

## Lover and Husband.

IN TWO INSTALLMENTS—PART II.

### CHAPTER IV.

With an impatient movement, I rise to my feet and shut the window.

Did Gordon really mean what he said; does he in truth regret our marriage? No, of course he does not, when it is simply for the sake of my money that he has married me.

But how horribly lonely I feel!

It seems to me that I can almost hear the sound of my own quickly-beating heart.

One thing is very certain, though; I am not going to bed yet; and so thinking, I cross the room in quest of a book with which to while away the next hour or so.

My search is a successful one and having secured 'A Fair Adversary' I am about to return to my seat when my foot touches some soft and yielding substance, which proved to be a small roll of paper.

Naturally enough I pick it up, and I find it is that hateful telegram, which Gordon has evidently dropped, after crushing it up into a ball.

This is what it says:

'Come to me at once. To-morrow will be too late. Ask for Madame Vincente, and be sure you obey this summons.'

'Ask for Madame Vincente!' So the telegram is from a woman.

Gordon lied to me when he declared it was from his lawyer.

Who is this 'Madame Vincente' who has such a hold upon my husband that he has obeyed her 'summons,' even upon our wedding day?

Oh, the shame—the bitter shame of it! How glad am I that I did not yield to his pleading, and how I long to take a deep and full revenge upon him for his duplicity; but what can I do?

During the weary hours of the night this thought is constantly haunting my brain, but at last I answer it, I will leave Gordon.

Yes; as he has chosen to desert me upon the very evening of our wedding day for another woman, I will leave him, and I shall be quite justified in doing it.

But where shall I go?

I am still meditating over this question when the chambermaid knocks at my door with the information that 'breakfast is ready, my lady.'

When I enter the breakfast room I see a newspaper lying beside my plate, and, almost mechanically, I unfold it, and begin scanning its contents.

Upon the front page is a whole column 'Apartments to Let' advertisements, and, with quickened interest, I read down the list.

Suppose I go to Cardingham, which appears to be a small fishing port, rejoicing in an hotel called the 'Princess Royal'?

Ringling for the hotel manager, I explain to him, with perfect calmness, that, as Sir Gordon has been unexpectedly called up to town, I shall continue our proposed 'tour along the coast' alone. I shall leave for Eastbourne by the 10.20 train, taking only one of my trunks with me; the rest my husband will claim when he returns to Dover, as he will be obliged to do ere joining me at Eastbourne.

With a courteous bow I then dismiss the man, and, picking up my husband's Bradshaw, I look out the most direct route from Dover to Cardingham, making a copy of it upon a half sheet of paper.

And then a fresh idea occurs to me. I ought, for appearance sake, to leave a letter for my husband. Well, I will do so.

With a mocking smile I cross to the writing-table, seize a loose sheet of paper, thrust it into an envelope, fasten the latter down, and address it to 'Sir Gordon Alverstone.'

What will he think when he opens it and draws out its blank contents?

The bogus letter completes my arrangements, which, I flatter myself, do me great credit.

A few minutes later I am calmly walking up and down the departure platform of the Dover railway station, waiting for the train which is to bear me away from this hateful place.

When it comes in, a few words and a liberal 'tip' to the guard secure me a compartment to myself, and taking off my hat, I lean my head back against the padded cushions, and endeavour to go to sleep.

But the drowsy got proves coy, and again my thoughts revert to the events of the past twenty-four hours.

Twenty hours ago, I was standing in my bridal robes in Yerbury church, having just promised to 'love, honour, and obey' the very man from whom I am now flying as fast as steam can carry me.

But no, it is not from him I am flying; it is from his cruelty and selfishness.

The journey from Dover to Cardingham is a long one, but at last I reach my destination, and making my way to a staid-looking porter, I ask him if he can direct me to the Princess Royal, whereupon he slouches out of the station, and turns down a short, narrow lane, which brings us into what is evidently the principal street of the place.

With spirits which grow every instant more and more depressed, I follow my guide, until at the bottom of the street, he pauses before the open door of a glaringly new house which stands by itself.

It is clearly the Princess Royal, and with an air of pride, the porter ushers me through its open portals into a smoke-scented bar-parlour, whose only occupant

is a mournful looking man reading a week-old newspaper.

To him the porter mutters a few words, but his explanations are abruptly terminated by the appearance upon the scene of a stout red-cheeked woman, and to her, with a sigh of relief I turn.

She proves to be the landlady while the mournful looking man is her husband and with many a 'wretched family' she takes me up stairs into her 'drawing room sweet.'

With scarcely a glance around me, I engage the rooms for a fortnight.

Having commissioned Mrs. Boggs to have my luggage brought from the station I divest myself of my hat and jacket, and then seat myself in the easiest chair I can find, beside one of the open windows of the sitting room.

Soon my meditations are interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Boggs with my tea, to which I do but scant justice.

'I fear me miss, that you've got a headache,' Mrs. Boggs remarks sympathetically.

'Yes, I have,' I answer. 'But a good night's rest will make me all right again, I've no doubt.'

'Which it is hoping it will, miss, I'm sure,' with a benignant glance.

But it is far into the small hours of the morning ere sleep visits my weary eyelids; so that the voluble exclamations concerning my generally disconsolate appearance which fall from the lips of the landlady, when she brings me my breakfast, are not altogether uncalled for.

It is a fine, clear morning, yet I cannot muster up sufficient energy to take a walk, but remain apathetically in the house until the sun is low in the west, when, with a sudden effort, I do slip on my hat for a stroll along the cliffs.

But even now I only go beyond the sharp bend in the sandy road which hides the hideous Princess Royal from my sight.

Then seating myself upon a piece of rock, I fall to watching the foam-crested, incoming tide.

Not a particularly enlivening performance, perhaps, but it suits me in my present state of mind; and it is not until the dancing waves are almost up to the base of the lofty cliffs, that I turn my steps homewards.

To my great satisfaction, nobody is visible when I reach the hotel; and quietly making my way upstairs, open the door of my sitting-room, enter, and am about to close the door behind me, when, with a low inarticulate cry, I recoil against the wall, for, standing beside the table in the centre of the apartment is—Gordon!

It is not the first time that I have seen him look angry, but I never seen him look as he does now.

I am not a coward yet I freely confess that my spirit shrinks from the glance he bends upon me and it is only out of sheer desperation that I manage to find my voice.

'Why don't you speak to me?' I demand.

And now he does so.

'Well may you cower beneath my glance,' he says slowly; and the icy coldness in his voice makes me shiver. 'Let me tell you this: you have more cause for fear than you are aware of. Do you think I am the sort of man to lightly condone such an offence as you have committed? If you do the sooner you disabuse your mind of the notion the better. How dared you do it? How dared you do it? How dared you do it? Answer me! How comes it that you, my wife, are here?'

'You—You shouldn't have left me,' I retorted locking my fingers tightly together in a desperate effort to regain some of my lost courage. 'It was outrageous, shameful of you! What do you suppose people would say if they knew that you had—'

With a sharp breath, I pause.

Shall I end my sentence thus: 'That you have already deserted me for another woman?'

No; I will keep this bitter truth to myself for the present at any rate; so, in a quivering voice I continue—

'That you deserted me on the very evening of our marriage? They would say you are a cruel, selfish tyrant, and that I was perfectly justified in leaving you. You make me wish myself dead, and I will run away again directly.'

'Indeed you won't,' he interrupts fiercely. 'I will take good care of that my lady. Tomorrow instead of going abroad with you, I shall take you down to Alverstone; that will be your punishment for this escape. I would have continued your lover if you would have allowed me to; but as you have chosen to set me at defiance, I will be your master instead.'

'You shall not!' I cry incoherently. 'You may kill me, but you shall never break my spirit.'

'Really,' he returns, with a short, sarcastic laugh. 'How heroic you are; quite ready to become a martyr, in fact. By-the-by, before I forget, there is a question I would like to ask. What induced you to seek refuge in such a world-forgotten spot as this?'

'For the very reason that it seemed to be "world-forgotten"!' I retort passionately. 'I hoped to be free from you here, and how you have been able to discover me so quickly I don't know, for—'

'I will enlighten you. It is entirely owing to your own carelessness. Do you recognize this?' He holds toward me the identical piece of paper upon which I copied out of his Bradshaw the railway route between Dover and Cardingham,

and which I could have been certain I had torn up.

'Where did you find it?' I ask, as soon as I can speak for the chagrin which is consuming me. 'I am sure I had no intention of leaving it for you to see.'

'I am quite aware of that; but, nevertheless, you very kindly enclosed it in that envelope you left behind for my delectation. Yes; you may look disgusted. It is annoying to find that you have checked yourself, isn't it?'

I do not answer—only turn swiftly towards the door; but, catching me by the arm, he compels me to remain where I am.

'Let me go!' I exclaim, my temper rising to a sort of white heat.

'I cannot think of doing so—calmly. 'But you shall!' striving with all my strength to wrest myself out of his grasp. 'If you don't, I will do something desperate; I—I will appeal to Mrs. Boggs.'

'Oh, no, you won't because I shall not allow you to do it. You shall not hold me, you only do it because you know I hate to be touched by you.'

'When we parted, the day before yesterday, you refused to say good-bye to me, and I was not going to give in to you; but I am not going to make the same mistake again. I shall hold you just as long as I choose to. Besides, with a glance which sends a hot blood to my face in a crimson tide—"you don't really want me to set you free. In your inmost heart of hearts, you don't hate me nearly so much as you profess to do."

With angry eyes I turn and face him.

'You think I do not hate you?' I say slowly and deliberately; 'that I am merely pretending when I say I do? I suppose you consider you are too fascinating for any girl to be able to resist you; but, for once in your life, you are mistaken. You are no more to me than is the poorest beggar in the streets—nay, not so much, for I would help him to the best of my ability; but I would not lift a finger to assist you, though you were dying.'

With a defiant gesture I throw back my head and look up at him.

But the glance I encounter is not good to see, and I can feel that the hand which is still resting on my arm is quivering with the storm of black fury which is raging within his breast.

'Good heavens!' he says between his teeth at last, in a voice which is hoarse with passion. 'How dare you try me like this? You will do it once too often, and then—Heaven help us both!'

With sternly knitted brows and heaving chest, he stands regarding me.

'What will he do next?'

I do not dare to make the least movement, lest, by doing so, I should break down the last frail barrier which holds his mad fury in check.

And then again he speaks.

'You have given me to understand pretty freely what your sentiments are,' he says slowly, speaking with a calmness which astonishes me not a little; it is so belied by his looks. 'Whether I believe them to be your true sentiments or not is beside the question. You have uttered them, and, as surely as you have not spared me one taunt which you could possibly fling in my face, so surely will I not spare you. And now you may go.'

And without a word I move away.

### CHAPTER V.

November has come, and Gordon and I have been just two months at home.

A dear old home it is, too, and I would not willingly exchange it for any other.

Gordon and I have not had any more serious differences, so I begin to hope that he has at last seen the folly of attempting to coerce me.

During the past month we have had a great many visitors, but the person whose acquaintance I most desire to make is still a stranger to me.

She is a Mrs. Delmaine, who lives at the Dover House—she has been its tenant for about four months—and of whose beauty and kindness to the poor I have heard so much that I quite long to know her.

It is of the beautiful widow I am thinking on this particular day, as I lazily doze a hot and jacket preparatory to taking my usual afternoon 'constitutional.'

But, all at once, I remember that there is a certain letter I ought to write before going out. So, without waiting to finish dressing, I hurry away to my own little 'den.'

In my usual impulsive fashion I enter the room, but quickly pause in surprise, for seated in front of the fire is my husband.

What in the world is he doing here?

With astonishment clearly depicted upon every line of my countenance, I close the door.

'I thought you were out riding,' he remarks with a languid glance up at me.

'No; I changed my mind,' is my answer. 'I have been half asleep in the conservatory since luncheon; but I am going for a walk now, as soon as I have written to Lady Cumming, accepting her invitation for the twentieth.'

'Isn't it rather late to go out?'

'Oh, no! It is only four o'clock.'

'Well, don't go too far; and take Lion with you.'

With a nod, I seat myself at the writing table, and forthwith proceed to pen my note to Lady Cumming, and then, crossing to the fire place, I am about to ring for a servant to take my letter to the post, when Gordon catches one of my hands in his, and pulls me down upon the arm of his chair.

Get over your surprise yet?' he asks.

'My surprise at what?' I demand, feigning not to understand him.

'At finding me here,' with an amused smile. 'Now, aren't you just dying with curiosity to know what brought me into your sanctum sanctorum?'

'Oh, excuse me! What was it?'

'A stamp?'

'A stamp? I echo.

'Yes; my own supply having run short,

I came to see if I could find one here, which I did; and by-the-by, my letter may as well go with yours,' and pulling it out of his pocket, he tosses it upon the table beside mine.

The address side falls upwards.

And to whom is it addressed?

To 'Madame Vincente, 16, Crossway Road, Hyde Park, W.'

In a crimson tide the hot blood rushes to my face; passionate scathing words rise to my lips, but, with a mighty effort, I choke them back, and casting one contemptuous glance at my husband, which, unfortunately, he does not see, as he is staring into the fire, I walk from the room, and from the house.

Ask him who 'Madame Vincente' is?

No; I will die first! The creature's name shall never pass my lips, let happen what will.

In a very agony of passion and shame I walk along, angry with myself for being angry, angry because I have not acquainted Gordon with the fact that I am aware of the shameful duplicity he is trying to practise upon me, and cannot make up my mind to leave him for ever.

If his relations with 'Madame Vincente' are honorable, why has he never mentioned her name to me?

And then, that telegram he received from her on our wedding day, calling him up to town.

Would an ordinary friend or acquaintance have sent such a telegram?

Under the circumstances, would any ordinary friend have obeyed it?

No; and a feeling of intolerable bitterness sweeps over me as I tell myself that the relations between 'Madame Vincente' and my husband must be extraordinary ones for him to obey her requests as he does.

By this time I have turned out of the park and have gone some distance along the highway in the direction of Denemister, our nearest town, and, as the afternoon is beginning to close in, I come to the conclusion that I ought to be retracing my steps.

At this point in my reflections, I reach a stile, which, if I climb it, will lead me into a short cut for home.

Shall I take the short cut?

Yes; I think I will, and forthwith I turn into it.

But I soon wish that I had kept to the road, for all at once I remember that the short cut will lead me through the Oak Plantation, a sufficiently dreary spot in broad daylight, so you can imagine what it is like when the evening shadows are beginning to fall.

However, I am not going to turn back; so, with a fine air of indifference and valor I unlatch the gate leading into the plantation and proceed onwards.

Hark! what is that?

I can distinctly hear approaching footsteps, and, without giving myself time to think, I dart behind a neighboring holly-bush.

I have a mortal horror of tramps, and I most sincerely wish I were at home.

Nearer and nearer the footsteps come, and then the sound of voices breaks upon the evening air.

There are two, one a man's, the other a woman's, and

Is it possible the man is Gordon?

I tell myself all this; yet in another moment all my elaborate theories are knocked on the head, for the man is Gordon.

But who is his companion?

I have never seen her before, and, for some indefinable reason, I shrink still closer behind the holly-bush.

Slowly they pass my hiding place; then the woman comes to a halt, of course compelling Gordon to do the same.

'You really shall not accompany me any further, mon ami,' she says in a voice of silvery sweetness. 'I shall be at home in ten minutes now, and I shan't be sorry to rest either, for my journey has tired me.'

'Which train did you come by?' Gordon asks.

'By the one reaching Denemister at two o'clock. I got home at a quarter to three, had lunch, despatched a note to you telling you of my return a day sooner than you expected me, and bidding you meet me in the Oak Plantation at five o'clock, and—well, the rest you know.'

'If your note had only reached me an hour earlier, madame, you would have written to me and sent the letter to the post when I got your note.'

The woman's answer I do not hear.

Can this beautiful creature be Madame Vincente?

I ask myself this question miserably, angrily, jealously.

Gordon has addressed her as 'madame,' he has just said that he has written to her this afternoon, and with no other woman would he be likely to keep a secret appointment.

Yes, she must be Madame Vincente, yet she has just said that she will be at home in another ten minutes.

'Oh what are you thinking, mon cher Gordon?' she asks at this juncture, with a low amused laugh. 'Come, tell me your thoughts, that you are so ungallant, so distrustful.'

'I was thinking, madame, that you are an angel,' Gordon answers quickly.

'Thanks, many, mon ami; you always were an adept at making pretty speeches,' madame says lightly. 'But what would the little wife say if she heard you? And that reminds me of something else. Was she very much annoyed at your leaving her upon the very evening of your wedding-day?'

'She wasn't pleased,' is Gordon's answer.

'She naturally wouldn't be. Poor little thing! I feel very, very sorry for her, and if I could have spared you the telegram, I would have done so. But I could not, and

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I was so glad—so thankful—when you obeyed it. I almost feared you would not under the circumstances.

'I never hesitated for an instant—there was too much at stake for me to do that.'

For a moment there is silence between them, a silence which the woman is the first to break.

'I wish I could have made your wife's acquaintance, she says in a thoughtful tone. 'But perhaps it is best that I should not; and now mon ami, I must be going, so wish me good bye.'

'Nay, not good-bye,' Gordon interposes quickly. 'I shall see you again.'

'Not unless you come over to Vienna. As you know, I have given up the Dover House.' (So this strange woman is Mrs. Delmaine. What then has she in common with Gordon? What is the secret which they evidently share, and who is Madame Vincente?) My mission down here is accomplished, and as soon as I have packed my personal belongings, I join my father at Vienna, which is to be our head centre for the future.'

'Tell me, madame,' Gordon says earnestly, 'are you content to go? Forgive the question, but you have been so good to me that—'

'Pooh, pooh, mon ami!' she interposes. 'What I have done for you is a mere bagatelle. I merely exerted what little influence I possess to obtain you your freedom, which you must remember you have had to pay for pretty heavily. As to my being content with my lot, I confess to you that I am not.'

'Then why—'

'I know what you would say,' she interposes again. 'But I cannot follow my own inclinations, which would prompt me to leave the world and seek within a cloister that peace which has of late years been denied me. While Stanislaus Rudnice is alive, his daughter, Vincente Delmaine! Almost I cry the name aloud.'

Two things at least are made clear to me at this moment; the beautiful woman before me is both 'Madame Vincente' and 'Mrs. Delmaine,' while, let the secret which binds her to Gordon be what it may, it is not what I have feared and suspected: it is no love secret.

Perhaps in the whole course of my life, I have never felt so deeply ashamed of myself as I do now, for I have bitterly wronged my husband.

At this point Mrs. Delmaine's voice once again comes to my ears.

'Tell your wife all, mon ami; she is saying in a most earnest tone. 'Now that you are freed to mould your life after your own desires, have no secrets from her. Tell her all, and then forget the past; let it be to you as though it had never been. And now, good-bye.'

'Shall we never meet again?' Gordon asks, in a strangely moved voice.

'It is probable, but there may come a day when I shall be able to claim your friendship.'

'Which will always be yours.'

'I am sure of it, and I thank you.'

From my hiding place, I see—without without any feeling of jealousy—my husband raise Mrs. Delmaine's hand to his lips; then, without another word, they separate, she going in one direction, he in another.

For perhaps five minutes longer I remain where I am; then I, too, leave the Oak Plantation, where so much has been revealed to me, with feelings which can be better imagined than described.

### CHAPTER VI.

'Gordon.'

'Yes.'

'I have had a letter from Aunt Kate this morning; she wants me to pay her a visit.'

'A very natural wish on her part.'

'I think I must accept her invitation this time. You see, I declined the one she sent me at Christmas, and she might feel hurt if I refused her again.'

'Certainly, she might,' Gordon agrees with the utmost readiness.

'Then you haven't any objection to my going?'

'None whatever.'