

The Doctor's Dilemma

By Hesba Stretton

CHAPTER XI.—(Continued.)

That was my sentence of banishment. She had only addressed me once during the conversation. It was curious to see how there was no resentment in her manner towards my father, who had systematically robbed her, whilst she treated me with profound wrath and bitterness.

The report of my father's illness had spread before I reached home, and sufficiently accounted for our visit to Jersey, and the temporary postponement of my last trip to England before our marriage. My mother, Johanna and I kept our own counsel, and answered the many questions asked us as vaguely as the Delphic oracle.

I wrote to Tardif, telling him I was going for an indefinite period to London, and that if any difficulty or danger threatened Olivia, I begged of him to communicate with my mother, who had promised me to befriend her as far as it lay in her power. My poor mother thought of her without bitterness, though in deep regret. To Olivia herself I wrote a line or two, finding myself too weak to resist the temptation. I said:

"My Dear Olivia—I told you I was about to be married to my cousin Julia Dobree; that engagement is at an end. I am obliged to leave Guernsey, and seek my fortune elsewhere. It will be a long time before I can see you again, if I ever have that great happiness. Whenever you feel the want of a true and tender friend, my mother is prepared to love you as if you were her own daughter. Think of me also as your friend.

"MARTIN DOBREE."

CHAPTER XII.

I left Guernsey the day before my father and Julia returned from Jersey.

My immediate future was not as black as it might have been. I was going direct to the house of my friend Jack Senior, who had been my chum at college. He, like myself, had been hitherto a sort of partner to his father, the well-known physician, Dr. Senior, of Brook street. They lived together in a highly respectable but gloomy residence, kept bachelor fashion, for they had no woman-kind at all belonging to them. The father and son lived a good deal apart, though they were deeply attached to one another. Jack had his own apartments, and his own guests, in the spacious house, and Dr. Senior had his.

The first night, as Jack and I sat up together in the long summer twilight, I told him everything—as one tells a friend a hundred things one cannot put into words to any person who dwells under the same roof, and is witness of every circumstance of one's career.

As I was talking to him, every emotion and perception of my brain, which had been in a wild state of confusion and conflict, appeared to fall into its proper rank. I was no longer doubtful as to whether I had been the fool my father called me. My love for Olivia acquired force and decision. My judgment that it would have been a folly and a crime to marry Julia became confirmed.

"Old fellow," said Jack, when I had finished, "you are in no end of a mess."

"Well, I am," I admitted; "but what am I to do?"

"First of all, how much money have you?" he asked.

"I'd rather not say," I answered.

"Come, old friend," he said, in his most persuasive tones, "have you fifty pounds in hand?"

"No," I replied.

"That's bad," he said; "but it might be worse. I've lots of tin, and we always went shares."

"I must look out for something to do to-morrow," I remarked.

"Ah, yes," he answered dryly, "you might go as assistant to a parish doctor, or get a berth on board an emigrant ship. There are lots of chances for a young fellow. I tell you what," he said, "I've a good mind to marry Julia myself. I've always liked her, and we want a woman in the house. That would put things straighter, wouldn't it?"

"She would never consent to leave Guernsey," I answered, laughing. "That was one reason why she was so glad to marry me."

"Well, then," he said, "would you mind me having Olivia?"

"Don't jest about such a thing," I replied; "it is too serious a question with me."

"You are really in love?" he answered.

"I will not jest at it. But I am ready to do anything to help you, old boy."

So it proved, for he and Dr. Senior did their best during the next few weeks to find a suitable opening for me. I made their house my home, and was treated as a most welcome guest in it. Still the time was irksome. They were busy whilst I was unemployed.

My mother's letters did not tend to raise my spirits. The tone of them was uniformly sad. She told me the flood of sympathy for Julia had risen very high indeed; from which I concluded that the public indignation against myself must have risen to the same tide mark. Julia had resumed her old occupations, but her spirit was quite broken. Johanna Carey had offered to go abroad with her, but she had declined.

A friend of Julia's, said my mother in another letter, had come to stay with her, and endeavor to rouse her. It was evident she did not like this Kate Daltrey, herself, for the dislike crept out unawares through all the gentleness of her phrases. "She says she is the same age as Julia," she wrote, "but she is probably some years older; for as she does not belong to Guernsey we have no opportunity of knowing." I laughed when I read that. "Your father admires her very much," she added.

There was not a word about Olivia. Sark itself was never mentioned, and it might have sunk into the sea. My eye ran over every letter first with the hope of catching that name, but I could not find it. This persistent silence on my mother's part was very trying.

I had been away from Guernsey two months, and Jack was making arrangements for a long absence from London as soon as the season was over, leaving

me in charge, when I received the following letter from Johanna Carey:

"Dear Martin—Your father and Julia have been here this afternoon, and have confided to me a very sad and very painful secret, which they ask me to break gently to you. You must come home again for a season. Even Julia wishes it, though she cannot stay in the same house with you, and will go to her own with her friend Kate Daltrey. Your father cried like a child. He takes it more to heart than I should have expected. Yet there is no immediate danger; she may live for some months yet. My poor Martin, you will have a mother only a few months longer. Three weeks ago she and I went to Sark, at her own urgent wish, to see your Olivia. I did not then know why. She had a great longing to see the unfortunate girl who had been the cause of so much sorrow to us all, but especially to her, for she had pined sorely after you. We did not find her in Tardif's house, but Suzanne directed us to the little graveyard half a mile away. We followed her there, and recognized her, of course, at the first glance. She is a charming creature, that I allow, though I wish none of us had ever seen her. Your mother told her who she was, and the sweetest flush and smile came across her face! They sat down side by side on one of the graves, and I strolled away, so I do not know what they said to one another. Olivia walked down with us to the Havre Gosselin, and your mother held her in her arms and kissed her tenderly. Even I could not help kissing her.

"Now I understand why your mother longed to see Olivia. She knew then—she has known for months that her days are numbered. When she was in London last November she saw the most skillful physicians, and they all agreed that her disease was incurable and fatal. Why did she conceal it from you? Ah, Martin, you must know a woman's heart, a mother's heart, before you can comprehend that. Your father knew, but no one else.

"Do not come before you have answered this letter, that we may prepare her for your return. Write by the next boat.

"JOHANNA CAREY."

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"Do you wish to consult my partner or me?" asked the keenest looking man. "I am Mr. Scott." "Either will do," I answered. "My business will be soon dispatched. Some months ago you inserted an advertisement in the Times." "To what purpose?" inquired Mr. Scott. "You offered fifty pounds reward," I replied, "for information concerning a young lady."

A gleam of intelligence and gratification flickered upon both their faces, but quickly faded away into a sober and blank gravity. Mr. Scott waited for me to speak again, and bowed silently, as if to intimate he was all attention.

"I came," I added, "to ask you for the name and address of that young lady's friends, as I should prefer communicating directly with them, with a view to co-operation in the discovery of her hiding place. I need scarcely say I have no wish to receive any reward. I entirely waive any claim to that, if you will oblige me by putting me into connection with the family."

"Have you no information you can impart to me?" asked Mr. Scott.

"None," I answered decisively. "It is some months since I saw the advertisement, and it must be nine months since you put it into the Times. I believe it is nine months since the young lady was missing."

"About that time," he said.

"Her friends must have suffered great anxiety," I remarked.

"Very great indeed," he admitted.

"If I could render them any service it would be a great pleasure to me," I continued; "cannot you tell me where to find them?"

"We are authorized to receive any information," he replied. "You must allow me to ask if you know anything about the young lady in question?"

"My object is to combine with her friends in seeking her," I said evasively. "I really cannot give you any information; but if you will put me into communication with them, I may be useful to them."

"Well," he said, with an air of candor, "of course the young lady's friends are anxious to keep in the background. It is not a pleasant circumstance to occur in a family. Of course, if you could give us any definite information it would be quite another thing. The young lady's family is highly connected. Have you seen any one answering to the description?"

"It is a very common one," I answered.

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