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THE DAVENANTS.

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CHAPTER VI.

WALTER AVENELL.

Winter had set in with more than its usual severity and the delicate constitution of Mr. Davenant made him feel keenly the rigour of a Canadian climate. December with the Christmas festival that marks its close had come and gone. The old year having performed its allotted part on the rapidly revolving wheel of time had, with the many preceding it, fled into the never-to-be-revisited region of the past, and a new period, the year 1837, memorable in Canadian history, dawned drearily upon the snow-covered wastes and ice-bound rivers of this part of the western continent.

The professional skill of Dr. Seymour made him aware that a fatal disease was making slow but sure inroads upon Mr. Davenant's constitution and he saw the time not very far distant when, again confined to a sick bed, he would be unable to labour for the support of his family, and a plan to meet this emergency presented itself to the mind of the kind and somewhat eccentric physician. He perceived his nephew's attachment to Miss Davenant, and as he knew that a marriage with him would place her in a position to afford a comfortable home to her father and blind sister he determined with characteristic bluntness to break the delicate subject to Emily. Lascelles yielding to a fit of despair at her coldness had abruptly concluded his visit at Dr. Seymour's and returned to his home near St. John's. The turn that the affair seemed likely to take alarmed the Doctor and urged his interference. Therefore taking advantage of a favourable opportunity he communicated to Emily his fears relative to her father's health, dwelling on the possibility of prolonging his life if he had the means of passing the winter in a warmer climate, and delicately hinting that she ought not to refuse the hand of Eugene Lascelles or the wealth which a marriage with him offered her. A flush of embarrassment rose to Emily's temples. She was not ignorant of Eugene's attachment although he had never spoken to her on the subject, but women learn those things intuitively.

"Has Mr. Lascelles commissioned you to—"

"Pop the question for him," interrupted the Doctor. "Not exactly, although it wouldn't be a bad plan, by George! the fellow is confoundedly bashful. He has more than his share of English reserve. But he has expressed the wishes on this matter, and regretted the frigidity of your manner, which left him so little reason to hope. If you would only thaw a little, Emily, he would take courage and soon come to the point. He's not a bad fellow, I assure you, although he wasn't in the way when beauty was sharing. But handsome men don't make the best of husbands, they are generally spoilt by admiration before marriage and expect too much submission and adulation from the poor women they have condescended to select for companions through life. At the best it must be confessed there are more blanks drawn in the matrimonial lottery than prizes, but I do think whoever gets Eugene Lascelles will get a kind unselfish husband, and that is what falls to the lot of few of the unfortunate daughters of Eve."

"You do not speak very encouragingly of matrimony," observed Emily smiling. "You, at least, have won a prize in that lottery, Doctor."

"So I have! and I thank God for it!" said Dr. Seymour fervently. "Hermine is a wife in a thousand, and believe me her nephew Eugene is one of the right kind of men calculated to make a woman happy in spite of his ugly phiz."

The Doctor now abruptly changed the conversation, thinking he had said enough to make an impression and give Emily something to think about. His remarks about her father's health confirmed her worst fears. His troublesome cough had filled her with alarm. She thought with dismay of their destitute condition when ill-health would oblige him to resign his present situation. Poverty was again looming up in the distance looking gloomy and uninviting. Then this marriage with Lascelles presented itself to her mind so desirable in a worldly point of view, yet Emily shrank from its contemplation. Not that she felt any aversion to her devoted admirer; on the contrary his attachment to herself had won her gratitude and disposed her to esteem him for his amiable qualities, but as she had no heart to give she hesitated, from principle, to encourage his attentions. Some years before in her own distant land she had known and loved one every way worthy

of a woman's love. For Walter Avenell she felt a depth of affection which would never die out of her heart—an affection which had been fully reciprocated. An engagement had bound them still closer to each other, but their marriage was postponed to an indefinite period, for Avenell was only a poor clerk in a mercantile house in Liverpool with a salary wholly inadequate for the support of a family. At length a brighter prospect opened before them, Avenell was sent by his employers to India to transact some business of importance with the promise that his salary should be considerably increased. The memory of that parting with her betrothed was often present with Emily, rolling in upon her mind a wave of bitterest regret, but then a sweet hope had mingled with the pain of their separation gilding the future with rainbow tints. Time passed on, Walter was detained in India much longer than he expected. At length he wrote to say he would soon embark for England as he had nearly finished the business transactions of his employers. That letter was received a few months before the Davenants immigrated to Canada, and since its arrival Emily had heard no more from him. It was supposed he was lost at sea, the ship in which he intended to sail for England was never heard of. His name was among the list of passengers, so there was no reason to hope he had escaped the sad fate of others. Emily believed he had gone down to his grave in the pitiless waters, but her love for him remained strong as ever, and it was the remembrance of this loved one still haunting "the greenest spot on memory's waste" which made her receive so coldly the attentions of Lascelles. Notwithstanding the worldly advantages of the marriage she would never have consented to it if only herself were concerned, but the idea that it would enable her to provide a home for her father was a temptation too powerful for her filial affection to resist. She therefore resolved no longer to repel the attentions of Lascelles, determining to crush back every cherished remembrance of past happiness.

CHAPTER VII.

DR. DELAMARE AGAIN.

"We are going to a ball at St. John's, Emily! The Seymours intend to take us. How delightful it will be!" exclaimed Georgina Davenant rushing into the sitting-room one morning after returning from a visit to their kind friends in St. James's Street.

"At St. John's on the other side of the river! how are we to get there, the distance is considerable."

"The doctor's sleigh will hold four, and he says travelling now is excellent. The ball is a public affair. We are to stop at an hotel. Only think what a delightful trip it will be!"

"The sleigh drive will be pleasant enough, and I dare say you will enjoy the ball. When does it take place?" asked Emily.

"On Thursday, and we shall have little enough time to prepare. What shall you wear. You'll have to dress well you know."

"A white muslin tastefully trimmed would be a suitable dress for you and me."

"For you, if it pleases your simple taste, but I shall have something more stylish," remarked Georgina. "A pink silk would, I think, look elegant trimmed with white lace," she added after a thoughtful pause.

"Rather too expensive. Consider papa's straitened means," urged the eldest sister.

"Always harping on that one word—economy!" observed Georgina peevishly. "If I cannot appear at the ball in becoming costume I shall not go at all."

A ring at the door was now heard. The next minute the servant entered and placed on the table a large parcel. Georgina seized it eagerly.

"Give me a pair of scissors to cut this provoking knot, Emily! You are always sure to get the cord into a knot when you want to untie a parcel in a hurry."

The parcel was soon opened, displaying to the eyes of the delighted Georgina two dress patterns of rich though delicate texture. A note from Mrs. Seymour requested her young friends' acceptance of the accompanying ball-dresses.

"Was anything ever so *à propos*! Now I shall appear to advantage," exclaimed the excited Georgina.

"How kind and thoughtful of Mrs. Seymour!" was her sister's grateful observation.

Early in the afternoon of Thursday Dr. Seymour's sleigh drew up before the Davenants' house. The young ladies were ready—Georgina on the *qui vive* of expectation. The trunk containing their ball costume was carefully stowed away and they themselves seated comfortably in the luxurious equipage, the spirited horses then dashing through St. Antoine and Notre Dame Streets, took the road across the ice-bound river in the direction of Laprairie. No magnificent bridge in those days spanned the St. Lawrence, and no railroad afforded a rapid means of travel between Montreal and St. John's. The pure frosty air was exhilarating, Emily felt its influence; the novelty of the scene—the wide-extended country robed in snow glittering in the sun-

light—made her enjoy the drive exceedingly. As the day waned and the setting sun clad in roseate and violet hues the waste of untrodden snow, the landscape assumed new beauty. Then, as the bright luminary sank beneath the horizon, a crescent moon presented its radiant bow in the clear depths of ether, mingling its soft beams with the twilight, thus seeming to prolong the evening. The ball at St. John's was well attended. Persons had come from Montreal and other places, and the hotels were so crowded that Dr. Seymour's party with difficulty found accommodation. At the door of the ball-room they encountered Eugene Lascelles.

"What a fortunate *rencontre*!" exclaimed Dr. Seymour gaily. "Here, Eugene, take one of these fair ladies off my hands! I felt quite at a loss what to do with Miss Davenant; your aunt and Georgina have taken possession of both my arms. Were it not for your appearing she would have been obliged to enter the ball-room pioneering the way for us or else bringing up the rear. She is, I am sure, quite delighted to see you," the doctor added with an arch smile at Emily.

"And it gives me very great pleasure to be in any way of use," said Eugene, eagerly offering his arm to Miss Davenant, who to his surprise showed none of her usual coldness nor unwillingness to accept his attentions.

The ball-room was large and tastefully decorated with a profusion of evergreens and banners, and the scene was strikingly gay and pleasing. The *début* of Emily Davenant in the crowded room was almost unnoticed, for although in her elegant ball costume she looked remarkably well, still her appearance was not calculated to produce a sensation. A few there were indeed who noticed the graceful-looking stranger, and whose eyes dwelt admiringly on the intellectual face, wearing its calm, sweet beauty of expression. Not such was Georgina's Davenant's reception in the gay assembly. A murmur of admiration greeted her entrance, and every eye followed her distinguished figure in admiring wonder as she promenaded the room leaning on the arm of a young officer, who immediately sought an introduction to her from Dr. Seymour.

"Ciel! what a beauty!" exclaimed one of a knot of fashionable young men who were gathered near one of the entrance doors. "Who is she? where did she come from?" he asked eagerly.

"From the clouds! as nothing so resplendent can be of earth or perishable elements." Look, Delamare!" the speaker added, addressing a gentleman who at this moment entered the room: "look at this magnificent creature who has just burst upon our dazzled view! What rare beauty! a style so exquisite!"

The start of surprise, the crimson tide rushing to the brow, and the sudden joy flashing from the dark eyes, showed the emotion experienced by Dr. Delamare as he saw once more Georgina Davenant. This emotion did not pass unnoticed by the little group.

"Ciel, how he blushes!" exclaimed one.

"You know her then? where did you get acquainted?" asked another.

"We came out in the same ship from England," was the unwilling response.

"Ah, *mon ami*! and does madame know of this interesting little event?" inquired a third with a smile of peculiar meaning.

Dr. Delamare vouchsafed no reply, and the next moment he stood beside Georgina Davenant. With a thrill of joy she recognised that well-known voice as he addressed her in low tremulous tones, but save the heightened colour she met him without any apparent emotion. Pride forbade any demonstration of pleasure at meeting one who she keenly felt had treated her with neglect. The coldness of her manner sent a chill of disappointment to the heart of Delamare; the radiant look caused by the happiness of this unexpected meeting died out of his face. Georgina noticed its altered expression, and a smile of triumph parted her chiselled lips. Intuitively she felt that the love he had professed for her during their voyage across the Atlantic still burned deeply on the altar of his heart. Whatever had caused his absence since he left her in Quebec, she felt assured it was not a want of devotion to herself. Delamare was making inquiries about her family when the officer on whose arm Georgina was still leaning claimed her hand for a quadrille just forming, and they joined the dancers, while Delamare stood apart watching in evident admiration her graceful movements, and as soon as her partner led her to a seat he was again at her side.

An interesting conversation now ensued, in which Georgina learned with secret joy that he had been absent from Canada since he bade her adieu at Quebec; the sick relative whose illness had hurried him away having been ordered to Saratoga for the benefit of its mineral water, he had but recently returned home. Delamare studiously avoided mentioning who that sick relative was, and Georgina felt no curiosity to inquire. After this explanation her coldness vanished, and Delamare saw again the old fond look beaming on him from her beautiful eyes.

Emily danced but little during the evening. Her chief amusement was looking on and listening to Dr. Seymour's humorous remarks on the gay crowd. "Do look at that moving mass

of crimson velvet and black, Emily! Observe her gawky efforts to attitudinize in the quadrille! I do think stout ladies should give up dancing, when they can boast of a certain amount of weight they ought to know they are no longer in a condition 'to trip it on the light fantastic toe.' And bless me what a contrast her partner presents! I mean that dapper man in such trim attire. See! how he is swung round in the dance by his very formidable partner. He seems a mere nothing in her hands, yet, in spite of his inferiority in bulk, that poor bit of mortality contemplates a marriage with the stout widow. She is rich and he a briefless lawyer not worth a cent. Talk of the man being the head of the woman! In a case like that it is simply absurd. She would be able to hold her own against half a dozen such men. Do you know, Emily," the Doctor continued gravely, "that I think St. Paul did not show his usual judgment in laying down marital law. He says he 'suffers not the woman to touch, but to be in silence with all subjection.' He must have been a crusty old fellow to lay down such a law for the fair sex. To make a woman hold her tongue is a moral impossibility! Why she will have the last if she dies for it! They say he was an old bachelor, and I suppose he didn't know much of the nature of women."

"St. Paul wrote by inspiration," observed Emily.

"Not always, my dear. Some of his injunctions were given according to his own judgment, he confesses, and I think this must have been one of them."

"But St. Peter's advice to wives agrees with St. Paul's."

"Oh that is easily accounted for! St. Peter being a married man, must have felt the bitterness of the female tongue himself and in revenge wished to impose subjection on women," was the Doctor's laughing answer.

A lady with a handsome faded face dancing in the same set with the stout widow and her little partner next attracted Dr. Seymour's criticism.

"By George! she is in the field yet!" he exclaimed in tones of surprise. "I thought she had given up her place in the festive throng to one of the next generation. Look at the *ré-dés* of the stout lady and the dapper man, Emily—the one dancing with that boy officer, I mean. Observe the girlish coquetry of her manner and the extreme youthfulness of her dress."

"Who is she?" asked Emily.

"She used to be called the garrison dirt in her young days, some fifteen years ago, and it seems she still retains her liking for the military. Just watch her flirtation with that beardless son of Mars."

"Is she married?"

"No! unfortunately not for it has been the aim of her life to secure a good *parti*."

"I wonder she didn't succeed, for she must have been beautiful fifteen years ago."

"So she was, but she snubbed civilians and would only marry a military man of rank. Nothing less than a Major or Colonel would suit her, and she didn't happen to get either. So she is Miss Macgregor yet, and will, I suppose, go down to her grave in single blessedness."

"Who is that very handsome girl who now passed leaning on that old gentleman's arm?" inquired Emily?

"That is Mrs. Clayton; is she not lovely?"

"Yes, but the expression of melancholy in the young face is rather singular. The gentleman is her father, I suppose."

"You are mistaken, my dear, he is her lord and master—worth half a million of dollars, it is said."

"Then she sacrificed her happiness on the altar of mammon. The melancholy clouding the beautiful face proclaims that," remarked Emily pityingly.

"Yes, but she was influenced by strong filial affection. Her parents are poor and burdened with a large family; her husband has made a handsome provision for them. I have known her for some years, she always was a good, affectionate daughter. I am sorry for her sake that the millionaire she married is on the shady side of sixty. Such unequal marriages must prove unhappy. What companionship can there be between youth and age! What interchange of thought between the youthful and matured mind! And yet what infatuation old men often display in choosing for a wife a girl young enough to be their grand-daughter. But where is Mrs. Seymour?" continued the doctor suddenly, changing the subject. "I lost her about an hour ago in the crowd, I will just go and see if any body has run off with her."

During his absence Emily's thoughts dwelt on the beautiful Mrs. Clayton, who had sacrificed her own happiness to procure a provision for those she loved. The case was similar to her own; was she not now contemplating a marriage with one she did not love for the sake of her father, in order to prolong his life? There was, however, one great difference between Lascelles and Mr. Clayton—that of age—and consequently more chance of happiness for her than for the fair young creature upon whose sad face her eye dwelt now so sympathetically.

After some minutes Dr. Seymour returned to his seat beside Emily informing her that