

POOR DOCUMENT

UNDER A SHADOW.

Continued.

'I really can hardly tell you. The earl was Colonel Montague when his last escape occurred. He ran away with some governess—a very ordinary kind of girl, I believe, and he was with her in Florence when he met the young lady whom he afterward married. Madame D'Isio knew it at the time, but she ignored it then; he was to be an English peer and a rich man. She told his wife of it afterward, when they had quarrelled violently one day, and Lady Cardyne has never been quite the same since.'

'Then that is the cause of the disagreement between them?' said Alison quickly. 'That and other things. For my part,' continued Lady Laura, 'I think it is cruel and cowardly to tell a wife anything about her husband, and I think also that blindness in a wife is wrong.'

'But are they really not happy?' asked Alison.

'No, they are miserable. I know no people more so. Lady Cardyne has not seemed well lately, she is peevish and irritable; she has no patience with her husband; everything he does is wrong—all that he says is wrong. I am often sorry for him.'

'Yet he seems kind to her. He asked me to dine with her on Tuesday, because it is her birthday, and he thinks that it will give her pleasure.'

'We are invited, too,' said Lady Laura. 'I am glad you are going—you will see all these things for yourself.'

Then their conversation ended; but before the ball was over Alison had an opportunity of judging for herself of the domestic felicity of Lord Cardyne.

He came to talk to her again and again; he was delighted with her; he was charmed with her beauty and grace.

'I never hoped to see you, Madame Ferrari,' he said; 'I have been always most delighted with your pictures. I hope you will come to Hargrave, we have some fine old paintings there.'

As he was saying the words, Lady Cardyne came up to them.

'Speak Italian to me,' she said; 'I am so tired of this harsh, unmusical English. Ah, Madame, just a few words, Lady Cardyne came up to them.'

'I will speak Italian to you, Camilla,' said the earl.

'You but you have an English voice, and it does not seem like the same thing. When a real Italian speaks Italian, it sounds like music; when an Englishman speaks it, it sounds like water rolling over stones.'

'I wish,' said the earl, half sadly, 'that I had been born an Italian—I might have pleased you better.'

'No, I do not think you would,' she said, half carelessly.

Alison saw how keenly the words wounded him—she even felt something like compassion for him. It seemed so strange that this man, who had won so many hearts, should be entirely set at defiance by his own wife.

'I am so tired,' said Lady Cardyne, 'so dreadfully tired.'

'Would you like to go home?' asked the earl; 'if so, I will order the carriage.'

'No, thank you. I should be just as dull and tired at home.'

'Then you will remain here some little time longer, Camilla?'

'I do not care to remain,' said pretty Madame Ferrer.

'But if you will neither go nor stay, what am I to do?' asked Lord Cardyne, in comic despair.

'Do! you need do nothing,' replied his wife; 'everything and every place is the same alike.'

'Will you dance again?' asked the earl. 'I have said that I am tired, Arthur, was the dignified reply.'

'Will you sit still and rest awhile, he asked.'

'I never care about sitting still,' she answered.

'Shall I go and find you an ice?' he persisted.

'There is ice enough in England without eating it,' was the reply.

'Then, my dearest Camilla, I really do not know how to please you.'

'I never for one moment thought you did,' said Lady Cardyne. Ah, me, I am so tired. Madame Ferrari, do you ever grow quite weary of the world and everything in it?'

'No,' replied Alison, 'I do not, and yet, Lady Cardyne, I have known more sorrow than you have ever known by name.'

'That one specimen was enough to convince Alison that between the earl and his young wife there was no chance of happiness. She wondered at his patience—she wondered that he could endure the peevish complaints, the utter absence of all self-control, the constant murmuring, never-ending complaints of England and everything in it.'

The Tuesday came when they were to go to the dinner given in honor of the young countess' birthday. Immediately that she saw Alison she sprang toward her and clasped her arms round her neck.

'It is my birthday,' she said, 'and this will be my greatest treat, the pleasure of seeing and talking to you.'

'It lacks the fervor of an Italian sun,' she said; 'but, with that exception, I see no difference.'

'Ah!' said the countess, pathetically, 'you are prejudiced.'

'I really think,' said Alison, gravely, 'that I might return the compliment. Do you think it quite wise, Lady Cardyne, to set yourself so completely against your husband's country? It should be yours by adoption.'

'The sons of a perdition mother are always perditions.'

'So you believe in the old title of "Perditions of the South Sea"?' said Alison.

'There was a shade of bitterness over the fair young face as the countess answered:

'Yes, I believe in it.'

'Well, I know,' said Alison, 'what, in your case, I should do. I would, for my husband's sake, try to love England and the English. After all, they have great virtues, you know.'

'Lord Cardyne,' she said, 'if we are to be not friends, but acquaintances, you must refrain from paying me compliments; to my mind they are generally insincere, and they are always in bad taste.'

He looked half offended, wholly astonished; then recovering himself quickly said:

'I shall be only too happy to obey any wish of yours, Madame; henceforth the small coin of compliment must not pass between us. Now for the Countess.'

It was a magnificent picture, and as she stood before it, let as of old, in a wondering trance of delight, a certain light came over her face that he remembered so well.

'Great Heaven, how like you are to her! he cried, in great agitation. 'I have seen her stand just so a hundred times and more, with that same light on her face.'

She was keenly alive to the danger of recognition. She turned to him slowly.

'Like whom? Of whom are you speaking, my lord?'

'It must be,' he cried. You must be Alison—Alison risen from the dead?'

She controlled the deadly fear that for one half moment had filled her.

'What droll things you say to me! How strange a name! What do you call it—Alison? Ah, here comes Lady Cardyne; I must tell her that you say I am—what is it?—Alison risen from the dead.'

'For Heaven's sake, hush!' he cried, hurriedly; and the young countess looked from one to the other.

'What is it, Madame?' she asked.

And Alison smiled.

'My lord is so strange; he thinks that I am risen from the dead.'

'Does he? Of whom does Madame Ferrari remind you, Arthur?'

'Some one I knew years ago, he replied. He was a very handsome man, and he was saying the words, Lady Cardyne came up to them.'

'You ought to be flattered, Madame,' said Lady Cardyne. 'Lord Cardyne has always shown great taste in the selection of his friends.'

'Alison, fearful of the words that might ensue, tried to divert the channel of her thoughts. She was suddenly disconcerted by hearing Lady Cardyne say:

'I could almost fancy, Madame, that your face is familiar to me. I can hardly tell why or how.'

'It is but fancy,' said Alison, calmly; 'but in her heart she felt that she had run the greatest risk by coming here.'

It passed off. The dinner was, in its way, a success, although to one so keen, so clever as Alison, the lady's dislike of her lord was very perceptible. Lady Cardyne looked on the most passionate fancy for Alison; she was hardly willing to leave her even for a minute, she devoted her self to her to the exclusion of her other guests. He was not happy, in spite of all the magnificence that surrounded him, in spite of the grandeur that was all natural to him; he looked like what Lady Laura called him—a disappointed man. Alison saw it all. He loved his wife, she loved him; but the great gulf between them was too wide. Alison saw it all. He loved his wife, she loved him; but the great gulf between them was too wide.

'I do not believe one word of it. Who told you so?'

'My grandmother, Madame D'Isio. She and Lord Cardyne quarrelled one day, and after he had gone out of the room, she told me that he had not married her for love, but that he had loved some one in Florence.'

'I do not believe it, and, if I may speak my opinion, I think it was a cruel thing to tell you anything of the kind. If he did not love you why did he marry you? I consider myself a very fair judge of a man, and I say that he does love you.'

'But he did care for one in Florence; Madame D'Isio told me so—a very beautiful girl, and she was his first love.'

'He did not, could not have cared for her as he does for you, or he would have married her, said Alison, with a beating heart.'

'Do men always marry the women they love?' she asked.

'Always, I believe, when they can afford to.'

'And do you think, Madame—I know you will speak frankly—do you think before her you have seen that my husband really loves me?'

'Yes, I do indeed, really and truly. I think that the happiness of his life is all bound up in you.'

'If I could really once think so, I should try to like England and the English. I should be quite different if I really believed it.'

'I am quite sure you may. I know love when I see it, and I tell you that your husband loves you.'

'Do you think he liked this other, this beautiful English girl in Florence?'

'Yes,' replied Alison; 'I have no doubt that he liked her, and perhaps, fifty more before her at the same time any one can see that you are the love of his life; those were but fancies—they have died in the light of this love.'

'How different I should be, if I thought so,' said Lady Cardyne. 'Whenever I feel the least inclined even to be happy, I think of what Madame D'Isio said to me, and I make myself miserable purposely.'

'I can only advise you to do what I should do myself,' said Alison. 'I should try to trust my husband; I would say to myself that the world was full of women, some of them more beautiful, more noble, more gifted than myself, yet that from the whole world he had chosen to marry me, therefore he must love me.'

'There is certainly something in that,' said the countess, with a brightening face.

'Men differ from women,' said Alison. 'They have many fancies which we think loves. The best of them know but one love in a lifetime.'

'I think,' said Lady Cardyne, 'that I will try. I will not rail against England to-day. Oh, Madame, I should love England well enough, if my husband loved me.'

'He does love you. See how anxious he is about you; how that handsome face of his glows over when he thinks that you are not pleased; how he watches you, anticipates you every wish, delights in pleasing you; how sad he is when you repine, how happy when you say one kind word to him. I believe you hold his heart in your hand.'

'Do you?' she asked, in wondering joy—'do you? Ah! Madame, that seems too good to be true.'

'What would you do if you knew that it were true?' asked Alison.

'The fair young face looked thoughtful for a few minutes, then she replied:

'If I really believed it I would go to my husband and put my arms round his neck; I should tell him I was sorry for every perverse word I had uttered; I

would tell him that I meant to love England for his sake—that it should be the home of my adoption. I wish—oh! how I wish it were true.'

There came a flash in the sweet voice as she spoke, and Alison's whole heart turned to her—this child-like girl who had supplanted her. She took Lady Cardyne's white jeweled hand in her own.

'Do,' she said, 'what you would do if you believed this to be true.'

'She would have added more, but at that instant Lord Cardyne came up to them.'

'I have been looking everywhere for this velvet and white fur,' he said. 'Where you really so cold, Camilla, that you wore furs to-day?'

'The sun is warmer and brighter than the velvet and white fur,' he said. 'Where you really so cold, Camilla, that you wore furs to-day?'

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