

## CHAPTER LXI. ATROCITY.

On the next day, a Tuesday in the week, an event took place which Eunece and I viewed with distrust. Early in the afternoon, a young man called with a note for Helena. It was to be given to her immediately, and no answer was required.

Maria had just closed the house door, and was on her way upstairs with the letter, when she was called back by another ring at the bell. Our visitor was the doctor. He spoke to Maria in the hall:

"I think I see a note in your hand. Was it given to you by the young man who has just left the house?"

"Yes, sir.

"If he's your sweetheart, my dear, I have nothing more to say."

"Good gracious, doctor, how you do talk! I never saw the young man before in my life."

"In that case, Maria, I will ask you to let me look at the address. Aha! Mischief!"

The moment I heard that I threw open the dining-room door. Curiosity is not easily satisfied. When it hears, it wants to see; when it sees, it wants to know. Every lady will agree with me in this observation.

"Pray come in," I said.

"One minute, Miss Jillgall. My girl, when you give Miss Helena that note, try to get a sly look at her when she opens it, and come and tell me what you have seen." He joined me in the dining-room, and closed the door. "The other day," he went on, "when I told you what I had discovered in the chemist's shop, I think I mentioned a young man who was called to speak to a question of identity--an assistant who knew Miss Helena Gracedieu by sight."

"Yes, yes!"

"That young man left the note which Maria has just taken upstairs."

"Who wrote it, doctor, and what does it say?"

"Questions naturally asked, Miss Jillgall--and not easily answered. Where is Eunice? Her quick wit might help us."

She had gone out to buy some fruit and flowers for Philip.

The doctor accepted his disappointment resignedly. "Let us try what we can do without her," he said. "That young man's master has been in consultation (you may remember why) with his lawyer, and Helena may be threatened by an investigation before the magistrates. If this wild guess of mine turns out to have hit the mark, the poisoner upstairs has got a warning."

I asked if the chemist had written the note. Foolish enough of me when I came to think of it. The chemist would scarcely act a friendly part toward Helena, when she was answerable for the awkward position in which he had placed himself. Perhaps the young man who had left the warning was also the writer of the warning. The doctor reminded me that he was all but a stranger to Helena. "We are not usually interested," he remarked, "in a person whom we only know by sight."

"Remember that he is a young man," I ventured to say. This was a strong hint, but the doctor failed to see it. He had evidently forgotten his own youth. I made another attempt.

"And vile as Helena is," I continued, "we cannot deny that this disgrace to her sex is a handsome young lady."

He saw it at last. "Woman's wit!" he cried. "You have hit it, Miss Jillgall. The young fool is smitten with her, and has given her a chance of making her escape."

"Do you think she will take the chance?"

"For all our sakes, I pray God she may! But I don't feel sure about it."

"Why?"

"Recollect what you and Eunice have done. You have shown your suspicion of her without an attempt to conceal it. If you had put her in prison you could not have more completely defeated her infernal design. Do you think

she is a likely person to submit to that, without an effort to be even with you?"

Just as he said those terrifying words, Maria came back to us. He asked at once what had kept her so long upstairs.

The girl had evidently something to say, which had inflated her (if I may use such an expression) with a sense of her own importance.

"Please to let me tell it, sir," she answered, "in my own way. Miss Helena turned as pale as ashes when she opened the letter, and then she took a turn in the room, and then she looked at me with a smile--well, miss, I can only say that I felt that smile in the small of my back. I tried to get to the door. She stopped me. She says: 'Where's Miss Eunice?' I says: 'Gone out.' She says: 'Is there anybody in the drawing-room?' I says: 'No, miss.' She says: 'Tell Miss Jillgall I want to speak to her, and say I am waiting in the drawing-room.' It's every word of it true! And, if a poor servant may give an opinion, I don't like the look of it."

The doctor dismissed Maria. "Whatever it is," he said to me, "you must go and hear it."

I am not a courageous woman; I expressed myself as being willing to go to her, if the doctor went with me. He said that was impossible; she would probably refuse to speak before any witness; and certainly before him. But he promised to look after Philip in my absence, and to wait below if it really so happened that I wanted him. I need only ring the bell, and he would come to me the moment he heard it. Such kindness as this roused my courage, I suppose. At any rate, I went upstairs.

She was standing by the fire-place, with her elbow on the chimney-piece, and her head, resting on her hand. I stopped just inside the door, waiting to hear what she had to say. In this position her side-face only was presented to me. It was a ghastly face. The eye that I could see turned wickedly on me when I came in--then turned away again. Otherwise, she never moved. I confess I trembled, but I did my best to disguise it.

She broke out suddenly with what she had to say: "I won't allow this state of things to go on any longer. My horror of an exposure which will disgrace the family has kept me silent, wrongly silent, so far. Philip's life is in danger. I am forgetting my duty to my affianced husband, if I allow myself to be kept away from him any longer. Open those locked doors, and relieve me from the sight of you. Open the doors, I say, or you will both of you--you the

accomplice, she the wretch who directs you--repent it to the end of your lives."

In my own mind, I asked myself if she had gone mad. But I only answered: "I don't understand you."

She said again: "You are Eunice's accomplice."

"Accomplice in what?" I asked.

She turned her head slowly and faced me. I shrank from looking at her.

"All the circumstances prove it," she went on. "I have supplanted Eunice in Philip's affection. She was once engaged to marry him; I am engaged to marry him now. She is resolved that he shall never make me his wife. He will die if I delay any longer. He will die if I don't crush her, like the reptile she is. She comes here--and what does she do? Keeps him prisoner under her own superintendence. Who gets his medicine? She gets it. Who cooks his food? She cooks it. The doors are locked. I might be a witness of what goes on; and I am kept out. The servants who ought to wait on him are kept out. She can do what she likes with his medicine; she can do what she likes with his food: she is infuriated with him for deserting her, and promising to marry me. Give him back to my care; or, dreadful as it is to denounce my own sister, I shall claim protection from the magistrates."

I lost all fear of her: I stepped close up to the place at which she was standing; I cried out: "Of what, in God's name, do you accuse your sister?"

She answered: "I accuse her of poisoning Philip Dunboyne."

I ran out of the room; I rushed headlong down the stairs. The doctor heard me, and came running into the hall. I caught hold of him like a madwoman. "Euneece!" My breath was gone; I could only say: "Euneece!"

He dragged me into the dining-room. There was wine on the side-board, which he had ordered medically for Philip. He forced me to drink some of it. It ran through me like fire; it helped me to speak. "Now tell me," he said, "what has she done to Eunice?"

"She brings a horrible accusation against her," I answered.

"What is the accusation?" I told him.

He looked me through and through. "Take care!" he said. "No hysterics, no exaggeration. You may lead to dreadful consequences if you are not sure of yourself. If it's really true, say it again." I said it again--quietly this time.

His face startled me; it was white with rage. He snatched his hat off the hall table.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"My duty." He was out of the house before I could speak to him again.

Third Period (concluded).

TROUBLES AND TRIUMPHS OF THE FAMILY, RELATED BY THE GOVERNOR.