

## *Kitty Gray's Trial*

by Mary C. Vaughan

Gray eyes, pearly skin, cheeks on which the fleeting crimson showed, and ripe, red lips, made the light, youthful form attractive, as it came gliding down the steps of a handsome, up-town, brown-stone mansion. More than one person turned to gaze, but, in faith, somewhat boldly, because a straw hat enclosed the face, and a blanket shawl enwrapped the form, and told that she who wore them, if she lived in that mansion, occupied a servant's place.

If there were tear stains and sadness on the face, few even looked in sympathy. No matter for her sweet, delicate beauty and pretty appealing ways. She was but a servant. Some, possibly, might feel an interest in her, might feel sorry for her if they but knew she had a worthy cause of grief; but none cared enough to inquire, and by a kind word unlock the fountain of the tears that glittered behind those sweeping lashes.

She came down and glided swiftly away. The tall policeman who stood on the corner *did* glance at her sympathetically, but, to be sure, that only showed his office had not yet hardened him. And, maybe, that a pretty girl's distress had power to touch a man's heart. Even a policeman, inured to rough life and the contact of coarse characters, can feel a pretty girl's grief. That seems true. There's a soft spot in every man's heart.

"Well, Bridget," quoth he, with a touch of hilarity, "what's the matter, hey? Did the mistress scold you? Don't cry! Girls have to be awful pretty to look better for crying."

The girl made no answer, but hurried on silently, and never looked at him.

"She didn't hear me," the man murmured, and a grieved look came over his really handsome face. The truth was, he had often noticed this pretty girl as he passed on his beat, and was deeply chagrined at his ill success in his first attempt at seeking her acquaintance. Besides, he really felt sorry for her, though quite ignorant of her trouble. She was out of sight presently, and in his occupation in a pilfering case, he contrived to forget her, and then strode off, whistling. He was out of the way when she returned, and did not see how much graver she looked.

Kitty Gray was the nurse of Mrs. Van Arsdale's two pretty children, whose curly heads might have been seen at the nursery window above, and whose bright, wondering eyes watched her, expressing their surprise that she should go away at that time of the day unaccompanied by them.

She turned a corner presently, and dived down a crooked way into a region of crooked streets and vile smells—a region very different from that in which the brown-stone mansion was situated. She went on hurriedly, past the little general shops and the tall tenement houses, where clustered swarms of people of the class she was born, and such homes as she had once lived in, before she found shelter under Mrs. Van Arsdale's roof, and began to beautify the dimly elegant mansion, as her light form and sweet girlish face were seen gliding through it.

Then her steps grew slower and she seemed to linger; and again she hurried on, more wildly than before, scarcely pausing to speak to the acquaintances that saluted her, till she came to a house, that, taller than the others, stood almost alone in the street of shops.

Into the dark, narrow entry she darted and rushed up the dirty stairs in reckless haste, past heaps of household refuse, outside the doors on every floor, over the slimy steps, and heedless of the close, sickening smells till she reached the upper landing.

Here she lightly tapped at a half-open door, whence the din of an angry woman's accents proceeded. The words told the speaker's nationality, and were sufficiently voluble in their Irish eloquence.

"And hare's Kitty, this blessed mornin' as ever was," cried the voice in a little shriek of joy that quite changed its quality the moment she entered. "An' sure it wasn't mesilf that was thinkin' of seein' ye this mornin.' Is little Miss Agnes and Master Harry wid ye, me darlin'?"

"No, mother," cried Kitty Gray, as she, dexterously avoiding the half dozen children of all sizes that played about the room, crossed it, and took a chair beside the stove, where the entire six incontinently ranged themselves about her, full of voluble welcomes. "No, I came alone, I wanted to see you. Did you find anything here after I had gone yesterday?"

"Only yer hankercher, wid yer name writ on the corner of it," answered Mrs. Gray, producing a square of dirty linen which seemed to have made intimate acquaintance with the mouths and hands of the little Grays.

"But is there notin' else—nothing Master Harry wore?" persisted Kitty.

The little, affectionate, troublesome brothers and sisters were clinging to her, climbing over her, absorbing her thoughts and attention, and Kitty did not observe the sudden whiteness, followed by a sudden flash of color that overspread her mother's face, and did not notice the strange hesitation and slowness of her manner; with an evident affectation of being absorbed in something she was doing.

"No; sure the child left nothing—did he? Or was it something he lost?"

"Oh, mother," cried Kitty, with a shriek, "are ye sure—are ye, now?"

"What is it—what is it, child?" cried the mother, in a fluster that was by no means feigned, as she clung to her child.

"Master Harry's beautiful necklace—it's not been seen since I left here, and they'll think I stole it. I know they will—perhaps they do now; only I said I must have left it here."

And she burst into tears and cried, which shook her light frame, while her poor mother looked on distracted.

“An’ sure ye didn’t, Kitty? Ye’re an honest girl, the child of honest parents. Tell ‘em so, and they’ll not think it. The child, of course, he’s lost it.”

And she wrung her hands, while her voice was raised high, and her words had the voluble utterance so natural to her race in excitement.

Poor Kitty burst into a passion of weeping and sobs. Her last hope was gone. She had made sure she should find the missing trinket in the care of her mother; and now she knew not where else to look. Arrest, disgrace stared her in the face. To be called a thief; to be deemed unworthy of trust; to be sent to prison—it was more than she could bear the thought of, and she said so!

Her mother mingled her tears with hers and joined in her groans. The children mingled their cries in the chorus, till Kitty, trained by her associations with less demonstrative show of emotions and quieter ways, grew ashamed of the din, and at last rose to go.

She hurried home, perturbed and unable to fix upon any course of action. Only one little shadow, a very faint one, of a hope remained to her. Might not the child have left the trinket at home, or might it not have been removed after he reached home, overlooked in laying his things away? If so, the blame of displacement was hers, but she could not be even suspected of theft. How ardently she called on every saint whose name she had ever heard to help her in her quest, to deliver her from this awful suspicion.

In vain her mother had assured her that her mistress knew her honesty too well; that her character was too good to admit of the suspicion; and pointed out to her that theft had only been talked about by the chambermaid, who was jealous of her, not by Mrs. Van Arsdale, who trusted her. She only prayed that she might be able to prove herself honest, and hoped noting from the influence of her previous good character. The poor child had learned already some of the world’s bitter lessons.

A short time brought her to the street in which Mrs. Van Arsdale lived, and she had lately had as her own residence. She saw the large, beautiful mansion, the carriage standing before the door, and the aspect of wealth and comfort that encircled the place; but a chill came over her as she fixed her eyes on the spot.

She had become greatly attached to it. But the feeling was gone, and a dread crept over her as she saw two policemen standing by the carriage, as if watching her approach.

The first impulse was of flight—an impulse no means born of guilt. But an instant’s reflection, during which she did not pause, brought back her composure. At least the outward semblance of it enabled her to walk steadily on.

She neared the officers, and just then she caught sight of the faces of the children peeping from the window. She had just met their smiles, with the bright smile that always replied, and had almost for an instant forgot her vague apprehensions, when a hand was laid upon her shoulder, and she looked round into the face of the oldest officer.

A shriek, even before he spoke, rang from her lips. No need for words from him. He thought her a thief, and had made her a prisoner.

Poor Kitty! Fear and apprehension bore the semblance of guilt even to the experienced eyes of the officer. She cowered down, her face whitening, her eyes wild and distended. She gave one faint shriek, then relapsed in to deadly silence, going mechanically on where they guided her, along the street, and up the broad steps of the mansion.

The servants gathered about, the mistress came, and the children crying and protesting against any harmful treatment of Kitty.

Even Mrs. Van Arsdale remonstrated. She did not want Kitty arrested; she did not believe she had stolen the brooch, and if she had, what should she, herself, and the children do without their nurse.

To this the officers had no reply to make. Mrs. Van Arsdale had made a complaint, and accused Kitty of the theft. They were only doing their duty, and they searched in vain in all likely and unlikely places for the missing trinket; heard the maids' talk, which might have been intended for testimony, but was only the utterance of a mass of bald suspicions, and ended by conveying their innocent, half-fainting prisoner to jail.

Before the night her mother knew where Kitty was, and all her friends had heard the sad story. Very differently it affected them.

A dreadful day and night poor Kitty had in prison. Her father came to see her; but strange to say her mother did not. He wept over her, and she was grateful and ashamed, but she missed the kind tender voice of her mother, sometimes wearisome in its effusion and repetition; but always loving. She lived—though she could hardly have believed it possible—till the morning came, and the time of her examination.

Terrible was the crowd among whom poor Kitty had passed the interval. A station-house crowd, of the very lowest of strata of the city vileness. She, poor girl, had never seen, never heard the horrid talk, never neared the contact with such. Poor, living hardly, faring cheaply, with little knowledge or culture; but never wicked. It was a horrible revelation to her, only haply she was unable to comprehend a tith of the ineffable, dire filth and blasphemy by which she was surrounded. But the dark hours passed away, and the morning sun shone out pure and bright, lighting even that gloomy abode of crime, and showing all the pallor and the haggard lines that night of awful wretchedness had left in the young girl's face, marring its gentle beauty, and bringing to her the semblance of age.

She turned from the prison fare with loathing, but when the court-hour came, she bound up her brown locks, and cooled the fevered hands and face with an ample stream of water, pure and refreshing in the vileness of the place, as where it ran into the marble basins of Mrs. Van Arsdale's residence.

When the officer came, she went up by his side to the place where she hoped for justice.

Another motley crowd, but Kitty hardly hoped there would be anyone for her. She almost wished she might be allowed to suffer alone.

“Why,” she thought, “should I wish the honest name of my parents mixed up with the vileness of the crime I am accused of; and the stain I must bear reflected on them?”

And she tried to steel herself for the unknown fate she must bear alone. The glare and noise confused her; and she would have fallen but for the officer’s support. And then a voice she seemed to know sounded in her ears. Gathering up her scattered senses she tried to raise herself.

The arms that surrounded her were not clad in the policeman’s blue, but the laborer’s hoddend gray. She raised her head and looked up to see her father’s eye beaming upon her. Not the old smiling eyes; not the twinkling merry eyes, and the jovial face—but ah, so sad, so haggard and worn. “See what I have brought him to,” was Kitty’s thought, as she sank back into the protecting arms. The officer whispered “courage!” to her, but her father only groaned and was silent.

She lay there for a long time not asking and scarcely caring to ask tidings; and the business of the court went on.

And then her name was called, and the officer indicated where she must stand, in front of the Judge, and the formalities went on. The charge was made, and Mrs. Van Arsdale called to substantiate it, when, for the first time, her father broke the silence.

“No use for the leddy to swear,” he said. “Me girl’s not guilty, she’s not a thafe, an none of me blood have been. The leddy has her brooch by this, and her that tuck it lies dead an’ cold.” And thus he went on, while the occupants of the room watched him in a silence that grew more intense each moment, and Kitty hardly knew that her mother had been the thief, and then that she had died that awful night of shame, and dread, and fright; perhaps by poison too! That she was freed of all suspicion of guilt, but only through the knowledge of her mother’s crime.

Soon she was free, and on her way to the poor home, so stricken with a fearful grief and the load of such a shame!

The child had lost the trinket, and the mother finding it had appropriated it. Its glittering beauty had tempted her, but she had no idea of its value, till after Kitty’s visit, and the innocent revelations of her trouble had enlightened her. And then she thought it too late to make reparation. “They will never believe the child a thafe,” had been her comfort, for she would not think it possible, and she hugged the delusion to her heart, but wished she dared return the trinket to its owners, since she equally dared not appropriate it to her own use, or offer it for sale.

And then she heard of Kitty’s arrest, and for the first time dared not fly to her side when in trouble. When her father had been to visit her child she remained at home in such grief as only she might know. At his return she had decided on her course. With many tears and sobs she told of her guilt, and gave him the trinket to return. Then she lay down on her bed while he sat by the

fire. After a time he dozed. He woke with a chill and a shudder and started up half asleep to go and look at her.

Even then she was past help. Neither doctor nor priest were of avail, the latter had seen her and received her confession earlier in the evening. Before morning light broke she was dead. To this scene it was that Kitty returned from the prison.

In vain Mrs. Van Arsdale besought her return to her. In vain the children mourned for their nurse. She devoted herself to her father, to her orphaned brothers and sisters. Life for her seemed over, save for its duties; and she never neglected them. Her sorrow and shame had been a terrible discipline, but they developed a character more elevated than hers would have ever been in prosperity.

Years after, older, more grave, but not less beautiful, she married the policeman who had pitied, loved, admired her since the day of her great sorrow, and, strangely, after all her trials and griefs made a happy wife.

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