

PRISCILLA'S JEWELS.

(BY ROSA MULHOLLAND, in the *Irish Monthly*.)

CHAPTER IV.—(Continued.)

"Never."

"Never?"

"Never, certainly, to Mr. Dalrymple, and never, I think, to any one else."

Mrs. Craig became agitated. "My dear child, have you rightly considered this matter? It is quite evident that Mr. Dalrymple is devoted to you. He is a man of property and a gentleman. He has told me all about his affairs and family connections, and I must say it seems to me that he is in every way desirable as a husband for you."

"Especially as I am an utterly penniless lass," said Priscilla, gaily. All her depression seemed to have vanished now that she could tell what was in her mind. "Dear Mrs. Craig, it may be very ungrateful of me, but I cannot like Mr. Dalrymple; I cannot even keep myself from disliking him. There is something about him—well I must not be ungenerous, perhaps unjust—"

Mrs. Craig picked up her knitting, but her hands trembled so that the needles only clattered together, and succeeded in forming no stitches.

"At all events," continued Priscilla, "I will never marry him, not though I starve. Dear Mrs. Craig, I want so much to ask you to do me a little more to help me. This storm, surely, cannot last much longer; and when it is over I shall want to go. Will you, can you, help me to find a situation as companion to a lady, or as governess to very young children? I can get a good character from my old school-mistress, and can also give a reference to my lawyer in America."

Mrs. Craig leaned her head on her hand, and looked long and earnestly into the young girl's earnest face. "You have a right spirit, my dear," she said, "and I will do all I can to help you. So, I am sure, will my son. I think he is writing to-day to some friends of ours in Edinburgh, so that the letter may be ready to go at the first clearing of the storm. He will, I am sure, be glad to mention your case. I am rather tired, or I should go to him now and tell him what you have said. Perhaps you would not mind going into the study and telling him yourself what you desire."

Priscilla turned a little pale. She could not forget that she fancied ten days ago—ten days which seemed like ten months—that she was becoming dear to Kenneth, and she still grew rather cold and sick when she allowed herself to think of what a silly mistake she had made. But she was brave enough to take any step which she had made up her mind ought to be taken.

"You think that is what I must do?" she said, looking straight at Mrs. Craig.

"I think it is the only thing to be done, seeing that there is no time to be lost," replied the elder lady, in the most matter-of-fact manner possible.

Priscilla folded up her work carefully, perhaps with more care and deliberation than usual, and then walked slowly and thoughtfully out of the room. It was but a step across the hall to Kenneth's study, and she stopped a moment on the mat and pressed her hands together; then knocked lightly on the door.

"Come in," cried the voice of the master, and Priscilla opened the door a little way and stood in the opening, like a child not sure of its welcome.

Kenneth sprang to his feet. "Miss Emerson, pray come in. Is there anything I can do for you?"

Priscilla closed the door, and sat down on the chair nearest to her; while Kenneth remained standing looking towards her expectantly. "Dr. Craig," she said, "I have come at your mother's suggestion, to ask a favour of you. She tells me you are writing to Edinburgh."

Kenneth had evidently been writing letters, but to what part of the world they were to be addressed he did not declare. "Can I be of any use to you?" he inquired, politely.

"I hope—I hope you can," said Priscilla. "As soon as the storm is over I shall want a situation as governess, or companion, and if you would kindly mention me to your friends in Edinburgh, something might be found for me. My references will be satisfactory, and I am of a cheerful temper. I think I could do best with little children."

Dr. Craig regarded her with a look of extreme surprise. "This is a startling request," he said, "and one I am quite unprepared for. I thought, in fact, I was sure—" he stopped, and seemed embarrassed; and though Priscilla guessed readily what he meant she would not appear to understand him. What right or reason had they to conclude that she would be so willing to accept any stranger's sudden offer of marriage?

"You think I ought to wait to see whether any of my jewels can be found?" she said, demurely. "But I have quite made up my mind that Duncan is innocent, and that my jewels will never reappear. They belong entirely to the past; and it is of the future I have now got to think."

"May I ask what has led you to make up your mind so completely as to the jewels?" said Dr. Craig, a faint flush rising on his face.

"Must I tell you, Dr. Craig?" asked Priscilla, looking at him with clear, anxious eyes.

"I think you ought to do so," said Kenneth, gravely. "The matter is a serious one, and anything that can throw light on it must not be kept to one's self."

"Even if it be but a thought that has arisen in one's mind?"

"It will be better for everyone that you should be perfectly frank with me."

Priscilla sat silent and reflecting. "Dr. Craig," she said, looking up suddenly, "do men often go about in ulsters that are very much too long for them—which would trail behind them like an untidy lady's gown?"

Dr. Craig laughed outright. The sudden transition from the very serious to the absurd was too much for him. "I don't think

they do," he said; "I have never observed them to do it."

"Mr. Dalrymple must have done it, if he wore that ulster which is hanging in my room."

Kenneth started. Now he saw the connection of ideas in her mind. "You think it was not his ulster that you wore?"

"You have hit the point at which I had arrived, tho' thought that has been troubling me for some weeks past. The ulster is too long, too large to be his. I have been for some days making up my mind to this belief. I suggested the idea to him to-day, and he admitted that it might have been the ulster of his tall companion, which he put on in mistake for his own."

"A natural enough explanation," said Kenneth, whose eyes were now fixed earnestly on the girl's fair, intelligent face.

"Yes; it had occurred to me before," said Priscilla; "but then," she added, slowly, "why should a pocket-book marked 'G. Dalrymple' be found in the pocket of the ulster, which never did belong to the H. Dalrymple whom we know?"

"Ah," said Kenneth; "why, indeed! Unless his companion had been his brother or his namesake."

"He has told me several times that he has no near relatives, no family ties—that he never had a sister or a brother. Besides, when I suggested that, in case he had taken another man's ulster, nothing of his could be expected to lie in the pocket—"

"Well?"

"He looked strangely; and a short time afterward I found him in my room, searching the pocket of that ulster—that extremely lengthy ulster, which I am sure he never could have worn."

"The scoundrel!" exclaimed Kenneth Craig.

Priscilla sat silent, her eyes fixed questioningly on Kenneth, noting the changing expressions of his face.

"And what conclusion have you come to upon all this?" asked he, after a few moments of silence.

"I dare not come to any," said Priscilla; "I give you the facts as I know them. You are more fit to pronounce upon them than I am. Only I have learned utterly to distrust Mr. Dalrymple."

A light flashed over Kenneth's face; but he controlled himself as he said: "And in what way does this influence you towards a conclusion that your jewels are irrevocably lost?"

"Only this: that suspicion was fixed upon Duncan by Mr. Dalrymple. We were persuaded by him that the sea could not have robbed me of them. His opinion has now no weight with me whatever, and I prefer to believe in Duncan."

"Reasoned like a true woman," said Dr. Craig, smiling. "However, I feel that your instincts may have led you to the truth."

"I think they have," said Priscilla; "and I will tell you a secret, Dr. Craig." She put her finger to her lip, and Kenneth drew nearer to her. "If," she said in a lowered voice, "it were possible that Mr. Dalrymple could have found me before Duncan found me, I should suspect he had taken the jewels himself."

"Now you go too far," said Kenneth; "for one thing it is not possible; he did not arrive on the island till you had been some hours in this house."

"I am glad it is not possible" said Priscilla, with a sigh of relief; "I would rather rest in the certainty that the sea had swallowed up my fortune."

"Would to God that I were sure that it had," said Kenneth, vehemently, "for then I would venture to ask you—" his face, turned on her, full of tenderness told her all that he meant. But his words stopped short. She was still in his eyes an heiress so long as property of hers worth fifty thousand pounds might, possibly, at any moment reappear.

"And you cannot bring yourself to ask questions of a woman upon whom the suspicion rests of being the owner of jewels?" said Priscilla, wistfully; and then, with a sudden change of manner, she rose and said gaily: "Well, I thank you, Dr. Craig, for giving me so much of your time," and then with a mocking courtesy she disappeared abruptly from the room.

That evening Kenneth joined the group in the drawing-room after supper, a thing he had not done for a week. He wore a look which perfectly satisfied his mother, and which was noticeable even to Dalrymple. His good spirits were accounted for by his announcement that he believed the storm was coming to a conclusion at last. He had been out studying the heavens, and thought he saw signs of mending in the weather.

"These long storms sometimes come to a curiously sudden ending," he said; "and, if to-morrow prove fine, we must be all on the alert. I shall be glad to see the coastguard and the police coming into the island, to clear up, if possible, the mystery of these jewels."

"What if Duncan should be before you, and get out of the island with his booty?" suggested Dalrymple.

"Duncan will not stir," said Kenneth. "Even a stupid rogue would know that to run away like that, would be to proclaim his guilt."

"True, true!" said Dalrymple, feeling Dr. Craig's eyes fixed on him with a look he did not like, and could not quite understand. "But there is no knowing what unaccustomed rogues, new to the situation, will do under the influence of panic."

"Duncan's best plan, whether he be innocent or guilty, will be to stand his ground like a man, and, whatever his motive may be, it is the line he will take."

"You have seen him lately?" said Mrs. Craig.

"I have had one or two interviews with him," said Kenneth. "He knows I am resolved to sift the matter to the bottom."

"It has occurred to me once or twice," said Dalrymple, "to think of how Duncan could expect to get rid of the jewels (if he has them), without attracting attention and inquiry. Jewels such as Miss Emerson's would be easily tracked."

"He might break them up and sell them, stone by stone, might he not?" said Mrs. Craig.

"A tedious way," laughed Dalrymple, a man clever enough to capture the jewels ought to be able to invent a better plan of getting rid of them than that."

(To be continued.)