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# Doc. Gordon

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### CHAPTER XI

"She left the Liptons at two o'clock and I have stopped at every house on my way, and no one has seen her."

"Oh, my God!" said Gordon, with a dazed look at James.

"What do you think?" asked James.

"I don't know what to think. I am utterly at a loss now. I supposed she was entirely safe. There are almost no tramps at this season, and in broad daylight. At two, you said? It is almost six. I don't know what to do. What will come next? I must tell Clara something before I do anything else."

Gordon rushed out of the office, and they heard his heavy tread on the stairs. Aaron stared at James, and still he did not chew.

"It's almost dark," he said with a low drawl.

"Yes."

"We've got to take lanterns, and hunt along the road and fields."

"Yes, we have."

The dog, which had been asleep, got up, and came over to James, and laid his white head on his knee. "We can take him," Aaron said. "Sometimes dogs have more sense than us."

"That is so," said James. He felt himself in an agony of helplessness. He simply did not know what to do. He had sunk into a chair and his head fairly rung. It seemed to him incredible that the girl had disappeared a second time. A queer sense of unreality made him feel faint.

Gordon re-entered the room. "I have told Clara that you have come back, and that Clemency is to stay all night with Annie Lipton," he said. Then he, too, stood staring helplessly. Emma had come into the room, and now she spoke angrily to the three dazed men. "Git the lanterns lit, for goodness' sake," she said, "and hunt and do something. I'm goin' to get supper, and I'll keep her pacified." Emma gave a jerk with a sharp elbow toward Mrs. Ewing's room. "For goodness' saks, if you don't know yet where she has went, why don't you do somethin'?" she demanded. The men went before her sharp command like dust before her broom. "Keep as still as you can," ordered Emma as they went out. "She mustn't git to worryin' before she comes home."

For the next two hours Gordon James, and Aaron searched. They walked, each going his separate way into the fields and woods on the road having agreed upon a signal when the girl should be found. The signal was to be a pistol shot. James went first to the wood, where he had found Clemency on her former disappearance. He searched in every shadow, throwing the gleam of his lantern into little dark nests of last year's ferns, and hollows where last year's leaves had swirled together to die, but no Clemency. At last, wearied and heartsick, he came out on the road. The moon was just up, a full moon, and the road lay stretched before him like a silver ribbon covered with the hoarfrost. He gazed down it hopelessly, and saw a little dark figure running toward him. He was incredulous, but he called, Clemency!"

A glad little cry answered him. He himself ran forward, and the girl was in his arms, sobbing and trembling as if her heart would break.

"What has happened? What has happened, darling?" James cried in an agony. "Are you hurt? What has happened?"

"Something very strange has happened, but I am not hurt," sobbed Clemency. James remembered the signal. "Wait a second, dear," he said; "your uncle and Aaron are searching, and I promised to fire the pistol if I found you." James fired his pistol in the air six times. Then he returned to Clemency, who was leaning against a tree. "How I wished we had driven here!" James said tenderly.

"I can walk, if you help me," Clemency sobbed, leaning against him. "Oh, I am so sorry I acted so this morning. I got punished for it. I haven't been hurt, nobody has been anything but kind to me, but I have been dreadfully frightened."

Gordon and Aaron came running up. "Where have you been, Clemency?" Gordon demanded in a harsh voice. "Another time you must do as you are told. You are too old to behave like a child, and put us all in such a fright."

Clemency left James, and ran to her uncle, and clug to him sobbing hysterically. "Oh, Uncle Tom, don't scold me," she whimpered.

"Are you hurt? What has happened?"

"I am not hurt a bit," sobbed Clemency.

Gordon put his arm around her. "Well," he said, "as long as you are safe keep your story until we get home. Elliot, take her other arm. She is almost too used up to walk. Now stop crying Clemency."

When they were home, in the office, Clemency told her story, which was a strange one. She had been on her way home from Annie Lipton's, and had reached a certain house, when the door opened and a woman stood there calling her. She described the woman and the house, and James gave a start. "That must be the same woman whom I saw," he exclaimed.

"She was a woman I had never seen," said Clemency. "I think she had only lived there a very short time.

Gordon nodded gloomily. "I know who she is, I fear," he said. "Strange that I did not suspect."

"She looked very kind and pleasant," said Clemency, "and I thought she wanted something and there was no harm, but when I reached her the first thing I knew she had hold of me, and her hands were like iron clamps. She put one over my mouth, and held me and with the other, and pulled me into the house and locked the door. Then she made me go into a little dark room in the middle of the house and she locked me in. She told me if I screamed nobody would hear me, but she did speak kindly. She was very kind. Once she even kissed me, although I did not want her to. She brought a lamp in, and made me lie down on a couch in the room and drink a glass of wine. She told me not to be afraid, nobody would hurt me. She seemed to me to be always listening, and every now and then she went out, but she always locked the door behind her. When she came back she would look terribly worried. About half an hour ago she went out, and when she came back brought a tray with tea and bread and cold chicken for me. I told her I would starve before I ate anything while she kept me there. She did not seem to pay much attention, she looked so dreadfully worried. She sat down and looked at me. Finally, she said, as if she were afraid to hear her own voice, 'Has any accidents happened near here lately that you have heard of?' I told her about the man that fell down in our drive and died of erysipelas. I did not tell her anything else. All at once she almost fell in a faint. Then she stood up, and she looked as if she were dead. She told me to stay where I was just fifteen minutes, then I might go, but I must not stir before. Then she kissed me again, and her lips were like ice. She went out, and I knew the door was not locked, but I was afraid to stir. I could hear her running about. Then I heard the outer door slam, and I looked at my watch, and it was fifteen minutes. Then I ran out and up the road as fast as I could. Just before I saw Doctor Elliot the New York train passed. I heard it. I think she was hurrying to catch that."

Gordon nodded.

"Oh, Uncle Tom, who was she, and why did she look me up?" asked Clemency.

"Clemency," said Gordon, in a sterner voice than Clemency had ever heard him use toward her, "never speak, never think, of that woman or that man again. Now go out and eat your dinner."

### CHAPTER XII

Clemency was so worn out that Doctor Gordon insisted upon her going directly to bed after dinner, and he and James had a solitary evening in the office with the exception of Gordon's frequent absence in his wife's room. Each time when he returned he looked more gloomy. "I have increased the morphine almost as much as I dare," he said, coming into the office about ten. He sat down and lit his pipe. James laid down the evening paper which he had been reading. "Is she asleep now?" he asked.

"Yes. By the way, Elliot, have you guessed who that woman was who kidnapped Clemency?"

James hesitated. "I don't fairly know whether I am right," he replied.

"Who?"

"The nurse."

"You are right. It was the nurse. That man had won her over, and set her up housekeeping in Westover. He had been staying at the hotel before he came here. He was her lover, of course, although he was too circumspect not to guard the secret. She has been living in that house for the last three months under the name of Mrs. Wood, a widow. The former occupants went away last summer, Aaron has been telling me. He said that once he himself saw the man enter the house, and he had seen the woman on the street. She had made herself quite popular in Westover. It was not part of that man's policy to keep his vice between locked doors. Locks themselves are the best witnesses against evil. She attended the Dutch Reformed church regularly. She was present at all the church suppers, and everybody has called on her in Westover. Now I think she has fled, half-crazed with grief over the death of her lover, and, afraid of some sort of exposure. Unless I miss my guess, there will be a furor around here shortly over her disappearance. She was not a bad woman and I remember her, and she was attractive, with a kindly disposition. But he had his way always with women, and I suppose she thought she was doing him a service by kidnapping poor little Clemency. I am sorry for her. I hope she did not go away penniless, but she has her nursing to fall back upon. I must see if Mrs. Blair cannot come here tomorrow. Clara must have somebody beside Clemency and Emma. I should prefer a trained nurse, and this woman is simply the self-taught village sort, but Clara prefers her. She shrinks at the very mention of a trained nurse. Of course it is unreasonable, but the poor soul has always had an awful dread of hospitals and a possible operation and I believe that in some way she thinks a trained nurse one of a dreadful trinity. She must be humored, of course. The result cannot be changed."

"You have no hope, then?" James said in a low voice.

"I have had no more hope from the outset than if she had been already dead." said Gordon.

James said nothing. An enormous pity for the other man was within him. He thought of Clemency, and he seemed to undergo the same pangs He felt such a terrible understanding of the other's suffering that it passed the bounds of sympathy. It became almost experience. His young face took on the same expression of dull misery as Gordon's. Presently Gordon glanced at him, and spoke with a ring of gratitude and affection in his tired voice.

"You are a good fellow, Elliot," he said, "and you are the one ray of comfort I have. I am glad that I have you to leave poor little Clemency with."

James looked at him with sudden alarm. "You are not ill?" he said.

"No, but there is an end to everybody's rope, and sometimes I think I am about at the end of mine. I don't know. Anyway, it is a comfort to me to think that Clemency has you in case anything should happen to me."

"She has me as long as I live," James said fervently. Red overspread his young face, his eyes glistened. Again the great pity and understanding with regard to the other man came over him, and a feeling for Clemency which he had never before had: a feeling greater than love itself, the very angel of love, divinest pity and protection, for all womanhood, which was exemplified for himself in this one girl. His heart ached, as if it were Clemency's upstairs, lying miserably asleep under the influence of the drug, which alone could protect her from indescribable pain. His mind projected itself into the future and realized the possibility of such suffering for her, and for himself. The honey-sting of pain, which was love, stung him sharply.

Gordon seemed to divine his thoughts. "God grant that you may never have to undergo what I am undergoing, my boy," he said. Then he added, "It was in poor Clara's blood, her mother before her died the same way. Clemency comes, on her mother's side, at least, of a healthy race, morally physically, although the nervous system is over sensitive. If my poor sister had been happy she would have been alive today. And as far as I know of the other side, there was perfect physical health, although he had that abnormal lack of moral sense that led one to dream of possession. Did you notice how much less evil he looked when he was dead, even with that frightfully disfigured face?"

"Yes."

"There are strange things in this world," said Gordon with gloomy reflection, "or else simple things which we are strange not to believe. Sometimes I think people will have to take to the Bible again in that literal sense in which so many are now inclined to disregard it. Well, Elliott, I honestly feel that you have nothing to fear in taking poor little Clemency. I should tell you that if I thought otherwise. She will make you happy, and I can think of no reason to warn you concerning any possible yapses, either her physical or her moral health, and I have had her in my charge since she first drew the breath of life. Come, my son, it is late, and we have a great deal to do tomorrow. This awful business has made me neglect patients. I have to see Clara again ,and get what rest I can." Gordon looked older and wearier than James had ever seen him as he bade him goodnight, old and weary as he had often seen him look. A sudden alarm for Gordon himself came over him. He wondered, after he had entered his room, if he were not strained past endurance. He recalled his own father's healthy, ruddy face, and Gordon was no older.

He lay awake a while thinking anxiously of Gordon, then his own happy future blazoned itself before him, and he dreamed awake, and dreamed asleep, of himself and Clemency, in that future, whose golden vistas had no end, so far as his young eyes could see. The sense of relief from anxiety over the girl was so intense that it was in itself a delight. Clemency herself felt it. The next morning at breakfast she looked radiant. Gordon had assured her the sick woman had rested quietly, and told her that Mrs. Blair was coming.

"Today I can go where I choose," before her died of the same wayea Clemency exclaimed gayly.

"Not until arternoon replied." Gordon then he relented at her look of disappointment, and suggested that she go with Elliot to make his calls, while he went with Aaron and the team. It was a beautiful morning; spring seemed to have arrived. Everywhere was the plash of running water, now and then came distant flutings of birds. "I know that was a bluebird," Clemency said happily. "I feel sure mother will get well now. It seems wicked to be glad that a man is dead, especially on such a morning, but I wonder if is, when he would have spoiled the morning."

"Don't think about it, anyway!" James said.

"I try not to."

"You must not!"

"I know why Uncle Tom did not want me to go out alone this morning," Clemency said, with one of her quick wise looks, cocking her head like a bird.

"Why?"

"He wanted to make sure that that woman has really gone."

"Clemency, you must not mention that man or woman to me again," said James.

"I am not married to you yet," Clemency said, pouting.

"That makes no difference, you must promise."

"Well, then, I will. I am so happy this morning, that I will promise anything."

James looked about to be sure nobody was in sight before he kissed the little radiant face.

"I won't speak of them again, but I am right," Clemency said with a little toss and blush and it proved that she was.

At luncheon Doctor Gordon told Clemency that she could go wherever she liked. She gave a little glance at James, and said gayly, "All right, Uncle Tom."

That afternoon Gordon and James made some calls in company, driving far into the hills. They had hardly started before Gordon said abruptly, "Well, the woman is gone, and there is a wild excitement in Westover over her disappearance. I believe they are about to drag the pond. A man who knew her well by sight declared that she boarded that New York train, but the people will not give up the theory that she has been murdered for her jewelry. By the way, I think I need not worry over her immediate necessities. It seems that she had worn a quantity of very valuable jewels. Of course her going without any baggage except a suit-case, and leaving behind the greater part of her wardrobe, does look singular. But it seems that the house was rented furnished, and I fancy she lived always in light marching orders, and probably carried the most valuable of her possessions upon her person and in her suit-case. Well, I am thankful she has decamped."

"You don't fear her returning?" asked James with some anxiety.

"No, I have no fear of that. She is probably broken-hearted over the death of that man. She is not the sort to kidnap on her own account. It was only for him. Clemency has nothing more to fear."

"I am thankful."

"You can well believe that I am, when I tell you that this afternoon I am absolutely sure, for the first time in years, that the girl is safe to come and go as she pleases. I have had hideous uncertainty as well as hideous certainty to cope with. Now it is down to the hideous certainty. That is bad enough, but fate on an open field is less unmanning than fate in ambush. I have long known to a nicety the fate in the field." Gordon hesitated a second, then he said abruptly, with his face turned from his companion, in a rough voice, "Clara can't last many days."

Continued Tomorrow.


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