

LADY LARKSPUR

By MEREDITH NICHOLSON

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is Raymond Bashford's widow, it's the one who calls herself Farnsworth. They're playing a game of some kind, and it's no laughing matter, but it won't take long to find out what they're up to."

"You'll hardly go the length of having them arrested as imposters, Torrence—not without some data to work on!"

"Certainly not. You seem to be hitting it off with both of them, but I advise you to be on guard. Are you sure your uncle never sent you his wife's photograph? That would have been a perfectly natural thing to do."

"If I'd got a photograph, I should have headed for Japan, not for France," I laughed, but I was thinking deeply. His line of reasoning as to the incongruity of the marriage was not so different from my own that I could sneer at his suspicions. I shrank from telling him that I didn't care a hang whether the widow was a fraud or not. If the two women who had settled themselves on the Barton estate were imposters, they were extraordinarily daring and clever.

We were nearing a gateway where his car waited, and I saw several of the guard hanging about at a discreet distance. "Look here, Singleton," he said angrily, "you don't seem to take this business very seriously. You don't want to make the mistake of letting a pretty girl pull the wool over your eyes." He lowered his voice and added:



"These Women Are Under Suspicion."

"These women are under suspicion of something more serious than an attempt to rob an estate. An agent of the state department called on me yesterday and asked embarrassing questions about Mrs. Bashford. Not a secret service man, you understand, or anything of that kind, but an important man in the state department."

"Of course you knew nothing to tell," I suggested.

"I took a chance at lying to him about her expected arrival. I thought it only decent to have a look at the woman first. He told me nothing except that the British embassy had made inquiries and that the matter was delicate and must be handled carefully."

"Was this inquirer lame—a small dark man with a black mustache?" I asked, suddenly interested. "Such a person has been hanging about here, so the boys tell me?"

"Not at all! I may as well tell you it was Raynor—you probably remember him. He's a specialist in international law, and they took him into the state department just after the Lusitania business. He's a gentleman and a good fellow—I've played golf with him a good deal—and I hated to lie to him, but I thought I'd see this woman before telling him she had reached America."

I confess that I was a trifle dismayed by this. Raynor I knew slightly. Professionally and socially he stood high, and even without the prestige of his official position he was not a chap to sneeze at; but I didn't want Torrence to know I had any doubts as to the perfect authenticity of my uncle's widow.

"Oh every transcontinental pilgrim is probably scrutinized closely these days," I remarked carelessly. "Mrs. Bashford has lost a brother in the war, and I haven't heard anyone talk more bitterly against Germany. And her companion certainly has no illusions about the kaiser."

"I don't like the business," he declared stubbornly. "Let's do nothing foolish," I insisted. "If Raynor has reason to suspect either or both of these women, we'll hear further from him."

"I've put myself in a hole," he said, angrily. "Of course I've got to advise him immediately that Mrs. Bashford is here."

"Just wait a few days; I undertake to keep them under surveillance; you can put the whole responsibility on me. If they attempt to leave, I'll warn you and Raynor instantly, but they have settled themselves as though they expected to spend the rest of their lives here."

I told him of Mrs. Bashford's adventures in reaching the house without convincing him that there was anything funny in her experiences, and he left on my promise to report to him daily at a given hour and instantly if anything unusual occurred. I was on my way back through the grounds when Antoine arrested me.

"Pardon me, but I'd like to ask what

you think of it, sir?" he asked hoarsely, falling into step.

"If you mean what do I think of Mrs. Bashford," I replied sharply. "I think she's quite charming and delightful and all any one could ask in every way."

"It's her manner of speaking of spookish things, Mr. Singleton. It doesn't seem fitting in a widow and her so lately bereaved. And the older lady's quite as bad, sir. The maids tell me they keep talking all day about fairies and pretending they're queens and such like, and talking poetry to each other. The late master never indulged in such things, sir."

"He would have lived longer if he had! It was probably the poetry and fairies that attracted him to Mrs. Bashford."

"Yes, sir," he acquiesced with a gulp. "I suppose you're right, sir."

"You should be grateful to Mrs. Bashford for not bouncing you all for the row you made last night. It could be done; in fact, Mr. Torrence has suggested that legal means could be found for getting rid of you."

"That would be very sad, sir," he said humbly.

"Isn't Mrs. Bashford kind to you? Hasn't she taken pains to make you all feel at home?"

"Well, yes, sir. But she's taken Elsie back into the house, and there's no work for her, there being two women in the laundry already; and she's told me Dutch must be given his old place in charge of the poultry; and both being Germans, you will recall."

"It's just her kind heart, you idiot! You've all been spoiled; that's what the matter with you."

"It causes feeling; that's all, sir."

"It doesn't cause it if you brace up and act like a man," I retorted. Then, sorry I had been so harsh, I added: "We must take good care of Mrs. Bashford, Antoine. It would be your old master's wish. It would be wise to keep a guard at the house for the present in case your mysterious stranger turns up again."

He couldn't have failed to note my change of tone about the unknown visitor, but he made no comment.

"The guard's set, sir; front and rear."

"While there's no danger whatever it's just as well to take no chances. Please tell the boys to send for me immediately at any hour of the night if they see any prowlers about."

"Very good, sir. But if you please, sir"—he had reached the garage and he fingered, fingering his hat nervously—"if it wasn't for the ladies talking about spirits, we'd all feel better, sir."

"You're far from being a fool, Antoine. Those ladies just play at believing in such rubbish. If they really believed in ghosts, you'd be sure they wouldn't talk about it at table before strangers like you and me."

"Though this seemed to impress him, a moment later, as I was drawing down the shades in my bedroom, I saw him running across the lawn like a frightened rabbit."

CHAPTER III.

A Fan.

The morning mail brought a letter from Scarples acknowledging my congratulations on his play. While my enthusiastic praise pleased him, he was very scornful of my suggestions, seeming even more depressed than when he talked to me.

"It's impossible for me to plan other work. 'Lady Larkspur' ate the soul out of me. I'm done; finished, clean out of the running. There's only this to report. I had a letter from Dalton saying that some time ago he asked, at the hotel where he sent the script of 'Lady Larkspur' to know whether Miss Dewing had sent a forwarding address. Her accumulated mail had been called for by some one whose identity was not disclosed. Of course this isn't much to hang a rope on, but if that play is what I think it is and Miss Violet Dewing ever reads it she's going to jump for the telegraph office the moment she finishes the last act. I have no plans for returning East; the folks at home let me do as I please, and it's a relief to be in seclusion where I hear nothing of the doings of Broadway. I hope your ancient globe-trotting aunt still lingers in the far East! Keep the ink flowing, son. That novel ought to be well under way when I get back."

The tale I had begun seemed utter trash in comparison with the story of Alice Bashford, in which, much against my will, I had become a minor character. I had rather prided myself on my ability to see through a plot in the first chapter of the most complicated mystery story, but there were points in this unwritten tale that baffled me.

I kept away from the house until dinner-time, when I was received quite as an old friend by Alice and Mrs. Farnsworth. The table talk was of Celtic poetry, and proved less disturbing to Antoine than the previous night's discussion of ghosts.

Their day had been spent, they explained, in a further examination of my uncle's Japanese loot, and they had taken a long walk beyond the estate's boundaries and were enthusiastic about the landscape.

"It's so beautifully peaceful all about here," Alice murmured. "I feel that I never want to move again."

"That's a real tribute to America," Mrs. Farnsworth remarked; "for Alice dearly loves new scenes. She inherited a taste for travel from her father, who put some new places on the maps, you know."

I didn't know and I wanted to ask questions about Alice's father, but as though anxious to frustrate such inquiries my aunt asked how close we were to the place made famous by Israel Putnam's spectacular escape from

the British. She had read the story and would motor to the scene, she declared. It was quite clear that there were chapters in her life that were not to be opened for my perusal. No sooner had I caught a glimpse of a promising page than the book was politely closed. A curtain hung between the immediate present at Barton-on-the-Sound and other scenes and incidents of the girl's life; and Mrs. Farnsworth was equally detached from any tangible background. It seemed that I might meet them daily for the rest of my life in this same friendly fashion without adding a particle to my knowledge of them.

I became alert immediately when, as we rose from the table, Alice said, with the air of asking an unimportant favor:

"We were speaking last night of a man who has been asking for us here. His visits have alarmed the servants, but there is nothing to fear from him. You know"—she smiled at Mrs. Farnsworth—"it's rather he who seems to fear us; that, at least, is our impression, though we have no idea why he should do so. Still, it's rather good fun to find yourself an object of special attention and to be followed, even pursued. We've even led him on a little, haven't we, Constance?"

Mrs. Farnsworth laughingly admitted that they had led the gentleman on a trifle, "but with all circumspection," she protested.

"We met him here and there in Tokyo, and later were surprised to find him crossing on our steamer. We threw him off in the Canadian Rockies, where we stopped for a day, and eluded him in Chicago, where he was evidently lying in wait for us."

"Delightful!" I exclaimed.

"But please don't get the idea that the man annoys us," interposed Mrs. Farnsworth.

"Far from it!" cried Alice.

"You've seen enough of us perhaps to understand that we enjoy little adventures," said Mrs. Farnsworth. "The man pretends to be interested in Mr. Bashford's art treasures. Antoine's story about the disguise is rather against that; but we will give him the benefit of the doubt. What we are hoping is that something really amusing may come of his persistent pursuit. With you and the army of servants here we feel perfectly safe; so we're for giving him every chance to show his hand."

"He is the Count Giuseppe Montani," said my aunt, "who represents himself as a connoisseur—a lover of the beautiful."

"The mystery is solved! It is easy to understand why he has haunted the place."

"Yes; quite easy. Count Montani is very anxious to see the porcelain."

"I wasn't referring to the pottery; but I shouldn't press the matter."

"I advise you not to; your remark was highly improper from a nephew to an aunt! I have told you about all I know of this Italian gentleman. I am going to ask a favor. He telephoned from Stamford this afternoon to know whether we had arrived, and I bade him call tonight. I should be glad if you would remain until he leaves. I should like to know what you make of him."

"Certainly," I assented, pleased that she had taken me into her confidence and deeply curious as to the Italian connoisseur. What she had told me so frankly and plausibly did not, however, touch upon the matter of the interest shown by the American state department in my aunt's arrival at Barton, which troubled me much more than the antics of the Italian who had followed the women across the Pacific.

Count Montani arrived shortly and was received in the drawing room. The ladies greeted him with the greatest cordiality. As he crossed the room I verified the limp and other points of Antoine's description. His bearing was that of a gentleman; and in his very correct evening dress he hardly looked like a man who would disguise himself and attempt to rob a house. He spoke English all but perfectly and proceeded at once to talk a great deal.

"I was sad when I found I had so narrowly missed you at Seattle, and again at Chicago. You travel far too rapidly for one of my age!"

(To be continued.)

CITATION FOR LETTERS ADMINISTRATION

The State of South Carolina, County of Laurens By O. G. Thompson, Probate Judge Whereas C. B. Boho made suit to me to grant him Letters of Administration of the Estate and effects of Sallie Burns Osborne. These are, Therefore, to cite and admonish all and singular the Kindred and Creditors of the said Sallie Burns Osborne, deceased, that they be and appear before me, in the Court of Probate, to be held at Laurens Court

House, Laurens, S. C., on 16th day of November, 1920 next, after publication hereof, at 11 o'clock in the forenoon, to show cause, if any they have, why the said Administration should not be granted. Given under my hand this 1st day of November Anno (Domini) 1920. O. G. Thompson (Seal) J. P. L. C.

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LAND SURVEYING EXAMPLE

Farmer A.—"I have sold my lower place and must have it surveyed; who should I get to do the work?" Farmer B.—"B. R. Todd, of course."

Farmer A.—"Yes, I would prefer him, but his charges seem a little high."

Farmer B.—"Seems high, only. I sold my old home place and felt just as you do, so I got another surveyor. It took this other man four days to do the job and he made a mistake of twelve acres. I finally had to get Todd to do the whole job over and it took him only two days to do it right, saving me \$1,200.00."

MORAL—IF YOU HAVE SURVEYING TO DO HAVE IT DONE RIGHT AT FIRST AND AVOID FURTHER EXPENSE AND DISSATISFACTION.

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