POOR DOCUMENT

UNDER A SHADOW.

Continued.

'Then how could you——'

'Ah! how could I?' she interrupted. 'I do not know. I would tell you the truth as I would tell it to Heaven. The idea seemed to me so utterly, so incomprehensibly vile, that I could not even understand or realize it; then, as I came to understand it better, the horror wore off. I cannot explain it to you; I cannot explain it even to myself; I can only say this, I am guilty. Why, or how it came about that I was guilty I could not tell. If I were to stand up and say to you that I sinned because I loved the one who tempted me, it would be false; if I said I sinned because I loved luxury and wanted wealth, or because my dull life wearied me and I was tired of being alone, that would be false. I think he tempted me through my love of art; he talked to me about Italy—about the dear old galleries of Venice and Verona. He knew how to set my heart and soul on fire, Heaven knows if I am speaking truthfully, as Heaven will judge me; but I declare that in going away with him I thought more of the pictures I should see, the constant change of scene, the excitement of travel, than I did either of him or of the wrong I was doing.'

'I believe it,' said Nugent. In the white, beautiful face before him there was an impress of truth.

'Afterward,' she went on, 'I came to love him. No, I will not desecrate the word—it was rather wild, jealous passion than love. I lived in a dream, Nugent; I seldom stopped to think; I was lost in delight at the wonderful scenes, the wonderful paintings, the thousand and one beauties that I saw around me. He took me to Italy, and, when we had exhausted all other cities, we went to a villa on the banks of the Arno. Never mind what happened there. I lived many lives, and it seemed to me that I died many deaths. There in that villa he deserted me, and my baby died.'

'Poor child!' he said, pityingly, holding the white hands clasped in his own. 'Poor child!'

'You asked me how I came to the Arno. I will tell you, Nugent. I remember the agony of knowing that he had deserted me—of knowing that he was to marry; then my memory is blank, until one night, when I awoke, and was feeling strangely weak and ill; while the moon was shining bright as day, by its light I saw through the half-open door of the next room a little white baby lying dead in the midst of white flowers. I must have been mad. I remember rising so quietly lest any one should hear me, taking the little one in my arms, and going to the river. I remember praying to God, as I plunged into the cold water. Then you rescued me.'

'And after?' he said, for she had paused abruptly.

'That was another life' she replied. 'It seemed to me that I had risen from the dead, and I determined to try a new life I gave up my old name, and took one that I had read of.'

'Then your name, was not Asalita Ferrari?' he said.

'No; I took that, and, as you know, I have made it famous. I had found out then that I, too, could be a painter—that I had the heaven-born gift men call genius. I was so happy in the thought, despite my sorrow and my fall, that I sold all my jewels, and, leaving Florence, I went to Rome. You know all my history after that.'

'Nay, Lady Carlyton I do not indeed; I only know that your fame extends over the wide world; but I know no more.'

'I gave myself up to work,' she said, I worked as I believe no one ever did before, and my dreams began to be realized—began to shape themselves into beautiful realities. the world, my own sad story the memory of my own dead child, all faded from me, and I lived only in my art; my dreams of color, of beauty, of form, the thousand ideas of grace and loveliness that had flitted through my mind became real. Ah, Nugent, I lived in my art, and slowly it dawned upon me that this great gift of mine was to be used as a means of doing good; that art must purify, ennoble, elevate; that it must raise men's thoughts and hearts to heaven, not chain them to earth. And it seemed to me wonderful that I, the fallen one, should hold the means of such good deeds in my sinful hands.'

A half-divine light flashed over her face, despite its sorrow.

'I have used my talent as a gift from Heaven,' she said; 'and I know that the world is better for it.'

CHAPTER LIII.

THE PENITENT'S PLEA.

'It is a strange story,' said Nugent Avenham, thoughtfully. 'You have more o tell me Asalita.'

'Yes; but not much more, Nugent,—only how my story ended. I worked hard, and tried to live well; I left no stone unturned; I neglected no opportunity of helping those who wanted help; I worked with my heart, soul, body and mind. Thank God for His gifts!—genius was mine. I woke to find myself famous; I can hardly tell now; my name seemed to be known everywhere where art was loved. At last I fell ill, and then the doctors ordered me to England. I came; I met with the kindest receptions; friends gathered around me, the noblest in the land greeted me, and I met your brother. I loved him from the first; but in my heart there were many struggles before I consented to marry him. I knew that I ought to tell him my story, yet I could hardly make up my mind to that, lest—oh! Heaven—lest I should lose him. I would not have married him but that I thought my secret so safe no one could ever discover the least trace of it. If I had thought it possible a time would ever come when this would come to light, I would rather have died any death than have married him.'

'It was not right,' said Nugent thoughtfully; 'a man has a right to look for all virtue in his wife. There are few men who would marry the loveliest or the wealthiest of women if they knew for certain that she had gone wrong. My brother would not have done so—I would not.'

'Nugent,' she said, in a faint voice, 'will you spare me? I know that I have done a fearful wrong; you cannot reproach me more bitterly than I reproach myself: you cannot say more to me than I say to myself; I would give my life, over and over again, to undo it all, if it could be undone.'

'That it can never be,' he replied.

'I know—I know. God has more mercy than men. God forgives—men never forget, I know.'

The beautiful face dropped on her hands with a look of despairing misery that went to his heart; and so they sat silent, while every leaf around them vibrated in the sweet spring breeze—silent, sad, hopeless. Nugent, more grieved than words could tell for his brother; Lady Carlyton, lost in a trance of misery. At last she raised her colorless face to his.

'Nugent,' she said, 'I have suffered so terribly. Will you befriend me?'

'I will do what I can, Asalita,' he replied.

She folded her white hands like a child who prays.

'Will you do this for me, Nugent—will you keep my wretched secret—will you help me to keep it? See, I kneel to ask you; I pray you, for heaven's own sake, keep my secret'

His face grew pale as her own. He answered her:

'I cannot promise. What you ask is impossible. My brother must know the truth.'

'Do not be hard on me!' she cried, with a great, tearless sob. 'I was so young—so young—and I had no mother. What could come from such a life as mine? Oh Nugent, keep my secret! If ever you want God's mercy for yourself, show it to me now!'

'My dear Asalita,' he said, gently. 'I am truly, heartily sorry for you—no one could be more so; but if I keep such a secret as that, it would really seem to me as though I had shared in your sin. Do not ask me.'

'But I must ask you. I shall kneel here until you grant my prayer. I must ask you. Do not be hard on me. I have repented so sorely since I knew that I had committed an almost unpardonable sin. Listen, Nugent—let me tell you how I have suffered. Tears will wash sins away—I am sure of it, although no one has told me so. In that grand old history, where Magdalene kneels at our Saviour's feet, He does not drive her away with harsh, angry words 'Poor sinful soul,' He seemed to say, 'steeped to the lips in sin, still they are all forgiven you because you have loved so much. Ah! Nugent you may jeer, may scoff, may laugh, but if these same divinely merciful lips spoke to me, they would utter words of pardon, because I have suffered so much. I have been through fire, let me tell you. My first suffering was a burning passion of jealousy when I saw the love that I had hoped to be eternal taken from me and given to another. Then I suffered the torture of long suspense, the anguish of uncertainty, the pain of desertion. I suffered even the pain of death, for I had said farewell to the world when I fled to the river. I suffered the gradual dawn of light—the dawn of the full knowledge of what I had done—of the nature of my sin. I, as it were, effaced myself, and began my life afresh. I suffered—ah, Nugent, if pain could atone for sin, mine was forgiven. Then, listen to what I did with my new life; I tried to fill it with good; I looked my sin in the face, and set myself to work to win the pardon of Heaven for it. The morning dawn would find me on my knees praying for pardon; I prayed while others slept. I learned the words of that sublime psalm in which David pleads for mercy; sleeping or waking they were never off my lips. I wept bitter tears, I pleaded I prayed. Would you tell me God was deaf? A contrite heart is never rejected, and mine was contrite. I could not tell you the good deeds I tried to do—you see that I am making you my judge. I visited the sick, I fed the hungry, I gave money to the poor; I neglected no one kind deed that it was possible to perform. And would you tell me God saw not? Ah! Nugent, do not be hard on me, my friend—be pitiful. Can all that love, all that sorrow, all that atonement, be in vain? See! in the heat of summer, when my lips were parched, and ripe grapes hung near me in cool, great clusters, I would not touch them; I sent them to the sick. I suffered hunger and thirst, always hoping suffering would help me to atone. Ah! Nugent, look kindly at me—tell me that you think God has pardoned me.'

'My dear Asalita,' he replied, touched by the intensity of her grief, the passion of her words, 'I do not for one moment deny what you say. I believe, in very truth, that God has forgiven your sin. It is of the judgment of man I am thinking, not of the judgment of Heaven.'

'The judgment of man!' she cried; 'surely man cannot be hard on me. I have helped my fellow-creatures—I have done nothing but good to them; why should they sit in judgment upon me? I have helped them with my talent, my gold, my strength, my time; their best beloved have died in my arms, their dearest have thanked me for helping to save their lives; even my work has helped them to be better, nobler, and wiser—why should they sit in judgment upon me?'

'I cannot say—it is the verdict of the world,' he replied.

'But the world cannot judge. How should the world know? It cannot tell that I was young and motherless, that I was tempted by my love for the beautiful that I repented so sorely; the world does not know all that.'

'No; but the sentence is pronounced all the same, Asalita. I cannot tell you why it is, unless it be that the world expects so much purity and innocence from woman, that it resents deeply and bitterly any loss of it.'

'That may be, but the world has no right to judge or condemn us above that, Nugent. Unless you had shown this—this terrible story by some means, you would always have loved, honored and respected me.'

'Yes, always,' he replied.

'Then you must have found me worth honor and respect,' she argued.

'I did,' he answered.

'Then, Nugent, why need you change the opinion now? In my youth I sinned; the mists of ignorance, of vanity, closed round me and I sinned; but the girl who sinned that sin is dead; from her ashes has sprung a woman whom you own to be worthy of all honor and respect—a woman whom the grace of God has crowned with genius, even with fame. Should she be punished for the sin of the ignorant girl?'

'I am afraid so,' he replied.

'Then there is no justice, no mercy, no pardon, and I need not ask it. The heavens are made of brass, men's hearts of iron! I have suffered and worked in vain!'

She wept as he had never heard any one weep before; great sobs seemed to rend her delicate frame.

'Be kind to me, Nugent,' she said; 'kill me as I kneel here. I can die; but I cannot go back to face my husband's misery when he shall know I have deceived him.'

'I wish that I had never returned here,' he said, sadly; 'I do not know what to do.'

She seized his hand; and held it while she pleaded.

'Nugent, have you not thought me a fitting wife for your brother? Have you seen in me anything with which you could find serious fault? Have I been light, pleasure-seeking, frivolous, neglectful of my duty?'

'No, you have been none of these things,' he replied.

'Then why denounce me—why destroy my life and his happiness? Oh! Nugent, let reason plead for me, as I cannot plead for myself. What if you denounce me to my husband? He will be compelled to send me from him; the verdict of the world will influence him as it has influenced you. He will send me away, and he will never know another moments happiness—never while he lives. The whole country will ring with the scandal. All this cruel harm will be done, and for what—for what? Just to bring a penitent sinner to fresh remorse and degradation. What will be gained by your denouncing me, Nugent?'

'Nothing, but justice will be done.'

'Ah! my dear friend, does justice lie in your hands? Shall you show me justice and no mercy? I will tell you how you can make justice and mercy meet.'

'How?' he asked; and over the pallid despair of her face came a gleam of hope. 'How?'

'I will tell you. The secret of my sin is known to none save you and myself. No one could ever suspect it, I have kept it so well. Nugent, would it not meet the ends of justice, if, after this, you watched me, watched all my actions, listened to my words; and if in me you see anything that excites your anger, your blame, your suspicion, then denounce me; but if I lead a good and blameless life, spare me. As you will one day want mercy from your own judge, will you do this, Nugent?'

'Let me think it over,' he said, 'leave me for a few minutes, and let me decide.' She hastened to a short distance from him, and, silently watching her, he saw her, after the fashion of the saints of old, bend he headr even to the very earth while she prayed. Could such a woman deserve to be denounced? She had been tempted, she had sinned in her youth, but was this verdict of the world a fair one? Had she not, as she said, suffered enough? Should he take up a stone and cast it at her, crying out!

'She is a sinner; let her die.'

Should he strip her of her well-earned fame, her crown of genius, her beautiful womanly attributes, her husband's love, her fair name, her good repute, her life's happiness? Oh, no, a thousand times no! As Heaven would have mercy on him in the hour when he most needed it, so he would have mercy on this helpless woman, who had prayed it from him with sighs and tears.

CHAPTER LIV.

'I WILL KEEP YOUR SECRET.'

'I will show mercy even as I hope to find it,' said Nugent Avenham to himself. 'If I do wrong Heaven forgive me. It could not be right to condemn that woman to a life of shame and misery.'

He went over to her.

'Asalita, I have decided,' he said.

She bowed her beautiful head.

'My whole life lies in your hands, Nugent.'

'I will keep your secret. No word, no look of mine shall ever betray it; you have suffered enough; you shall never know another day's unhappiness, if I can avert it. I will keep it as I would my own.'

He never forgot the light that came over her face, the light that came back again to her despairing eyes.

'Heaven bless you for it,' she said. 'I was sore afraid. Oh, Nugent, you may trust me; I own myself unworthy of the name I bear, but I bear it in all honor as the noblest and best could do. I love your brother with all my heart; if I can, I will love him even more; I will pay my debt of gratitude to you by devotion to your house. Oh, Nugent, I have been sore afraid. If you had decided against me, if you had thought it your duty to denounce me, I could have found no fault, but I could never have borne it; my husband's averted face would have killed me. You have saved my life—not once, but twice. I will prove my gratitude to you—I shall find the means. I have been so frightened.'

She sunk trembling on the grass, and Nugent, looking at her colorless face, felt half-alarmed.

'Why do you tremble, Asalita? The danger is past. I will be your true brother, your stanch, true friend—trust me. You shall never find that I fail.'

Still she did not answer him; and, looking at her, he found that she was quite insensible; she neither saw nor heard.

'What she has endured,' he thought, 'to bring her to this.'

And, as for the second time in his life the beautiful head was pillowed on his arm, profound, tender, deep pity stole into his heart, and remained there. He was not alarmed at the deep swoon—she would recover from that, he knew; but as she lay there he swore to befriend her, to help her, to stand between her and all sorrow, to guard her secret as he guarded his own life! Pity is akin to love; he had admired her immensely, but now something more tender than admiration came to him—such pitying, protecting love and affection as all good people feel for those they have befriended.

'Asalita,' he said, when the dark eyes opened and looked at him in vague wonder—'Asalita, my dear sister, you have frightened yourself too much; you were not very strong before; you will be quite ill now.'

'The danger is all passed,' she said, faintly.

'Yes; all passed and gone. I am your true and faithful friend and brother; I have thought it all over, sister, and I have decided you have suffered enough, quite enough, and your secret need never be known. You are quite sure that, except to you and myself, all this story is quite unknown to any human being?'

'I am quite certain,' she replied; 'as a girl so few knew me, and those few have forgotten me years ago; you yourself would never recognize in the Italian artist the obscure English girl.'

'No; I should not indeed,' he replied.

'No one knew exactly when I went away, or whom I went with,' she said. 'I do not see the most remote possibility of my true history ever being known; if I did I would tell my husband even now, lest he should hear it from another.'

'Then you may be happy. Forget this; live in the hope that your sin is forgiven.'

'And forgotten,' she added, quickly.

'And forgotten,' he replied, gravely.

'Nugent,' she said, looking timidly at him, 'knowing my story, will you be able to keep up appearances with me—to show me any manner of respect—to be kind to me?'

He smiled for the first time since that painful interview began.

'I do respect you, Asalita,' he said. 'You are a noble woman; you have lived down a fatal error, a terrible mistake; you have formed a noble, valuable life from the wreck of a ruined one. You have my respect, my esteem; you have my admiration and love.'

He never forgot how she raised her beautiful face to the skies—how she folded her hands, and said:

'At last—at last I have lived it down. My God, I thank Thee."

Then, drawing her hand in his arm, he said:

'Now we will go home. One more word, Asalita— let this conversation between us be buried—be as though it had never been; we will never resume it, never allude to it; and you will remember that you have in me a true friend, who will shield you when you require help. For my brother's sake, try to forget, try to be your usual self. It would only grieve him uselessly, were he to suspect anything wrong.'

So they returned; and, crossing the lawn, they met Lord Carlyton,

'What a long ramble you have had Asalita. I should say, Nugent, you will know every tree on the grounds by this time. But, my darling, you look pale and tired—so tired. How is it?'

'I am tired,' she replied; and her husband looked up at her in wonder,

'Why, Asalita, the music has gone out of your voice,' he said.

Nugent turned to her with a half-reproachful look.

'That is too bad, Lady Carlyton; you have allowed me to take you too far Now Basil will never trust you with me again.'

'Yes, he will,' she replied, with a smile on her face. 'My willful ways shall not bring blame to you.'

Lord Carlyton took his wife's hand.

'I must look after you more carefully.' he said; 'you have just the worn, tired look that you had when you came first from Italy. Now," he added, as they entered the house, 'no physician could perscribe more sensibly for you than I am about to do. You look as though you had been studying—thinking of a subject for a new picture without doubt. You go straight to your own room and lie down. I shall bring you some wine and the most amusing novel I can find.'

Lady Carlyton looked up with a smile, but her lips quivered.

'This is a lesson to you, Nugent, how to spoil your wife when you have one.'

'When I have one,' he replied, 'I will remember the lesson.,

'He may find a wife,' laughed Lord Carlyton; 'but he will never find one like you Asalita; there was but one treasure in this world, and I have secured it.'

In the dark eyes raised so wistfully to his, Nugent read the appeal; 'You see how he loves me; do not undeceive him; and then she went away.

'You are not strong, my darling, and I cannot have your strength taxed after this fashion. I can imagine that Nugent is delighted to have such a companian; but I must caution him.'

Tenderly, as though she had been an ailing child, he placed his beautiful, worshiped wife on the couch, then in a short time returned, bringing with him a bunch of grapes, some wine, and a book.

'All the appliances for comfort, Asalita,' he said. 'Eat these grapes; that is the finest bunch in the vinery. Drink this and then read yourself to sleep; you will wake quite refreshed and well.'

But before he left her Lord Carlyton bent down and kissed the beautiful face. His hands lingered carressingly on the dark, waving hair.

'My darling,' he murmured, 'for my sake, and because I love you so dearly, you must try to grow strong. What would become of me if you were ill, Asalita, light of my life?'

Then he left her, and the, poor helpless lady laid down her book, and turning her face to the wall, wept bitter tears.

'Oh forgive me—my God, forgive me. Do not let the curse of my sin fall on me now.'

While her husband thought she slept, she was praying with weeping eyes. But at dinner time she was herself again, looking beautiful as a queen in her dress of rose silk and her suit of diamonds. There was no shadow of reserve between Nugent and herself: he was only anxious to make her feel quite at home with him—to make her forget all that had passed. The only difference that any one could have detected in her manner to him, was that there was in it something of humility and of gratitude.

In one respect, Nugent Avenham kept his word—he watched her closely, so closely that had there been any flaw in her conduct, any shortcomings, any deficiency, he must have noticed it, had there been any frivolity, any lightness of manner, and false morality, he must have detected it. As it was, the more clogely he watched her the more he admired her. It was the most simple and blameless, the most noble of lives. In it there was no thought of self, no indulgence, ho indolence; work, thought for others, good deeds and noble actions filled it. Critical as he was, he could find no one single cause for blame; he could no fault; he was compelled to say to himself, 'This is the noble life of a noble woman—this is a life without reproach;' and so saying, he was glad that he had spared.

The time came when their departure for London had been arranged, and the gayeties of the season were all before them. But for this unfortunate discovery Nugent Avenham would long since have confided to Lord Carlyton the story of his love for Lady Eva. He hesitated now over doing so—gentlemen are always particular over the friends whom they introduce to wives and sisters. He himself had come around to Lady Carlyton's view of the matter—that after so much suffering and sorrow, her wrong-doing might be forgotten. He admitted it to himself; but it was quite another thing when he thought of introducing Lady Eva to her. On that morning when his suspicions had been confirmed, one of the objects that he had in view, if he had found all right, had been telling Lady Carlyton his love story. If he had found himself mistaken that morning, he would have confided every detail of it to her.

To be continued.

Notice of Sale.

TO Manly London, of the Parish of Sheffield, in the County of Sunbury, farmer, and all other persons whom it may in any wise concern:

Notice is hereby given under and by virtue of a power of sale contained in a certain indenture of mortgage, bearing date, the seventeenth day of October, in the Year of Our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and eighty-nine, made between the said Manly London, therein described as of the Parish of Sheffield, in the County of Sunbury, farmer, of the one part, and the undersigned, Thomas J. McElroy and Thomas J. McCaffry, administrators, of all and singular, the goods, chattels and credits of Terence McElroy, deceased, of the other part, which said indenture of mortgage is recorded in Sunbury County, records in Book E. No. 2, pages 279, 280, 281, and 282. There will, for the purpose of satisfying the moneys secured by the said mortgage, default having been made in the payment of the interest due on the same as well as in the payment of certain other moneys secured thereby, be sold at public auction at the front of the Record Office, in Oromocto, in the Parish of Burton, in the County of Sunbury, on

Saturday, the Twenty-fourth Day of October Next,

at the hour of eleven o'clock, in the forenoon, the lands and premises mentioned and described in the said indenture of mortgage as follows:—

"All that certain farm, piece or parcel of "land, situate, lying and being on the north-"ern side of Maquapit Lake, Parish of Shef-"field, County of Sunbury, Province of New "Brunswick, known and distinguished as part "of lot number twenty-seven, formerly owned "and occupied by one Edward M. London, "and bounded as follows: "Commencing at a "marked rock on the south side of the High-"way Road, running north to the Ferguson "side line, thence northeast to the Hudlin "Line, thence south to the Lake Shore, thence "west forty-one rods, thence north to the "place of beginning, containing by estimation "eighty acres more or less, also all that other "certain piece or parcel of land also being part "of lot number twenty-seven formerly owned "and occupied by the said Edward M. Lon-"don, and bounded as follows: "Commenc-"ing at a marked rock on the south side of "the Highway Road, thence running north to "Ferguson's side line, thence northeast, a suf-"ficient distance to give a breadth of fifteen "rods at right angles, thence south to the "Lake Shore, thence west fifteen rods, thence "north to the place of beginning, containing "by estimation thirty acres more or less; also "all the right, title and interest of the said "Manly London, in and to all that other "piece or parcel of land, being part of lot "number twenty-eight, in the parish and "county aforesaid, and bounded as follows: "Commencing at the north side of Maquapit "Lake thoroughfare, running north along "Thomas Thompson's side lines to Maquapit "Lake, thence a south easterly course along "the said lake to the mouth of the thorough-"fare, thence along the said thoroughfare to "the place of beginning, containing by esti-"mation twenty acres more or less."

Together with all and singular the buildings and improvements thereon and the appurtenances to the said lands and premises and every part and parcel thereof belonging or in any wise appertaining.

Dated August 26th, A. D., 1891.

T. J. McELROY,
THOS. J. McCAFFREY,
Administrators of all and singular, the goods, chattels and credits of Terence McElroy, deceased.

C. E. DUFFY,
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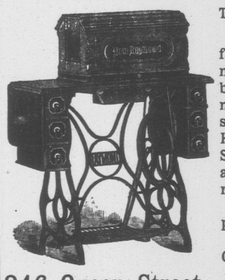

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