

CHAPTER LII. HELENA'S DIARY RESUMED.

While my father remains in his present helpless condition, somebody must assume a position of command in this house. There cannot be a moment's doubt that I am the person to do it.

In my agitated state of mind, sometimes doubtful of Philip, sometimes hopeful of him, I find Mrs. Tenbruggen simply unendurable. A female doctor is, under any circumstances, a creature whom I detest. She is, at her very best, a bad imitation of a man. The Medical Rubber is worse than this; she is a bad imitation of a mountebank. Her grinning good-humor, adopted no doubt to please the fools who are her patients, and her impudent enjoyment of hearing herself talk, make me regret for the first time in my life that I am a young lady. If I belonged to the lowest order of the population, I might take the first stick I could find, and enjoy the luxury of giving Mrs. Tenbruggen a good beating.

She literally haunts the house, encouraged, of course, by her wretched little dupe, Miss Jillgall. Only this morning, I tried what a broad hint would do toward suggesting that her visits had better come to an end.

"Really, Mrs. Tenbruggen," I said, "I must request Miss Jillgall to moderate her selfish enjoyment of your company, for your own sake. Your time is too valuable, in a professional sense, to be wasted on an idle woman who has no sympathy with your patients, waiting for relief perhaps, and waiting in vain."

She listened to this, all smiles and good-humor: "My dear, do you know how I might answer you, if I was an ill-natured woman?"

"I have no curiosity to hear it, Mrs. Tenbruggen."

"I might ask you," she persisted, "to allow me to mind my own business. But I am incapable of making an ungrateful return for the interest which you take in my medical welfare. Let me venture to ask if you understand the value of time."

"Are you going to say much more, Mrs. Tenbruggen?"

"I am going to make a sensible remark, my child. If you feel tired, permit me—here is a chair. Father Time, dear Miss Gracedieu, has always been a good friend of mine, because I know how to make the best use of him. The author

of the famous saying *Tempus fugit* (you understand Latin, of course) was, I take leave to think, an idle man. The more I have to do, the readier Time is to wait for me. Let me impress this on your mind by some interesting examples. The greatest conqueror of the century--Napoleon--had time enough for everything. The greatest novelist of the century--Sir Walter Scott--had time enough for everything. At my humble distance, I imitate those illustrious men, and my patients never complain of me."

"Have you done?" I asked.

"Yes, dear--for the present."

"You are a clever woman, Mrs. Tenbruggen and you know it. You have an eloquent tongue, and you know it. But you are something else, which you don't seem to be aware of. You are a Bore."

She burst out laughing, with the air of a woman who thoroughly enjoyed a good joke. I looked back when I left the room, and saw the friend of Father Time in the easy chair opening our newspaper.

This is a specimen of the customary encounter of our wits. I place it on record in my Journal, to excuse myself to myself. When she left us at last, later in the day, I sent a letter after her to the hotel. Not having kept a copy of it, let me present the substance, like a sermon, under three heads: I begged to be excused for speaking plainly; I declared that there was a total want of sympathy between us, on my side; and I proposed that she should deprive me of future opportunities of receiving her in this house. The reply arrived immediately in these terms: "Your letter received, dear girl. I am not in the least angry; partly because I am very fond of you, partly because I know that you will ask me to come back again. P. S.: Philip sends his love."

This last piece of insolence was unquestionably a lie. Philip detests her. They are both staying at the same hotel. But I happen to know that he won't even look at her, if they meet by accident on the stairs.

People who can enjoy the melancholy spectacle of human nature in a state of degradation would be at a loss which exhibition to prefer--an ugly old maid in a rage, or an ugly old maid in tears. Miss Jillgall presented herself in both characters when she heard what had happened. To my mind, Mrs. Tenbruggen's bosom-friend is a creature not fit to be seen or heard when she loses her temper. I only told her to leave the room. To my great amusement, she shook her bony fist at me, and expressed a frantic wish: "Oh, if I was rich enough to leave this wicked house!" I wonder whether

there is insanity (as well as poverty) in Miss Jillgall's family?

Last night my mind was in a harassed state. Philip was, as usual, the cause of it.

Perhaps I acted indiscreetly when I insisted on his leaving London, and returning to this place. But what else could I have done? It was not merely my interest, it was an act of downright necessity, to withdraw him from the influence of his hateful father--whom I now regard as the one serious obstacle to my marriage. There is no prospect of being rid of Mr. Dunboyne the elder by his returning to Ireland. He is trying a new remedy for his crippled hand--electricity. I wish it was lightning, to kill him! If I had given that wicked old man the chance, I am firmly convinced he would not have let a day pass without doing his best to depreciate me in his son's estimation. Besides, there was the risk, if I had allowed Philip to remain long away from me, of losing--no, while I keep my beauty I cannot be in such danger as that--let me say, of permitting time and absence to weaken my hold on him. However sullen and silent he may be, when we meet--and I find him in that condition far too often--I can, sooner or later, recall him to his brighter self. My eyes preserve their charm, my talk can still amuse him, and, better even than that, I feel the answering thrill in him, which tells me how precious my kisses are--not too lavishly bestowed! But the time when I am obliged to leave him to himself is the time that I dread. How do I know that his thoughts are not wandering away to Eunice? He denies it; he declares that he only went to the farmhouse to express his regret for his own thoughtless conduct, and to offer her the brotherly regard due to the sister of his promised wife. Can I believe it? Oh, what would I not give to be able to believe it! How can I feel sure that her refusal to see him was not a cunning device to make him long for another interview, and plan perhaps in private to go back and try again. Marriage! Nothing will quiet these frightful doubts of mine, nothing will reward me for all that I have suffered, nothing will warm my heart with the delightful sense of triumph over Eunice, but my marriage to Philip. And what does he say, when I urge it on him?--yes, I have fallen as low as that, in the despair which sometimes possesses me. He has his answer, always the same, and always ready: "How are we to live? where is the money?" The maddening part of it is that I cannot accuse him of raising objections that don't exist. We are poorer than ever here, since my father's illness--and Philip's allowance is barely enough to suffice him as a single man. Oh, how I hate the rich!

It was useless to think of going to bed. How could I hope to sleep, with my head throbbing, and my thoughts in this disturbed state? I put on my comfortable dressing-gown, and sat down to try what reading would do to

quiet my mind.

I had borrowed the book from the Library, to which I have been a subscriber in secret for some time past. It was an old volume, full of what we should now call Gossip; relating strange adventures, and scandalous incidents in family history which had been concealed from public notice.

One of these last romances in real life caught a strong hold on my interest.

It was a strange case of intended poisoning, which had never been carried out. A young married lady of rank, whose name was concealed under an initial letter, had suffered some unendurable wrong (which was not mentioned) at the hands of her husband's mother. The wife was described as a woman of strong passions, who had determined on a terrible revenge by taking the life of her mother-in-law. There were difficulties in the way of her committing the crime without an accomplice to help her; and she decided on taking her maid, an elderly woman, into her confidence. The poison was secretly obtained by this person; and the safest manner of administering it was under discussion between the mistress and the maid, when the door of the room was suddenly opened. The husband, accompanied by his brother, rushed in, and charged his wife with plotting the murder of his mother. The young lady (she was only twenty-three) must have been a person of extraordinary courage and resolution. She saw at once that her maid had betrayed her, and, with astonishing presence of mind, she turned on the traitress, and said to her husband: "There is the wretch who has been trying to persuade me to poison your mother!" As it happened, the old lady's temper was violent and overbearing; and the maid had complained of being ill-treated by her, in the hearing of the other servants. The circumstances made it impossible to decide which of the two was really the guilty woman. The servant was sent away, and the husband and wife separated soon afterward, under the excuse of incompatibility of temper. Years passed; and the truth was only discovered by the death-bed confession of the wife. A remarkable story, which has made such an impression on me that I have written it in my Journal. I am not rich enough to buy the book.

For the last two days, I have been confined to my room with a bad feverish cold--caught, as I suppose, by sitting at an open window reading my book till nearly three o'clock in the morning. I sent a note to Philip, telling him of my illness. On the first day, he called to inquire after me. On the second day, no visit, and no letter. Here is the third day--and no news of him as yet. I am better, but not fit to go out. Let me wait another hour, and, if that exertion of patience meets with no reward, I shall send a note to the hotel. No news of Philip. I have sent to the hotel. The servant has just returned,

bringing me back my note. The waiter informed her that Mr. Dunboyne had gone away to London by the morning train. No apology or explanation left for me.

Can he have deserted me? I am in such a frenzy of doubt and rage that I can hardly write that horrible question. Is it possible--oh, I feel it is possible that he has gone away with Eunice. Do I know where to find them? if I did know, what could I do? I feel as if I could kill them both!