

...the body was laid on the bed, and a faint, but what he put into the mouth was not swallowed. "He ain't dead though," remarked the man, "his heart is fluttering like he's still breathing, just take off all his things," but before they had finished doing so, the village doctor, Wilson, who had been called in for Charlie Thornhill arrived.

Without uttering a word he walked straight up to the bed, looked intently for an instant on the blood-bedaubed face of the nobleman, and placed his hand on his wrist.

"Warm water," he uttered, after a short pause, as all stood round with eager faces to hear his verdict, "warm water quick, a pair of scissors, and send a man for Sir William. This is a bad business, an ugly wound indeed," he remarked, as with the scissors he cut the hair all over the temple, and proceeded skillfully to dress it; "if brain fever does not intervene there are hopes, but all depends on the next few days."

Though still breathing, the unfortunate nobleman was perfectly unconscious, and looked a ghastly object as he lay on his bed.

"Let his relations and friends be immediately telegraphed to, and those who live within a short distance sent for at once," said the Doctor to the old butler. "I suppose there is plenty of clean ice in the ice-house? if not, it must be got at once, for it will be wanted. What's come to the neighborhood, lately?" he added; "there is poor young Thornhill nearly shot to death through thorough carelessness; Sir Turbit struck down by the hand of death; and now Lord Verriest by some cowardly poaching scoundrel."

A little brandy was forced down the throat of the wounded man who sighed faintly as he swallowed it, and there was a perceptible quivering of the eyelids.

"Must keep him up by stimulants," murmured the Doctor, as he watched the effects of the spirit; "it is the only chance."

He was seated watching every breath of the patient, when one of the men-servants stole in, and whispered something to the old butler who was seated at the other side of the bed.

The old man got up and came round to the Doctor; "Lord Lavender and Captain Slyfox are below, sir," he said, "may they come up?"

"By all means," replied the medical man, "I should like them to see that everything is being done that can be."

"Good God! Wilson, what's all this?" exclaimed Lord Lavender, as he entered the room with his friend; "is there any hope?"

"Whilst there is life there is hope, my Lord," replied the Doctor, "but it is a fearful wound. I have already telegraphed for Sir William, who, you know, only lives sixteen miles away, so there is every probability of his being soon here; he is sure to come by a special train, and a close carriage is now at the station waiting."

"Quite right, Wilson, quite right," said Lord Lavender, "and all his friends and relations of course have been summoned?"

"And poor Miss Sprightly?" asked Captain Slyfox, "has she been written or sent to? if not she must be."

The order was given, but all the men being out on various errands and confusion paramount in the house, it was forgotten until the next morning, and this was how Bessy did not receive the news sooner.

About midnight the carriage rolled up to the door, Sir William, and Doctor Wilson was in the hall to receive him. They conferred for a few instants apart, and then ascended to the chamber.

"What do you think, Sir William?" asked Lord Lavender, anxiously, after the skillful practitioner had made his examination.

"My Lord," Sir William, gravely, "there is no denying it is a very dangerous case, and lies on the balance of a feather. He will probably remain some three days like this, a change for better or worse will then take place; in nine days, however, it will be determined one way or the other. I shall not leave the house to-night, we shall want a nurse and a good one. I will now go into the study, and write to Mr. Charles Thornhill, asking him to let his old servant Grimes come here; he does not require her now, and she is the best person in a sick-room I ever met with; the note can be taken the first thing to-morrow morning."

"Is there anything, Sir William, you require?" asked Lord Lavender, as he and his friend prepared to take their departure, "because, if so, I and Slyfox will only be too glad to be of any assistance."

"Nothing, Lord Lavender; I and Doctor Wilson will remain in the room all night,

William, both gentlemen had left for the widows in one of the most carriages.

Every lad that could ride, and every farmer's horse that could be procured, had been sent by Mr. Conyers to the different subscribers of Warbeck Hunt, stating that in consequence of the melancholy occurrence the hounds would not meet until further notice.

When Sir William and Doctor Wilson made their appearance in Bessy's neat little bedroom, she was lying perfectly quiet, white as the sheets that surrounded her, and eyes bright and meaningless as the diamond ring (the gift of Lord Verriest) on her finger.

"Well, young lady," said Sir William, as he took her hand, "what can we do for you?" but continued gazing vacantly at the ceiling.

"Bessie, my darling," said her mother, "don't you see the doctors? they have come to tell you Lord Verriest is quite safe. She has been in this way," she added, "ever since Alice gave her the news three hours ago."

"Oh! miss, do speak to the gentleman," said her sobbing maid, "there is nothing the matter."

"Do you feel any pain, Miss Sprightly?" asked Mr. Wilson, "any pain in the head or chest?"

Still the same vacant listless look, and the question was unheeded.

"A serious case," said Sir William, "no fever and her pulse as regular as clockwork. We may speak freely, she does not heed or hear us; her system has received a fearful shock, and I fear she will ever remain in this state of apathy, unless she can be moved by some strong emotion."

"Oh, don't say so, Sir William?" cried the mother, falling down by the bedside, and burying her face in the clothes.

"Has she any friends or companions she is particularly fond of?" asked Sir William, of the maid, "any lady friends, I mean."

"There is only one she knows here, sir," replied the weeping girl, "Miss Thornhill."

"Then let her be sent for at once. Medicine is no good here, this is a case for time, and time only; she is a girl of strong feelings and emotions, and will only be moved out of this state of coma by some sudden excitement. You must not be cast down, Miss Sprightly," said Sir William, kindly taking her hand, and assisting her to rise, "there is nothing to fear but her mind; let her be kept quiet, but not alone, be moving constantly about in her room, and indulge her in every desire should she express any—I will call again in the afternoon," and bowing to the heart-broken mother left the room.

"Bessy, my darling Bessy," said Mary Thornhill, seating herself down by her friend's bedside, "don't you know me? what is the matter with you?" Tears were trickling down the tender-hearted girl's cheeks as she asked this question, for she was utterly shocked at the vague expression of her friend's face, but still there was no response. "Bessy," persisted her enquirer, "will you lend me your horses? or would you like to go for a ride and see how Lord Verriest is?" but receiving no answer or look of recognition poor Mary fairly broke down and sobbed aloud.

"Oh! Miss Bessy, do take some break-fast!" said her maid, as she placed a neat little tray on the bed before her; but the girl uttered no word, nor paid any attention, save that she pushed the tray impatiently from her, and her lips moved as if they were muttering something, though no sound escaped them.

For hours did Mary Thornhill sit beside her friend's bedside, endeavoring to arouse her attention and get her to say something, but without effect, for she heeded not the slightest thing.

At last she fell off into a gentle doze, and Mary getting up, and wishing Mrs. Sprightly adieu for the present, said she would return at eight that evening.

"Well, Duffer," said his friend, as they sat at dinner, "you said this morning you had no pity for poor Bessie Sprightly; I think you would have, though, if you knew the state he was in."

"Oh! she's all right enough," replied the other gulping down a glass of sherry: "half of it is sham; and, fancy, the hounds not hunting, and not going to hunt until further notice, and all because a fellow has a knock on the head. And I, too, going all the way to cover this morning on a fool's errand. Other men had notices of the hounds not intending to hunt, why should not I or you have had one?"

"Simply because we are not subscribers, but merely birds of passage. If you had any feelings at all, Shirkington," replied the other—"for he was considerably heated—"you'd

"So that d—d Rasper and Downey have been talking, have they?" said Shirkington, when he found his voice; "well, I'll walk into them the first time I meet them."

"So I would," returned his friend, "but I'll bet you a trifle you will not dare to say to either half of what you have just told me."

"As for you, Bluster, after what has passed, we can no longer live together; our month is up next week, and I shall not remain here after that time."

"Just exactly my intention," returned the other. "I have already arranged with Downey and Rasper to lodge with them. There is plenty of stabling, and we shall get on capitally."

"Oh! that's your game is it?" replied Shirkington, "so much the better; then I shall have the cottage all to myself."

"That is the best thing you can do, Shirkington, for you will never find any one to live with you whilst you talk in the way you do, and give utterance to such sentiments; now we will drop the subject." Lighting a cigar and filling himself up a glass of brandy and water, he took up the paper, and sat down by the fire in his arm-chair.

Perhaps the quiet part of Yorkshire, of which we have been speaking, had never been in such a state before; a popular nobleman was lying at death's door; a rich old city knight struck suddenly down by apoplexy; a beautiful girl's young hopes and mind destroyed; the favorite man of the county slowly recovering from a gun-shot wound, had all combined to make the place dull and lifeless. Dinner parties had been postponed, balls given up, and the meet of the hounds put off *sine die*.

"Do you not think, Thornhill," said Sir John Forest to the old Squire, as they met at the Moat, where both had gone to inquire after Lord Verriest, "it would be better for Charlie to come back to me a bit? He is strong enough to be moved now, for he has been out in the carriage two or three times already; it will be a change for him. Your daughter's time will be nearly all taken up with poor Miss Sprightly; but I forgot to ask what time this frightful accident to poor Verriest took place last night."

"His body was found about nine o'clock," returned the old Squire; "but as to Charlie's leaving me, pray don't ask it. I know how good, how kind, how generous, and what a friend you have been to him all through, but you must let him sleep with me until he is quite recovered."

"Of course, Thornhill, anything you like. This, unfortunately, is not the only house of grief; poor Lady Turtlefat, they say, is terribly cut up; and Mrs. Sprightly prostrated with misery at her daughter's sad state."

"Ah! poor girl," replied the old Squire; "I quite loved her, Forest, though she was only at my house once—a bright ingenious creature, full of life and hopes; she was simply charming—and Mary was exceeding fond of her; the friendship of an hour, for it is extraordinary how soon girls take to one another. The Sprightly's means are evidently small, but still she and her mother have doubtless seen better days; in fact, Mary told me that her friend had opened her heart to her—how she had come into Yorkshire with the idea of marrying that young man, Duffer, as it appeared he had shown her great attention at Brighton, and all but proposed; and how when she had seen him amongst other gentlemen, became disgusted with his vulgarity and manners. Girls will be girls you know, and she evidently saw Verriest's admiration of her—poor fellow; I was not partial to him at one time, and I own I was prejudiced. He would, I believe, have made her a good husband, and she a fond loving wife."

Those high-spirited girls generally come the collar quicker than the others; and the duties of her house, and visiting in the first society, as she certainly would have done, would have diminished her love for horses and hunting. Mary likes it in a quiet way; it is amusing and exciting for girls in a dull country place; and, after all, very little harm in it. I trust and hope the poor fellow upstairs will get over it, though Sir William says it is a toss up. Miss Sprightly's is a melancholy case; Mary tells me she can hardly bear to see her, but we must hope for the best."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ESCAPE.

The time passed wearily at the Moat; the house was hushed and silent; and, save when the neighboring gentry came to inquire after the unfortunate nobleman, it looked to all intents and purposes like a deserted mansion.

fortune, for the term of her natural life, and at her death to revert to his son under certain restrictions.

A couple of days after the interment of his father, John Turtlefat thought it would only be polite to ride over to the Moat and enquire after its owner's health. On arriving there, he found Sir William walking backwards and forwards on the terrace, inhaling a little fresh air.

"The crisis, Mr. Turtlefat," replied Sir William to the question put to him, "is not far off; this evening, I apprehend, will decide it one way or the other."

As they were conversing, another poor invalid appeared on the scene: Charles Thornhill had driven over in a low pony-chaise with Sir John Forest, to make his inquiries. Charlie, though looking sick and delicate, was mending fast.

"Well, Thornhill," said Turtlefat, "I am glad to see you out again."

Charlie, who was quite unaware of the proposal that his cousin had been honored with, shook hands with him cordially, and talked over various matters whilst the two elder gentlemen were conversing apart.

"I hardly expected you to shake hands with me, Thornhill," said the other, "especially after what has passed."

"My good fellow," replied Charlie, "you cannot suppose that I harbor any malice; your shooting me was quite accidental. No one, I am certain, would have been more sorry than you were."

"It is not that exactly," answered Turtlefat, slightly confused, "it was your cousin, Miss Thornhill's rejection of me, that I allude to."

"Why, you do not mean to say, Turtlefat," exclaimed the other, reddening up, and his eyes gleaming strangely, "that you proposed to Mary?"

"Yes, I did, Thornhill, coming home from hunting. I was a little elevated at the time, I admit, but if I had not popped then, I should have done so another day."

"You proposed—you dared to propose to my cousin, Turtlefat?"

"Yes, I did dare, and why not?"

"Why not?" said Thornhill grasping him tightly by the arm, and drawing him towards him; "why not—because," and he whispered something in his ear.

"Good God! Thornhill!" cried the young man falling back a pace or two, with face of ashy paleness, and trembling from head to foot as if stricken with sudden ague, "how on earth did you know this?"

"No matter, I know it."

"But how, Thornhill," asked the trembling, guilty-looking wretch, "how could you know it?"

"Come to me, Turtlefat, this evening at eight, and I will show you—and come privately, too—what a consummate scoundrel you are. Never dare to presume to address or annoy my cousin again in any way, or, by God! I'll not leave a whole bone in your skin. If you ever wish life to speak to you again you'll do what is right—it is not too late," and saying this he turned on his heel and left him.

John Turtlefat, as he rode towards home, pondered and wondered how Thornhill had become possessed of his fatal secret; and, on arriving at the Hall, buried himself in the seclusion of his room. He tried to read, he tried to write, but nothing could divert his attention; and he paced up and down his chamber, and impatiently cursed the man who possessed a knowledge, which he would have given half the world he had not been acquainted with.

Shortly before eight that evening he drove up by himself to the lodge gates of Linden Hall.

"Is that you, Turtlefat?" asked a voice, and Thornhill strode up to the side of the dog-cart. "Throw the rug over your horse," he added: "the lodge-keeper will look after him. It would not do for my uncle to know you were in the house; and he even thinks at this present moment I am lying down; follow me," and the two men walked rapidly away up the avenue.

On arriving at the house, Thornhill conducted his companion up one of the back staircases to his own room, which they reached without any one having seen them.

"I knew you were foolish, Turtlefat: have long known it," looking at the other in supreme contempt, "but I did not think you were so utterly without principle as you are—do you know what you have done?"

"Too well, Thornhill; but how did you become possessed of what I thought was only known to myself?"

"Wait here five minutes," replied Charlie, "and I will show you;" and saying this he passed into his dressing-room.

an actor in a third-class theatre! It will rather astonish the good people about here when it becomes known, which it shall, I swear."

Whilst all this was taking place, the unfortunate nobleman at the Moat was lying in a calm sleep; his medical attendants were below at dinner; old nurse Grimes had been relieved at her post, which was now occupied by one of the men-servants, and he seeing that his master slept quietly, stole softly from the room. He had not been gone three minutes before the invalid awoke: his eyes wandered vacantly round the apartment, and he muttered something to himself which was unintelligible; he shifted uneasily in his bed several times, and then sat up, and after a few seconds stepped deliberately to the floor, tottered across the room, and sat himself down by the fire, talking and muttering to himself all the while; and presently, reaching out his hand towards a bottle which stood on a small table beside him, gulped down the contents. His eyes now assumed a wild, startling expression, and two hectic spots burned on his cheek; he seemed for a few moments as if listening intently, putting his hand to his wounded head occasionally as if in pain. He then rose from the chair, and walking straight to the door on which hung his gorgeous dressing-gown, and which seemed particularly to have attracted his attention, took it off the hook and mechanically put it on; he then opened the door and passed out into the corridor, down the front staircase, across the hall, and out of the door which happened to be open.

Doctor Wilson's gig, which had only arrived a short time before with his man-servant, bearing a letter for his master, who was requested immediately to attend a poor curate's wife some nine miles off, and who was about to present her lord and master with an eleventh pledge of conjugal affection, stood temptingly before the delirious and fever-stricken nobleman.

The doctor's man had gone into the servants' hall for a glass of ale, leaving the well-accustomed old horse, who was used to standing alone by the hour together at the doors of the doctor's numerous patients.

Into the gig the nobleman stepped with his slipperless feet, catching hold of the reins, and giving the animal a cut across the flank with a whip, passed down the avenue at a rapid pace, and the lodge-keeper hearing the vehicle approach, without any hesitation flung open the gates, and the trap passed out on the high road. The man wondered that no one spoke, or even said good-night, but it was too dark, even by the lamps of the gig, to see who the driver was.

Nurse Grimes, entering the sick chamber shortly after his Lordship had left it, was petrified on finding it empty, hastily ringing the bell again and again, the servant who had been left in charge rushed in.

"Where on earth is his Lordship?" she asked with a scared countenance.

"I am sure I don't know, Mrs. Grimes; I left him here two minutes ago sound asleep."

"Oh! John, John, what have you done?" cried the old woman, passing swiftly from the room to the dining-room, where the gentlemen sat at dinner, and informed them of the fact.

A few minutes convinced them that the delirious nobleman had left his room, and made use of the doctor's gig to effect his escape.

Carrriages were ordered out, horses saddled for the country to be scoured, and the utmost confusion reigned.

Bessy Sprightly had been more composed for the last few days, and had answered "yes" and "no" to questions put to her, but was nearly in the same apathetic state we last left her in.

On this evening she was up, dressed, and lying on the sofa in the drawing-room, her mother was sitting and conversing in a low tone with Colonel Downey.

Their conversation was rudely interrupted by the door being rudely burst open, and a figure rushing in, wild and haggard, with a deadly pale and ghastly face, and eyes gleaming as those of a maniac's.

"Eh! what?" said the Colonel, jumping in considerable trepidation, "who the deuce is this?" and glancing again at the figure exclaimed, "Why, by Gad, it's Verriest!" the old soldier's instinct had told him in a moment how matters stood.

Bessy, on hearing the door so unceremoniously burst open, had risen from the sofa, and stood looking steadfastly at the apparition.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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