

The Doctor's Wife

BY MISS M. E. BRADDON



CHAPTER XII.—(Continued.)

"A criminal case?"
"Yes. I was in town on business a year or two ago, to renew some leases and look into a whole batch of tiresome business matters which my lawyer insisted upon my attending to in my own proper person, very much to my annoyance. I dropped into the United Stock Bank. While I was talking to one of the clerks at the counter a man came in and stood close to my elbow while he handed in a check. I know it came very close upon the hundred—received the money and went out. He looked like a groom out of livery. I left the bank almost immediately after him, and as he turned into a little alley I followed a few paces behind him. At the bottom of the alley my friend the groom was met by a big, black-whiskered man who seemed to have been waiting for him, for he caught him suddenly by the arm and said: 'Well, did they do it?' 'Yes,' the other man answered, and began fumbling in his pocket, making a chinking sound as he did so. 'You needn't have pounced upon me so precious sharp,' he said, rather sulkily; 'I wasn't going to bolt with it, was I?' The black-whiskered man had seen me by this time, and he muttered something to his companion which evidently meant that he was to hold his tongue, and then dragged him off without further ceremony. This was all I saw of the groom or the black-whiskered gentleman upon that occasion. I thought their method of cashing a check was rather a queer one; but I thought no more about it until three weeks afterward, when I went into the United Stock Bank again, and was told that the check which had been cashed in my presence was a forgery, one of a series of the most audacious frauds, perpetrated by a gang whose plans had only just come to light and none of whom had yet been arrested. 'They've managed to keep themselves in the dark in the most extraordinary manner,' the clerk told me; 'the checks are supposed to have been all fabricated by one man, but three or four men have been employed to get hold of the original signatures of our customers, which they have obtained by a complicated system.' Whereupon I told my little story of the black-whiskered gentleman."

Mr. Lansdell paused to take breath, and stole a glance at Isabel. She was pale always—but she was very pale now and was watching him with an eager, breathless expression.

"Silly, romantic little thing," he thought, "to be so intensely absorbed in my story."

"You're getting interesting, Roland," said Gwendoline. "Pray go on."

"The upshot of the matter was that at 8 o'clock that evening a grave little gentleman came to me and cross-questioned me as to what I knew of the man who had cashed the check. 'You think you could recognize this man with the black whiskers?' he said. 'Yes; most decidedly I could.' 'And you'll swear to him, if necessary?' 'With pleasure.' On this the detective departed and came to me the next day, to tell me that he fancied he was on the track of the man he wanted, but he was at a loss for means of identification. He knew, or thought that he knew, who the man was; but he didn't know the man himself from Adam. The next morning I had the supreme pleasure of pointing out my black-whiskered acquaintance. He looked very black, declaring that it was all a mistake, and that it would be easily set right. I let the two go together, very well pleased with my adventure.

"I was not so well pleased, however, when I found that I was wanted as a witness at preliminary examinations, and adjourned examinations, and on and off through a trial that lasted four days and a half; to say nothing of being badgered and brow-beaten by practitioners—who were counsel for the prisoner—and who asked me if it was my friend's whiskers I recognized, or if I had never seen any other whiskers exactly like his; if I could know him without his whiskers; whether any member of my family had been in a lunatic asylum; whether I usually devoted my leisure time to traveling about with detective officers; whether I should be able to recognize an acquaintance I had only seen once in twenty years; whether I was short-sighted; would I swear I was not short-sighted; would I be kind enough to read a verse or so from a diamond edition of the works of Thomas Moore; and so on.

"At question me as they would, the prisoner at the bar—commonly known as Jack the Scribe, alias Jack the Gentleman, alias ever so many other names which I have completely forgotten—was the identical person whom I had seen meet the groom. My evidence was only a single link in a long chain; but I suppose it was eminently damaging to my black-whiskered friend, for when he any two of his associates had received their sentence he turned toward where I was standing, and said:

"I don't bear any grudge against the gentlemen of the jury, and I don't bear any malice against the judge, but when a languid swell mixes himself up in business that doesn't concern him, he deserves to get it hot and strong. If ever I come out of prison alive, I'll kill you!"

"He shook his fist at me as he said it. There wasn't much in the words, but there was a good deal in the way in which they were spoken. He tried to say more; but the warders got hold of him and held him down, panting and gasping, and with his face of a dull livid white.

I saw no more of him; but if he does live to come out of prison, I most firmly believe he will keep his word."

"Izzie," cried George Gilbert, suddenly, "what's the matter?"

All the point of Mr. Lansdell's story was lost; for at this moment Isabel tottered and fell slowly backward upon the sward, and all the goldfish leaped away in a panic of terror as the doctor dipped his hat into the marble basin. He splashed the water into his wife's face, and she opened her eyes at last, very slowly, and looked round her.

"Did he say that," she said, "did he say that he'd kill—"

CHAPTER XIII.

Mrs. Gilbert recovered very quickly from her fainting fit. She had been frightened by Mr. Lansdell's story, she said, and the heat had made her dizzy. She sat very quietly upon a sofa in the drawing room, with one of the orphans on each side of her, while Brown Molly was being harnessed.

Gwendoline went away with her father, after bidding Mrs. Gilbert rather a cool good-morning. The daughter did not approve of the fainting fit, which she was pleased to call Mrs. Gilbert's extraordinary demonstration.

Roland begged Mr. Gilbert to allow him to order a close carriage for his wife's return to Graybridge.

"The gig shall be sent home to you to-night," he said; "I am sure the air and dust will be too much for Mrs. Gilbert."

But Mr. Raymond hereupon interfered, and said the fresh air was just the very thing Isabel wanted, to which opinion the lady herself subscribed. She did not want to cause trouble, she said; so the gig was brought round presently, and George drove his wife away.

She made no endeavor to banish Mr. Lansdell's image from her mind. If she had recognized the need of such an effort, she would have made it perhaps. But she thought that he would go away, and her life would drop back to its dead level, and would be "all the same as if he had not been."

But Mr. Lansdell did not leave Mordred just yet. Only a week after the never-to-be-forgotten day at the Priory, he came again to Thurston's Crag, and found Isabel sitting under the oak with her books in her lap. She started up as he approached her, looking rather frightened and with her face flushed and her eyelids drooping. She had not expected him.

He did not make the slightest allusion to that unfortunate swoon which had spoiled the climax of his story. The one subject, which of all others would have been most embarrassing to the doctor's wife, was scrupulously avoided by Mr. Lansdell. He talked of all manner of things to this ignorant girl, of books and pictures, and foreign cities, and wonderful people, living and dead, of whom she had never heard before.

Out of pure philanthropy Roland offered to lend her any of the books in his library.

"Yes," he said, "you must ask me for whatever books you would like to read; and by-and-by, when I have left Mordred—"

He paused for a moment involuntarily, for he saw that Isabel gave a little shiver.

"When I leave Mordred at the end of October, you must go to the Priory, and choose the books for yourself. My housekeeper is a very good woman, and she will be pleased to wait upon you."

Mr. Lansdell met the doctor's wife beside the water mill, sometimes in the meadow-land, which surged in emerald billows all about Graybridge, and Mordred and Warncliffe. He met her very often. It was no new thing for Isabel to ramble here and there in that lovely rustic paradise; but it was quite a new thing for Mr. Lansdell to take such a fancy for pedestrian exercise.

Upon the eve of that morning, which was to set all breech-loading rifles popping at innocent red-breasted victims, George Gilbert received a letter from his old friend and comrade, Mr. Sigmund Smith, who wrote in very high spirits and with a great many blots:

"I'm coming down to stop a few days with you, dear old boy," he wrote, "to get the city smoke blown out of my hyacinthines, and to go abroad in the meadows to see the young lambs—are there any young lambs in September, by the bye? I want to see what sort of a matron you have made of Miss Isabel Sleaford. Do you remember that day in the garden when you first saw her?"

Mr. Smith arrived at Warncliffe early next morning. He was in very high spirits, and talked incessantly to Isabel, who had stayed at home to receive him, when there was just a faint chance that Mr. Lansdell might take his morning walk in the direction of Thurston's Crag.

Mrs. Gilbert gave her old friend a very cordial welcome. She was fond of him, as she might have been of some big brother; less objectionable than the ordinary run of big brothers. He had never seen Mr. Sleaford's daughter looking so bright and beautiful. A new element had been introduced into her life. She was happy, unutterably happy, on the mystical threshold of a new existence. Not for all the ruby-velvet gowns and diamond coronets in the world would she have sacrificed one accidental half hour on the bridge under Thurston's oak.

She could talk to Sigmund about Mordred and the master of Mordred. He was not like George, and he would

sympathize with her enthusiasm about that earthly paradise.

"Do you know Mordred?" she asked. She felt a kind of pleasure in calling the mansion "Mordred," all short, as he called it.

"I know the village of Mordred well enough," Mr. Smith answered, "and I ought to know the Priory precious well. The last Mr. Lansdell was a client of my father's and when Roland Lansdell was being coached up in the Classics by a private tutor, I used to go up to the Priory and read with him. The governor was very glad to get such a chance for me; but I can't say I intensely appreciated the advantage myself, on summer afternoons, when there was ball playing at Warncliffe meads."

"You knew him—you knew Mr. Roland Lansdell when he was a boy?" said Isabel, with a little gasp.

"I certainly did, my dear Izzie; but I don't think there's anything wonderful in that. You couldn't open your eyes much wider if I said I'd known Eugene Aram when he was a boy. I remember Roland Lansdell," continued Mr. Smith, "and a very jolly young fellow he was, a regular young swell. He taught me fencing. Come, Mrs. Gilbert, put on your bonnet and come out for a walk. I suppose there's no chance of our seeing George till dinner time."

"Thurston's Crag is a pretty place; shall we go there?"

"Suppose we do. That's quite a brilliant thought of yours, Izzie. Thurston's Crag is a pretty place, a nice, drowsy, lazy old place, where one always goes to sleep."

Isabel's face was all lighted up with smiles.

"I am so glad you have come to see us, Sigmund," she said.

She was very glad. She might go to Thurston's Crag now as often as she could beguile Sigmund thitherward, and that haunting sense of something wrong would no longer perplex her in the midst of her unutterable joy.

Sigmund handed her across the stile in the last meadow, and then there was only a little bit of smooth verdure between them and the waterfall; but the overhanging branches of the trees intervened, and Isabel could not see yet whether there was any one on the bridge.

But presently the narrow winding path brought them to a break in the foliage. Isabel's heart gave a tremendous bound, and then the color, which had come and gone so often on her face, faded away altogether. He was there; leaning with his back against the big knotted trunk of the oak, and making a picture of himself, with one arm above his head, plucking the oak leaves and dropping them into the water. He looked down at the glancing water and the hurrying leaves with a moody, dissatisfied scowl. Had he been anything less than a hero, one might have thought that he looked sulky.

Mr. Lansdell must have been quite ardently attached to Sigmund in those early days, if one might judge of the past by the present; for he greeted his old acquaintance with absolute effusion, and sketched out quite a little royal progress of rustic enjoyment for Sigmund's week at Graybridge.

"We'll have a picnic," he said. "You remember we talked about a picnic, Mrs. Gilbert. We'll have a picnic at Waverly; there isn't a more delightfully inconvenient place for a picnic. One can dine on the top of the western tower, in actual danger of one's life. You can write to your Uncle Raymond, Smith, and ask him to join us, with the two nieces, who are really most amiable children. This is Thursday; shall we say Saturday for my picnic? I mean it to be my picnic, you know; a bachelor's picnic. Shall it be Saturday, Mrs. Gilbert?"

Isabel only answered by deepening blushes and a confused murmur of undistinguishable syllables. Sigmund answered for the doctor's wife. Yes, he was sure Saturday would do capitally. He further accepted the invitation to dine at Mordred on Sunday, for himself and his host and hostess.

CHAPTER XIV.

Mr. Roland Lansdell did not invite Gwendoline or her father to that bachelor picnic which he was to give at Waverly. He had a kind of instinctive knowledge that General Raysdale's daughter would not relish that sylvan entertainment.

"She'd object to poor Smith, I dare say," Roland said to himself, "with his sporting-cut clothes, and his slang phrases, and his perpetual talk about novels. No, I don't think it would do to invite Gwendoline; she'd be sure to object to Smith."

Mr. Lansdell said this, or thought this, a good many times upon the day before the picnic; but it may be that there was a lurking idea in his mind that Gwendoline might object to the presence of some one other than Mr. Smith in the little assembly that had been planned under Thurston's oak.

When the ponderous old fly from Graybridge drove up a narrow winding lane and emerged upon the green rising ground below the gates of Waverly, Roland was standing under the shadow of the walls with a big bunch of hothouse flowers in his hand. He was in very high spirits; for to-day he had cast care to the winds. Why should he not enjoy this innocent pleasure of a rustic ramble with simple country-bred people and children?

Charles Raymond and the orphans had arrived, and they all came forward together to welcome Isabel and her companions. Mr. Raymond had always been very kind to his nieces' governess, but he seemed especially kind to her to-day. He interposed himself between Roland and the door of the fly, and assisted Isabel to alight. He slipped her hand under his arm with a pleasant friendliness of manner.

(To be continued.)

We believe that if ever we become an artist, we will be original and paint a stork standing on two legs.

SUPPOSE WE SMILE.

HUMOROUS PARAGRAPHS FROM THE COMIC PAPERS.

Pleasant Incidents Occurring the World Over—Sayings that Are Cheerful to Old or Young—Funny Selections that Everybody Will Enjoy.

"Yes, she wants her alimony increased."

"Why?"
"I understand she thinks of marrying again and wants the money for her trousseau."—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

His Reason.

"I like the old songs best."
"Why?"
"Because nobody sings 'em."—Cleveland Leader.

Touched.



"That was a very touching case, that Jones' divorce case, wasn't it?"
"Yes, I hear that Jones' lawyer touched him for \$200."

Up Against It.

"So your old bachelor friend really decided to get married?"
"Yes, and he says, now that he has taken the leap, he is going to sift married life to the bottom."
"And has he started?"
"Yes, the first day they returned from the honeymoon his wife started him sifting ashes."

BEFORE HOSTILITIES COMMENCED.



Rooster—What was he saying about me?
Duck—Oh, nothing much, except that you were so old and tough that they couldn't even use you for boarding-house hash.

Road Acrobats.

"Just come from the vaudeville. By jinks, there was a chap there who turned three somersaults in succession."

"I don't have to go to vaudeville to see that, old chap. I can see that right in the street."

"When?"
"Why, when a racing automobile passes."

As to the Good Old Times.



The good old times were not, I wis, Entirely good enough— The collars would prevent a kiss, Ruffs made the old times rough.

Not So Bad.

Hix—What's your idea of a fool?
Dix—A man who identifies himself by asking questions a wise man can't answer.

Sure!

Bess—My ideal was shattered.
Tess—So was mine.
Bess—Oh, no! Yours was broke.
Tess—Well, it's about the same thing, isn't it?—Detroit News.

Matter of Time.

At a country fair a machine which bore a sign reading "How to Make Your Trousers Last" occupied a prominent position in the grounds, and attracted much attention. A countryman who stood gaping before it was told by the exhibitor, a person with a long black mustache, a minstrel-stripe shirt and a ninety-four-carat diamond in a red cravat, that for 1 cent deposited in the slot the machine would dispense its valuable sartorial advice. The countryman dug the required coin from the depths of a deep pocket and dropped it in the slot. Instantly the machine delivered a card on which was neatly printed:

"Make your coat and waistcoat first."—Harper's Weekly.

What Next?

"So Freddy Newport has the latest in automobiles?"
"I should say so. Why, he actually has an atomizer on the back that sprays his friends with lavender-scented gasoline."

Why It Proved a Failure.

Scribbles—Wright's new book, "Life in the Slums," failed to make a hit, I hear.

Dribbles—Yes. He had no idea of poverty—only poverty of ideas.

Nearly on the Shelf.

"That thin woman's face is familiar."
"Yes, that's Mrs. Sniffkins."
"Mrs. eh? She hasn't been married long, has she?"
"Well, not as long as she has been longing to be."—Philadelphia Press.

Given on the Spot.

Amachure—Yes, I'm going to take a hunting trip, but I need a dog. I'm looking for some one who will lend me a setter.

Wise—I can give you a pointer.
Amachure—Can you?
Wise—Yes. Don't go.—Philadelphia Press.

Wonderful.

"So you had your palm read by a palmist?" interrogated the tramp by the water tank.

"Yes, pard," replied his chum of the ties, "and it was wonderful how he could tell fortunes. I asked him what I needed the most of all in dis world."

"What did he say?"
"Why, he looked at me palm and said: 'A cake of soap.'"

The Spoils.

Gunner—What in the world is that on the front of Cogger's automobile? It looks like a cage.

Guyer—Why, that is his game basket.

Gunner—Game basket?
Guyer—Yes; it catches every rabbit and chicken he tosses up on his spins.

His Little Joke.

They had just moved in the house, and as is usually the case the former tenants had left much rubbish behind them.

"Just look," complained the little woman, "here are three pails of ashes in the yard."

"Ah," laughed the big husband, "speak of them with more reverence."
"Reverence! Why should I?"
"Because they are the ashes of the departed."

In the Wee Hours.

"In the oriental countries," said the man who reads books of travel, "a man will remove his shoes before entering a building. He calls it sacredness."

"And in this country," chuckled the rounder, who comes home under the light of the morning star, "he removes his shoes before entering the house and calls it wise precaution."

Double.

"Apparently you don't admire Miss Skreech."
"No; I don't like her airs."
"What airs?"
"These she sings and those she wears."—Philadelphia Press.

Good Day's Work.

"Wonder how Peury ever found a crew that was willing to go up to the north pole? I don't guess the pay was anything extraordinary."

"Over \$100 a day."
"What? Do you mean to say sailors get over \$100 a day?"
"Sure. Aren't the days over six months long up there?"