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A Touch of Trauma

by Marsh Haris

Rod Sturgess had all his life been subject to the slings and arrows of the most outrageous of all fortunes imaginable. There was simply no controlling the madness that cluttered up his existence. Whereas most people could go for great lengths of time without anything unusual happening to them, Rod could not go a single day. Fate regarded him with a perverse eye, and there was nothing to do but make the best of it. Which is precisely what he did, and indeed was known on occasion to even parlay it into a good thing. Then again it came disturbingly close to catastrophe.

Consequently when he announced that he was taking his vacation in Denmark his friends were all terrified. Of all places, Denmark! Why couldn't he have chosen some safer place, say like Mozambique? But Rod was adamant; Denmark it was, and Denmark it was going to be. So when he left, there were many who wondered if they would ever see old Rod again. At least in a recognisable state. Strange things have been known to happen in Denmark, and Lord knows Rod was an excellent candidate.

Naturally he had barely gotten there when things began to happen. He arrived in Copenhagen mid-afternoon, had a leisurely dinner, then went out for a stroll. Of course a stroll through the parks of Copenhagen on a lovely summer evening was more than Fate could ignore, and so within the hour Rod had secured himself a companion. Or to be more accurate, he had been secured. At any rate he and his attractive young man returned to his hotel where a number of thoroughly satisfactory hours were spent. Then sometime in the infant hours of the morning the young man, being a typically grateful and polite Dane, thanked his host, then went away.

The following day Rod went again into the city for lunch, some shopping, and sightseeing in general. But of course since it was Rod things could not long remain on an even keel. Shortly before dinner he rounded a corner and found himself staring dead-ahead at the young Dane of the night before. Now this in itself was not so bad, and indeed would have been quite desirable had it not been for the fact that the youth was not alone; there was a man with him. Remembering the lad's highly successful technique of the night before, Rod was not surprised. The wise thing to do, he decided quickly, was merely to walk on and pretend not to see him. He approached in as nonchalant a manner as possible, then sighed deeply inside as he strolled safely past. But with Rod that was entirely too much to expect. Some ten paces away he heard a series of rapid steps behind him and before he knew it the young man had come up and stopped him.

Rod eyed the two of them with a degree of uncertainty, all the while making valiant attempts at small talk.

«Mr. Sturgess, I want you to meet someone,» he said brightly. «This is my father.»

Rod winced sharply inside. With his luck it had to be his father. Well, the only thing to do was be cordial, then get away as quickly as possible. Why did these things always happen to him? Thinking frantically, he was about to blurt out some only vaguely credible excuse when the young man said,

«Father, this is the nice American I told you about this morning.»

Oh my nerves, Rod's mind gasped, my nerves! He attempted a total failure of a smile, all the while wishing devoutly that he could faint, if only he could pass out in some disgusting heap in the street. But rattled as they were, his nerves refused to give in.

«Oh yes,» the boy's father said with a smile. «I'm delighted. Mr. Stur-gess. May I ask if you've eaten yet?»

«Uh—no. I mean yes! Well that is . . .» It was the best he could do.

«Ah, then I insist you come to dinner with us. There's an excellent little place quite near here. I think you'll like the food.»

The handsome young Dane seconded the suggestion delightedly, and off they went. The man and his son chatted on as though very much enjoying both themselves and their guest, asking him questions about his vacation, and about America, while Rod babbled out all but unintelligible replies. It was a hateful situation.

During the course of the meal there was still more conversation, but always of the most ordinary sort. Not the first remark was made that might explain things. What were they doing? Surely they were up to something foul; there could be little doubt of it. They were simply too friendly and obliging. Blackmail. Yes that was most likely it. The boy would go out and solicit, then the father would move in and that way they were making a fortune off wealthy American tourists. Oh, the ignominy of it all!

Rod began to perspire and his appetite vanished. He had to get out, to get away. He would make some kind of excuse, rush to his hotel, then grab the first flight to Norway, or perhaps Sweden. Anyplace, *anyplace*, just so long as he escaped!

Fumbling and dropping his knife, Rod stammered. «I'm sorry—I. I must be going really. I promised someone I'd meet them back at the hotel about this time. Thank—uh, thank you.»

«Oh but you mustn't go now,» the young man begged.

«Yes, *I must!*» Rod blurted wildly, struggling to his feet.

«But what a pity. There's someone across the room I'd like you to meet. See, father? *There's that nice British sailor you were with last night!*»

This time Rod did faint. But they brought him to, and the four of them spent a marvelous evening together.

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