

THE TANGLED WEB

By Ethel Watts Mumford Grant
Author of "Dopes," "Whitewash," Etc.
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CHAPTER IV.

Once within the room Mrs. Gaynor took the young woman by the shoulders with gentle firmness and turned her toward the light. "Look at me. Your eyes are bloodshot; your head is paining you again."
She was answered by a look of dumb agony.
"Never mind," she continued with insistent gentleness. "You are not to help me dress; you are to do just as I say," she added in a sharper tone, as the girl made a feeble gesture of protest. "Come, I can help your head, you know—there, now." She forced the girl quietly into an easy chair, with a gentle laugh at her resistance. "There, now, rest, rest—poor little thing," she said softly as she bent over the relaxed form. She made a gentle movement as if to brush back the girl's heavy hair.
There was one observer of this odd little scene. Alice Rawlins, on her way down the corridor had paused at Mrs. Gaynor's door, which had sprung from its catch. She had seen the kindly movement and heard the gentle orders dictated by a rarely sympathetic spirit.
"Geet!" thought Alice, as she moved on toward her room, "she's a brick, that woman! It isn't one in a million that would be that considerate. I'd just like to do her a good turn for that." With which deeply philosophic comment she dismissed the subject.
As the dinner hour approached, Mrs. Gaynor was the first to reach the drawing room, her pallor and weariness accentuated by the languid line and dark hue of her velvet gown. Presently her hostess appeared. Her dress limp-lined and colorless as her character, left one wondering whether her dressmaker possessed a sense of humor. Miss Rawlins, true to her affected boyishness, appeared in her traditional evening costume of black velvet Norfolk, a fine linen shirt and ruffled stock. Her hair, still in the inevitable "club," was held by a diamond bar and a black bow.
"Woof," she said as she entered, "wait till you pipe the Lawdon. She's sporting a frock that gave me a sunstroke. She has twenty-seven yards of gold gauze wiping up the parquette, the diamond belt, and one gilt suspender."
"Rowdy!" reprimanded Mrs. Evelyn.
"Who—me or Mrs. Lawdon?"
Mrs. Gaynor laughed. "One suspender don't make a rowdy. Good evening, Boyd." She bowed over Alice's head to Wendham, who stood in the doorway.
His eyes sought hers with admiration. "Did you take my prescription and a good rest, this afternoon?" he inquired.
"Yes," she nodded briefly.
"You worldly dervishes are always compelling me to send you to sanitariums."
"Yes," interrupted Mrs. Evelyn, "I do think this racing fever of hers—"
"Oh, nonsense!" Mrs. Gaynor spoke with some irritation. "I have to help make my living, and as long as I'm successful—"
"But you needn't be so extravagant," objected the hostess.
Mrs. Gaynor shrugged. "Needn't be! I can't help myself. And after all, I don't play bridge."
"Because the stakes are too blamed low," said Alice. "As for me, give me penny ante."
The doctor's face was serious. "My dear Alice, you will never lose your nerve. But Mrs. Gaynor is made of different stuff, and I'm trying to convince her that she must ease the strain. She knows best where the tension lies."
"What is the amount of your fee?" inquired Mrs. Gaynor coldly.
Wendham blushed scarlet. "Forgive me for forcing my professional opinion upon you—it was only my real interest. I have seen so many lovely women transformed into nervous wrecks."
Wendham spoke warmly, ignoring the delicate position in which all the speakers were placed by this intrusion into the personal realm of one of the circle. The mad extravagance and love of excitement which characterized Nellie Gaynor concerned him deeply. They stood like unseen but insurmountable barriers between her magnetic personality and his growing love for her.
"Indeed," said Mrs. Gaynor, "I knew broken legs could be re-set, but I didn't know that you posed as a mender of character. Is the operation painful?" Her light tone treated his offer as a joke, but this time he was not to be put off.
"Not at all painful," he answered, "for the most wonderful anaesthetic in the world is the first thing neces-

"Rot!" exclaimed Alice.
"Really?" said Mrs. Evelyn.
Nellie Gaynor fixed upon Wendham a sudden glance of terror. She half raised her hand as if to push back a crowding presence. She was white to the lips. "Never, oh, never, never!" she gasped. "What do you mean?" she added. Her hand dropped to her side.
With infinite pity at his heart the physician watched the slim fingers twitch and tremble. "You wouldn't be frightened if you understood it," he said quietly. "You see that's the specialty I took up abroad."
"Why," said Mrs. Evelyn, with a face as blank as her pearls, "I thought it was some sort of a vaudeville thing, didn't you, Alice? Where was it we saw the 'Mysterious Marions,' who read your watch numbers and things?"
The conversation ceased abruptly as Mrs. Lawdon entered the room. Even the impassive Mrs. Evelyn could not restrain a smile, recalling the vivid, if somewhat unconventional description to which Miss Rawlins had treated them.
"How lovely!" she said vaguely. "Blondes seem always to wear either black or gold."
"It's a 'Paquin,'" beamed Mrs. Lawdon. "I do love his frocks, don't you?"
Wendham had not left Mrs. Gaynor's side, and his calm, affectionate gaze rested searchingly upon her face. "I'm not joking," he continued in an undertone. "Think it over."
Her momentary fright had passed. She had regained her old composure. "You're very good," she said, "to take so much interest—and—I know you are right. Very soon, perhaps next week, I'll take your advice—some of it," she added. "I'll go away and rest—take a cruise somewhere."
"Please," he pleaded.
"Dinner is served," announced the butler.
Wendham extended his arm. Nellie took it, conscious of the grateful sensation of its implied protection and strength.
"Yes," she admitted wearily. "I am very, very tired." She turned to him squarely as she reached her seat and spoke quickly, almost in a whisper. "Sometimes I feel as if I weren't quite sane—do you understand that? I can't realize that I



"HIS EYES HELD HERS AS IF FASCINATED."
allow myself my life—my way of living—I don't know why I tell you," she added with vexation. She waved her hand lightly as if to dismiss both his attention and the disagreeable truths he had brought before her, turning courteously to the partner on her right.

Dinner over, bridge tables were set out. Mrs. Gaynor did not join in the game, but, seated at the piano, let her fancy wander into soft improvisations. And Wendham, watching and listening with all his science and all his heart, detected ever the jarring note, as a trained engineer knows by the infinitesimal change of sound or vibration that his engine is not running smooth and true. His reverie was broken by Mrs. Lawdon's vibrant voice.
"Oh, yes, I will pay you now—I'd rather."
"Don't bother—send a check," said the hostess in her faint, vague voice.
"No, indeed; I'll fly to my room and fetch my purse. I hid it before I came down." She rose with switch and glitter and parted the heavy curtains. The light tapping of her high heels echoed on the polished floor of the hall.
There was a general rising and buzz of talk, adjustment of accounts, and reminiscent chat of honors, points and leads. Mrs. Gaynor left the piano and joined the others. Wendham approached her, determination written large upon his face. "Will you do me a favor, Nellie?" he asked.
"Of course, delighted. What can I do?" she inquired, cordially.
"Go to bed," he commanded.
She laughed nervously. "Dear me, do you want to be rid of me so soon? I couldn't sleep."
"You can rest."
"Rest," she repeated, "rest—I don't know the word."
"You must learn it, then."
"You are kind to bother so much about me—and—as soon as I can—I am going to try."
In her weariness she had turned to him with the sweet, relying gratitude of expression that raises womanly charm to its highest power. He longed to take her in his arms, to comfort and care for her, to bring

his knowledge and his love to her instant need. "Go rest—doctor's orders—Nellie!" his lips had framed the endearing name, when an excited clatter and a choking, hysterical cry brought the party to their feet with a common movement of anxiety.

CHAPTER V.

Mrs. Lawdon appeared at the door. The well-groomed beautiful woman of a few moments before was almost beyond recognition. Her face had aged ten years, her hair hung in disorder, a huge rent in the golden gauze of her gown showed the gleam of its white satin lining—mute evidence of the hurried regardlessness of her flight. And, as a last detail of the incomprehensible, her convulsive hands grasped a black feather hat of enormous proportions. For an instant her tragic, ridiculous figure was silhouetted against the dark portieres. Then she staggered forward, tripping over her long frock, waving the crumpled Gainsboro, stammering for speech.
"She's gone mad!" gasped Mrs. Evelyn, catching at her husband's arm.
Mrs. Lawdon found her voice. "I've been robbed—robbed—robbed!" Her voice rose in thin soprano gradations. "My diamonds—my emeralds—my ruby! They're gone. I tell you! Gone! Gone! Gone!" She collapsed upon a chair, flinging her body half across the center table, where she beat the polished wood with her clenched hands.
Alice Rawlins was the first to grasp the situation. "The hat box!" she gasped, her eyes upon the damaged millinery in Mrs. Lawdon's grasp. "It's been opened!"
The victim raised her head with a jerk. "You, you, Alice Rawlins! You know where they were—you! She sprang erect. "You and Mrs. Gaynor—you were the only people who did know!"
Alice's astonished face flamed scarlet. "Do you dare!"
Mrs. Gaynor turned white to the lips, her great eyes blazed more brilliant than the lost jewels. "Mrs. Lawdon is not quite herself." Her voice, full of fine, high breeding, fell like ice upon Mrs. Lawdon's fevered utterance.

Realizing that she had lost self-control, Mrs. Lawdon struggled for composure, but the magnitude of her loss again overwhelmed her. "You must search—at once—at once. I want the police—send for the police!"
Mr. Evelyn rang the electric bell. "I will give orders that all the servants be brought to the dining room. We will examine them there. Vrooman," he continued, addressing the butler, "I want everyone of my employees from the garden, house and stables—also the servants of my guests—to assemble at once in the dining room. Permit no one to leave the house or grounds on any pretext!"
The butler bowed, casting a glance of awed inquiry at the excited group before him. As he paused outside the door his trained ear plainly caught Mrs. Lawdon's protests.
"I won't have it, I won't! I want the police, I want detectives! Charlie!" she screamed, "where's Charlie? He'll make you send for the police!"
The slamming of a distant door and the approach of hurried feet announced the men from the billiard room. Charlie Lawdon rushed to his wife's side.
"What's the matter—what's the meaning of this?" he exclaimed.
"Oh, Charlie!" she wailed, "they're gone—all gone!"
"What's gone?" he asked, bewildered. Then his eye fell upon the remnants of the picture hat. "Robbed!" he said shortly. "Well, I told you to have paste copies made, didn't I?"
Mrs. Lawdon opened her mouth to answer, but her husband placed a restraining hand upon her shoulder.
"There, little woman, buck up—you're a bit off, of course. Tell us what you know—quiet, now."
Mrs. Lawdon brushed the tears from her eyes. "I owed Mrs. Evelyn eighty at bridge, you know. I went to find my purse—I'd hid it—it was my gold mesh one, with the diamond monogram. I put it in the same box with the ruby pendant. The key was all right but when I opened the trunk I found my purse lying on the bottom. At first I thought I didn't remember rightly. Then I thought I'd look—and every hat was empty—everyone!"
"Every hat!" exclaimed Mr. Evelyn in mystification.
"My wife had a strong box made like a hat trunk," Mr. Lawdon explained. "Cases, you know, set inside crowns; thought nobody'd ever think of looking there."
"I know," Mrs. Gaynor interrupted. "Mrs. Lawdon showed them to Alice and me this afternoon. Some one may have watched us."
"One thing is certain," Wendham insisted; "this must have happened between the time Mrs. Lawdon came down before dinner and when she went for her purse. Now, as Mrs. Lawdon came in last, and these ladies and gentlemen have been in her presence ever since, with the exception of those who accompanied Mr. Lawdon to the billiard room, it is safe to say that all these are beyond suspicion."

"Naturally," Mr. Lawdon agreed. "I suppose so," gasped his wife; "but Charlie, I want the police, too."
"We will question the servants first ourselves," Mr. Evelyn rose with decision.
The whole party adjourned to the dining room. Frightened, they

greeted them with timorous numbity. A dozen quickly authenticated alibis reduced the number of suspects. Cooks, butlers, and stablemen were dismissed. The housemaids and personal attendants of the guests remained. Of these three were eliminated, their duties having kept them in other parts of the house or in communication with other servants. A frightened gardener's boy who could give no satisfactory account of himself, the incorruptible Ellen, Mrs. Gaynor's maid Adele, and the second housemaid in charge of the guests' annex remained for more searching examination. The housemaid had been upon that floor, even in and out of all the rooms, as was her duty. She had seen no one, heard no one, and protested her innocence with tears. The gardener's boy at last owned that he had been making love to the cook's assistant through the kitchen window, the damsel reluctantly corroborating his statement. Mrs. Lawdon's maid had left the room the moment her mistress had gone to dinner—the door was unlocked and the window open—for which she bitterly denounced herself. Ellen, nervous and incoherent, confused her statements, which consisted of the simple facts of having put her mistress's room in order and gone below stairs, with walls of contrition at having left the apartment even for a moment. Adele answered without hesitation. She had felt ill. Mrs. Gaynor, who was the soul of kindness, had excused her from her duties, and even insisted on her lying down on the divan, where, her neuralgia being relieved, she had fallen asleep, and only awakened when the housemaid had entered. She had then put the room in order and joined the other servants. The housemaid told of finding her asleep on the divan, and Mrs. Gaynor corroborated her first statement, adding, that as the girl was not strong, she often allowed her privileges of the sort.

"The fact remains, however," Mrs. Gaynor added, "that Adele is the only person we find who was in that part of the house for any length of time." She turned to the maid gently, whose honest eyes followed her mistress with adoration. "Were you at all disturbed—did you wake at any time, as if some noise had roused you?"
"No, ma'am. I slept sound."
"What time was it," she questioned the housemaid, "when you finished your rounds and you and Adele went downstairs?"
"About ten," said the housemaid warily.
"Then from ten till a quarter of twelve, when Mrs. Lawdon went to her room, there was no one on that floor?"
There was silence.
"Adele," continued Mrs. Gaynor, "you are on no excuse to leave this house until Mrs. Evelyn gives you permission, and you are to do whatever she wishes. I know you are innocent," she added kindly. "It is only that the right thing must be done."
"Very well, ma'am," said Adele simply.
"They must be searched," said Mrs. Lawdon. "Close the doors, please, and let the men go into the drawing-room."
The women were searched amid tears and wails, Mrs. Evelyn presiding as if such occurrences were an everyday feature of her life, Mrs. Lawdon with frank brutality, and Mrs. Gaynor with pitying anxiety to spare the women's feelings.
Nothing was found. As the last garment was adjusted, Mrs. Lawdon burst into tears of vexation.
"This is all nonsense, all ridiculous," she wailed. "I don't care what you think, I want detectives, and I am going to have them."
Mrs. Evelyn realized the uselessness of protest. "You'll be sorry, but, of course, if you insist, we cannot do otherwise than allow you to take whatever measures you may desire."
"I should think not," sneered Mrs. Lawdon. "It's all very well for the Treadwells and the others to keep close about it, but I notice they don't get their things back, and I mean to have mine—I don't care who gets punished."
"May these women retire now?" asked the hostess coldly. "Are you satisfied that none of your property is upon their persons?"
"I want them kept together and watched—all the time!" demanded Mrs. Lawdon aggressively. "And I want every room in the house searched—now—this minute."
"That is being done," said Mrs. Gaynor. "Mr. Evelyn is attending to that. The search will be thorough, you may be sure."

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The Panacea.
The realization of God's presence is the one sovereign remedy against temptation.—Fenelon.

Form the Habit.
Habituate yourself to seek for the Kingdom of God in your own heart.—Fenelon.

Short Sermons For a Sunday Half-Hour

THEME: Meekness, Not Weakness

By REV. JOHN J. DONLIN
(Transfiguration Church, Brooklyn, N. Y.)

Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land.—Matt., v., 4.

The world does not esteem meekness. This virtue is looked upon as impracticable, because it is held as a negative quality among the forces required of practical living.
The error most persons make is in identifying meekness with weakness. But Jesus Christ would not have counselled meekness as one of the finer qualities of life if it were to be a drawback to legitimate endeavor in our workaday struggles. It is not reasonable to suppose that He would have placed a heavy handicap on those who seek to follow after Him. No indeed, Christ left us in His own life a beautiful example of what meekness may accomplish and yet He was one of the bravest of men in that He lay down His life for His friends. The Scriptures, too, tell us that "Moses was a man exceeding meek above all men that dwell on earth," but he stands out prominently as a man who did things.
The meek man is a type of a great moral force among us, for he is capable of self-control and self-denial. At all times he is master of himself and is able to limit his activity within the bounds of solid principles. This is the acme of perfect strength, to be able to do and yet exercise restraint. The meek man may be compared with the stoic, but with this difference, that while the stoic made passivity of emotions the end for which he labored the meek man exercises or restrains his passions out of love of God. He but follows the example of Christ, who said "Learn of me, for I am mee: and humble of heart," and for this came the promise of reward in the words "and you shall find rest for your souls."
The weak man, on the other hand, never has a chance of exercising meekness. He never overcomes, but yields to the opposing currents of nature. "The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" behold him bending as the willow before the storm. But as only he who bears the brunt of battle really knows the danger of the fight, so also it is only the man of strong impulses that knows the difficulty of conquering them. "Do thy works in meekness," says Ecclesiasticus, "and thou shalt be beloved above above the glory of men." It is, moreover, a mistake to fancy that meekness can come by flying from your fellowmen or by living a life of do-nothing, for meekness is not to be found in conditions, but in the hearts and characters of men—in a heart that palpitates with a fellow-feeling and in a character that grows broader with loving activity.

In the acquirement of meekness neither submission, surrender nor self-effacement count unless these are fortified by the enduring grace of enlightenment reflected in the Gospel's teaching. To be like clay in the potter's hands, to assume a "worm of the dust" attitude, to become a door mat for all men—this is not meekness, but a degradation that affronts God, who made men to His own image. So the task of the meek man is not to crush the thought of his mind, to train it; not to break his will, but to strengthen it; not to drag out of him his affections, but to purify them. And in this way he shall grasp the golden cup of opportunity and drink of it whenever it is passed. In this manner the meek "shall possess the land," because such a man shall command every resource within reach; he shall compel permanence of perfection; he shall house superabundant energy for proper moments, but with all there shall be a perfect unfolding of his soul in the calm of a fixed purpose, cooperating with Him who was the personification of meekness, who was indeed

Meek and lowly, pure and holy, Chief among the blessed three.

"Be Hopeful. Ye Sinful Ones."
Yonder are the men we seek! Forlorn and lost, full of evil and self-condemned—you who feel as if you were possessed with evil spirits, leprous with sin, in which Jesus will find ample room for the display of His holy skill! Of you I might say, as He once said of the man born blind: You are here that the works of God may be manifest in you. You, with your guilt and depravity, you furnish the empty vessels into which His grace may be poured; the sick souls upon which He may display His matchless power to bless and save. Be hopeful then, ye sinful ones, and expect that even in you He will work great marvels!—C. H. Spurgeon.

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