

HER BOY AT LAST.

A SOCIETY NOVEL.

By the author of "Edith Lyne," "Mildred Forrest House," "Chateau d'Or," etc.

Maddy bowed, and struck into a spirited waltz, which set many of the young people to whirling in circles, and produced the result which Maria so much desired, viz; it took Guy away from the piano, for he could not mistake her evident wish to have him as a partner, and with his arm around her waist he was soon moving rapidly from that part of the room, leaving only the doctor to watch Maddy's fingers as they flew over the keys. Maddy never thought of being tired. She enjoyed the excitement, and was glad she could do something towards entertaining Guy's guests. But Guy did not forget her for an instant. Through all the mazes of the giddy dance he had her before his eye, seeing not the clouds of lace and muslin encircled by his arm, but the little figure in blue sitting so patiently at the piano until he knew she must be tired, and determined to release her. As it chanced Maria was on his arm, and drawing her nearer to Maddy, he said, "Your fingers ache by this time, I am sure. It is wrong to trouble you longer. Agnes will take your place while you try a quadrille—I shall find you a partner."

"Oh, thank you," Maddy answered. "I am not tired in the least. I had as lief play till morning, provided they are satisfied with my time, and my stock of music holds out."

"But it is not fair for one to do all the playing; besides, I shall ask you to dance with me by-and-by."

Maddy's face crimsoned for an instant, and then in a low voice she said, "I thank you, but I must decline."

"Maddy!" Guy exclaimed, in tones more indicative of reproach than expostulation. There were tears in Maddy's eyes, and Maria Cutler watching her, was vexed to see how beautiful was the expression of her face as she answered frankly, "I have never told you that grandpa objected to my taking dancing lessons when I wrote to him about it. He does not like me to dance."

"A saint!" Maria uttered under her breath, smiling contemptuously as she made a movement to leave the piano, hoping Guy would follow her.

But he did not at once. Standing for a moment irresolute, while he looked curiously at Maddy, he said at last:

"Of course I interfere with no one's scruples of that kind, but I cannot allow you to wear yourself out for our amusement."

"I like to play—please let me," was Maddy's reply; and, as she set upon the floor were waiting for her, she turned to the instrument, while Guy mechanically offered his arm to Maria, who was waiting for him, and sauntered toward the green-room.

"What a blue old ignoramus that grandfather must be to object to dancing, don't you think so?" Maria said, laughing a little spitefully, and feeling secretly glad that Maddy had refused, and secretly angry at Guy for seeming to care so much.

"Say," she continued, as Guy did not answer her, "Don't you think it a sign that something is lacking in brains or education, when a person sets up that dancing is wicked?"

Guy would have taken Maddy's side then, whatever he might have thought, and he replied:

"Not lack of brains, certainly. Education and circumstances have much to do with one's views upon that subject. For my part, I like to see people consistent. Now, this old ignoramus, as you call him, lays great stress on *pomp and vanities*, and when I asked him once what he meant by them, he mentioned dancing in particular as one of the things which your church members promise to renounce?" and Guy bowed toward Maria, who, knowing that she was one of the church members referred to, winced perceptibly.

"But this girl—this Maddy. There's no reason why she should decline," she said; and Guy replied:

"Respect for her grandfather, in her case, seems to be stronger than respect for a higher power in some other cases."

"It's just as wicked to play for dancing as 'tis to dance," Maria remarked impatiently; while Guy rejoined:

"That is very possible; but I presume Maddy has never seen it in that light, which makes a difference," and the two retraced their steps to the room where the gay revellers were still tripping to Maddy's music.

After several ineffectual efforts Agnes had succeeded in enticing the doctor away from the piano, and thus there was no one near to see how at last the bright color began to fade from Maddy's cheeks as the notes before her ran together, and the keys assumed the form of one huge key which she could not manage. There was a blur before her eyes, a buzzing in her ears, and just as the dancers were entering heart and soul into the merits of a popular polka, there was a sudden pause in the music, a crash among the keys, and a faint cry, which sounded very much like "Mr. Guy," as Maddy fell forward with her face upon the piano. It was hard telling which carried her from the room, the doctor or Guy, or which face of the three was the whitest. Guy's was the most frightened, for the doctor knew she had only fainted, while Guy, struck with the marble rigidity of the face so recently flushed with excitement, said at first, "She's dead!" while over him there flashed a feeling that life with Maddy dead would be desolate indeed. But Maddy was not dead, and Guy, when he went back to his guests, carried the news that she had recovered from her faint, which she kindly ascribed to the heat of the room, instead of fatigue from playing so long. The doctor was with her, and she was doing as well as could be expected he said, thinking within himself how he wished they would go home, and wondering what attraction there was there, now that Maddy's place was vacant. Guy was a very miserable man by the time the last guest had bidden him good-night, and he had heard for the hundred-and-fiftieth time what a delightful evening it had been. Politeness required that he should look to the very last as pleasant and unaccompanied as if up-stairs there were no little sick girl, all alone undoubtedly with Dr. Holbrook, whom he mentally styled a "lucky dog," in that he was not

obliged to appear again in the parlors unless he chose.

The doctor knew Maddy did not require his presence after the first half hour, but he insisted upon her being sent to bed, and then went frequently to her door, until assured by Mrs. Noah that she was sleeping soundly, and would, if left alone, be as well as ever on the morrow; a prediction which proved true, for when at a late hour next morning the family met at the breakfast table, Maddy's was the brightest, freshest face of the whole, not even excepting Jessie's. Maddy, too, was delighted with the party, declaring that nothing but pleasurable excitement and heat had made her faint; and then, with all the interest which young girls usually attach to fainting fits, she asked how she looked and how she acted, and if she didn't appear very ridiculous, and how she got out of the room, saying the only thing she felt after falling was a sensation as if she were being torn in two.

"That's it," cried Jessie, who volunteered the desired information. "Brother Guy was 'way off with Maria Cutler, and doctor was with mamma, but both ran so fast, and both tried to take you up. I think Miss Cutler real hateful, for she said, 'mean like, 'Do you see them pull her, as if it was of the slightest consequence which carried her out?'"

"Jessie!" Guy interposed sternly; while the doctor, who had spent the night at Aikenside, looked disapprovingly at the little girl, who subsided into silence after saying in an under-tone, "I do think she's hateful, and that isn't all she said either about Maddy!"

It was rather uncomfortable at the table after that, and rather quiet too, as Maddy did not care to ask any more concerning her faint, while the others were not disposed to talk.

Breakfast over, the two young men repaired to the library, where Guy indulged in his cigar, while the doctor fidgeted for a time, and then broke out abruptly:

"I say, Guy, have you said anything to her about—well, about me, you know?"

"Why, no, I've hardly had a chance; and then, again, I concluded it better for each one to speak for himself," and knocking the ashes from his half-smoked cigar, Guy leaned back in his chair, with his eyes, and to all appearance, thoughts, wholly intent upon the curls of smoke rising above his head.

"Guy, if you were not engaged, I should be tempted to think you wanted Maddy Clyde yourself," the doctor suddenly exclaimed, confronting Guy, who still watching the rings of smoke, answered with the most provoking coolness, "You should?"

"Yes, I should; and I am not certain but you do as it is. Guy," and the doctor grew very earnest in his manner, "if you do care for Maddy Clyde, and she for you, pray tell me so before I make a fool of myself."

"Doctor," returned Guy, throwing the remains of his cigar into the grate, and folding his hands on his head, "you desire that I be frank and I will. I like Maddy Clyde, very much—more, indeed, than any girl I ever met, except Lucy. Had I never seen her—Lucy, I mean—I cannot tell how I should feel toward Maddy. The chances are, however, that much as I admire her, I should not make her my wife, even if she were willing. But I have seen Lucy. I am engaged to be married. I shall keep that engagement, and if you have feared me at all as a rival, you may fear me no longer. I do not stand between you and Maddy Clyde."

Guy believed that he was saying the truth, notwithstanding that his heart beat faster than its wont and his voice was a little thick. It was doubtful whether he would marry Maddy Clyde, if he could. By nature and education he was very proud, and the inmates of the red cottage would have been an obstacle to be surmounted by his pride. He knew they were far, far better than himself; but, from his earliest remembrance, he had been taught that blood and family and position were all important; that by virtue of them Remington was a name of which to be proud; that his father's foolish marriage with a pretty governess was the first mesalliance ever known in the family, and that he was not likely to follow that example was a point fully established in his own mind. He might admire Maddy very much, and, perhaps, build castles of what might possibly have been, had she been in his sphere of life; but, should he verily think of making her his wife, the olden pride would certainly come up as a barrier between them. Guy could not explain all this to the doctor, who would have been tempted to knock him down, if he had; but he succeeded in quieting his fears, and even suggested bringing Maddy there, if the doctor wished to know his fate that morning.

"I hear her now—I'll call her," he said and opening the door, he spoke to Maddy who was just passing through the hall.

"Dr. Holbrook wishes to see you," he said, as Maddy came up to him; and, holding the door, for her to enter, he saw her take the seat he had just vacated. Then, closing it upon them, he walked away thinking that last night's party, or something, had produced a bad effect on him, making him blue and wretched, just as he should suppose a criminal would feel when about to be executed.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DOCTOR AND MADDY.

Now that they were alone, the doctor's courage forsook him, and he could only stammer out some common-place remarks about the party, asking how she had enjoyed it, and if she was sure she had entirely recovered from the effects of her fainting fit. He was not getting on at all, and it was impossible for him to say anything as he had meant to say it. Why couldn't she help him, instead of looking so unobtrusively at him with those large, bright eyes? Didn't she know how dear she was to him? He should think she ought to have divined it ere this; and if so, why didn't she blush, or do something?

At last she came to his aid by saying, "You promised to tell me about the bracelets and necklace, whether I ought to keep them."

"Yes, oh, yes, I believe I did." And getting up from his chair, the doctor began to walk the floor, the better to hide his confusion. "Yes, the bracelets. You looked very pretty in them, Maddy; very; but you are always pretty—ahem—yes. If you

were engaged to Guy, I should say it was proper; but if not why, I don't know; the fact is, Maddy, I am not quite certain what I'm saying, so you must excuse me. I almost hated you that day you sent the note, telling me you were coming to be examined; but I had not seen you then. I did not know how, after a while—a very little while—I should in all probability—well, I did; I changed my mind, and I— I guess you have not the slightest idea what I mean." And stopping suddenly, he confronted the astonished Maddy, who replied: "Not the slightest, unless you are going crazy."

"He could in no other way account for his strange conduct, and she sat staring at him while he continued:

"I told you once that when I wanted my bill I'd let you know. I'd ask for pay. I want it now. I present my bill."

With a soiled, miserable feeling, Maddy listened to him, wondering where she could get the money, if it were possible for her grandfather to raise it, and how much her entire wardrobe would bring, suppose she should sell it. The bill had not troubled her haterly, for she had fallen into a way of believing that the doctor would wait until she was graduated and could earn it by teaching. Nothing could be more inopportune than for him to present it now and with a half-stiffed sob she began to speak but he silenced her by a gesture, and sitting down beside her said, in a voice more natural than the one with which he had at first addressed her:

"Maddy, I know you have no money. It is not that I want, Maddy; I want—I want—you."

He bent down over her now, for her face was hidden in her hands, all sense of sight shut out, all sense of hearing too, save the words he was pouring into her ear—words, which burned their way into her ears making it throb for a single moment with gratified pride, and then grow as heavy as lead as she knew how impossible it was for her to pay the debt in the way which he desired.

"I can't, doctor; oh, I can't!" she sobbed. "I never dreamed of this; never supposed you would want me for your wife. I am only a little girl—only sixteen last October—but I'm so sorry for you, who have been so kind. If I could love you as you deserve! I do love you, too; but not the way you mean. I cannot be your wife; no, doctor, I cannot."

She was sobbing piteously, and in his concern for her the doctor forgot somewhat the stunning blow he had received.

"Don't, Maddy!" he said, drawing her trembling form closely to him. "Don't be so distressed. I did not much think you'd tell me yes, and I was a fool to ask you. I am too old; but, Maddy, Guy is as old as I am."

The doctor did not know why he said this, unless in the first keenness of his disappointment there was a satisfaction in telling her that the objection to his age would apply also to Guy. But it did not effect Maddy in the least, or give her the slightest inkling of his meaning. He saw it did not and the pain was less to bear. Still, he would know certainly if he had a rival, and he said to her:

"Do you love some one else, Maddy? Is another preferred before me, and is that the reason why you cannot love me?"

"No," Maddy answered through her tears. "There is no one else. Whom should I love, unless it were you? I know nobody but Mr. Remington."

That name touched a sore, aching chord in the doctor's heart, but he gave no sign of the jealousy which had troubled him, and for a moment there was a silence in the room; then, as the doctor began to realize that Maddy had refused him, there awoke within him a more intense desire to win her than he had ever felt before. He would not give her up without another effort, and he pleaded again for her love, going over the past, and telling of the interest awakened when first she came to him that April afternoon, almost two years ago; then of the little sick girl who had grown so into the heart never before affected in the least by womankind; and lastly, of the beautiful woman, as he called her, sitting beside him now in all the freshness of her young womanhood. Maddy, as she listened, felt for him a strange kind of a pity, a wish to do his bidding if she only could, and why shouldn't she? Girls had married those whom they did not love, and been tolerably happy with them too. Perhaps she could be so with the doctor. There was everything about him to respect, and much which she could love. Should she try? There was a great lump in Maddy's throat as she tried to speak, but it cleared away, and she said very sadly, but very earnestly, too:

"Dr. Holbrook, would you like me to say yes with my lips when all the time there was something at my heart tugging to answer no?"

This was not at all what Maddy meant to say, but the words were born of her extreme truthfulness, and the doctor thus learned the nature of the struggle, which he saw was going on.

"No, Maddy, I would not have you say yes unless your heart was in it," he answered, while he tried to smile upon the fearful face looking up so sorrowfully at him.

But the smile was a forlorn one, and there came instead a tear as he thought how dear was this girl who never could be his. Maddy saw the tear, and, as if she were a child, wiped it from his cheek; then, in tones which never faltered, she told him it might be that in time she should learn to love him. She would try so hard, she would think of him always as her promised husband, and by that means should learn at last not to shrink from taking him for such. It might be ever so long, and perhaps she should be twenty or more, but some time in the future she should feel differently. Was he satisfied, and would he wait?

Her little hand was resting on his shoulder, but he did not mind its soft pressure or know that it was there, so strong was the temptation to accept the half-made promise. But the doctor was too noble, too unselfish, to bind Maddy to himself unless she were wholly willing, and he said to her that if she did not love him now she probably never would. She could not make a love. She need not try, as it would only result in her own unhappiness. They would be friends just as they always had been, and none need know of what had passed between them, except Guy. "I must tell him," the doctor said, "because he knew that I was going to ask you."

Maddy could not explain why it was that

she felt glad the doctor would tell Guy. She did not analyze any of her feeling, or stop to ask why she should care to have Guy Remington know the answer she had given Dr. Holbrook. He was going to him now, she was sure, for he arose to leave her, saying he might not see her again before she returned to New York. "She did not mention his bill. That was among the by-gones, a thing never again to be talked about; and offering him her hand, she looked for an instant earnestly into his face, and then, without a word, hurried from the room, while the doctor with a sad, heavy heart, went in quest of Guy.

"Refused you, did you say?" and Guy's face certainly looked brighter than it had before since he left the doctor with Maddy Clyde.

"Yes, refused me, as I might have known she would," was the doctor's reply, spoken so naturally that Guy looked up quickly to see if he really did not care.

But the expression of the face belied the calmness of the voice; and, touched with genuine pity, Guy asked the cause of the refusal—"Preference for any one else, or what?"

"No, there was no one whom she preferred. She merely did not like me well enough to be my wife, that was all," the doctor said, and then he tried to talk of something else; but it would not do. The wound was yet too fresh and sore to be covered up, and in spite of himself the bearded chin quivered and the manly voice shook as he bade good-bye to Guy, and then went galloping down the avenue.

Great was the consternation among the doctor's patients when it was known that their pet physician—the one in whose skill they had so much confidence—was going to Europe, where in Paris he could perfect himself in his profession. Some cried, and among them Agnes; some said he knew enough already; some tried to dissuade him from his purpose, while only two knew exactly why he was going—Guy and Maddy; he former approving his decision, and lending his influence to make his tour abroad as pleasant as possible; and the latter weeping bitterly as she thought how she had sent him away, and that, if aught befell him on the sea or in distant land, she would be held responsible. Once there came over her the wild impulse to bid him stay, to say that she would be his wife; but before the rash act was done, Guy came down to the cottage, and Maddy's resolution gave way at once.

It would be difficult to tell the exact nature of Maddy's liking for Guy at that time. Had he offered himself to her she would probably have refused him even more promptly than she did the doctor; for, to all intents and purposes, he was, in her estimation, the husband of Lucy Atherton. As such, there was no harm in making him her paragon of all male excellence; and Guy would have felt flattered could he have known how much he was in that young girl's mind. But now for a few days he had a rival, for Maddy's thoughts were all given to the doctor, who came down to see her once before starting for Europe. She did not cry while he was there, but her voice was strange and hoarse as she gave him messages for Lucy Atherton; and all that day her face was white and sad as are the faces of those who come back from burying their dead.

Only once after the party did she go up to Aikenside, and then, summoning all her fortitude, she gave back to Guy the bracelets and the necklace, telling him she ought not to wear them; that ornaments as rich as these were not for her; that her grandmother did not wish her to keep them, and he must take them back. Guy saw she was in earnest, and much against his will he received again the ornaments he had been so happy in purchasing.

"They will do for Jessie when she was older," Maddy said; but Guy thought it very doubtful whether Jessie would ever have them. They were something she had bought for Maddy, something she had worn, and as such they were too sacred to give to another. So he laid them away beside the picture guarded so carefully from every one.

Two weeks afterward Aikenside presented a desolate, shut-up appearance, for Agnes, Maddy and Jessie had returned to New York; Agnes to continue the siege which, in despair of winning the doctor, she had commenced against a rich old bachelor, who had a house on Madison Square; and Maddy to her books, which ere long obliterated, in a measure, the bitter memory of all that had transpired during her winter vacation.

CHAPTER XVII.

WOMANHOOD.

Two years pass quickly, particularly at school, and to Maddy Clyde, talking with her companions of the coming holidays, it seemed hardly possible that two whole years were gone since the eventful vacation when Dr. Holbrook had so startled her by offering her his hand. He was in Europe still, and another name than his was on the little office in Mrs. Connor's yard. To Maddy he now wrote frequently; friendly, familiar letters, such as a brother might write, never referring to the past, but telling her whatever he thought would interest and please her. Occasionally, at first, and more frequently afterwards, he spoke of Margaret Atherton, Lucy's younger sister, a brilliant, beautiful girl who reminded him, he said, of Maddy; only she was saucier, and more of a tease; not at all like Lucy, whom he described as something perfectly angelic. Her twenty-fifth birthday found her on a sick bed, with Dr. Holbrook in attendance, and this was the reason given why the marriage between herself and Guy was again deferred. There had been many weeks of pain, succeeded by long weary months of languor, and during all this time the doctor had been with her as the family physician, while Margaret also had been constantly in attendance.

But Lucy was much better now. She could sit up all day, and even walk a little distance, assisted by the doctor and Margaret, whose name had come to be almost as familiar to Maddy as was that of Lucy. And Maddy, in thinking of Margaret, sometimes wondered "if—" but never went any further than that. Neither did she ask Guy a word about her, though she knew he must have seen her. She did not say much to him of Lucy, but she wondered why he did not go for her, and wanted to talk with him about it, but he was so changed that she dared not. He was not so sociable as of old, and Agnes did not hesi-

tate to call him *cross*, while Jessie complained that he never romped or played with her now, but sat all day long in a deep reverie of some kind.

On this account, Maddy did not look forward to the coming vacation as joyfully as she would otherwise have done. Still, it was always pleasant going home, and she sat talking with her young friends of all they expected to do, when a servant entered the room, and glancing over the group of girls, singled Maddy out, saying, as he placed an unsealed envelope in her hand, "A telegram for Miss Clyde."

There was a blur before Maddy's eyes, so that at first she could not see clearly, and Jessie, climbing on the bench beside her, read aloud:

"Your grandmother is dying. Come at once. Agnes and Jessie will stay till next week."
Guy Remington.

It was impossible to go that afternoon, but with the earliest dawn Maddy was up, and unmindful of the snow falling so rapidly, started on that sad journey home. It was the first genuine storm of the season, and it seemed resolved on making amends for past neglect, sweeping in furious gusts against the windows, sifting down in thick masses from the leaden sky, and so impending the progress of the train that the chill wintry night had closed gloomily in ere the Somerville station was reached, and Maddy, weary and dispirited, stepped out upon the platform, glancing around for the usual omnibus, which she had little hope would be there on such a night. If not what would she do? This had been the burden of her thoughts for the last few hours, for she could not expect Guy to send out his horses in this fearful storm, much less to be there himself. But Guy was there, and it was his voice which first greeted her as she stood half-blinded by the snow, uncertain what she must do next.

"Ah, Mr. Remington, I didn't expect this. I am so glad, and how kind it was of you to wait for me!" she exclaimed, her voice expressing her delight, and amply repaying the young man, who had not been very patient or happy through the six long hours of waiting he had endured.

But he was both happy and patient now, with Maddy's hand in his, and pressing it very gently he led her into the ladies' room; then making her sit down before the fire, he brushed her snowy garments himself, and dashing a few flakes from her disordered hair, told her what she so eagerly wished to know. Her grandmother had had a paralytic stroke, and the only word she had uttered since was "Maddy." Guy had not been down himself, but had sent Mrs. Noah as soon as Farmer Green had brought the news. She was there yet, the storm having prevented her return.

"And grandma?" Maddy gasped, fixing her eyes wistfully upon him. "You do not think her dead?"

No, Guy did not, and stooping he asked if he should not remove from the little feet resting on the stove hearth the over-shoes, so full of melting snow. Maddy cared nothing for her shoes or herself just then. She hardly knew that Guy was taking them off, much less that as he bent beside her, her hand lay lightly upon his shoulders as she continued her questionings.

"She is not dead you say; but you do think—does anybody think she'll die? Your telegram said 'dying.'"

Maddy was not to be deceived, and thinking it best to be frank with her, Guy told her that the physician, whom he had taken pains to see on his way to the depot, had said there was no hope. Old age and an impaired constitution precluded the possibility of recovery, but he trusted she might live till the young lady came.

"She must—she will! Oh, grandma, why did I ever leave her?" and burying her face in her hands Maddy cried passionately, while the last three years of her life passed in rapid review before her mind—years which she had spent in luxurious ease, leaving her grandmother to toil in that humble cottage, and die without one parting word for her.

The feeling that perhaps she had been guilty of neglect was the bitterest of all, and Maddy wept on, unmindful of Guy's attempts to soothe her. At last, as she heard a creak in the adjoining room strike eight, she started up, exclaiming, "I have stayed too long. I must go now. Is there any conveyance here?"

"But, Maddy," Guy rejoined, "you cannot go to-night. The roads between here and Honedale are one unbroken snow-bank. It would take hours to break through; besides, you are too tired. You need rest, and must come with me to Aikenside, where you are expected, for when I found how late the train would be, I sent word to have your room and the parlors warmed, and a nice hot supper ready for us. You'll surely go with me, if I think best."

Guy's manner was more like a lover than a friend, but Maddy was in no state to remark it. She only felt an intense desire to go home, and turning a deaf ear to all he could urge, replied:

"You don't know how dear grandma is to me, or you would not ask me to stay. She's all the mother I ever knew. Think, would you stay if the one you loved best was dying?"

"But the one I love best is not dying, so I can reason clearly, Maddy."

Here Guy checked himself, and listened while Maddy asked again if there was no conveyance there as usual.

"None but mine," said Guy, while Maddy continued faintly:

"And you are afraid it will kill your horses?"

"No, it would only fatigue them greatly. It's for you I fear. You've borne enough to-day."

(To be continued.)

The Laugh of a Child.

The laugh of a child will make the holiest day more sacred still. Strike with the hand of fire, O weird musician, thy harp strung with Apollo's golden hair; fill the vast cathedral aisles with symphonies sweet and dim, daft touches of the organ keys; blow, bugler, blow, until thy silver notes do touch and kiss the moonlit waves and charm the lovers wandering 'mid vine-clad hills! But know your sweetest strains are discords all compared with childhood's happy laugh—the laugh that fills the eyes with light and every heart with joy. Oh, rippling river of laughter! thou art the boundary line between the beasts and men, and every wayward wave of thine doth drown some fretful fiend of care. O, Laughter! rose-lipped daughter of Joy! there are dimples enough in thy cheeks to catch and hold and glorify all the tears of Grief.