

CHAPTER LVII. HELENA'S DIARY RESUMED.

So it was all settled between them. Philip is to throw me away, like one of his bad cigars, for this unanswerable reason: "Helena disgusts me." And he is to persuade Eunice to take my place, and be his wife. Yes! if I let him do it.

I heard no more of their talk. With that last, worst outrage burning in my memory, I left the place.

On my way back to the carriage, the dog met me. Truly, a grand creature. I called him by his name, and patted him. He licked my hand. Something made me speak to him. I said: "If I was to tell you to tear Mr. Philip Dunboyne to pieces, would you do it?" The great good-natured brute held out his paw to shake hands. Well! well! I was not an object of disgust to the dog.

But the coachman was startled, when he saw me again. He said something, I did not know what it was; and he produced a pocket-flask, containing some spirits, I suppose. Perhaps he thought I was going to faint. He little knew me. I told him to drive back to the place at which I had hired the cab, and earn his money. He earned it.

On getting home, I found Mrs. Tenbruggen walking up and down the dining-room, deep in thought. She was startled when we first confronted each other. "You look dreadfully ill," she said.

I answered that I had been out for a little exercise, and had over-fatigued myself; and then changed the subject. "Does my father seem to improve under your treatment?" I asked.

"Very far from it, my dear. I promised that I would try what Massage would do for him, and I find myself compelled to give it up."

"Why?"

"It excites him dreadfully."

"In what way?"

"He has been talking wildly of events in his past life. His brain is in some

condition which is beyond my powers of investigation. He pointed to a cabinet in his room, and said his past life was locked up there. I asked if I should unlock it. He shook with fear; he said I should let out the ghost of his dead brother-in-law. Have you any idea of what he meant?"

The cabinet was full of old letters. I could tell her that--and could tell her no more. I had never heard of his brother-in-law. Another of his delusions, no doubt. "Did you ever hear him speak," Mrs. Tenbruggen went on, "of a place called Low Lanes?"

She waited for my reply to this last inquiry with an appearance of anxiety that surprised me. I had never heard him speak of Low Lanes.

"Have you any particular interest in the place?" I asked.

"None whatever."

She went away to attend on a patient. I retired to my bedroom, and opened my Diary. Again and again, I read that remarkable story of the intended poisoning, and of the manner in which it had ended. I sat thinking over this romance in real life till I was interrupted by the announcement of dinner.

Mr. Philip Dunboyne had returned. In Miss Jillgall's absence we were alone at the table. My appetite was gone. I made a pretense of eating, and another pretense of being glad to see my devoted lover. I talked to him in the prettiest manner. As a hypocrite, he thoroughly matched me; he was gallant, he was amusing. If baseness like ours had been punishable by the law, a prison was the right place for both of us.

Mrs. Tenbruggen came in again after dinner, still not quite easy about my health. "How flushed you are!" she said. "Let me feel your pulse." I laughed, and left her with Mr. Philip Dunboyne.

Passing my father's door, I looked in, anxious to see if he was in the excitable state which Mrs. Tenbruggen had described. Yes; the effect which she had produced on him--how, she knows best--had not passed away yet: he was still talking. The attendant told me it had gone on for hours together. On my approaching his chair, he called out: "Which are you? Eunice or Helena?" When I had answered him, he beckoned me to come nearer. "I am getting stronger every minute," he said. "We will go traveling to-morrow, and see the place where you were born."

Where had I been born? He had never told me where. Had he mentioned the

place in Mrs. Tenbruggen's hearing? I asked the attendant if he had been present while she was in the room. Yes; he had remained at his post; he had also heard the allusion to the place with the odd name. Had Mr. Gracedieu said anything more about that place? Nothing more; the poor Minister's mind had wandered off to other things. He was wandering now. Sometimes, he was addressing his congregation; sometimes, he wondered what they would give him for supper; sometimes, he talked of the flowers in the garden. And then he looked at me, and frowned, and said I prevented him from thinking.

I went back to my bedroom, and opened my Diary, and read the story again.

Was the poison of which that resolute young wife proposed to make use something that acted slowly, and told the doctors nothing if they looked for it after death?

Would it be running too great a risk to show the story to the doctor, and try to get a little valuable information in that way? It would be useless. He would make some feeble joke; he would say, girls and poisons are not fit company for each other.

But I might discover what I want to know in another way. I might call on the doctor, after he has gone out on his afternoon round of visits, and might tell the servant I would wait for his master's return. Nobody would be in my way; I might get at the medical literature in the consulting-room, and find the information for myself.

A knock at my door interrupted me in the midst of my plans. Mrs. Tenbruggen again!--still in a fidgety state of feeling on the subject of my health. "Which is it?" she said. "Pain of body, my dear, or pain of mind? I am anxious about you."

"My dear Elizabeth, your sympathy is thrown away on me. As I have told you already, I am over-tired--nothing more."

She was relieved to hear that I had no mental troubles to complain of. "Fatigue," she remarked, "sets itself right with rest. Did you take a very long walk?"

"Yes."

"Beyond the limits of the town, of course? Philip has been taking a walk in the country, too. He doesn't say that he met you."

These clever people sometimes overreach themselves. How she suggested it to me, I cannot pretend to have discovered. But I did certainly suspect that she had led Philip, while they were together downstairs, into saying to her what he had already said to Miss Jillgall. I was so angry that I tried to pump my excellent friend, as she had been trying to pump me--a vulgar expression, but vulgar writing is such a convenient way of writing sometimes. My first attempt to entrap the Masseuse failed completely. She coolly changed the subject.

"Have I interrupted you in writing?" she asked, pointing to my Diary.

"No; I was idling over what I have written already--an extraordinary story which I copied from a book."

"May I look at it?"

I pushed the open Diary across the table. If I was the object of any suspicions which she wanted to confirm, it would be curious to see if the poisoning story helped her. "It's a piece of family history," I said; "I think you will agree with me that it is really interesting."

She began to read. As she went on, not all her power of controlling herself could prevent her from turning pale. This change of color (in such a woman) a little alarmed me. When a girl is devoured by deadly hatred of a man, does the feeling show itself to other persons in her face? I must practice before the glass and train my face into a trustworthy state of discipline.

"Coarse melodrama!" Mrs. Tenbruggen declared. "Mere sensation. No analysis of character. A made-up story!"

"Well made up, surely?" I answered.

"I don't agree with you." Her voice was not quite so steady as usual. She asked suddenly if my clock was right--and declared that she should be late for an appointment. On taking leave she pressed my hand strongly--eyed me with distrustful attention and said, very emphatically: "Take care of yourself, Helena; pray take care of yourself."

I am afraid I did a very foolish thing when I showed her the poisoning story. Has it helped the wily old creature to look into my inmost thoughts?

Impossible!

To-day, Miss Jillgall returned, looking hideously healthy and spitefully cheerful. Although she tried to conceal it, while I was present, I could see that Philip had recovered his place in her favor. After what he had said to her behind the hedge at the farm, she would be relieved from all fear of my becoming his wife, and would joyfully anticipate his marriage to Eunice. There are thoughts in me which I don't set down in my book. I only say: We shall see.

This afternoon, I decided on visiting the doctor. The servant was quite sorry for me when he answered the door. His master had just left the house for a round of visits. I said I would wait. The servant was afraid I should find waiting very tedious. I reminded him that I could go away if I found it tedious. At last, the polite old man left me.

I went into the consulting-room, and read the backs of the medical books ranged round the walls, and found a volume that interested me. There was such curious information in it that I amused myself by making extracts, using the first sheets of paper that I could find. They had printed directions at the top, which showed that the doctor was accustomed to write his prescriptions on them. We had many, too many, of his prescriptions in our house.

The servant's doubts of my patience proved to have been well founded. I got tired of waiting, and went home before the doctor returned.

From morning to night, nothing has been seen of Mrs. Tenbruggen to-day. Nor has any apology for her neglect of us been received, fond as she is of writing little notes. Has that story in my Diary driven her away? Let me see what to-morrow may bring forth.

To-day has brought forth--nothing. Mrs. Tenbruggen still keeps away from us. It looks as if my Diary had something to do with the mystery of her absence.

I am not in good spirits to-day. My nerves--if I have such things, which is more than I know by my own experience--have been a little shaken by a horrid dream. The medical information, which my thirst for knowledge absorbed in the doctor's consulting-room, turned traitor--armed itself with the grotesque horrors of nightmare--and so thoroughly frightened me that I was on the point of being foolish enough to destroy my notes. I thought better of it, and my notes are safe under lock and key.

Mr. Philip Dunboyne is trying to pave the way for his flight from this house. He speaks of friends in London, whose interest will help him to find the employment which is the object of his ambition. "In a few days more," he said, "I shall ask for leave of absence."

Instead of looking at me, his eyes wandered to the window; his fingers played restlessly with his watch-chain while he spoke. I thought I would give him a chance, a last chance, of making the atonement that he owes to me. This shows shameful weakness, on my part. Does my own resolution startle me? Or does the wretch appeal--to what? To my pity? It cannot be my love; I am positively sure that I hate him. Well, I am not the first girl who had been an unanswerable riddle to herself.

"Is there any other motive for your departure?" I asked.

"What other motive can there be?" he replied. I put what I had to say to him in plainer words still. "Tell me, Philip, are you beginning to wish that you were a free man again?"

He still prevaricated. Was this because he is afraid of me, or because he is not quite brute enough to insult me to my face? I tried again for the third and last time. I almost put the words into his mouth.

"I fancy you have been out of temper lately," I said. "You have not been your own kinder and better self. Is this the right interpretation of the change that I think I see in you?"

He answered: "I have not been very well lately."

"And that is all?"

"Yes--that is all."

There was no more to be said; I turned away to leave the room. He followed me to the door. After a momentary hesitation, he made the attempt to kiss me. I only looked at him--he drew back from me in silence. I left the new Judas, standing alone, while the shades of evening began to gather over the room.

Third Period (continued).