

The Tangle of Fate

CHAPTER I.

Bonnie Dale rushed angrily out of the old schoolhouse into the grove, her red cloak flying unfastened from her shoulders, her Tam O'Shanter pushed rakishly back from the tangle of gold curls on her white forehead, her rosebud lips pouted in a delicious moue of utter scorn.

Behind the pouting schoolgirl followed—but more edified—Miles Westland, the handsome young schoolmaster. He, too, looked flushed, and very, very grave, and troubled, as if almost repentant of his own temerity in "keeping in" the spoiled darling of the whole school for whispering to her mate in stately hours.

But the offense had been so marked and the culprit so defiant, that really there had seemed no way out of it except to punish Bonnie Dale by the usual method that was to study a column of dictionary definitions and recite it after school.

Bonnie had stayed, she had recited every word correctly, but in the pout of the rosebud lips, and the defiant pose of the little curly head, Miles Westland read resentment deep and portentous.

"I am very, very sorry I had to punish you, Bonnie, but you know I must have strict discipline in school, or it would soon become too disorderly for study. Do say you are not angry with me, little girl."

Not a word came in reply. Bonnie winked two angry tears off her long, curling lashes, and went on strapping her books so hurriedly that some of them slipped through her trembling hands. Miles Westland went courteously to her assistance, and when his hand touched hers she felt that it was burning hot.

"Permit me," he said, courteously, and as he drew the strap, he added, with pardonable curiosity: "It must have been something very important that you were whispering about, or you would not have transgressed the rules of the study hour."

Bonnie stiffened herself with quite the air of a grande dame—she could be that when she chose, this little country beauty.

"Perhaps you want to know what it was," she said. "Very well, I was talking to Ella Deane about trying our fortunes at the Hallow Eve party to-night, so there?"

She caught the books from his hand, and, without even thanking him, rushed out of the creaking door, a second edition of Little Red Riding Hood in her scarlet cap and cloak.

The old red schoolhouse was built on a hill in a picturesque grove of magnificent forest. It was a large, rambling, and the richly colored leaves were swirling down through the air, driven by a bracing October gale.

"Bonnie! Bonnie!" called fresh young voices, and, looking round, she saw several of her schoolmates under a chestnut tree.

"We waited for you to talk about the Hallow Eve party to-night," said Ella Deane.

Bonnie threw herself and her books down among the chestnut burrs, and the girls crowded around, throwing handfuls of scarlet leaves into her lap.

"We got these to roast to-night," they said.

The young schoolmaster saw and heard.

He longed to join their merry party, but they gave him no invitation. Had he not punished their darling and so incurred the anger of her whole clique? They turned their backs upon one accord as he passed, and did not hesitate to let him hear such remarks as "Contented creature," "Spitfire old thing," "Kept you in to make love to you, did he, Bon?" etc., until his ears tingled with shame.

"Strange how they all take her part, and she so pretty that it would only be natural for other girls to be jealous of her charms. But I suppose it is her good-nature and her made-up ways. She is the ring-leader in all their mischief," mused the young man, as he turned away with a sigh from the very bottom of his heart.

He was but twenty-one, poor boy, and had fallen a ready victim to the vicious diablerie of the darling of the school.

It was true as he said, that Bonnie Dale was a madcap of the wildest order, but she was also wonderfully lovely, and that beauty was the pride of the country. Everybody loved Bonnie Dale's younger daughter, who had got the beauty prize at the country fair's baby-show before she was a year old, and had gone on getting fairer and fairer from then till now when she was between fifteen and sixteen years old. Her complexion was bright and perfect, with the faintest hands and feet, a figure of complex, piquant features, great, velvety dark eyes, and a perfect shower of golden curls. Bonnie Dale was a hour, and her beauty was fated to do cruel work in its day. Little she knew that now, careless madcap that she was, hating her books, and always dreaming those vague, sweet dreams of the future that come to young girls so soon—those dreams of love and lovers, so thrillingly sweet and true.

And as to Miles Westland's silent love, Bonnie did not give it a thought. She was so absorbed in visions that she did not heed realities. The love of her young schoolmaster would have seemed a prosaic thing indeed compared with her dreams of the fairy prince coming to woo and win her some golden day and bear her away to his castle by the sea, where, decked in silks and diamonds, she would reign a beautiful queen.

The Hallow Eve party was to be at Ella Deane's that night, and the boys and girls gathered early under the roof of the hospitable farmhouse. I say boys and girls advisedly, for in this primitive section of West Virginia girls of fourteen up to seventeen, and youths from fifteen to twenty-one constitute society. Early marriages are the rule; girls of twenty are regarded as old maids, and scarcely invited out at all, while married people, no matter how young, are relegated to the status of "old folks," and must find domestic bliss all in all, for no show have they in the merry-making of Nicholas County society. Alas, for the married belles of the giddy world, they would stand no chance here!

So on this bracing Hallow Eve, Farmer Deane's big square parlor was entirely given over to the very young people. Miles Westland was about the oldest and most sedate person present, and one of the fourteen-year-old girls might have been heard expressing her opinion that "that old bachelor ought to stay in the sitting-room with the old folks."

And yet the schoolmaster was only one-and-twenty, and handsomer by far than any of the other country boys. It was his dignity and a certain gravity of thought that played about his lips that made him seem old to the jocular girl. He was young enough, anyhow, for his heart to be beating wildly in the presence of a certain saucy beauty who, in a soft white gown with late October roses on her breast, looked distinctly lovely in spite of her proud avoidance of her silent lover.

With such youthful guests it was no wonder that the Hallow Eve party was one of wild hilarity. They danced, they joked, they flirted in their guileless youthfulness. Little hands were pressed warmly in the turns of the dance, dark eyes and blue eyes looked love into each other; young hearts palpitated wildly. Farmer Deane and his wife looked on with smiling approval at the happy scene.

But dancing was not indulged in long, for there were to be other amusements that evening, such as roasting chestnuts, and eating an apple before a mirror, with many other charms by which to fathom the future, so as soon as refreshments were served the musicians were excused, and the young folks began their Hallow Eve spells.

"May I burn chestnuts with you, Miss Bonnie?" asked a half-laughing, half-pleading voice, and with a shrug of her dimpled shoulders Bonnie looked up into the dark eyes of her teacher.

The girl's crimson lips parted to utter a scornful refusal, but obeying a coquetish impulse to show the girls her power over him, she assented, saying, carelessly: "Yes, if you choose, but I'm certain that my chestnut will pop up the chimney as soon as it is placed beside yours!"

"We shall see," Miles Westland answered, almost bitterly, and every one looked on laughingly, as the young schoolmaster and his willful pupil arranged two plump brown chestnuts on the bed of hot coals.

There was a moment of breathless suspense.

At first the two nuts burned quietly together, then they sizzled up suddenly and just as that smile of ineffable content dawned on Miles Westland's somber eyes—presto, pop went Bonnie's big chestnut up into the chimney, than back again into the heart of the great brick, and she looked on with a surprised countenance into a black cinder.

Bonnie turned her mischievous eyes upon her chagrined partner.

"I told you so!" she twittered, demurely.

A shout of laughter arose at the expense of the disappointed lover, whose handsome face turned crimson under their merry raillery. Apparently he was very sensitive to ridicule, for he did not laugh in return, only muttered some angry words under his breath, and after a moment's silence, took his hat, and with a cool good-night to the surprised company, withdrew from the house.

CHAPTER II.

"Nobody cares!" laughed the pert miss of fourteen, but Bonnie Dale looked startled for a moment, then she tossed her head, and said carelessly: "Let a candle, Ella, and we'll take turns going up stairs alone to look in the mirror for our lovers!"

She came back, pouting.

"I did not see anything in the glass but the old clock on the other side of the wall. I suppose I'm going to be an old maid," she said.

"Not if I can help it!" declared severely the miss of fourteen, and turned the laugh on Bonnie.

"I wouldn't marry either of you!" retorted Bonnie, audaciously, and turned the laugh on them.

Miles Westland did not come back that evening, but Bonnie scarcely seemed to remember his existence. She was the life of the merry party, joining in all their games, and trying her fortune a dozen different ways.

But there was one thing that vexed her. All her efforts to read the future were futile. Not once did any of those magical spells show her the face of the fairy prince who was coming to woo and win her in the near sweet future. Several of the other girls related startling experiences, but Bonnie had none. She was mortified almost to the point of tears.

"I do not believe in Hallow Eve, anyhow, and I'm going home to bed," she said at last, petulantly.

"Oh, Bonnie, please don't go. It will be midnight in just half an hour, and then we are all going in a body out to the spring to dip our left sleeves in the water," cried pretty Mollie Miller.

"And get your death of cold," laughed Bonnie.

"No, indeed, for then we will all run home and go to bed, and hang the first sleeve before the fire, and presently some one—whichever you are to marry—will come and turn the sleeve on the other side to dry."

"Oh, Bonnie, please don't go. It will be midnight in just half an hour, and then we are all going in a body out to the spring to dip our left sleeves in the water," cried pretty Mollie Miller.

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Little exclamations of mingled awe and delight arose on all sides, but Bonnie turned her back contemptuously on the wet-sleeve spell.

"I don't believe in any of your charms, so there, and I'm sleepy and I can't stay a minute longer—so good-night, all," and taking the arm of her Jewish servant, Gus Hamilton, Bonnie set out for her home, which was only a half-mile away, as her father's farm adjoined that of Mr. Deane. Soon she was at her own door, and after bidding the young man good-night, she lingered on the porch, gazing thoughtfully on the beautiful mountain scenery dimly seen under the haze of the moonlighted autumn night.

Bonnie was sorely provoked at the signal failure of all her magic spells, and a temptation that had been in her mind all day was growing stronger in the face of all her disappointments.

Bonnie's own dear aunt, when a young girl, had seen the face of her future husband in the dark pool that ran below the old haunted mill just one mile away from the farm. Bonnie had heard the story of that wonderful Hallow Eve told so often by her aunt that she believed in it implicitly.

"And that day a week I first met him, and in less than a year we were married," always wound up the good lady.

Bonnie had not the least desire to get married, but she had all a young girl's burning curiosity over her future husband.

"Why not go to the old mill, and look into the pool myself? No one need ever know, and I'm not afraid, not the least bit; it is so bright and clear, and—then—perhaps, I should have something to tell the girls to-morrow," mused the little beauty.

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She stood hesitating, with one hand on the door-knob. She knew it was unfastened, and that she could enter at any time she chose. Every one was asleep in the old house long ago, and she would not be missed if she stayed out a while longer.

"I'll do it," vowed Bonnie, with her heart in her throat, for she was afraid, although she had tried to persuade herself she was not.

Pulling the red cloak more closely about her shoulders, for the night was very chilly, she ran swiftly across the fields, taking a short cut to the ruined mill that the superstitious country people declared was haunted by the spirit of an Indian who had been murdered on its site in early pioneer times.

The mill stood on the bank of a picturesque ravine, through whose rocky depths flowed the wild Gauley River. Just above the mill, Bonnie stepped over some immense rocks into a series of falls that rested momentarily in a deep pool below the mill, then rushed on again in a tumultuous flow beneath overhanging cliff and boulders.

The moon was at its full, and the river shone like silver as Bonnie stepped into the old mill, trembling with awe and panting with weariness, her beautiful eyes gleaming with excitement. Now she would know her fate!

She doubted not that when she gazed down from the low window of the mill into the calm, dark water, that the most beautiful face in the world would look up at her from its dark depths. She expected that her husband was to be very, very handsome and a king among men. She hoped he would have blue eyes. She thought they were prettier than dark ones.

The sparkling black eye
May in triumph leap
Its darts without caring who feels 'em;
But the soft eye of blue,
Though it scatters wounds, too,
Is much better pleased when it heals 'em.

That was one of Bonnie's favorite songs, and she looked for dark blue eyes and chestnut curls in her hero. That was her fancy. Every young girl has an ideal lover in her guileless mind.

Trembling with eagerness and excitement, Bonnie moved forward to the low window that looked out on the mysterious pool, and leaning her white arms on the sill, bent over and gazed down into the depths.

(To be continued.)

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Residence of Bell Telephone Treasurer at Cote des Neiges Burned.
Montreal, Jan. 25.—Three daughters of Mr. A. G. Slack, treasurer of the Bell Telephone Company, lost their lives in a fire which broke out in their home, Cote des Neiges road, early this morning. Four other daughters of Mr. Slack jumped from the second story windows and were saved.

Shortly after midnight Mrs. Slack was awakened by smoke, which was filling up the house, and she aroused her husband, who ran out on the street looking for a fire alarm box, but could not find one. He was followed by his wife, after calling to the children to make their escape. Not finding the call box, Mr. and Mrs. Slack returned, only to find the house bursting with flames. Four children jumped and escaped, but three daughters, aged nine, twelve and sixteen, lost their lives. Two of the girls who escaped were burned and injured by their jump.

Elizabeth, the eldest daughter, jumped with the youngest child, six years old, in his arms, and suffered injuries to her back. Two other girls also escaped in this way. Beatrice, the third daughter, then discovered that her two younger sisters had not come out of the house, and rushed back in. She was evidently overpowered by the smoke, for her dead body was later found lying in one of the front rooms, while the charred bodies of the two missing girls were found lying beside the half-burned mattress of their bed, which had fallen with the floor to that below.

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Robins' Winter Nest.
It is a rare occurrence for robins to be found sitting at the end of December; yet this can now be seen at Vine Kenels, Overton, Hampshire. The robins have chosen for their nesting place a disused railway carriage at the Kenels, where the men usually clean their clothes, a process which seems to interest the robins not a little. One of the windows of the carriage is broken, and through this the birds obtain ingress and egress. Their nest, in which are three eggs, is in a crevice in roof of the carriage.—From the London Standard.

Despondent over the loss of personal liberty, James B. Weston, a convicted horse thief and jail-breaker, committed suicide in New Westminster Penitentiary. He was employed as a shoemaker and secreted a knife and cut his throat.

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