

THE NECKLACE OF TEARS

By LOUISE GERARD.

INSTALLMENT I.

CHAPTER I.

The Triple Alliance.

When John Wilson was a little boy his mother used to tell him fairy tales. She was a young widow who had to work hard for a living and she had not much time for entertaining her small son.

The story John loved best was about a princess. Being a fairy princess, of course, she had golden hair, blue eyes, skin like alabaster, and hands no bigger than rose-leaves. "When I'm a man I shall really marry a princess," he said one day at the conclusion of this favorite story.

His mother laughed softly, for princesses and her boy were far apart. "Never mind, John, if you are poor, I love you," she would whisper.

And the little boy was quite happy again.

When John was five the princess was four, and when he was six she was five. When John was seven the princess was six. Then he left school and went into an iron foundry. The image of the princess grew fainter, but sometimes when he was indulging in strong language she would come and look at him with soft, reproachful eyes, and put her tiny hands to her ears, and the rough words would stop, and try to mold himself on lines his ideal would approve.

When John was ten the princess was nine, and the faint shadow of her came between him and the temptations that beset a healthy young man who has just started to make money.

Then, although Wilson's years increased, the age of the princess remained stationary. But she was a dream maiden now, a high-born, honorable, dainty little thing, possessed of every womanly charm and virtue—an ideal—very in a hot, hard hunt for wealth the man almost forgot about her.

Yet sometimes, when he rested for a moment from the heated scramble, she would come and sit beside him. And he would smile at her sadly.

A lamp was burning on a table in a third-rate New York boarding house. It showed a tawdry room, smelling of cigarette smoke and patchouli. On a dishevelled bed a woman lay—a common looking creature.

By the bed two men stood. They were both tall, slim, handsome and elegant, unmistakably well-bred. The man on the left, with the end of Cissy, the former said presently, "And the end of the Triple Alliance, too, his father remarked.

"Turning on the bed, with a casual air Eugene de Gilbert lit a cigarette.

"I'm not so sure of that," he said in response to his father's remark.

"Not so sure?" the Count de Gilbert repeated.

"Why, what's to prevent us from using Desirée?"

"The very thing, Eugene!" the Count cried excitedly. "The very thing. You must go and fetch her at once."

Eugene flicked the ash from his cigarette.

"Not me," he replied. "If I set a foot in France I shall have to fight for my country—a damned uncomfortable job. You, mon pere, you must fetch Desirée."

He paused and smiled wickedly.

"Your business is to go to France and fetch Desirée. There's no time to waste. The funds are low. Now I'm off to the shipping office to book your passage, and then to see about getting Cissy under the daisies as creepily as possible."

Whistling gayly, Eugene de Gilbert went from the room, leaving his father staring at the woman who had been dead barely half an hour.

Several weeks later a little party of three had just come back from a ball at a fashionable hotel to the second-rate lodging house where they were staying. One of the three went straight up to the shabby back sitting-room and sat there awaiting the arrival of the other two. Two men entered.

"Hello, here's Desirée all alone in the dark," the younger remarked.

The older man switched on the light.

The face showed a young girl, slender and fragile, with a thin, transparent, almost misty blue eyes and a wealth of golden hair coiled like a crown on the top of her small head.

Crossing to her side, Eugene drew out a bracelet, a handsome piece of jewelry—a band of rubies and diamonds, worth at least £500.

"Ma chérie, would you like to try this pretty bracelet?" he asked.

"Put it away, Eugene, at once," the old Count said, a tremor in his voice.

"Oh, Desirée doesn't understand," Eugene said, laughing.

Nevertheless he put the bracelet into his pocket. Then he crossed to the girl's side and leaned over her, his handsome face expressing cruelty.

"Give me a kiss, Desirée," he said.

She moved her head away quickly.

"I don't like being kissed," she said.

"But I like kissing you," he replied.

"And I know another who would like to—Monsieur Bassino, our new millionaire friend from Brazil. Why did you run away from him just now? Why didn't you wait and say good-night when he so kindly gave you a ride in his motor? Millionaires don't grow on every tree."

A few days later the Count de Gilbert heard that his friend, the millionaire, the visitor, who was a man of about 40, was far from prepossessing, and to add to the disadvantages nature had bestowed on him, years of dissipation had left their mark. Once the meal was over Desirée got up and seated herself as far away from him as possible. But she did not escape for long. Within a few minutes he was at her side again, breathing heavily, talking in a thick, guttural voice, with a rasping American accent.

"You could be my queen if you liked to be a bit pleasant to me," he said with heavy emphasis.

His touch sent a shudder through her. Quickly she drew her hand away. Without a word she rose and made toward the door, almost falling over a chair in her haste to escape.

Manuel Bassino watched her go, chagrin and desire on his coarse face. "I'm just crazy for that girl," he said to the Count, "so crazy that I'd marry her in spite of everything. Though I know you'd let me have her without a cent, if the check was big enough."

Eugene laughed, but his father bristled fiercely.

"My niece is not for sale," he said haughtily.

CHAPTER II.

John Wilson Again.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Love's Sunlight.

Standing there in the night, after memories flooded his brain—colorful, alluring, giving him an imaginative tangle of garden with high brick walls cracked and plastered; cool, fragrant as his flowers with the sunlight upon her, a mirage in the dark, nebulous to the night with the light of the moon on her throat and arms; again in lyrical mood riding over fields and through flame-tinted forests, and there upon his hearth with freighted on her face and copper hair confessing a love that he dare not listen to, still standing there, a rabble of shrieking men. He could hear her voice: "Today it has become our war."

He visualized it triumphant above the hideous disorder, the broken things of Flanders dancing, laughing that men might forget that insistent, sad voice of the night which they would march at dawn into the vast darkness of eternity—men who would carry a memory of this girl, her surpassing loveliness of body and spirit, with them through the endless night.

He moved there in the shadows of a triumphant, a strange voice had slipped into his musing, his self-absorption, an old, old voice filled with wisdom it seemed forming it out of the night above his head. He glanced up into the night incredulous, telling himself he had heard nothing save the creaking of a dilapidated old wooden boot; yet, marvelling that he seemed to understand that creaking, that it was saying an ineffable thing. He strove to translate the idea conveyed to him, tried to put it into understandable language, but could not. It had to do with the fidelity a child's love, the potency of all love. Deeply he could feel an inexplicable verity, fundamental, pervasive, yet obscure.

For a few minutes the two men talked together; then Eugene got up and went from the room.

Although Desirée did not raise her eyes, she heard him go, and she knitted more industriously than ever, as if to bring something between herself and Bassino, but presently he drew his chair close to her side.

"Come," he said affectionately, his sensual face close to her innocent one, his hands fanning her thin cheeks, "all girls like pretty things. What would you like? I'm a millionaire. And I guess not many have come into your life, but you're such a little beauty, Desirée."

The free use of her name brought a touch of hauteur to the girl's sensitive face. Before she had time to say anything he had taken one of her hands. She tried to draw it away, but he held it in a vise-like grip.

"Your uncle's fixed up that you're to marry me," he went on.

"No, no!" she gasped, trying to get away.

He slipped an arm around her, drawing her close to his side. "Girls who say 'No' must be kissed into saying 'Yes,'" he said, his voice hoarse with passion.

She struggled frantically, giving little gasping screams. But she was helpless against his strength. He drew her closer, crushing his lips on her cheek, she felt his hands.

The next night Desirée was sitting on the bed in a stuffy little room on the top floor of the lodging house.

"Uncle, I don't want to marry Mr. Bassino. I don't really," a helpless little voice said.

"Nonsense," her uncle answered.

"There's 'The Necklace of Tears.' That's mine when I'm 21. Can't I sell that instead of having to marry Mr. Bassino?" she asked in a desperate voice.

"If you are to marry Mr. Bassino, that's enough," her uncle went on in a sharp tone. "So stop crying, and don't let me have any more of this foolishness."

Angrily he turned from her and left the room, switching off the electric light behind him.

For a moment or two Desirée did not move, transfixed by the fate that had overtaken her.

Then she dropped on her knees by the bedside.

"O God, in this great, dark world there is no one who will save me," she moaned.

The prayer of a frantic, helpless child left to the mercy of a couple of scoundrels!

In a large house on the outskirts of an English manufacturing town a Christmas party was in full swing. There were fully a hundred people present. Mrs. Green's parties were always popular; she had a liking for pretty young girls, she loved making, and she generally managed to get plenty of eligible men.

The man with her was of medium height, with a wither of shoulder and a head of hair short and heavy, his plain, strong face clean-shaven and inclined to redness.

Although John Wilson had striven hard to attain money, and now possessed an income of over £10,000 a year, he did not love wealth for its own sake, or use it merely to make a display.

However, he was not thinking of these matters at that moment. In a low, smiling, tolerant, quizzical tone he was listening to his hostess.

"Well, Mr. Wilson," she was saying, "it's Christmas again, and you're still not married."

Wilson had no immediate reply.

At that moment vaguely before him was the little phantom friend of his childhood, the fairy princess, fragile, lovely, and high-born, quite different from the merry, laughing, pretty girls around him.

Perhaps I'm not a family man," he suggested.

"Every man says that until he has a family," Mrs. Green paused, regarding her guest thoughtfully.

"I'll tell you what's the matter with you, Mr. Wilson. You stick too close to business."

He laughed good humoredly.

"If I hadn't stuck to business where had I been? I've been asked to go to the south of France for three months—to Nice. Why don't you go there for a few weeks and let some other people live? It would do you a world of good—get you out of the groove."

"I believe you've got the welfare of the world at heart, although you make a poor job of it," he remarked, "and I'll think about your suggestion."

Then the hand struck out, and, exclaiming, "Give me a kiss," he bent off in search of his next partner.

TOMORROW—John meets the fairy Princess.

RED ROSE TEA always pleases.—Adv.

TOMORROW'S RADIO

TUESDAY, JUNE 10.

Tuesday's Best Features.

WIP, PHILADELPHIA—"The Holy City."

WGY, SCHENECTADY—"Carmen" excerpts, WGY Opera Company.

WJAX, CLEVELAND—Naval Reserve Band.

KPO, SAN FRANCISCO—Imperial Marimba Band.

(Eastern Standard Time.)

WEAF, NEW YORK—492.

2-5 p.m.—Carola Anderson, violinist; Walter Kelly, tenor; Margaret Foley, mezzo-soprano; soprano, Anna M. Witt.

WJAX, CLEVELAND—Naval Reserve Band.

KPO, SAN FRANCISCO—Imperial Marimba Band.

(Central Standard Time.)

KQW, CHICAGO—536.

8:30 a.m.—Late news and comment.

Half-hourly thereafter.

5:45 p.m.—Children's bedtime story.

6 p.m.—Congress dinner concert.

7 p.m.—Chicago musical college.

7:30 p.m.—Farm bureau speeches.

7:45 p.m.—Continuation of musical program by Chicago Musical College.

WGN, CHICAGO—370.

7-10 p.m.—Musical program, with dance music by the Orpheo Orchestra.

WMAQ, CHICAGO—447.5.

11 a.m.—Republican National convention.

5 p.m.—Chicago Theatre organ.

5:30 p.m.—La Salle Orchestra.

7 p.m.—Literary talk, Harold Hansen.

7:30 p.m.—Talk by C. R. Bearmore.

8 p.m.—French lessons.

8:15 p.m.—Lyon and Healy program.

8:30 p.m.—Children's hour.

9 p.m.—Sport hour, Geo. C. Rogers.

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