

CHAPTER XXX. EUNICE'S DIARY.

Through the day, and through the night, I feel a misery that never leaves me--I mean the misery of fear.

I am trying to find out some harmless means of employing myself, which will keep evil remembrances from me. If I don't succeed, my fear tells me what will happen. I shall be in danger of going mad.

I dare not confide in any living creature. I don't know what other persons might think of me, or how soon I might find myself perhaps in an asylum. In this helpless condition, doubt and fright seem to be driving me back to my Journal. I wonder whether I shall find harmless employment here.

I have heard of old people losing their memories. What would I not give to be old! I remember! oh, how I remember! One day after another I see Philip, I see Helena, as I first saw them when I was among the trees in the park. My sweetheart's arms, that once held me, hold my sister now. She kisses him, kisses him, kisses him.

Is there no way of making myself see something else? I want to get back to remembrances that don't burn in my head and tear at my heart. How is it to be done?

I have tried books--no! I have tried going out to look at the shops--no! I have tried saying my prayers--no! And now I am making my last effort; trying my pen. My black letters fall from it, and take their places on the white paper. Will my black letters help me? Where can I find something consoling to write down? Where? Where?

Selina--poor Selina, so fond of me, so sorry for me. When I was happy, she was happy, too. It was always amusing to hear her talk. Oh, my memory, be good to me! Save me from Philip and Helena. I want to remember the pleasant days when my kind little friend and I used to gossip in the garden.

No: the days in the garden won't come back. What else can I think of?

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The recollections that I try to encourage keep away from me. The other recollections that I dread, come crowding back. Still Philip! Still Helena!

But Selina mixes herself up with them. Let me try again if I can think of Selina.

How delightfully good to me and patient with me she was, on our dismal way home from the park! And how affectionately she excused herself for not having warned me of it, when she first suspected that my own sister and my worst enemy were one and the same!

"I know I was wrong, my dear, to let my love and pity close my lips. But remember how happy you were at the time. The thought of making you miserable was more than I could endure--I am so fond of you! Yes; I began to suspect them, on the day when they first met at the station. And, I am afraid, I thought it just likely that you might be as cunning as I was, and have noticed them, too."

Oh, how ignorant she must have been of my true thoughts and feelings! How strangely people seem to misunderstand their dearest friends! knowing, as I did, that I could never love any man but Philip, could I be wicked enough to suppose that Philip would love any woman but me?

I explained to Selina how he had spoken to me, when we were walking together on the bank of the river. Shall I ever forget those exquisite words? "I wish I was a better man, Eunice; I wish I was good enough to be worthy of you." I asked Selina if she thought he was deceiving me when he said that. She comforted me by owning that he must have been in earnest, at the time--and then she distressed me by giving the reason why.

"My love, you must have innocently said something to him, when you and he were alone, which touched his conscience (when he had a conscience), and made him ashamed of himself. Ah, you were too fond of him to see how he changed for the worse, when your vile sister joined you, and took possession of him again. It made my heart ache to see you so unsuspecting of them. You asked me, my poor dear, if they had quarreled--you believed they were tired of walking by the river, when it was you they were tired of--and you wondered why Helena took him to see the school. My child! she was the leading spirit at the school, and you were nobody. Her vanity saw the chance of making him compare you at a disadvantage with your clever sister. I declare, Eunice, I lose my head if I only think of it! All the strong points in my character seem to slip away from me. Would you believe it?--I have neglected that sweet infant at the cottage; I have even let Mrs. Molly have her baby back again. If I had the making of the laws, Philip Dunboyne and Helena Gracedieu should be hanged together on the same gallows. I see

I shock you. Don't let us talk of it! Oh, don't let us talk of it!"

And here am I writing of it! What I had determined not to do, is what I have done. Am I losing my senses already? The very names that I was most anxious to keep out of my memory stare me in the face in the lines that I have just written. Philip again! Helena again!

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Another day, and something new that must and will be remembered, shrink from it as I may. This afternoon, I met Helena on the stairs.

She stopped, and eyed me with a wicked smile; she held out her hand. "We are likely to meet often, while we are in the same house," she said; "hadn't we better consult appearances, and pretend to be as fond of each other as ever?"

I took no notice of her hand; I took no notice of her shameless proposal. She tried again: "After all, it isn't my fault if Philip likes me better than he likes you. Don't you see that?" I still refused to speak to her. She still persisted. "How black you look, Eunice! Are you sorry you didn't kill me, when you had your hands on my throat?"

I said: "Yes."

She laughed, and left me. I was obliged to sit down on the stair--I trembled so. My own reply frightened me. I tried to find out why I had said Yes. I don't remember being conscious of meaning anything. It was as if somebody else had said Yes--not I. Perhaps I was provoked, and the word escaped me before I could stop it. Could I have stopped it? I don't know.

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Another sleepless night.

Did I pass the miserable hours in writing letters to Philip and then tearing them up? Or did I only fancy that I wrote to him? I have just looked at the fireplace. The torn paper in it tells me that I did write. Why did I destroy my letters? I might have sent one of them to Philip. After what has happened? Oh, no! no!

Having been many days away from the Girls' Scripture Class, it seemed to be possible that going back to the school and the teaching might help me to

escape from myself.

Nothing succeeds with me. I found it impossible to instruct the girls as usual; their stupidity soon reached the limit of my patience--suffocated me with rage. One of them, a poor, fat, feeble creature, began to cry when I scolded her. I looked with envy at the tears rolling over her big round cheeks. If I could only cry, I might perhaps bear my hard fate with submission.

I walked toward home by a roundabout way; feeling as if want of sleep was killing me by inches.

In the High Street, I saw Helena; she was posting a letter, and was not aware that I was near her. Leaving the post-office, she crossed the street, and narrowly escaped being run over. Suppose the threatened accident had really taken place--how should I have felt, if it had ended fatally? What a fool I am to be putting questions to myself about things that have not happened!

The walking tired me; I went straight home.

Before I could ring the bell, the house door opened, and the doctor came out. He stopped to speak to me. While I had been away (he said), something had happened at home (he neither knew nor wished to know what) which had thrown my father into a state of violent agitation. The doctor had administered composing medicine. "My patient is asleep now," he told me; "but remember what I said to you the last time we met; a longer rest than any doctor's prescription can give him is what he wants. You are not looking well yourself, my dear. What is the matter?"

I told him of my wretched restless nights; and asked if I might take some of the composing medicine which he had given to my father. He forbade me to touch a drop of it. "What is physic for your father, you foolish child, is not physic for a young creature like you," he said. "Count a thousand, if you can't sleep to-night, or turn your pillow. I wish you pleasant dreams." He went away, amused at his own humor.

I found Selina waiting to speak with me, on the subject of poor papa.

She had been startled on hearing his voice, loud in anger. In the fear that something serious had happened, she left her room to make inquiries, and saw Helena on the landing of the flight of stairs beneath, leaving the study. After waiting till my sister was out of the way, Selina ventured to present herself at the study door, and to ask if she could be of any use. My father,

walking excitedly up and down the room, declared that both his daughters had behaved infamously, and that he would not suffer them to speak to him again until they had come to their senses, on the subject of Mr. Dunboyne. He would enter into no further explanation; and he had ordered, rather than requested, Selina to leave him. Having obeyed, she tried next to find me, and had just looked into the dining-room to see if I was there, when she was frightened by the sound of a fall in the room above--that is to say, in the study. Running upstairs again, she had found him insensible on the floor and had sent for the doctor.

"And mind this," Selina continued, "the person who has done the mischief is the person whom I saw leaving the study. What your unnatural sister said to provoke her father--"

"That your unnatural sister will tell you herself," Helena's voice added. She had opened the door while we were too much absorbed in our talk to hear her.

Selina attempted to leave the room. I caught her by the hand, and held her back. I was afraid of what I might do if she left me by myself. Never have I felt anything like the rage that tortured me, when I saw Helena looking at us with the same wicked smile on her lips that had insulted me when we met on the stairs. "Have we anything to be ashamed of?" I said to Selina. "Stay where you are."

"You may be of some use, Miss Jillgall, if you stay," my sister suggested. "Eunice seems to be trembling. Is she angry, or is she ill?"

The sting of this was in the tone of her voice. It was the hardest thing I ever had to do in my life--but I did succeed in controlling myself.

"Go on with what you have to say," I answered, "and don't notice me."

"You are not very polite, my dear, but I can make allowances. Oh, come! come! putting up your hands to stop your ears is too childish. You would do better to express regret for having misled your father. Yes! you did mislead him. Only a few days since, you left him to suppose that you were engaged to Philip. It became my duty, after that, to open his eyes to the truth; and if I unhappily provoked him, it was your fault. I was strictly careful in the language I used. I said: 'Dear father, you have been misinformed on a very serious subject. The only marriage engagement for which your kind sanction is requested, is my engagement. I have consented to become Mrs. Philip Dunboyne.'"

"Stop!" I said.

"Why am I to stop?"

"Because I have something to say. You and I are looking at each other. Does my face tell you what is passing in my mind?"

"Your face seems to be paler than usual," she answered--"that's all."

"No," I said; "that is not all. The devil that possessed me, when I discovered you with Philip, is not cast out of me yet. Silence the sneering devil that is in You, or we may both live to regret it."

Whether I did or did not frighten her, I cannot say. This only I know--she turned away silently to the door, and went out.

I dropped on the sofa. That horrid hungering for revenge, which I felt for the first time when I knew how Helena had wronged me, began to degrade and tempt me again. In the effort to get away from this new evil self of mine, I tried to find sympathy in Selina, and called to her to come and sit by me. She seemed to be startled when I looked at her, but she recovered herself, and came to me, and took my hand.

"I wish I could comfort you!" she said, in her kind simple way.

"Keep my hand in your hand," I told her; "I am drowning in dark water--and I have nothing to hold by but you."

"Oh, my darling, don't talk in that way!"

"Good Selina! dear Selina! You shall talk to me. Say something harmless--tell me a melancholy story--try to make me cry."

My poor little friend looked sadly bewildered.

"I'm more likely to cry myself," she said. "This is so heart-breaking--I almost wish I was back in the time, before you came home, the time when your detestable sister first showed how she hated me. I was happy, meanly happy, in the spiteful enjoyment of provoking her. Oh, Eunece, I shall never recover my spirits again! All the pity in the world would not be pity enough for you. So hardly treated! so young! so forlorn! Your good father too ill to help you; your poor mother--"

I interrupted her; she had interested me in something better than my own wretched self. I asked directly if she had known my mother.

"My dear child, I never even saw her!"

"Has my father never spoken to you about her?"

"Only once, when I asked him how long she had been dead. He told me you lost her while you were an infant, and he told me no more. I was looking at her portrait in the study, only yesterday. I think it must be a bad portrait; your mother's face disappoints me."

I had arrived at the same conclusion years since. But I shrank from confessing it.

"At any rate," Selina continued, "you are not like her. Nobody would ever guess that you were the child of that lady, with the long slanting forehead and the restless look in her eyes."

What Selina had said of me and my mother's portrait, other friends had said. There was nothing that I know of to interest me in hearing it repeated--and yet it set me pondering on the want of resemblance between my mother's face and mine, and wondering (not for the first time) what sort of woman my mother was. When my father speaks of her, no words of praise that he can utter seem to be good enough for her. Oh, me, I wish I was a little more like my mother!

It began to get dark; Maria brought in the lamp. The sudden brightness of the flame struck my aching eyes, as if it had been a blow from a knife. I was obliged to hide my face in my handkerchief. Compassionate Selina entreated me to go to bed. "Rest your poor eyes, my child, and your weary head--and try at least to get some sleep." She found me very docile; I kissed her, and said good-night. I had my own idea.

When all was quiet in the house, I stole out into the passage and listened at the door of my father's room.

I heard his regular breathing, and opened the door and went in. The composing medicine, of which I was in search, was not on the table by his bedside. I found it in the cupboard--perhaps placed purposely out of his reach. They say that some physic is poison, if you take too much of it. The label on the bottle told me what the dose was. I dropped it into the medicine

glass, and swallowed it, and went back to my father.

Very gently, so as not to wake him, I touched poor papa's forehead with my lips. "I must have some of your medicine," I whispered to him; "I want it, dear, as badly as you do."

Then I returned to my own room--and lay down in bed, waiting to be composed.