

UNDER A SHADOW.

Continued.

'What does that significant tone mean? It cannot possibly be that you do not like the most admired of women, the most envied of men, Lord Cardyne?'

The beautiful face changed, the red lips quivered and grew pale. Looking at her, Lord Carlyton was struck by it; it was so seldom that that imperial face changed for any one. He thought to himself that perhaps Lord Cardyne had annoyed her by over-admiration.

'You do not like the earl, Asalita. I can see it by your face. Now tell me why?'

'I am not sure that I could tell you, she replied. 'You are right in thinking that I do not like him—not much, you know.'

Lord Carlyton laughed.

'Then I am sorry for him—I am sorry for any one whom you do not like, Asalita. Do not invite them, then.'

'It would seem so strange, Basil, if I refused. Lady Cardyne loves me so much, I must ask them.'

'I am curious to understand why you do not like her husband. Most ladies find him charming, irresistible.'

'I am not most ladies,' she said.

'No, but you admire beauty in every shape. I cannot imagine a more perfect specimen of manly beauty than Lord Cardyne.'

His wife raised her jeweled hand and touched his face with it.

'I see a thousand times more beauty in this good face of yours than in his,' she said; and he clasped her in his arms, while he kissed her over and over again—he was so happy, so light of heart.

'You will make me so vain that I shall positively begin to think I am handsome,' he said, laughing. 'Then this lady-killer has no charm for you, my wife?'

'None in the world,' she said. 'I must ask them; but Basil, you are very clever in managing matters—will you entertain him while I amuse and entertain Lady Cardyne?'

'I will,' he said; but more than once that day Lord Carlyton wondered why it was that his wife did not like the handsomest man in England; afterward he remembered every word of their conversation.

The expected guests arrived, and Lady Cardyne was entranced with delight at seeing Alison.

'How beautiful all this is! she said; 'better than London. You have no fogs, no mist; you have the pine woods and the sea; the warm sun and the sweet flowers. It is like Italy.'

She was happy in this beautiful southern home; but that same evening Lady Carlyton said to her husband:

'I am quite vexed and angry, Basil. It is quite annoying for me to be in the same room with Lord Cardyne.'

'Why, my darling?' he asked, with an amused expression of face.

Because he looks at me so intently. I might be an Egyptian sphinx, from the way in which he studies me. It makes me uncomfortable.'

'It need not do that, Asalita,' he said. 'But it does. I saw his wife look at him. She spoke to him three or four times, and he did not even hear her.'

'Because he was looking at you?' interrupted her husband.

'Yes; it is absurd,' said Lady Carlyton. 'I do not like it—it makes me angry.'

'Shall I tell him so, Asalita?'

'No, I will take care not to give him the chance again,' she replied.

A few days afterward Lord Carlyton found himself able to remark the peculiarity. They were smoking some choice cigars—the two gentlemen—and the ladies formed a picturesque group on the lawn.

'Why do you look at my wife so intently?' asked Lord Carlyton. 'You have not heard the three last questions I asked you, because you were so intently looking at her. Do you think her very beautiful?'

'I was not thinking of her beauty,' replied the earl, 'although she is the loveliest of women. I was struck more than ever by her remarkable likeness to a young friend of mine, who is dead.'

'Dead!' repeated Lord Carlyton. He loved his wife with such a jealous, devoted love he could not endure the word 'dead' applied to any one said to resemble her. 'Dead! Do not tell her so—you will make her nervous.'

'Is she nervous. I am sorry for it. I have told her so, many times,' replied the earl; and then Lord Carlyton thought that he quite understood why his wife disliked being looked at.

It was a great relief to Lady Carlyton to find that the earl had not the least suspicion. She was so cold, so reserved with him, that he talked less freely to her than he did to most people. One thing had touched her heart very much—Lady Cardyne had said to her:

'Do you know why I wanted to see you so very much?'

'No,' replied Lady Carlyton. 'I do not know of any reason in particular.'

'I wanted to thank you for your advice to me. I have followed it and am so happy. Dear lady, how much I owe you—true friend, how shall I thank you?'

'You are happy now?' said Alison.

Lady Cardyne was kneeling by her side, her white arms clasped round Alison's stately figure, her fair head bent on Alison's kindly breast.

'Your words,' she said, 'were words spoken in due season; but for them I should have been unhappy all my life. Now I have learned to love my husband; my heart has grown large; for his sake I love England and all her people. How shall I thank you?'

Lady Carlyton kissed the fair young face with a faint sigh.

'I am very glad that you are happy,' she said.

The fair young face nestled more lovingly to her.

'I have another secret to tell you,' she whispered, 'one that I have told to no one until you hear it; even my husband does not know, I tell you first, because

you are my beautiful, my best beloved.' 'And what is this wonderful secret?' asked Alison, bending over her, caressing the fair face, thinking how lovely and how loving the countess was.

'I will tell you. My seven has been very kind to me—so kind, so kind. Before the roses bloom next year I shall have a little child of my own; and, if it be a daughter, I shall call it Asalita, after you.'

Then she passed, the musical ripple of words died on her lips. She sprang away, terrified, and dismayed; for Alison, with a face white as death, had cried out:

'Oh, my God!'

In that one moment the terrible, hateful, shameful past, with all its wretched secret—the life at the villa, her agony of jealous despair, the little grave with the marble cross—she had thought of all, and of a cry of anguish came to her lips—anguish impossible to control.

'What is it?' cried Lady Cardyne. 'How you frighten me! What is the matter?'

Then Alison recovered herself; she was betraying her secret. This was the happy, loving, beloved wife of the man who had deceived her. The child of which Camilla was speaking would be the heir of all his wealth, not a nameless little babe, whose mother had lost her woman's crown of innocence. She was betraying all this. She must shut this little green grave out of her sight; she must forget that flower-like, tiny face that she had clasped in her arms as she leaped into the cold, deep river. Dear Heaven! would she never forget? She was no longer Alison Trente—Alison Trente was dead—she was Lady Carlyton. She smiled a strange, sad smile as she looked at Lady Cardyne.

'My dear friend,' she said, 'have I startled you? Pray forgive me; it was a pain so sharp, so sudden, I thought it would have killed me—a pain that went through my heart.'

The fair young face gazed anxiously into hers.

'Do you often have it,' asked Lady Cardyne.

'Not so often as I once had. Never mind me; my pain is nothing; but it startles me, and makes me cry out. Tell me about yourself—and this little child.'

'I shall be so happy,' said Lady Cardyne. 'I am so proud when I think of it. How dearly he will love me, I think. I wonder if I am right? I think a husband worships the wife who is the mother of his children.'

'Ah! would Heaven spare her the pain?' her heart cried out in its passion of grief—its agony.

She had been the mother of his child, but he had not loved her; he had tired of her, he had never even cared to see that child's face. Oh! little one, tender little darling, lying under the lilies—lilies no whiter than itself.

'Why, Asalita, dearest, you are crying!' said Lady Cardyne. 'See, you have dropped these great tears on my hands; they seem like a baptism of sorrow to me. You are thinking of something sad—what is it, dear?'

'What was it?' the little green grave? Oh! dead babe, answer for her. What was it?'

'I am so pleased for you,' she replied. 'I am more pleased than any words of mine can tell. Heaven bless you, Camilla! May every bright wish of yours be realized.'

And long afterward, when scandal, with its thousand tongues, hissed, and mocked, and cried, lasting those who listened into fury, the echo of those words was in Camilla's ears: 'Heaven bless you!'

False lips never utter such greetings as that.

Then, after a few days, the visitors went away, and Lady Carlyton, looking on the fair, smiling face of Lord Cardyne's wife, thought to herself:

'There can be no trace left now of my sin. They are just as happy as though I had never existed.'

And that thought was a source of great comfort to her.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE ABSENT BROTHER.

Another week of gaiety and pleasure, then Lord and Lady Carlyton were once more left alone at Haute Hall. It was autumn then, and the summer flowers were dead, but, to quote the expression commonly used, such an autumn! No one remembered anything like it; the weather was warm, bright and sunny; the foliage in the wood was glorious to behold; the leaves of every tint of crimson and brown made carpets on the high-road. Lady Carlyton was delighted.

'There is no such autumn as this in Italy,' she said to her husband; and he was just as delighted as herself.

One night she sat in the drawing-room, reading, and her husband tapped at the window. He had gone out to smoke his cigar among the pine-trees, Lord Carlyton always said there was no odor so delicious as that of pine-trees in the autumn.

Alison raised her beautiful face; her eyes always gladdened with a soft, tender light when they fell upon her husband's face—they did so now. The room in which she was sitting had long French windows that opened on the western terrace; at one of these Lord Carlyton stood.

'Asalita,' he said, 'come out; I want you to see this autumn moon—it is at its full to-night. Wrap a shawl round you, and come.'

To hear with her was always to obey, though the book was tempting and the night cold. She rose at once, and rang for her shawl; Lord Carlyton wrapped it round her neck, and throat, and arms.

'Now you are proof against cold,' she said. 'We will go out through this glass door; we might be laughed at if people knew that we were sentimentalizing by moonlight.'

They went out on the broad, beautiful terrace, that looked silver-white in the light of the moon; the whole world seemed bathed in that refulgent light—the trees were all silvered, the gardens, the distant woods, the pleasure grounds—it

was like Fairyland. Alison uttered a cry of delight.

'I did not know it was so beautiful, Basil, or I should have been out before.'

'I knew you would not like to miss it. Now, Asalita, is not this bright as a southern moon?'

'Yes,' she replied; and they both stood with faces raised to the 'Queen of the Night.' There was not a cloud in the dark blue sky; it was clear and bright, even the golden stars had hidden their faces and would not be seen. But the Lady Moon was in all her glory, round, bright, and clear, sailing quickly, with a radiance words could not describe. 'Yet,' said Alison, slowly, 'I like the sunlight best. There is something weird-like and ghostly in this moonlight—I like the sun best.'

'So do I,' added Lord Carlyton; and they walked together to the end of the terrace to the stone balustrade.

They stood there, leaning over, watching the light on the flowers and leaves, when Lord Carlyton, sighed a sigh of deep, unutterable content.

That was a sigh of happiness, not of pain, Basil, she said.

'It was one of perfect content,' he replied. 'I am thoroughly, completely happy, Asalita.'

'Without one drawback?' she asked.

'I cannot say that; there is and always will be one drawback to my perfect happiness.'

'What is that?' she asked, anxiously.

'My brother,' he replied, sadly.

'Your brother! Why, Basil, I did not know you had a brother?' cried Lady Carlyton. 'A brother of your own?'

He looked at her in utter surprise.

'Not know that I had a brother, Asalita—is it possible?'

'It is quite true,' she replied; 'you have never even mentioned a brother to me, and I am sure no one else has done so.'

'You, my wife, did you not know that I had a brother? It seems wonderfully strange; yet, after all, it is not so strange. We have most unfortunately been estranged for years—how many years I do not like to think.'

'Estranged?' repeated Lady Carlyton.

'Why, Basil, I should not have thought that any one could have been estranged from you.'

'You could not, Asalita,' he said, tenderly. 'My brother was once soul of my soul, life of my life. He was all the world to me, yet now we are strangers.'

'How is it?' asked Alison, with quick, keen sympathy.

'We quarrelled—I was right, he was wrong—but he never forgave me. I saved him from a deed that would have blighted his whole life, but he could not forgive me for so saving him.'

'Oh, Basil, how sorry I am; and I know nothing of this. You have had this great sorrow, and I never even heard of it. Why did you not tell me?'

Lord Carlyton looked slightly ashamed of himself.

'To tell the truth, Asalita, I have been so utterly engrossed in you since I met you, that I believe I have thought and cared for little beside.'

'That you should have a brother—it seems to me so strange that, even now, I can hardly believe it. Basil, tell me all about it; why did you quarrel?'

'I will tell you the whole story, Asalita, and when you understand my brother's impulsive, hasty character, you will say that I did right. As I have told you, we had but one heart and soul between us; we loved each other with a love passing that of men. I was not much older than himself; and we were very happy together, my brother and I.'

'What was your brother's name?' asked Lady Carlyton.

'Nugent; he was named after an uncle of our mother, and this uncle has left a fortune to his namesake—not a large fortune, but one that will please Nugent.'

'Nugent what, Basil? Not Carlyton, that is your title.'

'My brother's name is Nugent Avenham,' replied Basil. He went up to London and fell in love there. You know, Asalita, I am slow and thoughtful by nature. I am reserved. I love strongly and intensely, with a depth and passion that a lighter and more buoyant nature, like my brother's, does not even comprehend. He fell in love with the pretty face of a girl who had really no other qualification—who was poor, ignorant, vulgar and illiterate. You wonder how a gentleman like my brother Nugent could love such a one, to which I can only answer that love is most certainly, most decidedly blind. My brother thought her the loveliest of her sex; and, with honor and chivalry that, after all did credit to him, he asked her to be his wife.'

'What was she?' asked Asalita.

Lord Carlyton laughed.

'It was such a comedy,' he said; 'although it had the elements of tragedy in it. See was his laundress' daughter—a fair-faced girl, with blue eyes and golden hair. She laughed loudly, and spoke with the most atrocious accent; but Nugent was wild about her. He came home, and insisted at once upon my father's consent to marry her.'

'Poor boy?' said Alison.

'Yes he was to be pitied. My father laughed heartily at first, then grew wrathful; he treated Nugent like a child—indeed, my brother was in those days a hot-headed boy. If he had been allowed his own way, and been permitted to marry the siren, he would have hated her in a few months, and there would have been more unhappiness than there has been now. My father persuaded me to go up to London, and bribe the two women—mother and daughter—to leave the place and refuse to have anything more to do with him. I do not think I quite approved the idea, or that I felt that I was doing right; however, the idea of a division between my father and my brother was dreadful. I went, and when I saw the girl that poor Nugent loved, I would rather have sacrificed my whole fortune than have permitted him to marry her—when the glamor of love had fallen from his eyes he would have hated her. She did not particularly love my brother. There was a soldier in the

Albany barracks whom she preferred infinitely, and when she found that I was, as her mother said, 'willing to come down handsomely,' she was very glad to exchange Nugent, the refined gentleman, for the dashing private soldier in his irresistible uniform. I saw her married to what she called the man of her 'art,' and having given them what seemed to them a fortune, I went back home. It was all done for Nugent's good—for Nugent's sake—but he never forgave me. He had idealized her, and he would not believe, he would not even hear, what I had to say. He quarrelled with me, he would hear no reason, he refused to speak to me; he said that we had broken his heart, and he would never look at us again. He left home and went abroad, and I have never heard of or from him since.'

'How sad, how strange!' said Asalita; 'how cruel of him?'

'I do not know,' said Lord Carlyton; 'it is a terrible thing for a man to be filled in his first love. I have witnessed a thousand times since that I had not done it, that I had not interfered. I loved my brother very dearly; he was in Italy, I know, when my father died, but he did not come home.'

'And where is he now?' asked Lady Carlyton, anxiously.

'That I cannot tell you; his bankers have declined—they say by special desire and request—to give his address to any one. But I have an idea, Asalita, that he will come home; he cannot surely stay away much longer.'

'I wish he would,' she said; and never were words more blindly spoken. 'I wish he would; then I could try my best to make him love you again. He would not refuse me.'

'I wish he would come, Asalita; that is the only drawback to my perfect happiness. I do not despair about him as I once did. I have a presentiment that he will come back, and all will be well again; then he will thank me for having saved him from his own folly.'

'I hope so. Is he like you—this brother Nugent?'

Lord Carlyton laughed.

'No, he is a much handsomer man; he has one of those fine, frank, Saxon faces—all fire and ardor. I am sure you will love him, Asalita; and he is generous as a prince. I know no one like him.'

'It was not much like a prince to fall in love with such a girl as that.'

'He was young, and the blue eyes misled him. How angry my poor father was about it.'

She raised her beautiful face in the moonlight; she lifted her white hand, on which the diamonds glittered.

'If your father were living,' she said, 'would he think that you had done a wise thing in marrying me?'

'What need to record his answer—how he told her over and over again that she was the loveliest, the dearest, the best—that no lord of Haute had ever taken such a bride home—that no Lady Carlyton had ever reflected such luster on the name?'

And she, listening to him, forgets in that hour the terrible story of her sin.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

While the winter snow lay deep upon the ground and the flowers all lay dead, there came a letter from Lord Cardyne written at his wife's request, telling Lady Carlyton that the little stranger had arrived at last—a baby daughter—and the young countess would insist upon calling her Asalita. Lord Carlyton wondered why his wife's face grew so pale when she read it.

'You ought to be flattered, darling,' he said. 'The earl and countess could not pay you a greater compliment than by naming the first-born daughter of the house after you.'

'Heaven knows I am not flattered,' she said sadly.

'Then you ought to be. I shall be proud of the little one. You must send them a very kind letter in return, with a marvelous present for the baby.'

He felt some little wonder that his wife was so calm and cool—nay, she seemed rather troubled than otherwise. He remembered that afterward—in the dark days.

Winter passed, and the first snow-drop peeped from the frozen ground; there was a faint thrill of the coming spring in the air, a faint sound of music, a gleam of the springing leaves.

'You will like to see the first part of the spring in the country, Asalita,' said Lord Carlyton; 'to my thinking, it is the loveliest time in the year.'

'Why, shall we not be here all the spring?'

Her husband laughed.

'My innocent darling,' he said, 'you have but a faint idea of the toil that awaits you. I agree perfectly that Haute shall be our home, but we have other duties. Lady Carlyton must go to court; she must be presented to the queen; she must take her place in the foremost rank of society.'

'I would far rather stay at home,' she said, 'and watch the violets grow.'

'So would I, but noblesse oblige, darling. We must spend the fairest, sweetest month of the year in town. It will be a hard month, too, Asalita, dear. I predict for you that you will be one of the most popular women in London—an Italian artist, the loveliest of women, married to Lord Carlyton. You will have a double share of popularity, your own and mine.'

'I would fain give it to some one else; I am tired of popularity,' said the beautiful woman, with a sigh. 'Basil, my desires are limited. I want nothing but home and you.'

'We will not stay in town very long, but we must go. We must give a certain number of dinners and balls, of fetes and soirees—we will work hard and get it over. I hear that the season is expected to be a very good one. Lord Pattenmore tells me there are two new beauties who will set the world on fire.'

'Who are they, Basil?'

'I did not feel sufficiently interested even to ask. My beauty, the one I won for myself, is quite sufficient for all my

interest and thoughts; I can see no other beauty, know no others—all begins and ends in you. Suppose then, Asalita, we go up to town about the middle of April, and return at the end of May? Would you like that?'

'Yes; we shall see some of the fair spring at Haute,' replied Asalita; and so the matter was settled.

Alison had never been so happy. It was so beautiful to watch this fair spring. The white snow-drops gave place to flame-colored crocuses, to yellow primroses, and purple violets; the young lambs skipped in the meadows, the buds were springing in the trees; the air was so sweet, so soft, so balmy, it was a pleasure to live and breathe it.

Those long, bright days Lady Carlyton spent almost entirely out of doors; neither sun nor wind spoiled the glorious coloring of her face. She laughed at the idea of precautions, and her husband was always with her. Alas! that so fair a spring must end. The day—it was the second of April—and everything looked so inviting that Asalita was impatient to go out.

There had been a shower of rain the evening before, and she longed to inhale the perfume of the wet violets. Lord Carlyton laughed at her impatience.

'The woods will not run away, my darling,' he said, 'and I must absolutely read my letters before we go.'

'The post-boy is late,' she said, with a pretty petulance that made him laugh again.

To her great relief, the footman appeared, bringing in a bag.

'You will find nothing there to interest you, I am sure, Basil,' she said—nothing half so nice as the breath of the pure roses after the rain.

'I do not expect it,' he replied. 'Put on your cloak, Asalita, darling; we shall soon be ankle deep in primroses; there are not many letters in the bag this morning.'

Lady Carlyton quitted the room to put on her walking-dress. She was only a few minutes absent. When she returned her husband was lying back in his chair, his face pale as death, and an open letter in his hands.

'Darling, come here,' he said. 'I have such wonderful news—I cannot believe it is true.'

She went over to him.

'How your hands tremble, Basil. It is not bad news, surely?'

'No, not bad—good; a thousand times better than any I had ever hoped to hear. Asalita, this letter is from my brother Nugent.'

She was not surprised that his voice failed him, and that the tears came to his eyes.

'I am so glad,' she said, simply. 'I cannot tell you how glad I am, Basil. And what does he say?'

'It is a beautiful letter,' said Basil, with a brightening face—'so frank, so impulsive—just like himself. Reading it, I can imagine that I hear his voice; and, Asalita—see, I am weeping like a woman—I loved him so dearly, my only brother; we had but one heart between us.'

She kissed the tears from his eyes.

'Such tears are nothing to be ashamed of,' she said. 'Do you know, Basil, that I think if men shed a few more of them, the world would perhaps be the better for it?'

He looked at her in some surprise.

'My darling, what can you know of men?' he asked—'you, who have lived among pictures?'

To be continued.

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