

DULCIE CARLYON

A Novel

VOL. II

BY
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DULCIE CARLYON

CHAPTER I. SEPARATED.

'Something must be done, and deuced soon too, to separate this pair of spoons, or else they will be corresponding by letter, somehow or anyhow, after he has taken himself off; and Lady Fettercairn is always saying it is high time that something was definitely arranged between the girl and me! But, of course, Finella thinks *him* handsome enough to be the hero of a three-volume novel.'

Thus muttered Shafto, who, after a long absence, had returned to Craigengowan again, believing that Hammersley must now be gone; but he found, to his extreme annoyance, that two days of that officer's visit yet remained; so, with the futile *fracas* about the cards in his mind, Shafto avoided him as much as possible, and the house and grounds were ample enough to give him every scope for doing so.

He was sedulously bent on working mischief, and Fate so arranged that, on the second day, he had the power to do so.

They were on the very eve of separation now, yet Finella knew their love was mutual and true, and a glow of exultation was mingled with the sadness of her heart—a glow which had a curious touch of fear in it, as if such joy in his faith and truth could not be lasting. It was a kind of foreboding of evil about to happen, and when the time came that foreboding was remembered.

On the day of Hammersley's departure, he was to leave Craigengowan before dinner: thus, after luncheon, he contrived,

unseen, to slip a little note into her hand. It contained but two lines:—

'Darling, meet me in the Howe of Craigengowan an hour hence, for the last time. Do not fail.

'V. H.'

She read it again and again, kissed it, of course, and slipped it into her bosom.

To avoid everyone and to be alone with her own thoughts, she ran upstairs to the top of the house—to the summit of the old Scottish square tower, which was the nucleus whereon much had been engrafted even before the Melforts came to hold it, and going through a turret door which opened on the stone bartizan—a pleasant promenade—she sat down breathlessly, not to enjoy the lovely landscape which stretched around her, where Bervie Brow and Gourdon Hill were already casting their shadows eastward, but to wait and re-read her tiny note.

She put her hand into her bosom to draw it forth; but it was gone—she had lost it—and her first thought was, into whose hands might it fall!

She had a kind of stunned feeling at first, and then a glow of indignation that she should be treated like a child, in awe of Lady Fettercairn, and in a state of tutelage.

Vincent Hammersley went to the trysting-place betimes—the shady Howe of Craigengowan. The evening air was heavy with the fresh pungent fragrance of the Scottish pines, the flat boughs of which nearly met overhead thickly enough to exclude the sunshine, which here and there found its way through breaks in the bronze-

green canopy, and fell like rays of gold on the thick grass and pine cones below; but there was no appearance of Finella.

Shafto had resolved to achieve a separation between these two, we have said, and evil fortune put the power to do so completely in his hands.

Before Finella could reach the meeting-place among the shrubberies in the lawn, she came face to face with Shafto.

'Shafto!' she exclaimed, with intense annoyance, as she recoiled, 'you here—I did not know that you had returned.'

'And didn't care, no doubt? Yes—you are on the way to meet someone else?'

'How do you know that?'

'I found his little note to you.'

'Where?'

'At the foot of the turret stair.'

'And you dared to read it.'

'It was open. Dared!—well, I like that. Let us be friends at least.'

'I have much to pardon in you, Shafto,' said she, remembering the unpleasant trick he had played Hammersley about the cards.

'Let us understand each other, Finella.'

'I thought we did so already,' said she defiantly, and impatiently at his untimely presence; 'surely we have spoken plainly enough before this.'

His face was pale, and there was an expression of mischief in his eyes that startled her. It was mere jealous rage that acted love. He caught her hand, and, fearing him at that moment, she did not withdraw it, but did so eventually and sharply.

'What folly is this?' exclaimed Shafto; 'do not shrink from me thus, Finella, but allow me to make a last appeal to you. I cannot think that you are so utterly changed towards me, but that you are wilfully blinding yourself.'

'This is intolerable!' exclaimed the girl passionately, knowing that precious time was passing, that Vivian had but a minute or two to spare to receive a farewell kiss and last assurance of her love.

'You used to love me, I think, in past days, before this man Hammersley came here?'

'I knew and loved him in London before I ever heard of your existence,' she exclaimed, wound up to a pitch of desperation. 'Give me up my note—I see it in your hand.'

'His note?'

'Mine, I say.'

'You shall not have it for nothing then.'

'What do you mean?'

'Precisely what I say, pretty cousin. I must have some reward,' and holding the note before her at arm's length he again captured her right hand.

'Restore my property. Would you be guilty of theft?'

'No,' replied Shafto, laughing now with triumphant malice, as he remembered Dulcie Carlyon and her locket. 'But what will you give me for it?'

'What *can* I give you?'

'Something better than your grandmother will for it—a kiss, freely,' said he softly, as he saw what Finella did *not* see—Vivian Hammersley between the shrubberies, pausing in his approach, loth to compromise her, yet perplexed and startled by the presence of Shafto and the bearing of both.

Finella flashed a defiant glance at her tormentor, but aware that he was capable of much mischief, lest he might make some troublesome use of the note with her grand-parents, of whom she certainly stood in some awe, she was inclined to temporise with him.

'If I give you a kiss, cousin Shafto, will you please give me my note?' she asked.

'Yes,' said he, and his heart leaped.

'Take it, then.'

She put up her sweet and innocent face to his, but instead of taking one, he clasped her close to his breast, and holding her tightly, he daringly and roughly kissed again and again the soft lips that he had never touched before save in his day-dreams, and all

this was in sight of Vivian Hammersley, as he very well knew, and the latter, to Shafto's secret and intense exultation, silently drew back and disappeared.

Shafto had certainly then his moment of triumph!

Finella was greatly relieved when she obtained possession of her note; but her proud little heart was full of fury and indignation at the unwarrantable proceedings of Shafto, who hung or hovered about her just long enough to preclude all hope of her meeting with Hammersley, and when, full of sorrow, she returned to the house, she could see nothing of him, but was told by Grapeston, the old butler, that his departure had been suddenly hastened; that the trap was already at the hall-door to take him to the station, and the captain had charged him with a note for her.

It was hastily written in pencil, and a pencilled address was on the envelope. It ran thus:—

'I went at the appointed time. You did not come, but I saw you *elsewhere* in the arms of your cousin, who doubtless has been hereabout for some time past, unknown to me. *Those were no cousinly kisses you gave him.* God may forgive your falsehood, but I never will!

The room seemed to swim round her as she read and re-read the lines like one in a dream. As she did so for the second time and took in the whole situation, a cry almost escaped her. Then she heard some farewells hastily exchanged on the terrace, and the sound of wheels on gravel as the departing waggonette swept Hammersley away to the railway station, and no power or chance of explanation was left her.

The false light through which he—so brave, so true and honourable—must now view her tortured and humiliated her, and unmerited shame, mingled with just anger, burned in her heart. And Shafto had brought all this about!

Oh for language to describe her loathing of him! His was the mistake—the crime to be explained; but would it ever be explained? And she dared not complain to Lord or Lady Fettercairn, who openly abetted Shafto's avaricious aspirations as regarded herself.

She rushed away to her own room, lighted candles, and locked herself in. She sat down by the dressing-table; was that wan face reflected in the mirror hers? She leaned her elbows on the former, with her face in her hands, and sat there sobbing heavily in grief and rage without ever sighing, though her heart felt full to bursting.

She pleaded a headache as an excuse for non-appearance at dinner, and Lord and Lady Fettercairn exchanged a silent glance of mutual intelligence and annoyance, not unmingled, perhaps, with satisfaction.

Finella sat in her room as if turned to stone; at last she heard the stable clock strike midnight, and mechanically she proceeded to undress without summoning her maid.

A rosebud was in the rich cream-tinted lace about her pretty neck. *He* had given it to her but that morning, as they lingered on the terrace, and with haggard eyes she looked at it, kissed it, and put it in her white bosom.

This morning she was with him—her lover, her affianced husband—her own—and he was hers—all to each other in the world—and now!

'He hates me, most probably,' she murmured.

A few days stole away, and she tried to act a part, for watchful eyes were upon her. Hammersley was gone! Doubly gone! How she missed his presence was known only to herself. He was ever so sweetly but not obtrusively tender; so quick of wit, ready in attention and speech, though the envious Shafto phrased it, 'he would coax a bird off a tree.' He was so gentlemanly and gallant—every way such irreproachably good style, that she loved him with all the strength of her loving and passionate nature. The memory of the past—of her lost happiness—lost more than she might ever know, through the deliberate villainy of Shafto, rose ever before her with vivid distinctness; the evening on which their love was avowed in the drawing-room—the evening in the Howe of Craigengowan, when he gave her the two rings, and many other chance or concerted meetings, were before her now, and she could but clasp her hands tightly, while a heavy sob rose in her throat.

The wedding ring, he had given her to keep, was often drawn forth fondly, and slipped on her wedding finger in secret—a temptation of Fate, as any old Scotchwoman would have told her. She would have written a letter of explanation to Hammersley, but knew not where to address him; and ere long the announcement in a public print that he had sailed from Plymouth with a strong detachment of the 2nd Warwickshire, for the seat of war in South Africa, put it out of her power to do so, and she had but to bear her misery helplessly.

More than ever were they now separated!

CHAPTER II. AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

Lady Fettercairn was in the drawing-room at Craigengowan, and talking with Shafto seriously and affectionately on the subject of Finella and the wishes of herself and Lord Fettercairn; and Shafto was making himself most agreeable to his 'grandmother,' for he was still in high glee and elfish good humour at the mode in which he had 'choked off that interloper, Hammersley,' when a valet announced that an elderly woman 'wished to speak with her ladyship.'

'What is her name?'

'She declined to say.'

'Is she one of our own people?'

'I think not, my lady.'

'But what can she want?'

'She would not say—it was a private matter, she admitted.'

'Very odd.'

'She is most anxious to see your ladyship.'

'It is some begging petition, of course,' said Shafto; 'desire her to be off.'

'It may be so, sir.'

'Then show her the door.'

'She seems very respectable, sir,' urged the valet.

'But poor—the old story.'

'Show her in,' said Lady Fettercairn.

The elderly woman appeared, and curtsied deeply twice in a graceful and old-fashioned manner. Her once black hair was now seamed with white; but her eyes were dark and sparkling; her cheeks were yet tinged with red, and her rows of teeth were firm and white as ever, for the visitor was Madelon Galbraith, now in her sixtieth year, and with the assured confidence of a Highland woman she announced herself by name.

'I read in the papers,' said she, 'that the grandson of Lord Fettercairn had shot some beautiful eaglets at the ruins of Finella's castle. The grandson, thought I—that maun be the bairn I nursed, as I nursed his mother before him, and so I'm come a the way frae Ross-shire to see him, your leddyship.'

'I have heard of you, Madelon, and that you were in early life nurse to—to my younger son's wife,' said Lady Fettercairn, with a freezing stare and slight inclination of her haughty head; but she added, 'be seated.'

'Yes—I was nurse to Captain Maclan's daughter Flora,' said Madelon, her eyes becoming moist; 'the Captain saved my husband's life in the Persian war, but was killed himself next day.'

'What have we to do with this?' said Shafto, who felt himself growing pale.

'Nothing, of course,' replied Madelon sadly.

'Then what do you want?'

'What I have said. I heard that the son of Major Melfort—or MacIan as he called himself in the past time—was here at Craigengowan, and I made sae bold as to ca' and see him—the bairn I hae suckled.'

'If you nursed my grandson, as you say,' said Lady Fettercairn, 'do you not recognise him? Stand forward, Shafto.'

'Shafto—is this Mr. Shafto!' exclaimed Madelon.

'Yes, my son Lennard's son.'

'Shafto Gyle!' said Madelon bewildered.

'What *do* you mean?'

'What I say, my leddy.'

'This is Major Melfort's only son.'

'Only nephew! The bairn I nursed—the son of Lennard Melfort and my darling Flora—was named after her, Florian, and was like herself, dark-haired, dark-eyed, and winsome. Where is he? What is the meaning of this, Mr. Shafto? I recognise ye now, though years hae passed since I saw ye.'

'She is mad or drunk!' exclaimed Shafto, starting up savagely.

'I am neither,' said Madelon, firmly and defiantly.

'Turn her out of the house!' said Shafto, with his hand on the bell.

'There is some trick here—where is Florian?'

'How the devil should I know, or be accountable for him to a creature like you?'

'Ay, ay, Mr. Shafto, as a bairn ye were aye crafty, shrewd, and evil-natured, and if a lie could hae chokit ye, ye wad hae been deid lang syne.'

'This is most unseemly language, Madelon Galbraith,' said Lady Fettercairn, rising from her chair, 'and to me it seems that you are raving.'

'Unseemly here or unseemly there, it is the truth,' said Madelon, stoutly, and, sooth to say, Lady Fettercairn's estimation and knowledge of Shafto's character endorsed the description given of it by Madelon.

'Florian was dark, and you are, as you were, fair and fause too; and Florian had what you have not, and never had, a black mole-mark on his right arm.'

'Such marks pass away,' said Shafto.

'No, these marks never pass away!' retorted Madelon; 'there is some devilry at work here. I say, where is Florian? Ay, ay,' she continued; 'my bairn, Florian, was born on a Friday, and a Friday's birth, like a Friday's marriage, seldom is fortunate; but this is no my bonnie black-eyed lad, Lady Fettercairn—so *where* is he?'

'This is intolerable!' said Lady Fettercairn, whom that name by old association of ideas seemed to irritate; and, on a valet appearing in obedience to a furious ring given to the bell by Shafto, she added, 'Show this intruder out of the house, and do so instantly.'

The man was about to put his hand on Madelon, but the old Highland woman drew herself up with an air of defiance, and swept out of the room without another word.

'See her not only out of the house, but off the grounds,' shouted Shafto, who was almost beside himself with rage and genuine fear. 'Nay, I'll see to that myself,' he added. 'Such lunatics are dangerous.'

Seeing her hastening down the avenue, he whistled from the stable court a huge mastiff, and by voice and action hounded it on her. The dog bounded about her, barking furiously and tore her skirts to her infinite terror, till the lodgekeeper dragged it off and closed the gates upon her. Then she went upon her way, her Highland heart bursting with rage and longing for revenge.

Shafto was glad that Lord Fettercairn was absent, as he might have questioned Madelon Galbraith more closely; but to his cost he was eventually to learn that he had not seen the last of Florian's nurse.

This visit taken in conjunction with the mode in which Finella now treated him made Craigengowan somewhat uncomfortable for Shafto, so he betook himself to Edinburgh, and to drown his growing fears plunged into such a mad career of dissipation and extravagance that Lord Fettercairn began to regret that he had ever discovered an heir to his estates at all.

While there Shafto saw in the newspaper posters one day the announcement of the terrible disaster at Isandhlwana, 'with the total extirpation of the 24th Warwickshire Foot!'

'*His* regiment, by Jove! I'll have a drink over this good news,'
thought the amiable Shafto, and certainly a deep 'drink' he did have.

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