

THE CARLYON TRAGEDY.

Just the two men composed the family at Carlyon Hall, and a gay, wild life they led. Not that they were much together, or that good-will inclined them to the same course.

The elder man gave his select dinners and champagne suppers to his clients; while Ralph, his son, scoured the country for a score of miles about with choice spirits of his own.

The Hall itself was a patched-up pile of ruinous masonry. The Carlyons for three generations back had proved a spendthrift race; and their once ample patrimony had dwindled down to a few barren acres, with a village of miserable houses, which yielded the sole income of the present proprietor.

Still he could boast a long descent, and we all knew how far an illustrious pedigree will go towards propping up a falling house.

This was the state of affairs when Mrs. Mondeville came down from town with a half-dozen servants at her back, and pretty Bertha Mondeville, her very reluctant companion.

Bertha was the lady's youngest daughter, and beside the generous portion of Mondeville property destined to fall to her share, had good prospects of an inheritance from a certain wizened, eccentric old woman who had stood god-mother to her at her christening eighteen years before.

With such expectations, and possessed of natural attractions which drew hosts of sighing lovers to her feet, it was certainly reprehensible in her to give preference to one far beneath her in the social scale.

At least, so reasoned her lady mother. But Bertha was wilful, and maternal restrictions went for naught. She had given her heart and promised her hand to Henry Bernard, the struggling artist, who as yet was quite unknown to both fame and fortune.

He was sanguine, though, and Bertha no less so. She reposed the utmost confidence in his genius and ultimate success, while he toiled with renewed energy for his triumphal wreath, knowing that her happiness was involved in the result of his effort.

But here Mrs. Mondeville interposed. Her wrath fell harmlessly upon her daughter's perverse head, until, angered beyond bounds, she had recourse to extreme measures to break off the proposed marriage.

Henry Bernard was forbidden the house, and Bertha was placed under strict espionage for the time.

The Carlyons were distant relatives of the family; and Mrs. Mondeville fixed upon the Hall as a secure and retired asylum for her wayward child. So, hither they had come, fast upon the track of the courteous little note of warning that announced them.

The Hall had been put in hurried order for the reception of the ladies. The remnants of plate were duly polished; the frayed damask and fine linen (evidences of decaying gentility) taken from the drawers. Carlyon cleared his domicile of bachelor guests, and met them with the courtly ease which distinguishes gentle blood, no matter how much weighed upon by adverse circumstances.

Ralph, who was in the habit of being absent for days together, knew nothing of the proposed advent, and surprised himself not a little by coming home to find such an unprecedented party established there.

Mrs. Mondeville endured a week in the dreary solitary place, and then went away, leaving Bertha and a lynx-eyed maid to the hospitable charge of the Carlyons.

It was not a pleasant duty for the latter to assume, and for a time they regretted the necessary suspension of their reckless pleasures. Not that either reformed, even temporarily, but the Hall could no longer be thrown open to boon comrades and nightly orgies.

They clung to their customary habits, but unused to the trouble of concealment, chafed against the bondage which common courtesy imposed upon them.

This state of things did not continue long, however. Bertha's cheery young presence brought a flood of sunshine into the dreary old house, such as it had not known for years. The grim, dark rooms held attractions for their inmates which they had not hitherto possessed.

Certainly, in removing her daughter from the influence of one lover, Mrs. Mondeville had not meant to subject her to the importunities of two. Carlyon, drawn perhaps by visions of the ample dowry destined for her and Ralph—base as he was—actually touched with an approximation of noble sentiment were both soon numbered among her devotees.

Bertha's position was becoming extremely unpleasant. A note, smuggled out, despite the watchfulness of the maid, brought no response from Henry Bernard. Her mother remained unmoved by her urgent entreaties for a speedy return; and meanwhile the two Carlyons urged their individual suits with persistent ardor.

Ralph, impulsive and passionate, could wait to take no politic moves in prosecuting his wooing. His very earnestness would have pleaded powerfully for him, had not the girl's heart and mind been filled with other love and other thoughts. He came in upon her suddenly one afternoon, when he knew her to be alone.

"It's the old, old story, Bertha, that I want to tell you," he said. "I suppose I am not worthy of you—for I've been a wild blade in my time—but I will make myself better when you give me the dear assurance I am waiting for. Bertha, love, come to me."

His dark face, handsome, despite the lines dissipation had left upon it, grew tender; his eyes looked down in hers with eager, impassioned light. Bertha's heart throbbed pitiably as she realized the

pain her words must inflict upon him.

"Oh, Ralph, I had hoped you might not subject me to this test! It would be cruel to give you false hope, for I can never be more than your earnest friend. Forget that you have ever cared for me, and bestow your love on some one who will make you happier than I ever could."

"Bertha! Bertha! You can't mean to leave me in utter despair? I will wait and work, and prove myself a better man than I have yet been. Only tell me that there is a chance of winning you at last!"

"It never can be, Ralph! Because—because I love another!"

"The still, white rage which settled down upon his face frightened her more than if he had broken out in angry words.

"I shall not give you up nevertheless," he said, quiet with intensity. "Give me a little hope, and an equal chance, and I will try for your love by fair means; but by measures foul or fair, no other man shall ever take you from me!"

With that he turned, leaving her abruptly, as he had come, and his quick steps gave back a sharp ring from the paved walk without. At a little distance he encountered the elder Carlyon, who accosted him, timing his leisurely pace to the other's hasty strides.

"Easy, my son! I have some information which it may be best to impart at once. I happened to overhear your conversation of a moment ago—by the way, you should never make love near open windows—and am gratified to know that Bertha holds such an important place in your estimation."

"Ah!" Ralph waited, knowing that something more lay behind this suave address.

"Yes, but I must warn you against your own impetuous nature, which may lead you to extremes. As she said it is quite impossible for her to regard your suit with favor."

"May I ask why?"

"Simply because I intend to marry her myself!"

"By heaven, you shall not!"

The elder Carlyon dropped his eyelids, a trick of his when angered.

"Did you ever know me to relinquish a purpose?"

"Or me to fail in making good my words? I would kill any man ere he should thwart me, or brave me by taunting her preference."

Each read indomitable resolution in the other's face. The gauntlet was cast between them, and thereafter only bitter enmity could mark their mutual relation.

A week wore heavily away. Then Ralph disappeared, went no one knew whither, and Bertha awoke to a consciousness that she was no better than a prisoner in the old Hall. The maid had been bribed to co-operate with the elder Carlyon, and he himself announced his purpose with a quiet steadiness of manner which would admit of no gainsaying.

With his ruthless will crushing down all obstacles in his way, and no communication with her friends permitted, save such as he dictated. Bertha felt that her opposition must give way before the cruel forces he brought to bear upon her.

At last he gained his purpose. How he accomplished it himself and the maid best knew. But the clergyman was waiting at the church, and Bertha, worn to a shadow of her former cherry self, with her face scarce less white than the bridal robes she wore, went trembling down the worn easter stairs to go and be wedded to the man she both hated and feared.

Carlyon met her with a triumphant smile upon his face, but the words of gratulation he was about to offer never left his lips.

A man, with haggard face, bloodless lips drawn away from his glittering teeth, and dishevelled hair streaming about his neck, rushed up the length of the passage, and grappled with him. It was Ralph, who had been confined all this time in one of the vault-like cellars beneath the old Hall, and had escaped now to wreak insane fury upon his jealous jailer. There was an inherent madness in the Carlyon blood, and these weeks of solitude and mental torture had brought the curse upon the younger man.

A struggle ensued that was fearful to witness. Bertha caught up the stairs with rigid, blanched face, and eyes never wavering from the horrible spectacle. Servants screaming all was chaos for a moment, and then awful quietude fell upon the Hall.

There was a crushed, bleeding senseless mass upon the floor; and the madman, his rage appeased, unresistingly submitted to the bonds which were placed upon him. The elder Carlyon went to answer for his sins before an eternal tribunal, his son drags out a living death in a lunatic asylum.

But Bertha, sorely tried, found peace at last. Shocked beyond measure by the frightful tragedy which had been enacted, and appalled by the peril her daughter had passed, Mrs. Mondeville recalled Henry Bernard from the fruitless quest he was pursuing. It is needless to say that Bertha's letter never reached him, and that Mrs. Mondeville had sent him as far as possible from the actual track. But the young people could freely forgive all past injuries in the happiness which was theirs at last.

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