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THE DAVENANTS.

BY MRS. J. V. NOEL.

Author of "Hilda: or, The Merchant's Secret;" "The Abbey of Rathmore," &c.

CHAPTER XII.

DR. DELAMARE AT HOME.

In the evening Georgina again joined the family at tea.

"Are you fond of boating, Miss Davenant?" asked Louise as she entered the dining-room. "Henri has just been saying he would be happy to take you and Stephanie for a row on the river."

"I am too nervous to enjoy boating. I never was accustomed to it in England."

"There is not the slightest cause for feeling nervous on the Richelieu," broke in Delamare eagerly. "Look how calm the water is! and the evening is delightful."

"I think you would like it," rejoined Louise. "I wish I could enjoy again the pleasure of boating, but that, like every other, is denied me," she added mournfully.

Georgina knew she should enjoy a row on the river with Henri exceedingly, but that would not be carrying out her determination to avoid him as much as possible, and in spite of his beseeching glance and the wishes of her own heart, she declined accepting his polite offer on the plea of timidity.

"I am afraid you will find it very dull, living here, Miss Davenant," Delamare remarked carelessly; "it is so much pleasanter in Montreal."

"Yes," rejoined Louise, "our daily life is so monotonous."

"I do not care for gaiety," replied Georgina. "I had enough of that last winter. I think I shall like living at the chateau, residing in the country is pleasant this time of the year. However, I shall regret your leaving us," she added, addressing Louise.

"I do not see any necessity for my going to Saratoga," she said, "and yet it might be of use, Dr. A—— advises it; for my own part I have little hope of ever getting well. What do you think, Henri?"

"Whilst there is life there is hope," he answered sincerely. "However, I cannot see what good this intended visit to Saratoga can do you."

"You do not wish to go, I see," and an unpleasant suspicion awoke in the mind of Madame Delamare as she glanced uneasily at the beautiful stranger sitting opposite her handsome husband. Could she be the cause of his evident reluctance to leave the chateau?

Delamare detected the shadow of the green-eyed monster hovering near his wife, and he hastily remarked with assumed interest that it was merely on her account he was unwilling to undertake this journey to Saratoga, because he feared it would tax her strength too much.

"Dr. A—— thinks differently," was Madame St. Hilaire's abrupt observation, with an angry glance at her son-in-law.

"Then I submit to his superior judgment," he rejoined somewhat sarcastically, "and shall hold myself in readiness to depart as soon as it suits your convenience." He then rose from the tea-table and passed out into the garden to conceal the irritation he felt at being again baffled in his attempts to prevent this unwished-for journey to the States. How intensely provoking to be separated from Georgina so soon after their unexpected reunion! If he only had Louise to deal with he could have it all his own way, but Madame was unmanageable. He must be cautious too for Georgina's sake, lest he should arouse their suspicion.

"You seem to enjoy perfect health, Miss Davenant," observed Louise as they withdrew to the drawing-room after tea, and she sighed deeply as she thought of the contrast between them.

"I do. Illness must be a severe trial," replied Georgina sympathizingly.

"It is, but there are other trials even harder to bear—the loss of friends and of love. You can never suffer from the latter cause. Beauty like yours must always retain affection."

"How sentimental you are to-night, Louise!" The remark came from Dr. Delamare as he stepped in through the French window opening on the veranda. "I thought the age of sentiment with you was past," he added, seating himself on the couch beside her, managing, however, to sit so that he could look at Georgina without being observed.

His sneering tones sent a momentary flush to the invalid's wan face.

"I do not think sentiment ever dies in the heart of women. It would be well for them if it did," she observed, with touching significance, looking reproachfully at him.

"Are you fond of music, Mrs. Delamare?" asked Georgina, wishing to change the conversation.

"Yes, extremely fond, but I never hear any. Henri used at one time to sing and

play for me, but he is too lazy or too indifferent to do so now. He is an accomplished musician, Miss Davenant."

Miss Davenant knew that well. How often had she listened to his melodious voice as they were crossing the Atlantic. Those happy hours spent on deck as the vessel sailed buoyantly over the moonlit waters, and those rich cadences of passionate love-songs now came back with painful remembrance, carrying with them regret to the mind of Georgina. Then the love and happiness which filled her heart were innocent, and could be indulged without self-condemnation. She was ignorant that the man who professed such love for her was the husband of another. Delamare willingly complied with his wife's request to favour them with some music, but not to gratify her; he meant to please other ears. Seating himself at the piano he played some waltzes and quadrilles in a brilliant style; then selecting the song, "I love but thee," he sang with thrilling pathos, pouring out the words of the song with impassioned meaning.

"Has he not a magnificent voice?" asked the fond wife, listening enraptured to the volume of sweet sounds filling the apartment. "I think it was his voice which captivated me," she whispered with her sweet smile, making her pale face radiant for the moment.

"He sings charmingly," was Georgina's answer, and she sighed to think how little of that display of musical power was meant to please her ear. It pained her to see Louise so devoted to her faithless husband. If she only would pay back his coldness with indifference it would have relieved Georgina's heart of some of the guilt that oppressed it.

"You sing, I presume, Miss Davenant. Allow me to resign my seat at the piano to you."

"What an adept in deception is that man!" thought Georgina, "and what a little drama we both are acting before the eyes of poor Louise." And now she really did feel glad at their intended departure. It would be a relief to her to get rid of them for a time. This hypocrisy was humiliating; she would rather not see Delamare again until he was free.

Georgina played well with taste and execution; her voice, too, was fine, its tones rich and powerful.

"What a charming little concert we are having!" exclaimed Louise, her face animated with pleasing excitement. "It is such a pleasant break in the dull monotony of my life—so joyless you know!"

"I am glad to afford you pleasure, but will you not contribute your part to the evening's amusement? Stephanie says you sing delightfully."

"Ah, Stephanie is a flatterer! But if you wish it I will try a duet with Henri."

"Nonsense, Louise! it is absurd for you to sing after Miss Davenant!"

The contemptuous tones of Delamare's voice sent a sharp pain to the heart of the gentle wife, and the flush of wounded feeling tinged her pale cheek.

"You know," he added, hastily changing his tone as he met the reproving glance of Georgina, "that owing to ill health your voice has lost much of its power. It is not what it has been."

This implied compliment soothed the little irritation of Louise, but her countenance lost its animated expression, the gleam of happiness was soon clouded. Was it not as well that the light of life with her was waning? What had she to live for now, when the love that her heart craved was hers no longer? Happily she was ignorant that it had been given to another.

It was late when Georgina retired for the night, but the excitement of her feelings prevented her feeling sleepy. Seating herself near the open window to enjoy the cool summer night air, which fanned her feverish brow—feverish from excitement—she indulged in a long reverie. Each event of the day passed before her, every word and look of Delamare was recalled and dwelt upon. The certainty of his entire devotion to her failed, however, to carry its former thrill of happiness to her heart. Her love to him was still powerful, but its indulgence pained her, and she was beginning to realize its sinfulness, and as the sad, haggard face of Louise rose up before her she deeply regretted the wrong she had unconsciously done the suffering woman. The defects in Delamare's character, too, were standing out in strong light. His conduct in the domestic circle did not impress her favourably. Henri Delamare at home and Henri Delamare in society seemed two different men. She was beginning to see that the fascinating man to whom she had given the homage of her heart was a clay idol after all. Yet her fond heart soon relented as she indulged these hard thoughts of him, and her strong affection stood up boldly for his defence, excusing all his short-comings, self-love aiding to throw a veil over his imperfections, for was it not his passionate attachment to herself that caused his indifference and unkindness to his wife. It is the nature of a woman to palliate the faults of him she loves. This is the reason we see so many clinging to unworthy objects, pouring out a wealth of love on men wholly undeserving.

The clock in the hall below was striking twelve when a light suddenly gleamed in the

upper room of the north turret, the one Stephanie said was Madame St. Hilaire's oratory. It must then be the shadow of her tall figure that fell upon the white drapery of the narrow casement. Madame was, Georgina supposed, about to engage in midnight orisons. Her grandchild said she spent much time in prayer, but why was that oratory always shut up? why was every one else excluded from it? These were questions Georgina could not answer, although the circumstance excited her curiosity, and she kept her eye steadily fixed upon that turret window, wishing to penetrate beyond its white curtains and see how the stern-looking mistress of the chateau was engaged. For an hour the light continued to shine like a star in that turret chamber. It then suddenly disappeared, and Georgina retired to bed to dream of Delamare, and fancy that his mother-in-law, having discovered the secret of his attachment, was shutting him up in the north turret.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

It was a beautiful evening in the month of August when one of those large steamers that navigate the broad waters of the Hudson was seen to leave the city of New York on its upward trip to Albany. It was crowded with passengers, most of whom were on deck enjoying the romantic scenery along the shore as they steamed rapidly up the majestic river. In the stern of the boat, outside the door of the ladies' saloon, a small group was seated who are not strangers to the reader. They were Mr. and Mrs. Lascelles, Mr. Davenant and Clara, returning to Canada, Mr. Davenant's health being much improved. They had chosen this quiet nook to avoid the crowd on deck, and to be able to admire undisturbed the celebrated scenery of the Hudson. The Palisades attracted much of their attention, the precipitous range of cliffs extending for miles seeming to rise abruptly from the water, in whose calm depths they were so clearly shadowed. As the steamer entered the Tappan Sea the sun was nearing the horizon, tingling over the magnificent masses of pearly clouds in its vicinity a flood of golden radiance, and glittering on the foaming wake which the boat traced behind as it swiftly cut the quiet waters.

Onward sped the floating pile, freighted with human life, and now another steamer, which had left New York some twenty minutes later, was seen rapidly gaining on the "Washington," evidently intent on passing it. A race seemed unavoidable, and, reckless of the safety of the many persons on board, the captain and crew used every possible means to distance their approaching rival. Every available inflammable substance was thrown into the roaring furnace, and the quickened motion of the boat was fearful. The contest did not last many miles, the "Washington" proved its superiority and shot far ahead, while a prolonged shout from the exulting passengers on deck proclaimed their victory.

The exciting scene was full of alarming interest to our Canadian travellers, and interrupted their quiet enjoyment of the beauties of nature. Sunset was giving its gorgeous colouring to the scene as they approached Caldwell's Landing. They were detained there a little time, so that twilight was wrapping the picturesque shore in its sombre mantle when they once more moved with velocity on their way. And now through the deepening twilight gleamed the lofty beacon-light near the landing they had left. Emily was thoughtfully watching the streak of trembling light it cast upon the river when the loud ringing of the tea-bell broke with startling abruptness on the silence of the hour. Clara rose quickly, giving Mr. Davenant her hand to lead her to the dining-saloon, for the evening air had given the child an appetite, and they proceeded thither, followed by Mr. and Mrs. Lascelles.

The saloon was much crowded as they entered, the long table lined with hungry travellers, judging by the eagerness with which they seated themselves and prepared to enjoy the good things before them. One countenance among the many human faces caught and fixed the gaze of Emily Lascelles. Her eyes dilated with a great surprise, her heart stood still with overwhelming emotion, and a faint cry of amazement issued from her white lips—a cry which was unheeded in the noise around. Eugene felt the hand that rested on his arm press heavily, he looked at his wife and noticed her marble paleness. With anxious tenderness he supported her trembling form from the saloon into the night air, which soon recalled her fleeting senses. She faintly expressed a wish to retire to her state-room. There she implored him to leave her alone, assuring him that an hour's rest would quite restore her. He obeyed, wondering at the cause of this sudden illness. Emily's health was always so good, what had caused this strange faintness? Mr. Davenant guessed the reason, but forbore enlightening Lascelles on the painful subject, for he too had recognized the face at the tea-table which had occasioned Mrs. Lascelles such overwhelming emotion. Alone in her state-room she yielded to the agitation she had repressed. For a time she

seemed to lose all control over herself, subdued by the tempest of passionate vain regret. Her bowed form quivered with the intensity of her sufferings, her look was wild, her eye tearless.

"Oh Walter! Walter!" she wailed, "have you come back from the dead to find me the wife of another! to think that you still live and that by my own act we are separated for ever! Oh what an agony has rushed in upon my heart! Father in Heaven! sustain me or I sink in this unexpected trial!"

Long she remained wrestling with this terrible grief, and it was no small trial which produced such a tumult in her well-regulated mind, for the face she had seen in the saloon was the one which had impressed itself years before on her heart—that of her betrothed—for whom it had poured out all its innocent deep affection. What a stunning shock it then was to see him, Walter Avenell, among the passengers at the table! How could she endure this severest of all earthly trials! After a while the voice of her husband was heard outside the door of her state-room, anxiously inquiring if she felt better. Steadily her voice, she calmly answered in the affirmative, but the door remained locked between them; she could not let him see the wildness of her grief, and he went away again, wondering and wretched. A wild excitement in the steamer at last interrupted the indulgence of her anguish and roused her to a sense of some impending danger, the nature of which was soon revealed. A column of vivid light shot up into the darkened sky, filling her state-room with sudden brightness. The steamer was on fire; the machinery, intensely heated during the race, had ignited the wood surrounding it and now it burst forth into one fierce mass of flame. The greatest confusion prevailed. Fortunately the steamer was not far from shore, and it was run towards it with the hope of saving the passengers. This sudden danger gave a new turn to Emily's thoughts, and she hastily left her state-room with the intention of rejoining her family, but this she found was impossible. Her state-room was near the prow of the boat, and as the fire had broken out in the centre a sheet of flame cut off all communication with the stern, where the saloon was situated. She went on deck, hoping to find Eugene somewhere, but there the fire burned more fiercely and the heat and smoke were intolerable. Faint with terror at the dreadful fate which threatened her and the dear ones from whom she was separated, she tried in vain to extricate herself from the pressure of the crowd, who in their wild alarm exhibited the selfishness natural to men in the hour of peril. She was sinking on the deck, half insensible, when a loving arm encircled her and the well-known voice of Avenell pronounced her name in accents of joyful surprise. The delight that flashed over his face as he folded her in a passionate embrace, and the deep tenderness of his voice revealed to Emily that she was still the object of his earnest affection. Better it would be, she thought, if he had learned to forget her; that would have spared him the anguish he must soon feel on learning that she had given herself to another.

"Are you alone, Emily?" was the first question his lips uttered when he had recovered a little from the intense joy at their meeting.

"No, papa and Clara are with me, but I have unfortunately got separated from them." She did not add the name of her travelling companion. Her lips refused to pronounce the words which would be the death-knell of hope to the heart of Walter Avenell.

"I must look to your safety first, dearest," he said fondly. "You must trust yourself in the water with me. I can save you. The steamer is fast approaching the shore."

"Try and find papa and Clara," she pleaded.

"Leave me here and save them, Walter!"

"No, no!" he answered with decision. "I must place you in safety first. I cannot run the risk of losing you," he added with an impassioned look.

How those words thrilled with wild regret the heart of Emily. How could she ever tell him of her marriage with Lascelles and yet it must be revealed, but not just yet. Let him enjoy a few minutes longer his present happiness. The crushing blow would come soon enough.

The steamer now struck on some low rocks about a hundred yards from the shore, and Walter, supporting Emily, passed through the throng of excited passengers towards the part nearest the land. He then sprang with her into the water and struck out for the shore, she clinging to his shoulder as he directed. Many persons were struggling in the quiet waters, some floating with life preservers or any other article caught up in their terrible emergency, others who could not swim—mostly women and children were sinking in—the cold embrace of death. Some boats had put off from the shore and were picking up many of these, bearing them to the land where a humane crowd was gathered eager to afford assistance, but too often vainly trying to bring back life. Walter and Emily gained the shore in safety, he then swam back to the steamer in search of Mr. Davenant and Clara.

(To be continued.)