

CHAPTER XXVII. EUNICE'S DIARY.

Indeed, I am a most unfortunate creature; everything turns out badly with me. My good, true friend, my dear Selina, has become the object of a hateful doubt in my secret mind. I am afraid she is keeping something from me.

Talking with her about my troubles, I heard for the first time that she had written again to Mrs. Tenbruggen. The object of her letter was to tell her friend of my engagement to young Mr. Dunboyne. I asked her why she had done this. The answer informed me that there was no knowing, in the present state of my affairs, how soon I might not want the help of a clever woman. I ought, I suppose, to have been satisfied with this. But there seemed to be something not fully explained yet.

Then again, after telling Selina what I heard in the study, and how roughly Philip had spoken to me afterward, I asked her what she thought of it. She made an incomprehensible reply: "My sweet child, I mustn't think of it--I am too fond of you."

It was impossible to make her explain what this meant. She began to talk of Philip; assuring me (which was quite needless) that she had done her best to fortify and encourage him, before he called on papa. When I asked her to help me in another way--that is to say, when I wanted to find out where Philip was at that moment--she had no advice to give me. I told her that I should not enjoy a moment's ease of mind until I and my dear one were reconciled. She only shook her head and declared that she was sorry for me. When I hit on the idea of ringing for Maria, this little woman, so bright, and quick and eager to help me at other times, said "I leave it to you, dear," and turned to the piano (close to which I was sitting), and played softly and badly stupid little tunes.

"Maria, did you open the door for Mr. Dunboyne when he went away just now?"

"No, miss."

Nothing but ill-luck for me! If I had been left to my own devices, I should now have let the housemaid go. But Selina contrived to give me a hint, on a strange plan of her own. Still at the piano, she began to confuse talking to herself with playing to herself. The notes went tinkle, tinkle--and the tongue mixed up words with the notes in this way: "Perhaps they have been talking

in the kitchen about Philip?"

The suggestion was not lost on me. I said to Maria--who was standing at the other end of the room, near the door--"Did you happen to hear which way Mr. Dunboyne went when he left us?"

"I know where he was, miss, half an hour ago."

"Where was he?"

"At the hotel."

Selina went on with her hints in the same way as before. "How does she know--ah, how does she know?" was the vocal part of the performance this time. My clever inquiries followed the vocal part as before:

"How do you know that Mr. Dunboyne was at the hotel?"

"I was sent there with a letter for him, and waited for the answer."

There was no suggestion required this time. The one possible question was: "Who sent you?"

Maria replied, after first reserving a condition: "You won't tell upon me, miss?"

I promised not to tell. Selina suddenly left off playing.

"Well," I repeated, "who sent you?"

"Miss Helena."

Selina looked round at me. Her little eyes seemed to have suddenly become big, they stared me so strangely in the face. I don't know whether she was in a state of fright or of wonder. As for myself, I simply lost the use of my tongue. Maria, having no more questions to answer, discreetly left us together.

Why should Helena write to Philip at all--and especially without mentioning it to me? Here was a riddle which was more than I could guess. I asked Selina to help me. She might at least have tried, I thought; but she looked uneasy, and made excuses.

I said: "Suppose I go to Helena, and ask her why she wrote to Philip?" And Selina said: "Suppose you do, dear."

I rang for Maria once more: "Do you know where my sister is?"

"Just gone out, miss."

There was no help for it but to wait till she came back, and to get through the time in the interval as I best might. But for one circumstance, I might not have known what to do. The truth is, there was a feeling of shame in me when I remembered having listened at the study door. Curious notions come into one's head--one doesn't know how or why. It struck me that I might make a kind of atonement for having been mean enough to listen, if I went to papa, and offered to keep him company in his solitude. If we fell into pleasant talk, I had a sly idea of my own--I meant to put in a good word for poor Philip.

When I confided my design to Selina, she shut up the piano and ran across the room to me. But somehow she was not like her old self again, yet.

"You good little soul, you are always right. Look at me again, Euneece. Are you beginning to doubt me? Oh, my darling, don't do that! It isn't using me fairly. I can't bear it--I can't bear it!"

I took her hand; I was on the point of speaking to her with the kindness she deserved from me. On a sudden she snatched her hand away and ran back to the piano. When she was seated on the music-stool, her face was hidden from me. At that moment she broke into a strange cry--it began like a laugh, and it ended like a sob.

"Go away to papa! Don't mind me--I'm a creature of impulse--ha! ha! ha! a little hysterical--the state of the weather--I get rid of these weaknesses, my dear, by singing to myself. I have a favorite song: 'My heart is light, my will is free.'--Go away! oh, for God's sake, go away!"

I had heard of hysterics, of course; knowing nothing about them, however, by my own experience. What could have happened to agitate her in this extraordinary manner?

Had Helena's letter anything to do with it? Was my sister indignant with Philip for swearing in my presence; and had she written him an angry letter, in her zeal on my behalf? But Selina could not possibly have seen the letter--and Helena (who is often hard on me when I do stupid things) showed little

indulgence for me, when I was so unfortunate as to irritate Philip. I gave up the hopeless attempt to get at the truth by guessing, and went away to forget my troubles, if I could, in my father's society.

After knocking twice at the door of the study, and receiving no reply, I ventured to look in.

The sofa in this room stood opposite the door. Papa was resting on it, but not in comfort. There were twitching movements in his feet, and he shifted his arms this way and that as if no restful posture could he found for them. But what frightened me was this. His eyes, staring straight at the door by which I had gone in, had an inquiring expression, as if he actually did not know me! I stood midway between the door and the sofa, doubtful about going nearer to him.

He said: "Who is it?" This to me--to his own daughter. He said: "What do you want?"

I really could not bear it. I went up to him. I said: "Papa, have you forgotten Eunice?"

My name seemed (if one may say such a thing) to bring him to himself again. He sat upon the sofa--and laughed as he answered me.

"My dear child, what delusion has got into that pretty little head of yours? Fancy her thinking that I had forgotten my own daughter! I was lost in thought, Eunice. For the moment, I was what they call an absent man. Did I ever tell you the story of the absent man? He went to call upon some acquaintance of his; and when the servant said, 'What name, sir?' He couldn't answer. He was obliged to confess that he had forgotten his own name. The servant said, 'That's very strange.' The absent man at once recovered himself. 'That's it!' he said: 'my name is Strange.' Droll, isn't it? If I had been calling on a friend to-day, I daresay I might have forgotten my name, too. Much to think of, Eunice--too much to think of."

Leaving the sofa with a sigh, as if he was tired of it, he began walking up and down. He seemed to be still in good spirits. "Well, my dear," he said, "what can I do for you?"

"I came here, papa to see if there was anything I could do for You."

He looked at some sheets of paper, strung together, and laid on the table. They were covered with writing (from his dictation) in my sister's hand. "I

ought to get on with my work," he said. "Where is Helena?"

I told him that she had gone out, and begged leave to try what I could do to supply her place.

The request seemed to please him; but he wanted time to think. I waited; noticing that his face grew gradually worried and anxious. There came a vacant look into his eyes which it grieved me to see; he appeared to have quite lost himself again. "Read the last page," he said, pointing to the manuscript on the table; "I don't remember where I left off."

I turned to the last page. As well as I could tell, it related to some publication, which he was recommending to religious persons of our way of thinking.

Before I had read half-way through it, he began to dictate, speaking so rapidly that my pen was not always able to follow him. My handwriting is as bad as bad can be when I am hurried. To make matters worse still, I was confused. What he was now saying seemed to have nothing to do with what I had been reading.

Let me try if I can call to mind the substance of it.

He began in the most strangely sudden way by asking: "Why should there be any fear of discovery, when every possible care had been taken to prevent it? The danger from unexpected events was far more disquieting. A man might find himself bound in honor to disclose what it had been the chief anxiety of his life to conceal. For example, could he let an innocent person be the victim of deliberate suppression of the truth--no matter how justifiable that suppression might appear to be? On the other hand, dreadful consequences might follow an honorable confession. There might be a cruel sacrifice of tender affection; there might be a shocking betrayal of innocent hope and trust."

I remember those last words, just as he dictated them, because he suddenly stopped there; looking, poor dear, distressed and confused. He put his hand to his head, and went back to the sofa.

"I'm tired," he said. "Wait for me while I rest."

In a few minutes he fell asleep. It was a deep repose that came to him now; and, though I don't think it lasted much longer than half an hour, it produced a wonderful change in him for the better when he woke. He spoke

quietly and kindly; and when he returned to me at the table and looked at the page on which I had been writing, he smiled.

"Oh, my dear, what bad writing! I declare I can't read what I myself told you to write. No! no! don't be downhearted about it. You are not used to writing from dictation; and I daresay I have been too quick for you." He kissed me and encouraged me. "You know how fond I am of my little girl," he said; "I am afraid I like my Eunice just the least in the world more than I like my Helena. Ah, you are beginning to look a little happier now!"

He had filled me with such confidence and such pleasure that I could not help thinking of my sweetheart. Oh dear, when shall I learn to be distrustful of my own feelings? The temptation to say a good word for Philip quite mastered any little discretion that I possessed.

I said to papa: "If you knew how to make me happier than I have ever been in all my life before, would you do it?"

"Of course I would."

"Then send for Philip, dear, and be a little kinder to him, this time."

His pale face turned red with anger; he pushed me away from him.

"That man again!" he burst out. "Am I never to hear the last of him? Go away, Eunice. You are of no use here." He took up my unfortunate page of writing and ridiculed it with a bitter laugh. "What is this fit for?" He crumpled it up in his hand and tossed it into the fire.

I ran out of the room in such a state of mortification that I hardly knew what I was about. If some hard-hearted person had come to me with a cup of poison, and had said: "Eunice, you are not fit to live any longer; take this," I do believe I should have taken it. If I thought of anything, I thought of going back to Selina. My ill luck still pursued me; she had disappeared. I looked about in a helpless way, completely at a loss what to do next--so stupefied, I may even say, that it was some time before I noticed a little three-cornered note on the table by which I was standing. The note was addressed to me:

"EVER-DEAREST EUNEECE--I have tried to make myself useful to you, and have failed. But how can I see the sad sight of your wretchedness, and not feel the impulse to try again? I have gone to the hotel to find Philip, and to bring him back to you a penitent and faithful man. Wait for me, and hope for great things. A. hundred thousand kisses to my sweet Eunece.

"S. J."

Wait for her, after reading that note! How could she expect it? I had only to follow her, and to find Philip. In another minute, I was on my way to the hotel.