

(CONTINUED FROM TENTH PAGE.)

bottle of wine, which stood on the side-board with its cork drawn, on it, and then, wishing monsieur and madame bon soir, took herself off for the night, saying that she should be back early the next morning if madame should wish for a cup of tea or coffee.

Horace lit a cigar, and helped himself from the fresh bottle, pouring Laura out a second glass.

'Come, dear,' he said, 'a little wine will bring back some color to your cheek, for I can see the journey has tired you. What toast shall we drink? Our unceasing love?'

'That would be tempting Fate!' Laura answered with a laugh. 'No,' she added raising the glass to her lips, 'we will drink to forgetfulness. Let us live for the present, and forget that there is a past or a future.'

'She emptied her glass as she spoke, and Horace followed her example.

'Bah!' he said. 'That bottle is worse than the others. I will have it out to-morrow with the old sinner who sold it, and make him take it back. Deuce take it, it's strong enough, though; it makes me feel sleepy.'

He aroused himself with an effort, and drank more of the wine, but gradually ceased to talk, lolling back in his chair with a vacant look in his eyes.

Laura, too, was strangely weary, and, rising from the table, felt her head swim. What could it mean?

Surely it must be more than a coincidence for Horace and herself to be similarly affected in such a manner at the same time.

She tried to shake off the feeling of stupor which was fast overcoming her.

The effort was a vain one, however. All sorts of strange thoughts began to crowd upon her, and to chase each other through her mind.

Could it be that she had been poisoned, and that Horace had already succumbed to the action of some deadly drug?

'If so, by whom had the poison been administered? And for what reason?'

Surely it was not Horace himself who had drugged the wine of which they both had partaken.

The very idea was preposterous.

There could be no advantage to himself in dooming both of them to death.

The advantage lay quite in the other direction.

He must have wanted to live for many a year to come, and to share those years with her.

What, then could be the explanation of the mystery?

Had there been a mistake—an accident? She remembered now that he had complained of the taste of the wine, and had threatened vengeance on the merchant by whom it had been provided.

Perhaps the latter had inadvertently poisoned it.

Or could he have done so deliberately, owing the artist a grudge, and resorting to such means to be revenged upon him?

The girl's mind became utterly confused at this point.

She could think no further.

She sank into a chair, and fell almost instantly into a doze.

After a few minutes her eyes opened, and it seemed to her confused senses that there was a third person in the room—a woman—who stood by the table, looking down on Horace, who lay back asleep in his chair.

She tried to speak, to move, but both tongue and limbs seemed paralyzed.

Then she saw the figure standing by the table, take what seemed a packet from her bosom, and shake its contents into a glass, which she filled up with wine.

She saw the woman drink from the glass, and then, stooping over the sleeping Horace, kiss him passionately.

This was the last thing she remembered, for her eyelids closed, and with confused idea that all was a dream, she sank into oblivion.

CHAPTER VII.

HONOUR RETRIEVED.

Philip Lacy, after passing a few days of utter boredom in London, and finding that his regiment had landed, and were to be quartered at Shorncliffe, made up his mind to rejoin at once.

However, he determined to see Laura once more, for the last time.

He told himself it was folly, worse than folly, utter weakness, and yet he could not bear to think that she had parted from him for the last time in anger.

'I will ask her pardon, he said to himself 'and we will part as friends. I shall live it down, I daresay, but I should not be happy for a moment if I thought these ill-chosen words of mine stood between us.'

As he had left part of his luggage at the Peacock, he had an excuse to return to Mont; so having made up his mind, he drove at once to the terminus.

To his surprise, he met Sir Godfrey on the platform.

The knight was unusually gracious, and as soon as they were settled in their compartment, he offered Philip a cigar.

'Yes,' he said, 'I am very glad to have you for a travelling companion. My return is quite unexpected. It was only this morning that I learnt a certain party I wished to see could not leave the Hague till next month, and, as we shall be in London by then, and I have nothing else to detain me now, I thought it best to return to the Hall at once. It will be a little surprise for Lady Lyzette, as I found hardly time to telegraph.'

Sir Godfrey and the young officer had not many subjects of interest in common; but they managed to keep up a desultory conversation till they were close to Churchford.

Then there was a shrill scream of the steam whistle, and, without any further warning, a fearful crash.

Philip was thrown violently across the carriage, and, for a moment or more, lay nearly stunned.

When, sick and dizzy, he managed to pull himself up, he found that the carriage was on its side, and that Sir Godfrey was lying huddled up in a fearfully contorted attitude, at his feet.

By an effort of strength he wrenched open the upper door, and, with assistance, managed to extricate the knight, but only to find that he was quite dead, his neck having been broken.

Dreadfully distressed as he was in thinking of Laura's bereavement, Philip felt that his first duty lay in doing what he could for others who had been injured.

Fortunately the accident happened within little more than a mile of Churchford, and assistance was soon ordained.

No sooner had he seen the body of Sir Godfrey decently cared for than Philip made all haste he could to break the news to Laura.

Arrived at the Hall, his surprise was great when he learnt that she had left for Paris that morning to pay a visit to Miss Talbot, and that Sir Godfrey was to have joined her there.

Full of disquietude—for he remembered that the knight had spoken of his wife as being at the Hall—he hesitated what to do.

If there was any mystery, telegraphing to Miss Talbot would only complicate matters, and if Laura was with his aunt—which seemed incomprehensible—she would have to make the journey back alone.

At length he determined to go himself to Paris.

The line would be cleared in a few hours and he would be able to catch the night mail.

The butler accompanied him to Churchford, to see to Sir Godfrey's body being brought home, and after a dreary wait at the station, Philip found himself again in a train speeding back to London.

He was fortunate enough to catch the night express, and, on arriving at Paris, drove at once to an hotel, where he changed his clothes and ate a hasty breakfast, after which, although it was still early, he made his way to the private hotel at which he knew his aunt always stayed.

He found Miss Talbot seated opposite a commissioner of police in a state of great excitement.

Philip listened to the commissioner's tale with mingled feelings of sadness and relief.

What he had more than half feared had happened; and yet, even at the last moment, Laura had been plucked from the hand of her would-be-destroyer.

He gathered that an old woman, who looked after the rooms of M. Horace Salran, the artist, had been horrified on entering the flat at her usual early hour, to find, as she thought, three dead bodies in the dining room, her master, a young woman named Julie Toldain, an artist's model, and his—her master's—newly-wedded wife, whom he had only brought home the evening before.

She called the police at once, and on a doctor being summoned, he found that the artist and the young woman, who had doubtless been his mistress, were dead, but that the wife lived; in fact, she had already begun to recover consciousness.

She soon recovered enough to give the address of Miss Talbot, but refused to say anything more than that she and her husband had recently arrived from London, and that she knew nothing of the woman Julie Toldain; in fact she was too ill and weak to bear much questioning, so the commissioner had left her in the hands of the doctor, and had hastened at once to interview Miss Talbot.

After a little consideration, Philip took the commissioner into his confidence, and told him all that had happened, as far as he knew it.

The police-agent supplied the missing links without difficulty.

'An old story, monsieur,' he said, 'But, as things have turned out, no one beyond yourself and madame here, who, I understood you say, is your aunt, need know the truth. The lady is in no danger, having evidently taken but little of the poison, and can be moved here in the course of the day. Her evidence can be taken in her own room, and I will see that no particulars get into the papers.'

Philip thanked him warmly, and proposed at once accompanying him back to the flat, but here his aunt interposed.

'It will be much better for me to go, Philip,' she said. 'You can leave it to me to comfort her and bring some peace to her mind. You had better telegraph to the butler, or whoever is in charge at the Hall, and say that Lady Lyzette is with me, but is too ill to undertake the journey to England, and that you will telegraph again in forty-eight hours.'

Miss Talbot's maid soon had her dressed to go out, but before accompanying the commissioner she drew her nephew on one side.

'Philip, you had better not see her; at all events, not for some time,' she said. 'It will only make her feel her position more. Give me your address, and wait in Paris a few days, in case I should want you; but, if all goes well, rejoin your regiment, and leave Lady Lyzette in my care.'

A week later Philip Lacy joined his regiment, having never seen Laura since she parted from him on the fatal night of the dance.

It was a September evening when Philip Lacy crossed the narrow meadow which lay beyond Miss Talbot's house, and vaulted over the stile in the park fence.

He remembered well that other evening, when he came there to say good-byes to Laura when he was ordered to rejoin; and now he was there again to meet her.

Once more he heard her voice between the trees, and saw her when she had done before, when she heard his footsteps, and held out her hands.

It was eighteen months since he had seen her.

Her face was thinner than it had been, but its expression was that of the young girl he had seen at Churchford.

Her eyes met his for a moment, and then

sank, and the colour flickered up into her cheek.

'I have come as you asked me in your letter, Laura,' he said, gently. 'Perhaps I wrote prematurely, perhaps I ought to have waited longer, but I did as my heart dictated. I own to you, Laura, that I fought against my love, that I tried to crush it; but months ago I found that it was rooted in my heart for ever—that, without you, I must go through life a solitary, unhappy man.'

'It is difficult to read a woman's heart, to understand a woman's motives. I make no effort to do so. I just ask you, Laura, to try and care for me enough to become my wife.'

Philip, dear Philip,' the girl answered, 'it is like you to be good and generous, and I must try to do likewise for your sake. It is like you never to have mentioned the past, but how can I forget it? I was a coward, and gave you up, loving dearly all the time. Then I went mad, I think, but that is no excuse for my sin and folly. One thing I can say truly, and that is that Horace Salran was nothing to me. I even hated him, but I could no longer go on living the life I was doing. All was Dead Sea fruit in my mouth, and as I saw you despaired me, I longed—loving you all the time dearer that life—to make you share my agony. There, Philip, you have all the truth. How can you ask a woman such as I to become your wife?'

'I ask it all the same, dear,' he answered quietly. 'I know how dreary your lonely life must have been, and I fear my own unwise words urged you to utter recklessness. Come, dear, and let us strike out together a new life for the future.'

He felt her tremble like a bird, but still she struggled to do what she thought was right for him.

'Philip, consider again,' she murmured. 'It is true God saved me, and no one, no one but you and your dear aunt knows of my folly; but supposing anything was ever said, I should die if you had to blush for your wife; and people wondered and whispered when I refused to accept my marriage settlement, and returned all the jewels Sir Godfrey had given to me.'

'My darling,' he said drawing her to his heart, 'those are idle fears. You showed me by what you did how false you had been to your own self when you married the man your mother forced upon you. You told me, here on this spot, that you had not courage to resist her all unaided, and I ought to have gone and told her formally of our engagement before I left; the first false step you see was mine so now let me make atonement. Kiss me Laura; let the past be buried between us forever, and let us from today begin a new life and if we are poor at all events we have learnt that riches do not make happiness.'

Laura's heart was very full as their lips met, and her eyes were dim with tears of happiness, but the whole world seemed changed to her as they returned to the park and across the meadow.

The grass they trod on gleamed like gold in the rays of the setting sun; the rocks cawed overhead, as in long lines they made for their nests; the air felt light and buoyant; all Nature seemed to vibrate in unison with her own heart, and in the fulness of her happiness, she looked up shyly into Philip's face and murmured—

'I always loved you, dear, even at my worst!'

'And I you, darling,' he answered. 'So may our love last!'

The Land of Cockayne.

There seems to be no particular reason why anybody should work in Naples. To loaf in the sun and to play the lottery is as much as anybody but a severe moralist can be expected to ask of himself there.

It may be true that honest labor wears a lovely face, but about Naples and the South Sea Islands one is almost justified in trying to get handsome in some easier way. Matilde Seraso's 'The Land of Cockayne' (Harper & Bros.) is a gloomy and powerful story of the ravages of lottery gambling at Naples. Perhaps the ruin seems a little too general, the retribution too evenly distributed. Outside of books Fortune doesn't always play the part of Justice. But the fever and fury of gambling, the growth of the passion until it masters its victim, the absolutely selfish and hopeless monomania which it comes to will not be told more graphically or grimly than in this book. Here are several tragedies, real, visible, without hint of melodrama. Bianca Cavalcanti, her father, the Marquis, incorrigible gambler for the good of the family; his hatred and her love for Dr. Amati; Carmela, a girl of the people and her 'mucker' lover; the miseries of her sister; middle-class prosperity and smash-up in the Fragala household; the professor who sells examination papers; the lawyer who forges; the doctor who ruins his peasant parents; the stockbroker driven to suicide; the sisters, one a money lender, one the proprietor of a lottery game; in love with honest workmen who will not marry them unless they will give up their money grubbing; the duping medium who pretends to give winning numbers mystically; his wife the witch; the masterful usually the lottery shopkeeper, who becomes the victim of the victors; the madman of the drawing—all these are terribly real. People who waste their lives in the lottery should read this novel. This is the real thing—the real realism, the naturalism. For the past few years the naturalism of the novel has been a fashion, and of late years it has been a fad. The novel of the day should read this novel. This is the real thing—the real realism, the naturalism. For the past few years the naturalism of the novel has been a fashion, and of late years it has been a fad.

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Chat of the Boudoir.

How to be cool yet stylish is the problem under consideration in the world of fashion just at the moment, for with the weather in the 80's, it is the weather that wins in the contest for supremacy as a topic of conversation.

It is impossible to thrust into the background anything which can so persistently impress itself on our physical being; so fashion may propose to the fullest extent but it is the thermometer that regulates the disposition of our clothes. An abbreviated bathing suit is the only costume which really appeals very strongly to our sensibilities. Nevertheless, the ruling passion is strong, even in torrid weather, and the fashionable woman never loses sight of the fact that she must have style, whether her gown is a simple muslin or a most elaborate creation.

If she were quite as determined about cultivating an expression to harmonize with her clothes, smiles would dominate the feminine summer, for the gowns are pretty and dainty enough to go with the most beatific of faces. It is a laudable ambition just to live up to your clothes, and it seems like scolding to look sad and dejected in a dainty mull or a gay foulard. The thinnest muslins have most seductive charm at the moment, and in the guise of the most absolute simplicity is a new model made of pale blue trimmed with rather wide bands of muslin in a paler shade. A darker tint is sometimes quite as effective but the color employed should govern the choice. Three circular flounces, giving the effect of a triple skirt, each one edged with a two inch band of the paler shade, made with a full bodice and revers shaped fichu of muslin in the paler shade. There are two ways of applying the bands, the prettier of which is by joining them to the edges with an open stitch. In the other case they are stitched on after the usual manner of using bands this season.

A pretty effect is made by alternating shaped bands of the two shades and joining them with the cross stitch to form the deep circular flounce so much used. The chic touch for this variety of muslin gown is a fancy buckle, or a hemstitched sash of black chiffon.

The printed flowered muslins are fascinating this season. They come in pretty, graceful designs and soft colorings, and they are quaintly trimmed with a little old fashioned ruff: corded at the top and edged with lace. Groups of vertical tucks with rows of lace insertion between all around the hips, and extending down almost to the knee, are the modern addition to this style of gown, while the bodice shows the gathered and corded effect in puffs, outlining a bolero and encircling the elbow sleeves. The remaining portion of the bodice is in tucks and insertion. An odd feature is the belt of green taffeta silk with black velvet ribbon in the centre crossed at intervals with medallions of ecru guipure.

The simple frock of white mull, very much on the order of the gown worn by our grandmothers in their youth has come around again for the young girls who can affect this style with becoming grace. One difference between now and then is that it is worn only by the discriminating maiden who appreciates that she possesses the peculiar artistic qualifications which lend the charm to its simplicity. The necessary accessories to this kind of dress are the leghorn hat with a wide brim, and a real baby blue sash of soft ribbon or chiffon. Many of the old-time ideas are brought out in the latest muslins and we see again the narrow ruffles from the knee to the hem. Rows of narrow satin ribbon head the ruffles above the last one; and the bodice with a lace yoke has a fichu drapery of the muslin edged with a frill.

A rather novel mode of trimming muslin

gowns is seen in the combination of two kinds of lace, for example, Valenciennes and Irish lace, the former in a medium wide insertion, outlined on each edge with a narrow insertion of Irish lace. Two bands of this trimming encircle the skirt with medallions of Valenciennes lace between. The corselet belt and and yoke are also formed by the same encircling bands. A feature of the muslin costume is the hat with a ribbon ruche around the brim. This is an old fashion revived and carries with it no end of chic if it is worn with the simple thin gown.

Appropos of simple hats there is one in a sort of sailor shape trimmed with two birds the wings wide spread and arranged so that there is one underneath and one on top of the brim hugging it close at either side. A very noticeable feature of summer dress is the simplicity of color or rather the predominating use of neutral colors in delicate shades of gray and beige besides every possible tint of white. Even the foulards are delicate in coloring and are toned down still more by the use of stitched bands of cloth or taffeta in the predominating color of the silk.

White linen bands are also used on foulard, and another fancy in the line of linen decoration on silk is the cut out design in conventionalized flowers or scrolls. Almost any combination of materials seems to be permissible as a means of extending the present craze for applique. White cloth, in bands or scrolls, on guipure lace is one very effective application. The bands being stitched on the edge and trimmed close to the stitching.

Show This to Your Husband.

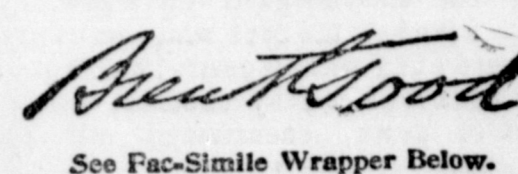
'What would you do if your wife should go out with the girls and come home at an unseemly hour of the night the same as my husband does with the wild and rollicking boys, and hang her boots on the hat rack and shove her bonnet under the lounge,' writes Abigail. That is a difficult question to answer. We should never have a wife of that kind, and if we did have we should do just the same as Abigail ought to do by her husband. We'd—Well, we'd tell her if she ever came home in that condition again we'd give her away and then we would do it. We shouldn't have any use for such a precious partner and we would not waste words upon her.

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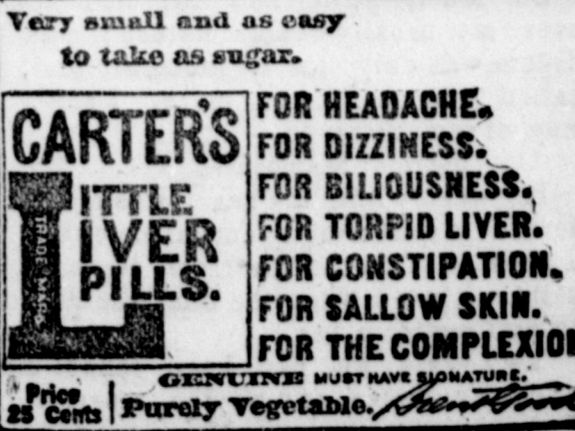
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