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Chapter 60 - Outside The Room

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Emily found Mirabel in the waiting room at Belford. Her sudden appearance might well have amazed him; but his face expressed a more serious emotion than surprise--he looked at her as if she had alarmed him.

"Didn't you get my message?" he asked. "I told the groom I wished you to wait for my return. I sent a note to my sister, in case he made any mistake."

"The man made no mistake," Emily answered. "I was in too great a hurry to be able to speak with Mrs. Delvin. Did you really suppose I could endure the suspense of waiting till you came back? Do you think I can be of no use--I who know Mrs. Rook?"

"They won't let you see her."

"Why not? _You_ seem to be waiting to see her."

"I am waiting for the return of the rector of Belford. He is at Berwick; and he has been sent for at Mrs. Rook's urgent request."

"Is she dying?"

"She is in fear of death--whether rightly or wrongly, I don't know. There is some internal injury from the fall. I hope to see her when the rector returns. As a brother clergyman, I may with perfect propriety ask him to use his influence in my favor."

"I am glad to find you so eager about it."

"I am always eager in your interests."

"Don't think me ungrateful," Emily replied gently. "I am no stranger to Mrs. Rook; and, if I send in my name, I may be able to see her before the clergyman returns."

She stopped. Mirabel suddenly moved so as to place himself between her and the door. "I must really beg of you to give up that idea," he said; "you don't know what horrid sight you may see--what dreadful agonies of pain this unhappy woman may be suffering."

His manner suggested to Emily that he might be acting under some motive which he was unwilling to acknowledge. "If you have a reason for wishing that I should keep away from Mrs. Rook," she said, "let me hear what it is. Surely we trust each other? I have done my best to set the example, at any rate."

Mirabel seemed to be at a loss for a reply.

While he was hesitating, the station-master passed the door. Emily asked him to direct her to the house in which Mrs. Rook had been received. He led the way to the end of the platform, and pointed to the house. Emily and Mrs. Ellmother immediately left the station. Mirabel accompanied them, still remonstrating, still raising obstacles.

The house door was opened by an old man. He looked reproachfully at Mirabel. "You have been told already," he said, "that no strangers are to see my wife?"

Encouraged by discovering that the man was Mr. Rook, Emily mentioned her name. "Perhaps you may have heard Mrs. Rook speak of me," she added.

"I've heard her speak of you oftentimes."

"What does the doctor say?"

"He thinks she may get over it. She doesn't believe him."

"Will you say that I am anxious to see her, if she feels well enough to receive me?"

Mr. Rook looked at Mrs. Ellmother. "Are there two of you wanting to go upstairs?" he inquired.

"This is my old friend and servant," Emily answered. "She will wait for me down here."

"She can wait in the parlor; the good people of this house are well known to me." He pointed to the parlor door--and then led the way to the first floor. Emily followed him. Mirabel, as obstinate as ever, followed Emily.

Mr. Rook opened a door at the end of the landing; and, turning round to speak to Emily, noticed Mirabel standing behind her. Without making any remarks, the old man pointed significantly down the stairs. His resolution was evidently immovable. Mirabel appealed to Emily to help him.

"She will see me, if _you_ ask her," he said, "Let me wait here?"

The sound of his voice was instantly followed by a cry from the bed-chamber--a cry of terror.

Mr. Rook hurried into the room, and closed the door. In less than a minute, he opened it again, with doubt and horror plainly visible in his face. He stepped up to Mirabel--eyed him with the closest scrutiny--and drew back again with a look of relief.

"She's wrong," he said; "you are not the man."

This strange proceeding startled Emily.

"What man do you mean?" she asked.

Mr. Rook took no notice of the question. Still looking at Mirabel, he pointed down the stairs once more. With vacant eyes--moving mechanically, like a sleep-walker in his dream--Mirabel silently obeyed. Mr. Rook turned to Emily.

"Are you easily frightened?" he said

"I don't understand you," Emily replied. "Who is going to frighten me? Why did you speak to Mr. Mirabel in that strange way?"

Mr. Rook looked toward the bedroom door. "Maybe you'll hear why, inside there. If I could have my way, you shouldn't see her--but she's not to be reasoned with. A caution, miss. Don't be too ready to believe what my wife may say to you. She's had a fright." He opened the door. "In my belief," he whispered, "she's off her head."

Emily crossed the threshold. Mr. Rook softly closed the door behind her.