

## CHAPTER XIX. EUNICE'S DIARY.

When people are interested in some event that is coming, do they find the dull days, passed in waiting for it, days which they are not able to remember when they look back? This is my unfortunate case. Night after night, I have gone to bed without so much as opening my Journal. There was nothing worth writing about, nothing that I could recollect, until the postman came to-day. I ran downstairs, when I heard his ring at the bell, and stopped Maria on her way to the study. There, among papa's usual handful of letters, was a letter for me.

"DEAR MISS EUNICE:

.....

"Yours ever truly."

I quote the passages in Philip's letter which most deeply interested me--I am his dear miss; and he is mine ever truly. The other part of the letter told me that he had been detained in London, and he lamented it. At the end was a delightful announcement that he was coming to me by the afternoon train. I ran upstairs to see how I looked in the glass.

My first feeling was regret. For the thousandth time, I was obliged to acknowledge that I was not as pretty as Helena. But this passed off. A cheering reflection occurred to me. Philip would not have found, in my sister's face, what seems to have interested him in my face. Besides, there is my figure.

The pity of it is that I am so ignorant about some things. If I had been allowed to read novels, I might (judging by what papa said against them in one of his sermons) have felt sure of my own attractions; I might even have understood what Philip really thought of me. However, my mind was quite unexpectedly set at ease on the subject of my figure. The manner in which it happened was so amusing--at least, so amusing to me--that I cannot resist mentioning it.

My sister and I are forbidden to read newspapers, as well as novels. But the teachers at the Girls' Scripture Class are too old to be treated in this way. When the morning lessons were over, one of them was reading the newspaper to the other, in the empty schoolroom; I being in the passage

outside, putting on my cloak.

It was a report of "an application made to the magistrates by the lady of his worship the Mayor." Hearing this, I stopped to listen. The lady of his worship (what a funny way of describing a man's wife!) is reported to be a little too fond of notoriety, and to like hearing the sound of her own voice on public occasions. But this is only my writing; I had better get back to the report. "In her address to the magistrates, the Mayoress stated that she had seen a disgusting photograph in the shop window of a stationer, lately established in the town. She desired to bring this person within reach of the law, and to have all his copies of the shameless photograph destroyed. The usher of the court was thereupon sent to purchase the photograph."--On second thoughts, I prefer going back to my own writing again; it is so uninteresting to copy other people's writing. Two of the magistrates were doing justice. They looked at the photograph--and what did it represent? The famous statue called the Venus de' Medici! One of the magistrates took this discovery indignantly. He was shocked at the gross ignorance which could call the classic ideal of beauty and grace a disgusting work. The other one made polite allowances. He thought the lady was much to be pitied; she was evidently the innocent victim of a neglected education. Mrs. Mayor left the court in a rage, telling the justices she knew where to get law. "I shall expose Venus," she said, "to the Lord Chancellor."

When the Scripture Class had broken up for the day, duty ought to have taken me home. Curiosity led me astray--I mean, led me to the stationer's window.

There I found our two teachers, absorbed in the photograph; having got to the shop first by a short cut. They seemed to think I had taken a liberty whom I joined them. "We are here," they were careful to explain, "to get a lesson in the ideal of beauty and grace." There was quite a little crowd of townfolk collected before the window. Some of them giggled; and some of them wondered whether it was taken from the life. For my own part, gratitude to Venus obliges me to own that she effected a great improvement in the state of my mind. She encouraged me. If that stumpy little creature--with no waist, and oh, such uncertain legs!--represented the ideal of beauty and grace, I had reason indeed to be satisfied with my own figure, and to think it quite possible that my sweetheart's favorable opinion of me was not ill-bestowed.

I was at the bedroom window when the time approached for Philip's arrival. Quite at the far end of the road, I discovered him. He was on foot; he walked like a king. Not that I ever saw a king, but I have my ideal. Ah, what a smile

he gave me, when I made him look up by waving my handkerchief out of the window! "Ask for papa," I whispered as he ascended the house-steps.

The next thing to do was to wait, as patiently as I could, to be sent for downstairs. Maria came to me in a state of excitement. "Oh, miss, what a handsome young gentleman, and how beautifully dressed! Is he--?" Instead of finishing what she had to say, she looked at me with a sly smile. I looked at her with a sly smile. We were certainly a couple of fools. But, dear me, how happy sometimes a fool can be!

My enjoyment of that delightful time was checked when I went into the drawing-room.

I had expected to see papa's face made beautiful by his winning smile. He was not only serious; he actually seemed to be ill at ease when he looked at me. At the same time, I saw nothing to make me conclude that Philip had produced an unfavorable impression. The truth is, we were all three on our best behavior, and we showed it. Philip had brought with him a letter from Mrs. Staveley, introducing him to papa. We spoke of the Staveleys, of the weather, of the Cathedral--and then there seemed to be nothing more left to talk about.

In the silence that followed--what a dreadful thing silence is!--papa was sent for to see somebody who had called on business. He made his excuses in the sweetest manner, but still seriously. When he and Philip had shaken hands, would he leave us together? No; he waited. Poor Philip had no choice but to take leave of me. Papa then went out by the door that led into his study, and I was left alone.

Can any words say how wretched I felt?

I had hoped so much from that first meeting--and where were my hopes now? A profane wish that I had never been born was finding its way into my mind, when the door of the room was opened softly, from the side of the passage. Maria, dear Maria, the best friend I have, peeped in. She whispered: "Go into the garden, miss, and you will find somebody there who is dying to see you. Mind you let him out by the shrubbery gate." I squeezed her hand; I asked if she had tried the shrubbery gate with a sweetheart of her own. "Hundreds of times, miss."

Was it wrong for me to go to Philip, in the garden? Oh, there is no end to objections! Perhaps I did it because it was wrong. Perhaps I had been kept on my best behavior too long for human endurance.

How sadly disappointed he looked! And how rashly he had placed himself just where he could be seen from the back windows! I took his arm and led him to the end of the garden. There we were out of the reach of inquisitive eyes; and there we sat down together, under the big mulberry tree.

"Oh, Eunice, your father doesn't like me!"

Those were his first words. In justice to papa (and a little for my own sake too) I told him he was quite wrong. I said: "Trust my father's goodness, trust his kindness, as I do."

He made no reply. His silence was sufficiently expressive; he looked at me fondly.

I may be wrong, but fond looks surely require an acknowledgment of some kind? Is a young woman guilty of boldness who only follows her impulses? I slipped my hand into his hand. Philip seemed to like it. We returned to our conversation.

He began: "Tell me, dear, is Mr. Gracedieu always as serious as he is to-day?"

"Oh no!"

"When he takes exercise, does he ride? or does he walk?"

"Papa always walks."

"By himself?"

"Sometimes by himself. Sometimes with me. Do you want to meet him when he goes out?"

"Yes."

"When he is out with me?"

"No. When he is out by himself."

Was it possible to tell me more plainly that I was not wanted? I did my best to express indignation by snatching my hand away from him. He was completely taken by surprise.

"Eunice! don't you understand me?"

I was as stupid and as disagreeable as I could possibly be: "No; I don't!"

"Then let me help you," he said, with a patience which I had not deserved.

Up to that moment I had been leaning against the back of a garden chair. Something else now got between me and my chair. It stole round my waist--it held me gently--it strengthened its hold--it improved my temper--it made me fit to understand him. All done by what? Only an arm!

Philip went on:

"I want to ask your father to do me the greatest of all favors--and there is no time to lose. Every day, I expect to get a letter which may recall me to Ireland."

My heart sank at this horrid prospect; and in some mysterious way my head must have felt it too. I mean that I found my head resting on his shoulder. He went on:

"How am I to get my opportunity of speaking to Mr. Gracedieu? I mustn't call on him again as soon as to-morrow or next day. But I might meet him, out walking alone, if you will tell me how to do it. A note to my hotel is all I want. Don't tremble, my sweet. If you are not present at the time, do you see any objection to my owning to your father that I love you?"

I felt his delicate consideration for me--I did indeed feel it gratefully. If he only spoke first, how well I should get on with papa afterward! The prospect before me was exquisitely encouraging. I agreed with Philip in everything; and I waited (how eagerly was only known to myself) to hear what he would say to me next. He prophesied next:

"When I have told your father that I love you, he will expect me to tell him something else. Can you guess what it is?"

If I had not been confused, perhaps I might have found the answer to this. As it was, I left him to reply to himself. He did it, in words which I shall remember as long as I live.

"Dearest Eunice, when your father has heard my confession, he will suspect that there is another confession to follow it--he will want to know if you love

me. My angel, will my hopes be your hopes too, when I answer him?"

What there was in this to make my heart beat so violently that I felt as if I was being stifled, is more than I can tell. He leaned so close to me, so tenderly, so delightfully close, that our faces nearly touched. He whispered: "Say you love me, in a kiss!"

His lips touched my lips, pressed them, dwelt on them--oh, how can I tell of it! Some new enchantment of feeling ran deliciously through and through me. I forgot my own self; I only knew of one person in the world. He was master of my lips; he was master of my heart. When he whispered, "kiss me," I kissed. What a moment it was! A faintness stole over me; I felt as if I was going to die some exquisite death; I laid myself back away from him--I was not able to speak. There was no need for it; my thoughts and his thoughts were one--he knew that I was quite overcome; he saw that he must leave me to recover myself alone. I pointed to the shrubby gate. We took one long last look at each other for that day; the trees hid him; I was left by myself.