POOR DOCUMENT

UNDER A SHADOW.

Continued.

'Let me never forget,' she said, "that all this is the homage paid to Asalita; none of it is due Alison Trente.'

She soon grew to like her English home after the fervid heat of Italy, its burning skies and scorching sun; the cool shade, the gray mists, the cool winds were all most welcome to her. She felt at home and light of heart as she had not done there. She walked for long hours in the sunny slopes of the park, she loved nothing better than riding over the waves of green grass, with the song of the birds in her ear. This was home. The very sight of the daisies in the fields, the wild roses in the hedges, the cattle drinking from the clear pools beneath the alder trees, filled her hear with keenest delight.

She stood one night on the summit of Richmond Hill the glorious panorama of of wood and water unrolled before her, a sweet, balmy air bending the green boughs and blowing the wild rose leaves, the birds singing as though their hearts were filled with joy. The clear sweet air seemed to invigorate her with fresh life. She looked to the glad smiling skies.

'Why should I not be happy?' she thought. 'True I have sinned—in my youth, my ignorance, my folly, I sinned: but I have repented of it most bitterly. I have worked hard to drive the memory of my sin away; I have worked hard to atone for it. Surely God has forgiven man has forgotten it. I may be happy now. I will put all memory of it from me—I will be happy. I will begin my life over again, and this past shall be blotted out and dead.'

She kept her resolve—the past died to her. If ever, by the most remote chance, any thought, of it came to her, she dismissed it abruptly—she would have none of it; she had suffered and atoned for her sin, there let it end. So the dawn of the day grew brighter for her, and life began to wear a new charm.

She had considered herself in some degree cut off from her kind. She had not cared to cultivate society, to make friends; all the sweetest and brightest possibilities of life were destroyed, she had thought, for her; now it was quite different. She opened her heart again to hope, to gladness, to brightness.

'Because one man happened to be a wicked man,' she said—'because of one sin and one dishonor, am I to be wretched all my life? Let it be dead.'

She began this new life. Society welcomed her with open arms—the beautiful Italian artist, so gifted so great a genius so magnificent a woman: every one of note was anxious to be seen on her visiting list; but the one who really liked her the best, who understood and appreciated her was Lady Herlan, the wife of Sir Wilton Herlan, one of the wealthiest men of the day. Lady Herlan was an amateur artist of no mean skill; the one love the one passion of her life, was painting and pictures, and of all pictures she preferred Asalita's When she knew that this gifted genius had left Italy and had come to reside in England, her delight knew no bounds; she talked of her incessantly, and gave Sir Wilton no peace until he promised to take her down to Richmond.

Her husband laughed at her enthusiasm.

'You will find yourself deceived, Laura he said to her; 'you are endowing this lady with all graces; she may be old, plain and cross.'

'She is not; nature does not make mistakes. Such a soul as hers could only be enshrined in a beautiful body.

And Lady Laura Herlan found that she was right. She was charmed with Asalita, who in her turn liked the beautiful, frank-hearted, charming woman.

'I have never known a genius before,' said Lady Laura, excusing her own enthusiam; 'there is nothing that I would not do to win your liking, Madame Ferrari.'

Alison did like her, and when, the day following, Lady Laura, drove over to Richmond to try to persuade her to spend a week with her in her beautiful town house, Alison was perfectly willing, and they returned together. It was then the beginning of May.

'You will be just in time,' said Lady Laura, 'to see every one who is worth seeing in London, and I predict that your first appearance will make a perfect sensation; we have not many among us like you.'

So Alison Trente, by one of those strange turns in the wheel of fortune which seem almost magical, found herself the most honored guest in the princely mansion of Sir Wilton Herlan.

As Lady Laura had predicted, her appearance created a decided sensation. People raved about her beauty; her genius took the world by storm. Every one knew her by repute, but few had expected to find her so beautiful or so graceful. She made a sensation; the beauties of the season were well known—this was some one quite fresh, quite novel.

Sir Wilton gave a dinner party, to which he invited the leading artists of the day, who were all charmed and delighted with their beautiful comrade. Her praise was spread from one to another. The Lady Laura was besieged with requests for an introduction to her accomplished guest. Alison bore her honors very meekly; the brilliant and gay life charmed her, captivated her, but it did not overwhelm her.

'I tell you what we really must do, Wilton," said Lady Laura, one day to her husband; 'we must give a grand ball; then all those who are so anxious for an introduction to Madame Ferrari can have one.'

"It would be the best plan, certainly," he replied, and the ball was agreed upon.

Lady Laura told her beautiful visitor about her.

'It is our only resource,' she said; 'so many people desire to know you. The list of invitations will comprise most of the best names in London, so that you will have a fair opportunity of seeing what English Society is like.'

Alison found every moment of her time occupied until the evening of the ball came. To do all honors to her kind hostess, she made a magnificent toilet, one that suited her dark, regal loveliness. She wore a superb dress of black velvet, trimmed with point lace; not, perhaps, a very suitable dress for a ball, but Alison had no intention of dancing, and she knew that there was no other costume in which she looked one-half so beautiful. Among the crowd of pink and white young ladies, with their flowing, fluttering dresses of white and gray tints, she moved serene, stately, and graceful as a queen, her face brilliant in its own beauty, her superb figure unique in its perfect grace.

She was universally admired; indeed, the ball was more like a fete, made purposely in her honor, than anything else. She had taken her seat just in front of a magnificent group of camellias, which formed a background; indeed, it was their great beauty which had drawn her to them. And there Lady Laura led one distinguished person after another, until it seemed to Alison quite an ovation.

She introduced dukes, and duchesses, and foreign princes, and Alison charmed them all. She did pause, just for a moment, to ask herself whether it was possible that this brilliant and magnificent scene was real, whether she should wake presently and find it all a dream, whether it could indeed be true that she was Alison Trente. No one imagined her to be an Englishwoman; having resided ten years in Italy, she had, as it were, half forgotten her own language. She used quaint and graceful words; she did not construct her sentences quite after the English fashion; there was something piquant and charming in her accent. Then her Italian was so fluent, so perfect, so musical that no one would have doubted for one moment that she was an Italian by birth; then her face, with its brilliant tints, its dark eyes, the heavy-fringed lids, was far more Italian than English. She did not wish to be known as an Englishwoman, therefore the compliments on her accent pleased her.

'I have a pleasant surprise for you,' said Lady Laura to Alison; 'here is a countrywoman of your own.'

And the next minute she brought to her a pretty, golden-haired woman, whom she introduced to her as Lady Cardyne.

For one moment it flashed across Alison that this was Colonel Montague's wife. She sat perfectly still, neither by word nor look betraying her emotion; her face grew deadly pale, and her hands clasped her jeweled fan so tightly, the wonder was that it was not broken. Lady Cardyne held out her hand with a little, low cry of delight.

'I am so pleased to see you,' she said; 'I am so delighted. I long to see an Italian face. May I sit down here by your side?'

Alison replied by a few words of grave courtesy.

'Ah mi!' said Lady Cardyne, 'it is like listening to sweetest music to hear my own tongue so beautifully spoken. Madame Ferrari, shall you like this cold, gray England? I do not—I am always longing lor the sunshine of my own land.'

'Yes, I love England,' replied Alison, gravely.

She had barely collected her bewildered faculties.

'Do you love it?' as Lady Cardyne, with a slightly aggrieved expression of face. 'I am so sorry—I do not. They do not know what sunlignt means, they have no color—everything looks gray, the sky and the fields.'

'Ah, no,' said Alison; 'there is no green so tender, so bright, or so beautiful as that which lies on English meadows.'

'You cannot have seen many,' said Lady Cardyne; 'this is your first visit. Do you know I felt quite indignant when I read that, for your health's sake, the doctors advised you to leave Italy for England? It was not very wise advice, I am sure; Italy is the home of health.'

'The heat was too great for me,' said Alison, 'I wanted colder air.'

'Well, I hope you will like it,' said Lady Cardyne, resignedly; 'you will get plenty of it. I would just as soon go to Siberia at once as to Hargrave Park.'

Alison looked up inquiringly.

'Ah, mi!' said the Countess of Cardyne, 'I had forgotten; you do not know where Hargrave Park is.'

'No,' said Alison, 'I do not.'

'It is my husband's place; a great, immense mansion, that stands in the midst of a large park. I do not like it—it is always cold, the wind blows there so keenly. I sit wrapped up in shawls all the time I am there.'

Alison laughed.

'You do not give a very inviting picture of England,' she said.

'Oh, Madame Ferrari, if I might pray, and beseech, and implore you to come to Hargrave; you do not know how my heart cleaves to all that is Italian. If you would but come, the place would seem warmer and brighter.'

'I will think of it,' replied Alison.

'I will ask my husband to persuade you. Most people think he is irresistible—I wonder if you will think so? Arthur, I want to speak to you.'

And Lady Cardyne turned to a group of gentlemen whom Alison had not noticed before.

CHAPEER XXXVIII.

BETRAYER AND BETRAYED.

Alison had not time to stir, to move, to speak. She was taken utterly and completely by surprise. It seemed to her that for half a moment her heart stopped beating—that the room grew suddenly dark—that a dreadful confusion seized her, and a strong hand held her captive. She longed to cry out, to say 'I will not see him; take me away!' She longed to fly from the room which to her was tainted by his presence; but a sense of her own dignity restrained her, no cry came from her lips, though they grew slightly pale; the diamonds did not tremble as they glittered on her while breast; the dark eyes did not droop, although something like a mist passed over them as they were raised to the face of the man who had betrayed her: Dear Heaven! what a passion of grief, of love, and of pain had passed over since she had first seen his face.

'Arthur,' said a slightly querulous voice 'let me introduce you to Madame Ferrari. Madame Ferrari, Lord Cardyne.,

He bowed low. So victim and victimizer, betrayer and betrayed, met together face to face once more. She saw that his eyes rested on her; something like a half-confused memory passed over them; there was a gleam in his eye which died away directly. He bowed, and murmured something to the effect that he was most happy. It was wonderful what effect the sound of his voice produced on Alison. It seemed to stir the depths of her heart, to stir the whole current of her being, the voice she had loved so well which had made all life's music for her—the musical, well-modulated tones.

'Do sit down, Arthur,' said Lady Cardyne, impatiently. 'I do not like to see you stand, and you look so tall. Do sit down and let me tell you what I want,'

With a good tempered laugh—ah! how well she remembered it—Lord Cardyne sat down, and his wife resumed:

'You must help me, Arthur.'

'I will, if you will show me how.'

'You ought to know what I mean. I mean to persuade Madame Ferrari to visit us at Hargrave. I want her to see for herself how cold and dull England is.'

'Hargrave is neither cold nor dull,' he said, negligently; 'but I shall be most delighted if madame will honor us. I must say, Camila, that if you wish Madame Ferrari to accept your invitation you have most decidedly gone the wrong way to work.'

'Of course, I am always in the wrong—I know that; I am prepared for it. Oh, madame, do say that you will come. If you knew how my heart aches for the sight of one Italian face, and my soul seems to long for the sound of an Italian voice—if you knew how dreary and desolate it is without one of my own country near me, you would be sorry for me and come.'

'That eloquence should touch your heart, Madame Ferrari,' said the earl, with a smile.

She tried hard to collect herself—to say to herself that she must mind what she was doing; one moment's want of caution might betray her even to the man who believed her dead.

'I will think of it,' she replied. 'You are very kind, Lady Cardyne.,

She did not look at the earl or speak to him. She did not dare to trust her own eyes or her own lips yet. He was slightly piqued. He said to himself that it was years since he had seen anything one half so beautiful as this magnificent woman. Her accent, the piquant, graceful English charmed him. She should both look at him and speak to him, he said to himself; he was not accustomed to silent lips or averted face.

'I must second Lady Cardyne's request,' he said. 'If you will honor us with a visit to Hargrave, you will confer the greatest pleasure on us.'

'If he knew,' thought Alison; 'if he only knew.'

To him she said:

'My plans are so uncertain, but I will keep your kind invitation in my mind.

Still she spoke to him with averted eyes, and the earl, having caught one glimpse of them, was determined to see them again.

Lady Cardyne went away to fulfil an engagement to dance, and the earl took his place by Alison's side.

'Lady Cardyne is Italian., he said; 'I need not tell you that; and she retains the greatest love for Italy. She cannot reconcile herself to England.'

'It is very natural,' said Alison.

'Do you think so? I am somewhat of a believer in the old adage, 'It is home where the heart is,'

'Perhaps her heart is in Italy,' said Alison, unable to resist that one little thrust.

'It is hardly complimentary to me to suppose that,' he replied, laughingly.

'Ah! no; perdon me; I had forgotten.'

Then Lady Herlan came up to speak to her, and as she raised her face Lord Cardyne saw it. He started, and she saw that he watched her keenly. Then, when they were alone again he said:

'You are, of course, Italian by birth, Madame Ferrari?'

She looked at him quite calmly.

'What else would you think me?' she said.

'Pardom me; of course, it is all fancy—nothing save a nervous fancy; but you are so much like some one I knew once, years ago—so like her.'

'Am I?' asked Alison, calmly. 'Likenesses among people are common enough.'

'I should hardly have thonght there were two faces in the world like hers,' he said. 'She was English, madame—an early love of mine; and, strange to say, she had the same taste. She was passionately fond of painting.'

"Is she an artist?' asked Alison.

'No,' he replied, slowly; 'she is dead; died in Italy.'

'Dead!' repeated Alison, with a shudder. 'What a very unpleasant word to say on such a brilliant evening. It always seems to me out of place to mention the word death or dead in a ballroom.'

'Yes, it is out of place; but there is a marvelous likeness. You have the same face.'

'But she was English and I am Italian,' said Alison.

'Yes; that, of course, a vital difference; then she—well, she was not what we call a lady exactly.'

There was a quiet flash from the dark eyes, a note of warning, if he had but taken it.

'An early love of yours, and not a lady exactly,' she said, with a perfect imitation of his voice and manner. 'I should have imagined that you were very fastidious, Lord Cardyne.'

'She was beautiful enough,' he replied, hastily; 'but she was not wealthy, not high-born. I know no one more innately a lady than she was.'

'And she died in Italy, too—so beautiful—how sad. Why did she die—of what, Lord Cardyne?'

The handsome face grew pale. He could never endure, heartless as he was, to remember how and why Alison Trente died.

'What a subject we have fallen upon,' he said, lightly. 'You will think me a complete type of the gloomy Englishman. I am ashamed of myself. Do you dance, madame?'

'No; I like to see others dance, but I care little for the amusement myself.'

'Lady Cardyne is very fond of it; she will not sit down again for some time. Will you—you will be tired of sitting here. May I show you Lady Herlan's conservatory?']

'Yes,' she replied, rising. 'I never can resist the temptation of seeing flowers.'

'You are fond of them?' he asked.

'I am an artist,' she answered, 'therefore I love everything bright and beautiful.'

Alison laid her hand on his arm. It seemed so strange to her, so utterly strange, that she could hardly realize it—that she should be walking with him, talking to him and he did not know her. That she was Alison Trente' yet that he believed Alison Trente dead, was also marvelous to her. They went to the pretty conservatory, where a few colored lamps were half hidden by the foliage. His eyes never left her face.

'You must not think me impertinent, Madame Ferrari,' he said; 'but you are so much like the friend I have been speaking of, the likeness almost frightens me; it seems like magic.'

'I ought to be much flattered,' she said; and she heard him mutter to himself, 'Poor Alison!'

They were silent for some minutes; then the earl said to her:

'It is in your power to do me a great favor, madame.'

'Then we may consider it done,' she replied, with a charming smile, 'Lord Cardyne.'

'You make the duty of asking a favor a very pleasant one,' he said. 'It is this madame: All Italians, as I suppose—all of one nation invariably understand each other. I wish you would try to make Lady Cardyne care more for England; she does not like the country or the people; she makes no friends; she likes no one; she is sure to like you, ii you would but try your influence over her.'

'It is strange,' said Alison.

'Not altogether. She was married very young; she was, in fact, but a spoiled child.'

'As you have spoken in this strain to me,' said Alison, 'I shall not think that I am taking any liberty in suggesting that you should ask some of Lady Cardyne's friends to reside with her.'

'I did,' he replied, eagerly. 'Madame D'Isio, her grandmother, was with us for some years, but she is dead; she died two two years ago, and Lady Cardyne has never peen happy since. I fancy that she thinks England helped to kill madame.'

'Then why not take her back to Italy?' asked Alison.

'I cannot. All my duties lie here in England; I cannot neglect them.'

'No, I had forgotten that,' she said; then, raising her dark, lustrous eyes to his face, she continued: 'But you have lived in Italy, have you not?'

'Why do you imagine so?' he asked.

'Unless you have lived there you could hardly have loved and married in Italy,' she replied.

'I was in Italy for some months.' His face softened, his voice changed, as he added: 'A few months, but they were very happy ones. It was there that I met Lady Cardyne. Transplanted flowers do not always grow well.'

'No, not always,' said Alison, thoughtfully.

She wondered if this handsome man looking at her so admiringly had any feeling of regret or remorse for the part that he had played in her life. Did he remember her? Did he ever regret what he believed to be her untimely death—her miserable end? He did not look like a happy man. She felt sure that this marriage of his had resulted disastrously. When his face was quite in repose, there was something dejected about it; he looked like a man who had never found rest. She could have pitied him, but for her intense conviction that whatever he suffered it served him right.

'You will, I am sure, Madame Ferrari,' he said, 'have compassion on us. My wife is always longing for Italian society. Will you visit her at times?

'I will with pleasure,' she replied.

His face brightened.

'Thank you. I shall always remember your goodness. Lady Cardyne's birthday will fall on Tuesday next. Will you waive ceremony and come to dine with us?'

'Yes.' replied Alison.

She had a great desire to see the house of the man who had not thought her even worthy to enter it. With all her goodness she was but human, and there was immense satisfaction in hearing him solicit her friendship for his wife, as the greatest favor that could be conferred upon them.

'I shall feel now,' he said, 'as though Lady Cardyne had a friend.'

'I hope she has many,' replied Alison.

He shook his head gravely.

'She has not sought them; she does not even care for them when she has found them. The littte organ boys in the streets, if they speak with an Italian accent, are more to her than any English man, woman, or child, to whom I can introduce her.'

'I will do my best,' said Alison; and again to herself, with bitter triumph, she added: 'If he knew—if he only knew.'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

'YOUR FACE IS FAMILIAR.'

It was a brilliant ball, and Lady Laura whispered to Alison that she was the cause of it.

'I knew,' she said, 'that you would make a sensation—and so you have. How do you like Lord Cardyne? You have been talking to him for some time.'

'I like him very well,' replied Alison.

'It was a thousand pities he went to Italy and married an Italian,' continued Lady Laura. 'He does not look like a happy man, does he?'

'Not particularly. Is he not supposed to be happy?'

'No; the fact is, he loves his wife. I am quite sure that he loves her, and every one else says the same thing.'

'Then he ought to look happy,' said Alison, quickly.

'It does not follow, for she does not like him. She was quite a child when he married her; she was just fresh from school, and fell in love, like a school-girl with the handsome, fair-haired Englishman. Most untortunately for her, she was allowed to marry him; the fancy would have died out in a short time if they had left it alone. He brought her to England and they have furnished the fashionable world with subjects of conversation ever since.'

'In what way?' asked Alison.

'Lady Cardyne was a spoiled child when she was married; she is spoiled now. She is full of caprices, some of them pretty, some of them foolish. She does not like England—she is always abusing it; she does not like the English—she is always abusing them; and rumor adds to that, she does not like her husband—and that I believe.'

'Why should she not like him?, said Alison. 'He seems very nice; he is handsome and kind.'

'They made a fatal mistake,' said Lady Laura, 'in ever asking Madame D'Isio to live with them. I think that if the earl and countess had been left alone, they would have been better friends, Madame D'Isio was ever interfering. Lord Cardyne, you may have heard, was a second Don Juan before his marriage. I have heard some strange stories about him.'

'Was he not a good man?' asked Alison, to whom, even after all these years, the words came with a shock of pain.

'Good!' repeated Lady Laura with unmitigated scorn; 'it was a strange kind of goodness. He never spared any one who happened to please his fancy. There are many broken hearts, many early deaths, lying at his door.'

How the words pained her! If she had known—oh, Heaven, if she had known!

'And since his marriage?' said Alison, faintly.

'It has been quite another matter. Strange as it may seem, after all his flirtations, he really loved his wife; he was devoted to her. It seems like righteous retribution that she should not care for him.'

'What had Madame D'Isio to do with it?' asked Alison.

To be continued.

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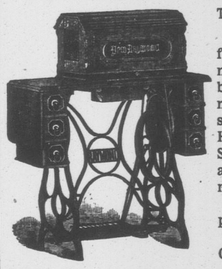

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