

For Weal or for Woe;

Or, A Dark Temptation

CHAPTER XXXVI—(Cont'd)

When the light awoke Little Gay was in a high, delirious fever.

The professor and his good wife stood by her couch with anxious faces. And then the cruellest blow that fate could have dealt poor, hapless Little Gay happened her.

In the senseless raving babblings that fell from her feverish lips she uttered the name of Harold Tremaine.

The professor leaped to his feet with an exultant face.

"A clew at last, my dear," he cried cheerily. "She has mentioned the name of a man I know. I will send for him, mainly to check up on his knowledge of his address—he can tell us who this young girl is, of course, and where her folks are to be found."

He immediately put the plan into execution. Hardly an hour had elapsed ere Tremaine presented himself at the professor's residence.

"Some girl repeating my name over and over in her delirium," he muttered angrily as he stood there on the marble steps.

And he idly wondered which one of his sine had found him out now.

He was dressed in faultless attire, from his polished boots to his immaculate shirt front on which a magnificent diamond blazed; yet when he was presented to the professor's wife, she formed a dislike to the dark, handsome face and smiling mouth under the drooping mustache, that she could never wholly account for.

Tremaine's ingratiating, amiable, joyous manner, which he used to lead him to the couch to identify the lovely stranger and his eyes fell upon Little Gay. He could scarcely repress the cry of exultation that sprung to his lips; and like a flash a diabolical plot swept through his brain, and he carried it out on the spot.

He turned to the professor with a startled gasp of dismay and the most intense joy.

"My God!" he exclaimed in a well-feigned excitement; "how came she here? This is my wife!"

While they explained the situation— which they did— he knew he should have time to think.

Reluctantly the professor admitted the true situation in a few words, begging Tremaine would not betray the medical fraternity in this affair, as it was necessary to obtain bodies in the cause of science, whenever and whatever way they could.

They readily believed Tremaine's story of his great grief over the supposed death of his young wife, and that, in one instance, at least, grave robbers could be blamed for the saving of a human life.

"If you think my wife is still alive, moved, will take her away at once," he went on eagerly; but to this neither the doctor nor his wife would agree.

"You must wait a week until she is a little stronger," they both declared, and despite his chagrin, he was forced to submit with a good grace.

On the fourth day Gay's great, dark, velvety eyes opened to consciousness, and the first person on whom they rested was Harold Tremaine, leaning tenderly over her couch.

Two or three other persons were in the room, but his eyes met and held her with a wary gaze; and she was only for a moment, however. The next instant, a thrilling, hysterical cry rang through the room:

"Save me from him!—save me!"

Tremaine drew back with a muttered curse, ground out savagely between his white teeth, which no one save Gay heard.

He turned to the doctor's wife with an injured expression on his darkly handsome face.

"My darling does not know me; she imagines me some mortal foe," he said sadly.

And his grief was apparently so real that she felt sorry for him, believing her judgment of him had been too hasty.

Gay grew so alarmingly worse, as he stood by the couch, that he was obliged to leave the room.

"Your husband, who as a physician of experience must have had many similar cases, will tell you in cases like my young wife's, they often imagine that the one who is nearest and dearest to them is their cruellest foe; you must pay no attention to her ravings; I shall take her away this evening. I shall be more than gratefully indebted to you if you will see that she is ready to accompany me within an hour, my dear lady."

Little dreaming of the cruel plot against poor Little Gay, which she was unconsciously lending herself to, she consented.

When Gay found herself alone with the kindly-faced, elderly lady, she held out her white arms to her with a piteous, trembling cry:

"You must not believe what he has told you—that I am his wife; he is my cruellest foe. I am the adopted daughter of Allen Remington, the banker of No. — Gramercy Park. I was decoyed away by the foulest plot that was ever—"

"There, there, my dear," interrupted the good lady, soothingly, as she placed her hand gently but firmly over the girl's quivering red mouth, "you are not to talk now. You shall tell me all about it after a while in the meantime you are to dress. Your folks know all about your being here, and they are to send a carriage for you pretty soon to take you home."

Gay would have put a thousand eager questions to her, but she refused to listen. She had wondered vaguely whether or not the pretty stranger whom Harold Tremaine called the very uncommon name of Gay, was really out of her head or not.

"Dear me," she thought to herself, "the idea of her imagining herself the adopted daughter of the great banker of Gramercy Park—that settles it; of course she's out of her head, poor, pretty young thing!"

As the motherly woman would neither listen nor reply to her questions, Gay was forced to relapse into silence, while the garments Tremaine had provided were donned.

How her heart throbbed at the thought! She was going home! She would tell them of Harold Tremaine's audacious report, and they would punish him for it. She longed to know how they had found her out, but it was quite useless to ask questions, she saw.

At length a carriage drew up before the door. Tremaine, in a carefully disguised voice, inquired if she were ready, and for answer the doctor's wife drew Gay gently down the porch to the vehicle in waiting.

Some one was seated within. Gay sprung into the coach with a fluttering cry:

"Papa, dear papa!" she sobbed joyously. "It is you who have come for me, to take me home, I know."

The coach door closed with a bang, and it whirled rapidly down the street, but it was not the banker's cheery voice that answered her.

"Make no outcry," hissed a voice close to her ear. "If you do, by all the powers above, I'll chloroform you and put a gag in your mouth. You are at my mercy at last, my girl. I mean to take a double vengeance upon you for giving me the slip from the old house by the river road, and for forcing me back from the bridge that night down into the water. You shall pay dearly for it."

Gay uttered a piercing cry for help. "Attempt that again at your peril!" cried Tremaine hoarsely, with a terrible oath.

The sentence was drowned in a shower of crashing glass.

In terror and desperation Gay had sprung suddenly forward, dashing her little hands through the plate glass window of the vehicle, shivering it to atoms, and before Tremaine could prevent her, again that shrill, piercing cry rang out on the night air.

It almost electrified two gentlemen who had stepped out of the telegraph office, waiting on the corner of Broadway to hail a passing cab.

They were Mr. Lennox, the detective, and Percy Granville.

"Some woman in danger!" cried the detective excitedly. "I must follow that coach. Good-bye, Granville," he said, wringing his friend's hand, as he signalled a cab and jumped in.

"If you want to make a five-dollar note, catch that coach a block ahead!" he exclaimed hurriedly to the driver.

The man whipped up his horses and the terrible chase began.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"I have the fastest team in the city, sir," replied the driver eagerly as he whipped up his horses. "I can run down the cab ahead of us if any one can."

It was not long before Tremaine observed that he was hotly pursued, and courses loud and deep broke from his lips.

"If I can but reach the river first," he muttered, under his breath, "I shall be the fool who is mad enough to follow me—to track me down."

"I shall pay you for this," he hissed in Gay's terrified ear. "If I had taken the precaution to chloroform you this infernal business would not have happened."

The terrific crashing of the wheels as they sped over the paved streets, drowned his angry voice.

It was a ride never to be forgotten; both drivers lashed and urged their horses to do their utmost, and the speed with which the vehicle turned corner after corner was tremendous.

Poor Gay expected each moment would be her last.

Slowly but surely the detective's cab was gaining on Tremaine's, and, at last, they were within hailing distance of each other.

"I command you to halt!" thundered the detective, leaning far out of his carriage window, his clarion tones rising above the noise of hoofs and wheels.

A derisive laugh from Tremaine floated back to him.

The detective placed his whistle to his lips, and blew a shrill blast to call his aid the blue-coated preservers of the peace; but, as usual, when they are wanted, they are not to be found.

The detective's blood was up; he was determined since the affair had gone so far, he would see it through to the end if it cost him his eyes.

He saw the cab was making for the river-bank, and more than one clever trail he had lost in this way.

"I'll double the sum I offered you if you overtake the cab ahead," he called out sharply to the driver, and again the man applied the whip to give a fresh impetus to the foaming, panting beasts.

One terrific cut of the whip, and the two cabs were abreast at last, and both came to a dead stop simultaneously.

"Now, then, halt!" thundered the detective again, and explain the mysterious cries for help that man's voice—that issued from this vehicle."

For answer, Harold Tremaine whipped out his revolver, and taking aim in a twinkling at the detective's head, fired; but the ball missed its mark, and before he could repeat his action, the weapon was dashed from his grasp by the bound hands of brave Little Gay.

"Foiled!" he exclaimed, with a terrible imprecation, springing forward in a daring attempt to regain his weapon; but Mr. Lennox was too quick for him.

In a trice both were on the pavement, grappling with each other in a desperate struggle for supremacy.

Tremaine's driver would have sprung to his rescue, but the other driver held him back.

"He is in the hands of the great detective, Lennox; you must not interfere," he said.

It seemed as though the famous detective had at last found his match, for Tremaine fought with the courage of an enraged demon.

He had recognized his assailant, and he determined not to be taken, for he knew he was wanted for more crimes than one in the great metropolis.

Gay, still bound and gagged, had crept from the coach, gazing at the fearful combat in mortal terror. It came to an end at last; the detective, with a clever movement, had succeeded in slipping a pair of handcuffs over Tremaine's white hands, and he was rendered powerless.

"Now then, drag him by main force toward the carriage-lamps, we will take a look at you and see who you are, and at the same time find out who it is you were about to kidnap."

Tremaine threw up his dark, handsome head proudly—defiant to the last—a mocking, sneering smile on his white face.

"I am captured, but not conquered," he exclaimed bitterly; "you shall soon find that out."

At that instant the light of the lamps fell full on his face, and the detective exclaimed, in the keenest amazement: "By all the powers, that's wonderful—the very man I have been searching the city and the whole country through for long months to find—Harold Tremaine!"

"Now that you have me, what do you want of me?" exclaimed Tremaine, turning a shade paler.

"First and foremost, to answer for the part you took in spiriting away Little Gay—Percy Granville's bride—from Paris some months ago, and secondly, for a bone the government has to pick with you," returned the detective grimly.

"May I ask who informed against me in the latter offense I am charged with?" asked Tremaine, hoarsely.

"A girl whom you discarded, I believe," replied Lennox. "Lydia Moore, who was your sweetheart—she lived in the old house by the river road, to which you brought Granville's bride—she made a clean breast of all she knew concerning you."

Tremaine ground his white teeth in impotent fury.

"Curse her!" he muttered savagely, "the woman has ruined me at last, as I always thought she would when I broke with her."

The detective had not waited an instant to bandy words with him, but, placing him in charge of a patrolman who had appeared on the thrilling scene, was hurriedly examining the interior of the coach Tremaine had occupied.

Was his senses playing him some horrible trick? Where was the woman whose piercing cries had first attracted him? The coach was empty!

His amazement knew no bounds, but it was only momentary, however; for, upon glancing about him he observed the slender figure of a young girl lying at his feet.

Little Gay had fallen in a dead faint

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when she had crept from the coach and beheld the terrible combat in which Tremaine and her would-be rescuer were engaged.

Mr. Lennox raised her in his arms; and as he did so caught a good view of the face, framed in its sheen of golden hair.

"Good Heavens!" he ejaculated, in intense excitement; "I shall believe in tracking this villain down, I have found Little Gay, Percy Granville's lost bride, and Banker Remington's adopted daughter."

He tore the bandage from the little red mouth, and unlocked the little white hands, hastily applying restoratives, which he always carried about him.

By this time another officer had found his way to the spot, and the two were dispatched to the Tombs with their handsome, aristocratic, defiant prisoner, with the written message to the chief that he was to be detained in close custody until Detective Lennox arrived.

Just as the letter placed Gay in the coach with instructions to drive as fast as the condition of the tired-out horse would permit to Banker Remington's residence, Gay opened her eyes.

A cry of most intense gratitude and joy broke from her lips as she saw the kindly face of her rescuer opposite her instead of the dark, treacherous face of Harold Tremaine.

The detective bent forward eagerly. "Do not be afraid, my dear," he said, taking one of the little chill-cold hands in his, "you are detained in my taking you to your friends. I sincerely hope I am not mistaken. You are Mr. Remington's adopted daughter—the bride of Percy Granville, are you not? Surely I cannot be mistaken."

"You are right," sobbed Gay; "I am indeed that person. Oh, tell me, sir, are you friend or foe? I have been deceived so much lately I do not know whom to trust. I am fearful of everyone playing me false whom I meet. Are you really taking me home to my dear adopted parents? If you are, could I fall down on my knees and bless you?"

"I am indeed taking you to them," he answered cheerily, "and to one, too, who has been wearing his very life out searching for you—to your young husband, my dear."

The cry of joy Gay uttered brought tears to his eyes.

"It seems almost too good to be true," she sobbed. "Oh, sir, if anything should come between us now, when meeting him seems so certain, the blow would kill me, I—I love him so."

"Nothing but death can prevent you from seeing him ere the day is done," he replied reassuringly; "so prepare yourself for a joyful meeting. As soon as I place you within the safe portals of your own home I will dispatch a messenger to the hotel, with these words: 'Gay has been found; she is at home with the Remingtons'. Beest assured that will fetch him to your side without an instant's delay."

Gay's heart was too full for utterance; she could only sob out brokenly:

"Oh, Percy, are we really to be united at last?"

Suddenly she sprung to her feet with a wild cry of horror.

"Oh, you are deceiving me!" she cried. "They told me he was to be wedded on the 20th to Evelyn St. Claire. To-day is the 20th. Oh—"

Soothingly Mr. Lennox took the two

cold, white hands that were beating the air on mortal terror, and at length succeeded in making her understand just how matters were, telling her all of Percy's story, which the reader already knows.

He told her, too, how her disappearance had been traced to the door of her beautiful, cruel rival; and how Evelyn St. Claire had acknowledged that she, and she alone, could unravel the mystery of her disappearance, but that she would die before she would speak the words that would enable Percy Granville to find his lost love.

"The vengeance of a just Heaven soon overtook her, however," continued Mr. Lennox, "for, in attempting to escape from my custody, in which she had been placed, she leaped from a vehicle and was picked up from the pavement in an unconscious condition; she was conveyed back to the Remington mansion, and the doctors say the guilty girl's death is but the question of a few short hours," he said gravely.

"Poor Evelyn—dying," sobbed Gay. "Oh, can nothing be done to save her? She was not kind to me, but I forgive and pity Little Gay at last, in deep distress."

"You are little less than an angel to feel so kindly disposed toward one who came so near wrecking your whole life," exclaimed the detective, admiringly; "still, your pity and forgiveness cannot save her; she cannot survive."

To describe the great joy of the banker and his wife when Mr. Lennox led Little Gay into the drawing-room where they were seated, is beyond the power of the pen. They laughed and cried over her by turns, declaring she was as one brought back to them from the grave.

In another part of the grand mansion, where Evelyn St. Claire was dying, they heard the great commotion.

"What is it?—have they found her?" she gasped.

"Yes," replied the joyful attendant, who had recognized the sweet young voice in the corridor below, "they have found Little Gay at last. God bless her!"

Evelyn St. Claire fell back on her pillow with a bitter groan.

All the plotting and planning—her cruel crimes—had all been in vain—Heaven had foiled her—Percy and his lost darling would find each other at last; they would be happy, while she was called to atone for her terrible sin.

While Gay was relating her painful experiences of all she had undergone since the day she was decoyed away, the detective hurried away to the nearest station and sent a telephone message flying over the wires to Percy Granville.

A message that almost took Percy's breath away in its intense joy.

"Little Gay, my bride, found at last!" he cried. "Can it be really true?"

(To be continued.)

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