

## **CHAPTER THE NINTH**

The Hero of the Trial

"You have forced it out of me. Now you have had your way, never mind my feelings--Go!"

Those were the first words the Hero of the Trial said to me, when he was able to speak again! He withdrew with a curious sullen resignation to the farther end of the room. There he stood looking at me, as a man might have looked who carried some contagion about him, and who wished to preserve a healthy fellow-creature from the peril of touching him.

"Why should I go?" I asked.

"You are a bold woman," he said, "to remain in the same room with a man who has been pointed at as a murderer, and who has been tried for his life."

The same unhealthy state of mind which had brought him to Dimchurch, and which had led him to speak to me as he had spoken on the previous evening, was, as I understood it, now irritating him against me as a person who had made his own quick temper the means of entrapping him into letting out the truth. How was I to deal with a man in this condition? I decided to perform the feat which you call in England, "taking the bull by the horns."

"I see but one man here," I said. "A man honorably acquitted of a crime which he was incapable of committing. A man who deserves my interest, and claims my sympathy. Shake hands, Mr. Dubourg."

I spoke to him in a good hearty voice, and I gave him a good hearty squeeze. The poor, weak, lonely, persecuted young fellow dropped his head on my shoulder like a child, and burst out crying.

"Don't despise me!" he said, as soon as he had got his breath again. "It breaks a man down to have stood in the dock, and to have had hundreds of hard-hearted people staring at him in horror--without his deserving it. Besides, I have been very lonely, ma'am, since my brother left me."

We sat down again, side by side. He was the strangest compound of anomalies I had ever met with. Throw him into one of those passions in

which he flamed out so easily--and you would have said, This is a tiger. Wait till he had cooled down again to his customary mild temperature--and you would have said with equal truth, This is a lamb.

"One thing rather surprises me, Mr. Dubourg," I went on. "I can't quite understand----"

"Don't call me Mr. Dubourg," he interposed. "You remind me of the disgrace which has forced me to change my name. Call me by my Christian name. It's a foreign name. You are a foreigner by your accent--you will like me all the better for having a foreign name. I was christened 'Oscar'--after my mother's brother: my mother was a Jersey woman. Call me 'Oscar.'--What is it you don't understand?"

"In your present situation," I resumed, "I don't understand your brother leaving you here all by yourself."

He was on the point of flaming out again at that.

"Not a word against my brother!" he exclaimed fiercely. "My brother is the noblest creature that God ever created! You must own that yourself--you know what he did at the trial. I should have died on the scaffold but for that angel. I insist on it that he is not a man. He is an angel!"

(I admitted that his brother was an angel. The concession instantly pacified him.)

"People say there is no difference between us," he went on, drawing his chair companionably close to mine. "Ah, people are so shallow! Personally, I grant you, we are exactly alike. (You have heard that we are twins?) But there it ends, unfortunately for me. Nugent--(my brother was christened Nugent after my father)--Nugent is a hero! Nugent is a genius. I should have died if he hadn't taken care of me after the trial. I had nobody but him. We are orphans; we have no brothers or sisters. Nugent felt the disgrace even more than I felt it--but he could control himself. It fell more heavily on him than it did on me. I'll tell you why. Nugent was in a fair way to make our family name--the name that we have been obliged to drop--famous all over the world. He is a painter--a landscape painter. Have you never heard of him? Ah, you soon will! Where do you think he has gone to? He has gone to the wilds of America, in search of new subjects. He is going to found a school of landscape painting. On an immense scale. A scale that has never been attempted yet. Dear fellow! Shall I tell you what he said when he left me here? Noble words--I call them noble words. 'Oscar, I go to make our

assumed name famous. You shall be honorably known--you shall be illustrious, as the brother of Nugent Dubourg.' Do you think I could stand in the way of such a career as that? After what he has sacrificed for me, could I let Such a Man stagnate here--for no better purpose than to keep me company? What does it matter about my feeling lonely? Who am I? Oh, if you had seen how he bore with the horrible notoriety that followed us, after the trial! He was constantly stared at and pointed at, for me. Not a word of complaint escaped him. He snapped his fingers at it. 'That for public opinion!' he said. What strength of mind--eh? From one place after another we moved and moved, and still there were the photographs, and the newspapers, and the whole infamous story ('romance in real life,' they called it), known beforehand to everybody. He never lost heart. 'We shall find a place yet' (that was the cheerful way he put it); 'you have nothing to do with it, Oscar; you are safe in my hands; I promise you exactly the place of refuge you want.' It was he who got all the information, and found out this lonely part of England where you live. I thought it pretty as we wandered about the hills--it wasn't half grand enough for him. We lost ourselves. I began to feel nervous. He didn't mind it a bit. 'You have Me with you,' he said; 'My luck is always to be depended on. Mark what I say! We shall stumble on a village!' You will hardly believe me--in ten minutes more, we stumbled, exactly as he had foretold, on this place. He didn't leave me--when I had prevailed on him to go--without a recommendation. He recommended me to the landlord of the inn here. He said, 'My brother is delicate; my brother wishes to live in retirement; you will oblige me by looking after my brother.' Wasn't it kind? The landlord seemed to be quite affected by it. Nugent cried when he took leave of me. Ah, what would I not give to have a heart like his and a mind like his! It's something--isn't it?--to have a face like him. I often say that to myself when I look in the glass. Excuse my running on in this way. When I once begin to talk of Nugent, I don't know when to leave off."

One thing, at any rate, was plainly discernible in this otherwise inscrutable young man. He adored his twin-brother.

It would have been equally clear to me that Mr. Nugent Dubourg deserved to be worshipped, if I could have reconciled to my mind his leaving his brother to shift for himself in such a place as Dimchurch. I was obliged to remind myself of the admirable service which he had rendered at the trial, before I could decide to do him the justice of suspending my opinion of him, in his absence. Having accomplished this act of magnanimity, I took advantage of the first opportunity to change the subject. The most tiresome information that I am acquainted with, is the information which tells us of the virtues of an absent person--when that absent person happens to be a stranger.

"Is it true that you have taken Browndown for six months?" I asked. "Are you really going to settle at Dimchurch?"

"Yes--if you keep my secret," he answered. "The people here know nothing about me. Don't, pray don't, tell them who I am! You will drive me away, if you do."

"I must tell Miss Finch who you are," I said.

"No! no! no!" he exclaimed eagerly. "I can't bear the idea of her knowing it. I have been so horribly degraded. What will she think of me?" He burst into another explosion of rhapsodies on the subject of Lucilla--mixed up with renewed petitions to me to keep his story concealed from everybody. I lost all patience with his want of common fortitude and common sense.

"Young Oscar, I should like to box your ears!" I said. "You are in a villainously unwholesome state about this matter. Have you nothing else to think of? Have you no profession? Are you not obliged to work for your living?"

I spoke, as you perceive, with some force of expression--aided by a corresponding asperity of voice and manner.

Mr. Oscar Dubourg looked at me with the puzzled air of a man who feels an overflow of new ideas forcing itself into his mind. He modestly admitted the degrading truth. From his childhood upwards, he had only to put his hand in his pocket, and to find the money there, without any preliminary necessity of earning it first. His father had been a fashionable portrait-painter, and had married one of his sitters--an heiress. Oscar and Nugent had been left in the detestable position of independent gentlemen. The dignity of labor was a dignity unknown to these degraded young men. "I despise a wealthy idler," I said to Oscar, with my republican severity. "You want the ennobling influence of labor to make a man of you. Nobody has a right to be idle--nobody has a right to be rich. You would be in a more wholesome state of mind about yourself, my young gentleman, if you had to earn your bread and cheese before you ate it."

He stared at me piteously. The noble sentiments which I had inherited from Doctor Pratolungo, completely bewildered Mr. Oscar Dubourg.

"Don't be angry with me," he said, in his innocent way. "I couldn't eat my cheese, if I did earn it. I can't digest cheese. Besides, I employ myself as much as I can." He took his little golden vase from the table behind him,

and told me what I had already heard him tell Lucilla while I was listening at the window. "You would have found me at work this morning," he went on, "if the stupid people who send me my metal plates had not made a mistake. The alloy, in the gold and silver both, is all wrong this time. I must return the plates to be melted again before I can do anything with them. They are all ready to go back to-day, when the cart comes. If there are any laboring people here who want money, I'm sure I will give them some of mine with the greatest pleasure. It isn't my fault, ma'am, that my father married my mother. And how could I help it if he left two thousand a year each to my brother and me?"

Two thousand a year each to his brother and him! And the illustrious Pratolungo had never known what it was to have five pounds sterling at his disposal before his union with Me!

I lifted my eyes to the ceiling. In my righteous indignation, I forgot Lucilla and her curiosity about Oscar--I forgot Oscar and his horror of Lucilla discovering who he was. I opened my lips to speak. In another moment I should have launched my thunderbolts against the whole infamous system of modern society, when I was silenced by the most extraordinary and unexpected interruption that ever closed a woman's lips.