

Chapter LXVI

'If any one should importune me to give a reason why I loved him, I feel it could no otherwise be expressed than by making answer, 'Because it was he, because it was I.' There is, beyond what I am able to say, I know not what inexplicable power that brought on this union.' - MONTAIGNE: *On Friendship*.

The time had come to prepare Mordecai for the revelation of the restored sister and for the change of abode which was desirable before Mirah's meeting with her brother. Mrs. Meyrick, to whom Deronda had confided everything except Mordecai's peculiar relation to himself, had been active in helping him to find a suitable lodging in Brompton, not many minutes' walk from her own house, so that the brother and sister would be within reach of her motherly care. Her happy mixture of Scottish fervor and Gallic liveliness had enabled her to keep the secret close from the girls as well as from Hans, any betrayal to them being likely to reach Mirah in some way that would raise an agitating suspicion, and spoil the important opening of that work which was to secure her independence, as we rather arbitrarily call one of the more arduous and dignified forms of our dependence. And both Mrs. Meyrick and Deronda had more reasons than they could have expressed for desiring that Mirah should be able to maintain herself. Perhaps 'the little mother' was rather helped in her secrecy by some dubiousness in her sentiment about the remarkable brother described to her; and certainly if she felt any joy and anticipatory admiration, it was due to her faith in Deronda's judgment. The consumption was a sorrowful fact that appealed to her tenderness; but how was she to be very glad of an enthusiasm which, to tell the truth, she could only contemplate as Jewish pertinacity, and as rather an undesirable introduction among them all of a man whose conversation would not be more modern and encouraging than that of Scott's Covenanters? Her mind was anything but prosaic, and had her soberer share of Mab's delight in the romance of Mirah's story and of her abode with them; but the romantic or unusual in real life requires some adaptation. We sit up at night to read about Sakya-Mouni, St. Francis, or Oliver Cromwell; but whether we should be glad for any one at all like them to call on us the next morning, still more, to reveal himself as a new relation, is quite another affair. Besides, Mrs. Meyrick had hoped, as her children did, that the intensity of Mirah's feeling about Judaism would slowly subside, and be merged in the gradually deepening current of loving interchange with her new friends. In fact, her secret favorite continuation of the romance had been no discovery of Jewish relations, but something much more favorable to the hopes she discerned in Hans. And now - here was a brother who would dip Mirah's mind over again in the deepest dye of Jewish sentiment. She could not help saying to Deronda -

'I am as glad as you are that the pawnbroker is not her brother: there are Ezras and Ezras in the world; and really it is a comfort to think that all Jews are not like those shopkeepers who *will not* let you get out of their shops: and besides, what he said to you about his mother and sister makes me bless him. I am sure he's good. But I never did like anything fanatical. I suppose I heard a little too much preaching in my youth and lost my palate for it.'

'I don't think you will find that Mordecai obtrudes any preaching,' said Deronda. 'He is not what I should call fanatical. I call a man fanatical when his enthusiasm is narrow and hoodwinked, so that he has no sense of proportions, and becomes unjust and unsympathetic to men who are out of his own track. Mordecai is an enthusiast; I should like to keep that word for the highest order of minds - those who care supremely for grand and general benefits to mankind. He is not a strictly orthodox Jew, and is full of allowances for others; his conformity in many things is an allowance for the condition of other Jews. The people he lives with are as fond of him as possible, and they can't in the least understand his ideas.'

'Oh, well, I can live up to the level of the pawnbroker's mother, and like him for what I see to be good in him; and for what I don't see the merits of I will take your word. According to your definition, I suppose one might be fanatical in worshipping common-sense; for my poor husband used to say the world would be a poor place if there were nothing but common-sense in it. However, Mirah's brother will have good bedding - that I have taken care of; and I shall have this extra window pasted up with paper to prevent draughts.' (The conversation was taking place in the destined lodging.) 'It is a comfort to think that the people of the house are no strangers to me - no hypocritical harpies. And when the children know, we shall be able to make the rooms much prettier.'

'The next stage of the affair is to tell all to Mordecai, and get him to move - which may be a more difficult business,' said Deronda.

'And will you tell Mirah before I say anything to the children?' said Mrs. Meyrick. But Deronda hesitated, and she went on in a tone of persuasive deliberation - 'No, I think not. Let me tell Hans and the girls the evening before, and they will be away the next morning?'

'Yes, that will be best. But do justice to my account of Mordecai - or Ezra, as I suppose Mirah will wish to call him: don't assist their imagination by referring to Habakkuk Mucklewrath,' said Deronda, smiling - Mrs. Meyrick herself having used the comparison of the Covenanters.

'Trust me, trust me,' said the little mother. 'I shall have to persuade them so hard to be glad, that I shall convert myself. When I am frightened I find it a good thing to have somebody to be angry with for not being brave: it warms the blood.'

Deronda might have been more argumentative or persuasive about the view to be taken of Mirah's brother, if he had been less anxiously preoccupied with the more important task immediately before him, which he desired to acquit himself of without wounding the Cohens. Mordecai, by a memorable answer, had made it evident that he would be keenly alive to any inadvertance in relation to their feelings. In the interval, he had been meeting Mordecai at the *Hand and Banner*, but now after due reflection he wrote to him saying that he had particular reasons for wishing to see him in his own home the next evening, and would beg to sit with him in his workroom for an hour, if the Cohens would not regard it as an intrusion. He would call with the understanding that if there were any objection, Mordecai would accompany him elsewhere. Deronda hoped in this way to create a little expectation that would have a preparatory effect.

He was received with the usual friendliness, some additional costume in the women and children, and in all the elders a slight air of wondering which even in Cohen was not allowed to pass the bounds of silence - the guest's transactions with Mordecai being a sort of mystery which he was rather proud to think lay outside the sphere of light which enclosed his own understanding. But when Deronda said, 'I suppose Mordecai is at home and expecting me,' Jacob, who had profited by the family remarks, went up to his knee and said, 'What do you want to talk to Mordecai about?'

'Something that is very interesting to him,' said Deronda, pinching the lad's ear, 'but that you can't understand.'

'Can you say this?' said Jacob, immediately giving forth a string of his rote-learned Hebrew verses with a wonderful mixture of the throaty and the nasal, and nodding his small head at his hearer, with a sense of giving formidable evidence which might rather alter their mutual position.

'No, really,' said Deronda, keeping grave; 'I can't say anything like it.'

'I thought not,' said Jacob, performing a dance of triumph with his small scarlet legs, while he took various objects out of the deep pockets of his knickerbockers and returned them thither, as a slight hint of his resources; after which, running to the door of the workroom, he opened it wide, set his back against it, and said, 'Mordecai, here's the young swell' - a copying of his father's phrase, which seemed to him well fitted to cap the recitation of Hebrew.

He was called back with hushes by mother and grandmother, and Deronda, entering and closing the door behind him, saw that a bit of carpet had been laid down, a chair placed, and the fire and lights attended to, in sign of the Cohens' respect. As Mordecai rose to greet him, Deronda was struck with the air of solemn expectation in his face, such as would have seemed perfectly natural if his letter had declared that some revelation was to be made about the lost sister. Neither of them spoke, till Deronda, with his usual tenderness of manner, had drawn the vacant chair from the opposite side of the hearth and had seated himself near to Mordecai, who then said, in a tone of fervid certainty -

'You are coming to tell me something that my soul longs for.'

'It is true I have something very weighty to tell you - something I trust that you will rejoice in,' said Deronda, on his guard against the probability that Mordecai had been preparing himself for something quite different from the fact.

'It is all revealed - it is made clear to you,' said Mordecai, more eagerly, leaning forward with clasped hands. 'You are even as my brother that sucked the breasts of my mother - the heritage is yours - there is no doubt to divide us.'

'I have learned nothing new about myself,' said Deronda. The disappointment was inevitable: it was better not to let the feeling be strained longer in a mistaken hope.

Mordecai sank back in his chair, unable for the moment to care what was really coming. The whole day his mind had been in a state of tension toward one fulfillment. The reaction was sickening and he closed his eyes.

'Except,' Deronda went on gently, after a pause, - 'except that I had really some time ago come into another sort of hidden connection with you, besides what you have spoken of as existing in your own feeling.'

The eyes were not opened, but there was a fluttering in the lids.

'I had made the acquaintance of one in whom you are interested.'

'One who is closely related to your departed mother,' Deronda went on wishing to make the disclosure gradual; but noticing a shrinking movement in Mordecai, he added - 'whom she and you held dear above all others.'

Mordecai, with a sudden start, laid a spasmodic grasp on Deronda's wrist; there was a great terror in him. And Deronda divined it. A tremor was perceptible in his clear tones as he said -

'What was prayed for has come to pass: Mirah has been delivered from evil.'

Mordecai's grasp relaxed a little, but he was panting with a tearless sob.

Deronda went on: 'Your sister is worthy of the mother you honored.'

He waited there, and Mordecai, throwing himself backward in his chair, again closed his eyes, uttering himself almost inaudibly for some minutes in Hebrew, and then subsiding into a happy-looking silence. Deronda, watching the expression in his uplifted face, could have imagined that he was speaking with some beloved object: there was a new suffused sweetness, something like that on the faces of the beautiful dead. For the first time Deronda thought he discerned a family resemblance to Mirah.

Presently when Mordecai was ready to listen, the rest was told. But in accounting for Mirah's flight he made the statement about the father's conduct as vague as he could, and threw the emphasis on her yearning to come to England as the place where she might find her mother. Also he kept back the fact of Mirah's intention to drown herself, and his own part in rescuing her; merely describing the home she had found with friends of his, whose interest in her and efforts for her he had shared. What he dwelt on finally was Mirah's feeling about her mother and brother; and in relation to this he tried to give every detail.

'It was in search of them,' said Deronda, smiling, 'that I turned into this house: the name Ezra Cohen was just then the most interesting name in the world to me. I confess I had fear for a long while. Perhaps you will forgive me now for having asked you that question about the elder Mrs. Cohen's daughter. I cared very much what I should find Mirah's friends to be. But I had found a brother worthy of her when I knew that her Ezra was disguised under the name of Mordecai.'

'Mordecai is really my name - Ezra Mordecai Cohen.'

'Is there any kinship between this family and yours?' said Deronda.

'Only the kinship of Israel. My soul clings to these people, who have sheltered me and given me succor out of the affection that abides in Jewish hearts, as sweet odor in things long crushed and hidden from the outer air. It is good for me to bear with their ignorance and be

bound to them in gratitude, that I may keep in mind the spiritual poverty of the Jewish million, and not put impatient knowledge in the stead of loving wisdom.'

'But you don't feel bound to continue with them now there is a closer tie to draw you?' said Deronda, not without fear that he might find an obstacle to overcome. 'It seems to me right now - is it not? - that you should live with your sister; and I have prepared a home to take you to in the neighborhood of her friends, that she may join you there. Pray grant me this wish. It will enable me to be with you often in the hours when Mirah is obliged to leave you. That is my selfish reason. But the chief reason is, that Mirah will desire to watch over you, and that you ought to give her the guardianship of a brother's presence. You shall have books about you. I shall want to learn of you, and to take you out to see the river and trees. And you will have the rest and comfort that you will be more and more in need of - nay, that I need for you. This is the claim I make on you, now that we have found each other.'

Deronda spoke in a tone of earnest, affectionate pleading, such as he might have used to a venerated elder brother. Mordecai's eyes were fixed on him with a listening contemplation, and he was silent for a little while after Deronda had ceased to speak. Then he said, with an almost reproachful emphasis -

'And you would have me hold it doubtful whether you were born a Jew! Have we not from the first touched each other with invisible fibres - have we not quivered together like the leaves from a common stem with stirring from a common root? I know what I am outwardly, I am one among the crowd of poor - I am stricken, I am dying. But our souls know each other. They gazed in silence as those who have long been parted and meet again, but when they found voice they were assured, and all their speech is understanding. The life of Israel is in your veins.'

Deronda sat perfectly still, but felt his face tingling. It was impossible either to deny or assent. He waited, hoping that Mordecai would presently give him a more direct answer. And after a pause of meditation he did say. firmly -

'What you wish of me I will do. And our mother - may the blessing of the Eternal be with her in our souls! - would have wished it too. I will accept what your loving kindness has prepared, and Mirah's home shall be mine.' He paused a moment, and then added in a more melancholy tone, 'But I shall grieve to part from these parents and the little ones. You must tell them, for my heart would fail me.'

'I felt that you would want me to tell them. Shall we go now at once?' said Deronda, much relieved by this unwavering compliance.

'Yes; let us not defer it. It must be done,' said Mordecai, rising with the air of a man who has to perform a painful duty. Then came, as an afterthought, 'But do not dwell on my sister more than is needful.'

When they entered the parlor he said to the alert Jacob, 'Ask your father to come, and tell Sarah to mind the shop. My friend has something to say,' he continued, turning to the elder Mrs. Cohen. It seemed part of Mordecai's eccentricity that he should call this gentleman his friend; and the two women tried to show their better manners by warm politeness in begging Deronda to seat himself in the best place.

When Cohen entered with a pen behind his ear, he rubbed his hands and said with loud satisfaction, 'Well, sir! I'm glad you're doing us the honor to join our family party again. We are pretty comfortable, I think.'

He looked round with shiny gladness. And when all were seated on the hearth the scene was worth peeping in upon: on one side Baby under her scarlet quilt in the corner being rocked by the young mother, and Adelaide Rebekah seated on the grandmother's knee; on the other, Jacob between his father's legs; while the two markedly different figures of Deronda and Mordecai were in the middle - Mordecai a little backward in the shade, anxious to conceal his agitated susceptibility to what was going on around him. The chief light came from the fire, which brought out the rich color on a depth of shadow, and seemed to turn into speech the dark gems of eyes that looked at each other kindly.

'I have just been telling Mordecai of an event that makes a great change in his life,' Deronda began, 'but I hope you will agree with me that it is a joyful one. Since he thinks of you as his best friends, he wishes me to tell you for him at once.'

'Relations with money, sir?' burst in Cohen, feeling a power of divination which it was a pity to nullify by waiting for the fact.

'No; not exactly,' said Deronda, smiling. 'But a very precious relation wishes to be reunited to him - a very good and lovely young sister, who will care for his comfort in every way.'

'Married, sir?'

'No, not married.'

'But with a maintenance?'

'With talents which will secure her a maintenance. A home is already provided for Mordecai.'

There was silence for a moment or two before the grandmother said in a wailing tone -

'Well, well! and so you're going away from us, Mordecai.'

'And where there's no children as there is here,' said the mother, catching the wail.

'No Jacob, and no Adelaide, and no Eugenie!' wailed the grandmother again.

'Ay, ay, Jacob's learning 'ill all wear out of him. He must go to school. It'll be hard times for Jacob,' said Cohen, in a tone of decision.

In the wide-open ears of Jacob his father's words sounded like a doom, giving an awful finish to the dirge-like effect of the whole announcement. His face had been gathering a wondering incredulous sorrow at the notion of Mordecai's going away: he was unable to imagine the change as anything lasting; but at the mention of 'hard times for Jacob' there was no further suspense of feeling, and he broke forth in loud lamentation. Adelaide Rebekah always cried when her brother cried, and now began to howl with astonishing suddenness, whereupon baby awaking contributed angry screams, and required to be taken out of the cradle. A great deal of hushing was necessary, and Mordecai feeling the cries pierce him, put out his arms to Jacob, who in the midst of his tears and sobs was turning his head right and left for general observation. His father, who had been - saying, 'Never mind, old man; you shall go to the riders,' now released him, and he went to Mordecai, who clasped him, and laid his cheek on the little black head without speaking. But Cohen, sensible that the master of the family must make some apology for all this weakness, and that the occasion called for a speech, addressed Deronda with some elevation of pitch, squaring his elbows and resting a hand on each knee: -

'It's not as we're the people to grudge anybody's good luck, sir, or the portion of their cup being made fuller, as I may say. I'm not an envious man, and if anybody offered to set up Mordecai in a shop of my sort two doors lower down, I shouldn't make wry faces about it. I'm not one of them that had need have a poor opinion of themselves, and be frightened at anybody else getting a chance. If I'm offal, let a wise man come and tell me, for I've never heard it yet. And in point of business, I'm not a class of goods to be in danger. If anybody takes to

rolling me, I can pack myself up like a caterpillar, and find my feet when I'm let alone. And though, as I may say, you're taking some of our good works from us, which is property bearing interest, I'm not saying but we can afford that, though my mother and my wife had the good will to wish and do for Mordecai to the last; and a Jew must not be like a servant who works for reward - though I see nothing against a reward if I can get it. And as to the extra outlay in schooling, I'm neither poor nor greedy - I wouldn't hang myself for sixpence, nor half a crown neither. But the truth of it is, the women and children are fond of Mordecai. You may partly see how it is, sir, by your own sense. A Jewish man is bound to thank God, day by day, that he was not made a woman; but a woman has to thank God that He has made her according to His will. And we all know what He has made her - a child-bearing, tender-hearted thing is the woman of our people. Her children are mostly stout, as I think you'll say Addy's are, and she's not mushy, but her heart is tender. So you must excuse present company, sir, for not being glad all at once. And as to this young lady - for by what you say 'young lady' is the proper term' - Cohen here threw some additional emphasis into his look and tone - 'we shall all be glad for Mordecai's sake by-and-by, when we cast up our accounts and see where we are.'

Before Deronda could summon any answer to this oddly mixed speech, Mordecai exclaimed -

'Friends, friends! For food and raiment and shelter I would not have sought better than you have given me. You have sweetened the morsel with love; and what I thought of as a joy that would be left to me even in the last months of my waning strength was to go on teaching the lad. But now I am as one who had clad himself beforehand in his shroud, and used himself to making the grave his bed, when the divine command sounded in his ears, 'Arise, and go forth; the night is not yet come.' For no light matter would I have turned away from your kindness to take another's. But it has been taught us, as you know, that *the reward of one duty is the power to fulfill another* - so said Ben Azai. You have made your duty to one of the poor among your brethren a joy to you and me; and your reward shall be that you will not rest without the joy of like deeds in the time to come. And may not Jacob come and visit me?'

Mordecai had turned with this question to Deronda, who said -

'Surely that can be managed. It is no further than Brompton.'

Jacob, who had been gradually calmed by the need to hear what was going forward, began now to see some daylight on the future, the word 'visit' having the lively charm of cakes and general relaxation at his grandfather's, the dealer in knives. He danced away from Mordecai,

and took up a station of survey in the middle of the hearth with his hands in his knickerbockers.

'Well,' said the grandmother, with a sigh of resignation, 'I hope there'll be nothing in the way of your getting *kosher* meat, Mordecai. For you'll have to trust to those you live with.'

'That's all right, that's all right, you may be sure, mother,' said Cohen, as if anxious to cut off inquiry on matters in which he was uncertain of the guest's position. 'So, sir,' he added, turning with a look of amused enlightenment to Deronda, 'it was better than learning you had to talk to Mordecai about! I wondered to myself at the time. I thought somehow there was a something.'

'Mordecai will perhaps explain to you how it was that I was seeking him,' said Deronda, feeling that he had better go, and rising as he spoke.

It was agreed that he should come again and the final move be made on the next day but one; but when he was going Mordecai begged to walk with him to the end of the street, and wrapped himself in coat and comforter. It was a March evening, and Deronda did not mean to let him go far, but he understood the wish to be outside the house with him in communicative silence, after the exciting speech that had been filling the last hour. No word was spoken until Deronda had proposed parting, when he said -

'Mirah would wish to thank the Cohens for their goodness. You would wish her to do so - to come and see them, would you not?'

Mordecai did not answer immediately, but at length said -

'I cannot tell. I fear not. There is a family sorrow, and the sight of my sister might be to them as the fresh bleeding of wounds. There is a daughter and sister who will never be restored as Mirah is. But who knows the pathways? We are all of us denying or fulfilling prayers - and men in their careless deeds walk amidst invisible outstretched arms and pleadings made in vain. In my ears I have the prayers of generations past and to come. My life is as nothing to me but the beginning of fulfilment. And yet I am only another prayer - which you will fulfil.'

Deronda pressed his hand, and they parted.