

CHAPTER XXXI. EUNICE'S DIARY.

My restless nights are passed in Selina's room.

Her bed remains near the window. My bed has been placed opposite, near the door. Our night-light is hidden in a corner, so that the faint glow of it is all that we see. What trifles these are to write about! But they mix themselves up with what I am determined to set down in my Journal, and then to close the book for good and all. I had not disturbed my little friend's enviable repose, either when I left our bed-chamber, or when I returned to it. The night was quiet, and the stars were out. Nothing moved but the throbbing at my temples. The lights and shadows in our half-darkened room, which at other times suggest strange resemblances to my fancy, failed to disturb me now. I was in a darkness of my own making, having bound a handkerchief, cooled with water, over my hot eyes. There was nothing to interfere with the soothing influence of the dose that I had taken, if my father's medicine would only help me.

I began badly. The clock in the hall struck the quarter past the hour, the half-past, the three-quarters past, the new hour. Time was awake--and I was awake with Time.

It was such a trial to my patience that I thought of going back to my father's room, and taking a second dose of the medicine, no matter what the risk might be. On attempting to get up, I became aware of a change in me. There was a dull sensation in my limbs which seemed to bind them down on the bed. It was the strangest feeling. My will said, Get up--and my heavy limbs said, No.

I lay quite still, thinking desperate thoughts, and getting nearer and nearer to the end that I had been dreading for so many days past. Having been as well educated as most girls, my lessons in history had made me acquainted with assassination and murder. Horrors which I had recoiled from reading in past happy days, now returned to my memory; and, this time, they interested instead of revolting me. I counted the three first ways of killing as I happened to remember them, in my books of instruction:--a way by stabbing; a way by poison; a way in a bed, by suffocation with a pillow. On that dreadful night, I never once called to mind what I find myself remembering now--the harmless past time, when our friends used to say: "Eunice is a good girl; we are all fond of Eunice." Shall I ever be the same lovable creature again?

While I lay thinking, a strange thing happened. Philip, who had haunted me for days and nights together, vanished out of my thoughts. My memory of the love which had begun so brightly, and had ended so miserably, became a blank. Nothing was left but my own horrid visions of vengeance and death.

For a while, the strokes of the clock still reached my ears. But it was an effort to count them; I ended in letting them pass unheeded. Soon afterward, the round of my thoughts began to circle slowly and more slowly. The strokes of the clock died out. The round of my thoughts stopped.

All this time, my eyes were still covered by the handkerchief which I had laid over them.

The darkness began to weigh on my spirits, and to fill me with distrust. I found myself suspecting that there was some change--perhaps an unearthly change--passing over the room. To remain blindfolded any longer was more than I could endure. I lifted my hand--without being conscious of the heavy sensation which, some time before, had laid my limbs helpless on the bed--I lifted my hand, and drew the handkerchief away from my eyes.

The faint glow of the night-light was extinguished.

But the room was not quite dark. There was a ghastly light trembling over it; like nothing that I have ever seen by day; like nothing that I have ever seen by night. I dimly discerned Selina's bed, and the frame of the window, and the curtains on either side of it--but not the starlight, and not the shadowy tops of the trees in the garden.

The light grew fainter and fainter; the objects in the room faded slowly away. Darkness came.

It may be a saying hard to believe--but, when I declare that I was not frightened, I am telling the truth. Whether the room was lighted by awful light, or sunk in awful dark, I was equally interested in the expectation of what might happen next. I listened calmly for what I might hear: I waited calmly for what I might feel. A touch came first. I feel it creeping on my face--like a little fluttering breeze. The sensation pleased me for a while. Soon it grew colder, and colder, and colder, till it froze me.

"Oh, no more!" I cried out. "You are killing me with an icy death!"

The dead-cold touches lingered a moment longer--and left me.

The first sound came.

It was the sound of a whisper on my pillow, close to my ear. My strange insensibility to fear remained undisturbed. The whisper was welcome, it kept me company in the dark room.

It said to me: "Do you know who I am?"

I answered: "No."

It said: "Who have you been thinking of this evening?"

I answered: "My mother."

The whisper said: "I am your mother."

"Oh, mother, command the light to come back! Show yourself to me!"

"No."

"Why not?"

"My face was hidden when I passed from life to death. My face no mortal creature may see."

"Oh, mother, touch me! Kiss me!"

"No."

"Why not?"

"My touch is poison. My kiss is death."

The sense of fear began to come to me now. I moved my head away on the pillow. The whisper followed my movement.

"Leave me," I said. "You are an Evil Spirit."

The whisper answered: "I am your mother."

"You come to tempt me."

"I come to harden your heart. Daughter of mine, whose blood is cool; daughter of mine, who tamely submits--you have loved. Is it true?"

"It is true."

"The man you loved has deserted you. Is it true?"

"It is true."

"A woman has lured him away to herself. A woman has had no mercy on you, or on him. Is it true?"

"It is true."

"If she lives, what crime toward you will she commit next?"

"If she lives, she will marry him."

"Will you let her live?"

"Never."

"Have I hardened your heart against her?"

"Yes."

"Will you kill her?"

"Show me how."

There was a sudden silence. I was still left in the darkness; feeling nothing, hearing nothing. Even the consciousness that I was lying on my bed deserted me. I had no idea that I was in the bedroom; I had no knowledge of where I was.

The ghastly light that I had seen already dawned on me once more. I was no longer in my bed, no longer in my room, no longer in the house. Without wonder, without even a feeling of surprise, I looked round. The place was familiar to me. I was alone in the Museum of our town.

The light flowed along in front of me. I followed, from room to room in the Museum, where the light led.

First, through the picture-gallery, hung with the works of modern masters; then, through the room filled with specimens of stuffed animals. The lion and the tiger, the vulture of the Alps and the great albatross, looked like living creatures threatening me, in the supernatural light. I entered the third room, devoted to the exhibition of ancient armor, and the weapons of all nations. Here the light rose higher, and, leaving me in darkness where I stood, showed a collection of swords, daggers, and knives arranged on the wall in imitation of the form of a star.

The whisper sounded again, close at my ear. It echoed my own thought, when I called to mind the ways of killing which history had taught me. It said: "Kill her with the knife."

No. My heart failed me when I thought of the blood. I hid the dreadful weapons from my view. I cried out: "Let me go! let me go!"

Again, I was lost in darkness. Again, I had no knowledge in me of where I was. Again, after an interval, the light showed me the new place in which I stood.

I was alone in the burial-ground of our parish church. The light led me on, among the graves, to the lonely corner in which the great yew tree stands; and, rising higher, revealed the solemn foliage, brightened by the fatal red fruit which hides in itself the seeds of death.

The whisper tempted me again. It followed again the train of my own thought. It said: "Kill her by poison."

No. Revenge by poison steals its way to its end. The base deceitfulness of Helena's crime against me seemed to call for a day of reckoning that hid itself under no disguise. I raised my cry to be delivered from the sight of the deadly tree. The changes which I have tried to describe followed once more the confession of what I felt; the darkness was dispelled for the third time.

I was standing in Helena's room, looking at her as she lay asleep in her bed.

She was quite still now; but she must have been restless at some earlier time. The bedclothes were disordered, her head had sunk so low that the pillow rose high and vacant above her. There, colored by a tender flush of sleep, was the face whose beauty put my poor face to shame. There, was the sister who had committed the worst of murders--the wretch who had killed in me all that made life worth having. While that thought was in my mind, I heard the whisper again. "Kill her openly," the tempter mother said. "Kill her

daringly. Faint heart, do you still want courage? Rouse your spirit; look! see yourself in the act!"

The temptation took a form which now tried me for the first time.

As if a mirror had reflected the scene, I saw myself standing by the bedside, with the pillow that was to smother the sleeper in my hands. I heard the whispering voice telling me how to speak the words that warned and condemned her: "Wake! you who have taken him from me! Wake! and meet your doom."

I saw her start up in bed. The sudden movement disordered the nightdress over her bosom and showed the miniature portrait of a man, hung round her neck.

The man was Philip. The likeness was looking at me.

So dear, so lovely--those eyes that had once been the light of my heart, mourned for me and judged me now. They saw the guilty thought that polluted me; they brought me to my knees, imploring him to help me back to my better self: "One last mercy, dear, to comfort me under the loss of you. Let the love that was once my life, be my good angel still. Save me, Philip, even though you forsake me--save me from myself!"

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There was a sudden cry.

The agony of it pierced my brain--drove away the ghastly light--silenced the tempting whispers. I came to myself. I saw--and not in a dream.

Helena had started up in her bed. That cry of terror, at the sight of me in her room at night, had burst from her lips. The miniature of Philip hung round her neck, a visible reality. Though my head was dizzy, though my heart was sinking, I had not lost my senses yet. All that the night lamp could show me, I still saw; and I heard the sound, faintly, when the door of the bed-chamber was opened. Alarmed by that piercing cry, my father came hurrying into the room.

Not a word passed between us three. The whispers that I had heard were wicked; the thoughts that had been in my mind were vile. Had they left some poison in the air of the room, which killed the words on our lips?

My father looked at Helena. With a trembling hand she pointed to me. He put his arm round me and held me up. I remember his leading me away-- and I remember nothing more.

My last words are written. I lock up this journal of misery-never, I hope and pray, to open it again. ----

Second Period (continued).

EVENTS IN THE FAMILY, RELATED BY THE GOVERNOR. ----