

PITCHERY - BIDGERY.

The Turnings of the Long, Long Lane.

BY MONSIEUR DEMOULIN.

CHAPTER XXXII.

FLIGHT.

The last entry in Beatrice's journal was made by her in the hope that it might be the last. In her life at Brandon Hall her soul had grown stronger and more serene. Besides, it had not come to this, that henceforth she must either stay and accept the punishment which they might contrive or fly instantly.

For she had dared them to their faces; she had told them of her crimes; she had threatened punishment. She had said that she was the avenger of Despard, and she had desired instant death she could have said no more than that. Would they pass it by? She knew that the secret of her secrets; she had proclaimed it to their faces. She had called Potts a Thug and disowned him as her father.

But one thing—light and this she was fully resolved to try. She prepared nothing. The need of money was all she thought of; nor if it had been would it have made any difference. She could not have obtained it. The one idea in her mind was therefore flight. She had concealed her journal under a loose piece of the flooring in one of the closets of her room, being unwilling to encumber herself with it, and in the result of a search in case she was captured.

She made no other preparations whatever. A light hat and thin jacket were all that she took to resist the chill air of March. There was a fever in her veins which was heightened by excitement and suspense. Mrs. Compton was in her room during the evening. Beatrice said but little. Mrs. Compton talked generally about a few topics on which she generally spoke. She never dared talk about the affairs of the house.

Beatrice was not impatient for she had no idea of trying to escape before midnight. She sat quietly while Mrs. Compton talked or prosed, absorbed in her own thoughts and plans. The hours seemed to her interminable. Slowly and heavily she dragged on. Beatrice's suspense and excitement grew every moment. She seemed to have a violent effort that a closer observer than Mrs. Compton would have failed to detect any emotion.

At last, about ten o'clock, Mrs. Compton retired, with many kind wishes to Beatrice and many anxious inquiries after her health. Beatrice listened patiently, and made some general remarks, after which Mrs. Compton withdrew.

She stood despairing. Only one way was now left and that lay through the hall-door itself. Suddenly, as she stood there, she heard footsteps coming down the long hall straight toward her. There was not the slightest chance of concealment here. There were no pillars, she beheld which she might crouch. She must stand, then, and take the consequences. Or, rather, would it not be better to walk forward and meet the new comer? Yes, that would do.

She determined to do so. So, with a quiet, slow step she walked back through the long corridor. About half-way she met the other. He stopped and started back. "Miss Potts!" he exclaimed in surprise. "It is the voice of Philips." "Ah, Philips," she said, quietly, "I am walking about for exercise and amusement. I cannot sleep. Don't be startled. It's only me."

Philips stood like one paralyzed. "Don't be cast down," he said at last in a trembling voice. "You have friends, powerful friends. What do you mean?" asked Beatrice, in wonder. "Never mind," said Philips mysteriously. "It will be all right. I dare not tell. But cheer up."

"What do you mean by friends?" "You have friends who are more powerful than I am," said Philips, hurriedly. "Clear up." Beatrice wondered. A vague thought of Brandon came over her mind, but she dismissed it at once. Yet the thought gave her a delicious joy, and at once dispelled the extreme agitation which had thus far disturbed her. Could Philips be in communication with him? Was he in reality conspirator about her while shaping the course of his gloomy vengeance? These were thoughts which flashed across her mind as she stood.

"I don't understand," said she at last. "But I hope it may be as you say. God knows, I am not a coward." She walked away, and Philips also went on. She walked slowly, until at last his steps died in the distance. Then a door opened. Evidently she had nothing to fear from him. At last she reached the main hall, and stopped for a moment. The light from the dining-room was still flashing out through the door. The grand entrance lay before her. There was the door of the hall, the door of the dining-room, the door of the parlor, the door of the study, the door of the library, the door of the billiard-room, the door of the smoking-room, the door of the sitting-room, the door of the breakfast-room, the door of the kitchen, the door of the scullery, the door of the larder, the door of the cellar, the door of the attic, the door of the roof.

At last, through utter weakness and weariness she sank down. Despair came over her. She could do no more.



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