

For Weal or for Woe;

Or, A Dark Temptation

CHAPTER XXXIV.—(Cont'd)

When every hope of tracing Gay failed signally, Mr. Lennox adopted the last measure that was left him—took the evening train for Passaic, and proceeded at once to the home of Evelyn St. Claire. The heiress sat in the library—her blonde head bent on her jeweled hands. Not once but a thousand times since her thrilling interview with Percy had she regretted the astounding revelation that had slipped from her tongue in the heat of the moment. She had been a fool to reveal the fact that the lost love whom he had so bitterly mourned was still alive. She uttered a desperate, mirthless laugh.

"It was a glorious revenge, but it does not satisfy me," she muttered; "I will—"
The rest of the sentence was never uttered, a peal of the bell interrupted her reverie, and the next moment a servant entered bearing the card of Russel Lennox.

Evelyn St. Claire frowned.
"Tell this person I will not see him," she exclaimed angrily, "but I will—"
"You must see him, my dear young lady," said a determined voice close behind the servant, and, pushing the astonished man aside, he strode into the room, bowing low to Miss St. Claire as he spoke.

She sprang to her feet fairly convulsed with anger and amazement, staring at the bold intruder.
"How dared you force your way here?" she demanded furiously.
"John," she exclaimed, calling sharply to the servant, who stood staring helplessly at the stranger, "show this person out, at once—lose no time. If he refuses to go quietly—throw him out."

And she emphasized the last three words with a stamp of her dainty foot on the velvet hearth-rug.
Quick as thought the detective thrust the servant from the threshold, closed the door, and quietly turned the key in the lock.

And in that instant Evelyn St. Claire recognized him as the very obliging gentleman who had secured the paper, that was missing from the file, for her in the New York newspaper office.

"There is no occasion for hysterical alarm, Miss St. Claire," he said sternly, at that moment displaying his official badge. "I have no wish to harm you. I am here in the cause of justice, you must tell me what you have done with Little Gay, the adopted daughter of Mr. Remington, and where she is to be found now, living or dead. You are my prisoner, Miss St. Claire, until this mystery is cleared up—you must speak."

A harsh, discordant laugh fell from Evelyn St. Claire's crimson lips.
"It is strange," thought the detective grimly, "that one so beautiful should be so utterly heartless, so cruel."
She faced the man defiantly, a mocking smile still curving her red lips.

"At whose instigation is this arrest made?" she inquired with superb indifference.
His answer changed her into a fend incarnate.
"At the instigation of one who loves the girl better than life itself—Mr. Percy Granville, of Redstone Hall."

A blood-curdling laugh interrupted him; Evelyn St. Claire sprang to her feet with a face fairly livid with passion.
"Go back and tell him this for me," she blazed out furiously, "I do know the face of earth can force me to reveal it! It will be a hard matter for you to prove that she did not fly from his arms willingly enough."
"You shall be compelled to reveal all!" declared the detective, angrily.

"Never!" she retorted, "I may lock me up in solitary confinement while my life lasts, you may torture me on the rack, you may kill me, but I will never disclose the fate that has overtaken Gay-nell Esterbrook, come what may!"
"Tell me one thing, that I may spare those who love the girl as much suffering as possible; is she living or dead?"
"You shall never know," replied Evelyn St. Claire. "I will carry that secret with me into my grave."

CHAPTER XXXV.

The detective looked into the beautiful face gravely.
"I will give you a week to think the matter over, detaining you in safe custody in the interim; at the end of that time if you still refuse to reveal to us where we can find Little Gay, living or dead, you will be called upon to answer for a crime you would not like to hear me name."

Evelyn St. Claire fell back in her cushioned arm-chair with a low cry on her lips; but her fright, however, was only momentary. She faced him with defiant, shipping eyes.

"I repeat, once for all, that I will carry the secret of Little Gay's fate down to the grave with me without revealing it. Percy Granville shall never clasp her to his heart—my rival shall never triumph over me," she said vehemently.
The detective looked at his watch meditatively—it wanted a quarter to nine.

"We are in time for the through express back to the city," he said. "You must come with me, Miss St. Claire."

"Where do you propose taking me?" she asked, with a gasp, shrinking back from him, her face paling to a dead white.

"I shall keep you a close prisoner at the Remington mansion for one week in order to bring you to your senses. After that must depend entirely upon yourself." Bravely defiant to the last, she uttered no word of comment when he hung for her wraps to be brought her.

He led her to the carriage in waiting, and in silence they made the memorable journey.
Mr. Lennox kept a close watch on the haughty beauty's every movement as they entered the railway car.

He believed she would make a sudden dash for liberty, and he meant to frustrate any such attempt.
In this he was quite mistaken. She allowed herself to be conducted to the Remington mansion without the slightest remonstrance.

The banker's wife met them in the corridor. Her eyes were red and swollen with weeping. The greeting between the ladies was constrained and embarrassing. Mrs. Remington followed her into the apartment that had been set apart for her use, begging her, with all a woman's eloquence, to tell them the fate of Little Gay.

"Your prayers and pleadings are all in vain," Evelyn declared. "You shall never learn the truth from me."
"Have you no heart?" sobbed the banker's wife, bitterly. "Think of the lives you have wrecked. Poor Little Gay was so sweet and innocent—think how shamefully you have betrayed her girlish friendship; she never harmed you, yet you have spoiled her life."

A mocking laugh fell from Evelyn St. Claire's lips.
"Spoiled her life, have I?" she repeated in shameless triumph. "I am well pleased to acknowledge it. She stole my lover from me—but for her he would have been mine. I hate her. She should not have crossed my path if she would have escaped a rival's terrible vengeance."

For hours Mrs. Remington pleaded with her, but she might as well have prayed to a heart of marble, neither tears nor entreaties softened or moved her.
This was the message that she was obliged to take down to the drawing-room to her husband, and to Percy, who was pacing up and down the room like one demented.

Evelyn St. Claire acknowledged that she, and she alone, could unravel the dark mystery that shrouded the fate of Little Gay—she could tell them whether she was living or dead; but whether they imprisoned her for life, torture her on the rack, but they should never force her secret from her lips. She would go down to her grave with the terrible secret locked securely in her breast.

Percy's intense grief was terrible to see, and in reckless desperation he resolved to see Evelyn and plead with her himself. He must do it for Gay's dear sake.

Evelyn St. Claire's heart gave a strange half-started throb as she heard his quick step on the corridor without, and recognized it. A moment later the door opened to admit Mrs. Remington, quickly followed by Percy.

He crossed the room to where Evelyn sat, standing pale and haggard before her.
Evelyn was struck with the great change in him; he looked as though years had passed over him.

"Evelyn," he cried hoarsely, his handsome white face working with pitiful emotion. "I have sent my friends to plead with you to reveal to us Little Gay's fate, and you have cruelly repulsed them one and all; now I come to you myself. Would it be of any use to kneel to you, to implore you to be merciful?"
"It would not be of the slightest use," she answered steadily. "You must be mad to think I would restore my rival to your arms. I would rather see you lying dead at my feet than know you were happy with her."

"You are a heartless girl!" he cried angrily. "I shall denounce you and force you to tell. I am desperate—picturing the horrors my darling may be suffering at this very moment while you refuse to disclose her whereabouts."
"Denounce me—force me to tell! You denounce me!" repeated Evelyn St. Claire, her blue eyes flashing like stars. "You expose me before the world—you for whose sake I have steepled my very soul in sin! I would have committed any crime, Percy Granville, to win your love!"

He started back as though she had stabbed him, holding up his hands with a gesture of abhorrence, but she went on recklessly.
"I loved you in spite of your coldness, your indifference. I cried out to Heaven for but one gift from the gods, and that was your love; and when I found that you loved that pretty doll-faced creature and not me, it made a fiend incarnate of me. My love for you has been my curse."

"But, surely, what you are pleased to call love, Evelyn, would never drive you to the commission of crime," he replied in great distress. "Oh, Evelyn, repent and try to atone for what you have done. You led Little Gay away from here on that eventful day; you also know what has befallen her since; and again I be-

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seech you to repent and confess where she is, for I cannot believe you have so injured her; you could not have been so inhuman."
"I am not one of the repenting kind," she retorted. "If it were to be done over again, and I had the hope of winning your love, Percy, I would do all that I have done; you cannot call that repentance, and that is the end of it. No power can tempt me to restore to your arms the rival who has won your love from me. I do not care what is done with me. I do not care whether I spend my life in a palace or a prison. Tell the whole world that I spirited away your love, if you will; you can take what action against me you please. I shall still have the satisfaction of knowing you are not giving my hated rival the love and caresses which should have been mine."

Percy Granville buried his face in his hands with a bitter groan.
He saw plainly that Evelyn had the best of the situation, and meant to keep it, come what might.

Mrs. Remington laid her white hand on his bowed head, pitying tears falling on the fair clustering curls that were pushed back from his forehead.
"Come away, Mr. Granville," she said gently. "It is useless to plead longer; just assume Heaven will restore you to your lost love without her aid."

Evelyn uttered a mocking laugh; still the words struck home to her heart like a prophecy.
"Why should I have cause for alarm?" she told herself, in the next breath. "He can never trace her. I defy all the powers of heaven and earth to restore his lost love to him!"

She wondered what they intended to do with her at the expiration of the stipulated week.
Suddenly an idea occurred to her.
Where was Fanny, the girl who had been Gay's maid—whom she had bound by such a strong oath of silence that eventful night?

If they would but send this girl to her, she could induce her to aid her to escape. Her hopes were soon dashed in this quarter, however, for she found that the maid had left suddenly, soon after Gay's mysterious disappearance.

The week that followed was not one soon to be forgotten.
Evelyn St. Claire remained steadfast to her purpose.

One answer to their passionate pleadings that they should know the place that had befallen Gay, and that she would carry the secret down to the grave with her.

At length the detective presented himself for her final decision.
She gave a scornful, defiant laugh, clutching her jeweled hands nervously in the folds of the dainty violet silk she wore.

"My answer is just what it has been from the first. I shall never restore Gay to the man whose love should have been mine!"
"Then you must come with me, Miss St. Claire," he said grimly. "There has been more leniency shown you than you deserve."

Again she allowed him to conduct her to the carriage which stood in waiting, but there was that in her eyes which should have warned him that he had a desperate woman to deal with.

She had not believed they would carry out their threat of openly denouncing her because she refused to speak.
Now the full horror of prison walls loomed up before her mental vision in all its terrors.

As the coach whirled on through the gathering darkness of the night, she tried to coax, to bribe the man to set her free. It was quite useless.
"You shall have your freedom the moment after you divulge to me what you have done with that poor young girl—never until then!" he answered sternly.

If he would not aid her to escape, she would make the daring attempt herself. Ah, if she could open the carriage door softly, gently, upon the side on which she sat without attracting the detective's attention—then with one swift motion leap from the vehicle to freedom!

She glanced at him furtively—he was gazing out of the opposite window in deep thought.
"Now is my time," thought Evelyn, still watching him narrowly, the light in her determined, steel-blue eyes deepening.

Amid the rumbling of the rapidly-revolving wheels the detective did not hear the handle of the coach-door turn ever so lightly and cautiously.
He must have been thinking deeply that he did not feel the cool breeze as it wafted across his face.

Ever so cautiously, the desperate, guilty girl, little by little, gathered her garments closer about her, planted her foot firmly on the carriage step; then—there was a swift, sudden movement, a lightning-like leap, and in a flash the detective realized what had happened—his beautiful captive—the only person who could unravel the dark mystery which shrouded Little Gay's fate—had slipped from his grasp.

He, the great detective, had been cleverly foiled by this desperate, daring young girl.
He was furious with anger and chagrin. The terrible jerk had frightened the mettlesome horses and they doubled their pace, breaking into a mad gallop.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

We will leave Mr. Lennox, the detective, hastily retracing his steps in search of the girl who had given him the slip so cleverly, and return to Little Gay whom, our readers will remember, we left in such a thrilling circumstance on the night of the storm.
As the lightning flashed through the

room the medical students fell back petrified with horror and dismay. The electric current had shattered to atoms the marble receptacle upon which Gay's form had been placed, and from the debris Gay slowly struggled up to a sitting posture, gazing around her with a bewildered, piteous air.

"Where am I?" she exclaimed plaintively. "A shriek of mortal terror rent the air."
"Oh, I remember, I remember," she cried out sharply, "he would not release me from that horrible place, and I made up my mind to die."

Up flew the little white hands to her breast, into which she had plunged the slender silver dagger, as though she expected to find it there still.
"I tried to end my life, I fell at his feet with the darkness of death closing in around me. What place is this? Who brought me here?"

The professor had comprehended the situation in a single instant; the girl had fallen into a trance, and had been brought to them under the supposition that she was dead.

He sprang forward with a low cry, lifted Gay to her feet, and before she had time to glance around the ghastly room into which she had been brought, had hurried her to another apartment.

Gay clung to him in terror, begging him piteously to tell her where she was, and why she was brought there; but before he could answer her, exhausted nature had asserted itself and she fell back in his arms in a deep swoon, that resembled death closely enough.

"Here's a pretty affair!" exclaimed the professor, nervously, "what in the world is to be done with her? Not a line—nothing about her gives a clew as to her identity!"

Of course it was clearly out of the question to send her to a hospital under the circumstances—the only way out of the affair was to take her to his own home.
And this plan he executed without delay.

He explained the embarrassing situation to his wife, who received the lovely stranger with open arms.
"What a pity we do not know who she is," she exclaimed, gazing admiringly on the waxen face, framed in soft, curling locks. "It's a shame we cannot let her people know she is alive and well—of course they are mourning her as dead, poor pretty child."

"After a few hours' rest she will come to, and be able to give us their address, and they can be sent for," predicted the professor; but in this he was wrong.
(To be continued.)

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