

CHAPTER XLVIII. INVESTIGATING.

Having revived his sinking energies in the fruit garden, Mirabel seated himself under the shade of a tree, and reflected on the critical position in which he was placed by Francine's jealousy.

If Miss de Sor continued to be Mr. Wyvil's guest, there seemed to be no other choice before Mirabel than to leave Monksmoor--and to trust to a favorable reply to his sister's invitation for the free enjoyment of Emily's society under another roof. Try as he might, he could arrive at no more satisfactory conclusion than this. In his preoccupied state, time passed quickly. Nearly an hour had elapsed before he rose to return to the house.

Entering the hall, he was startled by a cry of terror in a woman's voice, coming from the upper regions. At the same time Mr. Wyvil, passing along the bedroom corridor after leaving the music-room, was confronted by his daughter, hurrying out of Emily's bedchamber in such a state of alarm that she could hardly speak.

"Gone!" she cried, the moment she saw her father.

Mr. Wyvil took her in his arms and tried to compose her. "Who has gone?" he asked.

"Emily! Oh, papa, Emily has left us! She has heard dreadful news--she told me so herself."

"What news? How did she hear it?"

"I don't know how she heard it. I went back to the drawing-room to show her my roses--"

"Was she alone?"

"Yes! She frightened me--she seemed quite wild. She said, 'Let me be by myself; I shall have to go home.' She kissed me--and ran up to her room. Oh, I am such a fool! Anybody else would have taken care not to lose sight of her."

"How long did you leave her by herself?"

"I can't say. I thought I would go and tell you. And then I got anxious about her, and knocked at her door, and looked into the room. Gone! Gone!"

Mr. Wyvil rang the bell and confided Cecilia to the care of her maid. Mirabel had already joined him in the corridor. They went downstairs together and consulted with Alban. He volunteered to make immediate inquiries at the railway station. Mr. Wyvil followed him, as far as the lodge gate which opened on the highroad--while Mirabel went to a second gate, at the opposite extremity of the park.

Mr. Wyvil obtained the first news of Emily. The lodge keeper had seen her pass him, on her way out of the park, in the greatest haste. He had called after her, "Anything wrong, miss?" and had received no reply. Asked what time had elapsed since this had happened, he was too confused to be able to answer with any certainty. He knew that she had taken the road which led to the station--and he knew no more.

Mr. Wyvil and Mirabel met again at the house, and instituted an examination of the servants. No further discoveries were made.

The question which occurred to everybody was suggested by the words which Cecilia had repeated to her father. Emily had said she had "heard dreadful news"--how had that news reached her? The one postal delivery at Monksmoor was in the morning. Had any special messenger arrived, with a letter for Emily? The servants were absolutely certain that no such person had entered the house. The one remaining conclusion suggested that somebody must have communicated the evil tidings by word of mouth. But here again no evidence was to be obtained. No visitor had called during the day, and no new guests had arrived. Investigation was completely baffled.

Alban returned from the railway, with news of the fugitive.

He had reached the station, some time after the departure of the London train. The clerk at the office recognized his description of Emily, and stated that she had taken her ticket for London. The station-master had opened the carriage door for her, and had noticed that the young lady appeared to be very much agitated. This information obtained, Alban had dispatched a telegram to Emily--in Cecilia's name: "Pray send us a few words to relieve our anxiety, and let us know if we can be of any service to you."

This was plainly all that could be done--but Cecilia was not satisfied. If her father had permitted it, she would have followed Emily. Alban comforted her. He apologized to Mr. Wyvil for shortening his visit, and announced his

intention of traveling to London by the next train. "We may renew our inquiries to some advantage," he added, after hearing what had happened in his absence, "if we can find out who was the last person who saw her, and spoke to her, before your daughter found her alone in the drawing-room. When I went out of the room, I left her with Miss de Sor."

The maid who waited on Miss de Sor was sent for. Francine had been out, by herself, walking in the park. She was then in her room, changing her dress. On hearing of Emily's sudden departure, she had been (as the maid reported) "much shocked and quite at a loss to understand what it meant."

Joining her friends a few minutes later, Francine presented, so far as personal appearance went, a strong contrast to the pale and anxious faces round her. She looked wonderfully well, after her walk. In other respects, she was in perfect harmony with the prevalent feeling. She expressed herself with the utmost propriety; her sympathy moved poor Cecilia to tears.

"I am sure, Miss de Sor, you will try to help us?" Mr. Wyvil began

"With the greatest pleasure," Francine answered.

"How long were you and Miss Emily Brown together, after Mr. Morris left you?"

"Not more than a quarter of an hour, I should think."

"Did anything remarkable occur in the course of conversation?"

"Nothing whatever."

Alban interfered for the first time. "Did you say anything," he asked, "which agitated or offended Miss Brown?"

"That's rather an extraordinary question," Francine remarked.

"Have you no other answer to give?" Alban inquired.

"I answer--No!" she said, with a sudden outburst of anger.

There, the matter dropped. While she spoke in reply to Mr. Wyvil, Francine had confronted him without embarrassment. When Alban interposed, she never looked at him--except when he provoked her to anger. Did she remember that the man who was questioning her, was also the man who

had suspected her of writing the anonymous letter? Alban was on his guard against himself, knowing how he disliked her. But the conviction in his own mind was not to be resisted. In some unimaginable way, Francine was associated with Emily's flight from the house.

The answer to the telegram sent from the railway station had not arrived, when Alban took his departure for London. Cecilia's suspense began to grow unendurable: she looked to Mirabel for comfort, and found none. His office was to console, and his capacity for performing that office was notorious among his admirers; but he failed to present himself to advantage, when Mr. Wyvil's lovely daughter had need of his services. He was, in truth, too sincerely anxious and distressed to be capable of commanding his customary resources of ready-made sentiment and fluently-pious philosophy. Emily's influence had awakened the only earnest and true feeling which had ever ennobled the popular preacher's life.

Toward evening, the long-expected telegram was received at last. What could be said, under the circumstances, it said in these words:

"Safe at home--don't be uneasy about me--will write soon."

With that promise they were, for the time, forced to be content.