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IN THE SHADOW OF SHAME

By Fitzgerald Molloy

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Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

Olive Dumbarton, after the legal separation from her brutal husband, becomes a successful authoress and lives quietly with her daughter, Veronica, in Hexton Road, St. John's Wood, London. Her husband secretly returns to London and by letter makes further demands for money. Her cousin, Valerius Galbraith, a man of independent wealth, who has been in love with her since early youth, calls to say farewell before starting on a trip to Egypt.

CHAPTER II.

A fortnight elapsed since Olive Dumbarton said farewell to her cousin, during which time she had striven in vain to escape from the cloud of depression that crept upon her life. Veronica persuaded her to summon their friend and neighbor, Dr. Quave.

The latter, on seeing Mrs. Dumbarton, spoke gravely of overwrought nerves, exhausted brain, general debility, and ordered complete rest from mental work, open air exercise, avoidance of excitement, crowds and late hours, begging her of all things to free her mind from worry.

"What most fatigues and distresses me are sleepless nights," she said, "so that I have taken to use chloral."

"That you must immediately discontinue," Dr. Quave replied. "Sleep should come from natural causes, as from exercise, for instance."

"But I haven't sufficient strength to take exercise."

"You soon will. Narcotics are especially bad in a case like yours. I will send you a tonic—phosphorus, quinine and nux vomica. That, with complete rest, will set you right again," the doctor remarked, with a cheery air.

Mrs. Dumbarton gave up work because all ideas seemed to have forsaken her, and to frame three consecutive sentences became an impossibility.

One evening after dinner as she sat reading in the cosy room she called the study, a servant entered bearing a card. Mrs. Dumbarton started at the slight but unexpected noise made by the opening of the door, and then glanced at her visitor's name. "Mr. Bostock—show him in," she said, without hesitation and with pleasure. In another moment the publisher stood before her, a tall, slight man, with a wide, high forehead, dark gray melancholy eyes under well-marked brows and a black beard.

"Forgive me for calling at such an hour," he said, apologetically, "but I was in the neighborhood, and I thought I would do myself the pleasure of bearing you interesting news."

"I am always glad to see you," she answered, the frank expression of her pleasure showing in her face.

"My news is this: The whole of the first edition of your book has been subscribed for before publication."

"I am so glad!" cried Veronica.

"It fills me with apprehension," said the authoress. "What, if after all I disappoint the public, now it has been so kind?"

"No fear of that. It's the best novel you have written," George Bostock replied, looking at her with eyes that spoke the secret of his heart.

"I'm delighted that you think so. The last book at which I work always seems to me the best until it's finished; then, when I read it over, I see how completely it has failed to convey what I intended, and I am ready to feel unspeakable gratitude to the critics if they will mercifully refrain from rending me."

"Now they unanimously praise you," the publisher said.

"Far more than I deserve; I am not unmindful of their gentleness."

"You have earned all their praise," replied this cheery friend.

"'Tis more that I receive it."

And they continued chatting of literature and its votaries, unmindful because unconscious of the fate drawing nigh them, until once more the servant entered, this time with a book and a letter which had arrived by the last post. Looking at them, Mrs. Dumbarton saw they were directed in the handwriting of Valerius Galbraith.

George Bostock rose. He was struck by the pale and haggard appearance of his hostess, which her animation had until now concealed.

"Are you not well?" he inquired, anxiously.

"I have been somewhat upset."

"Surely not by him?"

"Yes. He has returned, notwithstanding his promise."

"Has he been here?" Bostock asked, anxiously, eagerly.

"Not yet; but he may come any day."

"Can nothing be done?" he inquired, much distressed by what he heard.

"I fear not. But the pain of this expectancy—the suspense——"

"I understand. Remember, if I can be of any service—you know——"

"Yes, I know," she answered, gratefully.

With a strong, firm grasp he held her hand in his, then left her without further words.

Left alone, Mrs. Dumbarton seated herself in a cosy chair and opened the book Valerius had sent. She soon became interested in its contents, so that time quickly passed unperceived by her.

Veronica had been an hour in the happy land of childhood's dreams, and the cook had retired to bed, so that none were downstairs save Olive Dumbarton and her maid, the latter awaiting the summons of her mistress. Suddenly, as the girl dozed over a weekly periodical, she was rudely startled into wakefulness by sounds of the shouting and crashing of furniture, and immediately after came a cry of bitter pain, such as might be drawn from a woman by a cruel blow, to which in turn succeeded a hoarse shout, as from a man in his extremity imploring mercy and demanding help.

Petrified by terror, the girl stood immovable with strained senses for a second, then, acting on impulse, she rushed to the study and flung wide the door. In the center of the room a man lay upon his back motionless, his eyes wide open and fixed, terror on his ghastly face, his jaws clinched, while bending above him, almost as rigid as he and as terrible to behold, stood Mrs. Dumbarton, a knife in one hand, her dress torn and blood besmeared, her demeanor wild. With a horrible scream the girl rushed from the room, quitted the house, and ran into the roadway.

A minute later and Veronica, draped in a dressing gown, hurried into the study. She bent above the prostrate, motionless figure and gazed upon the cruel and evil face.

"Father," she said, in a shuddering whisper.

Then she looked upon her mother, whose countenance was as that of a marble mask—a mask cunningly carved to express despair and delirium, agony and fear, and lighted by the eyes of flame, looked upon the knife clutched in the thin, nervous white hand and upon the blood-smeared gown, when with a piteous and tender cry—the cry of one wounded beyond healing, the child flung her arms around that dumb, tragic figure, exclaiming:

"Oh, mother, mother, what have you done?"

At that moment the servant hurriedly re-entered the room, followed by a policeman.

"Look," she said hysterically, as she pointed to her mistress. "Look, she has murdered him!"

As the policeman advanced Olive Dumbarton shivered and drew back, tottered, and with a piteous moan fell senseless beside the dead.

CHAPTER III.

On seeing the figure of a man stretched stark upon the floor, his breast stained with blood, the policeman, unheeding all else, knelt beside him to ascertain if life were quite extinct. Having satisfied himself upon this point, he looked up and asked:

"Terrible to Behold, Stood Mrs. Dumbarton."

"Who is he?"

"Her husband!" the maid replied, in a high, wild voice.

Before he could ask further questions, sounds were heard of footsteps and murmurs of voices of those whom the servant's cries of murder and the policeman's entry had attracted, and presently another constable, Dr. Quave and his son, and some strangers pushed their way into the room, followed by the cook, sleepy and scared.

The medical man bent above the dead, took one rigid hand in his own, placed his ear above the region where the heart had just been stilled, and said in an awesome tone:

"It's all over with him. He is quite dead."

From this ghastly figure he turned to Mrs. Dumbarton, who by this time had been lifted to a couch, where she lay motionless and apparently lifeless, her daughter clinging to and kissing her between heartbroken sobs.

The policeman made no attempt to arrest the woman suspected of murder, knowing she was not likely to make her escape, and aware that if arrested before she gave evidence in the Coroner's Court she could not be cross-examined.

"You must at once fetch an inspector, Martyn," the policeman who had first arrived upon the scene said to the other, "while I remain here and see that nothing is disturbed."

Crayton, the second constable, having disappeared, Mrs. Dumbarton been conveyed to her bedroom and the group of curious strangers having departed, silence fell upon the house, broken only by the occasional sounds of hurried footsteps in the corridor above stairs.

A considerable time passed before Martyn, keeping his watch beside that stark and ghastly figure, heard sounds of cab wheels stop before the house, and immediately Inspector Griffiths, of the Metropolitan Police District, entered with Crayton. Griffiths, who had been made acquainted with the circumstances of the case, methodically prepared to examine the deceased, hoping to find some clew to the instigation of the crime, some evidence which would surely bring the act home to the perpetrator.

Before beginning he was joined by Detective Inspector Mackworth, who had been sent to the house by the Director of Criminal Investigation, to whom Griffiths had forwarded a telegram.

Together they began the scrutiny, which seemed to afford little clew to the motive which caused David Dumbarton's death. The deceased had neither watch, chain, nor valuables in his possession; a few shillings and some pawn tickets were found in one pocket, a passbook containing entries of bets in another, while a third held an empty envelope directed in a round, masculine hand, and giving the address of the deceased.

These being carefully set aside, the examination of the room was proceeded with, the men stepping softly on the thick carpet, as if fearful lest they should wake that rigid form lying on the floor. Their search was almost immediately rewarded by the discovery near the couch on which Mrs. Dumbarton had lain of a large, bone-handled clasp knife, such as sailors might use, the blade of which was freshly stained with blood, and from the window crossing to the center of the room were traces of clay—marks of the footsteps of the murdered man. Beyond these nothing was perceptible in the well-ordered room to indicate the tragedy that had taken place within its walls and had forever cast a shadow on this peaceful home.

"He must have entered there," remarked Mackworth, pointing to the French windows, which opened in the center and extended almost to the floor. "Let us have a look at the garden." And with lamps flashing through the heavy darkness they examined the ground, tracking footmarks which crossed in a diagonal line from the gate to the window, leaving deep indentations in the flower plots, tramping shrubs and blossoms, and tearing down the grass upon the slope of the terrace fronting the house. Comparison of the footprints with the boots of the deceased showed beyond doubt it was he who had left the traces behind as he rushed on his way to death.

The closest observations made then and in the morning also failed to discover the tracks of a second pair of boots.

Not satisfied with this scrutiny, the inspector resolved to extend its sphere, but for this purpose he was obliged to wait until daylight came to his aid. For, though it seemed at this moment as if there could be little doubt regarding the perpetrator of the crime, yet Mackworth, knowing from experience the possibilities which frequently developed themselves, the unexpected turns that cases assumed, resolved to search for clews out of doors as well as within.

A couple of hours more were passed in the company of that grim presence before the birds in the garden began to stir themselves, chirruping weirdly in the solemn silence of dawn—before the pale, green light in the east dissolved into expanding hues of pink and gold, and the sun rose upon a drowsy world. Then Mackworth set to work.

Passing through the garden, he carefully examined the road to right and left for considerable distances, now taking the footpath to one side and again at the other, subsequently searching the center of the thoroughfare.

His labors, however, resulted in nothing more than the finding of a man's glove, apparently new, this having been discovered on the pathway at the opposite side and almost fronting Olive Dumbarton's house. Mackworth regarded it with little interest, considering that if not belonging to the deceased, it was probably dropped by some individual in no way connected with the crime.

The glove was, however, placed with the articles found upon David Dumbarton, and before the world of London was yet astir Inspector Mackworth was on his way to make inquiries concerning the deceased at the address copied from the envelope found upon his person.

(To be continued.)

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"It's very important," he went on; "I must have it rushed."

"It shall go right through."

"All right," he said, turning away. "Be sure and rush it now."

When he had gone the girl showed the message to another operator standing near. "Look at what is to be rushed," she said.

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"Well, have you ever stopped a train with this air thing of yours?" they would ask.

No, he couldn't say that he had done so. Nobody would let him try it, even on a train of dump cars.

One day he arrived in Pittsburg, selling his other invention and talking about his brake notion to a man connected with a railroad out there.

So the officials of the railroad permitted Westinghouse to put his new kickshaw on one of their trains. He had to agree to indemnify the road for any damage that might be caused to the train as the result of his trials.

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The train was equipped. On the designated day the confident inventor and a group of sceptical railroad men boarded the train on which the first air brakes were fixed.

Off went the train on its initial trip. The engineer put on full speed, and just as he had rounded a curve he saw ahead, at a grade crossing, and in the middle of the track, a loaded wagon, a man and a boy, and a balky horse. The engineer moved his little lever, and the first train that was ever stopped by air pulled up at a standstill several feet short of the obstruction.

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2. Avoid all poisons.
3. Take abundant exercise in the air, but always short of fatigue. Such exercise that every portion of the body is equally benefited. As it takes a strong engine for a long journey, cultivate lung power by slow, deep-breathing exercises.
4. Eat only the amount of food that nature needs, and study what to eat from a scientific point of view.
5. Cultivate normal sleep. Live and sleep only in rooms that are well sunned, well ventilated and not overheated.
6. Cultivate the habit of work in connection with some worthy ambition, for healthy exercise of body and mind is as strengthening as repose, and should balance it. Work while you work, and rest while you rest, avoiding all worry. Make yourself useful to the world and feel that you have a mission in it.
7. Avoid bad environments, the worst of which is the friend who encourages you to poison yourself.

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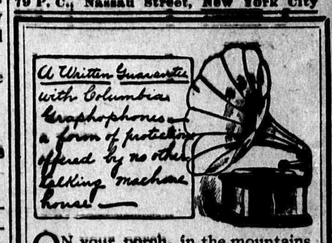

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