

CHAPTER LV. HELENA'S DIARY RESUMED.

I did think of it. Philip came to us, and lived in our house.

Let me hasten to add that the protest of Propriety was duly entered, on the day before my promised husband arrived. Standing in the doorway--nothing would induce her to take a chair, or even to enter the room--Miss Jillgall delivered her opinion on Philip's approaching visit. Mrs. Tenbruggen reported it in her pocket-book, as if she was representing a newspaper at a public meeting. Here it is, copied from her notes:

"Miss Helena Gracedieu, my first impulse under the present disgusting circumstances was to leave the house, and earn a bare crust in the cheapest garret I could find in the town. But my grateful heart remembers Mr. Gracedieu. My poor afflicted cousin was good to me when I was helpless. I cannot forsake him when he is helpless. At whatever sacrifice of my own self-respect, I remain under this roof, so dear to me for the Minister's sake. I notice, miss, that you smile. I see my once dear Elizabeth, the friend who has so bitterly disappointed me--" she stopped, and put her handkerchief to her eyes, and went on again--"the friend who has so bitterly disappointed me, taking satirical notes of what I say. I am not ashamed of what I say. The virtue which will not stretch a little, where the motive is good, is feeble virtue indeed. I shall stay in the house, and witness horrors, and rise superior to them. Good-morning, Miss Gracedieu. Good-morning, Elizabeth." She performed a magnificent curtsey, and (as Mrs. Tenbruggen's experience of the stage informed me) made a very creditable exit.

A week has passed, and I have not opened my Diary.

My days have glided away in one delicious flow of happiness. Philip has been delightfully devoted to me. His fervent courtship, far exceeding any similar attentions which he may once have paid to Eunice, has shown such variety and such steadfastness of worship, that I despair of describing it. My enjoyment of my new life is to be felt--not to be coldly considered, and reduced to an imperfect statement in words.

For the first time I feel capable, if the circumstances encouraged me, of acts of exalted virtue. For instance, I could save my country if my country was worth it. I could die a martyr to religion if I had a religion. In one word, I am exceedingly well satisfied with myself. The little disappointments of life pass

over me harmless. I do not even regret the failure of good Mrs. Tenbruggen's efforts to find an employment for Philip, worthy of his abilities and accomplishments. The member of Parliament to whom she had applied has chosen a secretary possessed of political influence. That is the excuse put forward in his letter to Mrs. Tenbruggen. Wretched corrupt creature! If he was worth a thought I should pity him. He has lost Philip's services.

Three days more have slipped by. The aspect of my heaven on earth is beginning to alter.

Perhaps the author of that wonderful French novel, "L'Ame Damne'e," is right when he tells us that human happiness is misery in masquerade. It would be wrong to say that I am miserable. But I may be on the way to it; I am anxious.

To-day, when he did not know that I was observing him, I discovered a preoccupied look in Philip's eyes. He laughed when I asked if anything had happened to vex him. Was it a natural laugh? He put his arm round me and kissed me. Was it done mechanically? I daresay I am out of humor myself. I think I had a little headache. Morbid, probably. I won't think of it any more.

It has occurred to me this morning that he may dislike being left by himself, while I am engaged in my household affairs. If this is the case, intensely as I hate her, utterly as I loathe the idea of putting her in command over my domestic dominions, I shall ask Miss Jillgall to take my place as housekeeper.

I was away to-day in the kitchen regions rather longer than usual. When I had done with my worries, Philip was not to be found. Maria, looking out of one of the bedroom windows instead of doing her work, had seen Mr. Dunboyne leave the house. It was possible that he had charged Miss Jillgall with a message for me. I asked if she was in her room. No; she, too, had gone out. It was a fine day, and Philip had no doubt taken a stroll--but he might have waited till I could join him. There were some orders to be given to the butcher and the green-grocer. I, too, left the house, hoping to get rid of some little discontent, caused by thinking of what had happened. Returning by the way of High Street--I declare I can hardly believe it even now--I did positively see Miss Jillgall coming out of a pawnbroker's shop!

The direction in which she turned prevented her from seeing me. She was quite unaware that I had discovered her; and I have said nothing about it since. But I noticed something unusual in the manner in which her watch-chain was hanging, and I asked her what o'clock it was. She said, "You have

got your own watch." I told her my watch had stopped. "So has mine," she said. There is no doubt about it now; she has pawned her watch. What for? She lives here for nothing, and she has not had a new dress since I have known her. Why does she want money?

Philip had not returned when I got home. Another mysterious journey to London? No. After an absence of more than two hours, he came back.

Naturally enough, I asked what he had been about. He had been taking a long walk. For his health's sake? No: to think. To think of what? Well, I might be surprised to hear it, but his idle life was beginning to weigh on his spirits; he wanted employment. Had he thought of an employment? Not yet. Which way had he walked? Anyway: he had not noticed where he went. These replies were all made in a tone that offended me. Besides, I observed there was no dust on his boots (after a week of dry weather), and his walk of two hours did not appear to have heated or tired him. I took an opportunity of consulting Mrs. Tenbruggen.

She had anticipated that I should appeal to her opinion, as a woman of the world.

I shall not set down in detail what she said. Some of it humiliated me; and from some of it I recoiled. The expression of her opinion came to this. In the absence of experience, a certain fervor of temperament was essential to success in the art of fascinating men. Either my temperament was deficient, or my intellect overpowered it. It was natural that I should suppose myself to be as susceptible to the tender passion as the most excitable woman living. Delusion, my Helena, amiable delusion! Had I ever observed or had any friend told me that my pretty hands were cold hands? I had beautiful eyes, expressive of vivacity, of intelligence, of every feminine charm, except the one inviting charm that finds favor in the eyes of a man. She then entered into particulars, which I don't deny showed a true interest in helping me. I was ungrateful, sulky, self-opinionated. Dating from that day's talk with Mrs. Tenbruggen, my new friendship began to show signs of having caught a chill. But I did my best to follow her instructions--and failed.

It is perhaps true that my temperament is overpowered by my intellect. Or it is possibly truer still that the fire in my heart, when it warms to love, is a fire that burns low. My belief is that I surprised Philip instead of charming him. He responded to my advances, but I felt that it was not done in earnest, not spontaneously. Had I any right to complain? Was I in earnest? Was I spontaneous? We were making love to each other under false

pretenses. Oh, what a fool I was to ask for Mrs. Tenbruggen's advice!

A humiliating doubt has come to me suddenly. Has his heart been inclining to Eunice again? After such a letter as she has written to him? Impossible!

Three events since yesterday, which I consider, trifling as they may be, intimations of something wrong.

First, Miss Jillgall, who at one time was eager to take my place, has refused to relieve me of my housekeeping duties. Secondly, Philip has been absent again, on another long walk. Thirdly, when Philip returned, depressed and sulky, I caught Miss Jillgall looking at him with interest and pity visible in her skinny face. What do these things mean?

I am beginning to doubt everybody. Not one of them, Philip included, cares for me--but I can frighten them, at any rate. Yesterday evening, I dropped on the floor as suddenly as if I had been shot: a fit of some sort. The doctor honestly declared that he was at a loss to account for it. He would have laid me under an eternal obligation if he had failed to bring me back to life again.

As it is, I am more clever than the doctor. What brought the fit on is well known to me. Rage--furious, overpowering, deadly rage--was the cause. I am now in the cold-blooded state, which can look back at the event as composedly as if it had happened to some other girl. Suppose that girl had let her sweetheart know how she loved him as she had never let him know it before. Suppose she opened the door again the instant after she had left the room, eager, poor wretch, to say once more, for the fiftieth time, "My angel, I love you!" Suppose she found her angel standing with his back toward her, so that his face was reflected in the glass. And suppose she discovered in that face, so smiling and so sweet when his head had rested on her bosom only the moment before, the most hideous expression of disgust that features can betray. There could be no doubt of it; I had made my poor offering of love to a man who secretly loathed me. I wonder that I survived my sense of my own degradation. Well! I am alive; and I know him in his true character at last. Am I a woman who submits when an outrage is offered to her? What will happen next? Who knows? I am in a fine humor. What I have just written has set me laughing at myself. Helena Gracedieu has one merit at least--she is a very amusing person.

I slept last night.

This morning, I am strong again, calm, wickedly capable of deceiving Mr. Philip Dunboyne, as he has deceived me. He has not the faintest suspicion

that I have discovered him. I wish he had courage enough to kill somebody. How I should enjoy hiring the nearest window to the scaffold, and seeing him hanged!

Miss Jillgall is in better spirits than ever. She is going to take a little holiday; and the cunning creature makes a mystery of it. "Good-by, Miss Helena. I am going to stay for a day or two with a friend." What friend? Who cares?

Last night, I was wakeful. In the darkness a daring idea came to me. To-day, I have carried out the idea. Something has followed which is well worth entering in my Diary.

I left the room at the usual hour for attending to my domestic affairs. The obstinate cook did me a service; she was insolent; she wanted to have her own way. I gave her her own way. In less than five minutes I was on the watch in the pantry, which has a view of the house door. My hat and my parasol were waiting for me on the table, in case of my going out, too.

In a few minutes more, I heard the door opened. Mr. Philip Dunboyne stepped out. He was going to take another of his long walks.

I followed him to the street in which the cabs stand. He hired the first one on the rank, an open chaise; while I kept myself hidden in a shop door.

The moment he started on his drive, I hired a closed cab. "Double your fare," I said to the driver, "whatever it may be, if you follow that chaise cleverly, and do what I tell you."

He nodded and winked at me. A wicked-looking old fellow; just the man I wanted.

We followed the chaise.