

CHAPTER XXII

THE AWAKENING

James and Mr. Burke met the great specialist in brain diseases at the noon train on Wednesday and drove him to Elmhurst.

Dr. Hoyt was a handsome, gray-haired man, with kindly eyes and a distinguished manner. When he was ushered into the library the young ladies were attracted by the physician at once, and from the first glance were inspired by confidence in his powers. Yet Dr. Hoyt spoke rather doubtfully of the case in hand.

"These cases are not so rare as you might suppose," he said; "yet no two of them are exactly alike. Usually the recovery is slow and tedious; but recovery is not always assured. In some instances, however, the memory is absolutely restored, and from what Mr. Burke has explained to me of Lucy Rogers's history this is what we may expect now. Or else, we must trust to time or an accident to awaken her dormant mental faculties. The case is so interesting that I should like, with your permission, to make an experiment which can result in no harm if it does not succeed."

"We put the matter entirely in your hands, sir," said Uncle John. "Act as you think best."

"I thank you," replied Dr. Hoyt, bowing. Then he turned to the girls.

"Which of you young ladies has won the friendship of Lucy Rogers?" he asked.

Louise answered that she and Eliza Parsons had become good friends.

"Will you assist me?" asked the physician.

"Willingly, sir."

"I wish to send the girl into a deep sleep, to render her unconscious without her suspecting my intention, or realizing the fact. Can you suggest a way to do this?"

Louise tried to think.

"What means will you employ, sir?" she asked.

"There are many ways to accomplish this. I prefer to administer a powerful sleeping potion. Have you any confectionery or bon-bons at hand?"

"Yes, indeed. I have just received a fresh box of bon-bons from New York. But I'm not sure I can induce Eliza to eat candy."

"Then let us prepare the potion in various ways. But you must be

careful, Miss Merrick, not to make a mistake and take the dose yourself."

Louise laughed.

"I'll be careful, sir," she promised.

The two then retired to perfect their plan, and in an hour every arrangement was complete.

Louise went to her room, donned a wrapper, and bandaged her head. Then she summoned Martha and asked the housekeeper to send Eliza Parsons to sit with her in the darkened room, as she was suffering from a headache.

The maid came at once, to all appearances, as happy and careless as ever. After expressing her sympathy she asked what she could do.

"Just sit down and keep me company, dear," replied Louise. "I'm not very bad, but I'm restless and can't sleep, and I want you to talk to me and amuse me."

Eliza laughed.

"That is easy, as far as talking is concerned," she said. "But to amuse you, Miss Louise, may be more difficult."

But the girls found a topic of conversation in the election, in which Eliza was much interested, and they chatted together for an hour or so before Louise made any move to consummate her plot.

"I hope my foolish reports to Mr. Hopkins did no harm to Mr. Forbes," Eliza was saying. "I really had little to tell him of your conversation or movements."

"You did no harm at all, for Mr. Forbes was elected," replied Louise. Then she said, carelessly:

"Martha has sent me this pitcher of lemonade, and I don't care for it. Won't you drink a glass, Eliza?"

"No, thank you," she replied, shaking her head. "I never drink lemonade."

"Then have one of these sandwiches?"

"I'm not hungry, Miss Louise."

Louise sighed. Both the lemonade and the sandwiches had been "dosed" by Dr. Hoyt. Then she picked up the box of bon-bons that was beside her.

"But you will eat some candy, dear. Every girl likes candy."

"I don't seem to care for it," said Eliza carelessly.

"Just one piece, to please me," coaxed Louise, and selected a piece from the box with dainty care. "Here, my dear; you'll find this sort very nice."

Eliza hesitated, but finally reached out her hand and took the bon-bon. Louise lay back in her chair and closed her eyes, fearing their eagerness might betray her. When after a time she opened them again Eliza was slowly rocking back and forth and chewing the confection.

Dr. Hoyt's first suggestion had been best. The potion had been prepared in several ways to tempt Eliza, but the candy had been the effectual bait.

Louise felt a glow of triumph, but managed to continue the conversation, relating in an amusing way the anxiety of the Elmhurst folks when the first returns seemed to indicate the election of Hopkins.

Eliza laughed once or twice, her head resting upon the back of her chair. Then the words of Louise began to sound dreamy and indistinct in her ears. The chair rocked with less regularity; soon it came to a stop, and Eliza was peacefully sleeping in its ample depths.

Louise now rose softly and rang her bell. Footsteps approached, and a knock came upon the door. She admitted Dr. Hoyt, Mr. Burke, and two

servants.

The physician approached the sleeping girl and gently lifted the lids of her eyes. Then he nodded with satisfaction.

"There was no suspicion on her part? She made no struggle--no attempt to evade unconsciousness?" he asked.

"None at all, sir," replied Louise. "She ate the bon-bon, and was asleep before she realized it."

"Excellent!" said the doctor. "We will now place her in her own room, upon her bed, while Mr. Burke and I drive over to her former home to complete our arrangements."

"Won't she waken?" asked Louise.

"Not until tomorrow morning, and when she does I hope for a complete restoration of her memory."

Beth went with Dr. Hoyt to the Rogers farm, because she knew Mrs. Rogers. It was necessary to break the news to the poor, blind woman gently, but Beth's natural tact stood her in good stead. She related the story of the search for Lucy, the discovery that one of the maids at Elmhurst resembled the missing girl, and the detective's conclusion that Eliza Parsons was none other than Lucy Rogers, who was suffering from a

peculiar mental aberration and had forgotten every detail of her former life.

Mrs. Rogers followed the tale with intelligent understanding, and her joy at the discovery of her wandering child was only tempered by the fear that Lucy would never know her mother again or be content to remain in her humble home.

Then Dr. Hoyt took up the conversation and related the many instances of complete recovery that had come under his observation.

"I am adopting heroic methods in this case," said he, "but I have reasonable hopes of their success. Your child doubtless became mentally confused while under this roof. How many hours she wandered, we do not know, but it could not have been long before she lay down by the roadside and fell asleep. When she awakened her mind was a blank as regards her identity and former history. Now, in order to effect a recovery, I have reversed these experiences with her. She is at present plunged into a deep sleep, under the influence of narcotics that have rendered her brain absolutely inactive. It is really a state of coma, and I wish her to waken in this house, amid the scenes with which she was formerly familiar. By this means I hope to induce her mental faculties to resume their normal functions."

Mrs. Rogers accepted this proposal with calmness and a confidence in the physician that was admirable. Old Will trembled with nervous excitement,

and was so "flustered" by the importance of the experiment that Dr. Hoyt decided to give him a quieting potion.

Lucy's room was prepared in the exact manner in which she had left it, and presently the visitors drove back to Elmhurst.

In the evening the doctor made the journey a second time, accompanying the unconscious form of Lucy, which was attended by a maid Louise had sent with her.

The girl was undressed and put to bed in her own room, and then everyone except Dr. Hoyt returned to Elmhurst.

The physician sat late in conversation with the blind woman and old Will, and when they retired for the night he lay down upon a lounge in the little living-room. The question of fees or of comfort was wholly ignored by the specialist at the moment. His sole interest was in his remarkable case.

Mrs. Rogers rose at daylight and with old Will's assistance prepared the breakfast. The little table was set in the humble living-room, and the fragrant odor of coffee pervaded the house. Dr. Hoyt drank a cup and then stepped out upon the little porch, taking a position of observation by the window.

"All right, Nell," muttered old Will, his knees knocking together, in

spite of himself.

Mrs. Rogers rose quietly and walked to the foot of the stairs.

"Lucy! Lucy!" she called.

"Yes!" came a faint reply.

"Breakfast is ready!"

Then the two old people sat in suppressed excitement for what seemed to them an age. But the physician, calmly stationed at the window, knew it was not very long.

Presently a light step sounded upon the stairs and Lucy came into the room.

"Good morning, mother dear!" she said, a new, sweet tenderness in her voice. And then she knelt and kissed the woman upon her brow.

The doctor looked at his watch.

"I must be going," he muttered, turning away. "There's time for me to catch the early train."

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