

## **CHAPTER LII. "IF I COULD FIND A FRIEND!"**

Shortly after Miss Ladd had taken her departure, a parcel arrived for Emily, bearing the name of a bookseller printed on the label. It was large, and it was heavy. "Reading enough, I should think, to last for a lifetime," Mrs. Ellmother remarked, after carrying the parcel upstairs.

Emily called her back as she was leaving the room. "I want to caution you," she said, "before Miss Wyvil comes. Don't tell her--don't tell anybody--how my father met his death. If other persons are taken into our confidence, they will talk of it. We don't know how near to us the murderer may be. The slightest hint may put him on his guard."

"Oh, miss, are you still thinking of that!"

"I think of nothing else."

"Bad for your mind, Miss Emily--and bad for your body, as your looks show. I wish you would take counsel with some discreet person, before you move in this matter by yourself."

Emily sighed wearily. "In my situation, where is the person whom I can trust?"

"You can trust the good doctor."

"Can I? Perhaps I was wrong when I told you I wouldn't see him. He might be of some use to me."

Mrs. Ellmother made the most of this concession, in the fear that Emily might change her mind. "Doctor Allday may call on you tomorrow," she said.

"Do you mean that you have sent for him?"

"Don't be angry! I did it for the best--and Mr. Mirabel agreed with me."

"Mr. Mirabel! What have you told Mr. Mirabel?"

"Nothing, except that you are ill. When he heard that, he proposed to go for the doctor. He will be here again to-morrow, to ask for news of your health. Will you see him?"

"I don't know yet--I have other things to think of. Bring Miss Wyvil up here when she comes."

"Am I to get the spare room ready for her?"

"No. She is staying with her father at the London house."

Emily made that reply almost with an air of relief. When Cecilia arrived, it was only by an effort that she could show grateful appreciation of the sympathy of her dearest friend. When the visit came to an end, she felt an ungrateful sense of freedom: the restraint was off her mind; she could think again of the one terrible subject that had any interest for her now. Over love, over friendship, over the natural enjoyment of her young life, predominated the blighting resolution which bound her to avenge her father's death. Her dearest remembrances of him--tender remembrances once--now burned in her (to use her own words) like fire. It was no ordinary love that had bound parent and child together in the bygone time. Emily had grown from infancy to girlhood, owing all the brightness of her life--a life without a mother, without brothers, without sisters--to her father alone. To submit to lose this beloved, this only companion, by the cruel stroke of disease was of all trials of resignation the hardest to bear. But to be severed from him by the murderous hand of a man, was more than Emily's fervent nature could passively endure. Before the garden gate had closed on her friend she had returned to her one thought, she was breathing again her one aspiration. The books that she had ordered, with her own purpose in view--books that might supply her want of experience, and might reveal the perils which beset the course that lay before her--were unpacked and spread out on the table. Hour after hour, when the old servant believed that her mistress was in bed, she was absorbed over biographies in English and French, which related the stratagems by means of which famous policemen had captured the worst criminals of their time. From these, she turned to works of fiction, which found their chief topic of interest in dwelling on the discovery of hidden crime. The night passed, and dawn glimmered through the window--and still she opened book after book with sinking courage--and still she gained nothing but the disheartening conviction of her inability to carry out her own plans. Almost every page that she turned over revealed the immovable obstacles set in her way by her sex and her age. Could she mix with the people, or visit the scenes, familiar to the experience of men (in fact and in fiction), who had traced the homicide to his hiding-place, and had marked him among his harmless fellow-creatures with the brand of Cain? No! A young girl following, or attempting to follow, that career, must reckon with insult and outrage--paying their abominable tribute to her youth and

her beauty, at every turn. What proportion would the men who might respect her bear to the men who might make her the object of advances, which it was hardly possible to imagine without shuddering. She crept exhausted to her bed, the most helpless, hopeless creature on the wide surface of the earth--a girl self-devoted to the task of a man.

Careful to perform his promise to Mirabel, without delay, the doctor called on Emily early in the morning--before the hour at which he usually entered his consulting-room.

"Well? What's the matter with the pretty young mistress?" he asked, in his most abrupt manner, when Mrs. Ellmother opened the door. "Is it love? or jealousy? or a new dress with a wrinkle in it?"

"You will hear about it, sir, from Miss Emily herself. I am forbidden to say anything."

"But you mean to say something--for all that?"

"Don't joke, Doctor Allday! The state of things here is a great deal too serious for joking. Make up your mind to be surprised--I say no more."

Before the doctor could ask what this meant, Emily opened the parlor door. "Come in!" she said, impatiently.

Doctor Allday's first greeting was strictly professional. "My dear child, I never expected this," he began. "You are looking wretchedly ill." He attempted to feel her pulse. She drew her hand away from him.

"It's my mind that's ill," she answered. "Feeling my pulse won't cure me of anxiety and distress. I want advice; I want help. Dear old doctor, you have always been a good friend to me--be a better friend than ever now."

"What can I do?"

"Promise you will keep secret what I am going to say to you--and listen, pray listen patiently, till I have done."

Doctor Allday promised, and listened. He had been, in some degree at least, prepared for a surprise--but the disclosure which now burst on him was more than his equanimity could sustain. He looked at Emily in silent

dismay. She had surprised and shocked him, not only by what she said, but by what she unconsciously suggested. Was it possible that Mirabel's personal appearance had produced on her the same impression which was present in his own mind? His first impulse, when he was composed enough to speak, urged him to put the question cautiously.

"If you happened to meet with the suspected man," he said, "have you any means of identifying him?"

"None whatever, doctor. If you would only think it over--"

He stopped her there; convinced of the danger of encouraging her, and resolved to act on his conviction.

"I have enough to occupy me in my profession," he said. "Ask your other friend to think it over."

"What other friend?"

"Mr. Alban Morris."

The moment he pronounced the name, he saw that he had touched on some painful association. "Has Mr. Morris refused to help you?" he inquired.

"I have not asked him to help me."

"Why?"

There was no choice (with such a man as Doctor Allday) between offending him or answering him. Emily adopted the last alternative. On this occasion she had no reason to complain of his silence.

"Your view of Mr. Morris's conduct surprises me," he replied--"surprises me more than I can say," he added; remembering that he too was guilty of having kept her in ignorance of the truth, out of regard--mistaken regard, as it now seemed to be--for her peace of mind.

"Be good to me, and pass it over if I am wrong," Emily said: "I can't dispute with you; I can only tell you what I feel. You have always been so kind to me--may I count on your kindness still?"

Doctor Allday relapsed into silence.

"May I at least ask," she went on, "if you know anything of persons--" She paused, discouraged by the cold expression of inquiry in the old man's eyes as he looked at her.

"What persons?" he said.

"Persons whom I suspect."

"Name them."

Emily named the landlady of the inn at Zeeland: she could now place the right interpretation on Mrs. Rook's conduct, when the locket had been put into her hand at Netherwoods. Doctor Allday answered shortly and stiffly: he had never even seen Mrs. Rook. Emily mentioned Miss Jethro next--and saw at once that she had interested him.

"What do you suspect Miss Jethro of doing?" he asked.

"I suspect her of knowing more of my father's death than she is willing to acknowledge," Emily replied.

The doctor's manner altered for the better. "I agree with you," he said frankly. "But I have some knowledge of that lady. I warn you not to waste time and trouble in trying to discover the weak side of Miss Jethro."

"That was not my experience of her at school," Emily rejoined. "At the same time I don't know what may have happened since those days. I may perhaps have lost the place I once held in her regard."

"How?"

"Through my aunt."

"Through your aunt?"

"I hope and trust I am wrong," Emily continued; "but I fear my aunt had something to do with Miss Jethro's dismissal from the school--and in that case Miss Jethro may have found it out." Her eyes, resting on the doctor, suddenly brightened. "You know something about it!" she exclaimed.

He considered a little--whether he should or should not tell her of the letter addressed by Miss Ladd to Miss Letitia, which he had found at the cottage.

"If I could satisfy you that your fears are well founded," he asked, "would the discovery keep you away from Miss Jethro?"

"I should be ashamed to speak to her--even if we met."

"Very well. I can tell you positively, that your aunt was the person who turned Miss Jethro out of the school. When I get home, I will send you a letter that proves it."

Emily's head sank on her breast. "Why do I only hear of this now?" she said.

"Because I had no reason for letting you know of it, before to-day. If I have done nothing else, I have at least succeeded in keeping you and Miss Jethro apart."

Emily looked at him in alarm. He went on without appearing to notice that he had startled her. "I wish to God I could as easily put a stop to the mad project which you are contemplating."

"The mad project?" Emily repeated. "Oh, Doctor Allday. Do you cruelly leave me to myself, at the time of all others, when I am most in need of your sympathy?"

That appeal moved him. He spoke more gently; he pitied, while he condemned her.

"My poor dear child, I should be cruel indeed, if I encouraged you. You are giving yourself up to an enterprise, so shockingly unsuited to a young girl like you, that I declare I contemplate it with horror. Think, I entreat you, think; and let me hear that you have yielded--not to my poor entreaties--but to your own better sense!" His voice faltered; his eyes moistened. "I shall make a fool of myself," he burst out furiously, "if I stay here any longer. Good-by."

He left her.

She walked to the window, and looked out at the fair morning. No one to feel for her--no one to understand her--nothing nearer that could speak to poor mortality of hope and encouragement than the bright heaven, so far away! She turned from the window. "The sun shines on the murderer," she thought, "as it shines on me."

She sat down at the table, and tried to quiet her mind; to think steadily to

some good purpose. Of the few friends that she possessed, every one had declared that she was in the wrong. Had they lost the one loved being of all beings on earth, and lost him by the hand of a homicide--and that homicide free? All that was faithful, all that was devoted in the girl's nature, held her to her desperate resolution as with a hand of iron. If she shrank at that miserable moment, it was not from her design--it was from the sense of her own helplessness. "Oh, if I had been a man!" she said to herself. "Oh, if I could find a friend!"