

All For Love

By May Agnes Fleming.



fruitless search, and returned to the saloon.

Like a flock of frightened birds, the ladies, pale with mortal apprehension, were huddled together—not daring even to speak. In brief, awestruck whispers the result was told; and then, with a chill with apprehension, the guests began rapidly to disperse. And in less than an hour, the stately house of Maude Percy was wrapped in silence, solitude and gloom. The lady, surrounded by her attendants, lay still unconscious, while all over London the news was spreading of the appalling termination of the wedding.

CHAPTER XI.

Into the great dark gulf of the Past, nearly two years, like two waves from an ever flowing sea, had vanished, freighted with their usual modicum of sorrow, joy, happiness and despair.

And what changes had those two years brought to the various personages connected with our tale?

First, Mr. O. C. Toosy, in whom I hope my fair readers feel an interest, had closed the eyes of his rich uncle, pocketed two thousand pounds, attired himself in the very deapest weeds, and began to turn his thoughts toward Dismal Hollow, and all "the real nice people around there."

Miss Clara Jernyngham had obtained the desire of her heart at last, was "Her Grace of D.," and, blazoning in "family diamonds," was boasted as one of the reigning beauties and belles of the London haiton. As to that "dear old thing," the duke, the pretty little duchess troubled her head very little about him; and he was left at home to amuse himself with alternate fits of the palsy and gout, and the other diseases old gentlemen are heir to.

Captain George Jernyngham had risen to the rank of colonel now, having been promoted, for his bravery in a certain action; and an old uncle, of whom he had hardly heard before, coming at the same time from the East Indies with an uncountable lot of money, and the liver disease, was accommodating enough to die in the nick of time, leaving all his wealth to our gay guardian. These two events, of good fortune enabled Master George to offer his hand, with a safe conscience, to handsome Lady Kate, which he did without even hinting at such a thing as a chandler's shop. Lady Kate showed her good taste in the selection of a husband, and two weeks after, "The Times," under the heading of "Marriage in High Life," announced the melancholy fact that Colonel Jernyngham was a bachelor no longer.

Of the gipsy Keturah, nothing was known. Now and then, at intervals, Earl De Courcy would catch a glimpse of a dark, wild face, with streaming hair, and hollow, sunken eyes, sitting after him like a haunting shadow from the grave. Wherever he went, night or day, that dusky, ominous shadow followed, dogging his steps like a sleuth-hound, until the dread of it grew to be a horror unspeakable—the vague mysterious terror of his life. No precautions could rid him of it, until it became the very bane of his existence. If he walked, looking over his shoulder he would see that tall, spectral figure coming after; if he sat in his carriage, and it chanced to stop for a moment, a white, wild face, with great burning eyes, would gleam in upon him for an instant with deadly hate and menace in every feature, and then vanish like a face from the dead. Neither night nor day was he safe from his terrible pursuer, until the dread of this ghoul wore the very flesh off his bones, reduced him to a mere living skeleton, poisoned every joy of his existence, made death and life a blank and a horror, until the birth of his little grandchild. And the only tender feeling in his stony heart centred in her: she became the only thing that rendered life desirable. His love for the child amounted to idolatry; in its infant innocence and beauty, it seemed like a protecting angel standing between him and his terrible pursuer, lighting the gloom of that awful haunting shadow with the brightness of unseen wings.

The last cold gleam of yellow sunshine faded from the dull March sky. Night, with black, starless, moonless face, with cold, piercing wind and sleet, was falling over London.

The gorgeous rooms, the glittering saloons, the spacious halls of the De Courcy mansion were all a blaze of light and magnificence, just as they were that very night two years before—that awful night of darkest gloom. By all but one, that night was forgotten now; for a gay family party were to meet to celebrate the first birthday of Lord De Courcy's grandchild. Strange that on the very anniversary of that dreadful night, another scion should be born to the house of De Courcy.

The guests had not yet begun to assemble, and standing by himself, wrapped in gloomy thought, the earl gazed dully into the deepening night. You would scarcely have known him, so changed had he grown by the blighting influence of that horrible incubus. Thin and haggard, with sunken eyes, projecting brows, snow-white hair, and care-worn look, he stood the very shadow of his former self—a stricken, bowed, miserably old man.

That very night, two years before, a face, white with woman's utmost woe, had gleamed upon him in that very light, as he stood in that self-same spot. He thought of it now with a convulsive shudder; and the flickering light seemed like a finger of blood-red flame pointing up to heaven, and invoking its wrath upon him. With an inward presentiment he looked through the darkness as if expecting that same dark, unearthly face to appear; and lo! while he gazed, as if she had sprung up through the earth, a tall, shadowy figure emerged from the darkness, and that awful spectral face he dreaded more than that of the arch fiend himself, gleamed white and awful through the gloom. She beheld him there in the light and again that long bony arm was raised, and that flickering finger pointed up to the lowering sky above, in darkest, voiceless menace. Then, flitting away in the darkness, to which she seemed to belong, the ghastly vision was gone, and Earl De Courcy stood frozen with horror to the spot, unable to speak or move.

At the same hour, a far pleasanter scene was going on in one of the rooms above.

It was the dressing room of Lady Maude, into which we once before introduced the reader. Once again she stood before the mirror while her maid assisted at her toilet, and chatted with the little duchess of B., who, magnificent in white velvet and emeralds, sat (or rather lay) half buried in the downy depths of a lounge—having taken advantage of her girlhood's intimacy with Lady Maude to come early, and indulge in what she phrased the "sweetest of talks," before she should descend to the drawing room, and begin her nightly occupation of breaking masculine hearts.

Very fair, very sweet, very lovely, looked Lady Maude, as she stood there with a soft smile on her gentle lips, and a calm, deep joy welling from the brooding depths of her soft dark eyes.

Her dress was white, even as it had been that night—white blonde over white satin, with her favorite jewels (pale oriental pearls) wreathing her shining ringlets of jet, and fluttering and shimmering in sparks of subdued fire on her white arms and bosom. The lovely young face looking out from those silky curls was sweeter and fairer now in her gentle maturity than it had ever been in the brilliant beauty of her girlhood. Scarcely twenty, her form had not attained the roundness of perfect womanhood, but was slight and slender as a girl of fourteen, yet perfect in its elegant contour.

"And the baby is well?" the duchess was languidly saying, as she played with a beautiful little water spaniel.

"Quite well, thank you," replied the low, sweet voice of Lady Maude, with her soft, misty smile.

"I need not ask for his lordship, for I saw him last night at the bal masque of Madame la Comtesse De St. Remy!" said the duchess, with some animation. "He was looking quite kindly as 'Leicester.'" By the way, Lady Maude, why were you not there?"

"Erminie seemed slightly indisposed, I answered the young mother.

"Is it possible! Well, I am very fond of children; but I do not think I could give up so brilliant an affair as last night's masquerade even for such a sweet little angel as Erminie. What do you think, Maude, I made a complete conquest of that handsome melancholy Turkish ambassador, who is all the rage now! I had him all to myself the whole evening!"

"Was his grace present?" said Lady Maude, a little gravely.

The question took the little duchess so much by surprise, that she raised herself on her elbow, opened her blue eyes to their widest extent, and stared in silence at her questioner. Seeing Lady Maude was quite serious, she lay back among the velvet pillows, and burst into a silvery peal of laughter.

"His grace! Oh, that is too good! Why, Lady Maude, the last time I saw the poor, dear, old man, which is a week or two ago, he could not stir either hand or foot, and had to be carried about by the odious Italian valet of his, in a chair, whenever he wanted to move. The dear, helpless old thing! he did look so odd and so absurd, shaking all over with that disagreeable palsy of his, that I could not bear to go into his room since. My maid, Fanchette, always finds out how he is, and tells me. But the idea of his going to the masquerade! O dear me!"

"And the affectionate wife went off into another low, musical peal, that made the pretty, soft-eyed water spaniel shake his neck of tiny silver bells, from sympathy till they tinkled again.

Lady Maude looked as she felt—a little shocked—at this heartless levity, and madame la duchesse, perceiving it, began:



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"O yes, Erminie! And therefore, O wise and happy mother, you must not expect one who is neither, to do otherwise than as she does. If my sole earthly happiness consists in a coach and four, superb diamonds, an unlimited number of lovers, and a box at the opera, why, I rather think I should be permitted to enjoy them, since I am really not a bad girl after all, and never mean to be. And your toilet is completed, and I have made quite a long speech, and your ladyship is good enough to lead the way to the nursery? I want to see this little stray angel of yours before I descend among the sinners below."

Smiling, and passing her arm around the slender waist of the thoughtless little duchess, Lady Maude passed with her from the room, and the two young girls entered the nursery.

It was a beautiful room, all draped in white and pale green, pure and peaceful as a glimpse of heaven. And in the centre of the room stood a little rosewood crib, with snowy hangings, wherein lay a young infant, so surpassingly lovely that the duchess might well call it a "stray angel."

Little Erminie—sweet Erminie—the child of noble, princely Lord Villiers, and beautiful Maude Percy—how shall I describe her? It is not often young babies are really pretty—dotting grandmothers and aunts to the contrary notwithstanding; but this one really was. A snow-white complexion, with the softest pink tinge on the rounded cheeks and lips, and faint and delicate as the heart of a sea-shell, a profusion of palest gold-toenails falling in slight, rippling waves, like raveled silk, on the white, rounded forehead. Two tiny blue-veined hands grasped, even in sleep, a pretty French doll, holding it close to the soft, white bosom, and the long, golden lashes lay brightly on the rosy sleep flushed cheeks.

"The lovely face of Lady Maude flushed with pride and happiness, and bending down, softly as the west wind kisses the sleeping flowers, her lips touched the babe's.

Light as the caress was, it awoke little Erminie. The golden lashes slowly lifted, and a pair of sweet blue eyes looked fearlessly up.

"Mamma," she cried, so joyfully, holding up her rosy little arms—"mamma, take Minnie."

"O the little darling!" exclaimed the duchess, catching her impulsively up, and half-mothering her with kisses. "Oh, did you ever see such a sweet little cherub? Oh, there never was such a lovely little angel! It's just the sweetest dearest, blessed, tidy little thing that ever was, so it is."

Baby, who evidently was an adept in broken English, and fully understood that profoundly mysterious language known as "baby-talk," immediately as if in reward for those exclamatory sentences, emphasized by the strongest italics, held up her rosy little mouth to be kissed again, being evidently (like all of her sex), fond of that operation.

"O! I never, never saw such a perfectly lovely little duck!" exclaimed the duchess Clara, in a second burst of enthusiasm. "Such sweet hair and such splendid eyes! Who does she look like, Maude? Not you, I'm sure."

"She has her father's blue eyes and fair hair," said the happy young mother, smiling at Clara's emphasis, which rendered every other word not only in italics, but in some cases even into capitals.

"Oh, she is the most charming little duck's o' diamonds I ever beheld in my life! Such a beautiful skin, just like white satin!" reiterated the duchess, punctuating her remarks by a series of short, sharp, little kisses, that made sweet Erminie open her large blue eyes in subdued wonder. "Oh Maude! I don't wonder you are so saintly with this beautiful little seraph ever with you! Sweet little angel Erminie! thou almost persuadest me to be a Christian!"

Lady Maude, with more than the adoring love of two years before, went over, and, laying her hand on his shoulder, said:

"Clara wanted to see Erminie before we descended to the drawing room, dearest Ernest, and has fallen even more deeply in love with her than she has with the Turkish ambassador, the fortunate possessor of the interestingly melancholy dark eyes."

Lord Villiers smiled, and looked, with eyes full of love, on sweet Erminie, who sprang up, crowing gleefully, and crying, "Papa!"

"Wait one moment, till I see. Why, she's the very picture of your lordship! Keep still, little girl, till I compare you with your papa. There's the same large, blue, Saxon eyes; the same fair, curling hair; the same high, princely forehead; the same handsome mouth (no harm to compliment a married man—eh, Maude?) the same long, aristocratic, white fingers—your very image, my lord!"

"I had rather she looked like Maude," said the young husband, embracing his wife's small waist fondly with his arm.

"Well, so she does when she smiles. Don't you perceive the resemblance now? Miss Erminie, will you be still? What a restless little creature it is?"

"Papa, papa, take Minnie," crowed that small individual, holding out her little arms, and looking pathetic and imploring.

"Here, papa, take the young lady," said the duchess, depositing her in the young man's arms, and shaking out her glittering plumage, slightly discomposed by the frantic exertions of the "young lady" in question.

"She is fonder of gentlemen than ladies, I perceive, though, if she wasn't," said Miss Erminie, in a paroxysm of delight, immediately buried her "long, aristocratic, white fingers" in papa's thick, burnished locks, with variations of pulling his whiskers and moustache and then tenderly kissing the above hirsute appendages to make them well again. And papa, like all other young papas, looked as if he thought her the most wonderful baby that ever lived, and danced her up and down until she forgot all sense of etiquette and propriety and fairly screamed with delight.

"Now, nurse, take Miss Minnie," he said, rising at last, and laughingly shaking back his thick, fair hair. "Come, Minnie, be good now; papa must go."

Still crowing as if she considered she had done something rather extraordinary than otherwise, Miss Minnie allowed herself to be taken by the nurse, and saw papa, and mamma, and the little lady in velvet and diamonds, smile a good-bye, and turn to leave the room.

"Foolish, little wife," said Lord Villiers, laughing, as he saw Lady Maude cast a longing, lingering look behind" at her heart's treasure, "can you not even tear yourself away from your darling for a few hours, without straining your eyes to catch a last glimpse?"

"I know it is foolish," said Lady Maude, half apologetically, yet still keeping her yearning eyes fixed on little Erminie; "but I feel so strangely about leaving her to-night. You will be sure to take good care of her, Martha?"

"Sartin, my lady," responded Martha, rather offended at their want of trust in her care.

"Now, Maude," said Lord Villiers, amused at her still apparent anxiety.

Down in the spacious drawing room Lady Maude soon found herself fully occupied in receiving the guests, who began to arrive thick and fast. But this did not remove her strange anxiety concerning Erminie; and about an hour after, she stole away for a moment to pay a hurried visit to the nursery.

All was calm and peaceful there. Little Erminie lay asleep once more in her crib, and Martha sat dozing in her rocking chair. Half ashamed of her groundless fears, Lady Maude lightly kissed her sleeping infant and said away. Little did she dream how many suns would rise and set—before they two should meet again. The night in mirth and music was passing on and the hour of midnight approached.

The Duchess of B., Earl De Courcy, and Lady Maude, were standing conversing together, when, as if struck by a sudden thought, the duchess exclaimed:

"Oh! by the way, Lady Maude, do you recollect the strange voice that interrupted the ceremony the night you were married? Have you ever discovered who that was?"

Both Lady Maude and the earl grew pale.

"Never! The whole affair has been wrapped in mystery ever since," said Lady Maude, with a slight shudder.

"Dear me, how frightened I was that night!" said the duchess, arranging her bracelets. "It was quite dreadful; the most mysterious thing—just like a ghost, or something in a play."

The duchess broke off suddenly and listened, at the great hall-clock tolled the hour of twelve.

And just as the last stroke died away, that same terrific voice they had heard years before pealed through the spacious room like the deep tolling of a death bell.

"Two years ago this night a legal murder was committed, and now the hour of retribution is at hand."

(Continued on Page 3.)

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