

# Prologue to Love

By  
MARTHA  
OSTENSO

© MARTHA OSTENSO-WNU SERVICE

## CHAPTER XII—Continued

"Lord, Autumn, what's come over you?" Florian reproached her. "You need a shaking up. I'll be out for you around eight."

"Will Lin be along?"  
"Not on your life—not with me," Florian replied. "She has made other arrangements."

"Of course."  
"Bruce is coming in to look after her. We'll make it a nice little four-some when we get together. Any objections?"

"None whatever," she replied lightly. "I'll be ready when you come."

When she mentioned the affair to her father and asked him if he would not like to come along, he drew down one shaggy eyebrow and elevated the other humorously.

"Me? Scarcely," he said. "But buy me a ticket—buy me half a dozen. It's a worthy cause. You run along and enjoy yourself. It'll probably be the last spree for you in this part of the world. Put on your glad rags and show 'em what it means to be a Dean!"

Autumn laughed a little tremulously and kissed the serene and smiling eyebrow. "I'll do that very thing, Da," she told him. "Though you'd cast more glamor on the name than I can, if that's what you want, you old Roman!"

He tweaked her ear, and Autumn ran upstairs to dress.

Florian, turned out flawlessly in evening clothes, was waiting impatiently in the drawing room below. His quick flush as she came down to meet him, the silver web of her evening wrap on her arm, would have been sweet to the light vanity that had been hers in a day gone by. Now she heeded it only with a feeling of faint vexation. Florian came forward and lifted a cool and waxy corsage of white orchids from the small table near the door.

"Permit me, most beautiful!" he said, bowing elaborately from the waist. "And if you tell me you hate orchids, I'll make you eat 'em!"

Autumn laughed and brushed the delicate aristocrats with her finger tips. "Extravagant wretch!" she said, and fixed them to her gown. "They're beautiful, Florian. There. Thank you so much."

She did, as a matter of fact, detest orchids, and in her imperious days at Aunt Flo's she had never thought twice about spurning them. But that was before this curious possession of pity had come over her.

"You haven't seen father, of course?" she said as they turned to leave.

"I crashed the gates with Hannah's assistance," Florian said. "Is the Laird still peeved about the haystack episode?"

"No," she replied. "He has forgotten that, I think. But he has his bad days."

"Probably feels low about your leaving him so soon again."

"Scarcely that. He may be joining me in the fall."

They had got into Florian's car. "We're going to miss you like the deuce," he said.

"It's something to know I'll be missed, anyway," Autumn murmured.

Florian put out a hand and crushed her fingers within his own, then let them go and grasped the wheel. "Damn it!" he muttered. "If you would only listen to reason—"

The hall in which the dance was being held was packed when they arrived. Japanese lanterns and gay streamers festooned the ballroom and across the bobbing sea of faces came the giddy blare of a jazz orchestra. Autumn looked down from a balcony upon the throng with heavy-lidded eyes behind which there was a searching glow.

"Some crush, eh?" Florian observed, standing close beside her. "Shall we go down at once and get our shins kicked? Or shall we wait awhile? They're using everything down there from the Ark gallop to the latest wobble of the rumba."

"Let us look on for a while first," she suggested.

As she spoke, her lashes swept low over her eyes. In the comparative freedom of the outer fringe of dancers, she had seen Linda and Bruce. Linda's eyes moved cautiously along the rim of the balcony, paused for an imperceptible instant as they met Autumn's, and moved on in indifference.

"There's Lin and Bruce," Florian said suddenly, "down there near the wall—to the right."

Autumn looked, pretending not to see at once. "I see them now," she said finally.

"You could pick them out of a million," Florian said admiringly. "They make the rest of the crowd look like also-rans. Let's go down and give them a little competition, Autumn."

"So you got here?" It was Hector Cardigan speaking at Autumn's elbow. She turned upon him a radiant smile and extended her hands.

"Hello, darling!" she cried throatily. "How gorgeous you look!" She seized the lapels of his dinner jacket and surveyed him with wide eyes. "Are you going to give me a dance?"

"You flatter me," Hector said in his courtly fashion. "Do you guarantee to bring me safely out of the melee?"

"She brings us all safely back—out of everything," Florian put in. "Are you so afraid?" Autumn asked, as if she had not heard Florian's remark.

"Those young things down there— they terrify me," Hector said. "And you a soldier!" Autumn bantered.

Hector smiled. "I was younger than I am now," he said. "And stepping all over one's toes was considered against the rules."

Autumn and Florian laughed, and the three made their way down to the dancing-floor, the men on either side of Autumn, her arms drawn lightly through theirs. They stood chatting for a moment beside a great potted palm, and then Autumn waved back at Hector as Florian swept her away into the dance.

"The next one, Hector, remember," she said over Florian's shoulder. "I'll meet you in the lounge."

Hector nodded, but when she was out of sight he frowned. Bruce Landor had just come off the floor with Linda Parr. They strolled toward him, saluting him from some distance away as they approached. It

ly. "The age of chivalry seems to have passed," he said, shaking his head.

Bruce gazed at his cigarette smoke with narrowed lids. "I don't follow you, Hector," he said. "I can't see what chivalry has to do with it when a girl takes it into her head to run off to Europe."

"Do you know, my boy," Hector replied, after a moment of silence, "I suspect that this younger generation they talk about so much nowadays—I suspect they're a pretty faint-hearted crowd compared with their fathers—or their grandfathers, for example."

"I'm not in a position to question you, Hector," Bruce said. "If your reference to the faint heart has anything to do with the fair lady—"

"Of course it has!" Hector put in. "In my day, if a young man had notions about a young lady, she wouldn't get a chance to run off to England and leave him in the lurch."

Bruce laughed lightly. "Hector," he said, "you're barking up the wrong tree, old boy."

Hector bristled immediately. "I don't bark—" he began, then halted abruptly and got to his feet. "Here comes Autumn herself," he said, his pleasure and annoyance making a curious gnome-like mask of his face.

For an almost imperceptible instant, Autumn paused in her approach to them. Hector saw her quick pallor and put out a hand toward her. Bruce rose and made a slight, formal bow with an ease that was disconcerting to Hector.

After a brief "Good evening!" to Bruce, Autumn turned at once to Hector.

"Our dance, Hector!" she announced. "Or haven't you finished your smoke?"

Hector waived her question and then drew himself up sternly. "You are planning to leave for England next Saturday, I understand," he said to Autumn.

"Next Saturday morning, Hector," she replied.

"I am inviting you two"—he said, and looked aggressively from one to the other—"to dinner at my house next Thursday evening. Will that suit you both?"

There was a silence in which Hector, the spectator, saw the clash of humorously blue eyes and clear, stricken, sea-green eyes. Bruce thrust one hand idly into the pocket of his coat and stood in a lounging attitude, looking pleasantly down at Autumn as he replied.

"Thursday will suit me, Hector."

"Why, certainly, darling," Autumn said breathlessly, turning to Hector. "How sweet of you! Shall we dance now?" She took Hector's arm and led him away.

Bruce watched them go, then smiled as he seated himself.

Poor old Hector, he thought wryly. Making a last gallant effort! And how gamely she had taken it! Came right back at him, her eyes flaming in rage. Oh, well—what the devil! He buried his cigarette angrily in the earth of a potted plant that stood near at hand, then got up and strolled out, the leisurely figure of a young man who had no scar on his spirit.

The evening was no more than half spent when Autumn begged Florian to take her home. She pleaded a headache—from the noise and the heavy air of the place. Florian protested, but finally agreed. They found Linda and together arranged for one last night at the Parr hunting lodge before Autumn should leave them. Autumn would drive up from home and meet them at the lodge. The day was set and the girls kissed each other good night. For once, it seemed, Autumn was more languid than Linda.

Fifty miles southward, and ten more off the straight trail to Kellowna, was the distance that Autumn must go to the Parr hunting lodge. She had left home early to attend to some business in Kamloops and to assure Hector that she would be on hand for his dinner party on the following evening. It was a matter of indifference to her that Florian would be at the lodge, too, but the thought of meeting Linda warmed her heart. It would be difficult to say good-by to her. In her frivolous, unsentimental way Linda had shown her more unconscious sympathy than she could ever guess.

It was barely dusk when Autumn drove her car in through the rustic gate that led to the lodge. She got out promptly and glanced about, anticipating that Linda and Florian would be on the lookout for her.

"Hello!" Florian came hurrying toward her from the doorway of the lodge.

He took her gloved hands in a firm grip and stood looking down at her with a strange, inscrutable smile.

"Hello, Florian!" she returned, her voice a little unsteady. "Gosh, I've been driving like a fiend!"

"Go on in," Florian told her and gave her shoulder a little squeeze with his hand from which she shrank with instinctive uneasiness.

He jumped into the car and drove it hurriedly into the garage cabin. Autumn started toward the lodge, but Florian caught up with her and opened the door for her to enter. Within the large room, familiar to

ly. "The age of chivalry seems to have passed," he said, shaking his head.

Bruce gazed at his cigarette smoke with narrowed lids. "I don't follow you, Hector," he said. "I can't see what chivalry has to do with it when a girl takes it into her head to run off to Europe."

"Do you know, my boy," Hector replied, after a moment of silence, "I suspect that this younger generation they talk about so much nowadays—I suspect they're a pretty faint-hearted crowd compared with their fathers—or their grandfathers, for example."

"I'm not in a position to question you, Hector," Bruce said. "If your reference to the faint heart has anything to do with the fair lady—"

"Of course it has!" Hector put in. "In my day, if a young man had notions about a young lady, she wouldn't get a chance to run off to England and leave him in the lurch."

Bruce laughed lightly. "Hector," he said, "you're barking up the wrong tree, old boy."

Hector bristled immediately. "I don't bark—" he began, then halted abruptly and got to his feet. "Here comes Autumn herself," he said, his pleasure and annoyance making a curious gnome-like mask of his face.

For an almost imperceptible instant, Autumn paused in her approach to them. Hector saw her quick pallor and put out a hand toward her. Bruce rose and made a slight, formal bow with an ease that was disconcerting to Hector.

After a brief "Good evening!" to Bruce, Autumn turned at once to Hector.

"Our dance, Hector!" she announced. "Or haven't you finished your smoke?"

Hector waived her question and then drew himself up sternly. "You are planning to leave for England next Saturday, I understand," he said to Autumn.

"Next Saturday morning, Hector," she replied.

"I am inviting you two"—he said, and looked aggressively from one to the other—"to dinner at my house next Thursday evening. Will that suit you both?"

There was a silence in which Hector, the spectator, saw the clash of humorously blue eyes and clear, stricken, sea-green eyes. Bruce thrust one hand idly into the pocket of his coat and stood in a lounging attitude, looking pleasantly down at Autumn as he replied.

"Thursday will suit me, Hector."

"Why, certainly, darling," Autumn said breathlessly, turning to Hector. "How sweet of you! Shall we dance now?" She took Hector's arm and led him away.

Bruce watched them go, then smiled as he seated himself.

Poor old Hector, he thought wryly. Making a last gallant effort! And how gamely she had taken it! Came right back at him, her eyes flaming in rage. Oh, well—what the devil! He buried his cigarette angrily in the earth of a potted plant that stood near at hand, then got up and strolled out, the leisurely figure of a young man who had no scar on his spirit.

The evening was no more than half spent when Autumn begged Florian to take her home. She pleaded a headache—from the noise and the heavy air of the place. Florian protested, but finally agreed. They found Linda and together arranged for one last night at the Parr hunting lodge before Autumn should leave them. Autumn would drive up from home and meet them at the lodge. The day was set and the girls kissed each other good night. For once, it seemed, Autumn was more languid than Linda.

Fifty miles southward, and ten more off the straight trail to Kellowna, was the distance that Autumn must go to the Parr hunting lodge. She had left home early to attend to some business in Kamloops and to assure Hector that she would be on hand for his dinner party on the following evening. It was a matter of indifference to her that Florian would be at the lodge, too, but the thought of meeting Linda warmed her heart. It would be difficult to say good-by to her. In her frivolous, unsentimental way Linda had shown her more unconscious sympathy than she could ever guess.

It was barely dusk when Autumn drove her car in through the rustic gate that led to the lodge. She got out promptly and glanced about, anticipating that Linda and Florian would be on the lookout for her.

"Hello!" Florian came hurrying toward her from the doorway of the lodge.

He took her gloved hands in a firm grip and stood looking down at her with a strange, inscrutable smile.

"Hello, Florian!" she returned, her voice a little unsteady. "Gosh, I've been driving like a fiend!"

"Go on in," Florian told her and gave her shoulder a little squeeze with his hand from which she shrank with instinctive uneasiness.

He jumped into the car and drove it hurriedly into the garage cabin. Autumn started toward the lodge, but Florian caught up with her and opened the door for her to enter. Within the large room, familiar to

ly. "The age of chivalry seems to have passed," he said, shaking his head.

Bruce gazed at his cigarette smoke with narrowed lids. "I don't follow you, Hector," he said. "I can't see what chivalry has to do with it when a girl takes it into her head to run off to Europe."

"Do you know, my boy," Hector replied, after a moment of silence, "I suspect that this younger generation they talk about so much nowadays—I suspect they're a pretty faint-hearted crowd compared with their fathers—or their grandfathers, for example."

"I'm not in a position to question you, Hector," Bruce said. "If your reference to the faint heart has anything to do with the fair lady—"

"Of course it has!" Hector put in. "In my day, if a young man had notions about a young lady, she wouldn't get a chance to run off to England and leave him in the lurch."

Bruce laughed lightly. "Hector," he said, "you're barking up the wrong tree, old boy."

Hector bristled immediately. "I don't bark—" he began, then halted abruptly and got to his feet. "Here comes Autumn herself," he said, his pleasure and annoyance making a curious gnome-like mask of his face.

For an almost imperceptible instant, Autumn paused in her approach to them. Hector saw her quick pallor and put out a hand toward her. Bruce rose and made a slight, formal bow with an ease that was disconcerting to Hector.

After a brief "Good evening!" to Bruce, Autumn turned at once to Hector.

"Our dance, Hector!" she announced. "Or haven't you finished your smoke?"

Hector waived her question and then drew himself up sternly. "You are planning to leave for England next Saturday, I understand," he said to Autumn.

"Next Saturday morning, Hector," she replied.

"I am inviting you two"—he said, and looked aggressively from one to the other—"to dinner at my house next Thursday evening. Will that suit you both?"

There was a silence in which Hector, the spectator, saw the clash of humorously blue eyes and clear, stricken, sea-green eyes. Bruce thrust one hand idly into the pocket of his coat and stood in a lounging attitude, looking pleasantly down at Autumn as he replied.

"Thursday will suit me, Hector."

"Why, certainly, darling," Autumn said breathlessly, turning to Hector. "How sweet of you! Shall we dance now?" She took Hector's arm and led him away.

Bruce watched them go, then smiled as he seated himself.

Poor old Hector, he thought wryly. Making a last gallant effort! And how gamely she had taken it! Came right back at him, her eyes flaming in rage. Oh, well—what the devil! He buried his cigarette angrily in the earth of a potted plant that stood near at hand, then got up and strolled out, the leisurely figure of a young man who had no scar on his spirit.

The evening was no more than half spent when Autumn begged Florian to take her home. She pleaded a headache—from the noise and the heavy air of the place. Florian protested, but finally agreed. They found Linda and together arranged for one last night at the Parr hunting lodge before Autumn should leave them. Autumn would drive up from home and meet them at the lodge. The day was set and the girls kissed each other good night. For once, it seemed, Autumn was more languid than Linda.

Fifty miles southward, and ten more off the straight trail to Kellowna, was the distance that Autumn must go to the Parr hunting lodge. She had left home early to attend to some business in Kamloops and to assure Hector that she would be on hand for his dinner party on the following evening. It was a matter of indifference to her that Florian would be at the lodge, too, but the thought of meeting Linda warmed her heart. It would be difficult to say good-by to her. In her frivolous, unsentimental way Linda had shown her more unconscious sympathy than she could ever guess.

It was barely dusk when Autumn drove her car in through the rustic gate that led to the lodge. She got out promptly and glanced about, anticipating that Linda and Florian would be on the lookout for her.

"Hello!" Florian came hurrying toward her from the doorway of the lodge.

He took her gloved hands in a firm grip and stood looking down at her with a strange, inscrutable smile.

"Hello, Florian!" she returned, her voice a little unsteady. "Gosh, I've been driving like a fiend!"

"Go on in," Florian told her and gave her shoulder a little squeeze with his hand from which she shrank with instinctive uneasiness.

He jumped into the car and drove it hurriedly into the garage cabin. Autumn started toward the lodge, but Florian caught up with her and opened the door for her to enter. Within the large room, familiar to

ly. "The age of chivalry seems to have passed," he said, shaking his head.

Bruce gazed at his cigarette smoke with narrowed lids. "I don't follow you, Hector," he said. "I can't see what chivalry has to do with it when a girl takes it into her head to run off to Europe."

"Do you know, my boy," Hector replied, after a moment of silence, "I suspect that this younger generation they talk about so much nowadays—I suspect they're a pretty faint-hearted crowd compared with their fathers—or their grandfathers, for example."

"I'm not in a position to question you, Hector," Bruce said. "If your reference to the faint heart has anything to do with the fair lady—"

"Of course it has!" Hector put in. "In my day, if a young man had notions about a young lady, she wouldn't get a chance to run off to England and leave him in the lurch."

Bruce laughed lightly. "Hector," he said, "you're barking up the wrong tree, old boy."

Hector bristled immediately. "I don't bark—" he began, then halted abruptly and got to his feet. "Here comes Autumn herself," he said, his pleasure and annoyance making a curious gnome-like mask of his face.

For an almost imperceptible instant, Autumn paused in her approach to them. Hector saw her quick pallor and put out a hand toward her. Bruce rose and made a slight, formal bow with an ease that was disconcerting to Hector.

After a brief "Good evening!" to Bruce, Autumn turned at once to Hector.

"Our dance, Hector!" she announced. "Or haven't you finished your smoke?"

Hector waived her question and then drew himself up sternly. "You are planning to leave for England next Saturday, I understand," he said to Autumn.

"Next Saturday morning, Hector," she replied.

"I am inviting you two"—he said, and looked aggressively from one to the other—"to dinner at my house next Thursday evening. Will that suit you both?"

There was a silence in which Hector, the spectator, saw the clash of humorously blue eyes and clear, stricken, sea-green eyes. Bruce thrust one hand idly into the pocket of his coat and stood in a lounging attitude, looking pleasantly down at Autumn as he replied.

"Thursday will suit me, Hector."

"Why, certainly, darling," Autumn said breathlessly, turning to Hector. "How sweet of you! Shall we dance now?" She took Hector's arm and led him away.

Bruce watched them go, then smiled as he seated himself.

Poor old Hector, he thought wryly. Making a last gallant effort! And how gamely she had taken it! Came right back at him, her eyes flaming in rage. Oh, well—what the devil! He buried his cigarette angrily in the earth of a potted plant that stood near at hand, then got up and strolled out, the leisurely figure of a young man who had no scar on his spirit.

The evening was no more than half spent when Autumn begged Florian to take her home. She pleaded a headache—from the noise and the heavy air of the place. Florian protested, but finally agreed. They found Linda and together arranged for one last night at the Parr hunting lodge before Autumn should leave them. Autumn would drive up from home and meet them at the lodge. The day was set and the girls kissed each other good night. For once, it seemed, Autumn was more languid than Linda.

Fifty miles southward, and ten more off the straight trail to Kellowna, was the distance that Autumn must go to the Parr hunting lodge. She had left home early to attend to some business in Kamloops and to assure Hector that she would be on hand for his dinner party on the following evening. It was a matter of indifference to her that Florian would be at the lodge, too, but the thought of meeting Linda warmed her heart. It would be difficult to say good-by to her. In her frivolous, unsentimental way Linda had shown her more unconscious sympathy than she could ever guess.

It was barely dusk when Autumn drove her car in through the rustic gate that led to the lodge. She got out promptly and glanced about, anticipating that Linda and Florian would be on the lookout for her.

"Hello!" Florian came hurrying toward her from the doorway of the lodge.

He took her gloved hands in a firm grip and stood looking down at her with a strange, inscrutable smile.

"Hello, Florian!" she returned, her voice a little unsteady. "Gosh, I've been driving like a fiend!"

"Go on in," Florian told her and gave her shoulder a little squeeze with his hand from which she shrank with instinctive uneasiness.

He jumped into the car and drove it hurriedly into the garage cabin. Autumn started toward the lodge, but Florian caught up with her and opened the door for her to enter. Within the large room, familiar to

ly. "The age of chivalry seems to have passed," he said, shaking his head.

Bruce gazed at his cigarette smoke with narrowed lids. "I don't follow you, Hector," he said. "I can't see what chivalry has to do with it when a girl takes it into her head to run off to Europe."

"Do you know, my boy," Hector replied, after a moment of silence, "I suspect that this younger generation they talk about so much nowadays—I suspect they're a pretty faint-hearted crowd compared with their fathers—or their grandfathers, for example."

"I'm not in a position to question you, Hector," Bruce said. "If your reference to the faint heart has anything to do with the fair lady—"

"Of course it has!" Hector put in. "In my day, if a young man had notions about a young lady, she wouldn't get a chance to run off to England and leave him in the lurch."

Bruce laughed lightly. "Hector," he said, "you're barking up the wrong tree, old boy."

Hector bristled immediately. "I don't bark—" he began, then halted abruptly and got to his feet. "Here comes Autumn herself," he said, his pleasure and annoyance making a curious gnome-like mask of his face.

For an almost imperceptible instant, Autumn paused in her approach to them. Hector saw her quick pallor and put out a hand toward her. Bruce rose and made a slight, formal bow with an ease that was disconcerting to Hector.

After a brief "Good evening!" to Bruce, Autumn turned at once to Hector.

"Our dance, Hector!" she announced. "Or haven't you finished your smoke?"

Hector waived her question and then drew himself up sternly. "You are planning to leave for England next Saturday, I understand," he said to Autumn.

"Next Saturday morning, Hector," she replied.

"I am inviting you two"—he said, and looked aggressively from one to the other—"to dinner at my house next Thursday evening. Will that suit you both?"

There was a silence in which Hector, the spectator, saw the clash of humorously blue eyes and clear, stricken, sea-green eyes. Bruce thrust one hand idly into the pocket of his coat and stood in a lounging attitude, looking pleasantly down at Autumn as he replied.

"Thursday will suit me, Hector."

"Why, certainly, darling," Autumn said breathlessly, turning to Hector. "How sweet of you! Shall we dance now?" She took Hector's arm and led him away.

Bruce watched them go, then smiled as he seated himself.

Poor old Hector, he thought wryly. Making a last gallant effort! And how gamely she had taken it! Came right back at him, her eyes flaming in rage. Oh, well—what the devil! He buried his cigarette angrily in the earth of a potted plant that stood near at hand, then got up and strolled out, the leisurely figure of a young man who had no scar on his spirit.

The evening was no more than half spent when Autumn begged Florian to take her home. She pleaded a headache—from the noise and the heavy air of the place. Florian protested, but finally agreed. They found Linda and together arranged for one last night at the Parr hunting lodge before Autumn should leave them. Autumn would drive up from home and meet them at the lodge. The day was set and the girls kissed each other good night. For once, it seemed, Autumn was more languid than Linda.

Fifty miles southward, and ten more off the straight trail to Kellowna, was the distance that Autumn must go to the Parr hunting lodge. She had left home early to attend to some business in Kamloops and to assure Hector that she would be on hand for his dinner party on the following evening. It was a matter of indifference to her that Florian would