

off to gaol. So you go home, ma'am, and take it easy. Leave it all to me, and in two or three days' time at furthest, I'll send and tell you to come and see her here."

"That will indeed be helping me," said Ernestine; "I am very much obliged to you. I will go and wait quietly as you say; I shall be so thankful to find her at last." Her cheek glowed, and her eyes brightened at the thought; and the gaoler, looking at her with evident approval, as she rose to go, held out a huge hand, with which he solemnly shook hers, looking as if he were celebrating a compact of eternal friendship; and this ceremony over, the turnkey appeared with his keys, and conducted her to the gate, whence she hurried home to the unsuspecting Mrs. Craven, who little thought from what species of society her charge had come.

CHAPTER XV.

REGINALD'S HISTORY.

Reginald was worse next day. All night the nurse said his cough had racked him and the morning found him exhausted and yet feverish, and so he continued through the whole day. Dr. Compton stood musingly by the window of the sitting-room, after he had left him in the evening; and at last turning round, he met Ernestine's anxious eyes.

"Of course," he said, "you understand that I can say nothing comforting of your brother's state. I was only thinking just now what a wonderful tenacity of life he displays."

"I daresay you will think me fanciful," said Ernestine, "but it really seems to me as if he could not die, so long as this terrible disquiet and unrest is upon him. His horror of death, whatever may be its cause, appears to chain his very soul back to earth, and his whole will is centered in the struggle to cling to life with all his strength."

"No, I do not think you fanciful," said Dr. Compton, in the slow, thoughtful manner habitual to him. "The termination of life is of course the result of physical causes; but there is no doubt that the bright, willing acceptance of death I have seen in some cases does smooth the dark passage to the grave most wonderfully; persons certainly die more easily, and it may be, at the last, more swiftly, when they have fully resigned their place in this world, and turned their thoughts and hopes to the unseen future. I wish your brother would do so; but —" he said no more, and again stood thoughtfully looking out."

Presently there came a light knock at the door, and the visitor, without waiting for an answer, opened it and walked in. He was a man apparently of middle age, although his hair, which was cut close on his small head, was quite gray. He had a clever face, but with a gentle, quiet expression; and his voice when he spoke was peculiarly low and pleasant. He wore the gown of an M.A., and came in, cap in hand, when he perceived Ernestine in the room. Dr. Compton turned round,—

"Ah, Vincent, is it you? I am glad you are better. I heard you were laid up in town."

"Yes; I have been ill for six weeks."

"Miss Courtenay," said Dr. Compton, "perhaps you have not met with Mr. Vincent before. Let me introduce him,—one of our college tutors, with whom I believe your brother is a special favorite."

Ernestine remembered the name as that of a man for whom Reginald had a great affection and admiration, and whose lectures he had attended assiduously.

"Yes," he said: "there are few young men for whom I have felt a greater interest than for Courtenay. I am deeply grieved to hear of his illness. I had no idea it was

serious when I left Greyburgh. What do you think of him, Compton?"

"I may tell you the truth," said the doctor, "for I have not deceived Miss Courtenay. He cannot recover; there is extensive disease of the lungs, and the progress of the complaint is rapid."

"I am shocked to hear it," said Vincent, who looked sincerely distressed, "I hope I may see him. It will not hurt him, will it?"

"Certainly not; I should think it would do him good to see you," said Compton. "At least, anything that gives him pleasure is good for him."

Vincent smiled, as if there could be no doubt of Reginald's pleasure in seeing him; and as the doctor now took his leave, Ernestine asked him to sit down while she went to tell her brother of his arrival. As she opened the door of the bedroom, she saw Reginald leaning forward with a look of intense anxiety on his face. He beckoned to her hastily to shut the door and come near to him. Then he seized both her hands with convulsive energy, and said in a hoarse whisper, "Is it Vincent who is there? Is it Vincent?"

"Yes," said Ernestine; "he wishes to see you; he seems so kind, and so distressed at your illness."

A moment before, she could not have thought it possible for Reginald's face to become paler than it was; but now every shade of color receded even from his lips, and left him ghastly.

"Ernestine, if ever you have loved me, help me now. Don't let Vincent come near me. To see him would be to recall every moment of agony I have suffered in these last dreadful weeks, and make me live them over again all in one. It is more than I can bear. It would rouse up all the demons of thought with which I have struggled so long. I hoped he would not have returned till my little time of life was past. Don't let me be tortured more than I can bear. Ernie, save me—save me!"

"My dearest," said Ernestine soothingly, "you shall not see him unless you like. I will go and tell him so. Don't tremble, Reggie; no one shall come near you."

"The thought of the agony it would be to see him is enough to make me tremble; but don't let him think I have lost my affection for him, or that I am ungrateful for his past kindness. Say what you like; only save me from seeing him."

Ernestine went slowly back. She hardly knew how to word the refusal, for she was aware that Reginald had been constantly with Vincent, and had greatly enjoyed his society. Ernestine was, however, of too truthful a nature to have learnt the habit of equivocation in her former fashionable life; so, when she met Mr. Vincent's inquiring look, she lifted her candid eyes to his face, and said,—

"I am very sorry that my brother does not feel able to see you. I do not know why. He begs you will not think him ungrateful for your former kindness, or that he has lost his attachment to you; but he is unequal to seeing you."

Vincent bent his keen eyes inquiringly on Ernestine.

"This is very strange," he said in his low, soft voice, "and, I may say, very painful to me, for Courtenay and I have been great friends. I felt for him as I might have done for a son or a younger brother of my own, and I should have thought that in this his hour of trial it would have been a comfort to him to see me. Is it perhaps that he is acting in according with advice from others?"

(To be continued.)

No one can ask honestly or hopefully to be delivered from temptation unless he has himself honestly and firmly determined to do the best he can to keep out of it.—*Ruskin.*

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