

RIGHTED AT LAST

BY MARY CECIL HAY

Author of "The Arundel Motto," "Nora's Love Test," "Back to the Old Home," Etc.

(Continued.)

"No, nor my place," said the little lady, emphatically. "I shall drive back as I drove here, thank you—behind Mr. Keith's splendid horses, and side by side with him. He is a clever man, and we get on admirably; now and then talking Shakespeare and the musical classes, and now and then 'cooing and billing, like Philip and Mary on a shilling.' No, I have no wish for a change."

Theodora's head was at a lofty elevation when she turned away, and her muttered "Odious!" was not confined to her own ears alone.

"Her exertions for my welfare are unselfish," observed Mrs. Payte, dryly, "and her motive inscrutable."

"Honor Craven was so bent on being driven by you, Mr. Keith," remarked Theodora, as he assisted her into her carriage, "that we other girls had no chance at all, even if we had wished it."

"Which, of course, Miss Trent, you did not."

"But of course I did," she pouted, declining to see that he wished to drop the subject; "only all girls are not so forward as Honor."

"Miss Craven," said Royden, with proud quietness, "has not even yet consented to take that vacant seat in my dog-cart—I wish she would."

No word further could Theodora say. She leaned back in her corner of the carriage, and during the drive hardly uttered a sentence, either to her mother or to Hervey; her only consolation being the thought that, in the garb destined for her, Honor Craven would present a spectacle slightly at variance with the dainty figure which she had always mildly chafed to see about the rooms where she wished to reign, but which, since she had known Royden Keith, excited every jealous and spiteful passion in her languid nature.

"There—that will be our last glimpse of Abbotsmoor for a time," said the rector, speaking to Honor with rather unusual gravity, as the dog-cart rolled smoothly under the trees of the avenue; "it is a beautiful place, and I hope the tragedy we have been recollecting to-day will be the last to throw its shadow over it."

She turned and looked up into his face, surprised.

"Of course it will be the last, Mr. Rector. What other could there be?"

"My dear," said the rector, in a thoughtful tone, which told Honor that something had vexed him that day, "there will be tragedies enacted so long as jealousy and envy are allowed to be unbridled passions. Let us do our best to keep our hearts free from them."

CHAPTER XI.

The daylight had quite faded when the picnic party reached Deergrove, and the rain had made the air so chilly that they were not sorry to see fires in the handsome, unhomey rooms.

"Of course you must change your dress, Honor," remarked Theodora, joining her in the hall. "Come up to my room."

Honor was not there long. Almost as soon as the other guests, who had been up-stairs only to wash their hands, was she down again, sipping her tea at the drawing-room fire; and, of all the involuntary laughter which her appearance provoked, her own was the most full of merriment; although she knew there was many a dress Theodora might have lent her, of which the misfit or unsuitableness would have been scarcely perceptible, while in this it was very painfully so.

"Theodora, my dear," blandly commented Mrs. Trent, levelling her glass, "how odd Honor looks in that dress."

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Theodora smiled a gentle assent, but forbore to press her advantage just then.

Still Honor, even in her questionable garb, was not to be repressed. It almost seemed that she had determined that, in defiance of the unpicturesque and unbecoming dress, she would be tonight the rival whom Theodora fancied she had annihilated; yet such an intention was in reality far from her thoughts. In her girlish light-heartedness, and in that intense power of enjoyment possessed by those who are endowed with a keen perception, alike of the beautiful and the ludicrous, Honor's merriment was real merriment, and therefore infectious. Random she might have been in her fun, but flippancy never; nor did one word of unkindness pass the laughing lips.

"I like to see young people capable of thoroughly enjoying themselves," observed Mrs. Payte to the rector, as he joined her on the couch. "Is it the remnant of an age that's past, or is it the foreshadowing of an age to come? Look at Theodora Trent, the model of this age. Why, she might have been in her present position for a hundred years, for any freshness it possesses for her."

"The age does very well," said the rector, asserting the truth good-humoredly. "Honor may look as bored and languid as Miss Trent, when she has been in society as long."

"Watch Mr. Haughton throwing straws against the wind," said the little old lady, after a pause. "He was mad with Honor just now, and when he had spoken to her he took up a book to pretend to read, and his hand shook as I only fancied a man's hand could shake in a novel. I'm glad to see that Hervey Trent looks more in his element here than he did about the rooms at Abbotsmoor."

"Probably because the carpets were up at Abbotsmoor," laughed the rector. "Trent is pre-eminently a carpet-knight."

"Pre-eminently," repeated Mrs. Payte, her shrewd eyes following Captain Hervey's slight, inert figure; "and I remember an old Spanish proverb which says a soldier had better smell of gunpowder than mush."

"Theodora, my dear," spoke Mrs. Trent, acting as prompted by her daughter, and as cleverly as long practice could make her, "can we not have a little music? Suppose you set the example."

Theodora demurred, of course; but when her mother's request had been backed anxiously by others, she took her seat at the piano with slow grace, and waited for a few seconds with folded hands, as if for an inspiration. But Miss Trent knew well what she intended to sing before her mother's request had been uttered.

After her performance, Captain Hervey acceded to the general demand for one of his songs, and went through it very creditably. Then—for neither Mr. nor Mrs. Haughton understood a note of music—Phoebe was prevailed upon to delight the audience with her two hundredth rendering of a certain reverie, whose gliding course bated a good deal under her plump little fingers, and whose dreamy train of thought was, to say the least, jerky; but it was, of course, pronounced a pretty thing—when over.

"Miss Craven, do you not sing?"

Mr. Keith, in the very middle of Theodora's coaxing demand for a song, had turned to the girl whom Miss Trent had hitherto ignored.

"I am not a good singer," said Honor, in her frank, bright way; "I have always been more fond of trying new music than of carefully practising."

"You read music very easily, then?" he asked, smiling.

"Yes—that is, easy to me; but—"

"But you will sing with me?"

"Now, Mr. Keith," pleaded Miss Trent, from the music-stool beside them, "please come; I am going to accompany you."

"Come, you," said Royden, a great deal more heartily than he would have said it two minutes before, "I am ready—and Miss Craven is going to sing, too. We will have the first duet we find."

As he spoke, he took up a copy of "Faust," and opened at an early duet between Faust and Marguerite—a duet which, perhaps, not in that operatic alone, but in all operas, unequalled in its graceful tenderness and its intense love.

The guests were silent, and some of them gathered about the piano, listening in rapt astonishment.

"One more!" cried Lady Somerson and the rector in a breath, when the last notes died away. "One more duet from the same opera."

Royden turned the leaves, and asked Honor if she would sing the one to which he pointed. She nodded brightly, and Theodora, reading the rather difficult accompaniment with moody intention, began again. There was no pathetic tenderness in this music, only the pathos of a wild and passionate despair; and when the last note had ceased, Honor felt a sudden, heavy sadness seize her.

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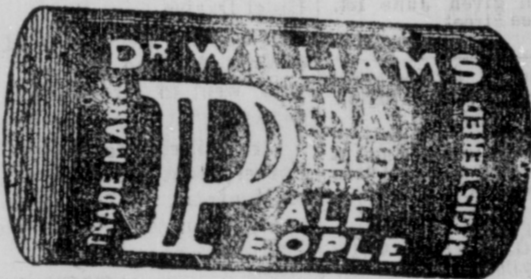
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NOT ABLE TO TURN IN BED.

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with inexplicable longing, "that we had sung that first. I wish the other had come last. That was so beautiful and happy—this is so sorrowful—so sorrowful."

Of course Theodora insisted on Mr. Keith's singing duets with her afterward, while Honor was very glad to sit part, unnoticed; and when at last Royden sang alone the exquisite tenor solo "Viva nel mio"—so much more beautiful and tender, if well sung to a piano, than it is upon the stage—she bent her head upon the book she pretended to read, and silenced Hervey, almost with a sob, when he began whispering to her. But when all the music was over, the mood left her.

"Honor"—it was some little time after this, and Mrs. Payte had caught the girl standing, gazing silently at Theodora and her mother—"what are you puzzling over?"

"I was wondering," Honor answered, without hesitation, "how I should entertain it if I were rich—at least how I should try to do it. What a silly idea it was!" added the girl, with sudden recollection.

"Very silly," acknowledged the old lady, speaking so loudly that the color mounted in Honor's face. "But, by the way, that reminds me that I have a little fortune-teller up-stairs in my satchel. Mrs. Dishbrow—poor thing! all her little vagaries are excusable—made it, and asked me to bring it to amuse you. All I want to know is, who's to believe it? You'll see how inappropriate the mottoes are sure to be. Fetch it, Honor, and let's see what it tells us. This is the sort of thing to be silly, if one should ever be."

"Oh, yes, let's have our fortunes told!" cried Phoebe, ecstatically, while Honor ran up-stairs.

"Yes, certainly our fortunes," seconded Theodora, with a little approach to

energy. "Mr. Keith, you'll have your say?"

"Remember, I do not make the mottoes, or quite understand them, or at all believe in them," said Mrs. Payte, as Honor laid the satchel in her lap. I brought the little fortune-teller because Selina said you might glean an atom of fun out of it."

The toy which the old lady took from her bag was a doll dressed gypsy-fashion, in the fold of whose many-colored and voluminous paper skirts lurked what the girls looked upon as "fortunes."

She laid the little figure on her knee, as she sat in her seat beside the fire, and made the young people wait at a respectful distance. She had in her hand a tiny gold pencil-case, which she used now and then, but always unobserved.

"Now, who comes first?" she asked. "Is it you, Miss Trent?"

"Yes. You can tell me mine first, if it is likely to be true."

"Suitable, let us say," amended the old lady, without glancing up. "You have the first choice of the numbers. There are but nine here altogether, so they will just go round."

"I choose number one," said Theodora, with her slow, conscious smile.

"Number one," repeated Mrs. Payte, very deliberately, as she pulled out a dark-blue fold of the many-colored skirts. "This is what is said on number one: 'The hearts of old gave hands, but our new heraldry is hands, not hearts.' I really do not know," continued the old lady, still without looking up, "what poet Selina has taken that from but you see how inapplicable it is don't you? Am I to read any more?"

"Oh, yes, please," cried Phoebe, while one or two of the others were silent, wondering over Theodora's choice.

"Then you choose," said Mrs. Payte,

face, "any number from two to nine."

"Seven," called Phoebe, with an excited little clasp of her hands; "seven is lucky, you know."

"Seven," echoed the fortune-teller, drawing out a pink fold. "This is what is written on seven: 'It is in woman as in soils—there is a vein of gold sometimes which the owner wots not of. That is an idea of Swift's, if I remember rightly. What do you think of it?'"

"I don't call that a fortune," said Phoebe, ruefully.

"Now," continued Mrs. Payte, smiling, as she refolded the pink paper, "Who comes next? You, Miss Haughton?"

"No, indeed."

"Yes, please, Miss Haughton," urged Royden, in his pleasant tones; "let us all take our turn."

"I think it nonsense," returned Jane, coldly; "but if I must be as foolish as all the others, I'll say nine."

"Nine—nine—I can hardly read nine," muttered the old lady bending over a yellow fold. "It is a couple of lines from Tennyson:

"Dark is the world to thee— Thyself art the reason why."

I suppose," she muttered, "it isn't to be expected that any single one will be appropriate. Now, Honor, it is your turn. Of course yours won't be suitable either. Stupid institution, isn't it? Choose your number—any one from two to eight, except seven, which is taken."

"Eight, please. What color is it, Mrs. Payte?"

She is a woman, and therefore to be won."

A bit from 'King Henry VI.' How absurd!"

"Yes—very absurd," said Honor, laughing; but she blushed a little, too, when she had met the eyes of Mr. Keith.

"What a hit!" ejaculated Captain Trent. "Give me as true a hit, Mrs. Payte. I say number three. I wonder no one has chosen number three before."

"Do you?" said Mrs. Payte, absently, drawing out a white fold of the thick glazed paper. "We will conclude—shall we?—that it has been specially reserved for you. Here it is. Listen: I am not settled yet in any staple condition; but lie wind-bound off the Cape of Good Hope, expecting some gentle gale to launch me out! That's a quotation from Howell; silly man to lie there, eh?—wind-bound off the Cape of Good Hope."

(To be continued.)

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