

FAITHLESS BUT TRUE.

IN TWO INSTALMENTS—PART II.

Before Christmas Horace Salran took his departure, but it was on the understanding that he should return in the early spring.

Amongst all Laura's new and old acquaintances, perhaps the only genuine friend she had was Miss Talbot.

Philip had never told his aunt his secret, and, it she suspected it, she never showed that she did.

All the same, she showed a great interest in the young bride, and sometimes even ventured on a little gentle advice and Laura, who seemed to care little what the world said or thought, listened with exemplary patience.

And so the winter slipped away and when the hedgerows were studded with the yellow primrose and purple violet, Horace Salran returned and Laura took no pains to conceal the pleasure she felt in seeing him again.

CHAPTER IV. NOT FORGOTTEN.

It was a blustering day towards the end of March, when Philip Lacy walked into his aunt's drawing-room and was received with unfeigned delight.

'You look but poorly, Philip,' she said; 'worn and thin. I fear you have had a hard time of it.'

'Oh, we all had to rough it a bit!' he answered. 'I will tell you about it after dinner—this is if you will kindly ask me to stay for presuming on your kindness. I told Mrs. Cox of the Peacock, that I should most likely dine out.'

'The Peacock! My dear Philip you don't mean to tell me that you went to an inn when your aunt's house—'

'My dear aunt, you have no idea what a savage I have become in my travels,' he answered, not letting her finish her sentence. 'I was taken prisoner, lived in a hut, and fed on dates. To me a house is stifling after sleeping out in the open air so much, and I find it difficult to rest on a bed. I really shall be much better at the Peacock, where they won't mind my getting up in the middle of the night and smoking with my head out of the window. I will dine with you as often as you like to ask me; but, till I become more civilized, please don't ask me to stay here. I should upset all your orderly ways. You would learn to look on me as a nuisance, and I should not like that.'

It was not, however, till Miss Talbot had vehemently argued against this plan, that she at last gave way, compromising by making Philip promise to dine with her every day, and lunch with her as often as he could.

'And now, aunt,' he said, when this was settled, 'tell me the local news. I hear that Miss Laura, your next door neighbor, has married Sir Godfrey Lyzette, and sets the fashions for Churchford and half the county.'

Miss Talbot cast a quick glance at her nephew's face, but saw no sign of emotion—hardly of curiosity.

'If he cared for the girl, he has got over it,' she said to herself, 'and it's perhaps just as well things have fallen out as they have.'

So she entered into a full account of Laura's marriage, and, although the girl was a favorite, of hers, did not hesitate to deplore the change that had taken place in her.

'Not that it's anything more than frivolity,' she went on to explain; 'and what can you expect from a young girl married to such a man as Sir Godfrey, who thinks a great deal more of a statue or a painting than he does of his wife? I counsel her sometimes, and she listens very patiently to what I say; but good advice, my dear boy, never kept anyone from ganging their ain gait yet.'

Whilst Miss Talbot was pouring into Philip's attentive ears all about Laura and her marriage, what led to it, and what it was likely to lead to, that young lady was quietly walking up and down one of the sheltered paths in the gardens of the Hall, listening with a smile on her lips to Horace Salran's passionate declaration of love.

'My dear Horace,' she said, drawing away the hand he attempted to seize, 'of course I like you, but I do not love you in the sense you wish—not nearly enough to ruin myself for your sake. In the first place my husband—'

'Pish! pray do not say you care for him.'

'He is very tiresome, I admit, but he is kind, and there are many worse husbands in this world; but I frankly admit he wears me dreadfully, and so do his friends.'

'Am I included?'

'How silly you are, Horace! Of course, you are different. I am sure I showed how pleased I was when you came back—perhaps more than I ought to have done.'

'But how can you stand this existence? I tell you that you know nothing of what the world is—of its pleasures. What can life be without love? We are young, the world is at our feet. I am already famous and shall become more so, and you shall share my fortunes. Every hour you stay here in this gloomy place amongst these stupid people is wasted. Yours is ours but for once—for a few short years. Let us pass that time together, and then come

what may, we shall have lived, enjoyed, basked in the sun-light. The future is vague. The only happiness to be certain of is that of the present.'

His handsome face glowed with eagerness and passion, and he tried to pass his arm round her waist.

'My dear Horace, I shall really have to go in and leave you if you are so tiresome!' Laura exclaimed rather petulantly, as she slipped from his embrace. 'I don't suppose I shall ever love anyone—at all events I do not now. So please don't bother me anymore with your vows and declarations of eternal constancy. I don't think that I could stand living here for ever; but, thank goodness, we are going to London in a month, and there I shall enjoy myself very well. Remember that you are to come, too; but you must not expect to monopolize me as you do down here.'

There was almost a scowl on his face as he looked down into the dark eyes that smiled back into his.

'You English women are all alike,' he said. 'Cold as icicles. You have no power to love; passion you cannot feel, and you can no more understand what I suffer than one can understand, without experiencing them, the sufferings of a man left to die of thirst and hunger in the desert.'

The smile died from Lady Lyzette's lips. 'We will go back to the house,' she said, with a shiver. 'It is fearfully cold out here. You are dreadfully thoughtless, Horace, or you would not have kept me out so long.'

He kept back the oath that rose to his lips.

'As you will,' he answered, with a shrug of the shoulders. 'I will see you to the door, and then, if you permit me, smoke a cigar out here in the garden. It is well to have no heart. Yet those who cannot suffer cannot enjoy.'

She made no answer, but hurried to the house, which, with a little nod to the artist, she entered, vanishing at once from his view.

'Sacre!' he muttered, as he selected a cigar from his case. 'How well she carries it off! But I shall win yet. It was because she feared herself that she left me. It is only a matter of days, or weeks, or months, and I can afford to wait.'

How could he know that it was his chance allusion to the desert that had conjured up Philip Lacy's face before her eyes?

How could he guess how she despised—loathed herself at that moment?

She sat in her own apartment thinking over the past and of what might have been till at length she sprang to her feet and rang the bell for her maid.

'Marie!' she cried when the maid entered the room, 'you must make me look beautiful tonight. Take out my dresses, and let me see what I shall wear. I shall die of ennui here if I do not find something to amuse me, and they say a woman can never be unhappy if she has plenty of pretty new dresses to wear.'

CHAPTER V. WINGED WORDS.

News travels fast in a little country village, and in less than twenty-four hours after his arrival, Laura knew that the man she had sworn to be true to was staying at the Peacock, and that he had dined the previous evening at his aunt's.

She was very glad to be prepared, and waited all day, half hoping, half dreading that he would call.

When the evening came without Philip Lacy having put in an appearance, she felt both hurt and disappointed.

She would rather have got the interview over.

She feared the look of reproach in his eyes, and felt, it he spoke to her about the past, she would have to tell how all had happened—how weak she had been, and yet how, if he had only been there to support her, she would never have given him up.

Two more days passed, and Laura felt piqued.

After all, very likely her mother was right, and he had not cared for her so very much; and that evening she came down to dinner gayly than usual, and beautifully dressed.

The next day, when Philip did call, she received him without showing a sign of emotion.

Her cheek, perhaps, was a trifle pale, but it soon flashed as she began to talk and ask questions about his adventures in the South.

He had been prepared by his aunt for the change in her manner, but he felt it deeply all the same.

Was this the pretty, tender girl he had left behind?

She was handsomer than ever, more brilliant, more captivating, yet the change saddened him, and he felt half inclined to think that, sharp as the pain had been, he had had an escape, as he wondered how this girl, who seemed to have risen to her new position with such ease, would have stood roughing it as a poor captain's wife.

But Philip Lacy was the last man to allow his face to betray his thought.

He talked as lightly as Lady Lyzette herself, made light of the miseries he had gone through, and quite took Sir Godfrey's fancy—the knight had come in during his narrative of the campaign—by a descrip-

tion of Arab customs which he had studied during his captivity, and his accurate observations on certain ancient ruins he had seen.

'We must see more of you, Captain Lacy,' he said, as Philip rose to leave. 'You are staying with your aunt, Miss Talbot, I understand, else I should have been very happy for you to take up your abode under our roof. As it is, I hope we shall see you frequently. We shall be here for a month or more before going to London, and though the shooting is over, I dare say Lady Lyzette will find means to amuse you. By the way Laura, have we not a dinner-party or a gathering of some sort? I think, if I remember rightly, you said something to me about it the other day.'

'Both, my dear Sir Godfrey. We have a few friends dining with us on Thursday, when I hope Captain Lacy will be able to join us, and we have a dance—not a ball, you know, just a few friends—on the following Tuesday. You won't be going away before then, will you, Captain Lacy?'

'I obtained leave, and came home overland, you know,' Philip answered, 'so I have a month or more before I need rejoin.'

'Well, then you will dine with us Tuesday and come to an "At Home" on Tuesday will you not? We are going to try and get up a cotillion—Monsieur Salran is quite an adept at leading one.'

'I don't like that Frenchman,' Philip thought as he left the house. 'He reminds me of a panther, and gloss and velvet, and yet when ruffled, a creature with very sharp claws. But I suppose it is insular prejudice, and I dare say he is a very good fellow in his way.'

And then, not feeling much interest in Horace Salran, his thoughts flew back to Laura, and after questioning himself sharply as to his own feelings, he arrived at the conclusion that the wound she had inflicted was quite healed, and that though, of course he did, and always should, feel an interest in her, his love was dead.

Philip Lacy found the dinner at the Hall very dull.

He was seated near a musical celebrity, and on his other side had the wife of a county squire.

He could hear Lady Lyzette laughing and incessantly talking to those at her end of the table, but at his end near the host, the conversation languished.

Sir Godfrey, when he had time to spare from the good things on his plate, discoursed learnedly on his favorite subjects; and the squire's wife bored the young soldier with questions about Egypt.

To him the meats were tasteless, and the wine had lost its flavour.

'I suppose I must stay till after this "At Home" I am invited to,' he thought, as he walked back to his inn. 'I fancy my faint has her suspicions that I was fond of Laura before I went away, and then there is Laura herself, I should not like either of them to think that I felt sore at heart. But there is no reason I should stay on after Tuesday. I will go up to town, make a round of the theatres, and then just run down again for an hour or two, or a night, to say good bye to aunt before I rejoin. The regiment is due in a fortnight.'

He told his aunt of his resolution next day, and she raised no objection.

'It's very good of you to stay down with me so long,' she said; 'but, if you really are determined to cut your visit short, you shall escort me up to town, for I am going over to Paris for a month—my usual change. Paris just now is delightful, and always does me good.'

'If the dinner had made Philip sad, the dance made him anxious.

In his opinion, Laura allowed the young French artist, Horace Salran, to pay her too much attention.

Not only did she give him nearly every other dance, but Philip read something in the Frenchman's eyes which convinced him that, if Laura was as yet heart-whole, Salran was desperately in love with Sir Godfrey's wife.

Philip left as early as he could, and, when he sought Lady Lyzette to say good-bye, something prompted him to warn her of a danger he conceived her too innocent to understand.

'And so you are really going away tomorrow?' Laura said, as he took her hand. 'I am sorry; but we shall see you in London, shall we not? You know the address.'

'Thanks,' very much, he answered; 'but I doubt if I shall be in London after the next ten days. There will be lots of work to do in the regiment. It is not likely that I shall see you again for a long time, Lady Lyzette, and if I take the privilege of an old friend, and say a few words at parting, will you forgive me?'

Her face paled suddenly.

'It is only this,' he went on hurriedly. 'You are very young, Laura, and can know little of the evil in the world. But if you believe in me, in my great friendship for you, do not encourage that Frenchman who dined with you so many times this evening. I know that with you it means nothing, but he builds false hopes on your kindness; myself noticed it. For your own happiness, Laura be careful.'

The sudden pallor had left Lady Lyzette's face, and her cheeks were burning as she answered—

'What right have you to advise me Philip Lacy? Why did you come back here to torment me? I dare say that if I tell, yours would be the hand to cast the first stone.'

She had snatched her hand from his, and now turned away before he could answer.

Horace Salran's face was as white as paper when he went from the house, and he was meditating with matters which he told himself bitterly, were no business of his.

He little guessed what harm he had done.

Laura, who had been waiting for him, saw his face, and felt for him.

Never had she seen his face so pale, but she was utterly weary of the lie she was leading, and, above all, she longed to make

Philip feel something of the agony she was feeling herself.

'He never loved me,' she thought bitterly, even at the moment when Horace was pleading most passionately. 'Philip never loved me, but it will wound his pride to hear that I have given myself to a man as young as himself. Even his cold nature will feel the sting, and if I am wretched, he shall suffer, too.'

That night, late as it was when he went to bed, Horace Salran took out his writing case and sat down to write a letter.

'I must put it to her that I am married, of course, he murmured to himself. If she thought the lady was not my wife she would make an awful fuss. She might even throw vitriol at her rival, for I know what her temper is, worse luck; but if I say boldly that I am married she will know that she must clear out. Besides, she will comfort herself with the reflection that I have married for money, not love, and that my heart will return to her keeping sooner or later. It is a pity, too, for she was a lovely model; but after all, a la belle Laura must accustom herself to our Parisian ways and learn not to be jealous.'

So, having settled this point he began to write.

'Ma Tante Chere,—You know how full this wretched world of ours is of surprises and changes, and therefore, with that charming philosophy which is all your own you will not be overwhelmed with the news that I am married and about to bring my wife to Paris. I know you will jeer at me, I who have so often laughed at others marrying; but we have all our fate and I have met mine. What makes me desolate is that I must ask you to vacate my rooms. It is a trial to me as I am sure it will be to you, but you will not only do so but see that La Mere Godace has an appetizing little dinner for us at eight o'clock on the evening of the fourteenth, and tell Jovan to send me in some of the blue sealed wine and a bottle of brandy. You will do all this I know, for love of Horace. For the first few weeks it will be better for you not to call, afterwards you will, I hope resume your sittings. Your sensitive heart, my dear Julie, will feel, I am sure, the pain I suffer in writing this, but we must console ourselves with memories of the happy past.

'I kiss your pretty eyes and remain always your true friend,

'HORACE SALRAN'

He directed the envelope, and after taking the precaution to seal it, threw himself back in his chair.

'A good finish to a pleasant day,' he muttered. 'I know she would give way, and it is always pleasing to find one's self right. Old Sir Godfrey taking himself up to London makes things easier and altogether pleasanter. I take my departure to-morrow, or the next day, and wait in London till the morning of the fourteen, till Madame will coin some excuse of meeting her husband, and come up by the early train, which will enable us to catch the express for Paris. Nothing could be simpler or plainer, and there is not one of our set in Paris who will not envy me my good luck!'

CHAPTER VI. THE SLEEP OF DEATH.

Almost the first thing that Horace Salran had done when he found his pictures selling, and money in both pockets, was to establish himself in small but charming artist's quarters.

There were a little hall, a dining room, a small saloon furnished in yellow plush, a bed room and a kitchen; while on the floor above was his studio.

The old woman who did everything, from cooking to answering the door bell, slept out.

As the light was fading on the afternoon of the fourteenth, La Mere Godace was very busy making preparations for the reception of Horace and his English wife.

She trotted backwards and forwards from the kitchen to the dining room, and every time she passed through the saloon she threw a glance of commiseration on the figure of a girl who sat close to the hearth, with her elbows resting on her knees, her face clasped in her hands, and her eyes fixed on the glowing logs.

'Dear, dear; it's dreadful how girls take on!' thought the old woman, as she crossed the saloon for the twentieth time. 'I remember I did just the same at her age. But heaven is merciful, and as we lose our youth and good looks we gain patience, and it we lose our sweethearts, there is consolation in a pot-au-feu and a little glass of kirsch, I hope, and no one any the poorer.'

As time slipped by, however, La Mere Godace began to grow a little nervous and impatient, and at length as the clock struck six, she thought it best to arouse the girl from the stupor into which she seemed to have fallen.

'My little bird,' she said, laying her hand on the shoulder of the silent figure, 'do not you think that it would be best for you to be up and putting on your hat? It has struck six.'

The girl slowly raised her head, and the old woman was shocked to see the wild look in her dark eyes.

'Ah, little!' she said. 'You must not take on. When you come to be as old as I am, you will laugh at the men. There is not one of them worth that!'

And, she snapped her fingers in disdain of mankind in general.

The girl put her hand round La Mere Godace's neck, and kissed her withered cheek.

'You are old woman!' she said. 'I wish I were like you and then I should hope to be happy. But I am not—I feel—ah—'

Her hand on her heart, as if it were a pain, she muttered the old woman, 'the heart is the home is.'

'No, no,' exclaimed the girl, 'not for me! But you drink, ma mere—it will put you in a good temper.'

The housekeeper drank her glass of kirsch by sips.

'It warms the heart, my dear,' she said. 'You had better try a little.'

No; but you can drink my glass as well as your own, for you must be tired, and I am going to help you lay the cloth. Don't—don't be cross, for I am determined to have one look at the bride. They won't see me. I will stand behind the curtain, and when I have had a peep I will go out by the stairs which lead to the studio, and can come down the other way.'

La Mere Godace protested against this plan, but her heart being warmed by the liqueur, she at length gave way on the promise that Mademoiselle Julie would fly behind the curtain the moment the bell rang, and not stay more than a minute—only just long enough to satisfy her curiosity.

The old woman having lit the gasrotted oil into the kitchen, leaving Julia out the wine and giving the finishing touch to the decoration of the table.

The girl being left alone stood for a moment looking at herself in the oval glass above the chimney piece.

The face which the glass reflected was handsome in a certain style.

The thick dark hair grew low down on the forehead, the eyebrows were heavy and straight, whilst the long lashes shaded eyes which might well be soft and loving, but which now looked with a hard cold stare out of the mirror.

'I am handsome, and yet he has tired of me,' the girl muttered to herself. 'I wonder how long it would have taken him to tire of this new puppet. But then, she is his wife, and he is bound to her, and cannot cast her aside as he has me. Ciel, how I hate this English woman! And he! He to write me such a letter. Why he could not have turned a dog out of the house with few words. He should have known me better than to think that I could live knowing that another woman has taken my place, or could endure to die leaving him to clasp another woman to his heart. What will they all say tomorrow in the morning, I wonder?'

She drew herself up and turned from the glass, with a disdainful smile on her full, red lips.

'Let them say what they will,' she murmured. 'I shall not hear. Praise or blame will be all the same to me them!'

She walked into the dining-room, after arranging some flowers in a vase and rearranging the table, took some bottles of wine, red and white, and proceeded to uncork them.

She took some minutes over this, standing at the sideboard with her back to the door.

Once she glanced over her shoulder, as if some noise had reached her ears; but the next moment she turned again to the sideboard, and, having finished her task, placed two bottles on the table.

Hardly had she done so when the door bell rang.

All color died out of the girl's face, but she did not lose her presence of mind.

In an instant she had seized her hat, which lay on a chair, and had passed through the saloon, and seemingly forgetful of her desire to catch a glimpse of the bride, had brushed past the old housekeeper, and gained the little staircase which led to the studio.

La Mere Godace, hobbling along in her list slippers, shook her head in dispassionate contempt from men in general and the folly of girls, but her face was decked with smiles when she threw open the door and welcomed Horace Salran and his lady with a succession of curtseys.

Horace presented Laura in due form.

'My wife, Madame Godace,' he said. 'Laura, Madame Godace,' has been to me the best of housekeepers, and you will find her a really excellent cook. I hope she has excelled herself this evening, and that you will not make her unhappy by having no appetite, for La Mere Godace is quite of dying on the spot if she thought she had failed to please you on this happy evening, when I bring you to my poor home.'

They were in the dining room by now, and Laura threw her travelling cloak on to a chair.

'I am afraid I have little appetite,' she said. 'This is the dining-room, I suppose, and that is the saloon. How small the rooms are, and how hot!'

'These are little inconveniences I am afraid you must put up with, ma belle,' he answered, with a slight sneer. 'But love, my dear Laura, will change them to a bower of Paradise,' he added, stooping to kiss her.

She pushed him away.

'I am tired,' he said petulantly. 'Well, then, dear, go and get ready for dinner. The bedroom is to the left of the saloon. Don't be long, for, if you have no appetite, I feel famished.'

He drew back the curtain more fully to allow her to pass into the saloon, and then, going to the table, poured himself out a tumbler of the white wine.

'The old scoundrel!' he muttered, as he set down the empty glass. 'He has palmed off some inferior wine on me. To-morrow I will go round and make him understand my visit to England has not spoiled my palate.'

He waited, warming himself at the fire, till Laura appeared, and then rang the bell to let La Mere Godace know that they were ready for dinner.

The housekeeper had excelled herself; but Laura scarcely tasted the food, and, only when pressed by Horace, drank some wine and seltzer.

Her mood changed, however, and something of the old levity, the reckless gaiety, he had been accustomed to in her, returned.

He himself was in high spirits, and did full justice to La Mere Godace's cooking; and although he had abused the wine, he drank freely of it.

As soon as the meal was over, the old woman cleared the table placed another

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