POOR DOCUMENT

# UNDER A SHADOW.

Continued.

'It was cruel,' cried Alison, with flashing eyes—'mean and cruel.'

'Still it was so; if a man commits a crime, he never knows the moment in which it may face him.'

'That was cruel,' said Alison, sadly.

'The other case was more cruel still,' he continued; 'I knew the lady well—she was beloved, honored and esteemed by all who knew her. Her husband held a very high position here in London, and she had two beautiful children. I know no one who was more popular than she. Lord H——, her husband met her when he was visiting somewhere in the country, and believing her to be a young widow, he married her. We were all delighted with her, and only wondered where he had been so fortunate to meet her. All went on pleasantly and well, until some ten years after their marriage in consequence of her inability any longer to pay a scoundrel his hush-money, her whole story was brought to light.'

'And what was it?' asked Alison briefly.

'Oh, that I would fain not repeat to you—one quite unfit for your ears.'

'Tell me,' said Alison.

And he, who would have given his life to please her, obeyed her at once.

'It was a sad story, madame. When she was quite young—so young as to be almost a child—one who ought to have known better persuaded her to run away with him. She did so, and, to his eternal shame, he did not marry her; on the contrary, when he had lived with her for some months, he grew tired of her and left her.'

'Ah!' said Alison, with a deep sigh.

'She was very young and very ignorant when it all happened, and I suppose that she thought, poor girl, she could live it down.'

'And she could not?' said Alison, sorrowfully.

'Sooner or later sin always comes to light. She had lived all these years honored, happy, and beloved; no wonder that she thought her sin forgotten.'

'How did it end?' asked Alison.

'Sadly as possible. She denied the truth, and her husband, infuriated against the scoundrel who betrayed her, brought an action against him for libel. Slowly and surely the truth came out; at first she denied it, then suddenly gave way and owned that it was true. Her husband gave up all his appointments and took her abroad. They are both still living, but it would be impossible to tell which is the most unhappy. When she thought it was all forgotten and was most happy her sin found her out.' Alison sighed deeply.

'That is the world's verdict, then,' she said, slowly—'that a woman, having once forfeited her place, shall never regain it?'

'Yes, it is the universal decree,' he replied.

'It is unjust,' said Alison. 'No life ought to be marred or stained by one sin.'

'But there are sins that stain and brand,' said Lord Carlyton, 'and the world pronounces that they may be forgiven, but not forgotten.'

'It is a cold and cruel world,' said Alison; 'I, for one do not believe in it.'

Yet she was very thoughtful all that day, and graver than either of her companions had seen her before.

## CHAPTER XLIV.

WOOED AND WON.

The last rays of the setting sun fell full upon the windows of Alison's painting-room. Such picturesque disorder, such magnificent disarray! Here one saw the head of a Florentine saint, with a nimbus round the hair; here a copy of one of Raphael's virgins, pure, seraphic, and lovely; there on the canvas glowed rich colors that would have shamed Tititian; here was a woman's face, with prayful eyes and sweet, sad lips; here a sketch of a Spanish cavalier, dark, proud, haughty; there stood an antique vase, and behind it hung a fold of ancient tapestry.

Alison had finished her day's work; she had changed the plain working-dress for a dinner costume, and very lovely she looked in it. The dress was of white lace profusely trimmed with crimson camellias. She wore one superb camellia on her white breast, and one in the fold of her dark waving hair. Never had Alison looked more beautiful. She had gone for a few minutes on to the green lawn, where purple passion-flowers grew round the stems of the cedars. She sat quite still, dreaming of the beautiful trees—for Alison loved trees with a strangely mystical love. A voice said, suddenly:

'Asalita, I thought I should find you here.'

She knew by the very tones of Lord Carlyton's voice that the man she had long expected had arrived at last. Her heart beat fast, her eyes drooped, her lips trembled—the love she had coveted and longed for was hers.

'Asalita, have I displeased you, that you find no word for me?'

'You took me quite by surprise,' she replied. 'I did not know that you were coming this evening.'

'I could hardly tear myself away yesterday,' he replied, 'and I could wait no longer. Do not look coldly on me, Asalita; do not turn from me. I have come to offer you my heart and my life—to lay my love and my fortune at your feet.'

She was quite silent; it was what she had wished, hoped for, longed for; yet now that it had come, she had no words in which to answer it, and he was kneeling at her feet, looking up at her with prayerful pleading eyes, as though his life depended on the answer.

'Asalita, have you no answer for me? I am not a coward; but if I thought that I loved you in vain, and you could never care for me—if I thought that, I should die. It cannot be so. Asalita, my beautiful love, I am unworthy of you, as any other man would be; your beauty, your grace, your genius place you on a pedestal none of us can reach; but that which makes the difference between myself and any other is that I love you so truly, so devotedly, that I would give my whole life for you—that I love you as no other could. You are my first love, Asalita; I have known no other; all the strength of my manhood, all the fervor of my soul, all the passionate love of my heart, have gone to you. Will you give me nothing in return?'

She raised her dark eyes to his face.

'I can give you one thing,' she said—'is it worth giving? that is my love.'

'And you, my peerless, beautiful Asalita, you will love me?' he cried, in a rapture too great almost for words.

'Yes,' she replied, slowly, as though weighing her words, 'I love you,' and then for a few minutes again there was silence between them.

When he looked at her, his face was wet with happy tears, a glad light shining in his eyes.

'I cannot thank you, Asalita,' he said, in a broken voice; 'there are some things which words cannot express; I cannot thank you, but I would give my life for you; always remember that, my love. 'I would give you my life.'

'I shall be content with your love,' she replied.

'Now, can it really be true,' he continued' that I who have nothing in the wide world to recommend me, have won the most beautiful and the most gifted woman in all the world to be my wife? Can it be true?'

He bent down and kissed the white jeweled hands that lay in his clasp.

'It looks very much like it,' said Asalita, with a smile.

Then, raising his face again, he said:

'I need but one thing more to make me perfectly happy. Tell me, Asalita, my best beloved, am I your first love?'

Was he? She stopped for a few minutes to think. She remembered Colonel Montague's handsome face, and how he had won her by the music of his voice. But had she loved him? Was that short-lived passion that had ended now in such perfect indifference, was that love? No; a thousand times no! It was not even worth the name. So she looked at him with calm, true eyes.

'I have never loved any one until I learned to love you,' she said.

'I thank Heaven for that,' he replied.

And Alison shrunk from the words. Yet she repeated to herself again and again that she had not deceived him—she had not spoken falsely, for she had not loved Colonel Montague.

'I am so happy,' said Lord Carlyton, as he stood by her side, 'that my happiness unnerves me, Asalita; I have not deserved it. You love me—you will be my wife?'

'I love you,' she replied; 'and I promise you to be your wife.'

It was the happiest hour of her life; the gorgeous sunset, the fragrant air, the song of the birds' the murmur of the bees among the roses—all seemed so many outward attributes to her love. She was so completely, so entirely happy in that, the first hour of her love, that she forgot her sin.

The sun set while he stood by her side, telling her of Haute Hall, his home, and of the life they should spend there together.

'You will not let a long time pass before you come to me, Asalita?' he pleaded. 'You tell me you have no parents, no friends, no one to consult—my darling, why should we wait?'

'It is etiqnette to wait a short time,' she said; 'you cannot woo a lady one day and marry her the next. You are too impatient, Lord Carlyton.'

'Impatient, am I? Ah, Asalita, when a man's heart is set upon a treasure, he is fearful of losing it. I am fearful of losing you; a thousand things may happen to take you from me; but if you are my own my wife, you would never be out of my sight; I could take care of you, watch over you, keep all kinds of trouble away from you. Could I not?'

She laughed the little gay, musical laugh that only comes from a glad heart.

'You seem to think that I am quite unable to take care of myself,' she laughed. 'You forget how many years I have lived in Italy, without any one, even, to take an interest in me. The only thing that kept my heart warm was my growing fame.'

'Do you care for fame now, Asalita?' he asked.

'No, not for fame; only for love,' she replied.

And again he felt that his happiness could not be told in words.

She would cease to be an artist now; she would cease to care for the fame and the wealth that she had won, and she would think only of him, and of how she loved him.

'Why are you smiling, Lord Carlyton?' asked Alison.

'I am thinking,' he replied, 'that every one in the world will envy my happiness.'

'Perhaps it would not be happiness to every one,' she said, 'to love and be loved by me.'

'Then I am sorry for them; I would not change now with a monarch; I have won that which no monarch can win."

And again Alison laughed the laugh of sweet content.

Lord Carlyton had his own way. He called Lady Laura to his assistance, and between them Asalita was besieged. She was persuaded at last to consent that the marriage should take place at the end of the season. Of course, all the papers had a paragraph about it, and the engagement of the gifted and beautiful Italian artist to Lord Carlyton, of Haunte Hall, formed a prominent part in the news of the day.

As he had said, there were no friends to consult, no one to advise, no one to interfere; the consent of the beautiful bride was all that he needed, and that he had obtained.

They were to be married on the second of June. While her lover was in London, Alison had no time for thought; he was never happy away from her; he was always taking her to choose something exquisite, either in the way of jewels, antiques, chairs, pictures, or statues; he was never away from her so that she had no time for thinking. She was hurried from one step to another; she had to choose hangings for her own boudoir, furniture from the great Hanweli's, carriages, horses—everything was left to her. It was not until her lover had gone from her that she had any leisure for thought. He had asked her where she would spend the honeymoon; he had suggested Paris, or her own home, beautiful Italy, wondering why she shrunk with a shudder from the bare idea of it. She preferred to go home—to his home, to Haute, where their life was to be spent; that was her ideal of most perfect bliss. No sooner did he hear that than Lord Carlyton hurried down to Haute, to see himself that all fitting preparations were made for his beautiful bride.

Then she had leisure to think, and she stood as one on the edge of a huge precipice might stand.

He was so good, so true, so noble. Ought she to marry him without telling him the exact truth? Ought she to join her life, so marred and blighted, to his—so fair and noble? Suppose that what she said were true—that when she least thought of it her sin would look her in the face; suppose that when she was his wife, loving, happy, honored, and beloved, all this terrible history of hers were to come to light? Better far tell him now than have it known then. She roused herself as one awakening from a terrible dream.

'Why should I think of such thing?' she said; 'my past is dead; I have lived it down; I will think of it no more; I have buried all traces of it; there is no one living who can say to me, 'I know you to be Alison Trente, and not Asalita Ferrari.' No one living can recognize me, or will dare to say that I am other than I seem, Heaven has been good to me; I have retrieved my past, and he loves me so dearly, so deeply, that it would be absurd for me to spoil his happiness by telling him that which no creature on earth knows but myself.'

So, when the second of June came, they were married, and Lady Carlyton thanked Heaven that day for the future that shone before her, and for the darkness that shrouded her past.

## CHAPTER XLV.

TOO PERFECT TO LAST.

There could be no prettier home in England than Haute Hall. Originally it had been built as a manor-house; each generation seemed to have added some to it. One had built towers, another turrets; one had added the graceful eastern wing, another (trying to outdo his predecessor) had added the western wing; one had put in oriel windows another had planned the grand terraces that sloped to the pleasure gardens. Each lord of Haute had added to or greatly embellished the already beautiful house, until it became a palace, and was known all over England for its picturesque beauty and antique loveliness. There was a keen contrast, too, between the gray ivy-covered wall and the light, modern, graceful exterior. Every modern luxury was to be found at Haute; the walls were hung with grand paintings; there was always a profusion of flowers, rich Turkey carpets, low lace hangings, dainty chairs, cabinets of burl of rare and superb workmanship; there was nothing which taste could desire, art suggest, or money purchase that was not to be found at Haute.

It was a beautiful home. Lady Carlyton's face had paled with emotion, and her eyes darkened with unshed tears when she first saw that superb pile of buildings gilded by the rays of the setting sun.

'Basil, is that your home?' she asked, in a low, hushed voice.

'Your home and mine, darling,' was the laughing reply, 'Pray God it may prove a happy one.'

'I think so—I am sure so,' she said, in the same hushed tones, 'but I did not know that it was one half so grand as this.'

'Did you not? I love it better, now that it has pleased you, than I have ever done before.'

He saw something like a shade of reverence come over his wife's face, and when her lips moved he knew that she was praying. He bent down and kissed the beautiful face.

'My darling,' he said, 'I know but one wonder, and it is, what have I done to merit so good and so fair a wife as you?'

When the dark after days came, she remembered their coming home, when the cup of happiness had seemed filled to the brim. It had been rather in accordance with her wish than his that the wedding had been so quiet. By Lady Laura's express desire, the marriage took place at her house. Few friends were invited, for Alison had dreaded much form or ceremony. A fair-faced, fair-haired girl, Rose Gordon, a cousin of Lady Laura, was her bridemaid. Sir Wilton and Lady Laura alone were at the ceremony. It was certainly against Lord Carlyton's wish; he would fain have shown to the world the beautiful bride whose love was his crown of honor. She looked so radiantly lovely in her wedding costume—in the white bridal-veil and orange wreath, in the gleam of white satin and shimmer of pearls—that he would fain have shown her to the whole world. But her wish, as usual, was his law; he was only too anxious that her least desire should be accomplished.

'I shall have my revenge,' he would say langhingly; 'the time will come when Lady Carlyton will be one of the most beautiful and most popular women in London. You shall have your way now, Asalita—I shall have mine then.'

So the quiet little ceremony which bound them together caused but little sensation just at the time; but Lady Carlyton found that fame had its penalties. It seemed as though the long list of wedding presents would never end. All those who had known her in Italy—those who appreciated her pictures, from the highest lady in the land to the lowest artist—everbody longed to prove to the beautiful artist how dearly she was loved. Her face flushed—a glad light came into her eyes as they rested on all this.

'I am loved,' she thought—'loved and honored. Surely, surely all is forgotten now!'

Lord Carlyton had been immensely touched and amused by these evidences of his beautiful wife's popularity.

'Queens, princes, dukes, duchesses,' he said—'no one has forgotten you; authors, artists, actors—what a world-wide reputation is yours, Asalita! I should not think that any one ever had so many wedding presents before.'

She was greatly pleased with her numerous and costly gifts, but that which touched her most was the number of pretty sketches sent by her brother artists, books sent by their writers—those were more precious than jewels to her.

If the exterior of Haute delighted her beyond measure, the interior pleased her even more; the large, lofty rooms, all in such perfect harmony, no glare of colors, all was perfect and artistic. It was so pleasant to roam over those sunlit rooms, and choose the warmest, the brightest, the most cheerful as her own.

'You must have the best rooms in the house, Asalita,' said Lord Carlyton; 'and they must be facing the sun, facing the flowers, so that you may dream you are in Italy. You like sunset, you tell me, better than sunrise—take these in the western wing.'

She did as he wished, and the beautiful, cheerful rooms were like paradise to her. Lord Carlyton took the keenest delight in filling them with flowers; the air was always warm with rich perfume.

'It will be my own fault,' thought Lady Carlyton, 'if I am not happy here.'

She was the beloved, honored, worshiped wife—the mistress of a large household. She was the queen of the county, second in position to none. She was the most gifted artist and the loveliest woman in England. Those were surely gifts enough to satisfy any one. She was most perfectly, most serenely, most unfeignedly happy; the past was dead, and she thought, poor lady it was buried.

'Are you tired, Asalita?' asked Lord Carlyton of his beautiful wife, one evening.

She looked up at him with the glad light smile he loved so well.

'Tired? No, Basil. As I have done nothing all day except enjoy myself, how can I be tired?'

It was evening, and they were alone. Lord Carlyton had declared that he would have a few week's happiness before the turmoil of visits began; he told her he could not realize or believe in his own happiness—that he was obliged to spend so much every day in looking at her, to satisfy himself that it was true he had won her. On this evening the wonderful fact had seemed to him more difficult of belief than ever. Lady Carlyton looked so beautiful; she wore one of her favorite dresses of rare white lace and scarlet flowers, and the symetry of the white neck and glorious arms was perfect. In the dark glossy coils of hair she wore a splendid camellia. and her face in its softened tenderness was marvelous to see.

'You are reading, 'Sesame and Lillie,' ' he said, looking over her shoulder. 'Now come with me, Asalita, and I will show you a picture that Ruskin could not criticize or Turner paint.'

'What is it?' she asked.

The sun setting over the bonny woods of Haute. Come, my darling. Light as your room is, it is brighter here in the sunshine among the flowers.'

She rose at once. One of her greatest charms was the sweet, submissive obedience that she paid her husband. He would take her hand in his sometimes, and ask:

'Is it the great artist, Asalita, or my wife who obeys me?'

And she would answer:

'Both.'

She went with him now down the steps of the sloping terraces, through the pleasure-grounds and the green croquet-ground; then they opened the gate that led to the woods. They saw the red, round setting sun over the trees.

'There can be no criticism on such a picture,' said Lord Carlyton.

'No,' she replied, 'none.' And they watched it until the far-off trees seemed bathed in golden light.

'It is such a beautiful world,' said Lady Carlyton, with a deep-drawn sigh of unutterable content. 'You must not smile at me, Basil, but I wonder so often if we shall have trees and flowers in heaven.'

'I have often thought about the same thing,' he replied, gravely. 'I think we shall; if the fairest scenes on earth are but faintest pictures of what we shall see in heaven, then the flowers will be fairer.'

'What a sweet, bright world—how I love it all; the swaying boughs, the rustling leaves, the cooing doves, the ripples of light—how I love it, Basil.'

'And what a fair life lies before us, Asalita; none could have a fairer. We have the prestige of an ancient name and race to maintain; we have the happiness, the welfare, the well-being, the prosperity of so many depending upon us. Do you know my ideal of a noble, useful, beautiful life, Asalita?' he asked, after a short pause.

'Tell me,' she said.

'It is not a life spent in the pursuit of gayety or pleasure, although in it I would have both; but it is the making of a home. This Haute Hall, this home of ours, standing in our own land, built among our own people, should be to us the very center of the earth, the dearest spot in it.'

'So it is to me,' said Lady Carlyton; and then, without knowing how or why, her thoughts flew back to that little green grave in Florence, with its white cross and the clustering lilies.

Her lips trembled as she repeated the words—the dearest spot. Ah! hapless little one in the lonely green grave—little nameless child, who had never lived to smile.

'Then,' went on the clear, deep voice, 'I would have the interests of the people dearer to us even than our own.'

She caught his enthusiasm.

'So would I, Basil; I would share their joys and their sorrows, help them when they want sympathy, when they want money; help them to make their toilet sweet—act as stewards of the riches God has given us.'

'That is what I mean, Asalita; Heaven has indeed given me a helpmate. But, my wife, my darling, you must pursue your art; that is a gift you must not neglect.'

'I could not, even if I would,' she answered.

'You shall paint grand pictures, my darling, that shall tell their own story in every home, and they shall be no longer monopolized by the rich; they shall be spread about like sweet messengers. Ah! who shall say the amount of good that one good picture does? You shall paint fair-faced girls, whose eyes are so calm and pure that heaven seems to be in them—whose lips are so sweet and magical they make one think of the lips that chant praises forever and forever more, so that men, looking on them, shall see between women and angels there should be little difference.'

Her dark eyes, filled with the keenest rapture of delight; were looking into his.

'You make me so happy, Basil,' she said, in her low, musical voice; 'you are so noble and so good, that I wonder, in my turn, how you could ever care for me.'

'Come over to the brook-side and look at your face reflected in the waters,' he replied laughingly. I think that a king on his throne might envy me.'

## CHAPTER XLVI.

AN UNWELCOME GUEST.

Lord Carlyton had been compelled to relax; his rich friends would no longer be denied. Lady Laura went over to Haute; then Lady Cardyne wrote to say that in losing madame she had lost half the brightness of her life. They were passing the county; might they stay, if only for one day, at Haute? That letter distressed Lady Carlyton greatly. If she could have done as she would, she would fain have struck the earl and countess from her list of friends. Now that she was married, the honorable wife of an honorable man, it was torture to her either to see or to think of Arthur Montague. True, he did not recognize her, he had a dim, confused idea that he had seen her and known her in another phase of life; he thought her wonderfully like hapless Alison; but that the brilliantly beautiful woman—the artist, whose name was on every lip, the peerless Lady Carlyton—was Alison Trente, even had she told him so herself, he would not have believed it. She would have given much never to meet him, and the idea of being compelled to welcome him into the heart of her home shamed her, distressed, tortured her.

'You do not seem very well pleased with your letter, Asalita,' said Lord Carlyton. 'It is from Lady Cardyne?'

'Yes; we shall be compelled to ask them,' said Lady Carlyton, slowly; 'and we can hardly tell them that that we do not care to see them for more than one day.'

'Why should you tell them that, darling? You like Lady Cardyne very much, do you not?'

'Yes, I like her.'

To be continued.


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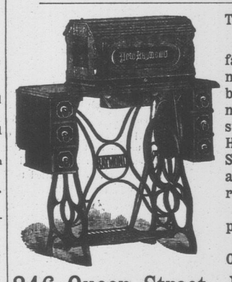

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