

**IN BONDS: A
NOVEL**

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In bonds: a novel by Laura Preston

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LAURA PRESTON

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NOVEL**

IN BONDS.

A NOVEL.

BY

LAURA PRESTON.

"WITH CAUTION JUDGE OF PROBABILITY;
THINGS THOUGHT UNLIKELY, E'EN IMPOSSIBLE,
EXPERIENCE OFTEN SHOWS US TO BE TRUE."
Shakespeare.



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TO WALTER WILLIAM PALMER, ESQ.,

OF SAN FRANCISCO,

This Volume is Affectionately Dedicated.

SAN FRANCISCO,
April, 1867.

IN BONDS.

CHAPTER I.

"In Love, if Love be Love, if Love be ours,
Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers;
Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all."

"Trust me not at all or all in all."

Temple's "Virgins."

THE tide was coming in. Gently the swelling waves kissed the pebbly strand, as they yielded unto it their offerings of strangely-fashioned shells and clinging weeds. Gleaming in the last rays of the setting sun, they rolled murmuringly almost to the feet of a young girl who stood pensively watching their ebb and flow.

The scene was exceedingly wild and picturesque, and of it the fair wanderer formed a striking feature as she stood facing the ocean framed by gray, barren cliffs which rose abruptly upon each hand. Standing thus with the shadows of evening stealthily gathering over her face and enwrapping her form, and all surrounding it, she might have been fancied the very Genius of Solitude. She was of medium height, though she looked much taller as she stood, with her crimson shawl wrapped closely around her slender figure, gazing intently far over the waters. She was very pale—not purely white—but of that rich olive tint which dis-

tinguishes beauties of the far South. Even her cheeks were unflushed by a tint of rose, yet were redeemed from sallowness by a glow of warmth which was diffused over her countenance, as if a sunbeam were prisoned there. Her hair was of purplish blackness, shining and wavy, brushed plainly back from the somewhat low forehead, and gathered in a large knot at the back of her well-formed head. A bow of crimson ribbon enhanced its blackness, and gave a tint of color to the cheek near which it floated. A shadow of deep thought—a faint trace of melancholy—seemed to settle upon her as she thus stood motionless, her full red lips compressed, and her white hands tightly clasped, as if in a mighty effort to restrain the impatience of her soul.

At last she started, and a smile of joy banished all gloom from her face as she heard the faint sound of a human voice break upon the stillness. Turning quickly she eagerly looked, first to the narrow, level beach on her left, and then up among the cliffs, upon a narrow path by which also the cove might be gained. On the summit of the highest cliff stood a young man, who waved his hand in token of recognition, and then began the descent of the precipitous path. The

way was rugged and called into action all his agility and strength of muscle. His figure was tall and slender, but seemingly not fitted to endure much fatigue. His face was handsome, delicate in its outlines, and expressive of more pride than strength of character, its greatest charm resting in the gentle expression of the lips, the proud curves and lines of which seemed ever on the point of yielding to the joyous smile that betokens a benevolent soul. High-minded and good-natured, those who knew him best described Harold DeGrey to be. His was a character that needed no disguises, and affected none.

The young girl contemplated his descent with a smile of pleasure upon her lips, and sprang joyfully forward as he gained the flat beach and stood before her.

"La Guerita, I am most happy to find you here!" he exclaimed, clasping his arms around her and pressing a kiss upon her lips, smiling rapturously as she glanced at him shyly through her long curling lashes.

"My love," he continued, exultantly, "you know I promised you good news if you would meet me here, and did I ever deceive you, La Guerita?"

"O no, Harold!" she spoke eagerly; yet she trembled and her lips grew pale.

"And I will not now, my own! I have, indeed, good news for you; or at least I shall be the most miserable of men if you do not find it so. I have seen Professor Harland. All is satisfactory. He consents to our union, and nothing now remains to serve as a barrier to our felicity."

"But, Harold, what did the Pro-

fessor say?" she spoke anxiously, as if scarcely satisfied with the manner in which her lover had spoken.

He instantly became grave, as he replied: "He said enough, my love, to allay all my—— your scruples. Mine your sweet face had long ago allayed."

"Did he tell you——?" she began eagerly.

"He told me very little, dearest, but what we knew before," interrupted DeGrey; "and although, my love, it is indeed a pleasure to me to be confirmed in my ideas of the respectability of your birth, you will not, I am sure, believe that my affection for you could have been lessened even if your own foolish fears had been proven true."

She smiled a reply, and a little doubtfully, he thought, and coloring redly, he exclaimed: "Ah, La Guerita, you think it has not long been so, but I believe it has been the case for a much longer period than I am myself aware of."

"I am happy to believe it," she said unaffectedly, "but I would not have you blind to your own feelings or interests, Harold, or be so myself. I know that you are proud, and the mystery surrounding my birth must be a sore trial to you."

He did not speak, but the expression of his face showed that she was right. She stood at his side uneasily for a moment, then turning toward him with a quick, impatient gesture, asked, "What did Professor Harland say?"

"Enough to satisfy me!" returned DeGrey, ingenuously owning that his pride had long striven with his love, even as her own had done,

but not so generously. "In the first place, La Guerita, he told me, as you know already, that Fabean and yourself were left in his care when mere infants by an elderly quakeress, and a gentleman of prepossessing and distinguished appearance. Professor Harland was at that time very poor, and in consideration of the princely sum offered him, readily consented to receive the two into his family, asking no questions, and receiving no information concerning them, save what the quakeress dropped in the few words, "God bless thee, for thou art saving two innocent babes a world of trouble. Thou hast a kind face; they will be safe with thee."

"I never heard of this quakeress before," cried La Guerita in amazement, "and her connection with me appears to destroy the theory that I am of foreign birth!"

"Not at all!" replied DeGrey, "for the Professor assures me that the gentleman spoke no English, and therefore he conversed with him only in Spanish. His knowledge of the language at that time was quite limited, yet he has now every reason to suppose that his conjecture as to the nativity of the stranger was correct. He believes, too, La Guerita, that Fabean and yourself are the offspring of a noble family—the liberal allowance yearly forwarded to you through Town & Forest, declares that you are supplied by no niggardly hand, while the noble bearing of both your brother and yourself, satisfies me that the proudest of the land might deem your alliance an honor."

The young girl had withdrawn from her lover's encircling arm, and looked at him as if to read his inmost

soul, saying slowly, "Harold, have you no doubts? Are you indeed satisfied that I am worthy in all respects to be your wife?"

"More than worthy! Yes, more than worthy!" he cried excitedly, "I must have been mad to doubt it so long. None other ever questioned the purity of your origin; I would have stricken them to the earth had they dared to do so. The closest observers say there is about you an air of pride and conscious worth that low born people could never assume."

She smiled drearily, saying in a low voice, "I have such strange thoughts sometimes Harold. Occasionally in such hours as that preceding your coming, oftener still when I wake from a troublous dream; I so often wonder in what direction, over this waste of waters I must sail to reach my home, and those whom my birth should have made my friends."

"That is not after all a puzzling question," returned Harold DeGrey, "your very name is indicative of the place of your birth, 'La Guerita De-Cuba—the Fair Maid of Cuba.' Can you doubt that beneath the orange boughs of that sunny isle your eyes first saw the light?"

"Fabean believes that to be the case," said the young girl, musingly; adding after a few moments thought, "I myself have no cause to doubt it. I often wonder, Harold, that my brother thinks so lightly of our strange position; it does not seem to trouble him in the least, and indeed I thought but little of it myself until——"

"I troubled you with foolish questions," interrupted DeGrey. "My La Guerita," he continued, excitedly,

"I was ungenerous—ay, unmanly—I thank God my great love for you has made me strong! You know I was born and bred an aristocrat; by my high-born English mother—my peerless mother—I was taught from infancy to hold a stainless name of infinitely more value than all other possessions, and I do so still; the belief that was born with me will never die. But that your descent is as spotless as my own, thank God, I firmly believe."

"Else you would not be here!" she said disdainfully.

"Else, La Guerita, I had never loved you," he returned, gently. "Think you my heart would have sprung forth to claim as its mate one whose pulses throbbed with churlish blood. No, my very love is surety to me of your purity. Come to me, love! Come to me."

She sank into his arms, yielding to the love, that stronger than pride or duty, refused to aid her in condemning one who each moment uttered words that filled her soul with dread. "I am very weak," she sobbed; "I cannot say—'leave me ere it is too late;' yet I would rather that you should break my heart now, than live to know one pang of shame for me!"

"Leave you, La Guerita! Never!" exclaimed DeGrey passionately, aroused by his surprise from his usual calmness. "Have I not told you that I am convinced that some dark cloud envelopes, but stains not, a name as fair, and perhaps more noble than my own. Victor is assured of it, and even my mother; they long to embrace you. La Guerita, I love you; happen what may, I cannot leave you; never speak of it again.

Have you not said that you love me?"

"I do! I do!" she returned, quickly and fervently. "That is why I tremble to look into the future. I would rather die than bring sorrow upon you. Ah, Harold! I have grown to be a strange coward of late."

"And needlessly, too, I am sure!" said DeGrey, caressingly, and soothing her fondly. Professor Harland showed me to-day the last letter he received concerning you. It was, as usual, written in Spanish, and signed "DeCuba." It contained instructions to the Professor, in case you should desire to marry. "The suitor must be of good family and spotless reputation," was explicitly said; and does not that alone clearly prove that you can lay claim to the same?"

She shook her head.

"Well! well!" he exclaimed, impatiently, yet fondly; "I cannot leave you, La Guerita. I am willing, for your sweet sake, to cast aside my usual caution, and take one leap in the dark. All the world will be light with you near me."

She received his caresses as if spell-bound; she could not speak the words that hung heavily on her lips. The silence had become almost terrible to her, fraught, as it was, with so much of love and pain; when it was broken by a clear voice shouting forth a merry boating song.

"Ah! it is Fabcan!" they simultaneously exclaimed; "and in good time, too. He has remembered what we had forgotten—that the tide rises high enough here to cut off all means of retreat by the shore. Had he not come we should have had to scale

these cliffs to reach Fairview to-night."

"Ah! Fabean is always thoughtful!" exclaimed La Guerita, gazing fondly and admiringly upon a young man who, with long and steady strokes, was guiding a small boat towards them.

"Make ready, there, to come aboard!" he shouted as he neared the shore, and looked laughingly upon his sister and her lover. "Pretty folks you are," to make a tryst at such a place; you may thank your stars that I guessed something of it."

"I am inclined to think you a Yankee after all," said DeGrey, with a laugh, as the young man rested on his oars. "You are a veritable Jonathan for guessing, and there is nothing Spanish in your face, I am sure."

There was not, indeed. His countenance was of the purest Saxon type; his complexion remarkably clear and fair; his hair light-brown, and his eyes darkly blue. Both in face and figure he formed a striking contrast to his sister.

They sometimes deplored the difference, for they loved each other so deeply; they fain would have resembled each other, if only in person; for their dispositions were hopelessly at variance. La Guerita was often sad; while nothing ever clouded Fabean's brow. She delighted in intellectual pursuits; while he, at eighteen, still loved the sports of boyhood, and laughed all serious thoughts to scorn.

On that sunny afternoon his spirits were most exuberant, and 'ere they had long been seated in his boat, he had infected DeGrey with his mirth-

ful humor. But La Guerita spoke and smiled but little; she seemed lost in thought. Her lover often attempted to laugh away the gloom that had settled upon her, and her brother laughingly rallied her upon her silence. At another time his jests would have aroused her from the deepest abstraction; but then they were powerless, and insensibly each became affected by her dejection, and fell into thought.

So many minutes passed; when suddenly La Guerita seemed oblivious of the presence of any one save her lover. She turned towards him abruptly, glancing at him with a troubled expression in her lustrous eyes, saying,

"I am doing very wrong. I know it; I know it."

"How is that possible?" exclaimed DeGrey.

"I feel that I am tempting Providence," she returned, in a low, thrilling voice. "I feel that I am tempting God to bring some great calamity upon me by consenting to marry you while this darkness is upon me."

"La Guerita!" rejoined her lover, somewhat sadly; "I have often noticed that God is to you a terrible and merciless Being—never the Christ who, in His tender mercy, came from heaven to save sinners."

She bowed her head, feeling keenly how clearly he had read her inmost soul.

They had reached a small dock, at the foot of an extensive lawn, and were about to land. La Guerita DeCuba arose and silently gave her hand to DeGrey, and it was not until they were alone on the lawn that she ventured to speak to him.