

Chapter LIX

'I count myself in nothing else so happy As in a soul remembering my good friends.' - SHAKESPEARE.

Sir Hugo Mallinger was not so prompt in starting for Genoa as Mr Gascoigne had been, and Deronda on all accounts would not take his departure until he had seen the baronet. There was not only Grandcourt's death, but also the late crisis in his own life to make reasons why his oldest friend would desire to have the unrestrained communication of speech with him, for in writing he had not felt able to give any details concerning the mother who had come and gone like an apparition. It was not till the fifth evening that Deronda, according to telegram, waited for Sir Hugo at the station, where he was to arrive between eight and nine; and while he was looking forward to the sight of the kind, familiar face, which was part of his earliest memories, something like a smile, in spite of his late tragic experience, might have been detected in his eyes and the curve of his lips at the idea of Sir Hugo's pleasure in being now master of his estates, able to leave them to his daughters, or at least - according to a view of inheritance which had just been strongly impressed on Deronda's imagination - to take makeshift feminine offspring as intermediate to a satisfactory heir in a grandson. We should be churlish creatures if we could have no joy in our fellow-mortals' joy, unless it were in agreement with our theory of righteous distribution and our highest ideal of human good: what sour corners our mouths would get - our eyes, what frozen glances! and all the while our own possessions and desires would not exactly adjust themselves to our ideal. We must have some comradeship with imperfection; and it is, happily, possible to feel gratitude even where we discern a mistake that may have been injurious, the vehicle of the mistake being an affectionate intention prosecuted through a life-time of kindly offices. Deronda's feeling and judgment were strongly against the action of Sir Hugo in making himself the agent of a falsity - yes, a falsity: he could give no milder name to the concealment under which he had been reared. But the baronet had probably had no clear knowledge concerning the mother's breach of trust, and with his light, easy way of taking life, had held it a reasonable preference in her that her son should be made an English gentleman, seeing that she had the eccentricity of not caring to part from her child, and be to him as if she were not. Daniel's affectionate gratitude toward Sir Hugo made him wish to find grounds of excuse rather than blame; for it is as possible to be rigid in principle and tender in blame, as it is to suffer from the sight of things hung awry, and yet to be patient with the hanger who sees amiss. If Sir Hugo in his bachelorhood had been beguiled into regarding children chiefly as a product intended to make life more agreeable to the full-grown, whose convenience alone was to be consulted in the disposal of them - why, he had shared an assumption which, if not

formally avowed, was massively acted on at that date of the world's history; and Deronda, with all his keen memory of the painful inward struggle he had gone through in his boyhood, was able also to remember the many signs that his experience had been entirely shut out from Sir Hugo's conception. Ignorant kindness may have the effect of cruelty; but to be angry with it as if it were direct cruelty would be an ignorant *unkindness*, the most remote from Deronda's large imaginative lenience toward others. And perhaps now, after the searching scenes of the last ten days, in which the curtain had been lifted for him from the secrets of lives unlike his own, he was more than ever disposed to check that rashness of indignation or resentment which has an unpleasant likeness to the love of punishing. When he saw Sir Hugo's familiar figure descending from the railway carriage, the life-long affection which had been well accustomed to make excuses, flowed in and submerged all newer knowledge that might have seemed fresh ground for blame.

'Well, Dan,' said Sir Hugo, with a serious fervor, grasping Deronda's hand. He uttered no other words of greeting; there was too strong a rush of mutual consciousness. The next thing was to give orders to the courier, and then to propose walking slowly in, the mild evening, there being no hurry to get to the hotel.

'I have taken my journey easily, and am in excellent condition,' he said, as he and Deronda came out under the starlight, which was still faint with the lingering sheen of day. 'I didn't hurry in setting off, because I wanted to inquire into things a little, and so I got sight of your letter to Lady Mallinger before I started. But now, how is the widow?'

'Getting calmer,' said Deronda. 'She seems to be escaping the bodily illness that one might have feared for her, after her plunge and terrible excitement. Her uncle and mother came two days ago, and she is being well taken care of.'

'Any prospect of an heir being born?'

'From what Mr Gascoigne said to me, I conclude not. He spoke as if it were a question whether the widow would have the estates for her life.'

'It will not be much of a wrench to her affections, I fancy, this loss of the husband?' said Sir Hugo, looking round at Deronda.

'The suddenness of the death has been a great blow to her,' said Deronda, quietly evading the question.

'I wonder whether Grandcourt gave her any notion what were the provisions of his will?' said Sir Hugo.

'Do you know what they are, sir?' parried Deronda.

'Yes, I do,' said the baronet, quickly. 'Gad! if there is no prospect of a legitimate heir, he has left everything to a boy he had by a Mrs. Glasher; you know nothing about the affair, I suppose, but she was a sort of wife to him for a good many years, and there are three older children - girls. The boy is to take his father's name; he is Henleigh already, and he is to be Henleigh Mallinger Grandcourt. The Mallinger will be of no use to him, I am happy to say; but the young dog will have more than enough with his fourteen years' minority - no need to have had holes filled up with my fifty thousand for Diplow that he had no right to: and meanwhile my beauty, the young widow, is to put up with a poor two thousand a year and the house at Gadsmere - a nice kind of banishment for her if she chose to shut herself up there, which I don't think she will. The boy's mother has been living there of late years. I'm perfectly disgusted with Grandcourt. I don't know that I'm obliged to think the better of him because he's drowned, though, so far as my affairs are concerned, nothing in his life became him like the leaving it.'

'In my opinion he did wrong when he married this wife - not in leaving his estates to the son,' said Deronda, rather dryly.

'I say nothing against his leaving the land to the lad,' said Sir Hugo; 'but since he had married this girl he ought to have given her a handsome provision, such as she could live on in a style fitted to the rank he had raised her to. She ought to have had four or five thousand a year and the London house for her life; that's what I should have done for her. I suppose, as she was penniless, her friends couldn't stand out for a settlement, else it's ill trusting to the will a man may make after he's married. Even a wise man generally lets some folly ooze out of him in his will - my father did, I know; and if a fellow has any spite or tyranny in him, he's likely to bottle off a good deal for keeping in that sort of document. It's quite clear Grandcourt meant that his death should put an extinguisher on his wife, if she bore him no heir.'

'And, in the other case, I suppose everything would have been reversed - illegitimacy would have had the extinguisher?' said Deronda, with some scorn.

'Precisely - Gadsmere and the two thousand. It's queer. One nuisance is that Grandcourt has made me an executor; but seeing he was the son of my only brother, I can't refuse to act. And I shall mind it less if I can be of any use to the widow. Lush thinks she was not in ignorance about the family under the rose, and the purport of the will. He hints that there was no very good understanding between the couple. But I fancy you are the man who knew most about what Mrs.

Grandcourt felt or did not feel - eh, Dan?' Sir Hugo did not put this question with his usual jocoseness, but rather with a lowered tone of interested inquiry; and Deronda felt that any evasion would be misinterpreted. He answered gravely -

'She was certainly not happy. They were unsuited to each other. But as to the disposal of the property - from all I have seen of her, I should predict that she will be quite contented with it.'

'Then she is not much like the rest of her sex; that's all I can say,' said Sir Hugo, with a slight shrug. 'However, she ought to be something extraordinary, for there must be an entanglement between your horoscope and hers - eh? When that tremendous telegram came, the first thing Lady Mallinger said was, 'How very strange that it should be Daniel who sends it!' But I have had something of the same sort in my own life. I was once at a foreign hotel where a lady had been left by her husband without money. When I heard of it, and came forward to help her, who should she be but an early flame of mine, who had been fool enough to marry an Austrian baron with a long mustache and short affection? But it was an affair of my own that called me there - nothing to do with knight-errantry, any more than you coming to Genoa had to do with the Grandcourts.'

There was silence for a little while. Sir Hugo had begun to talk of the Grandcourts as the less difficult subject between himself and Deronda; but they were both wishing to overcome a reluctance to perfect frankness on the events which touched their relation to each other. Deronda felt that his letter, after the first interview with his mother, had been rather a thickening than a breaking of the ice, and that he ought to wait for the first opening to come from Sir Hugo. Just when they were about to lose sight of the port, the baronet turned, and pausing as if to get a last view, said in a tone of more serious feeling - 'And about the main business of your coming to Genoa, Dan? You have not been deeply pained by anything you have learned, I hope? There is nothing that you feel need change your position in any way? You know, whatever happens to you must always be of importance to me.'

'I desire to meet your goodness by perfect confidence, sir,' said Deronda. 'But I can't answer those questions truly by a simple yes or no. Much that I have heard about the past has pained me. And it has been a pain to meet and part with my mother in her suffering state, as I have been compelled to do, But it is no pain - it is rather a clearing up of doubts for which I am thankful, to know my parentage. As to the effect on my position, there will be no change in my gratitude to you, sir, for the fatherly care and affection you have always shown me. But to know that I was born a Jew, may have a momentous influence on my life, which I am hardly able to tell you of at present.'

Deronda spoke the last sentence with a resolve that overcame some diffidence. He felt that the differences between Sir Hugo's nature and his own would have, by-and-by, to disclose themselves more markedly than had ever yet been needful. The baronet gave him a quick glance, and turned to walk on. After a few moments' silence, in which he had reviewed all the material in his memory which would enable him to interpret Deronda's words, he said -

'I have long expected something remarkable from you, Dan; but, for God's sake, don't go into any eccentricities! I can tolerate any man's difference of opinion, but let him tell it me without getting himself up as a lunatic. At this stage of the world, if a man wants to be taken seriously, he must keep clear of melodrama. Don't misunderstand me. I am not suspecting you of setting up any lunacy on your own account. I only think you might easily be led arm in arm with a lunatic, especially if he wanted defending. You have a passion for people who are pelted, Dan. I'm sorry for them too; but so far as company goes, it's a bad ground of selection. However, I don't ask you to anticipate your inclination in anything you have to tell me. When you make up your mind to a course that requires money, I have some sixteen thousand pounds that have been accumulating for you over and above what you have been having the interest of as income. And now I am come, I suppose you want to get back to England as soon as you can?'

'I must go first to Mainz to get away a chest of my grandfather's, and perhaps to see a friend of his,' said Deronda. 'Although the chest has been lying there these twenty years, I have an unreasonable sort of nervous eagerness to get it away under my care, as if it were more likely now than before that something might happen to it. And perhaps I am the more uneasy, because I lingered after my mother left, instead of setting out immediately. Yet I can't regret that I was here - else Mrs. Grandcourt would have had none but servants to act for her.'

'Yes, yes,' said Sir Hugo, with a flippancy which was an escape of some vexation hidden under his more serious speech; 'I hope you are not going to set a dead Jew above a living Christian.'

Deronda colored, and repressed a retort. They were just turning into the *Italia*.