

# Remember Me No More.

IN TWO INSTALMENT—PART I.

## CHAPTER I

'Well, it's very hard on us, that's all I can say!'

'Yes, I do think, Violet you might remember you've had your chances. When you were our age you enjoyed yourself like everybody else; but now that you're thirty, and we're years younger, were to be as dull and sober as any greyhead in the parish. People who are young and full of life oughtn't to be expected to pen themselves up like those who have had their day. It's rank selfishness.'

'Christie, Christie, indeed you oughtn't to talk like that!'

'Oh, it's all very well for you, Violet, but it's quite true what Christie says. We are only nineteen and twenty, and we never have any enjoyment. You set yourself against our going anywhere, or having anyone here! It isn't as if you were our mother. I never saw any sense in girls letting a sister lord it over them, and rule their lives as if she were a parent. It's absurd! Besides, I don't see at all why you should set yourself against Mr. Derrick so particularly. He may not be to your taste, but he is to ours, and to most people's. You seem to have a perfect prejudice against the man.'

'Mother wouldn't object—it is you who rule her. I know people must wonder—and it's no good being pretty and—'

'Oh, do stop! cried the eldest sister almost entreatingly. 'In our circumstances—'

'Both our circumstances! It's always that! We are no poorer than heaps of people. Besides, we don't want show or fuss—we don't ask for it, Violet. How can it possibly run away with money to just ask a person in to tea occasionally? I'm sure ever since we came home from school it has been horrible. We are like nuns; while as for you, you are worse! And besides, if we married, or if only one of us did so, it would be so much the better for our circumstances.' I wonder you don't think of that. A little gaiety, a little society, and we should be off your hands and spending other people's money instead of our own. You are penny-wise and pound foolish, and for my part I'm sick of it. It—'

'It is not a case of money, Kitty. I've tried to make you understand it isn't before.'

'Miss Traill!' rather pale, thin, but sweet looking face was growing terribly harassed; but Christie and Kitty, in their buoyant, youthful selfishness, thought or cared nothing for that.

They left very angry.

It was the same old battle, being fought over the same old ground, and they were all tired to death of it.

'Well, what is it a case of then, P. You never explain or tell us anything.'

'I—I can't explain; I can't tell you anything. You ought not to bother and worry on about the matter as you do. There are hundreds—thousands—of girls who are obliged to live quiet, and neither go out much nor entertain at home. You have health and strength, and—'

'And what good are they to us, I should like to know, if we're to vegetate like turnips? I call it disgusting, the way you try to keep us down and out of sight. You used to go out. Someone was telling me the other day you were considered quite a beauty, and as jolly a girl as they wished to see. You never let us be jolly, and I expect we're every bit a good looking as you were. Oh, it's perfectly abominable! Both the younger girls gave vent to a long, angry breath; but the elder one's was changed with a terrible sorrow as it escaped her as an echo of theirs.

'Dear girls,' she said; 'indeed, I wish I could make you understand that I sympathize with you. You always make me out hard and unfeeling, while all the time I'm far more unhappy than you are. I did, as you say, go out when I was young, but it never brought me any happiness; and when I was twenty-five, I became so tired of it—so weary—that I gave it all up, and—'

'But why do you object to our trying it? We might not grow tired of it; we're not all built alike, you know.'

'I don't want you to have to endure a grief I had to endure. Believe me, you are far happier, living quietly, than if you went out a great deal, and had to fill the house with company in return.'

There was something so impressive in Violet's look and tone that the two younger girls were silenced, though they were not convinced, and probably never would be.

They were bright, good looking girls, both rosy cheeked and plump, with fair, nut brown hair and English looking figures but not very remarkable either for the features or for the depth of the expression upon their faces, whereas Violet was a being of quite a different order.

The two younger girls did not like to acknowledge the inferiority of which they were vaguely conscious, and they bitterly resented the occasional remarks that fell upon their ears that Violet was the beauty of the family, the 'flower of the flock,' utterly above and beyond themselves.

Though this might not be put before them in plain words, it was not difficult to read the general opinion.

There was evidently something wanting in their plump, commonplace good—looks—soul, grace, culture, whatever it might be

called—and it was discovered by everybody, except, perhaps, waddy youth whose opinion went for nothing.

It was evident that Violet, in her young days—which, they seemed always very anxious to make out, were over and done with—had created much more of a stir and won a great deal more admiration than themselves.

Now she was very quiet; stayed a great deal at home and devoted herself to Mrs. Traill, who, though no invalid, but a fine and handsome woman of middle age, also seemed to prefer her own fireside to the gaieties of society.

Christie and Kitty felt that it was very hard.

They would have liked to keep a sort of 'open house;' they would have liked shoals of friends, both to visit and to receive as visitors.

They thought the only duty that ought to fall to them in life was to thoroughly enjoy themselves.

They were never tired of reminding their elder sister that, in the old days, before they came, five years ago, to Mistlethorpe, she had been a very popular young person, fitting here, there, and everywhere in Ledsbury.

They hated her reserve upon the subject, and her quiet determination that she would not be dragged into the circle of their acquaintances.

For acquaintances and friends they had, and persisted in having, but Violet would not encourage them at Woodbine Cottage, and the two younger girls asserted that she ruled their mother, who would not be averse from a different order of things had she been the housekeeper.

But it was Violet who held this position, and somehow she and her mother 'kept themselves to themselves,' and rarely accepted the invitations that Christie and Kitty snapped up with the greatest eagerness.

'It's all very well, V. wanting to turn into an old maid, and mother being able to let her,' they used to grumble between themselves. 'But we're not ambitious of any such fate. We're not so hard driven by poverty that we couldn't have little afternoon tea or supper parties—nothing ceremonious, or grand, or expensive—no dinners, or anything like that, but the festivities that other girls have.'

'V. always sets her face against entertaining in any form, and she has prim, stupid notions that, unless one makes a return, one should not accept hospitality at all. We seem different from everybody else. There's some mystery somewhere.'

'Of course we know we're not rich—we shouldn't pretend to be; but she always admits it isn't exactly a question of poverty. People must think it remarkable.'

It had been particularly vexatious, they felt, of late, this retirement, for a new star had appeared in the Mistlethorpe sky; and as it was not a large place, the arrival had caused a sensation.

A Mr. Derrick was visiting about in the big houses in the neighbourhood—young, handsome, well born and wealthy.

The two younger Misses Traill had met him once or twice, and their hearts fluttered wildly in consequence.

Each secretly believed she might have made a conquest, or certainly would make it were she allowed a fair chance, and this belief had infused a little venom into their attack upon Violet—a much harder and bitterer assault than usual.

The whole place was ringing with Roger Derrick's praises.

Every girl over the age of eighteen was 'going in for him,' and Christie's and Kitty's empty, foolish heads were half turning with excitement also.

It was all very well for Violet, almost 'on the shelf,' and quite out of everything—a pious sort of girl, who liked sticking at home and preaching—to remain cool and unconcerned.

They chattered upon the topic of Mr. Derrick, and the times when they had seen him and spoken to him, all day long, and they thought their sister's reserve was very unsympathetic, and abused her in no measured terms for trying to make herself out so different from everybody else.

And then, Violet put on such a sweet, appealing manner sometimes, which was so mysterious, that it irritated them more than ever.

It seemed to put them so completely in the wrong.

She assured them so earnestly, and with such distress, that she was sorry for them; but as she never altered her ways, this was utterly ridiculous, of course.

Altogether, the two younger Misses Traill considered their sister to be treating them very badly!

## CHAPTER II.

Christie Traill's heart was beating excitedly.

She was at a dance that had been given by one of the big people of the neighbourhood, and she had suddenly been singled out by Mr. Roger Derrick for special attention—or what seemed to her special attention; for, being what he was, the man of the room, and considering the crowd of pretty and well born girls surrounding them, it did seem very strange that he should be able to bestow two dances upon her—a girl he had hardly exchanged half-a-dozen words with.

She had met him before, certainly, but nearly always in a throng, and, in spite of her talk, she had hardly believed he knew her name.

Now she had seen him deliberately speaking about her, as he stood with a few other men near the door of the ball room.

They had seemed to mention her, and Mr. Derrick had wheeled round, regarding her very searchingly and with great interest, and a minute or two afterwards had come across and asked her for not only one dance, as might have been expected, but two.

She was in a state of wild excitement. How Kitty would envy her! How zalous the other girls would be!

She sat beating her white slipped feet upon the waxed floor delightedly.

Roger Derrick was such a handsome, distinguished-looking man.

He was, perhaps, one or two and-thirty, with broad shoulders, intent yet lazy-looking eyes of a nondescript hue, and brown hair that had a dash of gold in it.

He had a charm of manner and a singularly pleasant voice, and simply enchanted at being chosen out for such notice.

She felt that she looked better than any other girl present, in spite of the fact that she was not so expensively attired as many of them were.

Vi had suggested white, softly-falling crepe for her dress, and Kitty's, and their mother had insisted that the whole effect must be that of simplicity.

In vain Christie and Kitty had urged that satin, or even silk would look much nicer.

Mrs. Traill was firm, and pooch-pooched such an idea as impossible.

Violet obtained no thanks for her suggestion; but, had the girls only known it, they looked infinitely nicer and more suitably attired as they were, than they would have done had they figured in rich robes.

Their plump, florid faces and forms, though youthful and good-looking enough, were softened by the dresses Violet had suggested.

She had exquisite taste, and used it in their behalf upon every occasion, though very often they declined to follow her advice, but pleased themselves.

'Poor old V. I shouldn't wonder if she were a bit jealous of us!' they were not above confiding to each other. She never cares to see us in anything expensive or stylish!

The fact being that Violet could perceive in a moment that anything they termed 'stylish' brought out a slight tendency to vulgarity in their appearance; but that, if they dressed with care, this might be kept out of sight.

Christie was so pleased, however, at the present moment, by the way things were turning, that she was willing to admit her elder sister had been tight, perhaps, after all.

'Kitty, what do you think?' she whispered in wild jubilation, edging up to her junior cautiously, as that young lady sat among some others, all straining their eyes towards possible partners, who were walking languidly round. 'Mr. Derrick has asked me for two! He can't do that to many, for there are only twenty dances on the programme.'

Kitty looked up, amazed, excited, but as jealous as Christie had hoped her to be. 'I daresay he'll come round to me, then, in a minute,' she returned, in a would-be careless tone.

'Perhaps so,' murmured Christie.

Her expression of countenance, however betrayed that she doubted this, for though she acknowledged that Kitty was pretty, she considered that she herself was prettier.

Mr. Derrick had chosen one of the first dances, and he made a rather surprising suggestion to his partner as he offered her his arm.

'Would you care to sit it out, Miss Traill?' he murmured. 'The room is getting rather hot, and it seems very pleasant in the conservatory.'

'I should prefer it,' answered Christie eagerly.

She had heard it was a kind of compliment for a man to wish to spend a quiet half hour with a partner—that it betokened an interest in her, a desire to get to know her as he could not were they merely spinning round the room.

She felt that in the conservatory she could chatter brightly, and show to better advantage, perhaps, than if she were dancing, for she did not particularly excel in the terpsichorean art, but she was always accounted a 'jolly' girl.

So they wended their way to the cool retreat, where Roger selected seats amongst the dark greenery of the plants and palms, and he bestowed several what Christie took for admiring glances upon her, as they talked on conventional subjects, but she was more pleased when he began to show a strong personal interest in her.

'I have met you once before, have I not?' he asked.

Christie could have answered 'three times,' and given him the place and hour of each encounter, but she had acquiesced enough to reply—

'I believe you have,' with a fairly cool indifference.

Therefore you belong to this neighbourhood? he went on and his companion was nothing loath to afford him all information upon the point.

'Oh, yes!' she answered. 'Do you know a white house standing in Summer Lane called Woodbine Cottage?'

Mr. Derrick was afraid he did not.

'It is not a large house,' explained Christie, mortified at having to make the admission. 'It is a small one, standing by itself. Well, that is where I live.'

'And you have lived in Mistlethorpe all your life?' he inquired.

He certainly seemed to feel an interest in her, and his handsome eyes were fixed upon her quite eagerly.

'No, not all my life. We once lived at a place called Ledsbury,' she volunteered. 'It was a much jollier one than Mistlethorpe, but then I was a child and was

away at school. I—'

'Ledsbury! repeated Mr. Derrick reflectively.

'Yes. Do you know it?'

'I have been there,' he replied in a careless tone.

'It was ever so much nicer than this old place, wasn't it?' exclaimed Christie eagerly.

'I thought so,' said Mr. Derrick in a peculiar tone.

Christie would have thought it was a sad one, only that sort of smile sat upon his lips, dreamy and strange.

'Then I suppose you were a little girl when your father lived there?' he said, suddenly walking up and turning to her.

'I have no father; he died a long time ago. He was killed in battle,' said Christie. 'I can't remember so very much about it.'

'But you have a mother, I suppose?' pursued Mr. Derrick.

'Yes.'

What a lot of questions he was asking! He could not be taking for merely talking's sake, Christie felt with secret exultation.

'And sisters?'

'Yes, two. The one that is here to-night—'

'Oh! one is here to-night?' interrupted Mr. Derrick, with quite a start.

'Yes. Haven't you seen her? She is supposed to be like her—at least, some people think so,' said Christie, dubiously, for she considered it a little bit of a compliment to Kitty, and it would not do for Mr. Derrick to think too much of her sister.

'Older than you, though?' he said.

'Well, she may look so, perhaps. I daresay people think she does,' answered Christie, not ill pleased; 'but she is a year younger, as a matter of fact.'

'And you have another sister?'

'Yes; but she is much older than we are.'

'And she is not here tonight?'

There was a sort of constraint in his voice.

Christie thought that he might find it awkward to be extracting information in this pointed way, so she resolved to be as communicative as she could.

'Oh, dear, no!' she smiled. 'Poor old V. she is such a stay at home creature that nobody can get her out at all. I believe they wanted her; I know they sent an invitation, but she preferred to stay with mother. You see, she's quite old—more than ten years older than I am, and I believe she thinks it time to give up every sort of fun and frivolity.'

'But that's a very foolish, old-fashioned sort of idea, isn't it?' exclaimed Mr. Derrick, languidly scornful.

'I don't know—perhaps it is,' said Christie a little blankly.

She had not expected her handsome companion to take this view of the subject.

'Oh, utterly nonsensical! She is just at about her best time if she is the age you say,' observed Mr. Derrick coolly.

Christie felt vexed in a vague sort of way, and thought that she herself might look small.

'Well, seems odd to us,' she asserted, half defiantly. 'She's very good, and all that, but she hasn't a bit of fun in her, and she's quite thirty to. I don't suppose she'll ever be married.'

'Perhaps she is not anxious to marry,' suggested Roger.

Christie felt he was, somehow, not so agreeable as he had been, although he was smiling.

His eyes seemed to be reading her through and through.

'I didn't say she was,' she retorted. 'I told you she liked staying at home. Only, I don't see why she should think Kitty—that's the one who is here to-night—and I should stay with her. She ought to remember that people have different tastes. We like to enjoy ourselves. We like music and dancing, and all that—don't you?'

'Yes,' said Mr. Derrick; 'and doesn't your sister ever give any reason why she doesn't?'

'No,' pouted Christie. 'She is as staid and sober as mother—or a good deal more so. It's rather hard on us, I must say, for he isn't to lead such a hermit's life when she was our age and we were away at school.'

'No; I expect she was quite different from you,' asserted Mr. Derrick.

'I should think so, indeed,' said Christie heartily. 'We are not a bit alike. I don't think I shall ever grow stiff and old-maidish.'

'Do you go out a great deal?' asked Mr. Derrick.

'No; not so much as I should like,' she admitted. 'And when I do, it is generally to some quiet afternoon affair. Of course, plenty goes on in Mistlethorpe, no doubt, but one can never make friends if one's people are against the system.'

'But you can see your friends or acquaintances in your own home?' said Mr. Derrick, leaning towards her.

There was an expression in his eyes that suddenly caused Christie's foolish heart to beat excitedly.

'Was he going to propose to call upon them? It so, oh, what a triumph! He must be really attracted, by the confidential way in which he was talking to her—trying to find out all about her relatives and friends and pursuits—her ordinary, everyday life.'

She resolved definitely that, come what might, she would not discourage him.

'Oh, yes, if they care to call,' she murmured.

She was expecting Mr. Derrick to burst forth into some offer to do so, when someone came into the conservatory.

It was Kitty, who did not intend to let Christie make all the running if she could help it, and had determined that Mr. Roger Derrick should be made to ask her for a dance, willy nilly.

interrupted at a critical moment, and she knew that she had a purpose in it, too!

She was thoroughly vexed, and would have remained blind and deaf to Kitty's palpable desire, had not Mr. Derrick himself risen quite readily to the occasion and thrust himself forward.

'Is not this the other Miss Traill I have met?' he said, while Kitty gabbled volubly on some unimportant matter—purposely exaggerated—to her angry sister, who yet dared not openly show her displeasure.

'I should be very glad if you could spare me a dance,' Mr. Derrick continued. 'I did not see that you were here.'

And he actually inscribed his name for two dances upon the younger girl's programme also.

Kitty now exalted as triumphantly as Christie had done, though the latter reminded her afterwards, when they were alone, that she had simply forced the young man to behave as he did.

'He really wanted mine; but he was made to ask for yours,' she said.

However, Kitty informed her sister, after her two dances with Mr. Derrick, that he had been more agreeable to her than any of her other partners had been—had seemed perfectly smitten, in fact, and had tried by every means in his power to find out all about her tastes and private occupations.

'He must be an outrageous flirt, then, that's all, my dear,' remarked Christie scornfully; 'for he went upon that identical tack with me.'

At the conclusion of her second dance with Mr. Derrick, which came on late in the evening, she rushed across to Kitty with a face of radiance.

'There; I told you so!' she cried. 'He has just asked me if he may call. It was on my account that he questioned you so closely.'

Or on mine that he asked you if he might call,' retorted Kitty. 'At any rate, if he does, we shall soon discover the attraction, I suppose, so we needn't begin to fight just yet.'

And they returned to Woodbine Cottage in the highest spirits.

## CHAPTER III.

'Oh, her day for those bygone days When I was gay and young, When I was gay and young, What havoc did I then create, The little girls among, The little girls among.'

Sang Kitty blithely on the following morning as she burst in late to breakfast.

'A lovely dance, mother! I never enjoyed myself so much before.'

'Nor I,' chimed in Christie, who was already at the table. 'I had the most delightful time. Mr. Derrick had only been in the room a minute or two when he came straight up to me, engaged me for two dances—one of which was the supper-dance—so you see it was the best of the lot—and was most awfully attentive and impressive all the evening. I'm sure every other girl in the room was jealous about it.'

'Then they would have had to be jealous of me, too,' exclaimed Kitty.

'Oh! but you asked for the dances he had with you,' observed Christie, contemptuously.

'My dear!' cried Mrs. Traill, from her easy chair. 'What do you mean?'

Violet was seated in the window, having finished her morning meal long before, her slender figure and pretty head bent over some sewing.

She looked rather pale and a trifle harassed, though this was nothing fresh; but her lips were set in a rather tight line, which was not usual.

'Oh, I only spoke to Christie while she was with him, and she was nasty about it,' explained Kitty carelessly.

'Just a made up excuse, perfectly as patent to him as to me!' ejaculated her sister.

Neither of the girls was pleased with the other.

They were almost equally empty headed and jealous, but Kitty was a shrewd, pleasant and better-hearted than Christie.

They both intended to make a brave fight for Mr. Derrick, each considering him her admirer.

The only point on which they had thoroughly agreed was that the two at home should not be informed of his intention of calling at Woodbine Cottage.

If he got home and told them that he is coming, there will probably be a row, or, anyhow, some disagreeable talk,' Christie had said. 'Perhaps they would stop him seeing us, or coming again, for you know they do not like visitors; but if he descends upon them without the least warning, there will be no time to do anything.'

'You are quite right,' Kitty had answered. 'But we had better not go out for a day or two, or we might miss him.'

So they took care never to go far from home that week.

They dressed in their most 'lethargic' attire, and sat in the small drawing room every afternoon for a couple of hours, pretending to practice duets, but in reality they were keeping a strict watch upon the path that led up from the lane to the house.

Their patience, and almost their hopes, however were exhausted when, the first week having passed, Mr. Derrick had not appeared.

'This is nonsense, you know!' exclaimed Kitty, as she dragged off her very best frock for the seventh time running, again donned her humble serge. 'You may say what you like, Chris, but the man never intends to come! I shouldn't bother to wait in for him any longer. If he had intended to call he would have done it immediately after the dance.'

'He may have been prevented,' urged Christie, though she was vexed and mortified.

'Stiff! He wouldn't have been prevented if he had wanted to seriously,' exclaimed Kitty, with a grain of common sense, which was induced in her by her sister. 'I shouldn't stay away from the Brooks' big "at—'

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