

CHAPTER LVI. HELENA'S DIARY RESUMED.

When we had left the town behind us, the coachman began to drive more slowly. In my ignorance, I asked what this change in the pace meant. He pointed with his whip to the open road and to the chaise in the distance.

"If we keep too near the gentleman, miss, he has only got to look back, and he'll see we are following him. The safe thing to do is to let the chaise get on a bit. We can't lose sight of it, out here."

I had felt inclined to trust in the driver's experience, and he had already justified my confidence in him. This encouraged me to consult his opinion on a matter of some importance to my present interests. I could see the necessity of avoiding discovery when we had followed the chaise to its destination; but I was totally at a loss to know how it could be done. My wily old man was ready with his advice the moment I asked for it.

"Wherever the chaise stops, miss, we must drive past it as if we were going somewhere else. I shall notice the place while we go by; and you will please sit back in the corner of the cab so that the gentleman can't see you."

"Well," I said, "and what next?"

"Next, miss, I shall pull up, wherever it may be, out of sight of the driver of the chaise. He bears an excellent character, I don't deny it; but I've known him for years--and we had better not trust him. I shall tell you where the gentleman stopped; and you will go back to the place (on foot, of course), and see for yourself what's to be done, specially if there happens to be a lady in the case. No offense, miss; it's in my experience that there's generally a lady in the case. Anyhow, you can judge for yourself, and you'll know where to find me waiting when you want me again."

"Suppose something happens," I suggested, "that we don't expect?"

"I shan't lose my head, miss, whatever happens."

"All very well, coachman; but I have only your word for it." In the irritable state of my mind, the man's confident way of thinking annoyed me.

"Begging your pardon, my young lady, you've got (if I may say so) what they call a guarantee. When I was a young man, I drove a cab in London for ten

years. Will that do?"

"I suppose you mean," I answered, "that you have learned deceit in the wicked ways of the great city."

He took this as a compliment. "Thank you, miss. That's it exactly."

After a long drive, or so it seemed to my impatience, we passed the chaise drawn up at a lonely house, separated by a front garden from the road. In two or three minutes more, we stopped where the road took a turn, and descended to lower ground. The farmhouse which we had left behind us was known to the driver. He led the way to a gate at the side of the road, and opened it for me.

"In your place, miss," he said slyly, "the private way back is the way I should wish to take. Try it by the fields. Turn to the right when you have passed the barn, and you'll find yourself at the back of the house." He stopped, and looked at his big silver watch. "Half-past twelve," he said, "the Chawbacons-- I mean the farmhouse servants, miss--will be at their dinner. All in your favor, so far. If the dog happens to be loose, don't forget that his name's Grinder; call him by his name, and pat him before he has time enough to think, and he'll let you be. When you want me, here you'll find me waiting for orders."

I looked back as I crossed the field. The driver was sitting on the gate, smoking his pipe, and the horse was nibbling the grass at the roadside. Two happy animals, without a burden on their minds!

After passing the barn, I saw nothing of the dog. Far or near, no living creature appeared; the servants must have been at dinner, as the coachman had foreseen. Arriving at a wooden fence, I opened a gate in it, and found myself on a bit of waste ground. On my left, there was a large duck-pond. On my right, I saw the fowl-house and the pigstyes. Before me was a high impenetrable hedge; and at some distance behind it--an orchard or a garden, as I supposed, filling the intermediate space--rose the back of the house. I made for the shelter of the hedge, in the fear that some one might approach a window and see me. Once sheltered from observation, I might consider what I should do next. It was impossible to doubt that this was the house in which Eunice was living. Neither could I fail to conclude that Philip had tried to persuade her to see him, on those former occasions when he told me he had taken a long walk.

As I crouched behind the hedge, I heard voices approaching on the other

side of it. At last fortune had befriended me. The person speaking at the moment was Miss Jillgall; and the person who answered her was Philip.

"I am afraid, dear Mr. Philip, you don't quite understand my sweet Euneece. Honorable, high minded, delicate in her feelings, and, oh, so unselfish! I don't want to alarm you, but when she hears you have been deceiving Helena--"

"Upon my word, Miss Jillgall, you are so provoking! I have not been deceiving Helena. Haven't I told you what discouraging answers I got, when I went to see the Governor? Haven't I shown you Eunice's reply to my letter? You can't have forgotten it already?"

"Oh, yes, I have. Why should I remember it? Don't I know poor Euneece was in your mind, all the time?"

"You're wrong again! Eunice was not in my mind all the time. I was hurt--I was offended by the cruel manner in which she had treated me. And what was the consequence? So far was I from deceiving Helena--she rose in my estimation by comparison with her sister."

"Oh, come, come, Mr. Philip! that won't do. Helena rising in anybody's estimation? Ha! ha! ha!"

"Laugh as much as you like, Miss Jillgall, you won't laugh away the facts. Helena loved me; Helena was true to me. Don't be hard on a poor fellow who is half distracted. What a man finds he can do on one day, he finds he can't do on another. Try to understand that a change does sometimes come over one's feelings."

"Bless my soul, Mr. Philip, that's just what I have been understanding all the time! I know your mind as well as you know it yourself. You can't forget my sweet Euneece."

"I tell you I tried to forget her! On my word of honor as a gentleman, I tried to forget her, in justice to Helena. Is it my fault that I failed? Eunice was in my mind, as you said just now. Oh, my friend--for you are my friend, I am sure--persuade her to see me, if it's only for a minute!"

(Was there ever a man's mind in such a state of confusion as this! First, I rise in his precious estimation, and Eunice drops. Then Eunice rises, and I drop. Idiot! Mischievous idiot! Even Selina seemed to be disgusted with him, when she spoke next.)

"Mr. Philip, you are hard and unreasonable. I have tried to persuade her, and I have made my darling cry. Nothing you can say will induce me to distress her again. Go back, you very undetermined man--go back to your Helena."

"Too late."

"Nonsense!"

"I say too late. If I could have married Helena when I first went to stay in the house, I might have faced the sacrifice. As it is, I can't endure her; and (I tell you this in confidence) she has herself to thank for what has happened."

"Is that really true?"

"Quite true."

"Tell me what she did."

"Oh, don't talk of her! Persuade Eunice to see me. I shall come back again, and again, and again till you bring her to me."

"Please don't talk nonsense. If she changes her mind, I will bring her with pleasure. If she still shrinks from it, I regard Euneece's feelings as sacred. Take my advice; don't press her. Leave her time to think of you, and to pity you--and that true heart may be yours again, if you are worthy of it."

"Worthy of it? What do you mean?"

"Are you quite sure, my young friend, that you won't go back to Helena?"

"Go back to her? I would cut my throat if I thought myself capable of doing it!"

"How did she set you against her? Did the wretch quarrel with you?"

"It might have been better for both of us if she had done that. Oh, her fulsome endearments! What a contrast to the charming modesty of Eunice! If I was rich, I would make it worth the while of the first poor fellow I could find to rid me of Helena by marrying her. I don't like saying such a thing of a woman, but if you will have the truth--"

"Well, Mr. Philip--and what is the truth?"

"Helena disgusts me."