

# Barbara Cartland

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Punished with love

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## *Author's note*

There were more than six hundred Native States in India in whose territories the British did not directly govern. These were generally those that had accepted the British Raj peacefully without fighting or being obstructive. The states varied in size and altogether contained seventy-seven million inhabitants.

Ostensibly they were independent Powers, but if their Rulers disregarded the wishes of the Raj, they were given a British Resident or Advisor.

Some of the States were completely independent, whilst others required strict control where the Prince misgoverned his people, oppressed the weak or had unpleasant habits.

It is amusing to know that Governesses for Princely households were actually supplied by the Raj as a part of the system for Imperial grooming of the young Princes. Often this was astonishingly successful!

Moulded by Nannies, Tutors and advisors and by the example of visiting officials and often the schooling of Eton and Oxford, many of the Princes became very English as someone wrote, 'they were English aristocrats buffed to an Oriental polish!'.  
*"A sense of greatness keeps a nation great,  
And mighty they who mighty can appear."*

## *Chapter One 1883*

Riding along the dusty country lane, Latonia wondered why her cousin had sent her such an urgent note early that morning.

It was unlike Toni to sound so agitated and Latonia found herself going over all the events that might have occurred since they had last been together, which was only the day before yesterday.

It was in fact strange that they had not been in communication for the last forty-eight hours, because, as Toni often said, they were closer than any sisters were ever likely to be.

Actually Latonia often thought that Toni was more like a twin sister, which was not surprising considering that their mothers had felt the same kind of relationship before their daughters were born.

Lady Branscombe and Mrs. Hythe had been first cousins and they had both started their babies in the same month and had laughingly said that they were racing each other as to who would be a mother first.

Mrs. Hythe had won and Latonia was just three days older than her cousin.

To make the unity between them closer, both Lady Branscombe and Mrs. Hythe had been determined to give their children similar names and, strangely enough, they had been convinced that they would produce daughters.

"Hubert naturally wants a son," Lady Branscombe had said. "What Englishman does not? But I am certain, Elizabeth, that I shall have a daughter and that you will have one too,"

"That is extraordinary," Mrs. Hythe replied, "because, when I have been dreaming about my baby, it has always been a girl – and, although we have no grand title to inherit, such as makes it imperative for you to have a son, Arthur wants a boy he can teach to ride and shoot and who will ultimately go into the same Regiment he was in himself."

"Arthur will have to wait!" Lady Branscombe said with a smile.

But she did not anticipate, nor did Elizabeth Hythe, that the two girls would both be only children.

It was, of course, obvious from the moment they were born that they would play together and spend as much time as possible in each other's company and they were given very nearly the same names – Latonia and Antonia.

They shared a Governess, which was convenient for the Hythes, who had little money and it was on Lord Branscombe's horses that Latonia learnt to ride, finding them far more spirited and better bred than anything her father could afford.

She was, however, not jealous of the difference in financial status between herself and Toni.

Although her father and mother lived in a pleasant but small manor house with a few acres of ground, she was aware, even when she was very young, that the atmosphere was very different from that in the huge mansion that belonged to Toni's father.

As she had once said to her mother,

"Aunt Margaret and Uncle Hubert never seem to laugh in the way that we do."

But Toni, who had shortened her name from Antonia as soon as she could speak, made up for the lack of gaiety where her father and mother were concerned.

She was not only exceedingly attractive, but she was mischievous, impulsive and, as she grew older, very flirtatious.

She soon realised that it was not only her social position and her father's great fortune that made her attractive, but her own beguiling and magnetic personality, which left young men bemused, bewildered and head-over-heels in love, almost as soon as they met her.

Lady Branscombe had intended to present Latonia and Toni to Queen Victoria at the same time and give them a London Season, which she was sure would result in both of them finding desirable and eligible husbands.

Unfortunately, Lady Branscombe had been killed in a hunting accident two years before Toni reached her eighteenth birthday and Lord Branscombe arranged for a distinguished relative to take his wife's place.

But Latonia was tragically orphaned a few months before it was planned that she and Toni should go to London.

Captain and Mrs. Hythe had gone to London to visit Lord Branscombe's younger brother.

Kenrick Combe had the reputation of being one of the most outstanding and promising young Officers the Army had ever produced.

He was spoken of with respect by those in command and with something like awe by his contemporaries.

While he was holding a post of some importance in India, he had asked his brother, Lord Branscombe, to come out and join him and not only had planned a lot of social entertainment during his visit but had promised to show him those parts of India that he was particularly interested in.

Unfortunately at the last moment Lord Branscombe found it impossible to leave England.

Not only had his duties in the House of Lords kept him but he was also in fact feeling extremely unwell with some complaint that the doctors were finding difficult to diagnose.

They decided that he was not strong enough to undertake such an arduous voyage and the extensive entertaining that was to take place when he reached India.

Therefore, rather than disappoint his brother, he sent Captain Hythe and his wife at the last moment, to represent him.

"It is something Papa will enjoy, as he has always longed to see India," Mrs. Hythe had said to Latonia. "He has also been a friend of Kenrick Combe ever since he was a boy."

"Of course you must go, Mama," Latonia had replied, "but I shall miss you."

"And I shall miss you, darling. But I know you will have fun staying with Toni and mind you behave yourselves. If there is any mischief about, Toni will be in it."

Mrs. Hythe had laughed at the time and Latonia had laughed with her.

Only when her mother and father had left had she realised how much mischief Toni could manage to pack into twenty-four hours of the day.

She was not yet officially 'out' and was therefore supposed to be confined to the schoolroom, thinking of her lessons and certainly not of young men.

But where Toni was concerned they sprang up like mushrooms overnight and there were always notes being surreptitiously delivered to her by servants who had been bribed, assignations in obscure little woods and

riders lurking amongst the fir trees who would appear mysteriously as soon as they were out of sight of the house and ride with them until they returned to it.

To Latonia it was all very exciting and at the same time very innocent.

Sometimes she would ask her cousin,

“Do you think you are in love, Toni?”

“No, of course not!” Toni would reply. “Patrick, Gerald and Basil are only boys, but I like the look in their eyes when they stare at me and I enjoy knowing that they are longing to kiss me, but are afraid I will be angry if they try.”

Latonia laughed, knowing that Toni spoke the truth and was not really interested in any of the men she attracted.

Equally she wondered what would happen in the future and she was also aware that, as far as she was concerned, for the first time in their lives she and Toni were very different.

She had no wish to have dozens of men running after her.

In her daydreams she always thought that she would find one man whom she would love and who would love her, just as her mother had fallen in love with her father the moment she saw him.

‘I want a home,’ Latonia told herself.

It was something she was to repeat a month later, when, tragically, she learnt of the death of her parents.

She had received a letter from her mother about their trip to India, in which she read,

*“It has all been fascinating and Papa has enjoyed every moment of it and has so much to tell Uncle Hubert when he returns.*

*I hope you will not mind, dearest, if we decide to stay on for another month. I am sure you are quite happy with Toni and it will really not be long before we are together again.”*

Three weeks before this letter arrived, taking the usual seventeen days to come from India to England, Lord Branscombe died from a disease of the heart.

It was something the doctors should have diagnosed sooner and only when it was too late did they realise in what a frail state he had been for a long

time and that it was a miracle he had not died earlier.

Telegraphs flashed the news to India, and Toni realised that her Uncle Kenrick, fifteen years younger than her father, was now the fourth Lord Branscombe.

“What is he like?” Latonia asked.

“I have not seen him for years,” Toni replied. “Papa was very proud of him, but from all I have heard he is somewhat of a martinet and the Subalterns serving under him find him terrifying.”

She spoke lightly, as though it was of no importance, but Latonia had already heard the servants say that the new Lord Branscombe would be Toni’s Guardian.

A month later, on their way back from India, having found it difficult to leave earlier because of the preparations which had been made for their entertainment, Captain and Mrs. Hythe had contracted yellow fever.

A sailor developed it first and this had resulted in the whole ship being quarantined when they reached Port Said.

Mrs. Hythe had written to Latonia saying how frustrating it was to be cooped up in a ship that flew the Yellow Flag and to be prevented from going ashore.

There was, however, nothing they could do about it and, when first one and then another of the members of the crew succumbed to the dreaded disease and then finally some of the passengers, the Hythes could only pray that they would be immune.

When Latonia learnt that her father and mother had died, it was at first impossible to believe that she would never see them again.

Because she loved her parents and had enjoyed so much happiness with them, she felt as if a part of herself had died with them. Over and over again she wished that she had been with them so that there would have been no question of their being separated.

Then she told herself that life had to go on and her father of all people would hate her to be a coward, refusing to face up to the difficulties that lay ahead now that she was alone.

What made it harder than anything else was that Toni had already been taken away to London by a relative who had arranged to chaperone her when she made her debut.

"It is no use sitting moping in the country, dear child," she had said. "You must come to London and, although you cannot go to parties because you are in mourning, you can meet people in my house and, as soon as six months are over, you can go to theatres and the opera and find a million other things to occupy you."

She had not included Latonia in the invitation, which, as she had only just learnt of her own bereavement, she could not have accepted anyway.

As the months passed and Toni did not return, Latonia realised that the chaperone had no wish to undertake further responsibilities and that the idea of her 'coming out' at the same time as Toni had been conveniently forgotten.

Latonia did not mind. She was quite happy in the country and an old Governess, who had once taught both her and Toni when they were small, had moved into the manor house to live with her as a chaperone.

Miss Waddesdon was an intelligent woman who was now getting old and, having no wish for anything but a quiet life, she was content to let Latonia do exactly what she wished.

This, without Toni, amounted to nothing very sensational and the months drifted past until without any warning Toni returned.

She had no sooner arrived than she sent for Latonia and, as they flung their arms around each other, they both knew that nothing was changed and that they were back on the same footing as they had been since childhood.

"I have been longing to see you!" Toni cried. "I kept on suggesting to Cousin Alice that you should join me in London, but she was absolutely determined that I was enough trouble on my own!"

Toni laughed as she spoke and Latonia looked at her questioningly as she asked,

"Are you in trouble?"

"Of course I am!" Toni replied. "Am I ever in anything else? And, dearest, you have to help me. I cannot do without you."

"What is it this time?"

"I am in love!"

Latonia clasped her hands together.

"Oh, Toni, how exciting! Who is he?"

"The Marquis of Seaton!"

Latonia gasped.



“I don’t believe it! How did you meet him and what has his father to say about it?”

It was not surprising that Latonia was astonished.

The Marquis of Seaton was the eldest son of the Duke of Hampton, the most important person in the County, who gave himself such airs that he considered the local people beneath his condescension.

Although he could not ignore Lord Branscombe, he had quarrelled with him over the boundaries of their adjoining estates and the two Noblemen had therefore not been on speaking terms.

When they were girls, Latonia and Toni had often seen the Marquis out hunting and had longed to make his acquaintance.

He was older than they were, exceedingly handsome and an excellent rider. But, as Latonia had often thought, it was as easy to meet the man in the moon as to become acquainted with the Marquis of Seaton.

Now it appeared that Toni had not only met him but was in love with him and Latonia listened with rapt attention to all that her cousin had to tell her.

“I saw him almost the first night I was in London “ Toni related. “We were at a small musical party and it was rather dull. I was not surprised when he disappeared before we were introduced, but I was determined to meet him sooner or later. I tried to find out from Cousin Alice who were his friends and which houses he visited.”

“Was that difficult?” Latonia asked.

“Not really,” Toni answered. “Everyone gossips about everyone else and I soon discovered that the Marquis was having an *affaire de coeur* with a very attractive married woman”

She thought that Latonia looked shocked and she added laughingly,

“All gentlemen run after married women because they are safe. They never speak to girls if they can help it because they are terrified that they might be caught!”

“I can understand that, Toni,” Latonia said. “But you look lovely, much lovelier than when you first went to London.”

She was speaking the truth.

Her cousin had grown more sophisticated and certainly more alluring than she had been in the past.

Perhaps it was because she was more sure of herself and, of course, the gown she wore, which had obviously come from a most expensive and inspired dressmaker, gave her an added glamour.

“Go on about the Marquis,” Latonia prompted.

“It took me over a month before I met him,” Toni continued, “and when I did, I was determined to make him fall in love with me just to pay him out for all the years that stuck-up Duke never asked us inside Hampton Towers!”

“He would not have asked me anyway,” Latonia pointed out.

“You will be asked in the future, because I intend to be the Marchioness of Seaton.”

Latonia gave a little gasp.

“What will the Duke say to that?”

“He will have to forget the quarrel he had all those years ago with Papa and forget his grandiose ideas of marrying his son off to a Princess.”

“A Princess?”

“You don’t suppose he would think anyone else good enough for the son of an Almighty Duke of Hampton?” Toni answered.

Then she gave a laugh and threw out her arm with an expression of delight.

“Oh, Latonia, Latonia! It has been such fun! I was determined to capture Ivan and I have succeeded, except that in making him fall in love with me, I have fallen in love with him!”

“You really love him?”

“I adore him,” Toni replied. “I cannot tell you how attractive and how wonderful he is!”

She gave a little sigh of satisfaction.

“It is like all the Fairy stories come true. I love Ivan, he loves me and everything will be perfect once the Duke has – agreed.”

“You are certain he will?” Latonia asked in a low voice.

“He will agree – or he will die,” Toni said. “Either way, Ivan and I will be married.”

“What do you mean?”

“The Duke is very ill,” Toni explained. “I think he has heart trouble rather like Papa had. That is why Ivan has said we must wait a little while before he tells his father that he intends to marry me.”

“Supposing the Duke refuses?”

"Ivan is afraid that the shock of his opposing his father might kill him."

"Then you must certainly wait," Latonia said firmly.

"I have told Ivan that I am prepared to do so for a limited amount of time," Toni said. "But he is as impatient as I am for us to be married and be together, so we will not have to wait long."

"You really think the Duke will agree?"

"He will have to," Toni replied and now there was a hard note in her voice. "Nothing and nobody will make me give up Ivan and I know that he feels the same about me. Besides, it is poetic justice."

"You mean that you will eventually be the Duchess of Hampton?" Latonia asked.

"I mean just that," Toni agreed, "and I shall take great pleasure, Latonia, in inviting all the people to Hampton Towers who have been excluded by that stuck-up autocratic couple of snobs all these years."

"Toni, you must not speak about your future in-laws like that!"

"Why not?" Toni enquired. "I am not marrying them. I am marrying darling Ivan and he is a very different sort of person. He is warm and loving and he worships me – he does really, Latonia."

"I am not surprised," Latonia said, thinking that she had never before seen her cousin looking so pretty and attractive.

"We are going to be so happy and I will tell you something that will amuse you, Ivan will find my fortune very useful."

Latonia raised her eyebrows.

"Are you telling me that the Duke is not as rich as we thought he was?"

"That is the truth," Toni answered. "Ivan thinks that his father may have mismanaged things and has also overspent with his grandiose ideas, wishing to appear more important than anybody else. Ivan tells me that there are always twelve footmen on duty at Hampton Towers."

"Twelve!" Latonia exclaimed.

"And the Duke travels with six outriders instead of four."

There was silence for a moment and then Latonia asked,

"Has His Grace already picked out the Princess he wishes his son to marry?"

"Of course he has!" Toni replied. "And Ivan says that he has the choice of not one but several, mostly from German Principalities but nevertheless of Royal blood."

Latonia was silent.

She was thinking that while the Branscombes were an old and respected family and the new Lord Branscombe was the fourth Baron, they did not compare with the Duke of Hampton, whose ancestors included many members of different European Royal families.

Toni looked at her and laughed.

"I know what you are thinking," she said, "but you need not waste your time worrying about me. Ivan loves me and I love him and not all the Dukes or a whole cavalcade of blue-blooded Royal Princesses are going to stop us from marrying each other!"

"Oh, I am glad, dearest!" Latonia said warmly. "Not because you will be a Duchess but because you will be happy as Papa and Mama were. Nothing mattered to them except each other and their love and that is what I have always prayed both you and I will find one day."

"As I have found already. When you meet Ivan you will understand why he is the only man I have ever met who makes my heart beat quicker and with whom I feel I want to spend the rest of my life."

Riding now towards The Castle, Latonia wondered a little apprehensively if Toni's impetuous summons had anything to do with the Marquis.

'Surely,' she wondered, 'nothing can have gone wrong?'

She had not yet met him, although there was no doubt from the notes that arrived every day, as well as flowers and other presents, that he was as infatuated with Toni as she was with him.

They also managed to meet regularly but secretly, so that their interest in each other was not repeated to the Duke.

As the Hampton and Branscombe estates marched with each other, there were plenty of woods just on the boundary on each side, where two people on horseback could disappear amongst the trees and when they rode home in different directions, no one would have the slightest idea that they had been together.

"Does not your Head Groom think it rather strange that you ride alone?" Latonia asked.

"It is something I have always done, as you know, except when I am riding with you," Toni answered, "so he is used to it. Once or twice I have told him that I was meeting you."

Latonia gave a little cry.

"Oh, do be careful not to tell lies in which you might be caught out!" she said. "He may know I have no decent horses of my own at the moment."

"Why did you not tell me?" Toni asked. "I will send you over two immediately."

Latonia looked embarrassed.

"I did not mean that."

"Well, you should have. We share everything as we always have and, as soon as possible, I want you to move here and be with me."

"I am longing to do that," Latonia answered, "but Miss Waddesdon has been so sweet in coming to live with me after you went to London that I cannot send her away."

"I will tell you what we will do," Toni said. "As soon as that tiresome woman whom Cousin Alice chose is no longer here to chaperone me – and she drives me crazy with her eternal chatter – both you and Miss Waddesdon can come to The Castle."

"That would be lovely!" Latonia said.

"It will make it a lot easier," Toni said with satisfaction, "and with any luck you will be able to move in next week or the beginning of the week after."

Latonia had been looking forward to it so much because she loved being with Toni and she thought now that it would be very disappointing if Toni's urgent summons meant that their plan had to be changed.

As she rode down the drive and saw The Castle ahead of her, she thought it would be fun to be back in the great house that she had found so intriguing as a child.

There had been so many places in which to play hide-and-seek, while the nurseries, which had seemed as big as the whole manor house, had held every type of toy, game and doll that any two small girls could have wished for.

Then, as she drew nearer, it suddenly struck Latonia for the first time that The Castle in the future would belong not to Toni but to her uncle.

As it was the family house of the Branscombes, Kenrick Combe would live there when he returned from India and, as Latonia had never met him, she thought perhaps she would no longer be the welcome guest that she was now.