

CHAPTER LX. DISCOVERY.

A little later, on that eventful day, when I was most in need of all that your wisdom and kindness could do to guide me, came the telegram which announced that you were helpless under an attack of gout. As soon as I had in some degree got over my disappointment, I remembered having told Eunece in my letter that I expected her kind old friend to come to us. With the telegram in my hand I knocked softly at Philip's door.

The voice that bade me come in was the gentle voice that I knew so well. Philip was sleeping. There, by his bedside, with his hand resting in her hand, was Eunece, so completely restored to her own sweet self that I could hardly believe what I had seen, not an hour since. She talked of you, when I showed her your message, with affectionate interest and regret. Look back, my admirable friend, at what I have written on the two or three pages which precede this, and explain the astounding contrast if you can.

I was left alone to watch by Philip, while Eunece went away to see her father. Soon afterward, Maria took my place; I had been sent for to the next room to receive the doctor.

He looked care-worn and grieved. I said I was afraid he had brought bad news with him.

"The worst possible news," he answered. "A terrible exposure threatens this family, and I am powerless to prevent it."

He then asked me to remember the day when I had been surprised by the singular questions which he had put to me, and when he had engaged to explain himself after he had made some inquiries. Why, and how, he had set those inquiries on foot was what he had now to tell. I will repeat what he said, in his own words, as nearly as I can remember them. While he was in attendance on Philip, he had observed symptoms which made him suspect that Digitalis had been given to the young man, in doses often repeated. Cases of attempted poisoning by this medicine were so rare, that he felt bound to put his suspicions to the test by going round among the chemists's shops--excepting of course the shop at which his own prescriptions were made up--and asking if they had lately dispensed any preparation of Digitalis, ordered perhaps in a larger quantity than usual. At the second shop he visited, the chemist laughed. "Why, doctor," he said, "have you forgotten your own prescription?" After this, the prescription was asked for,

and produced. It was on the paper used by the doctor--paper which had his address printed at the top, and a notice added, telling patients who came to consult him for the second time to bring their prescriptions with them. Then, there followed in writing: "Tincture of Digitalis, one ounce"--with his signature at the end, not badly imitated, but a forgery nevertheless. The chemist noticed the effect which this discovery had produced on the doctor, and asked if that was his signature. He could hardly, as an honest man, have asserted that a forgery was a signature of his own writing. So he made the true reply, and asked who had presented the prescription. The chemist called to his assistant to come forward. "Did you tell me that you knew, by sight, the young lady who brought this prescription?" The assistant admitted it. "Did you tell me she was Miss Helena Gracedieu?" "I did." "Are you sure of not having made any mistake?" "Quite sure." The chemist then said: "I myself supplied the Tincture of Digitalis, and the young lady paid for it, and took it away with her. You have had all the information that I can give you, sir; and I may now ask, if you can throw any light on the matter." Our good friend thought of the poor Minister, so sorely afflicted, and of the famous name so sincerely respected in the town and in the country round, and said he could not undertake to give an immediate answer. The chemist was excessively angry. "You know as well as I do," he said, "that Digitalis, given in certain doses, is a poison, and you cannot deny that I honestly believed myself to be dispensing your prescription. While you are hesitating to give me an answer, my character may suffer; I may be suspected myself." He ended in declaring he should consult his lawyer. The doctor went home, and questioned his servant. The man remembered the day of Miss Helena's visit in the afternoon, and the intention that she expressed of waiting for his master's return. He had shown her into the parlor which opened into the consulting-room. No other visitor was in the house at that time, or had arrived during the rest of the day. The doctor's own experience, when he got home, led him to conclude that Helena had gone into the consulting-room. He had entered that room, for the purpose of writing some prescriptions, and had found the leaves of paper that he used diminished in number. After what he had heard, and what he had discovered (to say nothing of what he suspected), it occurred to him to look along the shelves of his medical library. He found a volume (treating of Poisons) with a slip of paper left between the leaves; the poison described at the place so marked being Digitalis, and the paper used being one of his own prescription-papers. "If, as I fear, a legal investigation into Helena's conduct is a possible event," the doctor concluded, "there is the evidence that I shall be obliged to give, when I am called as a witness."

It is my belief that I could have felt no greater dismay, if the long arm of the Law had laid its hold on me while he was speaking. I asked what was to be

done.

"If she leaves the house at once," the doctor replied, "she may escape the infamy of being charged with an attempt at murder by poison; and, in her absence, I can answer for Philip's life. I don't urge you to warn her, because that might be a dangerous thing to do. It is for you to decide, as a member of the family, whether you will run the risk."

I tried to speak to him of Eunece, and to tell him what I had already related to yourself. He was in no humor to listen to me. "Keep it for a fitter time," he answered; "and think of what I have just said to you." With that, he left me, on his way to Philip's room.

Mental exertion was completely beyond me. Can you understand a poor middle-aged spinster being frightened into doing a dangerous thing? That may seem to be nonsense. But if you ask why I took a morsel of paper, and wrote the warning which I was afraid to communicate by word of mouth--why I went upstairs with my knees knocking together, and opened the door of Helena's room just wide enough to let my hand pass through--why I threw the paper in, and banged the door to again, and ran downstairs as I have never run since I was a little girl--I can only say, in the way of explanation, what I have said already: I was frightened into doing it.

What I have written, thus far, I shall send to you by to-night's post.

The doctor came back to me, after he had seen Philip, and spoken with Eunece. He was very angry; and, I must own, not without reason. Philip had flatly refused to let himself be removed to the hospital; and Eunece--"a mere girl"--had declared that she would be answerable for consequences! The doctor warned me that he meant to withdraw from the case, and to make his declaration before the magistrates. At my entreaties he consented to return in the evening, and to judge by results before taking the terrible step that he had threatened.

While I remained at home on the watch, keeping the doors of both rooms locked, Eunice went out to get Philip's medicine. She came back, followed by a boy carrying a portable apparatus for cooking. "All that Philip wants, and all that we want," she explained, "we can provide for ourselves. Give me a morsel of paper to write on."

Unhooking the little pencil attached to her watch-chain, she paused and looked toward the door. "Somebody listening," she whispered. "Let them listen." She wrote a list of necessaries, in the way of things to eat and things

to drink, and asked me to go out and get them myself. "I don't doubt the servants," she said, speaking distinctly enough to be heard outside; "but I am afraid of what a Poisoner's cunning and a Poisoner's desperation may do, in a kitchen which is open to her." I went away on my errand-- discovering no listener outside, I need hardly say. On my return, I found the door of communication with Philip's room closed, but no longer locked. "We can now attend on him in turn," she said, "without opening either of the doors which lead into the hall. At night we can relieve each other, and each of us can get sleep as we want it in the large armchair in the dining-room. Philip must be safe under our charge, or the doctor will insist on taking him to the hospital. When we want Maria's help, from time to time, we can employ her under our own superintendence. Have you anything else, Selina, to suggest?"

There was nothing left to suggest. Young and inexperienced as she was, how (I asked) had she contrived to think of all this? She answered, simply "I'm sure I don't know; my thoughts came to me while I was looking at Philip."

Soon afterward I found an opportunity of inquiring if Helena had left the house. She had just rung her bell; and Maria had found her, quietly reading, in her room. Hours afterward, when I was on the watch at night, I heard Philip's door softly tried from the outside. Her dreadful purpose had not been given up, even yet.

The doctor came in the evening, as he had promised, and found an improvement in Philip's health. I mentioned what precautions we had taken, and that they had been devised by Eunece. "Are you going to withdraw from the case?" I asked. "I am coming back to the case," he answered, "tomorrow morning."

It had been a disappointment to me to receive no answer to the telegram which I had sent to Mr. Dunboyne the elder. The next day's post brought the explanation in a letter to Philip from his father, directed to him at the hotel here. This showed that my telegram, giving my address at this house, had not been received. Mr. Dunboyne announced that he had returned to Ireland, finding the air of London unendurable, after the sea-breezes at home. If Philip had already married, his father would leave him to a life of genteel poverty with Helena Gracedieu. If he had thought better of it, his welcome was waiting for him.

Little did Mr. Dunboyne know what changes had taken place since he and his son had last met, and what hope might yet present itself of brighter days for poor Eunece! I thought of writing to him. But how would that crabbed

old man receive a confidential letter from a lady who was a stranger?

My doubts were set at rest by Philip himself. He asked me to write a few lines of reply to his father; declaring that his marriage with Helena was broken off--that he had not given up all hope of being permitted to offer the sincere expression of his penitence to Eunece--and that he would gladly claim his welcome, as soon as he was well enough to undertake the journey to Ireland. When he had signed the letter, I was so pleased that I made a smart remark. I said: "This is a treaty of peace between father and son."

When the doctor arrived in the morning, and found the change for the better in his patient confirmed, he did justice to us at last. He spoke kindly, and even gratefully, to Eunece. No more allusions to the hospital as a place of safety escaped him. He asked me cautiously for news of Helena. I could only tell him that she had gone out at her customary time, and had returned at her customary time. He did not attempt to conceal that my reply had made him uneasy.

"Are you still afraid that she may succeed in poisoning Philip?" I asked.

"I am afraid of her cunning," he said. "If she is charged with attempting to poison young Dunboyne, she has some system of defense, you may rely on it, for which we are not prepared. There, in my opinion, is the true reason for her extraordinary insensibility to her own danger."

Two more days passed, and we were still safe under the protection of lock and key.

On the evening of the second day (which was a Monday) Maria came to me in great tribulation. On inquiring what was the matter, I received a disquieting reply: "Miss Helena is tempting me. She is so miserable at being prevented from seeing Mr. Philip, and helping to nurse him, that it is quite distressing to see her. At the same time, miss, it's hard on a poor servant. She asks me to take the key secretly out of the door, and lend it to her at night for a few minutes only. I'm really afraid I shall be led into doing it, if she goes on persuading me much longer."

I commended Maria for feeling scruples which proved her to be the best of good girls, and promised to relieve her from all fear of future temptation. This was easily done. Eunece kept the key of Philip's door in her pocket; and I kept the key of the dining-room door in mine.