dennis Harrison.

Any help you can give me in getting proof which will be accepted by the state of California as evidence of my getting to be 65 years of age next November will be appreciated by the writer.

I have been told that a notarized affidavit signed by my boyhood

HOSPITAL NEWS

(Continued from page 5)

daughter on October 8th.

Mr. and Mrs. Avery Silver

Cove Creek, announce the birth of a son on October 8th.

Mr. and Mrs. Blake McCoy

of Clyde, route 1, announce the birth of a son on October 11th.

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Moore

Waynesville, route 2, announce the birth of a son on October 11th.

Mr. and Mrs. Fred Huffman

Waynesville, announce the birth of a son on October 11th.

Mr. and Mrs. Lee Gaddy,

Waynesville, route 1, announce the birth of a son on October 11th.

Mr. and Mrs. Coburn

Waynesville, announce the birth of a son on October 12th.

G. C. Plott, Game and Fish Protector, Attended District Meet Saturday

G. C. Plott, county fish and game protector of Haywood, attended district meeting of the game and refuge co-operation from this area which was held at Asheville on Saturday.

Forty were present for the meeting, at which time the coming year was outlined.

acquaintances testifying to knowledge of me and my age, boyhood days would be sufficient for this reason I would appreciate hearing from any of the old who remember.

Very sincerely yours,
GEORGE D. HARRISON
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