EDMUND YATES

THE ROCK AHEAD

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Table of Contents

Volume 1

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

My dear Sir,

Although I have not the pleasure of your personal acquaintance, I venture to ask you to accept the dedication of this book, in slight acknowledgment of the admirable manner in which you have reproduced two of my previous stories (*Broken to Harness* and *The Forlorn Hope*) in the pages of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and of the flattering way in which you have frequently referred to my writings in that excellent periodical.

Faithfully yours,
EDMUND YATES.

London, April 1868.

PROLOGUE.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I.

Whispered.

Table of Contents

Hot in Brighton, very hot. The August sun reflected off white-chalk cliff and red-brick pavement, and the sea shining and sparkling like a sapphire; the statue of George the Fourth, in its robe of verdigris, looking on in blighted perspiration at the cabmen at its base, as though imploring a drink; the cabmen lolling undemonstratively on the boxes of their vehicles, not seeking for employment, and--partly by reason of the heat, but more, perhaps in consequence of the money received recently at the races--rather annoyed than otherwise when their services were called into requisition. For the Brighton races had just taken place, and the town, always so full, had been more crammed than ever. All the grand hotels had been filled with the upper ten thousand, who moved easily over from Chichester and Worthing and Bognor, where they had been staying for Goodwood, which

immediately precedes Brighton; and all the lodgings had been taken by the betting-men and the turfites,--the "professionals," with whom the whole affair is the strictest matter of business, and to whom it is of no interest whether the race is run at Torquay or Wolverhampton, in blazing sunshine or pouring hailstorm, so long as the right thing "comes off," and they "land the winner."

It was all right for the bookmakers this time at Brighton: the favourites, against which so much money had been staked, had been beaten, and "dark" horses, scarcely heard of, and backed for nothing, had carried off the principal prizes. So it followed that most of the gentry of the betting-ring, instead of hurrying off to the scene of their next trials of fortune, finding themselves with plenty of money in their pockets, at a pleasant place in lovely weather, made up their minds to remain there during the intervening Saturday and Sunday, and to drop business so far as possible until the Monday morning, when they would speed away by the early express-trains.

So far as possible, but not entirely. It is impossible for them to drop business altogether even on this glorious Sunday afternoon, when the whole face of Nature is blandly smiling. See the broad blue bosom of the sea smooth and sparkling as glass, dotted here and there with white-sailed pleasure-boats; see far away, beyond the encircling belt of brick and stone, the broad shoulder of the bare and bushless downs, over which the fresh air careering comes away laden with the delicious scents of trodden turf and wild thyme and yellow gorse; see the brown beach, where under the lee of the fishing-smacks, or making a table of the

large flukes of rusty anchors, sit groups of excursionists,--pallid Londoners, exulting in the unwonted luxury of escaping from the stony streets, and more excited by the brisk and revivifying sea air than by the contents of the stone bottle which stands in the midst of each group, and whose contents are so perpetually going round from hand to hand in the little footless glass; see the Esplanade thronged with its hundreds of foot passengers, its scores of flies and carriages; see the Stock Exchange in all its glory, and the children of Israel gorgeous in long ringlets, thunder-and-lightning neckties, and shot-silk parasols; and see the turf-men standing here and there in little knots, trying to be interested in the scenes passing around them, but ever and again turning to each other with some question of "odds," for some scrap of "intelligence."

The ring is strongly represented this Sunday afternoon on Brighton Parade, both in its highest and its lowest form. The short stout man in the greasy suit of black, with the satin waistcoat frayed round the pockets by the rubbing of his silver watch-guard, who is jotting down memoranda with a fat cedar-pencil in his betting-book, enters freely into conversation and is on an equality with the gentlemanly-looking man whose only visible "horseyness" is expressed in his tightly-cut trousers and his bird's-eye neckerchief with the horseshoe pin. Patrons of the turf, owners of racehorses, commission-agents, bookmakers, touts, tipsters, hangers-on of every kind to turf speculations and turf iniquities, are here at Brighton on this lovely Sunday afternoon.

There was one group, consisting of three people, planted on the Esplanade, just in front of the Old Ship Hotel, the

three component members of which were recognised and saluted by nearly everyone who passed. One of them was a short square-built man, with keen eyes closely set and sunken, small red whiskers, and a sharp-pointed nose. He was dressed in black, with a wonderfully neatly-tied long white cravat, folded quite flat, with a dog's tooth set in gold for a pin; and he wore a low-crowned hat. The other two were young men, dressed in the best style of what is known as "horsey get-up." They had been talking and laughing ever since they had taken up their position, immediately after lunching at the hotel, out of which they had strolled with cigars in their mouths; and it was obvious that any respect which the elder man might receive was not paid to him on account of his age, but rather in acknowledgment of the caustic remarks with which he amused his companions. These remarks seemed at last to have come to an end. There had been a long silence, which was broken by the elder man asking,

"O, seen anything of Gore--Harvey Gore? Has he gone back, or what?"

"Don't know; haven't seen him since Thursday night," said the taller of the young men.

"Won a pot of money on the Cup," said the other sententiously; "regular hatful."

"What did his pal do?" asked the elder man. "Lloyd I mean. Did he pull through?"

"Dropped his tin, Foxey dear. Held on like grim death to Gaslight, and was put in the hole like the rest of us. He tells me he has been hit for--"

"*He* tells you!" interrupted the elder man; "He tells you! I've known Gilbert Lloyd for two or three years, and anything *he* tells me I should take deuced good care not to believe."

"Very good, Foxey dear! very nice, you sweet old thing! only don't halloo out *quite* so loud, because here's G.L. coming across the road to speak to us, and he mightn't--How do, Lloyd, old fellow?"

The new-comer was a man of about four-and-twenty, a little above the middle height, and slightly but strongly built. His face would generally have been considered handsome, though a physiognomist would have read shiftiness and suspicion in the small and sunken blue eyes, want of geniality in the tightly-closing mouth visible under the slight fair moustache, and determination in the jaw. Though there was a slight trace of the stable in his appearance, he was decidedly more gentlemanly-looking than his companions, having a distinct stamp of birth and breeding which they lacked. He smiled as he approached the group, and waved a small stick which he carried in a jaunty manner; but Foxey noticed a flushed appearance round his eyes, an eager worn straining round his mouth, and said to his friend who had last spoken, "You're right, Jack; Lloyd has had it hot and strong this time, and no mistake."

The young man had by this time crossed the road and stood leaning over the railing. In answer to a repetition of their salutes, he said:

"Not very bright. None of us are always up to the mark, save Foxey here, who is perennial; and just now I'm worried and bothered. O, not as you fellows imagine," he said hastily, as he saw a smile go round; and as he said it his

face darkened, and the clenching of his jaws gave him a very savage expression,--"not from what I've dropped at this meeting; that's neither here nor there: lightly come; lightly gone; but the fact is that Gore, who is living with me over there, is deuced seedy."

"Thought he looked pulled and done on Thursday," said Foxey. "Didn't know whether it was backing Gaslight that had touched him up, or--"

"No," interrupted Lloyd hurriedly; "a good deal of champagne under a tremendously hot sun; that's the cause, I believe. Harvey has a way of turning up his little finger under excitement, and never will learn to moderate his transports. He's overdone it this time, and I'm afraid is really bad. I must send for a doctor; and now I'm off to the telegraph-office, to send a message to my wife. Gore was to have cleared out of this early this morning, to spend a day or two with Sandcrack, the vet, at Shoreham; and my proprietress was coming down here; but there's no room for her now, and I must put her off."

"Do you think Harvey Gore's really bad?" asked one of the younger men.

"Well, I *think* he's got something like sunstroke, and I *know* he's a little off his head," responded Lloyd. "He'll pull round, I daresay--I've no doubt. But still he can't be moved just yet, and a woman would only be in the way under such circumstances, let alone it's not being very lively for her; so I'll just send her a message to keep off. Ta-ta! I shall look into the smoking-room to-night at the Ship, when Harvey's gone off to sleep." And with a nod and a smile, Gilbert Lloyd started off.

"Queer customer that, Foxey."

"Queer indeed; which his golden number is Number One!" said Foxey enigmatically.

"What's his wife like?"

"Never saw her," said Foxey; "but I should think she had a pleasant time of it with that youth. It will be an awful disappointment to him, her not coming down, won't it?"

"Foxey, you are an unbeliever of the deepest dye. Domestic happiness in your eyes is--"

"Bosh! You never said a truer word. Now, let's have half-a-crown's-worth of fly, and go up the cliff."

A short time after Gilbert Lloyd had left the house in which he had taken lodgings, consisting of the parlour-floor and a bedroom upstairs, Mrs. Bush, the landlady, whose mind was rather troubled, partly because the servant, whose "Sunday out" it was, had not yet returned from the Methodist chapel where she performed her devotions--a delay which her mistress did not impute entirely to the blandishments of the preacher--and partly for other reasons, took up her position in the parlour-window, and began to look up and down the street. Mrs. Bush was not a landlady of the jolly type; she was not ruddy of complexion, or thin and trim of ankle, neither did she adorn herself with numerous ribbons of florid hue. On the contrary, she was a pale, anxious-faced woman, who looked as if she had had too much to do, and quite enough to fret about, all her life. And now, as she stood in the parlour-window on a hot Sunday, and contemplated the few loungers who straggled through the street on their way to the seashore, she

assumed a piteous expression of countenance, and shook her head monotonously.

"I wish I hadn't let 'em the rooms, I'm sure," said Mrs. Bush to herself. "It's like my luck--and in the race-week too. If *he's* able to be up and away from this in a day or two, then *I* know nothing of sickness; and I've seen a good deal of it too in my time. No sign of that girl! But who's this?"

Asking this, under the circumstances, unsatisfactory question, Mrs. Bush drew still closer to the parlour-window, holding the inevitable red-moreen curtain still farther back, and looked with mingled curiosity and helplessness at a cab which stopped unmistakably at the door of her house, and from the window of which a handsome young female head protruded itself. Mrs. Bush could not doubt that the intention of the lady in the cab was to get out of it and come into her house; and that good-for-nothing Betsy had not come in, and there was nobody to open the door but Mrs. Bush--a thing which, though a meek-enough woman in general, she did not like doing. The lady gave her very little time to consider whether she liked it or not; for she descended rapidly from the cab, took a small travelling-bag from the hand of the cabman, paid him, mounted the three steps which led to the door, and knocked and rang with so determined a purpose of being admitted that Mrs. Bush, without a moment's hesitation,--but with a muttered "Mercy on us! Suppose he'd been asleep now!" which seemed to imply that the lady's vehemence might probably damage somebody's nerves,--crossed the hall and opened the door.

She found herself confronted by a very young lady, a girl of not more, and possibly less, than nineteen years, in

whose manner there was a certain confidence strongly suggestive of her entertaining an idea that the house which she was evidently about to enter was her own, and not that of the quiet, but not well-pleased, looking person who asked her civilly enough, yet not with any cordiality of tone, whom she wished to see.

"Is Mr. Lloyd not at home? This is his address, I know," was the enigmatical reply of the young lady.

"A Mr. Lloyd *is* lodging here, miss," returned Mrs. Bush, with a glance of anything but approbation at her questioner, and planting herself rather demonstratively in the doorway; "but he isn't in. Did you wish to see him?"

"I am Mrs. Lloyd," replied the young lady with a frown, and depositing her little travelling-bag within the threshold; "did you not know I was coming? Let me in, please."

And the next minute--Mrs. Bush could not tell exactly how it happened--she found the hall-door shut, and she was standing in the passage, while the young lady who had announced herself as Mrs. Lloyd was calmly walking into the parlour. Mrs. Bush was confounded by the sudden and unexpected nature of this occurrence; but the only thing she could do was to follow the unlooked-for visitor into the parlour, and she did it. The young lady had already seated herself on a small hard sofa, covered with crimson moreen to match the window-curtains, had put off her very becoming and fashionable bonnet, and was then taking off her gloves. She looked annoyed, but not in the least embarrassed.

"*That* is Mr. Lloyd's room, I presume?" she said, as she pointed to the folding-doors which connected the parlours,

and which stood slightly open.

"Yes, m'm; but--"

Mrs. Bush hesitated; but as the young lady rose, took up her bag, and instantly pushed the door she had indicated quite open, and walked into the apartment, Mrs. Bush felt that the case was getting desperate. Though a depressed woman habitually, she was not by any means a timid one, and had fought many scores of highly successful battles with lodgers in her time. But this was quite a novel experience, and Mrs. Bush was greatly at a loss how to act. Something must be done, that was quite clear. Not so what that something was to be; and more than ever did Mrs. Bush resent the tarrying of Betsy's feet on her return from Beulah Chapel.

"*She* would have shut the door in her face, and kept her out until I saw how things really were," thought the aggrieved landlady; but she said boldly enough, as she closely followed the intruder, and glanced at her left hand, on which the symbol of lawful matrimony duly shone:

"If you please, m'm, you wasn't expected. Mr. Lloyd nor the other gentleman never mentioned that there was a lady coming; and I don't in general let my parlours to ladies."

"Indeed! that is very awkward," said the young lady, who had opened her bag, taken out her combs and brushes, and was drawing a chair to the dressing-table; "but it cannot be helped. Mr. Lloyd quite expected me, I know; he arranged that I should come down to-morrow before he left town; but it suited me better to come to-day. I can't think why he did not tell you."

"I suppose he forgot it, m'm," said Mrs. Bush, utterly regardless of the uncomplimentary nature of the suggestion, "on account of the sick gentleman; but it's rather unfortunate, for I never *do* take in ladies, not in my parlours; and Mr. Lloyd not having mentioned it, I--"

"Do you mean to say that I cannot remain here with my husband?" said the young lady, turning an astonished glance upon Mrs. Bush.

"Well, m'm," said the nervous landlady, "as it's for a short time only as Mr. Lloyd has taken the rooms, and as it's Sunday, I shall see, when he conies in. You see, m'm, I've rather particular people in my drawing-rooms, and it's different about ladies; and--" Here she glanced once more at the light girlish figure, in the well-fitting, fashionable dress, standing before the dressing-table, and at the white hand adorned with the orthodox ring.

"I think I understand you," said the intruder gravely; "you did not know Mr. Lloyd was married, and you are not sure that I am his wife. It is a difficulty, and I really don't see how it is to be gotten over. Will you take *his* word?--at all events I may remain here until he comes in presently?"

Something winning, something convincing, in the tone of her voice caused a sudden revulsion of feeling in Mrs. Bush. The good woman--for she was a good woman in the main--began to feel rather ashamed of herself, and she commenced a bungling sort of apology. Of course the lady could stay, but it *was* awkward Mr. Lloyd not having told her; and there was but one servant, a good-for-nothing hussy as ever stepped--and over-staying her time now to that degree, that she expected the "drawing-rooms" would not have their

dinner till ever so late; but at this point the young lady interrupted her.

"If I may stay for to-night," she said gently, and with a very frank smile, which made Mrs. Bush feel indignant with herself, as well as ashamed, "some other arrangement can be made to-morrow; and I require no waiting-on. I shall give you no trouble, or as little as possible."

Mrs. Bush could not hold out any longer. She told the young lady she could certainly stay for that day and night, and as for to-morrow, she would "see about it;" and then, at the dreaded summons of the impatient "drawing-rooms," bustled away, saying she would return presently, and "see to" the stranger herself.

Pretty girls in pretty dresses are not rarities in the lodging-houses of Brighton; indeed, it would perhaps be difficult to name any place where they are to be seen more frequently, or in greater numbers; but the toilet-glass on the table in the back bedroom of Mrs. Bush's lodging-house, a heavy article of furniture, with a preponderance of frame, had probably reflected few such faces as that of the lady calling herself Mrs. Lloyd, who looked attentively into it when she found herself alone, and decided that she was not so very dusty, considering.

She was rather tall, and her figure was slight and girlish, but firm and well-developed. She carried her head gracefully; and something in her attitude and air suggested to the beholder that she was not more commonplace in character than in appearance. Her complexion was very fair and clear, but not either rosy or milky; very young as she was, she looked as if she had thought too much and lived

too much to retain the ruddiness and whiteness of colouring which rarely coexist with intellectual activity or sensitive feelings. Her features were well-formed; but the face was one in which a charm existed different from and superior to any which merely lies in regularity of feature. It was to be found mainly in the eyes and mouth. The eyes were brown in colour--the soft rich deep brown in which the pupil confounds itself with the iris; and the curling lashes harmonised with both; eyes not widely opened, but yet with nothing sly or hidden in their semi-veiled habitual look--eyes which, when suddenly lifted up, and opened in surprise, pleasure, anger, or any other emotion, instantly convinced the person who received the glance that they were the most beautiful he had ever seen. The eyebrows were dark and arched, and the forehead, of that peculiar formation and width above the brow which phrenologists hold to indicate a talent for music, was framed in rippling bands of dark chestnut hair.

She was a beautiful and yet more a remarkable-looking young woman, girlish in some points of her appearance, and in her light lithe movements, but with something ungirlish, and even hard, in her expression. This something was in the mouth: not small enough to be silly, not large enough to be defective in point of proportion; the line of the lips was sharp, decisive, and cold; richly coloured, as befitted her youth, they were not young lips--they did not smile spontaneously, or move above the small white teeth with every thought and fancy, but moved deliberately, opening and closing at her will only. What it was in Mrs. Lloyd's face which contradicted the general expression of youth which it

wore, would have been seen at once if she had placed her hand across her eyes. The beaming brown eyes, the faintly-tinted rounded cheeks, were the features of a girl--the forehead and the mouth were the features of a woman who had left girlhood a good way behind her, and travelled over some rough roads and winding ways since she had lost sight of it.

When Mrs. Bush returned, she found the stranger in the front parlour, but not standing at the window, looking out for the return of her husband; on the contrary, she was seated at the prim round table, listlessly turning over some newspapers and railway literature left there by Gilbert Lloyd. Once again Mrs. Bush looked at her with sharp suspicion; once again she was disarmed by her beauty, her composure, and the sweetness of her smile.

"Mr. Lloyd is not in yet, m'm," began Mrs. Bush, "and you'll be wanting your lunch."

"No, thank you," said Mrs. Lloyd; "I can wait. I suppose you don't know when he is likely to be in?"

"He *said* directly," replied Mrs. Bush; "and I wish he had kept to it, for I can't think the sick gentleman is any better. I've been to look at him, and he seems to me a deal worse since morning."

Mrs. Lloyd looked rather vacantly at Mrs. Bush. "Have you a lodger ill in the house?" she asked. "That makes it still more inconvenient for you to receive me."

Mrs. Bush felt uncomfortable at this question. How very odd that Mrs. Lloyd should not know about her husband's friend! They are evidently queer people, thought the landlady; and she answered rather stiffly:

"The only lodger ill in the house, m'm, is the gentleman as came with Mr. Lloyd; and, in my opinion, he's very ill indeed."

"Came with Mr. Lloyd?" said the young lady in a tone of great surprise. "Do you mean Mr. Gore? Can you possibly mean Mr. Gore?"

"Just him," answered Mrs. Bush succinctly. "Didn't you know he was here with Mr. Lloyd?"

"I knew he was coming to Brighton with him, certainly," said Mrs. Lloyd; "but I understood he was to leave immediately after the races--before I came down. What made him stay?"

Mrs. Bush drew near the table, and, leaning her hands upon it, fell into an easy tone of confidential chat with Mrs. Lloyd. That lady sat still, looking thoughtfully before her, as the landlady began, but after a little resting her head on her hand and covering her eyes:

"He stayed, m'm, because he was very ill, uncommon ill to be sure; I never saw a gentleman iller, nor more stubborn. His portmanteau was packed and ready when he went to the races, and he told Betsy he shouldn't be five minutes here when he'd come back; and Mr. Lloyd said to him in my hearing, 'Gore,' said he, 'how your digestion stands the tricks you play with it, I can *not* understand;' for they'd been breakfasting, and he had eat unwholesome, I can't say otherwise. But when they come from the races, they come in a cab, which wasn't usual; and, not to offend you, m'm, Mr. Lloyd had had quite enough" (here she paused for an expression of annoyance on the part of her hearer; but no such manifestation was made); "but Mr. Gore,

he *was* far gone, and a job we had to get him upstairs without disturbing the drawing-rooms, I can assure you. And Mr. Lloyd told me he had been very ill all day at the races, and wouldn't come home or let them fetch a doctor--there were ever so many there--or anything, but would go on drinking, and when he put him in the cab, he wanted to take him to a doctor's, but he wouldn't go; and Mr. Lloyd did say, m'm, begging your pardon, that Mr. Gore damned the doctors, and said all the medicine he ever took, or ever would take, was in his portmanteau."

"Was there no doctor sent for, then? Has nothing been done for him?" asked Mrs. Lloyd, with some uneasiness in her tone, removing her hand from her eyes and looking full at Mrs. Bush.

"We've done--Betsy and me and Mr. Lloyd; for no one could be more attentive--all we could; but Mr. Gore was quite sensible, and have a doctor he *would not*; and what could we do? We gave him the medicine out of the case in his portmanteau. I mixed it and all, and he told me how, quite well; and this morning he was ever so much better."

"And is he worse now? Who is with him?" asked Mrs. Lloyd, rising.

"Well, m'm, *I* think he looks a deal worse; and I wish Mr. Lloyd was come in, because I think he ought to send for a doctor; I don't know what to do."

"Who is with him?" repeated Mrs. Lloyd.

"No one," returned Mrs. Bush. "No one is with him. When Mr. Lloyd went out, he told me Mr. Gore felt inclined to sleep; he had had some tea and was better, and I was not to let him be disturbed. But when I was upstairs just now, I

heard him give a moan; and I knew he was not asleep, so I went in; and he looks very bad, and I couldn't get a word out of him but 'Where's Lloyd?'"

"Take me to his room at once," said Mrs. Lloyd, "and send for a doctor instantly. We must not wait for anything."

But the incorrigible Betsy had not yet returned, and Mrs. Bush explained to the stranger that she had no means of sending for a doctor until she could send Betsy.

"Let me see Mr. Gore first, for a minute, and then I will fetch the nearest doctor myself," said Mrs. Lloyd; and passing out of the room as she spoke, she began to ascend the narrow staircase, followed by the landlady, instructing her that the room in which the sick man was to be found was the "two-pair front."

The room in which the sick man lay was airy, and tolerably large. As Gertrude Lloyd softly turned the handle of the door, and entered, the breeze, which bore with it a mingled flavour of the sea and the dust, fluttered the scanty window-curtains of white dimity, and caused the draperies of the bed to flap dismally. The sun streamed into the room, but little impeded by the green blinds, which shed a sickly hue over everything, and lent additional ghastliness to the face, which was turned away from Gertrude when she entered the chamber. The bed, a large structure of extraordinary height, stood in front of one of the windows; the furniture of the room was of the usual lodging-house quality; an open portmanteau, belching forth tumbled shirts and rumpled pocket-handkerchiefs, gaped wide upon the floor; the top of the chest of drawers was covered with bottles, principally of the soda-water pattern, but of which

one contained a modicum of brandy, and another some fluid magnesia. Everything in the room was disorderly and uncomfortable; and Gertrude's quick eye took in all this discomfort and its details in a glance, while she stepped lightly across the floor and approached the bed.

The sunlight was shining on Harvey Gore's face, and showed her how worn and livid, how ghastly and distorted, it was. He lay quite still, and took no notice of her presence. Instantly perceiving the effect of the green blind, Gertrude went to the window and pulled it up, then beckoned Mrs. Bush to her side, and once more drew near the bed.

"Mr. Gore," she said, "Mr. Gore! Do you not know me? Can you not look at me? Can you not speak to me? I am Mrs. Lloyd."

The sick man answered her only with a groan. His face was an awful ashen gray; his shoulders were so raised that the head seemed to be sunken upon the chest; and his body lay upon the bed with unnatural weight and stillness. One hand was hidden by the bedclothes, the other clutched a corner of the pillow with cramped and rigid fingers. The two women exchanged looks of alarm.

"Was he looking like this when you saw him last--since I came?" said Mrs. Lloyd, speaking in a distinct low tone directed completely into the ear of the listener.

"No, no; nothing like so bad as he looks now," said Mrs. Bush, whose distended eyes were fixed upon the patient with an expression of unmitigated dismay. "Did you ever see anyone die?" she whispered to Gertrude Lloyd.

"No; never."

"Then you will see it, and soon."

"Do you really think he is dying?" and then she leaned over him, shook him very gently by the shoulder, loosened his hold of the pillow, and said again,

"Mr. Gore! Mr. Gore! Do you not know me? Can you not speak to me?"

Again he groaned, and then, feebly opening his eyes, so awfully glazed and hollow that Gertrude recoiled with an irrepressible start, made a movement with his head.

"He knows me," whispered Gertrude to Mrs. Bush; "for God's sake go for a doctor without an instant's delay! I must stay with him."

The landlady, dreadfully frightened, was only too glad to escape from the room.

For a few moments after she was left alone with the sick man Gertrude stood beside him quite still and silent; then he moved uneasily, again groaned, and made an ineffectual attempt to sit up in his bed. Gertrude tried to assist him; she passed her arms round his shoulders, and put all her strength to the effort to raise him, but in vain. The large heavy frame slipped from her hold, and sunk down again with ominous weight and inertness. Looking around in great fear, but still preserving her calmness, she perceived the bottle in which some brandy still remained. In an instant she had filled a wine-glass with the spirit, lifted the sufferer's feeble head, and contrived to pour a small quantity down his throat. The stimulant acted for a little upon the dying man; he looked at her with eyes in which an intelligent purpose pierced the dull glaze preceding the fast-coming darkness, stretched his hand out to her, and drew her nearer, nearer. Gertrude bent over him until her chestnut

hair touched his wan livid temples, and then, when her face was on a level with his own, he whispered in her ear.

* * * * *

Mrs. Bush had not gone many steps away from her own hall-door when she met Gilbert Lloyd. He was walking slowly, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his head bent, his eyes frowning and downcast, and his under-lip firmly held by his white, sharp, even teeth. He did not see Mrs. Bush until she came close up to him, and exclaimed,

"O, Mr. Lloyd, how thankful I am I've met you! The gentleman is very bad indeed--just gone, sir,--and I was going for a doctor. There's not a moment to lose."

Gilbert Lloyd's face turned perfectly white.

"Impossible, Mrs. Bush," he said; "you must be mistaken. He was much better when I left him; besides, he was not seriously ill at all."

"I don't know about that, sir, and I can't stay to talk about it; I must get the doctor at once."

"No, no," said Lloyd, rousing himself; "I will do that. Where is the nearest? Tell me, and do you go back to him."

"First turn to the right, second door on the left," said Mrs. Bush, with unusual promptitude. "Dr. Muxky's; he isn't long established, but does a good business."

Gilbert Lloyd hurried away; and Mrs. Bush returned to the house, thinking only when she had reached it, that she had forgotten to mention his wife's arrival to Gilbert Lloyd.

* * * * *

When Lloyd entered the sick man's room, bringing with him Dr. Muxky, as that sandy-haired and youthful general practitioner was called by his not numerous clients, he saw a female figure bending over the bed. It was not that of Mrs. Bush; he had passed her loitering on the stairs,--ostensibly that she might conduct the gentlemen to the scene of action, really because she dared not reënter the room unsupported by a medical presence. The figure did not change its attitude as they entered, and Dr. Muxky approached the patient with a professional gliding step. He was followed by Lloyd; who, however, stopped abruptly on the opposite side of the bed when he met the full unshrinking gaze of his wife's bright, clear, threatening eyes.

"May I trouble you to stand aside for a moment?" said Dr. Muxky courteously to Gertrude, who instantly moved, but only a very little way, and again stood quite still and quite silent. Dr. Muxky stooped over his patient, but only for a few seconds. Then he looked up at Gilbert Lloyd, and said hastily,

"I have been called in too late, sir; I'm afraid your friend is dead."

"Yes," said Gertrude quietly, as if the doctor had spoken to her: "he is dead. He has been dead some minutes."

Gilbert Lloyd looked at her, but did not speak; the doctor looked from one to the other, but said nothing. Then Gertrude stretched out her hand and laid her fingers heavily upon the dead man's eyelids, and kept them there for

several moments amid the silence. In a little while she steadily withdrew her hand, and without a word left the room.

On the drawing-room landing she found Mrs. Bush. That practised and cautious landlady, mindful of the possible prejudice of her permanent lodgers against serious illness and probable death in their immediate vicinity, raised her finger, as a signal that a low tone of voice would be advisable.

"Go upstairs; the doctor wants you," said Gertrude, and passed quickly down to the parlour. A few moments more, and she had put on her bonnet and shawl, opened the hall-door without noise, closed it softly, and was walking swiftly down the street towards the shore.

CHAPTER II.

Pondered.

Table of Contents

The sandy-haired slim young man, whose name was Muxky, who was a member of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, and who amongst the few poor people of Brighton that knew of his existence enjoyed the brevet-rank of doctor, found himself in anything but a pleasant position.

The man to see whom he had been called in was dead; there was no doubt of that. No pulsation in the heart, dropped jaw, fixed eyes--all the usual appearances--ay, and rather more than the usual appearances: "What we professionally call the *rigor mortis*--the stiffness immediately succeeding death, my dear sir, is in this case very peculiarly developed." Mr. Muxky, in the course of his attendance at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, had seen many deathbeds, had inspected in an easy and pleasant manner many dead bodies; but he had never seen one which had presented such an extraordinary aspect of rigidity so immediately after death. He approached the bed once more, turned back the sheet which Mrs. Bush had drawn over the face, and kneeling by the side of the bed, passed his hand over and under the body. As he moved, Gilbert Lloyd moved too, taking up his position close behind him, and watching him narrowly. For an instant a deep look of anxiety played across Gilbert Lloyd's face, the lines round the mouth deepened and darkened, the brows came down over the sunken eyes, and the under jaw, relaxing, lost its aspect of determination; but as Mr. Muxky turned from the bed and addressed him, Lloyd's glance was perfectly steady, and his face expressed no emotions stronger than those which under the circumstances every man would be expected to feel, and no man would care to hide.

"This is rather an odd experience, my dear sir," said Mr. Muxky; "called in to see our poor friend, who has, as it were, slipped his cable before my arrival. Our poor friend, now, was a--well--man of the world as you are--you will understand what I mean--our poor friend was a--free liver."

Yes, Gilbert Lloyd thought that he was a man who ate and drank heartily, and never stinted himself in anything.

"Nev-er stinted himself in anything!" repeated Mr. Muxky, who had by this time added many years to his personal appearance, and entirely prevented the bystanders from gleaning any expression from his eyes, by the assumption of a pair of glasses of neutral tint--"nev-er stinted himself in anything! Ah, a great deal may be ascribed to that, my dear sir; a great deal may be ascribed to that!"

"Yes," said Gilbert Lloyd carelessly; "if a man will take as much lobster-salad and Strasbourg pie as he can eat, with as much champagne and moselle as he can carry; and if, in spite of the remonstrances of his friends, he will sit without his hat on the top of a drag, with the August sun beating down upon him--"

"Did he do that, my dear sir--did he do that?"

"He did, indeed! Several of us implored him to be careful; but you might as well have spoken to the wind as to him, poor dear fellow. We told him that he'd probably have a--a--what do you call it?"

"General derangement of the system? Flux of blood to the--"

"No, no; sunstroke--that's what I mean; sunstroke. Perigal, who was out in India in the Punjaub business--he was on our drag when poor Harvey was taken bad, and he said it was sunstroke all over--regular case."

"Did he, indeed?" said Mr. Muxky. "Well, that's odd, very odd! From the symptoms you have described, I imagined that it must have been something of the kind:--brain overdone, system overtaxed. In this railway age, Mr. Lloyd,