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BLACK, GREEN or MIXED

For Weal or for Woe;

Or, A Dark Temptation

CHAPTER XXVI.—(Cont'd)

Again a diabolical plot entered the brain of Evelyn St. Claire. She crept to her couch and threw herself upon it, dressed as she was, muttering:

"I must snatch a few hours' sleep to give me the nerve to carry out the scheme of vengeance I have mapped out. I must be up with the sun to put it in execution."

She was up with the sun the next morning, and arrayed herself for an early walk.

Again she hailed the first coupe when she had turned the corner, and gave the directions where to drive in a cool, steady voice. An hour or more of sharp driving brought her to a low, irregular stone building, almost hidden by tall poplar trees, on the outskirts of the city.

"Wait for me here," said Evelyn, alighting from the vehicle and turning toward the stone house. "I may be gone but a few minutes—or an hour, perhaps." She glanced up hesitatingly at the heavily curtained windows with something like a feeling of awe.

Few knew of the existence of this strange abode so near the throbbing heart of the great city. No one ever heard the muffled moans and cries that never penetrated the thick walls that entombed many a human being, yet it was a private asylum for the insane.

It was a strange yet a true fact, that no poor victim who had ever crossed its dark, mysterious portals came forth alive to tell its horrible secrets to the outer world.

Evelyn set her lips tightly together, boldly ascended the broad steps, and gave the bell a sharp, imperative pull.

A moment later the door was opened by a short, wiry, black-bearded man, who eyed her with keen suspicion as he brusquely inquired her business.

"I should like to see the doctor who keeps this place," returned Evelyn, with equal stiffness. "My business is of the utmost importance. Tell Dr. Ladeau I must see him without delay."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"I repeat that my business is of the utmost importance," exclaimed Evelyn, impatiently. "I must see the doctor without delay."

"I am Dr. Ladeau, madam," he replied, bidding her enter, and throwing open a door to the right—office and library combined—bowing her in, and placing a chair for her. "How can I serve you, my dear lady?"

For a single instant their eyes met. "I wonder if I can trust him?" thought Miss St. Claire; "he certainly looks like a man who can be approached by gold's influence."

The keen-eyed French doctor was eyeing his early morning caller sharply from beneath his shaggy brows; noting the hesitating manner and the flush that stole into her blonde face under his penetrating gaze, mentally concluding that his stylish visitor had sought him upon some very delicate mission.

For an instant Evelyn was at a loss how to proceed. "I have come upon an embarrassing errand, doctor," she said; "but I think, of all persons in this city, you can best help me, and I am willing to pay handsomely for it."

The doctor bowed low, his face beaming with smiles. "Please consider me entirely at your service, madam," he said, in a smooth voice; "rest assured I shall do all in my power to assist you in any way."

"Thanks," replied Evelyn, emboldened by the stress he laid upon the last three words, and the peculiar knowing nod that accompanied them. "I may as well come to the point at once," she said, flushing constrainedly.

"Certainly," responded the French doctor; "pray do so by all means, I am all attention."

Evelyn toyed nervously with the diamond bracelets on her wrists a moment, then proceeded hesitatingly. "I have a relative—a young and beautiful girl—whom I wish to place in your asylum under your charge. She is hopelessly insane, though of the mild order, and may require your constant care for long years. Guard her well—let no human eye from the outside world rest upon her face, and you shall name your own price. That is my errand, doctor; now I ask if I can bring her to you—remember, I will pay handsomely for securing your services for her under your own roof."

"I shall be only too pleased to be of

assistance to you, dear madam," murmured the doctor blandly. "Bring the young lady here, by all means, during the course of the afternoon, and here she shall rest secure until you desire her release."

A wicked gleam of triumph shot into Evelyn St. Claire's steel-blue eyes as she rose to depart.

The doctor soon after bowed his visitor out of the office, and watched the coupe roll away, with a crafty smile playing about the corners of his bearded lips.

"I wonder who she is," he ruminated, closing his fingers tightly over the roll of bills she placed in his hand. "I shouldn't wonder if I had stumbled across, and found a table gold mine this time. I have my doubts as to whether the girl she intends bringing here is insane or not, but, of course, that's none of my affair. Here the girl shall stay, insane or not, as long as her friends are able to pay handsomely for it."

As Evelyn ran hurriedly up the marble steps of the Remington mansion, she saw Gay standing pale and hollow-eyed at the parlor window.

"I awaited breakfast to take it with you, Evelyn," she said, advancing out into the corridor, to meet her treacherous friend. "I went to your room, and finding it empty, surmised that you had gone out to take an early morning ramble."

"I have a wretched headache this morning, Evelyn," she went on plaintively, raising her little hand to her throbbing temples. "I feel dazed, quite unlike my usual merry self."

"I am so sorry," returned Evelyn in a sympathetic voice. "Late hours and receptions don't seem to agree with you. If you have no engagement for this afternoon to compel you to remain in doors, come to the matinee with me, and see the 'Mikado'; it's perfectly charming."

"Perhaps I may," returned Gay, indifferently, "though I don't care very much for theatrical performances."

Before Evelyn could reply, the footman brought in the morning mail, and laid it upon the table.

There were a dozen of letters or more for the banker, quite as many for his wife, and four for Gay.

One, a square cream envelope addressed simply to Miss Remington, No. — Gramercy Park, caught Evelyn's eye as she stood beside her, and her face paled to a dead white as she recognized Percy Granville's dashing chirography, and this letter Gay took up first and broke the seal.

One glance at its contents—a few brief lines—and her lovely rose-bud face flushed a burning red.

It ran as follows:

"Miss Remington,—I shall do myself the honor of calling upon you this evening, if agreeable. Trusting you are fully recovered from your recent shock in the park, I remain, yours with respect, "PERCY GRANVILLE."

Evelyn St. Claire could have struck Little Gay down, she was so bitterly angry at the happy light that flooded the girl's face. She knew quite as well as if she had read Gay's letter that Percy Granville had made an appointment to call.

The headache Gay had complained of seemed to leave her as if by magic, and her lovely dark eyes shone bright as stars.

"Some one whom you know, Evelyn, is to call upon me this evening," she said, hiding her blushing face among the roses in the silver vase beside her. "I do not know whether I had better go to the matinee with you this afternoon or not. I really wish, Evelyn, that you would excuse me."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," laughed Miss St. Claire. "It is a long time after the matinee is over until evening, and I shall not leave you by yourself to indulge in day-dreams. You must come with me to see the 'Mikado.'"

Alas, it was an evil moment in which Gay laughingly consented, at length, and walked blindly into the pit that had been dug for her unwary feet.

It had been with a waxy guilty face indeed that Fanny, the maid, had met her young mistress that morning, and despite the money that nestled snugly in her bosom, and the promise that she had given the haughty heiress—to keep her terrible secret, she could scarcely repress the longing to fling herself down at Little Gay's feet and confess all.

She heard the order that she was to lay out Gay's blue silk walking-dress—for she was going to the matinee that afternoon, with Miss St. Claire—with a perceptible shudder.

She longed with all her heart to warn Gay to look out for the treacherous blonde.

The wary heiress, however, gave her no such opportunity; she never left Gay for a single moment alone.

Gay had not mentioned to Mrs. Remington that she intended going to the matinee, and when she went to kiss her goodbye the grand old lady was taking her usual afternoon siesta, so she tiptoed noiselessly out of the room again without waking her, and joined Evelyn, who was waiting her in a coupe at the door.

Evelyn threw her arms about her, and quickly drew her into the vehicle, and the door closed after her with a sharp click.

To Gay's intense surprise, the curtains of heavy silken seal-brown were closely drawn, and a heavy odor of Marechal-Nil roses pervaded the coupe—from the bouquet Evelyn carried.

"We shall have a very cozy ride, my dear," said Evelyn, with a shrill laugh that sounded strangely out of place.

"I have a call to make—I knew you would not mind accompanying me, Gay, we shall have plenty of time."

Evelyn exerted herself to chat so gaily that Gay never noticed how swiftly time was flying, or the long distance they were traversing, until the coupe came to a sudden halt.

"Here we are," cried Evelyn, "come in with me."

She slipped her arm through Gay's, and drew her innocent victim up the stone steps and into the wide, dark hall, to the most piteous fate a young girl ever met. A small, dark, wiry man had opened the door for them. Gay did not notice the peculiar look that passed between them.

Evelyn passed into the office or library, Gay following her.

"What a strange place," said Gay, shudderingly, as she followed Evelyn's example by seating herself; "what in the world can bring you here, I wonder. This room is so dark and grim I actually feel uncomfortable in it. You must not laugh at me, Evelyn," she went on thoughtfully, "but it seems to recall all the stories I have ever read of haunted houses; these paneled walls, dark painted ceilings, and huge frowning book-cases, together with that dark-looking foreigner who admitted us, actually frighten me. Do tell me, Evelyn, what brings you here?"

Evelyn's answer was cut short, by the most unearthly, horrible sound that ever fell upon mortal ears, a series of blood-curdling shrieks and piercing cries that fairly froze the blood in Gay's veins. No words could portray what they were like. She sprang to her feet with a gasp of terror, and would have fled precipitately out of the room and out of the house, had not Evelyn clutched her firmly by the white arm, holding her back by main force, with gleaming, triumphant eyes.

"Don't attempt to break away from me in such unpardonable haste," sneered Evelyn, contemptuously; "listen and I will tell you why we are here."

"I am so afraid, Evelyn," gasped Gay, piteously. "I pray you let us hasten away at once. I am faint—those awful sounds. Oh—"

Here inhaled the fragrant breath of these roses and it will revive you," interrupted Evelyn, catching up her bouquet, and fairly burying Gay's white face in it.

The bouquet contained something more than the fragrant, innocent breath of the roses, which Evelyn was pressing so steadily to her nostrils.

"Take them away!" gasped Gay, tearing frantically at the flowers with one hand, while with the other she grasped gropingly the back of an adjacent chair for support.

"Evelyn," she whispered wildly, "I—I—oh, I see it all now; you have drugged the roses. I am fainting—dying!"

A deadly whiteness spread over poor Little Gay's face, her limbs trembled. The piteous entreaty in her face would have melted any heart to pity save that of her cruel rival and bitter foe.

Gay's senses were fast becoming dazed, but through it all she could hear Evelyn St. Claire's sneering, discordant laugh, and the beautiful luring blonde face seemed to whirl about her.

The guilty heiress saw that the roses had done their work—poor Gay was at her mercy.

Then the mask of smiles she had assumed so well dropped from her revengeful face, and she turned upon Gay with the wickedest laugh that ever was heard rippling over her crimson lips.

"You are not going to die, Gaynell Esterbrook," she cried. "I, your rival, have planned a fate a thousand times worse than that for you. I may as well tell you the truth, girl, and die on mercifully, retreating toward the door, backward, like a writhing serpent. "I used a clever ruse to lure you here. This is a private asylum for the incurable insane; your friends keep the howling, frenzied creatures here until death relieves them of the task of maintaining them; and in these walls, where no cry ever penetrates to the outer world, and amid these frightful wretches, you are to stay until you die, and the sooner you die the better."

"Evelyn!"

The name fell from Gay's white lips in a low, wailing cry of mortal terror, but Miss St. Claire never heeded and went on pitilessly.

"It was I who separated you from Percy Granville so effectually; I vowed that I would do it, and I have kept my vow of vengeance!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Who can portray the horror of the situation—the pitiful anguish of Little Gay as she realized the foul conspiracy closing in around her.

Like the sharp thrust of a dagger, every word her revengeful foe uttered fell upon her bleeding heart.

"Now that all possibility of love is removed from you forever, let me tell you something else," Evelyn St. Claire went

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Perfect valor is to do without a witness all that we could do before the whole world.—La Rochefoucauld.

It is a great step in the interpretation of life when we have discovered that all events are ultimately spiritual.—Brierly.

The world will never be in any manner of order or tranquility until men are firmly convinced that conscience, honor and credit are all in our interest.—Steel.

An obstacle is not a discouragement. It may become one, but only with our own consent. So long as we refuse to be discouraged we cannot be discouraged.—Maeterlinck.

It is good to pardon, to be merciful, to be liberal; and it is better to be just. Many of the misfortunes of life—like hyenas—flee if you courageously meet them.—Talmage.

There would be fewer sorrows among mankind if men made less use of their imaginations in recalling the memory of past sorrows than in bearing patiently their present lot.—Goethe.

The best some people can do is to express somebody else's opinions.

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