

this parish, where there is so much need, that the living must have the first claim. But I think I can beg a few flowers for you to put into Teddy's hand. You would like that?"

Her countenance brightened.

"I would, sir, and thank you kindly," with a little curtsy. "He was allus a good boy, was my Teddy. Brought 'ome 'is bit o' wages as reg'lar; but 'e's gone now. And with Miller out o' work I don't know where we'll all be."

With the idea of the blossoms needed to comfort that sorrowful heart still in his mind, Guy walked up to Kingston Villa as soon as he was at liberty. Surely from her abundance Mrs. Brookes could spare a handful to solace the stricken creature who had just left him:

In the hall—upon the mat, in fact—Guy encountered the Countess. Waiting for admittance, he had beheld, by means of the decorated glass panels of the door, what seemed, surveyed through that medium, to be a dim shadow that flitted rapidly down the staircase as soon as his ring made itself heard. Helen's subsequent slow saunter across the black-and-white tiles, brought about the meeting that she intended, just as the servant answered the bell.

"Are they never off guard?" the Curate meditated.

"But Mrs. Brookes is not receiving," Helen came forward to tell him, as soon as he asked for her hostess. "She is most busy. Her poor head, too—ah! how it is bad. If I could take a message?"

He looked at her with a smile. Clever woman as she was, even she could sometimes overshoot the mark. Bad headaches and business had not hitherto amalgamated in the case of the indolent widow. In short, he neither believed her excuses nor supposed that Mrs. Brookes had any knowledge regarding them. It was, unless he mistook, a little venture of Helen's own, prompted by what motive he could not as yet guess.

"Mrs. Brookes is generally good enough to see me," he answered, with his hand already upon the door of the dining-room. -

In that apartment the mistress of Kingston Villa was ordinarily to be found, the drawing-room being regarded by her with some awe as a sacred spot, where she could by no means take her ease or snatch the "forty winks," which she always considered necessary after her early dinner.

Certainly Stella's step-mother gave no sign either of great occupation or of severe illness, when Guy entered, followed, after a moment, by the baffled Helen. She was, on the contrary, quietly leaning back in her chair, regardless of the position of the well-known pink rose, at present conspicuous just above her nose, and listening, with a smile, to the deferential communications which Caryl was pouring into her greedy and too trustful ears. Guy noticed that the table was covered with papers and specimens of ore.

Mr. Clive turned with something of a start as they appeared, including the newcomer and his own unsuccessful ally in a ferocious scowl, to which Helen's only response, as she seated herself with the oft-seen piece of embroidery in her hand, was a scarcely perceptible grimace. As to Guy, he shook hands all round with as much cordiality as he could assume, and then at once began to beg for the flowers.

"Really, Mr. Ryder, I can't imagine what sich sort o' folks want with bouquets at a funeral," Mrs. Brookes answered when she had listened to his tale. "And Debarr 'ates to cut his white blooms. 'Owever, I won't say no. You can go and 'arsk 'im yerself. Show Mr. Ryder please, Mr. Clive, where our mines are situated."

The smile with which she issued her command, at once revealed, to Guy at any rate, her mischievous humour. Mrs. Brookes was a creature of moods, one day delighting to worry the very person whom at other times she chose to pet and flatter. Possibly Caryl had lately made some remark which offended her. Perhaps he had but wearied her with too much talk. It was not unlikely that she desired simply to exasperate the Curate by intelligence which could not but alarm him. Or again, all those various motives may have been at work. Still, however that might be, it was clear from the quick frown which contracted Helen's forehead, and the reluctance with which Caryl rose to do her bidding, that neither of the pair had been at all prepared for such a revelation of their projects. Guy comprehended in a moment that, had he dared, the man would have refused to obey. But then, he did not dare.

"About here," Clive said, sweeping his hand over a map, and indicating thereby a region of country several thousands of miles in extent. "But I