

CHAPTER XXIX. HELENA'S DIARY.

On reaching the street which led to Philip's hotel, we spoke to each other for the first time.

"What are we to do?" I said.

"Leave this place," he answered.

"Together?" I asked.

"Yes."

To leave us (for a while), after what had happened, might be the wisest thing which a man, in Philip's critical position, could do. But if I went with him--unprovided as I was with any friend of my own sex, whose character and presence might sanction the step I had taken--I should be lost beyond redemption. Is any man that ever lived worth that sacrifice? I thought of my father's house closed to me, and of our friends ashamed of me. I have owned, in some earlier part of my Journal, that I am not very patient under domestic cares. But the possibility of Eunice being appointed housekeeper, with my power, in my place, was more than I could calmly contemplate. "No," I said to Philip. "Your absence, at such a time as this, may help us both; but, come what may of it, I must remain at home."

He yielded, without an attempt to make me alter my mind. There was a sullen submission in his manner which it was not pleasant to see. Was he despairing already of himself and of me? Had Eunice aroused the watchful demons of shame and remorse?

"Perhaps you are right," he said, gloomily. "Good-by."

My anxiety put the all-important question to him without hesitation.

"Is it good-by forever, Philip?"

His reply instantly relieved me: "God forbid!"

But I wanted more: "You still love me?" I persisted.

"More dearly than ever!"

"And yet you leave me!"

He turned pale. "I leave you because I am afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Afraid to face Eunice again."

The only possible way out of our difficulty that I could see, now occurred to me. "Suppose my sister can be prevailed on to give you up?" I suggested. "Would you come back to us in that case?"

"Certainly!"

"And you would ask my father to consent to our marriage?"

"On the day of my return, if you like."

"Suppose obstacles get in our way," I said--"suppose time passes and tries your patience--will you still consider yourself engaged to me?"

"Engaged to you," he answered, "in spite of obstacles and in spite of time."

"And while you are away from me," I ventured to add, "we shall write to each other?"

"Go where I may," he said, "you shall always hear from me."

I could ask no more, and he could concede no more. The impression evidently left on him by Eunice's terrible outbreak, was far more serious than I had anticipated. I was myself depressed and ill at ease. No expressions of tenderness were exchanged between us. There was something horrible in our barren farewell. We merely clasped hands, at parting. He went his way--and I went mine.

There are some occasions when women set an example of courage to men. I was ready to endure whatever might happen to me, when I got home. What a desperate wretch! some people might say, if they could look into this diary!

Maria opened the door; she told me that my sister had already returned, accompanied by Miss Jillgall. There had been apparently some difference of opinion between them, before they entered the house. Eunice had attempted

to go on to some other place; and Miss Jillgall had remonstrated. Maria had heard her say: "No, you would degrade yourself"--and, with that, she had led Eunice indoors. I understood, of course, that my sister had been prevented from following Philip to the hotel. There was probably a serious quarrel in store for me. I went straight to the bedroom, expecting to find Eunice there, and prepared to brave the storm that might burst on me. There was a woman at Eunice's end of the room, removing dresses from the wardrobe. I could only see her back, but it was impossible to mistake that figure--Miss Jillgall. She laid the dresses on Eunice's bed, without taking the slightest notice of me. In significant silence I pointed to the door. She went on as coolly with her occupation as if the room had been, not mine but hers; I stepped up to her, and spoke plainly.

"You oblige me to remind you," I said, "that you are not in your own room." There, I waited a little, and found that I had produced no effect. "With every disposition," I resumed, "to make allowance for the disagreeable peculiarities of your character, I cannot consent to overlook an act of intrusion, committed by a Spy. Now, do you understand me?"

She looked round her. "I see no third person here," she said. "May I ask if you mean me?"

"I mean you."

"Will you be so good, Miss Helena, as to explain yourself?"

Moderation of language would have been thrown away on this woman. "You followed me to the park," I said. "It was you who found me with Mr. Dunboyne, and betrayed me to my sister. You are a Spy, and you know it. At this very moment you daren't look me in the face."

Her insolence forced its way out of her at last. Let me record it--and repay it, when the time comes.

"Quite true," she replied. "If I ventured to look you in the face, I am afraid I might forget myself. I have always been brought up like a lady, and I wish to show it even in the company of such a wretch as you are. There is not one word of truth in what you have said of me. I went to the hotel to find Mr. Dunboyne. Ah, you may sneer! I haven't got your good looks--and a vile use you have made of them. My object was to recall that base young man to his duty to my dear charming injured Euneece. The hotel servant told me that Mr. Dunboyne had gone out. Oh, I had the means of persuasion in my pocket! The man directed me to the park, as he had already directed Mr.

Dunboyne. It was only when I had found the place, that I heard some one behind me. Poor innocent Euneece had followed me to the hotel, and had got her directions, as I had got mine. God knows how hard I tried to persuade her to go back, and how horribly frightened I was--No! I won't distress myself by saying a word more. It would be too humiliating to let you see an honest woman in tears. Your sister has a spirit of her own, thank God! She won't inhabit the same room with you; she never desires to see your false face again. I take the poor soul's dresses and things away--and as a religious person I wait, confidently wait, for the judgment that will fall on you!"

She caught up the dresses all together; some of them were in her arms, some of them fell on her shoulders, and one of them towered over her head. Smothered in gowns, she bounced out of the room like a walking milliner's shop. I have to thank the wretched old creature for a moment of genuine amusement, at a time of devouring anxiety. The meanest insect, they say, has its use in this world--and why not Miss Jillgall?

In half an hour more, an unexpected event raised my spirits. I heard from Philip.

On his return to the hotel he had found a telegram waiting for him. Mr. Dunboyne the elder had arrived in London; and Philip had arranged to join his father by the next train. He sent me the address, and begged that I would write and tell him my news from home by the next day's post.

Welcome, thrice welcome, to Mr. Dunboyne the elder! If Philip can manage, under my advice, to place me favorably in the estimation of this rich old man, his presence and authority may do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Here is surely an influence to which my father must submit, no matter how unreasonable or how angry he may be when he hears what has happened. I begin already to feel hopeful of the future.