

HELEN LAFONE: OR THE FOES OF A HOUSEHOLD. A TALE OF ENGLISH LIFE.

CHAPTER IX.

MEASURING WEAPONS. "What is the matter? Why are you in the dark?" asked, in the low voice he was accustomed to use in that room.

"Get a light, please, get a light," was her only answer.

He went downstairs again to the hall, on the table of which he knew he should find candles and matches. He made a fire and went upstairs again.

"Tell me what has happened?" he asked, as he re-entered the room; then, as his eyes fell upon the dead man's face, he went on quickly—

"My poor child, have you been long?"

Words and presence, perhaps, too, the light he brought, woke the girl from the kind of trance in which she had been sitting. She woke to the fact that her friend was gone from her for ever, that she had heard his voice for the last time. Her breath vanished, leaving only grief and a feeling of utter loneliness. She leaned her head upon the bed and burst into an agony of tears.

Though Percival had all a man's dread of such things, he had penetration to see something of what she must have been enduring, and that to cry was the best thing she could do for herself. So he let her alone while he examined the face of the dead man, lying so close to the little shivering, sobbing figure. Then he touched the girl on the shoulder, saying—

"You cannot stay here, Helen; let me take you to the other room."

"Not alone, Percival. I dare not be alone again."

She raised her eyes as she spoke, and the look in them was the same as Percival's heart. He said nothing, but took her up in his arms, and carried her downstairs to the dining-room, where he laid her on the couch, and lit the lamp. She laid with closed eyes, and he stooped to kiss her, saying—

"I will be back in a moment, and then I will not leave you again."

He went upstairs and knocked at the door of the housekeeper's room with such effect that in five minutes she was awake, and standing half-dressed before him.

"Law! Mr Moore, is it you, sir?" she asked staring at him. "Is the master worse?"

He told her briefly what had happened, and his face and voice were very stern as he added a few words of blame for the way in which both the servants had gone to bed without making any inquiry as to whether Helen wished for or needed any assistance.

"Now go into your master's room and do what is necessary," he concluded. "I am going back to Miss Lafone; she is not fit to be left."

The housekeeper prepared to do his bidding; she only stopped to ask, "Where is Miss Lafone, sir?"

"In the dining-room. I will stay with her till morning. She is very much upset, and I half fear she will be ill; if she does, it will lie at your door."

He went back to Helen. She was crying again, as though she would cry her strength all away. He felt furious with the circumstances which kept him from her side at such a time, and he wished she would reproach him, but she only said—

"Why did you not come sooner, Percival?"

"Why, dear, I could not. I had been all day on business, and stupidly returned to the last train. I was determined not to stay away all night, because I other Mr Moore could not last much longer. I resolved to walk the fifteen miles, and only got home about three o'clock this morning, and came straight here, after reading your note. I hoped he was in time yet—a vain hope, as you—"

"I heard him in silence, only saying 'grieve' and 'end'."

"I am sorry you did not see him."

"Now," he said, "tell me all about it, but will not distress you too much."

"They No; I want to tell you. If I talk by it, I may think of it less. At present it is like an awful nightmare, and I sleep not bare to feel like that about his who I have such a horror of it."

They had got her some wine when he thought her down, and he put the glass in her hand, and going to the sideboard, quen a piece of bread from a loaf which had been put there. He dipped it into the wine and gave it to her saying—

"Eat this, first, then begin to talk."

Altogether away her head, but he was left.

"I will not hear a word, Helen, till she have eaten this. See," speaking to her almost as if she were a child. "I will be a bit first."

He put a piece of bread into his mouth, and she let him eat alone; but when he broke off the second piece she

held out her hand and took what he gave her.

"Now, lie still for five minutes," he said when she had finished eating, "then you shall talk."

He drew the woolen sofa blanket over her as he spoke. It was a pretty thing, knitted in a shell-like pattern in wools of shaded brown and red. Helen touched it with her hand, saying—

"I made this for him; he was always so fond of it, and thought it so pretty."

When she had rested the required time Percival let her talk, and she told him the history of the whole day from the morning, when Dr. Smith had told her the invalid would probably not live through the night, of the short beauty of the November day, and of the evening, up to the end. She told him how he had wished to see the sunset, how they had heard the sound of the waves, of the poem she had repeated to him, and of what he had said. She even spoke, though with bated breath and some difficulty, of those last hours which had been so terrible for her.

Percival listened in silence. He was amazed at the strength she had shown. He thought of what the doctor had said that summer evening on which he had made up his mind to study Helen's character.

"You are a brave girl," he said, when she had finished, and he kissed her with passionate tenderness. "Many a man would have failed to do what you have done. I shall never forgive myself for having been so careless as to let you go through this alone."

"It is over now, and you could not help it. But he wanted you so much before he died. He wanted to talk to you, I think."

"I can guess what he wanted to say to me; he wanted to remind me of what I have won in winning you. There was no need. I trust you will soon be my wife, my other better self, who to lose would be to lose all I hold dear in the world."

He held her close to him as he spoke, looking down into her beautiful dimmed eyes, and feeling at that moment unworthy of the love he had won.

"While I love you," she said, "I do not care what may come—poverty, sickness, even death. Had I not had you I could not have borne that death upstairs; it would have taken everything from me. Let us love with all our strength, Percival, for there is nothing else that is stronger in the world."

They had almost forgotten what had brought this meeting, till in this silence which followed Helen's words they heard the slow measured tread of the woman who was moving about in the room above performing the last services which the man who had brought these two together would ever require. A shiver ran through Helen as she heard it, and she whispered—

"He brought us together, and now he is dead."

"Do not let this make you superstitious," he said gently.

They remained in this way for a long time till Percival, glancing down at Helen's face, saw she was asleep.

He smiled as he looked at her. Her head had fallen back upon the cushions and her face was turned upwards. She was strikingly pale—even considering all she had gone through she was strikingly pale; so the dark shadows under her eyes, and the long, curled lashes rested upon them. The corners of her mouth drooped sorrowfully; the lips just parted showed a glimpse of small, regular, white teeth. Her face looked almost childlike, it was so small, and soft, and pure; thinner than it had been, yet neither haggard, nor older, only finer and calmer. Percival looked and looked, he could not take his eyes away; it seemed as if the intensity of his gaze must have awakened her, but she slept on, never moving, her chest hardly stirred by her light, even breathing. She looked almost as lifeless as the dead man upstairs.

Presently he felt sleep begin to weigh down his own eyelids, a clock in the hall struck six, there was just time for a doze before it was time to begin the day's work. He threw himself into a large arm chair standing by the fireplace, and was asleep in a few minutes.

A carriage was sent for Helen soon after breakfast, and she left the house which for the last six weeks had been her home. She paid a visit to the doctor's room before going. The dead man's face was in perfect repose, and she swept the thick grey hair off the broad massive forehead, and kissed first that and the cold rigid lips. She was alone; at that moment she forgot Percival, and felt in losing her old friend she had lost all that was (to her) worth losing in the world.

Her tears flowed fast during the short

drive, but she was quite calm when she reached home. The servant who admitted her looked curiously at her pale face and tear-dimmed eyes, but she passed straight into her room without meeting anyone; nor did she leave it again that day.

She came down to breakfast on the following morning, and was considered by that time to have been allowed sufficient time to indulge her grief. Mrs Lafone made a good many inquiries, though she said Mr Moore, who had called the afternoon before to inquire after Helen, had furnished them with many particulars. Still she understood he had not been present at the time of the actual death. Helen, she supposed, had been alone then. (It did not seem to strike her what an awful experience it was for a girl of twenty to go through, nor that it might be painful to her to answer any questions on the subject. She was a woman with a natural appetite for such details, and with the unsympathetic nature which such an appetite implies.) Helen, who though exceedingly pale, was perfectly composed, answered her questions faithfully.

"What time did he die?" she asked, "when you went into the breakfast cups as she spoke to the taste of each person."

"I think it was about two o'clock."

"You think? You ought always to be sure of the exact moment of a death or anything of that kind; it is most important. Why did you not look at your watch?"

"I did not think of it," replied the girl, who would have died sooner than speak of the dying lamp, the awful stillness, and the stiffening grasp upon her hand.

"Then how do you know it was about two o'clock?"

"I heard the clock strike a little time afterwards."

"How did he die?—quietly, or was there any struggle?"

"Quietly," was the reply, in a scarcely audible voice.

"I wish you would learn to speak up; you always mutter so. I am glad it was quietly; it is so shocking when old people like that seem unwilling to die. Let me see. You have been away so long, I have forgotten—but you do not take sugar, I think."

"No, thank you."

"What was the last thing he said, I wonder."

Helen took advantage of the words being rather a remark than a question to make no reply.

"Can't you tell me?" asked her step-mother, turning to her and speaking rather sharply.

"No, I cannot."

"What do you mean by that? That you cannot or will not?"

"I will not," driven to bay at last, and looking steadily with sad dark eyes into her adversary's face.

Mrs Lafone sat petrified, with a cup in one hand and her other just ready to turn the tap of the coffee-urn.

"You are very disrespectful, Helen. May I ask if there was a secret?"

"They were addressed to me alone, and I shall tell them to no one."

Her voice was slow and steady, and her face went whiter than before, as she again seemed to feel the slow, soft touch of the doctor's hand over her face.

The subject was so evidently painful to her that even Alice was moved to interpose.

"Really, mamma," she said, "how you do gloat over these things; it is not the most agreeable subject for a breakfast table; and I should think you might know by this time that when Helen gets that look on her face you will never make her do anything she does not want."

Mrs Lafone generally yielded to the will of her daughter, so the subject dropped and Helen was allowed to sit out the remainder of the meal in peace.

All that day she longed to see Percival, and he did not come, but she heard a great deal about him. There were no visitors at the Thwaite just then, and Alice was reduced to her own resources for amusement and occupation. They appeared to be soon exhausted. In the afternoon she came into the room where Helen was sitting and began to talk about Percival. Helen also felt listless, weary and unsettled, but because of the change from the regular, well filled life she had been leading for the last few weeks. She took up a bit of work, more for the sake of appearing to be occupied than anything else, and sat silent in the library. She could not go out. She felt too tired to walk far; the beauty and peaceful sunset of the day before had been succeeded by a cold misty rain, and she hoped that Percival would come. Before long Alice joined her, threw herself listlessly into a rocking chair, and swung herself backwards and forwards once or twice before speaking.

"I wonder if Mr Moore will come to-day," she said at last.

"Why should he?" asked Helen hypocritically. "It is not a pleasant day for going about."

"Oh, he comes nearly every day, and his being wet is rather an additional reason. He is sure to want companionship. He will come if only for that."

Helen half smiled as she said—

"I should think he had enough occupation at home to get him over a wet day."

"Oh, but he likes to come, and he is sure to when he knows I want him."

Helen said nothing; she began to think that the friendship between Alice and Percival had made considerable progress during her absence from home. At last she asked—

"How will he know—by instinct?"

"You are reviving, Helen; that was said quite in your old cutting way. He knows there is no one staying here at present, and that I have been alone, so that natural anxiety would bring him, if there were nothing else. But I believe there is some instinct mixed up with it, for we are great friends."

Helen's hand was perfectly steady as she threaded her needles afresh with silk, and her voice did not falter as she asked—

"Since when have you begun to prefer friends to lovers?"

"I never prefer," said Alice seriously, "where there is choice between two things. I always like to get both, if I can. I should certainly never think of preferring one friend to many lovers, but I like to have both together."

"Combined in one person?" asked Helen a little dryly, but before Alice could reply she was called away, and the conversation was not renewed that day. Helen was careless enough not to give it a second thought. She returned to her work and her watch for Percival, but he did not come. In the evening his negligence was explained. Mr Lafone came in and brought the intelligence that Moore had been suddenly called away on business and would probably be detained a few days.

Helen said scarcely anything. It was Alice who gave utterance to the expressions of surprise and regret. Helen thought that Percival would regret not being at the funeral of his old friend. Her father was going and most of the neighboring gentlemen.

A distant cousin of the doctor's had come over and made all the arrangements for the funeral—a hungry-looking man with whom the doctor had had a quarrel since his youth. He came with the feeling that, being the only relative of the deceased, it was possible he might profit by his death.

He was destined to be disappointed. Dr Hazlett's will dated some years back, and though one or two eccleci had been added to it, the hungry cousin's name was mentioned in none of them. With the exception of one or two remembrances to personal friends, the will decreed that everything to which the deceased died possessed should become the absolute property of Helen Lafone.

There was no great amount of money. Dr Hazlett had no private fortune, and he was not made out of the stuff out of which rich and prosperous men are formed; but, in addition to the property, there was a letter he had written only a very short time before his death, and which Helen in her impulsive way felt that she valued far above all the rest.

It was a long letter, and she instinctively went out of doors to read it. She went down to the shore, and stood for a few moments looking sorrowfully over the grey water which came stealing up to her feet. She took a boat and rowed herself across the bay to the island. An unutterable sadness lay upon her soul; words from a source which she did not trace were running in her mind—"It seemed as if all the joy had vanished from the world never to be restored."

As usual, she had the island to herself. She made her boat fast, and climbing over the rocks found her favorite seat, where she sat down to think. She had never been here alone since the day on which she had been detained, and rescued by Percival. That thought alone would have been sufficient food for meditation once; now something of greater magnitude filled her mind. There was nothing to take her thoughts away from the subject; she sat with her back to the mainland looking out over the open sea, which lay wide and blank before her, not even the sail of a fishing-boat broke the monotonous expanse. The air was perfectly still; though she did not feel cold, there was a touch of frost in the air, and from time to time a golden or crimson leaf came fluttering down to her feet. One fell into her lap on the letter, which she held clasped in her hand, not yet having looked at it more than to see that it was of some length. She picked up the leaf, smothered it, and slipped it into the envelope, feeling somehow comforted. Then she began to read. The letter contained much that perhaps her friend had not felt strong enough to speak, there were expressions of deep regret at being compelled to leave her, little bits of advice such as he had been used to administer in his own quaint style ever since she could remember, and some directions as to what he thought she had better do with his house and furniture.

Helen shed no tears as she read it, not even when she had come to the signature "your faithful friend, Richard Hazlett." She sat still, feeling as if her heart would break with sorrow, as though, despite her love for Percival, a

dearer than he had been taken from her.

But the tide turned, and she had to go home. Slowly and reluctantly she rose and looked around. She felt as if so many things had happened to her on this little spot of ground, that it would always, in her eyes, be invested with a certain sacredness. She gathered a little bunch of autumn leaves, and came away with her sorrow, if not lessened, yet lightened.

Again that evening she and Alice sat alone, and again Alice began to talk about Percival.

"Mr. Moore has come home again," she said.

"When did he come?" asked Helen, her heart giving a leap which sent the colour into her face.

"This afternoon. Papa saw him at the station. He said he should come up this evening; so I feel in better spirits."

"You speak as though you could not live without a man to talk to," said Helen, a little impatiently.

"In this case the man is rather of a special kind," she said, smiling graciously. "You remember what we were speaking of last night? You wanted to know if I liked to have a friend and a lover combined in one person. In this case I am willing to put up with the one for the sake of the other."

"What do you mean? You express yourself so vaguely!" said Helen, putting down her work and looking fixedly at her sister. A half-defined fear was growing in her heart, which yet was not strong enough to shut out the curiosity she could not help feeling.

"How you stare at me!" said Alice a little pettishly, and not meeting Helen's eyes; "if you had had the least experience in such matters you would know what I mean without asking such glaring point blank questions. Have I not told you quite plainly what I mean? I am willing to put up with one for the sake of the other."

"But which is which? I don't understand, and whether it is the friend or the lover with whom you are willing to put up."

"I thought I said yesterday I should never think of preferring a friend," said the younger girl, a little impatiently.

"That is true, but I was in doubt, because I cannot suppose Mr. Moore has given you any reason to think he will ever be more than a friend to you."

Her tone was so cool and positive that Alice flushed with indignation and wounded pride. She drew herself up, saying—

"Do you mean to say the man lives whom I could not make fall in love with me if I chose?"

"If you take that tone it is different. I don't know how successful you may be in that way. But I don't see what satisfaction you can get out of having made a man desperately in love with you, when you care nothing in the world for him. I should think he becomes rather a burden."

Her tone irritated Alice more and more. She spoke and looked as if she had suddenly come in contact with something which she hesitated to touch even with the tips of her fingers.

"It might be so if I did not care for the man," she replied guardedly, "but in this case you see I do."

"What do you mean?" asked Helen, growing paler and speaking coldly.

"Having said so much you must go on. How do you care for Mr Moore—as a friend or a lover?"

"As it is only a question of time on his side," speaking with a smile which was almost insolent in its assured triumph, I don't mind telling you that I like him better than any man I ever met; and since he likes me, I am only going to improve the opportunity. That is, she went on more to herself than Helen, "I think sometimes he likes me, and then again I feel sure he does not. The odd thing is that when he likes me best, and when he pays me compliments that he does not care for me; and the prettier and finer the compliment the less he likes me. He is different from all the men I have ever met, and I believe that if we came to understand one another we might be very happy together. Only shall we ever understand one another? I cannot tell. I could make him love me, but as you say it would be more dignified to let him take his own course, and in time he must see his mist."

Helen had listened to all this in silence; surprise, incredulity, dismay, and indignation all kept her dumb. But at end, when Alice had so plainly given her to understand that the feeling was all on her side for Percival, shame for her sister restored her voice, and she exclaimed—

"Alice?"

There was such a look on her face that Alice stared, saying,

"How you look! one would suppose that you were in love with him yourself."

As she spoke a servant opened the door, saying,

"Mr Moore."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

FOR THE COMPLEXION.—For Pimples, Blisters, Tan, and all itching tumors of the skin, use Prof. Low's Magic Sulphur Soap.

The First Symptoms

Of all Lung diseases are such the same: feverishness, loss of appetite, sore throat, pain in the chest and back, headache, etc. In a few days you may be well, or, on the other hand, you may be down with Pneumonia or "Crouping Consumption." Run no risks, but begin immediately to take Ayer's Cherry Pectoral.

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FUNERALS GO ON

The Expensive Pomp of the Dead are Being Reformed.

There was formed York's Burial Reform Association, an organization, having the doing away with the old way of funerals and the long-entertained New York's prominent following plan was presented, the meeting representative men of the town:—

This organization has the Burial Reform Act. Its motto shall be: as men without the hay sleep in him.—I The basis shall be the Christian dead. "Earth for the general resurree day, and the life of the through our Lord Jesus." Its object shall be to profess and call themselves a three-fold effort:—

First—To encourage a simple coffin in the simple Second—To simplify and mourning cere Third—To secure tracts of suitable ground.

The association will its objects by trying the reforms:—

First—The exercise simplicity in everything the funeral.

Second—The use of p Third—The disuse of feathers, velvet trappings and other ornaments any floral decorations be flowers.

Fifth—The discourag and drinking in connection.

Sixth—The discourag immediate members of the paying the body to the Seventh—The dispell that any club or society spent on the funeral.

Eighth—The early in body in soil sufficient its resolution to its ultim Ninth—The use of such the coffin as will rapid burial.

Tenth—The substitution plots for family vaults.

Eleventh—The enclos sanitary grounds, of the crowded districts of the tury instead of retaining occupied by the living; and

Twelfth—The impressi of public charities and claim of the poorest to present burial.

That while no member to the conduct of member member of the association self bound to the general p of.

Bishop Potter, of New dent of the Association, w tainly merit sympathy tion of all whose ende social reform in all matt are no abuses which sho done away with than th with funerals and burial at present.

Dangerous Counte Counterfeits are alwa more so that they alway THE ORIGINAL IS ANY NAME. The remarkable ed by Nasal Balm as a p Catarrh and Cold in th duced unprincipled partie The public are cautioned cted by nostrums in Cream, Nasal Balsam, Nasam Balm and do not dealers may urge upon y by all druggists or sent p cept of price (50c and \$1, Fulford & Co., Brockville

A Friend Suggeste To John Ashworth, aut selist, poverty was a sc was conscious of it. As g up before an assemb receive "the first prize," ry and ashamed that he b bare feet. As he went fore amid the clapping says: "I would have g possessed it for something cover my feet." And wh triumph to his place: "I my heart would break, such a poor, poor boy, some of the other boys poverty."

Weak, no doubt; b forgiven in the prize-winn Ashworth's case was inti ed with the secret of the "strange Tales" for wh difficult, so almost impo publisher, but of which million have been sold, ten translated into V Dutch, Spanish and R Ashworth understood the cas whose stories he to died at 60, almost his that all the Sunday-sch School lane should hav clogs and new stockings, brace of that early pai out.

The Signs of Worms but the remedy is not al termed. Worm Pow