

THE TANGLED WEB

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CHAPTER I.

EVELYN GRANGE is one of the show places of Long Island. It occupies a hill crest commanding the great Hempstead plains, made beautiful by its fine gradations of distance and color. To the left lies the wooded rolling country of Wheatley Hills, and but a few motor miles away the blue waters of the Sound indent the island's shore. The house—a vast edifice of pale red brick with white trim—possesses terraces bordered by marble balustrades, descending in steep succession; each a giant step of flowers, divided down the middle by a marble staircase alternating with pebbled pathways. The right wing of the mansion is devoted to the luxurious housing of its guests. The left wing contains the servants' quarters and the necessary array of kitchens. Detached buildings for squash and bowls offer exercise and pleasure for dark and sullen days. In the distance the great bulk of the stables lies shrouded in huge trees, whence a faint yapping from the crowded kennels is almost always audible.

It was Wendham's first visit to the Grange, and, as he drove up the long, leaf littered road in the gathering dusk, he was unprepared for the imposing structure that met his sight. "Really," he said to Mrs. Lawdon, who had arrived on the same train, and sat beside him enveloped in chinchilla and grey velvets, "a title should go with it. Doesn't seem the proper thing for just a plain Mister, does it?"

"Do you think anything is too fine for the American gentleman?" she answered.

Wendham was glad that the growing dusk hid his smile. "Really, I wasn't quite serious about it," he answered, "and I've been away so long, you see, that I've grown continental."

She nodded. "Charlie told me you'd been in Europe—how long—four years, wasn't it?"

"Four years," he echoed thoughtfully, "and what changes!"

"And Charlie married!—you got our cards, didn't you? It seems to me they were sent to Vienna or somewhere like that."

"Yes, I received them—about six months ago."

"Then there's the Boskwith divorce—that must have surprised you—and Nellie Gaynor's a widow now, you know."

She paused abruptly, suddenly recalling the gossip that linked Boyd Wendham's hasty departure with the marriage of the lovely Nellie. "Doesn't look heartbroken," she commented to herself, as she turned to examine his appearance under cover of admiring the passing landscape.

She saw a strong-featured, keen-eyed man of powerful build, whose hair, though prematurely grey, did not age his appearance, chiefly because of the boyish sparkle of his unusually handsome eyes, and the affectionate humor of his flexible mouth. "Decidedly handsome," thought Mrs. Lawdon, with a dab at the gilt fringes of her hair. "I wonder why she didn't take him—they say old Gaynor was a pill." Aloud she said, "Mrs. Gaynor's to be one of this house party. Did you see her abroad? She was over there more than a year after Mr. Gaynor died."

"No, I didn't happen to see her in Europe. My specialties—I'm a physician, you know—kept me in Vienna, but I'm looking forward to renewing an old friendship. I've had a glimpse of her, of course, since I've been back, but only for a moment." He spoke so naturally that Mrs. Lawdon was disappointed. He glanced at his companion, wondering how that astute cotillion butterfly, Charlie Lawdon, had ever been so "let in." The whole surface of her world had been rippled by the plunge of this particular little cloud into its distilled and filtered depths. There was no denying Mrs. Lawdon's gaudy and perfumed plebeianism.

"Do you know Mrs. Evelyn well?" she asked abruptly. "I've only met her once or twice, but they're old friends of yours, aren't they?"

"They are two of the best I have," he answered. "Cass and I were college mates—and Patty, oh well, I remember her with long red silk legs and short brown silk braids," he laughed reminiscently. "She was a funny child, always tired; she was born tired—but, here we are; let me help you."

The carriage drew up before the main entrance, whose white columns seemed vast in the soft electric illumination from the dull glass globes guarding the doorway. The footman rang the bell and returned for Wendham's simple suitcase and Mrs. Lawdon's elaborate traveling expediments. The rest of her collection was in charge of her maid,

due later in the servant's trap. A large hat trunk, however, she had insisted should accompany her; indeed, the valued millinery must not be out of her sight, and with difficulty it had been installed, to the detriment of the speckless knees of the footman, who now deposited it resentfully upon the veranda.

The door swung open, revealing the subdued, rich tones of the interior, where the glow of antique velvets, heavy with tarnished embroideries, met the eye. Grape-wood torsion columns of the Spanish renaissance formed the doorways, while a dreamy-eyed madonna in the brocade and jeweled robes of the sixteenth century smiled from a canvas that filled the wall space by the stairs; two macaws, of ostentatious plumage, swung in gilded rings, adding a final touch of old world eccentricity.

The new arrivals entered and a moment later Mrs. Evelyn, in a floating teagown, was extending languid greetings. Evelyn, however, made up in heartiness for his wife's tepid cordiality. "Nobody minded Patty, anyway; it was just her way," Mrs. Lawdon, not being familiar with her hostess's peculiarities, at once took umbrage. Only the joy of being within the Evelyns' exclusive portals prevented her from immediate rudeness. She contented herself with a mental note to "get even," and noisily devoted herself to Mr. Evelyn and Alice Rawlins, who entered in her cross-country riding trousers, high boots and gray frock coat, as alert and vigorous as a young Amazon.

"Hello, Kate, have some tea, have a highball? Pat, there, will never think to ask you. Better warm up a bit before we go to 'red up' as the country say. Oh, Boyd, it's bully to meet you again. Of course Cass looked out for you—I see it in your eye. But it takes the new woman to look out for herself. What, ho!



"WHAT A PEACH," MISS RAWLINS EXCLAIMED.

James! What's yours, Kate—tea? James, take Mrs. Lawdon's furs, and send them up to the blue suite. It is the blue suite, isn't it, Patty? And send Mrs. Lawdon's maid and things there when they come. And Nellie—see who's here—Boyd Wendham! Arise and make salaamings."

A tall, slender, white-clad woman rose from behind the elaborate tea-table where she had been presiding, and advanced cordially. "Oh, Boyd!" she exclaimed, "it is good to see you." Her lovely, high-bred face lost its cameo whiteness in a soft flush of pleasure, while her dark, heavily-ringed eyes lighted as from within. Wendham took her extended hand, and the old emotion that the years had not lessened, flooded his heart once more. "Mrs. Gaynor," he stammered, "this is indeed a pleasure." She laughed reprovingly. "Mrs. Gaynor, is it, Dr. Wendham? Dear me, have we had a quarrel? I was unaware of it."

Before he could answer, Mrs. Evelyn had recalled her duties as hostess.

"Oh, you haven't met Mrs. Gaynor have you, Mrs. Lawdon? Dear me, how reminds me," she drawled. "Meet each other, do."

Mrs. Lawdon's heart warmed. She forgave her hostess's apparent aloofness for the sake of this most desirable introduction. But before she was able to do more than bow cordially and take breath for an appropriate speech, the prize was removed by the doctor's prompt seizure of the lady's attention.

Once more Mrs. Lawdon devoted herself to Alice and Cass Evelyn.

Wendham and Mrs. Gaynor had become absorbed in talk. Every moment her charm took stronger hold upon him, but he could not but note her nervous, strained condition, the tell-tale pallor, and the bruised, sleepless setting of her over-brilliant eyes. "I wish I'd never studied medicine, when I see you, Nellie; it makes me worry about you. What in the world have you been doing?"

"Oh, nothing much—I suppose you know I've gone in for racing a good deal." He looked at her in surprise. "Oh," she added hastily, "I had to make my living, and I was left part owner of a racing stable when my husband died. I've been very successful, didn't you know? I'm very busy and my correspondence alone is enough to wear me out."

"That reminds me," he said abruptly, "I was entrusted with something for you. Let me give it to you now, before I forget it." From an inner pocket he drew forth a thin, foreign-stamped letter. "It came while I was with the Mortimers, and Calvin forgot to remail it. I was entrusted with it as a sort of

object lesson to forgetful husbands."

CHAPTER II.

Mrs. Gaynor received the letter and looked at the address. She paled; her eyes sought his face in a swift glance.

"No, not for me, after all," she said, laughing unreasonably. "And not a spot left on which to re-address! I must enclose it, I suppose. Forget it for a week, at least, because I haven't an envelope to fit. You know how it is. I'm sure I don't know why I allow my friends to make such a nuisance or a convenience of me." She thrust the letter securely into her belt.

"Good nature is hard on its possessor," he answered. "Your friend, by the way, has a name very familiar to me, but I can't place it."

Mrs. Gaynor's eyes narrowed. "You don't recall where you met her? Abroad, perhaps; I knew her there—a sort of nomad. She's traveling out West now. You see," she added nervously, "any important mail, remittances and things, she had ordered sent to me, and I forward as she advises—but it's rather a burden."

"Your description doesn't help me," he mused. "And, after all, I'm rather rude to inquire into your friend's affairs."

"Not at all—nothing is rude between old friends." She smiled upon him her old brilliant smile of conquest. He was suddenly elevated to the dizzy height of close companionship. Her manner included him in her chosen circle. The name of her strange correspondent vanished from his mind, and he was conscious only of the compelling magnetism of her presence.

The tete-a-tete was of short duration, however; Evelyn, whiskey and soda in hand, joined them.

"Well, Wendham, so you're just from the Mortimers. Are they over their excitement yet? Pat tells me they're almost given up entertaining since the robbery. That's foolish; nobody blames them, and if Mrs. Treadwell will tour the provinces attired as the human grab-bag, she can't expect her hosts to supply her with a body-guard. I told her that when she was here."

"She didn't seem much put out, I noticed," said Alice from across the room. "She had on a new pearl rope that was first cousin to a cable."

"Near-pearls," said Mrs. Evelyn, scornfully.

Mrs. Lawdon entered the conversation at high pitch. "That's what I think, Mrs. Evelyn. If a person has good things, for heaven's sake wear them!" She fingered her sapphire lorgnette chain till it flashed in the lamplight. "My husband is always after me to have replicas, but I do think that sort of thing is the very height of bad taste, don't you?"

"You ought to see Kate out for bear," said Alice to Mrs. Gaynor. "If Sally Treadwell is the human grab-bag, Kate is the only original Christmas tree."

"Alice!" said the hostess reprovingly. But far from being offended, Mrs. Lawdon was charmed. "Dear me, I haven't so very much. Charlie has been awfully nice, and he knows I love pretty things, but really—"

"Well, all I ask," said Alice, rising to kick a rug into place, "is that you'll let me have them to play with, with my very own hands. I've never forgotten you as the Queen of Sheba at Mrs. Todd's costume dinner. No one talked of anything else for the week after—That reminds me, Pat, the Todds telephoned over to know who was going to the races to-morrow and what your plans were—said something about letting you have their extra motor if yours was still out of order."

"Oh, thanks," said Mrs. Evelyn. "Of course Nellie and Dr. Wendham will go and Mrs. Lawdon and Charlie, if he comes. Madge will be over from the Lesbys with us—"

"Which means that I stay at home," interrupted Alice. "I would be smothered by the same gasoline. How I hate that little moth-eaten, fan-cared, washed-out, forked-tongued gossip."

"Very well," Mrs. Evelyn agreed imperturbably. "With me, that makes six. Our little motor will take four and the rest can go in the Todds'. Alfred," she called to a passing servant, "ring up Mrs. Todd and tell her Mrs. Evelyn will be very glad to have the use of her motor to-morrow. That's all settled," she sighed, as though the most weighty issue of international affairs had at last been decided.

"What kind of a card have they got?" asked Alice, somewhat chagrined by the prompt acceptance of her resignation, and addressing herself to Mrs. Gaynor.

"Very fair." Nellie moved from Dr. Wendham's side toward the central group. "Ventador, for the first race, Miller up, Bay Side and Quarter ought to make a good finish. But if you want a ten-to-one shot play Trident in the fourth. I'm doing awfully well of him; he's been doing great work."

The very simplicity of her manner and voice as she spoke hurt Wendham—the revolt in him of his Puritan ancestry at this manifestation of the emancipation of the modern woman.

"Trident, that's Billy Lough's old skate. He sold him for a song. Whose tip are you playing?" Evelyn asked.

"Sold for a song because Billy doesn't know a horse from a mow-

ing machine, and because Stacy does. He's part owner now, for one thing, and any one knows that Stacy isn't buying skates—except for his ice pond." Alice's voice had a ring of defiance and Evelyn laughed good-humoredly.

"Of course, if Stacy has given Nellie the tip, there's nothing more to be said. Aren't you jealous, Alice, that Nellie knows as much of Stacy's affairs as you do?"

Alice Rawlins buried her nose in her glass and grunted a most unladylike disapproval. "I like a man to know his own business thoroughly, and Stacy does," she replied.

"One for you," said Wendham to his host.

"Who is this Stacy?" inquired Mrs. Lawdon.

"Stacy," answered Evelyn with a grin at Mrs. Rawlins, "is Laughton's right hand horseman and Alice's right hand—er—groom—at her bridle—ouch! Alice, don't whack my fingers. He's a brick, anyhow."

Mrs. Gaynor sat down wearily, passing her hand across her brow with a gesture of distress. "Dear me," she exclaimed, "how tired I am! I didn't believe I could be so tired. I really must take a vacation in bed soon."

"Well," observed Mrs. Evelyn, "it's your own fault a dozen times over. Fancy, Alice, she's so attached to that silly little maid of hers—"

"That silly little maid, as you call her," interrupted Mrs. Gaynor, "had the devotion to stay with me through thick and thin when I couldn't pay her wages, and she was in wretched health besides."

"Which is no excuse for your rubbing her head for her when she has neuralgia, and every time you do it exhausts you. Did you ever hear of anything so foolish? Hire a masseur for her if you want to. You tire yourself, and it's undignified."

Nellie shrugged expressively—and moved toward the staircase. Wendham followed her—"Just a word," he said gently. "Let down the strings of the violin if you would keep its tone."

CHAPTER III.

Mrs. Lawdon put down her book and smiled a flattered welcome as Mrs. Gaynor sank into a wicker veranda chair—for Mrs. Lawdon, though pretty and blessed with her share of the world's goods compared with the shares of numerous others not so fortunate, fully realized that she was far from gracing that inner circle of society to which Nellie Gaynor's multiple charms added lustre. Here was a golden opportunity to secure a valuable acquaintance.

"I am surprised you didn't go to the races, Mrs. Gaynor," she remarked, sure that this opening must lead to further conversation.

The lady smiled. "Yes, Alice-sit-by-the-fire hardly seems my role, does it? To-day should have been Alice-sleep-by-the-fire. The truth is that for once in my life I was too tired." She leaned her rippled golden head against the cushions and half closed her eyes. Deep weariness was stamped on her perfect features.

Mrs. Lawdon took notice, wondering whether sympathy would be rendered, or if good form required her to assure the sufferer of her unaltered lovelessness. She decided upon the latter.

"Tired! One would never believe it. You are positively radiant!" she exclaimed with enthusiasm.

Nellie Gaynor opened her eyes; a smile flickered upon her lips. "You are too kind," she murmured. "And you, don't you care for racing?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" cried Mrs. Lawdon, hastening to resent the imputation that so fashionable a sport was not to her liking. "I love it, but I felt as if I'd caught cold last night—you know that cold drive from the station—so that I feared to sit on the clubhouse lawn, and there's no use being inside. Charlie is placing a few bets for me. I'm playing Roseben."

"Mr. Evelyn will execute my card," Mrs. Gaynor shifted slightly. "You see I've made it quite a business. When my husband died his estate was heavily involved, so I took over the stable after I came back from Europe."

"Yes, indeed!" cried Mrs. Lawdon, delighted with the intimate tone of the conversation. "I heard so much of you before I met you, you know. You're quite a plunger. Charlie told me you took twenty thousand out of the Metropolitan handicap one year, and no one knew until afterwards that you had a heavy interest."

"Oh, not so much as that," Nellie laughed. "No one knew, because my two biggest bets were 'on the side.'" Mrs. Gaynor touched a string of pearls clasped by a scintillating ruby and diamond snap. "Part of that killing went into this. But, dear me, they would hardly interest you. I'm going to ask you to let me see your jewels some day. Your emeralds are simply astonishing, I hear."

The little parvenu flushed with pleasure. "Would you care to, really? Then why not now? Alice wants to see them, too. She's in the squash court. Come up to my sitting room and I'll send for her." She rose fidgeting. Mrs. Gaynor followed languidly. A touch upon the electric bell brought Mrs. Lawdon's maid, who was despatched in search of the energetic Miss Rawlins. "You know," twittered the hostess of a moment as the two ladies settled themselves in Mrs. Lawdon's sitting room, "it's really an awful responsibility, all this stuff, and since the affair of the Mortimers, when Mrs.

Treadwell's pearls simply vanished, I've been nervous."

"It was odd," Mrs. Gaynor agreed. "I'd been spending the week end there, just before it happened. Their butler was drunk half of the time, and there isn't the slightest doubt in my mind that he failed to lock up securely. The only reason nothing else was taken was that the thieves were frightened. The Mortimers have three Pomeranians, you know, and though no one heard them bark, the burglars may have known that they were about the house, and made off with one good dog."



"MY DIAMONDS, MY EMERALDS, MY RUBY!" SHE SHRIEKED.

thing rather than take further chances. They are frightfully yappy little beasts, you know—the dogs, not the thieves," she added smiling. "That's what everyone said," agreed Mrs. Lawdon. "Why, there were a dozen robberies right in that section of Long Island—people in motor cars and yachts—and the night of the Vanderbilt cup race, some one got away with the Dressars' whole jewel case."

A tap on the door announced Alice Rawlins, fresh and rosy from her recent exercise.

"Hello, Kate. Howdy, Mrs. Gaynor. Going to show us the Kohinoor? Dear me, don't look peevish." She threw herself upon the corner of the lounge and swung her feet boyishly; the charm of her youth atoning for boisterous speech and manner. "Trot out the show case," she ordered gleefully.

Mrs. Lawdon smiled with superiority. "You'll be surprised—and, it's all my own invention. I've made a jewel casket that no burglar would ever think of." Taking a key from a trousse hanging in plain sight by the dressing table, she approached a small square hat trunk of solid make and unlocked it, revealing six be-feathered hats of intoxicating designs.

"Gee!" said Alice, rising to her feet, "she's robbed a hen roost and an ostrich farm and a greenhouse!" Mrs. Lawdon lifted out a delicious touque and, taking it by the crown, gave what might have been the lining a pull, revealing a velvet tray set within.

"Well, that is clever, Kate," Alice exclaimed. "Are they all like that, whitened sepulchers, ribbon and feathers without, and within filled with jewels and pearls of great price?"

Mrs. Gaynor applauded. "Certainly that is the best idea I ever heard of. But you oughtn't to let anyone into the secret—why—one of the servants coming by—your maid—I do hope you are careful." As she spoke she took the box extended toward her and gazed enraptured upon its glistening contents.

"What a peach!" Miss Rawlins exclaimed, looking over her shoulders. "Now, doesn't that clasp look like a pair of dollar marks! My! what a pearl rope! That ruby has the Queen of Sheba beaten a mile."

She dangled the jewel from its slender platinum chain, where it turned slowly, flashing in the afternoon sunlight that poured in at the window.

"Hold on; you give me acute appendicitis of the eyeball," said Miss Rawlins, shading her eyes with one hand as she pressed an electric button with the other. "That reminds me, I've had no afternoon tea. Have a highball with me, Kate? How about you, Mrs. Gaynor?"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Lawdon, pushing the irrepressible Alice toward the door. "Give your orders through the crack—you heard what Mrs. Gaynor said, and she's right; the servants shouldn't see these things." She hastily crammed a jewel box into the crown of a two foot Gainsborough as a knock sounded loud upon the door.

Miss Rawlins giggled. "Do you suppose Mrs. Evelyn employs Sherlocks on her house force? Why, they're a lot of lately landed." She opened the door the mere width of a thread. "What, ho, without! A flagon of Scotch and soda, prithee. Say, how about you, Kate?"

"No," said Mrs. Lawdon emphatically, casting a troubled glance at her guest.

Alice banged the door. "You make me tired, Kate. Don't you recall that rhyme of Tennyson's or somebody's—"

"Between the Bark and the day-light—
When the night is beginning to lower,
Comes a pause in the day's occupation
That is known as the cocktail hour."

Mrs. Gaynor laughed as she read. "What a child!" she said. "What a naughty child! Well, I must be going. It's late and I want to rest before I dress for dinner. Thank you so much, Mrs. Lawdon, I did enjoy seeing your pretty things—and—your jewel case is a dream."

She waved a light farewell as she departed in the direction of her own suite in the main building. At the end of the hall a servant staircase gave unobtrusive entrance to the "Annex." As she passed it the door swung open, admitting her maid. Mrs. Gaynor started. "Adele! I was just going to ring for you."

"I told the second maid I'd help her with these rooms," she replied. "Of course you did," approved Mrs. Gaynor. "That's quite right always make yourself useful in the houses where we visit—but you look tired."

"Yes, Madame," the girl answered, and followed her mistress meekly.

(To be continued.)

The Two Alternatives.

"We get some sad cases," said the attendant at the lunatic asylum to the visitor, and opened the door to the first cell.

Inside was a man sitting on a stool and gazing vacantly at the wall.

"Sad story," said the attendant; "he was in love with a girl, but she married another man and he lost his reason from grief."

They stole out softly, closing the door behind them, and proceeded the next inmate. This cell was thickly padded, and the man within was stark, staring mad.

"Who is this?" inquired the visitor.

"This," repeated the attendant—"this is the other man."

HAD HELP.



"I don't see how he stopped both smoking and drinking. I couldn't do it."

"You haven't met his wife, have you?"

Awake All the Time.

"That new preacher you have is a pretty wideawake young man, isn't he?"

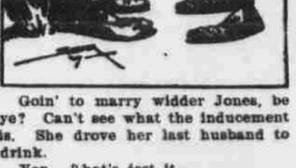
"Yep. Keeps right on preachin' when everybody else is asleep."

Poor Fellow.

Reporter—you were not always wealthy, I believe?

Billionaire—No, I have seen the time when I couldn't afford to buy a five thousand dollar automobile.

LED TO BE DRIVEN.



Goin' to marry widdler Jones, be ye? Can't see what the inducement is. She drove her last husband to drink.

Yep. That's jest it.

Barnyard Talk.

First Rooster—"Bless me if the old hen isn't eating ticks."

Second Rooster—"Yes, I believe she is to lay a carpet."

"Ought not we do something for the preservation of our forests?"

"Oh, what's the use?" answered Senator Borghum, impatiently. "Trees cast vote."

One on the Cat.

An Iowa editor recently printed in his paper that if the rain didn't stop before long, everything in the ground would be peeping out. An old subscriber, reading the prognostication, went out in the back yard and dumped another load of rock on the grave of the family cat.

An Old Grandfather.

Little Girl—I've got a father and a muvver and a grandfather.

Kindly Stranger—And how old is your grandfather?

Little Girl—I don't know, but we've had him a long time.