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## Chapter 40 - Consulting

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Out of the music room, and away from his violin, the sound side of Mr. Wyvil's character was free to assert itself. In his public and in his private capacity, he was an eminently sensible man.

As a member of parliament, he set an example which might have been followed with advantage by many of his colleagues. In the first place he abstained from hastening the downfall of representative institutions by asking questions and making speeches. In the second place, he was able to distinguish between the duty that he owed to his party, and the duty that he owed to his country. When the Legislature acted politically--that is to say, when it dealt with foreign complications, or electoral reforms--he followed his leader. When the Legislature acted socially--that is to say, for the good of the people--he followed his conscience. On the last occasion when the great Russian bugbear provoked a division, he voted submissively with his Conservative allies. But, when the question of opening museums and picture galleries on Sundays arrayed the two parties in hostile camps, he broke into open mutiny, and went over to the Liberals. He consented to help in preventing an extension of the franchise; but he refused to be concerned in obstructing the repeal of taxes on knowledge. "I am doubtful in the first case," he said, "but I am sure in the second." He was asked for an explanation: "Doubtful of what? and sure of what?" To the astonishment of his leader, he answered: "The benefit to the people." The same sound sense appeared in the transactions of his private life. Lazy and dishonest servants found that the gentlest of masters had a side to his character which took them by surprise. And, on certain occasions in the experience of Cecilia and her sister, the most indulgent of fathers proved to be as capable of saying No, as the sternest tyrant who ever ruled a fireside.

Called into council by his daughter and his guest, Mr. Wyvil assisted them by advice which was equally wise and kind--but which afterward proved, under the perverse influence of circumstances, to be advice that he had better not have given.

The letter to Emily which Cecilia had recommended to her father's consideration, had come from Netherwoods, and had been written by Alban Morris.

He assured Emily that he had only decided on writing to her, after some hesitation, in the hope of serving interests which he did not himself understand, but which might prove to be interests worthy of consideration, nevertheless. Having stated his motive in these terms, he proceeded to relate what had passed between Miss Jethro and himself. On the subject of Francine, Alban only ventured to add that she had not produced a favorable impression on him, and that he could not think her likely, on further experience, to prove a desirable friend.

On the last leaf were added some lines, which Emily was at no loss how to answer. She had folded back the page, so that no eyes but her own should see how the poor drawing-master finished his letter: "I wish you all possible happiness, my dear, among your new friends; but don't forget the old friend who thinks of you, and dreams of you, and longs to see you again. The little world I live in is a dreary world, Emily, in your absence. Will you write to me now and then, and encourage me to hope?"

Mr. Wyvil smiled, as he looked at the folded page, which hid the signature.

"I suppose I may take it for granted," he said slyly, "that this gentleman really has your interests at heart? May I know who he is?"

Emily answered the last question readily enough. Mr. Wyvil went on with his inquiries. "About the mysterious lady, with the strange name," he proceeded--"do you know anything of her?"

Emily related what she knew; without revealing the true reason for Miss Jethro's departure from Netherwoods. In after years, it was one of her most treasured remembrances, that she had kept secret the melancholy confession which had startled her, on the last night of her life at school.

Mr. Wyvil looked at Alban's letter again. "Do you know how Miss Jethro became acquainted with Mr. Mirabel?" he asked.

"I didn't even know that they were acquainted."

"Do you think it likely--if Mr. Morris had been talking to you instead of writing to you--that he might have said more than he has said in his letter?"

Cecilia had hitherto remained a model of discretion. Seeing Emily hesitate, temptation overcame her. "Not a doubt of it, papa!" she declared confidently.

"Is Cecilia right?" Mr. Wyvil inquired.

Reminded in this way of her influence over Alban, Emily could only make one honest reply. She admitted that Cecilia was right.

Mr. Wyvil thereupon advised her not to express any opinion, until she was in a better position to judge for herself. "When you write to Mr. Morris," he continued, "say that you will wait to tell him what you think of Miss Jethro, until you see him again."

"I have no prospect at present of seeing him again," Emily said.

"You can see Mr. Morris whenever it suits him to come here," Mr. Wyvil replied. "I will write and ask him to visit us, and you can inclose the invitation in your letter."

"Oh, Mr. Wyvil, how good of you!"

"Oh, papa, the very thing I was going to ask you to do!"

The excellent master of Monksmoor looked unaffectedly surprised. "What are you two young ladies making a fuss about?" he said. "Mr. Morris is a gentleman by profession; and--may I venture to say it, Miss Emily?--a valued friend of yours as well. Who has a better claim to be one of my guests?"

Cecilia stopped her father as he was about to leave the room. "I suppose we mustn't ask Mr. Mirabel what he knows of Miss Jethro?" she said.

"My dear, what can you be thinking of? What right have we to question Mr. Mirabel about Miss Jethro?"

"It's so very unsatisfactory, papa. There must be some reason why Emily and Mr. Mirabel ought not to meet--or why should Miss Jethro have been so very earnest about it?"

"Miss Jethro doesn't intend us to know why, Cecilia. It will perhaps come out in time. Wait for time."

Left together, the girls discussed the course which Alban would probably take, on receiving Mr. Wyvil's invitation.

"He will only be too glad," Cecilia asserted, "to have the opportunity of seeing you again."

"I doubt whether he will care about seeing me again, among strangers," Emily replied. "And you forget that there are obstacles in his way. How is he to leave his class?"

"Quite easily! His class doesn't meet on the Saturday half-holiday. He can be here, if he starts early, in time for luncheon; and he can stay till Monday or Tuesday."

"Who is to take his place at the school?"

"Miss Ladd, to be sure--if you make a point of it. Write to her, as well as to Mr. Morris."

The letters being written--and the order having been given to prepare a room for the expected guest--Emily and Cecilia returned to the drawing-room. They found the elders of the party variously engaged--the men with newspapers, and the ladies with work. Entering the conservatory next, they discovered Cecilia's sister languishing among the flowers in an easy chair. Constitutional laziness, in some young ladies, assumes an invalid character, and presents the interesting spectacle of perpetual convalescence. The doctor declared that the baths at St. Moritz had cured Miss Julia. Miss Julia declined to agree with the doctor.

"Come into the garden with Emily and me," Cecilia said.

"Emily and you don't know what it is to be ill," Julia answered.

The two girls left her, and joined the young people who were amusing themselves in the garden. Francine had taken possession of Mirabel, and had condemned him to hard labor in swinging her. He made an attempt to get away when Emily and Cecilia approached, and was peremptorily recalled to his duty. "Higher!" cried Miss de Sor, in her hardest tones of authority. "I want to swing higher than anybody else!" Mirabel submitted with gentleman-like resignation, and was rewarded by tender encouragement expressed in a look.

"Do you see that?" Cecilia whispered. "He knows how rich she is--I wonder whether he will marry her."

Emily smiled. "I doubt it, while he is in this house," she said. "You are as rich as Francine--and don't forget that you have other attractions as well."

Cecilia shook her head. "Mr. Mirabel is very nice," she admitted; "but I wouldn't marry him. Would you?"

Emily secretly compared Alban with Mirabel. "Not for the world!" she answered.

The next day was the day of Mirabel's departure. His admirers among the ladies followed him out to the door, at which Mr. Wyvil's carriage was waiting. Francine threw a nosegay after the departing guest as he got in. "Mind you come back to us on Monday!" she said. Mirabel bowed and thanked her; but his last look was for Emily, standing apart from the others at the top of the steps. Francine said nothing; her lips closed convulsively--she turned suddenly pale.