

For Weal or for Woe;

Or, A Dark Temptation

CHAPTER VIII.—(Cont'd)

He laughed at the low-breathed threat; but there came a day when he remembered it all too well—a day when he stood at a fearful cost for the daring crime he had committed; and the hand that dealt out such terrible justice to him was the white hand of a woman.

The words had scarcely left her lips ere there was a low moan from Gay, which heralded the return of consciousness beneath Chloe's vigorous rubbing, and by the use of her strong cordials.

Tremaine thrust both Lydia and the negress hurriedly from the apartment, whispering to the former that on no account must she be seen or recognized there.

Chloe was hurriedly dispatched to put what was called "the red room" in readiness for Gay at once.

A moment later Gay opened her eyes, and the first object upon which they rested was the pale, uncertain flickering candle-light was the face of Harold Tremaine.

With a piercing cry she sprang to her feet, remembering in a flash how she happened to be here.

"Sit down, my dear," Tremaine said coolly; "and now that you find yourself in my power, let us talk the matter over amicably. The treatment you receive at my hands rests entirely with yourself."

"Let me go," cried Gay, frantically; "how dared you bring me here—I shall cry out for help—surely someone will hear me and come to my rescue."

And seizing the action to the word, she uttered a succession of piercing screams, until at last, weak and spent, she was forced to cease from her exhausted cry; but not one of those pitiful cries pierced the muffled walls of her prison-house.

"When you find out how useless it is to expect help to reach you here, you will sit down and listen to reason. It depends upon yourself, my pretty Gay, whether you ever leave this place or not."

He struck a match on the sole of his polished boot as he spoke, coolly proceeding to light a cigar and watching her through the rings of smoke that curled around him.

In an agony of fear and increasing horror, Gay wheeled around and faced him, her brave young face paling and flushing with each emotion.

"What have I ever done, sir, that you should torture me in this way?" she cried. "If you have one spark of human pity in your breast, you will listen to the prayer of an unprotected girl, and let me go free."

"What have you ever done?" repeated Harold Tremaine, rising from his chair and pacing hurriedly up and down the length of the room. "Listen, and I will tell you what you have done, Gavneil Esterbrook. You have changed the whole course of my life in a few short hours—done what no other girl on the face of the earth could have done—made me love you," he cried, with passionate earnestness, lowering his voice to a whisper.

So great was Gay's astonishment, she could not find words to answer him; sheer amazement held her fairly spell-bound.

As no word fell from the girl's white lips he went on triumphantly:

"When I forced you into the coach so unceremoniously, at our unexpected and opportune meeting on the highway, I did so out of pure motives of revenge upon you—I believed that I hated you."

"As the coach door closed you fell back in my arms in a dead faint, and there I held you. With the weight of your dark curly head resting so heavily against my breast, occurred to me the sweet possibilities of what might have been. I bent my head and kissed you, Little Gay, and with that kiss was born the most passionate love that ever thrilled through a man's heart. I have heard of love turning to hate in a single hour, but I have never experienced the reverse of it; yes, I love you, Little Gay, love has triumphed over revenge, and I mean to make you mine."

He saw the look of horror in the girl's dark eyes, and he saw the deepening pallor of the beautiful young face, and he added bravely:

"Do not misunderstand me, my pretty Little Gay, I intend to make you what I never thought I should care to make any woman—my wife."

Gay's intense anger quite overcame her fear.

"Your wife?" she cried—"never!—never!"

"You shall be my wife, Gay," he cried, white to the lips; "you shall never leave this place until you do."

"Then," retorted the girl defiantly, "I will stay here a lifetime!"

CHAPTER IX.

"Marry you?" flashed out Gay, her black eyes blazing; "even if I could—I would not. I would die first!" she burst out indignantly, drenching her little white hands until the delicate finger-nails bruised the tender pink palms.

"If that was your design in bringing me here, you have utterly failed. I despise you words fail to express how much," she panted.

He gazed at her steadily, at the lovely, frowning, averted face, the scornful, curling lips and anger-dilated eyes, the smile never leaving his handsome insolent face.

"Your obstinacy and aversion make you all the more charming, my pretty Gay," he answered coolly; "but let me tell you there are more ways than one to bring you to terms. Why, if any one knew of your presence here your reputation would be blasted forever, my dearest little beauty."

The girl's face paled, but she answered bravely:

"I would tell how I was forcibly brought here, and the whole world would rise up against you and punish you for this daring outrage."

A low, taunting laugh answered this outburst of indignation, and the girl's little story, my fair Gavneil. The world shows women little mercy when the breath of scandal attacks them. Who would believe that you did not come here to-night of your own free will and choice to give it out as? A man can always find plenty of friends to substantiate such statements, where the young girl is obliged to battle with the world for her living, and has no protector to vindicate her."

"God can take care of the unprotected, and I defy you. If there are any young girls in your family—take care—beware. Heaven may lay its curse on you—through them—in its own good time."

The sound of Chloe's approaching footsteps cut short his reply.

"Do not repeat one word of the conversation that has taken place between us; if you do it will be at your peril," he whispered hurriedly.

The next moment Chloe put her black, woolly head in at the door.

"The red room was too badly tore up, Marsee Tree," she said. "Ise don gone an' fixed up 't'other one 'cross de hall. That's all ready."

Tremaine caught one of Gay's cold hands firmly in his own, forcibly compelling her to follow him.

The apartment into which she was conducted was a magnificent one. Tremaine did not enter; standing respectfully on the threshold hat in hand.

"These four slides will care to be your home until I exact from you the promise I want," he said slowly. "You will live and die here unless you comply; escape is impossible."

He took a step nearer, stooped, and whispered so low that Chloe could not catch the words:

"Promise to marry me this very night,

and I will take you away without an hour's delay. You shall have jewels, silks and acres, all that the feminine heart holds dear, for I love you more passionately than any man ever loved a young girl before."

And signaling Chloe into an inner apartment, he turned again to Gay.

"I ask you once more, will you marry me and leave this place within the hour? Let my love influence you."

"I will never marry you, I could not," retorted Gay. "I love another a thousand-fold more dearly than you love me."

"My rival shall never win you; I would shoot him at the very altar first," exclaimed Tremaine, vehemently, a dangerous light sparkling in his eyes—the lips under his thick, curling, black mustache working convulsively.

"I will not be teased to argue longer with you in your present state of mind," he said. "Time must effect the change, it seems! I will woo you and win you here at my own sweet will. You shall be my bride, fair defiant Gay, and that, too, ere the month is over. No man will or no I come of a race who have never known defeat—especially in love affairs."

Before she was aware of his intention, he had seized one of her little white hands and pressed a passionate kiss upon it. Gay drew her hand from his grasp in bitter resentment, creating her beautiful head and giving him the full benefit of the flashing scorn in her glorious dark eyes.

He raised his hat with a mocking bow. "I leave you, fair Gay," he said, retreating toward the door, "but I warn you to make no attempt to escape; if you did, I should put my plan into execution at once. I swear I shall use my power over you with a sinister smile."

"What power do you pretend to hold over me?" cried Gay, spiritedly. "I am only a young girl, and very ignorant of the ways of the world, I admit, but I know this much, no man can force a girl to marry him against her will. No minister would marry an unwilling bride, she panted; "he could not—I would fling myself at his feet and tell him all, crying out I was—I was—"

"You will do nothing of the kind," he interrupted, a satanic frown sitting over his dark, handsome face. "I would have preferred winning you by fair means, if possible," he went on steadily; "but if you make it impossible, I shall be forced to a desperate measure in case you prove obstinate. Permit me to explain what I shall do to prevent you from making the slightest outcry."

As he spoke he drew from his pocket a small revolver, heavily inlaid with pearl and silver.

"I shall simply hold this toy to your pretty forehead to prevent a scene. The minister whom I shall secure for this little affair will be none the wiser, for he is blind. "Do you think," he continued, "that I am a man to give up what I have set my heart upon possessing? How little you know me. An revolver—not good—no—my fair Gavneil," he said, bowing himself out of her presence and closing the heavy oaken door after him.

He loitered a moment in the room where Chloe was, then Gay heard the quick ring of his footsteps in the corridor, and as he passed down to the stairway, at that moment the heavy silken curtains were parted and Chloe came into the apartment.

Gay flew to her, flinging herself on her knees, clinging to the old woman's woollen skirts in a very transport of grief pitiful to behold.

"If this is your house, I pray you to let me go free, she sobbed.

The old black woman stepped cautiously around to make sure they were quite alone, then hesitated a moment before she answered her.

"On yer life don't tell what Ise tell yer, chile," she whispered. "This isn't my house, it's a den of thieves, oblie, an' de capten hisse brought yer har in his arms in a dead faint."

A cry of horror broke from Gay's white lips.

"Had God forsaken her? Could her own mother whom she had never known look down upon the misery and persecution of her orphan child without appealing at the great White Throne for mercy and protection for her poor Little Gay?"

"You, at least, have a good, kind heart," she sobbed. "You will surely help me to get away. There is one who will mourn my loss keenly; he would reward you with plenty of gold if you would but help to get away from here quickly."

"Chloe, I wouldn't dare do it," declared the old woman. "Ise powerful friend of Marsee Tree—he's a reg'lar debbil, an' says he when he left de room, 'Chloe, Ise gwine ter leave dat gal under your eye, an' ef I don't find she am ha'ar when I cum back I wouldn't give much for yer ole black hide, you mind my words!' So yer see, honey, Ise too 'fraid ter opin dat ar door."

"Oh, Heaven!" gasped Gay, wringing her little white hands in the most abject misery; "the fates have conspired to ruin me. Oh, Chloe, have pity on me! If you will not set me free, kill me! Better death than that I should fall into the hands of the man who brought me here."

"Lor, chile, don't talk like dat. O'e Chloe wouldn't tech one ha'ar o' yer pity, ef Ise fer a all Marsee Tree's ill-gotten hold—guess not. This am his own room he's given up ter yer, chile; but let me give you a bit o' advice. For de Lor's sake, chile, don't rile him. You dunno Marsee Tree like I do. Member old Chloe's warning, Marsee Tree am a ferce debbil!"

The turned abruptly and hobbled out of the apartment, leaving Gay alone—Heaven help her—a prisoner in the mysterious old brick house by the river road.

"I will not remain here quietly submissive to that villain's outrageous scheme," she cried aloud, beating upon the walls and wringing her hands frantically.

It was by the merest accident that her hand suddenly came in contact with a hidden spring skillfully concealed in the wall, and to Gayneil's great consternation, the panel slid noiselessly back, disclosing a dark aperture beyond.

For a moment Gay stood as if rooted to the spot, but she was a brave, daring girl, and in a trice she had quickly recovered her composure, the love of adventure, which was keen within her, leading her on.

Whether did the dark depths lead to escape or—

"If I only had a candle," Gay panted, "I would explore this vault, or passage, or whatever it may be."

Put aside she had none.

"I will go without a light, carefully feeling my way step by step," she declared boldly to herself; and, cutting the action to the word, Gay gathered up her skirts in her dainty little hand, and stepped—defying fate itself—into the gloomy passage.

The walls were damp, cold, and moldy, yet Gay pushed bravely and carefully on, with a prayer on her lips that the secret subterranean passage might lead to freedom.

There seemed to be several passages opening out from the main one.

Suddenly, from one of these, a man emerged, carrying a lantern in his hand. Gay saw that he wore a mask, yet that did not conceal his identity from her, for at the first glimpse, Gay had detected the form and quick, springy walk of Harold Tremaine.

He hurried along as though familiar

with the underground passage, and Gay with breathless interest gazed as swiftly as a shadow after him.

He entered a wine-cellar, and she saw him set down his lantern and lift a heavy trunk aside, upon which lay a few bottles with their sealed corks visible.

Gay shrank still further back among the dense shadows.

He proceeded leisurely to open a wooden door with a skeleton key, but the rusty lock would not yield to the key, so he gave a quick, impatient rap, and a moment later a small, heavy-set man opened it.

"Where are the rest?" asked Tremaine, pausing on the threshold and gazing sharply about the room.

"A few are here, the rest have gone for a little trip," answered the man with an expressive laugh.

Tremaine pressed into the apartment, banging the door to after him.

Gay was left in total darkness save for the narrow strip of light visible from the crack of the door.

She crept boldly toward it, feeling her way along the slimy walls.

She reached the door and pushed it open ever so slightly to gain a good view of the interior, and this was what she saw:

A large vault, paved and walled with stone, to which there was but one entrance—the door at which she stood.

Lamps were placed in brackets about the walls, their reflectors throwing a white, garish light over the cavern.

Two immense safes occupied opposite corners of the vault; their doors stood open, and to Gay's intense astonishment she saw that one contained great heaps of shining gold, the other was stacked high with new, crisp bank-notes.

A large printing press stood in the center of the cavern, and upon this two men were leaning, one with a narrow steel bar in his hand, the other was holding the lamp down low. Several dark-faced men were lounging about on the benches that were placed here and there, their masks pushed back over their foreheads, as was also Harold Tremaine's now.

As Gay peered in she saw him take a bank-note from the press and proceed to examine it minutely. There was a scowl on his dark, handsome face which presently gave place to a sinister smile of satisfaction.

"It's a fine piece of work, chief," broke in one of the men, and would proceed to examine it minutely. There was a scowl on his dark, handsome face which presently gave place to a sinister smile of satisfaction.

"It's a fine piece of work, chief," broke in one of the men, and would proceed to examine it minutely. There was a scowl on his dark, handsome face which presently gave place to a sinister smile of satisfaction.

From the open crack of the doorway Gay gazed upon the strange scene with wild, dilated eyes.

Chloe's words returned to her with an awful shock. "You are in a den of thieves—the captain himself brought you here—yes, they were thieves and counterfeiters too."

She had despised Harold Tremaine enough before; but now that his true character and occupation were revealed to her she loathed him a thousand times worse if that were possible.

Another thought forced itself upon her confused brain: Would not a man who was capable of perpetrating such a daring fraud be capable of any other deadly sin, and especially against a weak, unprotected girl, whom cruel fate had placed in his power?

Gay clutched the door with her little white hands and moaned aloud.

In a single instant, as if pandemonium had been suddenly let loose, each man was on his feet with a volley of oaths. Their masks were thrown down over their swarthy faces in a twinkling, and a score or more drawn revolvers flashed in the garish lamplight.

"Some spy's tracked us down, boys! cried the chief hoarsely. "Remember every man of you, our oath, that a spy is to be shot down on sight, even though he be a father or brother."

With one bound he reached the door his followers at his heels. With one wrench he tore it from the little white fingers that were striving with might and main to hold it back, flung it open wide, with a terrible imprecation, to behold Gay standing before him, pale as a marble statue, her dark curls falling in picturesque disorder around her, proudly erect facing death in the twinkling of the eye, the engraved counterfeiters had leveled at her breast (To be continued.)

Secret Parting.

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Queen Mary buys between forty and fifty gowns in a year. For her morning gowns she seldom pays more than \$125. Here evening gowns rarely cost more than \$200. She wears a morning costume frequently a couple of dozen times before it is put out of the wardrobe and an evening dress about a dozen times. There are ladies of the royal household who never wear an evening dress more than three times, and frequently but once.

Queen Mary's expenditure on gowns alone rarely exceeds \$4,000 in the year. This is less by at least \$1,250 than the sum annually spent in dresses by, say, the Queen of Spain, the German Empress or the Zarina. For her serge dresses, and she scarcely ever wears any other sort of costume when she is at

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On hats the Queen spends less than \$1,000 a year. She has paid \$100 for a hat, but not often. Her expenditure on footwear runs to about \$300. She buys a couple of dozen pairs of boots and half a dozen pairs of shoes in the course of the year. For the latter she pays \$20 a pair.

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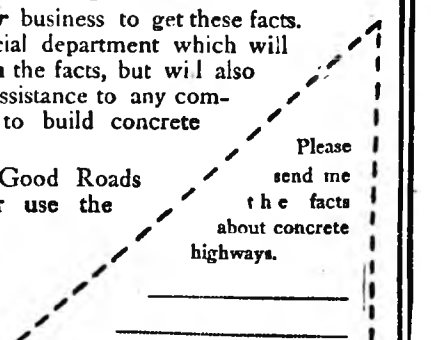
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