

LOVE'S SHADOW

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[Illustration: Love's Shadow]

Love like a shadow flies
When substance love pursues;
Pursuing that that flies,
And flying what pursues.

SHAKESPEARE

CHAPTER I

Hyacinth

'There's only one thing I must really implore you, Edith,' said Bruce anxiously. '*Don't* make me late at the office!'

'Certainly not, Bruce,' answered Edith sedately. She was seated opposite her husband at breakfast in a very new, very small, very white flat in Knightsbridge—exactly like thousands of other new, small, white flats. She was young and pretty, but not obvious. One might suppose that she was more subtle than was shown by her usual expression, which was merely cheerful and intelligent.

'Now I have to write that letter before I go,' Bruce exclaimed, starting up and looking at her reproachfully. 'Why didn't I write it last night?'

Edith hadn't the slightest idea, as she had heard nothing of the letter before, but, in the course of three years, she had learnt that it saved time to accept trifling injustices. So she looked guilty and a little remorseful. He magnanimously forgave her, and began to write the letter at a neat white writing-table.

'How many g's are there in "Raggett"?' he asked suspiciously.

She didn't answer, apparently overtaken by a sudden fit of absence of mind.

'Only one, of course. How absurd you are!' said her husband, laughing, as he finished the letter and came back to the table.

She poured out more coffee.

'It's a curious thing,' he went on in a tone of impartial regret, 'that, with all the fuss about modern culture and higher education nowadays, girls are not even taught to spell!'

'Yes, isn't it? But even if I had been taught, it might not have been much use. I might just not have been taught to spell "Raggett". It's a name, isn't it?'

'It's a very well-known name,' said Bruce.

'I daresay it is, but I don't know it. Would you like to see the boy before you go?'

'What a question! I always like to see the boy. But you know perfectly well I haven't time this morning.'

'Very well, dear. You can see him this afternoon.'

'Why do you say that? You know I'm going golfing with Goldthorpe! It really is hard, Edith, when a man has to work so much that he has scarcely any time for his wife and child.'

She looked sympathetic.

'What are you doing today?' he asked.

'Hyacinth's coming to fetch me for a drive in the motor.'

His face brightened. He said kindly, 'I *am* so glad, darling, that you have such a delightful friend—when I can't be with you. I admire Hyacinth very much, in every way. She seems devoted to you, too, which is really very nice of her. What I mean to say is, that in her position she might know anybody. You see my point?'

'Quite.'

'How did you meet her originally?'

'We were school-friends.'

'She's such a lovely creature; I wonder she doesn't marry.'

'Yes, but she has to find someone else whom *she* thinks a lovely creature, too.'

'Edith, dear.'

'Yes, Bruce.'

'I wish you wouldn't snap me up like that. Oh, I know you don't mean it, but it's growing on you, rather.'

She tried to look serious, and said gently, 'Is it, really? I am sorry.'

'You don't mind me telling you of it, do you?'

'Not at all. I'm afraid you will be late, Bruce.'

He started up and hurried away, reminding Edith that dinner was to be at eight. They parted with affectionate smiles.

When he had gone down in the lift, Edith took an inextensive walk through the entire flat, going into each room, and looking at herself in every looking-glass. She appeared to like herself best in the dining-room mirror, for she returned, stared into it rather gravely for some little time, and then said to herself: 'Yes, I'm beginning to look bored.'

Then she rang the bell, and the nurse brought in a pretty little boy of nearly two, Huffily dressed in white, who was excited at the prospect of his great morning treat—going down in the lift. Speaking of him with some formality as Master Archie, she asked the nurse a few questions, which she mistakenly supposed gave that personage the impression that she knew all that there was to be known about children. When she was alone with him for a minute she rushed at him impulsively, saying, privately, 'Heavenly pet! Divine angel! Duck!' in return for which he pulled her hair down and scratched her face with a small empty Noah's Ark that he was taking out with him for purposes of his own.

When he had gone she did her hair up again in a different way—parted in the middle. It was very pretty, wavy, fair hair, and she had small, regular features, so the new way suited her very well. Then she said again—

'Yes, if it were not for Hyacinth I should soon look bored to death!'

Hyacinth Verney was the romance of Edith's life. She also provided a good deal of romance in the lives of several other people. Her position was unusual, and her personality fascinating. She had no parents, was an heiress, and lived alone with a companion in a quaint little house just out of Berkeley Square, with a large studio, that was never used for painting. She had such an extraordinary natural gift for making people of both sexes fond of her, that it would have been difficult to say which, of all the persons who loved her, showed the most intense devotion in the most immoderate way. Probably her cousin and guardian, Sir Charles Cannon, and her companion, Anne Yeo, spent more thought and time in her service than did anybody else. Edith's imagination had been fired in their school-days by her friend's beauty and cleverness, and by the fact that she had a guardian, like a book. Then Hyacinth had come out and gone in for music, for painting, and for various other arts and pursuits of an absorbing character. She had hardly any acquaintances except her relations, but possessed an enormously large number of extremely intimate friends—a characteristic that had remained to her from her childhood.

Hyacinth's ideal of society was to have no padding, so that most of the members of her circle were types. Still, as she had a perfect passion for entertaining, there remained, of course, a residue; distant elderly connections with well-sounding names (as ballast), and a few vague hangers-on; several rather dull celebrities, some merely pretty and well-dressed women, and a steadily increasing number of good-looking young men. Hyacinth was fond of decoration.

As she frankly admitted, she had rather fallen back on Edith, finding her, after many experiments, the most agreeable of friends, chiefly because in their intercourses everything was always taken for granted. Like sisters, they understood one another without explanation—à *demi-mot*.

While Edith waited impatiently in the hall of the flat, Anne Yeo, her unacknowledged rival in Hyacinth's affections, was doing needlework in the window-seat of the studio, and watching Hyacinth, who, dressed to go out, was walking up and down the room. With a rather wooden face, high cheek-bones, a tall, thin figure, and no expression, Anne might have been any age; but she was not. She made every effort to look quite forty so as to appear more suitable as a chaperone, but was in reality barely thirty. She was thinking, as she often thought, that Hyacinth looked too romantic for everyday life. When they had travelled together this fact had been rather a nuisance.

'Why, when you call at the Stores to order groceries, must you look as if you were going to elope?' she asked dryly. 'In an ordinary motorveil you have the air of hastening to some mysterious appointment.'

'But I'm only going to fetch Edith Ottley for a drive,' said Hyacinth. 'How bored she must get with her little Foreign Office clerk! The way he takes his authority as a husband seriously is pathetic. He hasn't the faintest idea the girl is cleverer than he is.'

'You'd far better leave her alone, and not point it out,' said Anne. 'You're always bothering about these little Ottleys now. But you've been very restless lately. Whenever you try to do people good, and especially when you motor so much and so fast, I recognise the symptoms. It's coming on again, and you're trying to get away from it.'

'Don't say that. I'm never going to care about anyone again,' said Hyacinth.

'You don't know it, but when you're not in love you're not yourself,'
Anne continued. 'It's all you live for.'

'Oh, Anne!'

'It's quite true. It's nearly three months since you—had an attack. Blair was the last. Now you're beginning to take the same sort of interest in Cecil Reeve.'

'How mistaken you are, Anne! I don't take at all the same interest in him. It's a totally different thing. I don't really even like him.'

'You wouldn't go out today if you were expecting him.'

'Yes, but I'm not ... and he doesn't care two straws about me. Once he said he never worshipped in a crowded temple!'

'It's a curious coincidence that ever since then you've been out to everyone else,' said Anne.

'I don't really like him—so very much. When he *does* smile, of course it's rather nice. Why does he hate me?'

'I can't think,' said Anne.

'He doesn't hate me! How can you say so?' cried Hyacinth.

'Doesn't he?'

'Perhaps it's because he thinks I look Spanish. He may disapprove of looking Spanish,' suggested Hyacinth.

'Very likely.'

Hyacinth laughed, kissed her, and went out. Anne followed her graceful figure with disapproving, admiring eyes.

CHAPTER II

The Anxieties of Sir Charles

Like all really uncommon beauties, Hyacinth could only be adequately described by the most hackneyed phrases. Her eyes were authentically sapphire-coloured; brilliant, frank eyes, with a subtle mischief in them, softened by the most conciliating long eyelashes. Then, her mouth was really shaped like a Cupid's bow, and her teeth *were* dazzling; also she had a wealth of dense, soft, brown hair and a tall, sylphlike, slimly-rounded figure. Her features were delicately regular, and her hands and feet perfection. Her complexion was extremely fair, so she was not a brunette; some remote Spanish ancestor on her mother's side was, however, occasionally mentioned as an apology for a type and a supple grace sometimes complained of by people with white eyelashes as rather un-English. So many artistic young men had told her she was like La Gioconda, that when she first saw the original in the Louvre she was so disappointed that she thought she would never smile again.

About ten minutes after the pretty creature had gone out, Anne, who had kept her eyes steadily on the clock, looked out of the window, from which she could see a small brougham driving up. She called out into the hall—

'If that's Sir Charles Cannon, tell him Miss Verney is out, but I have a message for him.'

A minute later there entered a thin and distinguished-looking, grey-haired man of about forty-five, wearing a smile of such excessive cordiality that one felt it could only have been brought to his well-bred lips by acute disappointment. Anne did not take the smile literally, but began to explain away the blow.

'I'm so sorry,' she said apologetically. 'I'm afraid it's partly my fault. When she suddenly decided to go out with that little Mrs Ottley, she told me vaguely to telephone to you. But how on earth could I know where you were?'

'How indeed? It doesn't matter in the least, my dear Miss Yeo. I mean, it's most unfortunate, as I've just a little free time. Lady Cannon's gone to a matinée at the St James's. We had tickets for the first night, but of course she wouldn't use them then. She preferred to go alone in the afternoon, because she detests the theatre, anyhow, and afternoon performances

give her a headache. And if she does a thing that's disagreeable to her, she likes to do it in the most painful possible way. She has a beautiful nature.'

Anne smiled, and passed him a little gold box.

'Have a cigarette?' she suggested.

'Thanks—I'm not really in a bad temper. But why this relapse of devotion to little Mrs Ottley? And why are you and I suddenly treated with marked neglect?'

'Mrs Ottley,' said Anne, 'is one of those young women, rather bored with their husbands, who are the worst possible companions for Hyacinth. They put her off marrying.'

'Bored, is she? She didn't strike me so. A pleasant, bright girl. I suppose she amuses Hyacinth?'

'Yes; of course, she's not a dull old maid over forty, like me,' said Anne.

'No-one would believe that description of you,' said Sir Charles, with a bow that was courtly but absent. As a matter of fact, he did believe it, but it wasn't true.

'If dear little Mrs Ottley,' he continued, 'married in too great a hurry, far be it from me to reproach her. I married in a hurry myself—when Hyacinth was ten.'

'And when she was eighteen you were very sorry,' said Anne in her colourless voice.

'Don't let us go into that, Miss Yeo. Of course, Hyacinth is a beautiful—responsibility. People seem to think she ought to have gone on living with us when she left school. But how was it possible? Hyacinth said she intended to live for her art, and Lady Cannon couldn't stand the scent of oils.' He glanced round the large panelled-oak room in which not a picture was to be seen. The only indication of its having ever been meant for a studio was the north light, carefully obstructed (on the grounds of unbecomingness) by gently-tinted draperies of some fabric suggesting Liberty's. 'Life wasn't worth living, trying to keep the peace!'

'But you must have missed her?'

'Still, I prefer coming to see her here. And knowing she has you with her is, after all, everything.'

He looked a question.

'Yes, she has. I mean, she seems rather—absorbed again lately,' said Anne.

'Who is it?' he asked. 'I always feel so indiscreet and treacherous talking over her private affairs like this with you, though she tells me everything herself. I'm not sure it's the act of a simple, loyal, Christian English gentleman; in fact, I'm pretty certain it's not. I suppose that's why I enjoy it so much.'

'I daresay,' said Anne; 'but she wouldn't mind it.'

'What has been happening?'

'Nothing interesting. Hazel Kerr came here the other day and brought with him a poem in bronze lacquer, as he called it. He read it aloud—the whole of it.'

'Good heavens! Poetry! Do people still do that sort of thing? I thought it had gone out years ago—when I was a young man.'

'Of course, so it has. But Hazel Kerr is out of date. Hyacinth says he's almost a classic.'

'His verses?'

'Oh no! His method. She says he's an interesting survival—he's walked straight out of another age—the nineties, you know. There were poets in those days.'

'Method! He was much too young then to have a style at all, surely!'

'That was the style. It was the right thing to be very young in the nineties. It isn't now.'

'It's not so easy now, for some of us,' murmured Sir Charles.

'But Hazel keeps it up,' Anne answered.

Sir Charles laughed irritably. 'He keeps it up, does he? But he sits people out openly, that shows he's not really dangerous. One doesn't worry about Hazel. It's that young man who arrives when everybody's going, or goes before anyone else arrives, that's what I'm a little anxious about.'

'If you mean Cecil Reeve, Hyacinth says he doesn't like her.'

'I'm sorry to hear that. If anything will interest her, that will. Yet I don't know why I should mind. At any rate, he certainly isn't trying to marry her for interested reasons, as he's very well off—or perhaps for any reasons. I'm told he's clever, too.'

'His appearance is not against him either,' said Anne dryly; 'so what's the matter with him?'

'I don't know exactly. I think he's capable of playing with her.'

'Perhaps he doesn't really appreciate her,' suggested Anne.

'Oh, yes, he does. He's a connoisseur—confound him! He appreciates her all right. But it's all for himself—not for her. By the way, I've heard his name mentioned with another woman's name. But I happen to know there's nothing in it.'

'Would you really like her to marry soon?' Anne asked.

'In her position it would be better, I suppose,' said her guardian, with obvious distaste to the idea.

'Has there ever been anyone that you thoroughly approved of?' asked Anne.

He shook his head.

'I rather doubt if there ever will be,' Anne said.

'She's so clever, so impulsive! She lives so much on her emotions. If she were disappointed—in that way—it would mean so much to her,' Sir Charles said.

'She does change rather often,' said Anne.

'Of course, she's never really known her own mind.' He took a letter out of his pocket. 'I came partly to show her a letter from Ella—my girl at school in Paris, you know. Hyacinth is so kind to her. She writes to me very confidentially. I hope she's being properly brought up!'

'Let me read it.'

She read—

'DARLING PAPA,

'I'm having heavenly fun at school. Last night there was a ball for Madame's birthday. A proper grown-up ball, and we all danced. The men weren't bad. I had a lovely Easter egg, a chocolate egg, and inside that another egg with chocolate in it, and inside that another egg with a dear little turquoise charm in it. One man said I was a blonde anglaise, and had a keepsake face; and another has taken the Prix de Rome, and is going to be a schoolmaster. There were no real ices. Come over and see me soon. It's such a long time to the holidays. Love to mother.

'Your loving,

'ELLA.'

'A curious letter—for her age,' said Ella's father, replacing it. 'I wish she were here. It seems a pity Lady Cannon can't stand the noise of practising—and so on. Well, perhaps it's for the best.' He got up. 'Miss Yeo, I must go and fetch Lady Cannon now, but I'll come back at half-past six for a few minutes—on my way to the club.'

'She's sure to be here then,' replied Anne consolingly; 'and do persuade her not to waste all her time being kind to Edith Ottley. It can't do any good. She'd better leave them alone.'

'Really, it's a very innocent amusement. I think you're overanxious.'

'It's only that I'm afraid she might get mixed up in—well, some domestic row.'

'Surely it can't be as bad as that! Why—is Mr Ottley in love with her?' he asked, smiling.

'Very much indeed,' said Anne.

'Oh, really, Miss Yeo!—and does Mrs Ottley know it?'

'No, nor Hyacinth either. He doesn't know it himself.'

'Then if nobody knows it, it can't matter very much,' said Sir Charles, feeling vaguely uncomfortable all the same. Before he went he took up a portrait of Hyacinth in an Empire dress with laurel leaves in her hair. It was a beautiful portrait. Anne thought that from the way he looked at it, anyone could have guessed Lady Cannon had tight lips and wore a royal fringe.... They parted with great friendliness.

Anne's wooden, inexpressive countenance was a great comfort to Sir Charles, in some moods. Though she was clever enough, she did not

have that superfluity of sympathy and responsiveness that makes one go away regretting one has said so much, and disliking the other person for one's expansion. One never felt that she had understood too accurately, nor that one had given oneself away, nor been indiscreetly curious.... It was like talking to a chair. What a good sort Anne was!

CHAPTER III

Anne Yeo

'Would you like me to play to you a little?' Anne asked, when Hyacinth had returned and was sitting in the carved-oak chimney-corner, looking thoughtful and picturesque.

'Oh no, please don't! Besides, I know you can't'

'No, thank goodness!' exclaimed Anne. 'I know I'm useful and practical, and I don't mind that; but anyhow, I'm not cheerful, musical, and a perfect lady, in exchange for a comfortable home, am I?'

'No, indeed,' said Hyacinth fervently.

'No-one can speak of me as "that pleasant, cultivated creature who lives with Miss Verney," can they?'

'Not, at any rate, if they have any regard for truth,' said Hyacinth.

'I wish you wouldn't make me laugh. Why should I have a sense of humour? I sometimes think that all your friends imagine it's part of my duty to shriek with laughter at their wretched jokes. It wasn't in the contract. If I were pretty, my ambition would have been to be an adventuress; but an adventuress with no adventures would be a little flat. I might have the worst intentions, but I should never have the chance of carrying them out. So I try to be as much as possible like Thackeray's shabby companion in a dyed silk.'

'Is that why you wear a sackcloth blouse trimmed with ashes?' said Hyacinth, with curiosity.

'No, that's merely stinginess. It's my nature to be morbidly economical, though I know I needn't be. If I hadn't had £500 a year left me, I should never have been able to come and live here, and drop all my horrid relations. I enjoy appearing dependent and being a spectator, and I've absolutely given up all interest in my own affairs. In fact, I haven't got any. And I take the keenest interest in other people's—romances. Principally, of course, in yours.'

'I'm sure I don't want you to be so vicarious as all that—thanks awfully,' said Hyacinth. 'At any rate, don't dress like a skeleton at the feast'

tomorrow, if you don't mind. I've asked the little Ottleys to dinner—and, I want Charles to come.'

'Oh, of course, if you expect Cecil Reeve!—I suppose you do, as you haven't mentioned it—I'll put on my real clothes to do you credit.' She looked out of the window. 'Here's poor old Charles again. How he does dislike Lady Cannon!'

'What a shame, Anne! He's angelic to her.'

'That's what I meant,' said Anne, going out quickly.

'Charles, how nice of you to call and return your own visit the same day! It's like Royalty, isn't it? It reminds me of the young man who was asked to call again, and came back in half an hour,' said Hyacinth.

'I didn't quite see my way to waiting till Monday,' he answered. 'We're going away the end of the week. Janet says she needs a change.'

'It would be more of a change if you remained in town alone; at least, without Aunty.'

From the age of ten Hyacinth had resented having to call Lady Cannon by this endearing name. How a perfect stranger, by marrying her cousin, could become her aunt, was a mystery that she refused even to try to solve. It was well meant, no doubt; it was supposed to make her feel more at home—less of an orphan. But though she was obedient on this point, nothing would ever induce her to call her cousin by anything but his Christian name, with no qualification. Instinctively she felt that to call them 'Charles and Aunty', while annoying the intruder, kept her guardian in his proper place. What that was she did not specify.

'Well, can't you stay in London and come here, and be confided in and consulted? You know you like that better than boring yourself to death at Redlands.'

'Never mind that. How did you enjoy your drive?'

'Immensely, and I've asked both the little Ottleys to come to dinner tomorrow—one of those impulsive, unconsidered invitations that one regrets the second after. I must make up a little party. Will you come?'

'Perhaps, if I arranged to follow Janet to Redlands the next day, I might. Who did you say was the other man?'

'I expect Cecil Reeve,' she said. 'Don't put on that air of marble archness, Charles. It doesn't suit you at all. Tell me something about him.'

'I can't stand him. That's all I know about him,' said Sir Charles.

'Oh, is that all? That's just jealousy, Charles.'

'Absurd! How can a married man, in your father's place, a hundred years older than you, be jealous?'

'It is wonderful, isn't it?' she said. 'But you must know something about him. You know everyone.'

'He's Lord Selsey's nephew—and his heir—if Selsey doesn't marry again. He's only a young man about town—the sort of good-looking ass that your sex admires.'

'Charles, what a brute you are! He's very clever.'

'My dear child, yes—as a matter of fact, I believe he is. Isn't he ever going to *do* something?'

'I don't know,' she said. 'I wish he would. Oh, *why* don't you like him?'

'What can it matter about me?' he answered. 'Why are you never satisfied unless I'm in love with the same people that you are?'

'Charles!' she exclaimed, standing up. 'Don't you understand that not a word, not a look has passed to suggest such a thing? I never met anyone so—'

'So cautious?'

'No, so listless, and so respectful; and yet so amusing.... But I'm pretty certain that he hates me. I wish I knew why.'

'And you hate him just as much, of course?'

'No, sometimes I don't. And then I want you to agree with me. No-one sympathises really so well as you, Charles.'

'Not even Miss Yeo?'

'No, I get on so well with Anne because she doesn't. She's always interested, but I prefer her never to agree with me, as she lives here. It would be enervating to have someone always there and perpetually sympathetic. Anne is a tonic.'

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