

**EIGHTH SCENE - The Library.**

The next day Sir Joseph Graybrooke, Sir Joseph's lawyer, Mr. Dicas (highly respectable and immensely rich), and Richard Turlington were assembled in the library at Muswell Hill, to discuss the question of Natalie's marriage settlement.

After the usual preliminary phrases had been exchanged, Sir Joseph showed some hesitation in openly approaching the question which the little party of three had met to debate. He avoided his lawyer's eye; and he looked at Turlington rather uneasily.

"Richard," he began at last, "when I spoke to you about your marriage, on board the yacht, I said I would give my daughter--" Either his courage or his breath failed him at that point. He was obliged to wait a moment before he could go on.

"I said I would give my daughter half my fortune on her marriage," he resumed. "Forgive me, Richard. I can't do it!"

Mr. Dicas, waiting for his instructions, laid down his pen and looked at Sir Joseph's son-in-law elect. What would Mr. Turlington say?

He said nothing. Sitting opposite the window, he rose when Sir Joseph spoke, and placed himself at the other side of the table, with his back to the light.

"My eyes are weak this morning," he said, in an unnaturally low tone of voice. "The light hurts them."

He could find no more plausible excuse than that for concealing his face in shadow from the scrutiny of the two men on either side of him. The continuous moral irritation of his unhappy courtship--a courtship which had never advanced beyond the frigid familiarity of kissing Natalie's hand in the presence of others--had physically deteriorated him. Even his hardy nerves began to feel the long strain of suspicion that had been laid unremittingly on them for weeks past. His power of self-control--he knew it himself--was not to be relied on. He could hide his face: he could no longer command it.

"Did you hear what I said, Richard?"

"I heard. Go on."

Sir Joseph proceeded, gathering confidence as he advanced.

"Half my fortune!" he repeated. "It's parting with half my life; it's saying good-by forever to my dearest friend! My money has been such a comfort to me, Richard; such a pleasant occupation for my mind. I know no reading so interesting and so instructive as the reading of one's Banker's Book. To watch the outgoings on one side," said Sir Joseph, with a gentle and pathetic solemnity, "and the incomings on the other--the sad lessening of the balance at one time, and the cheering and delightful growth of it at another--what absorbing reading! The best novel that ever was written isn't to be mentioned in a breath with it. I can not, Richard, I really can not, see my nice round balance shrink up to half the figure that I have been used to for a lifetime. It may be weak of me," proceeded Sir Joseph, evidently feeling that it was not weak of him at all, "but we all have our tender place, and my Banker's Book is mine. Besides, it isn't as if you wanted it. If you wanted it, of course--but you don't want it. You are a rich man; you are marrying my dear Natalie for love, not for money. You and she and my grandchildren will have it all at my death. It can make no difference to you to wait a few years till the old man's chair at the fireside is empty. Will you say the fourth part, Richard, instead of the half? Twenty thousand," pleaded Sir Joseph, piteously. "I can bear twenty thousand off. For God's sake don't ask me for more!"

The lips of the lawyer twisted themselves sourly into an ironical smile. He was quite as fond of his money as Sir Joseph. He ought to have felt for his client; but rich men have no sympathy with one another. Mr. Dicas openly despised Sir Joseph.

There was a pause. The robin-redbreasts in the shrubbery outside must have had prodigious balances at their bankers; they hopped up on the window-sill so fearlessly; they looked in with so little respect at the two rich men.

"Don't keep me in suspense, Richard," proceeded Sir Joseph. "Speak out. Is it yes or no?"

Turlington struck his hand excitedly on the table, and burst out on a sudden with the answer which had been so strangely delayed.

"Twenty thousand with all my heart!" he said. "On this condition,

Graybrooke, that every farthing of it is settled on Natalie, and on her children after her. Not a half-penny to me!" he cried magnanimously, in his brassiest tones. "Not a half-penny to me!"

Let no man say the rich are heartless. Sir Joseph seized his son-in-law's hand in silence, and burst into tears.

Mr. Dicas, habitually a silent man, uttered the first two words that had escaped him since the business began. "Highly creditable," he said, and took a note of his instructions on the spot.

From that point the business of the settlement flowed smoothly on to its destined end. Sir Joseph explained his views at the fullest length, and the lawyer's pen kept pace with him. Turlington, remaining in his place at the table, restricted himself to a purely passive part in the proceedings. He answered briefly when it was absolutely necessary to speak, and he agreed with the two elders in everything. A man has no attention to place at the disposal of other people when he stands at a crisis in his life. Turlington stood at that crisis, at the trying moment when Sir Joseph's unexpected proposal pressed instantly for a reply. Two merciless alternatives confronted him. Either he must repay the borrowed forty thousand pounds on the day when repayment was due, or he must ask Bulpit Brothers to grant him an extension of time, and so inevitably provoke an examination into the fraudulent security deposited with the firm, which could end in but one way. His last, literally his last chance, after Sir Joseph had diminished the promised dowry by one half, was to adopt the high-minded tone which became his position, and to conceal the truth until he could reveal it to his father-in-law in the privileged character of Natalie's husband. "I owe forty thousand pounds, sir, in a fortnight's time, and I have not got a farthing of my own. Pay for me, or you will see your son-in-law's name in the Bankrupt's List." For his daughter's sake--who could doubt it?--Sir Joseph would produce the money. The one thing needful was to be married in time. If either by accident or treachery Sir Joseph was led into deferring the appointed day, by so much as a fortnight only, the fatal "call" would come, and the firm of Pizzituti, Turlington & Branca would appear in the Gazette.

So he reasoned, standing on the brink of the terrible discovery which was soon to reveal to him that Natalie was the wife of another man.

"Richard!"

"Mr. Turlington!"

He started, and roused his attention to present things. Sir Joseph on one side, and the lawyer on the other, were both appealing to him, and both regarding him with looks of amazement.

"Have you done with the settlement?" he asked.

"My dear Richard, we have done with it long since," replied Sir Joseph. "Have you really not heard what I have been saying for the last quarter of an hour to good Mr. Dicas here? What can you have been thinking of?"

Turlington did not attempt to answer the question. "Am I interested," he asked, "in what you have been saying to Mr. Dicas?"

"You shall judge for yourself," answered Sir Joseph, mysteriously; "I have been giving Mr. Dicas his instructions for making my Will. I wish the Will and the Marriage-Settlement to be executed at the same time. Read the instructions, Mr. Dicas."

Sir Joseph's contemplated Will proved to have two merits--it was simple and it was short. Excepting one or two trifling legacies to distant relatives, he had no one to think of (Miss Lavinia being already provided for) but his daughter and the children who might be born of her marriage. In its various provisions, made with these two main objects in view, the Will followed the precedents established in such cases. It differed in no important respect from the tens of thousands of other wills made under similar circumstances. Sir Joseph's motive in claiming special attention for it still remained unexplained, when Mr. Dicas reached the clause devoted to the appointment of executors and trustees; and announced that this portion of the document was left in blank.

"Sir Joseph Graybrooke, are you prepared to name the persons whom you appoint?" asked the lawyer.

Sir Joseph rose, apparently for the purpose of giving special importance to the terms in which he answered his lawyer's question.

"I appoint," he said, "as sole executor and trustee--Richard Turlington."

It was no easy matter to astonish Mr. Dicas. Sir Joseph's reply absolutely confounded him. He looked across the table at his client and delivered himself on this special occasion of as many as three words.

"Are you mad?" he asked.

Sir Joseph's healthy complexion slightly reddened. "I never was in more complete possession of myself, Mr. Dicas, than at this moment."

Mr. Dicas was not to be silenced in that way.

"Are you aware of what you do," persisted the lawyer, "if you appoint Mr. Turlington as sole executor and trustee? You put it in the power of your daughter's husband, sir, to make away with every farthing of your money after your death."

Turlington had hitherto listened with an appearance of interest in the proceedings, which he assumed as an act of politeness. To his view, the future was limited to the date at which Bulpit Brothers had a right to claim the repayment of their loan. The Will was a matter of no earthly importance to him, by comparison with the infinitely superior interest of the Marriage. It was only when the lawyer's brutally plain language forced his attention to it that the question of his pecuniary interest in his father-in-law's death assumed its fit position in his mind.

His color rose; and he too showed that he was offended by what Mr. Dicas had just said.

"Not a word, Richard! Let me speak for you as well as for myself," said Sir Joseph. "For seven years past," he continued, turning to the lawyer, "I have been accustomed to place the most unlimited trust in Richard Turlington. His disinterested advice has enabled me largely to increase my income, without placing a farthing of the principal in jeopardy. On more than one occasion, I have entreated him to make use of my money in his business. He has invariably refused to do so. Even his bitterest enemies, sir, have been obliged to acknowledge that my interests were safe when committed to his care. Am I to begin distrusting him, now that I am about to give him my daughter in marriage? Am I to leave it on record that I doubt him for the first time--when my Will is opened after my death? No! I can confide the management of the fortune which my child will inherit after me to no more competent or more honorable hands than the hands of the man who is to marry her. I maintain my appointment, Mr. Dicas! I persist in placing the whole responsibility under my Will in my son-in-law's care."

Turlington attempted to speak. The lawyer attempted to speak. Sir Joseph--with a certain simple dignity which had its effect on both of them--declined to hear a word on either side. "No, Richard! as long as I am alive this is my business, not yours. No, Mr. Dicas! I understand that it is your business to

protest professionally. You have protested. Fill in the blank space as I have told you. Or leave the instructions on the table, and I will send for the nearest solicitor to complete them in your place."

Those words placed the lawyer's position plainly before him. He had no choice but to do as he was bid, or to lose a good client. He did as he was bid, and grimly left the room.

Sir Joseph, with old-fashioned politeness, followed him as far as the hall. Returning to the library to say a few friendly words before finally dismissing the subject of the Will, he found himself seized by the arm, and dragged without ceremony, in Turlington's powerful grasp, to the window.

"Richard!" he exclaimed, "what does this mean?"

"Look!" cried the other, pointing through the window to a grassy walk in the grounds, bounded on either side by shrubberies, and situated at a little distance from the house. "Who is that man?--quick! before we lose sight of him--the man crossing there from one shrubbery to the other?" Sir Joseph failed to recognize the figure before it disappeared. Turlington whispered fiercely, close to his ear--"Launcelot Linzie!"

In perfect good faith Sir Joseph declared that the man could not possibly have been Launce. Turlington's frenzy of jealous suspicion was not to be so easily calmed. He asked significantly for Natalie. She was reported to be walking in the grounds. "I knew it!" he said, with an oath--and hurried out into the grounds to discover the truth for himself.

Some little time elapsed before he came back to the house. He had discovered Natalie--alone. Not a sign of Launce had rewarded his search. For the hundredth time he had offended Natalie. For the hundredth time he was compelled to appeal to the indulgence of her father and her aunt. "It won't happen again," he said, sullenly penitent. "You will find me quite another man when I have got you all at my house in the country. Mind!" he burst out, with a furtive look, which expressed his inveterate distrust of Natalie and of every one about her. "Mind! it's settled that you all come to me in Somersetshire, on Monday next." Sir Joseph answered rather dryly that it was settled. Turlington turned to leave the room--and suddenly came back. "It's understood," he went on, addressing Miss Lavinia, "that the seventh of next month is the date fixed for the marriage. Not a day later!" Miss Lavinia replied, rather dryly on her side, "Of course, Richard; not a day later." He muttered, "All right" and hurriedly left them.

Half an hour afterward Natalie came in, looking a little confused.

"Has he gone?" she asked, whispering to her aunt.

Relieved on this point, she made straight for the library--a room which she rarely entered at that or any other period of the day. Miss Lavinia followed her, curious to know what it meant. Natalie hurried to the window, and waved her handkerchief--evidently making a signal to some one outside. Miss Lavinia instantly joined her, and took her sharply by the hand.

"Is it possible, Natalie?" she asked. "Has Launcelot Linzie really been here, unknown to your father or to me?"

"Where is the harm if he has?" answered Natalie, with a sudden outbreak of temper. "Am I never to see my cousin again, because Mr. Turlington happens to be jealous of him?"

She suddenly turned away her head. The rich color flowed over her face and neck. Miss Lavinia, proceeding sternly with the administration of the necessary reproof, was silenced midway by a new change in her niece's variable temper. Natalie burst into tears. Satisfied with this appearance of sincere contrition, the old lady consented to overlook what had happened; and, for this occasion only, to keep her niece's secret. They would all be in Somersetshire, she remarked, before any more breaches of discipline could be committed. Richard had fortunately made no discoveries; and the matter might safely be trusted, all things considered, to rest where it was.

Miss Lavinia might possibly have taken a less hopeful view of the circumstances, if she had known that one of the men-servants at Muswell Hill was in Richard Turlington's pay, and that this servant had seen Launce leave the grounds by the back-garden gate.