

All For Love

By May Agnes Fleming.



lend me a guinea or two, would you?"

"Why, certainly, Mr. Harkins," said Mr. Toosyeggs, briskly, drawing out his purse. "I'm real happy to be able to be of service to you. Here's two guineas, and don't put yourself out about paying it."

"Mr. Toosyeggs, you're a brick!" said Mr. Harkins, grasping his hand with emotion. "I won't put myself out in the least, since you're kind enough to request it; but hif you'll come and dine with me some day, I'll give you a dinner of b'ied pertaters and roast honions fit for a king. Will you come?" urged Mr. Harkins.

"Certainly I will, Mr. Harkins; and it's real kind in you to ask me," said Mr. Toosyeggs, politely. "I see you're in a hurry, so I'll bid you good-day, now. Most certainly I'll come, Mr. Harkins. I'm obliged to you."

CHAPTER IX.

And how fell the news of Reginald Germaine's innocence of the crime for which he was condemned, and his sad end, on the other personages, connected with our tale?

To his mother came the news in her far-off Greenwood home; and as she heard he had perished forever in the stormy sea, Reginald, already tottering in her half-crazed brain, entirely gave way and she died, a shrieking maniac, through the dim, old woods.

To Earl De Courcy it came in his stately home, to fill his heart with deepest sorrow and remorse. Hauntingly before him arose the agonized, despairing face of the lonely woman, as on that last night, she had groveled at his feet, shrieking for that mercy he had refused. Proud, stern man as he was, no words can express the deep pity, the heartfelt sorrow he felt, at the thought of that lonely, despairing, childless woman, a wanderer over the wide world.

To Lord Ernest Villiers it came, bringing deepest regret for the bold-eyed, high-hearted youth, so unjustly condemned, so wrongly accused. He thought of him as he knew him first—proud, princely, handsome, and generous. And now! that young life, under the unjust sentence of the law, had passed away; that haughty head, noble even in its degradation, lay far under the deep sea, among the bleaching bones of those guilt-hardened men.

To one, in her father's castle halls, it came, bringing untold relief. He had cruelly wronged her; but he was dead now, and she freely forgave him for all she had suffered. While he lived, incurable sorrow must be hers; but he was gone, and happy days might dawn for her yet. She might love another now, without feeling it a crime to do so—one noble and generous, and worthy of her in every way. One deep breath of relief, one low sigh to the memory of his sad fate and then a look of calm, deep happiness stole over the beautiful face, such as it had not worn for years, and the beautiful head, with its wreath of raven ringlets, dropped on her arm, in a voiceless thanksgiving, in a joy too intense for words.

And this was Lady Maude Percy. In spite of her steady refusal of his suit, Lord Villiers had not despaired. He could not understand the cause of her strange melancholy and persistent refusal of her hand, knowing, as he did, that she loved him, but, believing the obstacle to be merely an imaginary one, he hoped on, and waited for the time to come when this singular fancy of hers would be gone.

That time had come now. Calling, one morning, and finding her in the drawing room, he was greeted with a brilliant smile, with a quick flush of pleasure, and a manner so different from her customary one, that his heart bounded with sudden hope.

"I am truly rejoiced to see Lady Maude recovering her spirits again," he said, his fine eyes lit up with pleasure.

"If Lord Villiers only knew how much cause I had for that nameless melancholy," he would forgive me any pain it may ever have caused him," she said, while a shadow of the past fell darkly over her bright young face.

"And may I not know? Dearest Maude, when is this mystery to end? Am I never to be made happy by the possession of this dear hand?"

He took the little, white hand, small and snowy as a lily-leaf, and it was no longer withdrawn, but nestled lovingly in his, as if there it found its rightful home.

"Maude, Maude," he cried, in a delirium of joy, "is your dark dream, then, in reality over? O Maude, speak, and tell me! Am I to be made happy yet?"

"If you can take me as I am, if you can forgive and forget the past, I am yours, Ernest!" she said in a thrilling whisper.

In a moment she was in his arms, held to the true heart whose every throbbing was for her—her head upon the breast that was to pillow hers through life.

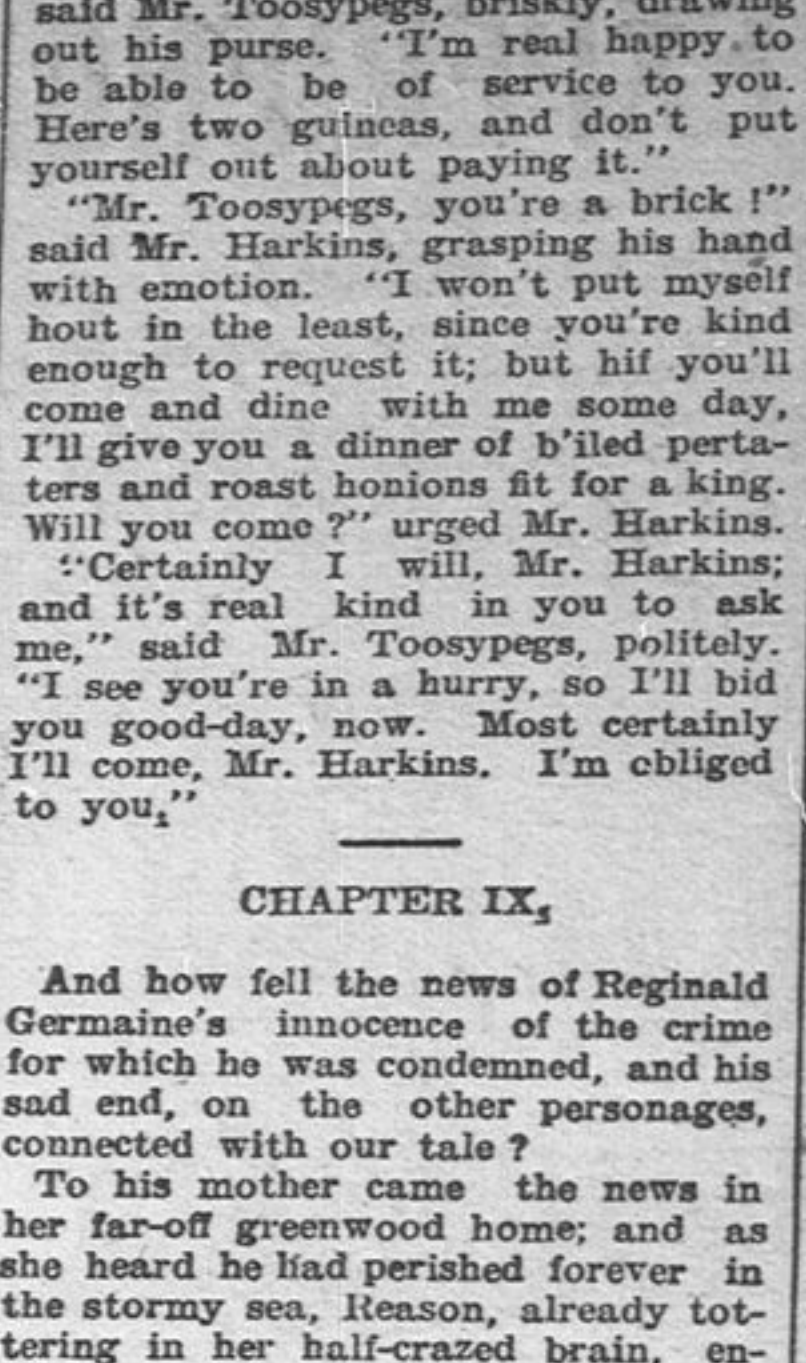
"Maude, Maude! My bride, my life, my peerless darling! O Maude, this is too much happiness!" he cried, in a sort of transport between the passionate kisses pressed on her warm, yielding lips.

Blushingly she rose from his embrace, and gently extricated herself from his arms.

"O Maude, my beautiful darling! May heaven forever bless you for this!" he fervently exclaimed, all aglow with passionate love.

She had sunk into a weak and hand-

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many young heart she could feel throbbing under her own, and whispered:

"My own life's darling still! O Maude! if you must grieve, it shall be on my breast. If you have erred, so, too, have I—so have we all, often. I will forget all but that you have promised my arms should be your home forever!"

And you forgive and love me still? O Lord Ernest!

He kissed away her tears as she wept aloud.

"One thing more, dearest. Who was my Maude's first love?"

He felt a convulsive shiver run through the delicate form he held. He felt her breast heave and throb as if the name was struggling to leave it, and could not.

"Tell me, Maude; for I must know."

"O Saints in Heaven! how can I! O Lord Ernest! this humiliation is more than I can endure."

"Speak, Lady Maude! for I must know."

She lifted her eyes to his, full of unspeakable anguish, and then dropped her head heavily again; for that fixed, grave, noble face, full of love and pity as it was, there was no yielding now.

"Tell me, Maude, who was the husband of your childhood?"

From the pale, quivering lip, in a dying whisper, dropped the words: "Reginald Germaine, the gipsy!"

There was a moment's death-like silence. The handsome face of Lord Ernest Villiers seemed turned to marble, and still motionless, as if expiring, she lay in the arms that clasped her still in a close embrace. At last: "Heaven be merciful to the dead! Look up, my precious Maude; for nothing on earth shall ever come between us more!"

Calm and clear, on the troubled wave of her tempest-tossed soul, the low words fell; but only her convulsive sobs were his answer.

"Maude! my own dear Maude!" he cried at last, alarmed by her passion of grief, "cease this wild weeping. Forget the troubled past, dear love, for there are many happy days in store for us yet."

But still she went on—wildly, vehemently, at first—until her strong passion had passed away. He let her sob on in quiet now, with no attempt to check her grief, except by his silent caresses.

She lifted her head and looked up, at last, thanking him by a radiant look, and the soft thrilling clasp of her white arms.

"I will not ask you to explain now, sweet Maude," he softly whispered. "Some other time, when you are more composed, you shall tell me all."

"No—no; better—now—far better now; and then, while life lasts, neither you nor I, Ernest, will ever breathe one word of the dark, sorrowful story again. O Ernest! can all the fondest love of a lifetime suffice to repay you for the forgiveness you have shown me to-day?"

"I am more than repaid now, dear love. Speak of that no more. But now that the worst is over, will my Maude tell me all?"

"I have not much to tell, Ernest; but you shall hear it. Nearly three years before you and I met, when a child of fourteen, I was on a visit to my Uncle Everly's. My cousin Hubert, home from college brought with him a fellow-student to spend the vacation, who was presented to me as Count Germaine. What Reginald Germaine was then, you who have seen him do not need to know. Handsome, dashing, fascinating, he took every heart by storm, winning love by his gay, careless generosity, and respect by his talents and well known daring. I was a dreamy, romantic school-girl; and in this bold, reckless boy, handsome as an angel, I saw the living embodiment of my most glorious ideal. From morning till night we were together, and, Ernest, can you understand that wild dream? How I loved him then, words are weak to express, how I loathed and despised him after no words can ever tell. Ernest, he persuaded me to elope with him one night; and we were married. I never stopped to think of the consequences then. I only knew that I would have given up my hopes of heaven for him! Three weeks longer he remained at Everly Hall; and then papa sent me back to school and he went to London.

"No one was in our secret, and we met frequently, unsuspected; though papa, thinking he was too presuming, had forbidden me to associate with him. One day we went out driving; the carriage was upset, fainting; and for a long time I remembered nothing more."

"When reason returned, I was in a little cottage, nursed by an old woman; while he hovered by my bedside night and day. Then I learned that I had given birth to a child—dead and buried now. I could recollect myself as people recollect things in a confused dream—of hearing for a time the feeble cries of an infant, and seeing a baby face, with the large, black, beautiful eyes of Reginald Germaine. I thought, at the time, a strange, unaccountable change had come over him; though I could not tell what. When I was well again, I learned. Standing before me, one morning, he calmly and quietly told me how he had deceived me—that, instead of being a French count, he was the son of a strolling gipsy; but that, having repented of what he had done, he was willing to give me up."

"The very life seemed stricken out of my heart as I listened. Then my pride—the aroused pride of my race—arose; and, oh! words are weak to tell how I loathed myself and him. That I, a Percy—the daughter of a race that has mated with royalty hitherto—had fallen so low as to wed a gipsy! I shrank in horror unspoken, from the black, bottomless quagmire into which I had sunk. All my love in that instant turned to bitterness, and I passionately bade him leave me, and never dare to come near me again, or breathe a word of the past. He obeyed; and from that day I never beheld him more."

"After that, I met you, Lord Er-

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