

## **Chapter XXVII. Resolution.**

Having read Mrs. Linley's answer, Mr. Sarrazin looked out of the breakfast-room window, and saw that the fog had reached the cottage. Before Mrs. Presty could make any remark on the change in the weather, he surprised her by an extraordinary question.

"Is there an upper room here, ma'am, which has a view of the road before your front gate?"

"Certainly!"

"And can I go into it without disturbing anybody?"

Mrs. Presty said, "Of course!" with an uplifting of her eye brows which expressed astonishment not unmixed with suspicion. "Do you want to go up now?" she added, "or will you wait till you have had your breakfast?"

"I want to go up, if you please, before the fog thickens. Oh, Mrs. Presty, I am ashamed to trouble you! Let the servant show me the room."

No. For the first time in her life Mrs. Presty insisted on doing servant's duty. If she had been crippled in both legs her curiosity would have helped her to get up the stairs on her hands. "There!" she said, opening the door of the upper room, and placing herself exactly in the middle of it, so that she could see all round her: "Will that do for you?"

Mr. Sarrazin went to the window; hid himself behind the curtain; and cautiously peeped out. In half a minute he turned his back on the misty view of the road, and said to himself: "Just what I expected."

Other women might have asked what this mysterious proceeding meant. Mrs. Presty's sense of her own dignity adopted a system of independent discovery. To Mr. Sarrazin's amusement, she imitated him to his face. Advancing to the window, she, too, hid herself behind the curtain, and she, too, peeped out. Still following her model, she next turned her back on the view--and then she became herself again. "Now we have both looked out of window," she said to the lawyer, in her own inimitably impudent way, "suppose we compare our impressions."

This was easily done. They had both seen the same two men walking

backward and forward, opposite the front gate of the cottage. Before the advancing fog made it impossible to identify him, Mr. Sarrazin had recognized in one of the men his agreeable fellow-traveler on the journey from London. The other man--a stranger--was in all probability an assistant spy obtained in the neighborhood. This discovery suggested serious embarrassment in the future. Mrs. Presty asked what was to be done next. Mr. Sarrazin answered: "Let us have our breakfast."

In another quarter of an hour they were both in Mrs. Linley's room.

Her agitated manner, her reddened eyes, showed that she was still suffering under the emotions of the past night. The moment the lawyer approached her, she crossed the room with hurried steps, and took both his hands in her trembling grasp. "You are a good man, you are a kind man," she said to him wildly; "you have my truest respect and regard. Tell me, are you--really--really--really sure that the one way in which I can keep my child with me is the way you mentioned last night?"

Mr. Sarrazin led her gently back to her chair.

The sad change in her startled and distressed him. Sincerely, solemnly even, he declared that the one alternative before her was the alternative that he had mentioned. He entreated her to control herself. It was useless, she still held him as if she was holding to her last hope.

"Listen to me!" she cried. "There's something more; there's another chance for me. I must, and will, know what you think of it."

"Wait a little. Pray wait a little!"

"No! not a moment. Is there any hope in appealing to the lawyer whom Mr. Linley has employed? Let me go back with you to London. I will persuade him to exert his influence--I will go down on my knees to him--I will never leave him till I have won him over to my side--I will take Kitty with me; he shall see us both, and pity us, and help us!"

"Hopeless. Quite hopeless, Mrs. Linley."

"Oh, don't say that!"

"My dear lady, my poor dear lady, I must say it. The man you are talking of is the last man in the world to be influenced as you suppose. He is notoriously a lawyer, and nothing but a lawyer. If you tried to move him to

pity you, he would say, 'Madam, I am doing my duty to my client'; and he would ring his bell and have you shown out. Yes! even if he saw you crushed and crying at his feet."

Mrs. Presty interfered for the first time.

"In your place, Catherine," she said, "I would put my foot down on that man and crush him. Consent to the Divorce, and you may do it."

Mrs. Linley lay prostrate in her chair. The excitement which had sustained her thus far seemed to have sunk with the sinking of her last hope. Pale, exhausted, yielding to hard necessity, she looked up when her mother said, "Consent to the Divorce," and answered, "I have consented."

"And trust me," Mr. Sarrazin said fervently, "to see that Justice is done, and to protect you in the meanwhile."

Mrs. Presty added her tribute of consolation.

"After all," she asked, "what is there to terrify you in the prospect of a Divorce? You won't hear what people say about it--for we see no society now. And, as for the newspapers, keep them out of the house."

Mrs. Linley answered with a momentary revival of energy:

"It is not the fear of exposure that has tortured me," she said. "When I was left in the solitude of the night, my heart turned to Kitty; I felt that any sacrifice of myself might be endured for her sake. It's the remembrance of my marriage, Mr. Sarrazin, that is the terrible trial to me. Those whom God has joined together, let no man put asunder. Is there nothing to terrify me in setting that solemn command at defiance? I do it--oh, I do it--in consenting to the Divorce! I renounce the vows which I bound myself to respect in the presence of God; I profane the remembrance of eight happy years, hallowed by true love. Ah, you needn't remind me of what my husband has done. I don't forget how cruelly he has wronged me; I don't forget that his own act has cast me from him. But whose act destroys our marriage? Mine, mine! Forgive me, mamma; forgive me, my kind friend--the horror that I have of myself forces its way to my lips. No more of it! My child is my one treasure left. What must I do next? What must I sign? What must I sacrifice? Tell me--and it shall be done. I submit! I submit!"

Delicately and mercifully Mr. Sarrazin answered that sad appeal.

All that his knowledge, experience and resolution could suggest he addressed to Mrs. Presty. Mrs. Linley could listen or not listen, as her own wishes inclined. In the one case or in the other, her interests would be equally well served. The good lawyer kissed her hand. "Rest, and recover," he whispered. And then he turned to her mother--and became a man of business once more.

"The first thing I shall do, ma'am, is to telegraph to my agent in Edinburgh. He will arrange for the speediest possible hearing of our case in the Court of Session. Make your mind easy so far."

Mrs. Presty's mind was by this time equally inaccessible to information and advice. "I want to know what is to be done with those two men who are watching the gate," was all she said in the way of reply.

Mrs. Linley raised her head in alarm.

"Two!" she exclaimed--and looked at Mr. Sarrazin. "You only spoke of one last night."

"And I add another this morning. Rest your poor head, Mrs. Linley, I know how it aches; I know how it burns." He still persisted in speaking to Mrs. Presty. "One of those two men will follow me to the station, and see me off on my way to London. The other will look after you, or your daughter, or the maid, or any other person who may try to get away into hiding with Kitty. And they are both keeping close to the gate, in the fear of losing sight of us in the fog."

"I wish we lived in the Middle Ages!" said Mrs. Presty.

"What would be the use of that, ma'am?"

"Good heavens, Mr. Sarrazin, don't you see? In those grand old days you would have taken a dagger, and the gardener would have taken a dagger, and you would have stolen out, and stabbed those two villains as a matter of course. And this is the age of progress! The vilest rogue in existence is a sacred person whose life we are bound to respect. Ah, what good that national hero would have done who put his barrels of gunpowder in the right place on the Fifth of November! I have always said it, and I stick to it, Guy Fawkes was a great statesman."

In the meanwhile Mrs. Linley was not resting, and not listening to the expression of her mother's political sentiments. She was intently watching

Mr. Sarrazin's face.

"There is danger threatening us," she said. "Do you see a way out of it?"

To persist in trying to spare her was plainly useless; Mr. Sarrazin answered her directly.

"The danger of legal proceedings to obtain possession of the child," he said, "is more near and more serious than I thought it right to acknowledge, while you were in doubt which way to decide. I was careful--too careful, perhaps--not to unduly influence you in a matter of the utmost importance to your future life. But you have made up your mind. I don't scruple now to remind you that an interval of time must pass before the decree for your Divorce can be pronounced, and the care of the child be legally secured to the mother. The only doubt and the only danger are there. If you are not frightened by the prospect of a desperate venture which some women would shrink from, I believe I see a way of baffling the spies."

Mrs. Linley started to her feet. "Say what I am to do," she cried, "and judge for yourself if I am as easily frightened as some women."

The lawyer pointed with a persuasive smile to her empty chair. "If you allow yourself to be excited," he said, "you will frighten me. Please--oh, please sit down again!"

Mrs. Linley felt the strong will, asserting itself in terms of courteous entreaty. She obeyed. Mrs. Presty had never admired the lawyer as she admired him now. "Is that how you manage your wife?" she asked.

Mr. Sarrazin was equal to the occasion, whatever it might be. "In your time, ma'am," he said, "did you reveal the mysteries of conjugal life?" He turned to Mrs. Linley. "I have something to ask first," he resumed, "and then you shall hear what I propose. How many people serve you in this cottage?"

"Three. Our landlady, who is housekeeper and cook. Our own maid. And the landlady's daughter, who does the housework."

"Any out-of-door servants?"

"Only the gardener."

"Can you trust these people?"

"In what way, Mr. Sarrazin?"

"Can you trust them with a secret which only concerns yourself?"

"Certainly! The maid has been with us for years; no truer woman ever lived. The good old landlady often drinks tea with us. Her daughter is going to be married; and I have given the wedding-dress. As for the gardener, let Kitty settle the matter with him, and I answer for the rest. Why are you pointing to the window?"

"Look out, and tell me what you see."

"I see the fog."

"And I, Mrs. Linley, have seen the boathouse. While the spies are watching your gate, what do you say to crossing the lake, under cover of the fog?"