

# LADY CAR

THE SEQUEL OF A LIFE

BY

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***LADY CAR***  
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## CHAPTER I

LADY CAROLINE BEAUFORT was supposed to be, as life goes, an unusually fortunate woman. It is true that things had not always gone well with her. In her youth she had been married almost by force—as near it as anything ever is in an age when parental tyranny is of course an anachronism—to a man unlike herself in every way—an uncultured, almost uncivilised, rich boor of the neighbourhood, the descendant of a navy who had become a millionaire, and who inherited all the characteristics of his race along with their money, although he had never known anything of navydom, but had been born a Scotch country gentleman with a great estate. It is to be supposed that her father and mother believed it to be for her real good when they placed poor Car, fainting with fright and horror, in the arms of a man whose manners made even them wince, though they were forced into no such constant contact with him, for they were far from being wicked parents or bad people in any way. There is nothing in the world so difficult to understand as the motives which lead fathers and mothers to such acts, not so common as they used to be, yet not so rare as they ought to be. They think, perhaps, that a little aversion at first tells for next to nothing in the long run, and that an affectionate, gentle creature, submissive to law and custom, will end by loving any man who belongs to her, or having at least some sort of sentiment which will answer for love; and that, on the other hand, no fantastic passion of youth is to be trusted to surmount all the risks of life in the lottery of marriage, which affords so many changed points of view; whereas wealth is a solid and unchangeable good which outlives every sentiment. These, I

suppose, were the conclusions of Lord and Lady Lindores when they married their daughter to Mr. Thomas Torrance—or, rather, these were the conclusions of the Earl, in which his wife concurred very doubtfully, and with much reluctance, rather failing in courage to support her child in any effort for liberty than helping to coerce her. If Lord Lindores was determined as to the value of wealth, Lady Lindores was one of those women who have come to the silent conclusion that nothing is of any great value, and that life has no prizes at all. What does it matter? she was in the habit of saying to herself. She did not believe in happiness—a little less comfort or a little more was scarcely worth struggling for; and no doubt, as Lord Lindores said, wealth was one of the few really solid and reliable things in the world, a thing with which many minor goods could be purchased—relief to the poor, which was always a subject of satisfaction, and other alleviations of life. Lady Car was sacrificed to these tenets. But Providence had been good to her: and while she was still young her husband had died. If he did not justify Lord Lindores' expectations in his life he did in his death. For he left everything in his wife's hands; not only had she the excellent jointure which her settlements secured her—a jointure without any mean and petty clause about marrying again—but everything was left in her hands—the control of the property during little Tom's minority, and almost every advantage which a queen-mother could have. Tom was a little fellow of six, so that a long period of supremacy was in Carry's hands, and the rough fellow whom she had almost hated, from whom her very soul had shrunk with a loathing indescribable, had done her the fullest justice. It is doubtful whether Lady Car was at all touched by these evidences of devotion on the part of a man who had bullied and oppressed her for years. But she was startled into violent and passionate compunction, extraordinary in so gentle a

person, by the still wilder and more impassioned joy which swept over her soul when she heard of his sudden death. Poor Lady Car had not been able to resist that flood of exultation which took possession of her against her will. What did she want with his money? He was dead and she was free. It filled her with a guilty, boundless delight, and then with compunction beyond expression, as she tried to return from that wild joy and took herself to task.

And then, after a very short interval, she had married again; she had married what in the earlier years of the century people called the man of the heart—the lover of old days who had been dropped, who had been ignored when Lord Lindores came to his title and the prospects of the family had changed. How much Lady Caroline knew or did not know of the developments through which Mr. Beaufort had passed in the meantime no one ever discovered. She found him much as he had been when her family had dropped him, only not so young. A man who had made no way, a man without reproach, yet without success, who had kept stationary all the time, and was still a man of promise when his contemporaries had attained all that they were likely to attain. Beaufort was poor, but Lady Car was now rich. There was not the least reason why they should not marry unless he had been fantastic and refused to do so on account of her superior wealth. But he had no such idiotic idea. So that Lady Car was considered by most people, especially those who had a turn for the sentimental, as a very lucky woman. There had been the Torrance episode when she had not been happy, and which had left her the mother of two children, destined, perhaps, some time or other, to give her trouble. But they were children amply provided for, and she had an excellent jointure, and had been able to marry at thirty the man of her heart. She was a very lucky woman, more fortunate than most—far more fortunate

than three parts of those women who make, compulsorily or otherwise, ill-assorted marriages to begin with. In very few cases indeed does the undesirable husband die, leaving his wife so much money as that, unburdened by any condition as to marrying again; and very seldom indeed does the woman so happily left pick up again in the nick of time her first love, and find him unchanged. It was quite a romantic story, and pleased people: for, however worldly minded we may be, we all like to hear of a fortunate chance like this, and that all is well that ends well, and that the hero and heroine live happy ever after, which was the conclusion in this case.

The first part of Lady Car's history has been written before: but probably the reader remembers nothing of it, and no one would blame him; for it is an old story, and a great many episodes of that human history which we call fiction have been presented to his attention since then. She was tall, of a pliant, willowy figure, soft grey eyes, and an abundance of very soft light-brown hair. Her complexion was pale but clear, and her nose a trifle, the merest trifle, longer than the majority of noses. This conduced greatly (though I don't deny that it was a defect) to the general impression made by Lady Caroline, who was what is called aristocratic in appearance from the crown of her head to the sole of her foot. It was the grand distinction, an air such as some of the humblest-minded and most simple of women often have of that ethereal superiority of race which we all believe in. As a matter of fact, her brother, Lord Rintoul, had a great deal less distinction in his appearance than many a poor clerk. But Lady Car might have been a princess in her own right, and so, to be sure, she was. Unfortunately, I am obliged to describe her to begin with, since it is impossible to bring her forward in her own person until I have

told a little of her story. She was amazingly, passionately happy in her second marriage—at first. If she saw any drawbacks she closed her eyes to them, as passionately determined to admit nothing that went against her bliss—but perhaps she did not see anything. And, after all, there was not much to see. Mr. Beaufort was a gentleman. He was a man of great cultivation of mind, an excellent scholar, understanding every literary allusion that could be made, never at a loss for a happy phrase or quotation, quite an exceptional man in the way of culture and accomplishment. He was extremely good-looking, his manners were admirable, his character without reproach. Nothing seemed wanting in him that a woman could desire. And, notwithstanding the uncomfortable episode of her first marriage, and the two black-browed children, who had not a feature of their mother's, he was Lady Car's only love, and, so far as anybody knows, or as was ever known, she was his. By how many devious ways a pair may be led who are destined to meet at last! He in various wanderings over the world; she, in the blank of her dreadful life, through all her martyrdoms, had all the time been tending to this. And now they were happy at last.

'No,' she said, 'Edward; don't let us settle down; I can't: a house would not contain me. I want the grand air, as the French say. I should be making horrible comparisons, I should be thinking'—she stopped with a shiver—'of the past. Let us go abroad. I have not been abroad since we were parted; it will look like taking up the story where it dropped.'

Beaufort gave a half-conscious glance towards the spot outside where the black-browed children were playing. He felt, perhaps, that it would not be so easy to take up the story where it had dropped; but he assented, with quiet gentleness soothing her. 'I am



always fond of wandering. I have done little else all my life—and with you!’

‘Yes, with you!’ she repeated. She was accustomed to the children, and did not think of the anachronism of their presence at the moment of taking up the story. ‘You shall take me to all the new places where you have been alone, and we’ll go to the old places where we were that summer together; we’ll go everywhere and see everything, and then when all the novelty is exhausted we shall come back and make a home of our own. And then, Edward, you shall be left free for your work. How we used to talk of it *that* summer! You have not done much to it yet?’

‘Nothing at all,’ he said, with something like a blush.

‘So much the better,’ cried Lady Car. ‘I should have been jealous had you done it without me—you could not do it without me. You shall not touch a pen while we are away, but observe everything, and investigate mankind in all aspects, and then we’ll come home—and then, Edward, what care I shall take that you are not disturbed—how shall I watch and keep off every care! You shall have no trouble about anything, no noises or foolish interruption, no one to disturb you but me. And I will be no interruption.’

‘Never, my love,’ he said fervently; but this was the only thing to which he responded clearly. He had not, perhaps, the same intentions about that great work as once he had. He did not see it in the same light; but it gave him a certain pleasure to see her enthusiasm. It surprised him, indeed, that she could be capable of that enthusiasm just as if the story had never dropped. Women, sweet souls! are so strange. There had been nothing in his life so

definite as the Torrance marriage and the black-browed children; but yet she was capable of taking up the dropped story just where it had been thrown aside. So far as love went he felt himself capable of that too, but then he had not dropped the love when the story was dropped. Whereas she—In all these records there was something to be got over with a faint uneasiness, to be ignored if possible. He could not return with the same unity of mind as she displayed to the half-forgotten things of the past. But he was sure that her presence would never be any interruption, and he was pleased to fall into her eager, delightful plans, and to think of wandering with her wherever two people can wander, and when the two people are man and wife that is virtually everywhere. He was very ready for that dream of life.

Besides, if there is anything out of the way in the conditions of a new beginning, it is always a good thing to go abroad. Little anomalies which stand out from the surface of quiet life at home look so much less in the atmosphere of strange places and among the varieties of travel. The best way to forget that there has been once a great gap between two who are to be one, and a lifetime passed by each in surroundings so different, is to go far away and make new joint associations for each which will bridge over that severance. Neither of them gave this reason: she, perhaps, because she was unconscious of it; he, because he had no desire to state the case either to the world or to her—or even to himself. He was, in his way, with the many precautions which he had taken to keep disagreeable subjects at a distance, a genuine philosopher in the old-fashioned sense of the word.

Accordingly they went abroad, for something more than the longest honeymoon, the black-browed children accompanying them more or less, that is, they performed certain journeys in the

wake of the pair, and were settled here and there, at suitable centres, with all the attendance of skilled nurses and governesses which wealth makes it so easy to procure, while Lady Car and her husband pursued their further way, never altogether out of reach. She never forgot she was a mother even in the first rapture of her new happiness. And he was very good to the children. At their early age most children are amusing, and Mr. Beaufort was eminently gentle and kind. His wife's eyes shone when she saw him enter into their little lives as if they had been his own. What a thing for them to have such a man from whom to derive their first ideas of what a man should be! What a thing! She stopped and shuddered when she realised her own meaning; and yet how true it was—that the instructor they might have had, the example, the warning, the man who was their father, had been taken away, to leave the room open for so much better a teacher, for a perfect example, for one who would be a real father to them! Poor children! Lady Car felt for them something of the conventional pity for the fatherless even in the midst of the swelling of her heart over this great gift that had come to them. Their father indeed!

The years of the honeymoon flew like so many days of happiness. They went almost everywhere where a sea voyage was not indispensable, for Lady Car was a very bad sailor. They avoided everything that could have been troublesome or embarrassing in the conversations, and were quite old married people, thoroughly used to each other, and to all their mutual diversities of feeling and ways of thinking, before they returned home. They were both vaguely aware that the homecoming would be a trying moment, but not enough so to be afraid of it or resist the conviction that the time had come when it was no longer possible to put it off. It was before they returned home, however,

in the first consultations over their future dwelling, that the first real divergence of opinion arose.

## CHAPTER II

‘WE must think of where we are going to live,’ Lady Car said; ‘we have never discussed that question. The world is all before us where to choose——’

The boat lay faintly rocking upon the little wavelets from which the ruddy reflection of the sunset was just fading. The beautiful outline of the mountains on the Savoy side stood out blue and half-cold against the glowing west, the Dent du Midi had still a flush of rose colour upon its pinnacles, but had grown white and cold too in the breadth of its great bosom. Evening was coming on, and, though there was still little chill in the air, the sentiment of the September landscape was cold. That suspicion of coming winter which tells the birds so distinctly that it is time to be gone breathed a hint to-night into human faculties more obtuse. Carry threw her shawl round her with a little shiver which was quite fantastic and unnecessary. She did not really mean that it began to be cold, but only that something had made her think of a fireside.

He was seated in front of her with his oars resting idly in the rowlocks. It was a lovely night, and they were close to their temporary home, within a few minutes of the shore. ‘Where we are going to live?’ he said. ‘Then you don’t think of going to your own house.’

She started a little. He would never have found it out had they been on solid ground, but the boat responded to every movement. It was only from this that he knew he had startled her, for she recovered herself immediately, and said, ‘Would you like that,

Edward?’ in a voice which she evidently meant to be as easy as usual, but from which consciousness was not altogether banished.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘my love, it will be the time of year for Scotland, and I suppose there is plenty of game; but I neither like nor dislike, Car. I have not thought about it. I suppose I had taken it for granted that your own house would be the place to which you would go.’

‘I never thought of it as my own home,’ she said, in a low, hurried tone, which he could scarcely hear. ‘Oh, no, no. I could not go there.’

‘Well,’ he said cheerfully, ‘then of course we sha’n’t go there. I don’t care where we go; wherever you are, there is my home. I had not known one till I had you: it is for you to choose.’

She said nothing more for a time, but leant a little over the side of the boat, putting down her hand into the darkening ripples. ‘After all, the lake is as warm as if it were summer still,’ she said. It was she who had introduced the subject, but something had blown across her, a breath from the past, which had taken all the pleasure out of it. She shivered a little again, with a contradictoriness of which she was unaware. ‘There must have been snow somewhere, I think, up among the hills.’

‘It is you who are blowing hot and cold, Carry,’ he said, smiling at her. ‘I think myself it is a perfect evening. Look at the last steamer, passing along against the line of the hills, with its lights, and crammed with tourists from stem to stern. Shall we go in? There’s time enough before it gets here, but I know you don’t like the wash.’

‘I don’t like anything that agitates the water, or anything else, perhaps.’

‘Not so bad as that; it is I who am most tolerant of the dead level. You like a little agitation, or commotion, or what shall I call it?’

‘Do you think so, Edward? No, I love calm; I am most fond of peace, the quiet lake, and the still country, and everything that goes softly.’

‘My love,’ he said, ‘you like what is best always, and the best has always movement in it. You never liked monotony. Let things go softly, yes, but let them go; whereas I can do very well without movement. I like to lie here and let the water sway us where it pleases; you want me to take the oars and move as we will.’

‘Yes,’ she said, with a soft laugh, ‘perhaps I do. You see through me, but not altogether,’ she added, with another hasty movement, betrayed once more by the boat.

‘No, not altogether,’ he said, with a look which, in the gathering dimness of the twilight, she did not perceive. Besides, his head was turned away, and his mind also. She hoped indeed he did not, he would never divine the almost horror that had sprung up in her at the idea which he had taken so calmly, that of going back to what he called her own house. Her own house! it had never been hers. She thought that she would never go back then to a place full of the old life that was past, thank God! yet never could be quite past so long as her recollection so ached at the thought of it. It seemed to Lady Car that if she went back she might find that *he* was still there, and that everything that had been since was but a dream.

The night falls faster in these regions than in the lingering North. It was almost dark already, though so short a time since the sun set. The steamer came rustling along, more audible than visible, a bustling shadow against the opal gleam of the water and the cold blue of the hills, with its little bright lights like jewels, and swift progress, throbbing along through the heart of the twilight. Lights began to appear in the windows of the tall houses along the bank. The night was gradually stealing into the vacant place of the day. The steamer came on with a rush of purpose and certain destruction, and roused her from her thoughts to a little nervous tremor. 'I wish you would take the oars, Edward, as you say, and let us go in, please. I know it will do us no harm; but——'

'You are frightened all the same,' he said, leisurely settling to the oars.

'It is like a spirit of evil,' she cried.

He took the boat in, making haste to free her from that little nervous thrill of apprehension, though with a laugh. She was aware that she was fantastic in somethings, and that he was aware of it. It was a little imperfection that did no harm. A woman is the better of having these little follies. He felt a fond superiority as he rowed her in with a few strokes, amused at her sense of danger. And it was not till some time later, after they had climbed a somewhat rugged path to their villa among the trees, and had looked into the room where little Janet lay fast asleep, and then had supped cheerfully at a table close to the broad window, that the subject was resumed. By this time all the noises were stilled, a full moon was rising slowly, preparing to march along the sky in full majesty in the midst of the silent tranquillity of the night; there was not a breath of air stirring, not a cloud upon the blue heavens, which



were already almost as clear as day by the mere resplendence of her coming over the solid mountains, with their many peaks, which 'stepped along the deep.' The steamer had rustled away to its resting-place, wherever that was. The tourists had found shelter in the hotels, which shone with their many lights along the edge of the lake. These big caravansaries were unseen from the villa, all that was noisy and common was out of sight; the lake all still, not a boat out, with a silver line of ripples making a straight but broken line across the large glimmer of its surface; the dark hills opposite, with a silver touch here and there, and the great open-eyed, abundant moon above looking down upon them, they and she the only things living in that wonderful space which was all beauty and calm. They sat looking out for some time without saying anything. Such a night is in itself a sort of ecstasy, especially to those who want nothing, and with whom, as with the whole apparent world stretched out before them, all is well.

'And to think we shall have to leave all this presently and enter into the fret and care of settling down!' he said, with a half-laugh. 'I interrupted you, dear, to-night when you were talking of that. I suppose it was I that diverted your thoughts. Since it is not to be your Towers, where is it to be?'

'Not my Towers,' she said, with a little half-reproachful look at him and a sudden clasping together of her lightly interlaced fingers.

'Well, let us say Tom's Towers; but in present circumstances it is very much the same.'

Once more a little shiver ran over her, though there was no chill at all in the soft air that came in from the lake and the moonlight. But her voice was a little uncertain with it, as if her

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