

"Lead him by the head," said the doctor as he was closing the door.

In a few minutes they went out to the verandah in front of the house to wait for the new horse. They had not to wait long. They had not exchanged ten words when they heard the quick tramp of a horse's hoofs on the ground, and in an instant the horse flew past the end of the house with the speed of the ostrich of the desert. One of the shafts of the sulky was still attached to his harness; the rest of it was gone. He rushed through the gateway into the road and was out of sight in a moment.

"Good God!" exclaimed Rivers, "what has happened?" the doctor was mute, neither spoke nor moved; he was evidently paralyzed with wonder and perhaps with fear.

Rivers ran past the house towards the barn, and there he saw a sight that was not soon to be forgotten—there in the pathway lay the broken fragments of the sulky, and a little beyond the stable a man stone dead with the mark of a horse's shoe deeply indented in his forehead. It had crushed into his brain, and he had evidently died instantaneously.

If Rivers was speechless with horror, it is not surprising. To behold a man killed in an instant, in his prime and strength, whom he had seen five minutes before full of health and "lusty life" was surely a sight to appal the strongest heart. And, again, the thought that the very same accident might have happened to him lent additional horror to the scene. The tragedy was easily explained. The domestics had seen it all from the windows, the man had jumped into the sulky to drive round to the door. In an instant the horse started—kicked out with both heels straight at the man's head—smashed the sulky to atoms and then galloped like a demon down the road.

"And this," thought Rivers, is what might have happened to me, had I been unfortunate enough to get behind that accursed devil of a horse."

In the meantime the doctor had partly recovered his self-possession, and joined the party which had gathered round the corpse. But the face of the dead man was not whiter than his own, and his hand was scarcely as cold. He had not yet spoken a word—his tongue seemed to have lost the power of articulation, and his voice was seemingly gone.

"Speak!" cried Rivers "where did you get this horse. The man who sold him to you if he knew of his tricks is a murderer—a wilful murderer!"

"This seemed to have the effect of raising the doctor from his lethargy. With a strong effort he broke the spell which seemed to seal his lips, and his voice as he spoke was strong as before."

"Yes, a vile murderer. He has killed that man. O God it is awful—cut off so suddenly! May the Lord have mercy on his soul!"

As he spoke Dr. Bland sat down on the steps and covered his face with his handkerchief. He was weeping; yes, weeping bitterly.

In the mean time, the body had been carried into the next house. The Coroner was sent for, a jury sworn, and a verdict found in accordance with the facts of the case. In two days the remains of the unfortunate man were consigned to its kindred clay, there soon to be forgotten by all, except by a widowed mother whose only support he had been.

The morning after this accident took place, Charles Rivers rode over to see Dr. Bland. When he came to meet him he seemed pale and toil-worn.

"Jemuel," said Rivers, "I want to buy that horse; name your price."

"What do you want of him?"

"I have a particular use for him."

"Take him then, I will ask nothing for him. Only keep him out of my sight."

"I prefer buying him."

"Very well, then, a nominal price. He cost me forty pounds; you shall have him for five."

"A bargain; here is the money."

Rivers led the horse away with him in triumph, refusing to gratify Dr. Bland's curiosity as to what he intended to do with him. They were not, however, long kept in the dark. He put the brute in one of his own fields, went to the house got his rifle, and shot him dead, remarking as he did so that he would never kill any more men, and expressing at the same time the uncharitable hope that the fellow who sold him to Dr. Bland might get his brains kicked out in like manner.

Charles Rivers took good care that the mother of the unfortunate man should not suffer. He sent her everything she required, and in addition, forty pounds in money, being the value of the horse which had killed her son.

A day or two after these events took place, Rivers received a note from Ellen Foster requesting his presence at tea that evening.—Charles Rivers was constantly at the house of Miss Foster, and an invitation of this kind was something unusual as he was in the habit of going there to tea, without being asked whenever it suited him; and he and Ellen Foster were almost like brother and sister. He therefore fully expected to meet some strangers there this time, but was deceived. None but Miss Foster and her father were present.

"Well Charlie" said old Mr. Foster affectionately shaking hands with the youth, "glad to see you, where have you been for the last week? Ellen thought something had happened to you and sent over a note to see if you were alive. How does the mare go, by the way?"

"D—! excuse me, I should have said a plague to all trotting horses! That poor ostler's death has quite turned me against them."

"Yes, that was dreadful. I don't wonder, Lucky for you, you were not behind him."