

# For Weal or for Woe;

## Or, A Dark Temptation

### CHAPTER XXV.—(Cont'd)

The banker's wife pressed Evelyn to accept the hospitality of her home while she remained in the city.

"You shall have the room opening off from Gay's," she said, "and we will try to make your stay very pleasant."

Evelyn pretended to demur a little, but ended by accepting. It was well her white lids drooped over her eyes, veiling their strange glitter.

When she found herself shut up in the solitude and seclusion of her own chamber she gave full vent to the terrible rage and despair that waged such deadly war in her heart. "Fate is playing against me," she stormed, "but I will defy fate and crush this girl."

"Gaynell in the city and Percy Granville coming here to call upon the girl whom he rescued in the park—never dreaming it is she. Was there ever such an unaccountable attraction in fate before? They are liable to meet any day—any moment; explanations would follow, and the old love would away the hearts of both, and—and—he would break with me to wed his old love."

"Oh, no, no," she cried out wildly, pressing her hands tightly over her throbbing heart and rocking herself to and fro. "I will kill them first. I love him—I love him!" she cried fiercely, "and she shall not take him from me now, when I have every chance of winning him. I am not safe while this Gay lives. That thought brought still another and darker to her brain, so dazed with the conflicting tortures of intense jealousy.

For an hour or more she gazed out of the open window at the starlit sky; gazed without seeing aught but the beautiful girlish face of Little Gay.

The night deepened and darkened, spreading its sable wings over the great city.

Oh, cruel city—dark, mysterious city—where crime nests forth with the setting sun and stalks boldly abroad under the dim, flickering light of the stars.

"Anything could be done in a great wicked city like this," the voice of the deadly tempter whispered to Evelyn St. Claire.

"I love him the best," she muttered, hardening her heart. "Let me think what life would be worth to me without him, and let that thought decide me."

An hour later, Evelyn, wrapped in a long, dark circular and heavily veiled, stole quietly out of the house, quite unobserved.

She hailed the nearest cab and, with a few hurriedly whispered words of direction to the driver, was soon whirling rapidly over the streets of the city on her fatal errand.

"I will be back before they have time to miss me," she muttered, sinking back among the cushions.

The cab stopped before one of the great leading houses and Miss St. Claire entered the office. The papers were on file for a month back, and toward those the beautiful, guilty girl made her way.

She had read the account in that very paper only a few days back, of a lovely Spanish girl who had killed her faithless lover on the eve that he was to have been wedded to another, by the use of a subtle poisonous drug, whose power was almost unknown to the medical fraternity, as its presence in the human system could not be traced. How this lover had met his death even experts could not define, until this girl came to die, and confessed all on her death-bed.

Long and diligently Evelyn searched the file. Was fate conspiring against her again? It was not there.

"Perhaps I can help you find the paper you are searching for," said a keen-eyed, pleasant-faced gentleman standing near her.

"Thank you. I was looking for the paper bearing date of the twentieth instant; it contained a few society notes I should have liked to have seen."

The accommodating gentleman stepped up to the clerk's desk.

"Have you a paper of the twentieth?" he said carelessly. "It seems to be missing from the file."

As he spoke he exchanged a meaningful look with the clerk, and immediately the paper was passed out.

He handed it to Evelyn with a low bow. "Thank you, sir," she replied.

Although the gentleman stepped around to the other side of the room, he noted with keen eyes which column she was searching.

The smile that flickered a moment round her lips showed him that she had found what she wanted.

"I shall be sure to remember the name of the drug now," she told herself, passing out of the office.

The next instant the gentleman, who was none other than the famous detective Percy Granville had at once time engaged to search for Little Gay, was bending over the columns which had attracted the stylish young lady.

"Society notes. There's nothing of the kind here," he muttered. "Ah-ha! she has torn a bit from the paper, I see."

Hastily securing another paper of the same date, he turned to that particular column and found the article missing; she had torn the name of a deadly drug from the paper, together with a full description of its effects on the human system.

Quick as thought the experienced detective whipped out his note-book and jotted down the incident, together with a full description of the faintly blonde.

"I wonder what mystery I've run afoul of now," he soliloquized, hastily calling a cab and ordering the driver to follow closely the cab which had just turned the corner.

While the coach dashed on in pursuit of the one occupied by Evelyn, the famous detective, who was always prepared for cases of emergency, hastily transformed himself into quite a different personage from the respectable looking gentleman who had entered the coach.

Meanwhile, the heiress was whirling swiftly up Broadway.

The cab stopped once more, this time before a large drug-store, and Evelyn alighted with a firm step she walked up to the counter and called for the drug; but here a startling dilemma confronted her; the clerk would not let her have it without a written order from some responsible physician.

The shock was so great, the disappointment so keen, Evelyn paled to the very roots of her light gold hair.

"She must have the deadly drug at any cost," she told herself.

Evelyn looked at the young clerk; if she could but coax him to let her have it!

She turned her blue eyes upon him saying pleadingly:

"Oh, if you would but make an exception in this case for me, sir, I should be very much obliged," persisted Evelyn, in a low voice. "I want it so much."

The clerk was not old and crusty-hearted—it was the hardest task he had ever done, refusing this stylish young lady. He blushed furiously under the fire of her bright eyes, and was terribly confused.

"If it was my store, you should have it in a minute," he said. "The proprietor is more than strict. I must refuse you."

Artful tears filled the lovely blue eyes gazing up into his own.

"Why need you mention it to the proprietor, then?" she questioned innocently; "he need not know of it. You look so kind and—accommodating, surely you cannot find it in your heart to refuse me. I—I want it to touch up an old painting."

She laid one little white hand on his in her intense eagerness, and the thrilling, magical touch of those fingers made the blood leap through the bashful young clerk's veins like electric fire.

"After all, she wanted it for such a harmless object," he told himself. "Please let me have it," pleaded Evelyn, her heart thrilling with exultation, as she noticed he was wavering.

He was young and easily influenced, as many a man has been before him, by the alluring blandishments of a beautiful girl. He was not proof against the beauty's bewitching glances.

"You will let me have the drug, won't you?" persisted Evelyn.

And scarcely conscious of what he was doing—white to the very lips—he obeyed.

While they were talking, a feeble old man had entered the store, tottering up quite close to the haughty heiress.

"Want your show-cases cleaned?" he inquired, in a cracked whining voice.

"No," responded the clerk; "get out of here quick, too."

"I'm deaf," whined the old man; "if you will give me the job, nod your head. I've a wife and nine children to support. The clerk nodded his head in assent to get rid of the old man; for as it happened the cases really did need polishing, and the latter went at the cases with a will apparently.

Remembering the old man had said he was deaf, Evelyn did not take the precaution to lower her voice in the least.

At length, with the fatal drug in her possession, Evelyn left the store.

"I almost think she bewitched me," murmured the clerk. "Heavens! what a risk I run in letting her have that deadly drug—and by the Harry, I forgot to take her name and address, too; what if anything should come of it," and a shudder passed over his frame. "Hello," he muttered, with a violent start, "what has become of the fellow who was cleaning the show-cases?"

He glanced around in surprise—the old man was gone.

### CHAPTER XXVI.

Evelyn St. Claire regained her own room in the Remington mansion without being missed.

The footman who admitted her wondered vaguely that Miss Gaynell's guest should have gone out alone on the street, especially at night, she being a stranger in the city, too. He took this to Fanny—Gay's maid—who had declared that she fairly hated the Irish blonde who ordered her around as if she was nobody, and hoped "for goodness sake she wasn't to remain long."

There was to be a brilliant reception at the Remington mansion that night, but Evelyn pleaded a severe headache as an excuse for not going to the drawing-room.

A tigerish hate swept through Evelyn's very soul as she came into her room for a moment before going down to welcome her guests.

The girl's wondrous beauty fairly took her breath away. The dark eyes glowed like midnight stars. The lovely, curling hair fell about the little head in a sheen of shining gold; the peachy, dimpled cheeks were flushed like the heart of a crimson flower, and the creamy tulle dress she wore, garnished here and there with water-lilies, set off the lovely arms and slender, graceful neck to their advantage, heightened by the necklace of gleaming pearls she wore.

Evelyn St. Claire bit her lip furiously under the mask of a smile as she gazed at the lovely vision before her.

"I am so sorry you are not able to come down," said Gay, sympathetically. "I will come in when it is over, and give you a perfect account of it."

"Do," replied Evelyn, again veiling the terrible glitter in her steel-blue eyes.

She watched the slender figure out of sight.

"Shine to-night, my pretty Gay!" she cried bitterly, "for you have to die ere the day dawns. You were uncommonly pretty when you were only a little lanky girl in the Passaic Cotton Mills—now you are more beautiful than an hour! It would never do for you to meet my lover again—he loved you once—he would adore you now," and involuntarily her hand crept to the fatal package concealed in her bosom.

When Gay came to her room that night, Evelyn feigned sleep and Gay quitted the apartment with noiseless feet and sought her own boudoir.

She could have told Evelyn of two different proposals she had received that evening, and of two bitterly jealous rivals, between whom a duel was imminent, because beautiful Little Gay had waited twice with the one, and sung "Kathleen Mavourneen" to the other.

Of course, Gay gently refused them both; still, each of them declared that he would win her if his rival was gentlemanly enough to give him fair play and cease forcing his attentions upon her, which were certainly undesired.

One of these handsome young fellows was Harry Chesleigh of Roseville, the other a dashing young military cadet—Hal Leslie.

It was not of them Gay was thinking as she sought her couch; it was of Percy Granville, and she fell asleep wondering when he would make the call he had promised, and wondering how she would school her heart sufficiently to keep from flinging herself in his arms and crying out, "Oh, my love, my love! I cannot meet you as a stranger! It is breaking my heart. Love me again, I cannot live without you!"

Fanny, Gay's maid, had been engaged in putting the pretty cream dress and all of her things away; she turned the gas-jet low, and was just about to quit the boudoir, when the knob of the door turned with a low, subdued click, and through the aperture glided the white figure of a woman.

The maid stood among the shadows of the window drapery and watched her curiously, muttering to herself:

"What is she about, I wonder? I'll stay here and see."

For a moment Evelyn St. Claire—for it was she—paused in the centre of the boudoir; and casting one quick keen glance

about her, she detected the faint outlines of the slender, girlish form resting upon the lace-draped couch.

"Your time has come, Gay Esterbrook, or Gay Remington, whichever you may choose to call yourself," she muttered, clenching her jeweled hands deep into the folds of her dress, as she glided swiftly toward the couch with a devilish gleam in her steel-blue eyes.

Gay lay with her head resting upon her arm. No warning of the awful danger that menaced her fitted through her dreams.

If it had not been for her gentle breathing Little Gay would have looked like a beautiful statue carved in marble.

Evelyn St. Claire gazed on the beautiful face with the intense rage of a fiend incarnate.

"You have crossed my path again, girl," she muttered, "and now you must die for it."

She drew the vial from her pocket and held it up for an instant toward the gas-jet. It was of slightly greenish hue, and seemed to emit a thousand rays of sparkling tongues of fire, then changing to purple and blue like the flame of a diamond.

"Take that, Gay Esterbrook," she hissed, swiftly uncorking the vial and holding it close to the unconscious sleeper's nostrils. A pungent odor swept through the boudoir—one breath of which had locked Gay's senses in a stupor before she could waken.

One grain from the vial, shook between those crimson lips, would produce instant death. Evelyn St. Claire nerved herself for her dastardly work—again the voice of jealousy urged her on as she hesitated—while Gay's young life was at stake.

Again the brilliant powder flashed in the dim light, but in that thrilling moment a strong arm hurled Evelyn St. Claire back, and Fanny, the faithful maid, sprung between Evelyn and her innocent victim.

At that moment the daring bravery of the guilty heiress asserted itself, as she found herself so suddenly and unexpectedly cornered.

It was well that she had planned what she should do in a case of emergency, if she were detected entering Gay's room.

Quick as thought she executed her bold scheme.

She drew back with a suppressed scream—yawning and opening her blue eyes in the most natural surprise, very wide.

"Oh, where am I?" she cried, in pretended bewilderment. "I pray you to forgive me," she went on, wringing her jeweled hands imploringly together. "I must have fallen into my habit of sleepwalking. I'm in somebody's room."

By this time the maid had turned on a flood of gaslight.

Cleverly as Evelyn had played her little game, she had not succeeded in deceiving the serving-maid.

"I'm not to be duped in that way, miss," she retorted bluntly. "I have heard of people walking about in their sleep, many a time before," whispered the girl, significantly, "but I have never heard of a somnambulist doing what you attempted to do to-night," she added.

"Why, what did I try to do," returned

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Evelyn, turning white, still pretending puzzled wonder.

"You tried to murder Miss Gay," returned the girl sharply. "She would have been a corpse by now if I hadn't been here."

Evelyn recoiled with a hoarse cry.

"It is false!" she stammered. "If you dare accuse me of such a thing, girl, I will swear upon my oath that it was you who attempted to destroy your young heiress, and I rushed in to prevent you."

The faithful maid fairly gasped at the depth and extent of this fair fiend's atrocious wickedness.

Evelyn saw her advantage and followed it up swiftly.

"Be wise, girl; make terms with me; say nothing of what has occurred to-night; give me your written pledge you will not, and I will pay you down a thousand dollars cash."

The maid, who had never been able to scrape twenty-five hard-earned dollars together in her whole life, fairly gasped at the stupendous offer of the great heiress.

"I mean it," said Evelyn St. Claire; "write a few words which I will dictate and it will earn for you a thousand dollars cash."

There are women who possess the deadly, magnetic fascination of a serpent over their fellow-creatures, and Evelyn was one of them; she held the girl spell-bound under her cool, keen eyes.

A thousand dollars! Was ever such a temptation offered a poor girl who knew so well the true value of money?

Who can blame her that she wavered, and that at last, dearly as she loved poor Gay, the promise of so much gold for simply writing a few words and holding her tongue, overcame her scruples?

Evelyn St. Claire rapidly wrote out a few lines, and the thoughtless maid, too dazed and dazzled by the heap of bills on the table, took up the pen and signed her name to the document, without stopping to read it over.

Heaven help her! she little dreamed

that she had signed a so-called confession, setting forth that she herself had attempted to take the life of beautiful Gay, and that she had been frustrated by Miss St. Claire, a guest in the house!

"Ha!" thought Evelyn St. Claire triumphantly, "in the future, when this girl grows weary of keeping my secret, this will silence her!"

She threw herself down into a cushioned chair by the window, and all through the weary hours of the long night thought over plots and plans against the life of hapless Gay.

"The girl seems to bear a charmed life," she muttered; "but my next attempt shall not meet with such dire failure."

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	ASSETS as at 31st December, 1912	
	\$49,605,616.49	
	Increase over 1911	5,704,730.51
	CASH INCOME from Premiums, Interest, Rents, etc., in 1912	12,333,031.60
	Increase over 1911	1,775,746.03
	PROFITS PAID to Policyholders entitled to participate in 1912	691,975.84
	ADDED TO SURPLUS during 1912	614,008.09
	TOTAL SURPLUS 31st December, 1912, over all liabilities and capital, (according to the Company's Standard, viz., for assurances, the Om. (5) Table, with 3 1/2 and 3 per cent. interest, and, for annuities, the B. O. Select Annuity Tables, with 3 1/2 per cent. interest)	5,331,081.52
	DEATH CLAIMS, Matured Endowments, Profits, etc., during 1912	4,732,463.29
	PAYMENTS to Policyholders since organization	34,402,734.66
	NEW BUSINESS (paid for in cash) during 1912	30,814,409.64
	Increase over 1911	4,377,628.45
	ASSURANCES IN FORCE 31st December, 1912	182,782,420.00
	Increase over 1911	18,160,347.00

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Year.	Income	Assets	Life Assurances in Force
1872.....	\$ 49,210.93	\$ 96,461.95	\$ 1,064,350.00
1892.....	1,109,630.43	3,403,700.88	23,901,047.00
1902.....	3,661,509.34	13,480,272.88	67,181,602.00
1912....	12,333,031.60	49,605,616.40	182,782,420.00

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