

## A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE.

BY MINNIE DOUGLAS.

THE waiters watched his slightest movement, and attended to his wants in a manner seldom witnessed. Was he not the richest American, or, at any rate, the most liberal, who had taken up his abode at the Langham this year? There is some pleasure in waiting on a gentleman who tips half-a-sovereign as freely as an Englishman does a shilling!

Mr. Jonathan Lee was evidently a millionaire, and a man who understood how to enjoy himself. His wife was a thin, overdressed woman of forty, whose face had once been pretty, but that was long ago; and whose aim in life, being childless, was the acquisition of new clothes and jewellery. She never tired of changing her dresses, and was rarely seen wearing one a second time in public.

Mr. Lee had a passion for sending telegrams. He seldom wrote a letter, but bombarded his friends with messages on matters of no importance—always, to do him justice, prepaying a reply.

One day—it was one of our horrid days, and an east wind was blowing—Mrs. Lee observed: “I can’t see the use of paying a shilling for a telegram that nobody cares to get.”

“And what’s the use of giving forty guineas for a dress that nobody cares to see?” retorted Mr. Lee: which caused his wife to flounce the one she was then wearing into the nearest arm-chair, where she devoted her attention to the last fashion-book.

But one day there came a telegram which had crossed the Atlantic, and the news it contained, whether it were good or bad, caused Mr. Jonathan Lee to take an affectionate leave of his wife, previous to starting on a short journey. The wording of the message was this:

“English gent has got the papers.”

Amongst the woods and hills of Surrey stands a fine old stone mansion belonging to Sir Andrew Gordon. In the library of the house the members of the family were assembled one evening, and the family consisted of the old baronet and his son Archibald, an antiquated aunt of the latter, Miss Dorothy Gordon, and Constance Gwyn, Sir Andrew’s ward, a beautiful girl of nearly eighteen.

“There will be a storm to-night. Hark how the wind is rising!” said Miss Dorothy, with a shiver. “It’s a mercy your travels are over, Andrew.”

“Yes,” said the old man, holding his hands towards the fire; “I am better pleased with the safety of my own stone walls than the best mail steamer that ever crossed the Atlantic. But now I’ll ring



for lights ; and, Archie, my boy, come over and try to understand some of the mysteries contained in these yellow papers."

Archie, a handsome, fair-haired fellow of twenty-three, had been resting at full length—and that was over six feet—on a comfortable sofa, watching lazily the charming figure of his father's ward, who persistently looked every way but his.

"I'll come ; but I don't suppose I shall make anything out of them," he answered, rising slowly.

"My boy, it is most important—quite a fortune for you ! Your poor mother never knew of it," were the words Constance heard as she sat idly in her low chair near the fire. "The papers are worth two thousand a year ! That rascal who has kept them back would give something to know where they are now !" chuckled the old baronet, as he spread out the crackling letters and a large sheet of parchment on a table, the butler meanwhile arranging a reading-lamp to suit his master in so leisurely a manner as to call forth an impatient exclamation of "That will do ! that will do !"

Simmons respectfully took the hint, and now busied himself with the heavy curtains, having noiselessly closed the shutters.

"There is a shocking draught," murmured Miss Dorothy. "Don't you feel it, Constance ?"

"Not a bit," replied Constance, laughing as she rose to get her work-basket ; "but the wind *will* get in such a night as this."

Simmons retired, and Archie observed :

"I'm awfully glad that fellow is leaving—he walks like a cat !"

"Indeed," cried Miss Dorothy, querulously, "I think your father does wrong to part with him ; we have never had so quiet a servant."

"Never mind the man—attend to me !" cried Sir Andrew. "You must particularly try to remember this." Archie, only outwardly listening, was exhibiting some of those provoking symptoms which a lover shows after there has been a cloud in the atmosphere, and the lady has managed to get the best of it.

Constance Gwyn seemed to remember something, and left the room. When she returned after a quarter of an hour's absence, the butler had entered with a tray of glasses and the requisites for Sir Andrew's "nightcap" of whisky toddy. The baronet folded the papers into a neat bundle, and locked them in an old-fashioned cabinet.

"They will be safe here to-night ; to-morrow I will take them to the lawyer's," he said, placing the key in his pocket. Then turning towards his ward, he enquired, "How is Gelert, fair lady ?"

"I don't think he is well, Sir Andrew. I've just been to see him."

"Constance !" cried Miss Dorothy, scandalised, "have you been out to the dog-kennel at this hour, and on such a night ?"

"Yes, Miss Dorothy—and it is much too cold for the poor fellow to be left out there !"

"Now, my love !" deprecated the old lady, waving one delicate



hand in token that her will was law, "never mention the idea of bringing that enormous dog into the house."

The ghost of a pout came into Constance's sweet face.

"There, there," said Sir Andrew merrily, "don't fret, Constance. Gelert shall have a skilled physician to-morrow, if you think him ill. I shouldn't mind his coming into the house, but our tyrant here, you see!" and he shrugged his shoulders.

"Archie," softly whispered the girl, as he lit her candle for her "will you see Gelert?" and she raised her beautiful grey eyes appealingly to his. A merry look of triumph passed over his face.

"Yes, if you promise not to play chess with the curate to-morrow!"

"Oh, don't be silly! If you think Gelert is ill, bring him in."

"Ill or well, I'll send him to your room in half an hour, if you'll say good-night civilly," at the same time drawing his fiancée behind a tall screen for a silent embrace, which sent her away blushing.

A bright fire burned in Constance Gwyn's bed-room. She put on her dressing-gown, and dismissed her maid as soon as the latter had received Gelert from Archie Gordon's hands, and brought him to his mistress. The dog was only seeking company, and not ill. He looked the picture of contentment as he lay at Constance's feet, and she, feeling wakeful, sat quietly reading—though between the page and her eyes came up Archie's face.

The house had long been still, when the clock in the corridor struck one. Gelert at the moment raised his huge head and listened attentively. Constance closed her book, and wondered why the dog still kept his intent look; it made her slightly nervous, and she began to listen too. Certainly there was a sound as of a window in the library, just beneath her own room, being opened. The wind and rain made so wild a sound that she would have banished the thought of anything but these, had it not been that Gelert half rose to his feet with a low growl.

"Be quiet, Gelert!" she whispered: for she feared he would bark, and so reveal to Miss Dorothy his forbidden presence.

Gelert's only answer was to look earnestly at his mistress, prick his ears again, and walk slowly to the door.

Constance went into the corridor to listen. The only person near her was nervous Miss Dorothy, whom she dreaded to rouse. Taking firm hold of Gelert's collar, she softly reached the top of the grand staircase, and a gleam of moonlight, which burst through the stormy clouds, lit up with a weird light the portraits that lined the wall, and then as suddenly faded. In the darkness Gelert drew his mistress to the staircase, showing increased anxiety to make her understand that there was a cause for his excitement. Constance leant over the bannister. The door of the library was partly open and a faint light was in the room. In a moment a thought of the papers Sir Andrew had just brought from America flashed on Constance; she remem-



bered that they were of importance to Archie, and that someone else would be glad to get them from him.

Whispering a few words to quiet the dog, she crept softly down the broad stone staircase, and paused near the door. Through the crack she saw that two men stood at the far end near Sir Andrew's cabinet, and it was open. A strange courage came to the girl. She knew that if she could cross to the corner by the opposite window, there was a bell there which communicated with the wing where Sir Andrew slept and which would also arouse the servants. In another moment she had stooped and clasped one arm round the dog's neck, and he seemed to know her wish, for he crawled stealthily beside her into the room. They had nearly crossed it, when Gelert drew a panting breath, which startled one of the men. He quickly turned and aimed a pistol at Constance. In an instant she loosed Gelert and sprang at the bell—heard the peal ring out, a pistol-shot fired, and a dog's furious worrying—then fell unconscious on the floor.

"How quiet you all are!" and then Constance thought she had not said it—such a faint voice it sounded. And what bed was this with great green curtains? Surely Miss Dorothy's! And the room was dim, so when Miss Dorothy crept to the side of the bed Constance could not see that her face was wet with thankful tears.

"My love, you are in my room because I am nursing you."

"Have I been ill?" said the weak voice again.

"Yes, dear, but don't talk." And Miss Dorothy slipped away to come back with the old doctor and Sir Andrew. The patient's eyes wandered towards the door. Sir Andrew whispered a few words to the doctor.

"Oh, there's somebody else, is there? Well, he may come just for a minute."

The "Somebody" had been outside, waiting.

"My darling," he whispered, holding the weak little hand.

Constance looked up in his face, trying to remember something.

"Did we quarrel about—chess—or somebody?"

"Oh, *that's* all right," answered Archie, eagerly. "You checkmated me."

"Well, but who was shot?"

"That will do now, my dear," said the good doctor, hastily, motioning all but Miss Dorothy away. "If you are a good girl and go to sleep, you shall talk to them all by-and-bye."

In the library Sir Andrew told the following to his son:

"When I was twenty-eight years of age I was still dependent on my uncle, who, though he could not keep the title from me, had the power of alienating the property. He wished me to marry his daughter, but while staying in Paris I fell in love with a beautiful young American girl who was studying at a school there. I knew her twin brother more for her sake than his own), and he witnessed my private mar-



riage with her. Within a year my uncle died, and I was about to travel to America with my wife, and acknowledge her publicly there, when you were born, and your dear mother lived but an hour. Her brother, Jonathan Lee, saw me in my deep affliction, and urged upon me that he could acquaint all American friends and save me a sorrowful journey. A year ago I learnt that you were entitled to the half-share of some mining property which had been left to Jonathan Lee and his sister, or, in event of their death, to you. I went to America, obtained the necessary papers, and made good your title to the share in the property, which Lee had been appropriating. He is in England, and may have instigated the attempt at robbery by bribing that scoundrel, the butler; but as the latter was shot when Gelert sprang on the man who aimed his pistol at Constance, we will let the matter drop. The other hired miscreant escaped, but I think Gelert must have hurt him."

Constance is lying on a sofa in the drawing-room, looking very lovely if a little frail. Archie is by her side, and Gelert rests his huge head against her hand.

"My darling, the doctor's orders are immediate change of air for you. A month ago I begged you to name the day, so now you will promise to agree to a very quiet wedding here a week or two hence, and then I will take you abroad."

No answer, and the girl raised one hand to cover her face, which it could not do.

"Tell her to say 'Yes,' Gelert!" said Archie, laughingly raising the great dog's paws in supplication.

"May Gelert come too?"

"To be sure; and here comes my father to hear the glorious news, and to prevent our good Aunt Dorothy fussing about trousseaux!"

One more telegram reaches Mr. Jonathan Lee, and it convinces him that he will do well to be thankful for mercies received, and to hasten to his native land—there to arrange for the regular disbursement of half his income from the mines, in favour of his young English nephew, whom he would never see or hear of, unless he failed in the above arrangements.

"We start for America to-morrow!" commenced Jonathan Lee to his wife.

"Oh, my! I haven't got half the things I meant to buy in Europe."

"And you never will!" gloomily responded Jonathan.