

For Weal or for Woe;

Or, A Dark Temptation

CHAPTER XXII.

We left Little Gay clinging to the broken rails of the bridge, listening to that horrible cry of "Murder!" as it rang out with startling clearness on the night air.

Nearer, nearer came the swift footsteps in answer to those cries, and the man who was hurrying to the spot caught a glimpse of a lovely face, framed in a sheen of golden hair, that vanished like a shadow in the dense darkness of the starless night.

Like a flash the young man darted after the beautiful vision, and a breathless, exciting chase ensued.

"I shall solve this mystery if it costs me my head," he muttered, suttling his handsome white teeth together, and redoubling his flying pace.

The moon struggled out from behind a network of heavy clouds, and he saw the slim figure just ahead of him.

Another instant and he had cleared the distance between them, and had laid a detaining hand on the fugitive's slender shoulder.

"Now, then," he demanded breathlessly, "I must know the meaning of those cries I heard a moment since—what were you doing on the bridge yonder? Was any one molesting you?"

The white, despairing, lovely face turned toward him in the moonlight, startled the young man like an electric shock.

His strong white hand relaxed its hold. "Great Heaven!" he ejaculated in the most intense astonishment, "do my eyes deceive me—or is this—Little Nell?"

Gay glanced up in terror at the handsome face bending over her, then all fear fell from her like magic—she recognized him at once.

"Yes, it's I, Mr. Chesleigh," she faltered. "I—"

Up flew the little hands, and Gay burst into a storm of passionate tears that completely choked her utterance.

Harry Chesleigh was mystified—bewildered.

"Look here, Miss Nell," he exclaimed, "you must tell me what this mystery means. In Heaven's name, tell me how you happened to be here at this ghastly hour, and if it was from your lips those terrible cries of murder issued which I heard. I am your friend, my dear girl," he went on eagerly, "you may trust me—pardoning me the meanwhile for addressing you so familiarly; bear in mind, we know you only by the name of Little Nell."

"I am Gaynell Esterbrook," she answered hesitatingly; "I ought to have told you that before, but I—"

Young Chesleigh gave a start of surprise. "Gaynell," he repeated, "why, what a pretty name; I have never heard it before. But about those cries?" he inquired anxiously, "surely they were not—they could not have been uttered by you. I must have been a delusion of my imaginative brain, I almost think."

Gay hesitated in the most painful embarrassment, and he went on, eyeing the lovely face curiously:

"They do say a weird old gypsy orone inhabits a grotto or tumbled-down hut in the heart of the woods yonder, who inveigles susceptible young girls hereabouts to her den under the pretense of telling them their fortune, and secures them out of their money."

"Many a foul murder has been committed in these woods and many a daring robbery; but no one was ever yet cunning enough to trace it to this strange old gypsy—the last of her race. Surely it was not to meet her that you have ventured here to-night."

"No," said Gay, faintly, "it was not that which brought me here; I uttered a cry on the bridge—the railing broke, and I almost fancied myself falling down—down into the dark water with the broken rails, and—"

"No wonder you were frightened," interposed the young man, "but you have not told me what brought you here, and at this ghastly hour, so far from Leighton Hall."

"It is because I was turned away from there," she sobbed.

"Turned away from Leighton Hall?" he repeated in the most intense amazement. "Why, how did it happen? What on earth was it for?"

Then the whole cause of it came out—how she had been to the masked ball, and how Ione Leighton had happened to come into her room after it was all over and discovered that she had been there, by seeing the dress she had worn on a chair, and of the tempestuous scene that had followed; and how, to appease Miss Leighton's wrath, who declared she should be turned away from the Hall with the morning's light, she had gone at once, not waiting for the morrow.

Harry Chesleigh's eyes glowed as he listened.

Gay did not hear the muttered imprecation that he ground between his white teeth beneath the curling mustache as the full force of Ione's cruelty burst upon him.

His blood fairly boiled with indignation against the heartless beauty whom he had adored until now.

"It is well that I sat smoking with the quire so long after the ball was over," he mused, "otherwise I should have missed you. You shall go home to Rosecliff with me, poor little storm-driven swallow; my motor will receive you with open arms. My carriage is at the fork of the road. I jumped out upon hearing those cries."

Gay demurred, but he resolutely drew her arm within his own and led her toward the carriage, and in a few moments more they were whirling rapidly in the direction of Rosecliff.

He listened to Gay's graphic recital of the broken ties and the wreck she had prevented with absorbing interest.

She did not tell him that she knew the perpetrators who had planned the disaster she had averted, nor did she tell him how she had been spirited away from among the passengers during the confusion which ensued.

As he listened he made up his mind, as the passengers had done, that the heroic little heroine fed in the confusion to avoid their grateful thanks.

There was great consternation at Rose-

cliff when handsome Mr. Harry, as the servants called him, strode into the entrance hall of his aristocratic mansion home at that unseasonably early hour, with the little trembling figure, clad in a plain navy-blue serge dress and cloth cap to match, clinging close to his arm.

"They quite forgot themselves staring at the lovely young stranger, who was gazing back at them with great dark, velvety, dilated eyes, until young Mr. Chesleigh brought them to their senses by an exclamation of angry impatience.

"What are you staring at this young lady in that fashion for?" he demanded haughtily. "Go to my mother's boudoir at once," he commanded, "and tell her I am come—but not alone—a young girl is with me; as soon as I can see her I will explain. In the meantime, see that a repast is served with as little delay as possible."

The startling news was carried to Mrs. Chesleigh in her boudoir at once by her maid.

The grand old lady started up from her couch with a look of horror on her proud, stern face.

"I can scarcely realize what you tell me," she cried shrilly. "Give me my dressing-robe and slippers. I will go down to the drawing-room myself, and see what this means!"

A moment later there was the swish of a silken robe in the corridor; she had reached the drawing-room, drawn the velvet hangings apart, standing white and stern on the threshold gazing frowningly into the beautiful, startled, girlish face turned toward her—the loveliest rosetud face she had ever beheld.

And yet she fairly hated Little Gay at first sight.

Her handsome son sprung eagerly to the door to meet her, leading her in, and presented her to Gay in his impulsive fashion, giving her a brief sketch of Little Gay's pitiful story, or rather as much as he knew of it, of Ione's cruelty in turning her away from Leighton Hall, and of his opportune meeting with her near the old bridge.

"I shall leave her in your care, mother," he said, rising to leave the drawing-room at length. "I know you will make her feel at home at Rosecliff."

He passed out of the room with a nod and a smile to both—leaving them alone together.

The sound of his retreating footsteps had scarcely died away ere the look of sympathetic interest fell like a mask from his lady-mother's haughty face.

Gay was appalled at the sudden change in her.

"Did you think to deceive me with that cleverly-concocted story?" she cried icily, swiftly crossing to Gay's side and clutching her arm in a hard, vice-like grip—the dark, fiery eyes fairly scorching their way to Gay's heart.

"Madam!" exclaimed Gay, in affright; "I do not understand what you mean."

A scathing laugh from the haughty woman broke in upon the words as they fell from her lips.

"What charming innocence," she sneered. "You are an adventuresome girl, and you know it. You have singled my son out as a shining mark, because you know he is young, impulsive, and impracticable—and what is more to the purpose in your eyes—a young man of wealth, but I—his mother, will thwart your evil designs."

"Madam!" gasped Gay, white as the lilies in the marble vase near her.

"Hush!" cried the grand old lady imperiously, stamping her velvet-shod foot. "I tell you I know your scheme. You threw yourself purposely in his way that morning, feigning unconsciousness in order to draw him into some kind of a trap, for you knew he was in the habit of passing that way mornings."

Falling in this, you allowed yourself to be taken to Leighton Hall where you could be thrown in his way, knowing that he was Ione Leighton's lover."

"She must have had good and sufficient reason for turning you from Leighton Hall—in the dead of night. It is strange, too, that my son remained thereabouts until this unseasonably early hour; but young men will be young men—where a pretty face is concerned, and a fascinating young woman lures them on."

"If money is your object, here, take my purse—there's about a hundred dollars in it—take it and go to New York where you probably belong, and leave my son alone. Now heed me well, never cross his path again while you live."

Gay dashed the money which the proud old lady pressed into her hand on the floor and spurned it from her with her little foot, her velvety eyes blazing like stars.

"May God forgive you, you cruel, cruel woman!" gasped Gay, wild with indignation, "for I never can forgive the insult you have heaped upon the head of a poor, defenseless girl to-night. The hour may come when you will bitterly rue it. I would die before I would touch one penny of your money. I honor your son, but you—Heaven forgive you for striking the last bitter blow to a girl's breaking heart."

With the dignity of a little queen Gay turned and walked from the room and swiftly out of the grand mansion, her eyes blinded with tears and her heart bursting with grief.

"Oh, God, I wish I could die!" moaned the poor girl, struggling onward through the gray dunes of the early morning. "The world is too hard and bitter for me; I am persecuted by every one who has ever looked upon my face, it seems. Why should I struggle against fate? The world is too small for me; it is narrowing down to a grave. Why can't I die and end it all? Why should I cling to a life which is so pitifully cursed? I will die!"

She stood leaning against the pillars of an old stone well, gazing down into its dark, silent depths.

The deadly foxglove and poisonous vines had rendered its waters unfit for use long years ago, and they rotted over it unheeded.

"There is no person in the wide world who will miss me or search for me," Gay sobbed. "I am going to leave this dark, lonely world where there is nothing but sorrow, and go to Hazel. Good-bye, Percy, my false love, whom I have so adored," she moaned.

With trembling hands she drew aside the poisonous vines, and without one backward glance or a single cry plunged headlong down, down the dark abyss!

CHAPTER XXIII.

As Gay plunged boldly down into the terrible depths of the old ivy-covered well, a strong hand was thrust quickly forward, grasping her skirts and drawing her forcibly back to the world which she would have left with such headlong haste.

Gay glanced up into her rescuer's face with a sob of despair.

"Why did you save me," she cried bitterly, "when I wanted so much to die?"

It was a kindly, sympathetic face, and the blue eyes regarding her so intently were full of pity.

"Why do you wish to die?" he asked, curiously, "you are too young to have

found the world cold and bitter, and life a burden."

"I have found it all that, and more," sobbed Gay, bitterly; "I am utterly alone in the world, penniless, homeless and wretched."

"What if I should tell you of good fortune the gods have in store for you," he queried, "what then?"

Gay opened her dark, velvety eyes, and looked at the young man in utter amazement.

"I suppose you think I am either mad or dreaming," he laughed lightly, "to speak in that way."

"It looks very much like it," admitted Gay; "there is no good fortune in store for me; a blank fell to my lot in the lottery of life."

"Listen to me, my dear girl," he briskly said, resolutely drawing her still further from the deadly gas that rose from the old well. "You are not as friendless and penniless as you have imagined yourself to be. I have something to tell you—something so strange that you can hardly bring yourself to believe in your own good fortune—yet you shall not doubt the truth of what I have to tell you long, for I can prove my assertions here and now."

Gay looked at the stranger in terror and dismay, quite believing him to be an escaped lunatic from some adjacent asylum—still worse, one crazed with drink.

He smiled at the expression on the lovely, terrified face, as though he read her secret thoughts, and hastened to explain.

"You see I know you, young lady; you are the little heroine who saved the train from being wrecked on the Jersey road last night. Now don't interrupt me—bear me through. In the confusion which ensued, you fled to escape the grateful acknowledgments of the passengers, among whom was I, a reporter on a New York paper."

"There was great regret among the passengers that you could not be found. One old gentleman, a wealthy banker who lives in almost a castle at Gramercy Park, declared if you could be found he would marry you his heiress."

"You were to be advertised for in all the papers. He wrote out the ads on the train and I telegraphed on, that it might appear in the morning issue and catch your eye. I caught but one meteoric glimpse of your face, as you lay back in a dead faint in the old engineer's arms, but I knew that I ever saw you again. I could recognize you instantly. It was mighty lucky that I was sent to report upon an affair in this neighborhood, otherwise a tragedy, which the world would have been none the wiser for, would have been enacted."

Gay listened like one in a dream. She had heard and read of the fates showering untold wealth upon penniless girls, but she had doubted whether it had ever really happened; but now, could it be possible that the gates of gold were to be flung open so miraculously to her, and all because she had simply saved a train from disaster?

"If you will place yourself in my care, I will render you every assistance in my power," he added.

"It seems almost too good to be really true," sobbed Gay.

"But it is true—every word of it," replied the young reporter. "There will be no end of rejoicing when I telegraph on that I have found the much-sought-for little heroine."

In the excitement of that moment a strange, thrilling thought came to Gay—a thought that made her poor little heart beat with pain. Would Percy Granville care for her if she were a great heiress?

He had cared for the poor little working-girl who had loved him so fondly; but would he sue for pardon from the petted child of wealth?

An hour later Gay was whirling on toward her new, strange life, as fast as steam could take her.

The event was a nine days' wonder in the social world. The leading journals teemed with the romantic affair—praising the wondrous beauty of the brave little heroine, concluding with the remark:

"The banker, Allen Remington, had legally adopted the young lady, and she had taken his name."

It was strange, yet a fact, that not one of the papers mentioned the name she had foregone to take that of the great banker.

Three persons read the romantic article with great interest. Young Mr. Chesleigh, who had been persuaded into the belief that Gay had voluntarily left Rosecliff by his triumphant lady mother, Miss Tremaine, who had miraculously escaped the fate he so richly deserved by the help of a passer-by, who had also hastened toward the bridge when that awful cry of "Murder!" rang startlingly out on the night air. The third person who read it with the greatest of interest was Percy Granville.

"What a heroic little creature she is!" he thought admiringly, and Allen Remington, bless his kind old heart, is just the man to appreciate such an action. I am glad this poor girl, whoever she may be, has secured such a fine home. I feel sure Miss Remington will prove worthy of his kindness. By the way," he mused thoughtfully, "some time when I am in New York I must call upon the old banker, remembering that he was my uncle's and most honored friend."

Percy Granville could not understand the impulse that led him to look that particular paper up in his desk with his most valuable papers, but it was not until long months had elapsed that he thought of his resolve again to call at the spacious home of Banker Remington.

In the meantime, let us follow the fortunes of our little Gay—our dark-eyed little heroine, whom we first introduced to our readers—standing at her loom in the Passaic Cotton Mills—striving to keep body and soul together, and the wolf from the door, on five dollars a week; and always in perpetual fear of being turned off each Saturday night—now an heiress, in a mansion home, robed in silks and costly jewels, surrounded by all the luxuries of wealth—but let this much be said to her credit, she was not one whit the prouder.

"There's many and many a girl I know of, in the old mill, who would look just as well as I do if they had the same clothes and the same surroundings," she often thought, as she gazed in the long gilded mirror.

The old banker and his wife fairly idolized Gay.

They were proud of her matchless beauty—they filled the house with French masters, music professors, and teachers to give her all the requirements needed in the social position she was called upon to fill.

Great was Ione Leighton's dismay and consternation when Harry Chesleigh drove down to Leighton Hall the following week, purpose to inform her that the heroine of the romantic story which was going the rounds of the papers—and whom the millionaire banker had adopted—was no less a personage than the poor, friendless girl whom she had turned from her door in the dead of the night.

Of course she denied it, even after she heard how he had met Little Gay near the bridge and had taken her home to Rosecliff.

After Harry Chesleigh took his leave, the two sisters talked over the startling news with gusto.

"To think that that miserable little thing is a great heiress now," cried Ione, turning her flushed, abashed face away from Grace. "Who would have thought it? She'll be sure to be revenged upon me, if she can. I think, upon the whole,

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the wisest thing I can do is to try to make friends with her."

"I really want to know if you have that much assurance," cried Grace, aghast.

"That's just what I have got," returned Ione, complacently. "When any one has as much influence as Banker Remington's adopted daughter will have in society, one has to use considerable diplomacy."

Ione Leighton actually had the assurance to send to Gay that very night an invitation to pass the holidays at Leighton Hall—to forget the impulsive words the writer had uttered the last time they met, for they were uttered in anger, but never really meant—oh, no, never—and that she had cried for a week afterward when she found she had been taken at her word.

When Gay received that message from Ione Leighton, it was her first hour of triumph.

"What a magic power shining gold has," she thought, pushing the note from her with disgust as though it had been a viper, and had stung her little gemmed hands.

She returned the elegant little invitation without so much as a word of reply. (To be continued.)

AIRSHIPS IN A BALKAN WAR

Flights Demonstrate Need of Armor-plate Protection.

The first Bulgarian aviator to lose his life in the Balkan war was Lieut. Tarraxchieff, who was sent out by Gen. Yankoff early in the war to reconnoitre Adrianople. His monoplane went wrong and he crashed to the ground and was killed as the result of his injuries. The Russian aviator, Poppoff, was also killed as a result of his machine catching fire and falling to the ground, and on December 6th Dr. Constantin, the one-time assistant of Dr. Doyen, a well-known French surgeon, was shot while making a flight. He managed to descend, the machine alighted safely at the Bulgarian camp with the dead aviator, who had been shot in the breast,

still clutching his control wheel. The barograph showed that he had been up to a height of 4,000 feet. He had flown over a Turkish fort and taken photographs, and had evidently been shot in the act. His biplane was riddled with bullets, but this did not seem to affect its flying qualities. Thus once again was demonstrated the necessity of protecting the aviator with armor-plate if he is going to engage in active warfare. The only aviator employed by the Turks appears to have been the Frenchman, Letort. He made several reconnaissances of two or three hours' duration, and brought valuable information to the Turkish commander. A breakdown to his engine caused him to alight behind the Greek lines, and he was captured.

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