

some doctor of their acquaintance. 'A clever fellow. When he says a case is a bad one it is all over with a man.' That was the sentence Hope caught. The four men passed on, hardly casting a glance on the dark figure by the roadside.

'Jim's coming along with the mare,' were the last words she heard.

Again the sound of horses' feet—an irregular sound this time. Another rider, yet not Harold, leading a riderless horse. Now Hope looked up. She must ascertain if Harold had ridden that horse the day before, and why, if so, had he remained behind? She spoke to the man—a stableman evidently in the employ of Mr. Furniss. He pulled up at once, quite ready to answer questions.

'The Englishman, you want to know about? Well, yes, he's in a very bad way. As nasty a fall as ever a man had!'

'A fall?' Hope's heart stood still. She had her hand on the man's bridle now. She must hear everything. 'Has Mr. Wentworth had a fall from his horse?' she stammered.

'From this very mare here. And as quiet a creature as there is for miles round. But it ain't likely any beast will stand a plank falling down sudden on to her flanks from a house in building. It was this way, you see. Mr. Wentworth he was riding with a loose rein out of Merseymouth yonder (I was just behind him—I saw it all), when a young fool of a lad came out of the window of a half-put-up shed. "This 'ere won't do," says he, and shies a plank down to his mate, but it catches the paling and falls into the road, hitting Fairy here. She swerves, and chucks Mr. Wentworth against a stone wall. The doctor he thinks badly of him.'

'Where—where is he?' asked Hope, breathlessly. All her thoughts were changed in an instant. Harold injured, suffering, was not the husband she had armed herself to give up with cold contempt. She must go to him at once.

'The master's stayed along of him up at Mrs. Proctor's in Merseymouth. They carried him in there. His back's broken, I think they said. Here, I say, missis, where

are you off to? Are you belonging to the gentleman?'

'Yes, yes,' said Hope, breathlessly; 'I know him. I come from Mr. Furniss's.'

Still she preserved the instinct to shield her husband's reputation.

'Then look here, you wait for yonder trap you see coming along. It's Morty's, and it's bound for Merseymouth. You'll be there in half an hour, for his pony's a stunner to go; and if you're a hand at nursing, the master will be precious glad of you. Here, I'll speak to Morty for you.'

Before Hope could realise what the man meant, a sort of high-wheeled dogcart pulled up beside her, and a lantern-jawed man invited her in.

'What, you're the nurse?' he said. 'The chaps in front told me about the accident. Hope you'll find the poor fellow alive.'

Then, to Hope's great relief, he put his pipe in his mouth and devoted himself to encouraging the pony to its utmost speed. Morty was known in the district for his swift, not to say wild, driving, but Hope felt the pace almost slow.

How this last hour had altered every thought and feeling within her! All she cared for now was to reach Harold, to nurse him. Surely she had been guided here for the purpose.

Merseymouth was a scattered little township, boasting but few good houses. Opposite the best of these, with a bright light shining in an upper window, 'Morty' pulled up with a sudden jerk.

'Proctor's,' he said.

'Thank you,' gasped Hope. 'I—I can't pay you.'

'I should think not,' was the answer. 'Glad I met you; good-bye.'

And Morty spun on. It was quite dark now. Hope groped her way to the door of the house, opened it, and walked straight in. She had decided as she came along what to do and say.

'I am the nurse,' she said. 'May I go upstairs at once?' She guessed she was speaking to Mr. Furniss, a heavy, elderly man, sitting with a rather dejected face in an armchair.