

## CHAPTER XXVIII. HELENA'S DIARY.

Looking at the last entry in my Journal, I see myself anticipating that the event of to-day will decide Philip's future and mine. This has proved prophetic. All further concealment is now at an end.

Forced to it by fate, or helped to it by chance, Eunice has made the discovery of her lover's infidelity. "In all human probability" (as my father says in his sermons), we two sisters are enemies for life.

I am not suspected, as Eunice is, of making appointments with a sweetheart. So I am free to go out alone, and to go where I please. Philip and I were punctual to our appointment this afternoon.

Our place of meeting was in a secluded corner of the town park. We found a rustic seat in our retirement, set up (one would suppose) as a concession to the taste of visitors who are fond of solitude. The view in front of us was bounded by the park wall and railings, and our seat was prettily approached on one side by a plantation of young trees. No entrance gate was near; no carriage road crossed the grass. A more safe and more solitary nook for conversation, between two persons desiring to be alone, it would be hard to find in most public parks. Lovers are said to know it well, and to be especially fond of it toward evening. We were there in broad daylight, and we had the seat to ourselves.

My memory of what passed between us is, in some degree, disturbed by the formidable interruption which brought our talk to an end.

But among other things, I remember that I showed him no mercy at the outset. At one time I was indignant; at another I was scornful. I declared, in regard to my object in meeting him, that I had changed my mind, and had decided to shorten a disagreeable interview by waiving my right to an explanation, and bidding him farewell. Eunice, as I pointed out, had the first claim to him; Eunice was much more likely to suit him, as a companion for life, than I was. "In short," I said, in conclusion, "my inclination for once takes sides with my duty, and leaves my sister in undisturbed possession of young Mr. Dunboyne." With this satirical explanation, I rose to say good-by.

I had merely intended to irritate him. He showed a superiority to anger for which I was not prepared.

"Be so kind as to sit down again," he said quietly.

He took my letter from his pocket, and pointed to that part of it which alluded to his conduct, when we had met in my father's study.

"You have offered me the opportunity of saying a word in my own defense," he went on. "I prize that privilege far too highly to consent to your withdrawing it, merely because you have changed your mind. Let me at least tell you what my errand was, when I called on your father. Loving you, and you only, I had forced myself to make a last effort to be true to your sister. Remember that, Helena, and then say--is it wonderful if I was beside myself, when I found You in the study?"

"When you tell me you were beside yourself," I said, "do you mean, ashamed of yourself?"

That touched him. "I mean nothing of the kind," he burst out. "After the hell on earth in which I have been living between you two sisters, a man hasn't virtue enough left in him to be ashamed. He's half mad--that's what he is. Look at my position! I had made up my mind never to see you again; I had made up my mind (if I married Eunice) to rid myself of my own miserable life when I could endure it no longer. In that state of feeling, when my sense of duty depended on my speaking with Mr. Gracedieu alone, whose was the first face I saw when I entered the room? If I had dared to look at you, or to speak to you, what do you think would have become of my resolution to sacrifice myself?"

"What has become of it now?" I asked.

"Tell me first if I am forgiven," he said--"and you shall know."

"Do you deserve to be forgiven?"

It has been discovered by wiser heads than mine that weak people are always in extremes. So far, I had seen Philip in the vain and violent extreme. He now shifted suddenly to the sad and submissive extreme. When I asked him if he deserved to be forgiven, he made the humblest of all replies--he sighed and said nothing.

"If I did my duty to my sister," I reminded him, "I should refuse to forgive you, and send you back to Eunice."

"Your father's language and your father's conduct," he answered, "have

released me from that entanglement. I can never go back to Eunice. If you refuse to forgive me, neither you nor she will see anything more of Philip Dunboyne; I promise you that. Are you satisfied now?"

After holding out against him resolutely, I felt myself beginning to yield. When a man has once taken their fancy, what helplessly weak creatures women are! I saw through his vacillating weakness--and yet I trusted him, with both eyes open. My looking-glass is opposite to me while I write. It shows me a contemptible Helena. I lied, and said I was satisfied--to please him.

"Am I forgiven?" he asked.

It is absurd to put it on record. Of course, I forgave him. What a good Christian I am, after all!

He took my willing hand. "My lovely darling," he said, "our marriage rests with you. Whether your father approves of it or not, say the word; claim me, and I am yours for life."

I must have been infatuated by his voice and his look; my heart must have been burning under the pressure of his hand on mine. Was it my modesty or my self-control that deserted me? I let him take me in his arms. Again, and again, and again I kissed him. We were deaf to what we ought to have heard; we were blind to what we ought to have seen. Before we were conscious of a movement among the trees, we were discovered. My sister flew at me like a wild animal. Her furious hands fastened themselves on my throat. Philip started to his feet. When he touched her, in the act of forcing her back from me, Eunice's raging strength became utter weakness in an instant. Her arms fell helpless at her sides--her head drooped--she looked at him in silence which was dreadful, at such a moment as that. He shrank from the unendurable reproach in those tearless eyes. Meanly, he turned away from her. Meanly, I followed him. Looking back for an instant, I saw her step forward; perhaps to stop him, perhaps to speak to him. The effort was too much for her strength; she staggered back against the trunk of a tree. Like strangers, walking separate one from the other, we left her to her companion--the hideous traitress who was my enemy and her friend.