

The Doctor's Wife

BY MISS M. E. BRADDON

CHAPTER XXIII.—(Continued.)

"Raymond, is this true?" Mr. Lansdell asked, as the door closed upon his uncle. He spoke as if there had been no break or change in the conversation since Mrs. Gilbert's name had been mentioned.

If the answer to this question had involved a sentence of death, or a reprieve from the gallows, Roland Lansdell could not have asked it more eagerly. He ought to have believed in Isabel as firmly as to be quite unmoved by any ill-timed slander; but he loved her too much to be reasonable. Jealousy, the demon—lovely united as a Siamese twin to Love, the god—was already gnawing at his entrails. It could not be, it could not be, that she had deceived and deluded him; but if she had; ah, what baseness, what treachery!

"There is a strange man staying at a little rustic tavern in Nessborough Hollow. You know what gossips these country people are. Heaven knows I have never put myself out of the way to learn other people's business; but these things get heaped about in all manner of places."

"Tell your story plainly, Raymond. There is a strange man staying in Nessborough Hollow—well, what has all this to do with Mrs. Gilbert?"

"Only this much—she has been seen walking alone with this man, after dark, in Nessborough Hollow."

"It must be a lie; a villainous invention of some one who has been seen to meet this man, he is some relation. Yes, I have reason to think that she has some relation staying in this neighborhood."

"But why, in that case, should she meet the man secretly at such an hour, while her husband is lying ill?"

"There might be a hundred reasons," Mr. Raymond shrugged his shoulders. "Can you suggest one?" he asked.

"But has she been seen to meet him?" asked Roland, suddenly. "No, I will not believe it. Some woman has been seen walking with some man; and the Graybridge vultures, eager to swoop down upon my poor innocent dove, must have seen that the woman is Isabel Gilbert. No, I will not believe this story."

"So he is, then," answered Mr. Raymond. "In that case we can drop the subject."

But Roland was not so easily to be satisfied. The poisoned arrow had entered far into his soul, and he must needs drag the cruel barb backward and forward in the wound.

"Not till you have given me the name of your authority," he said.

"Pshaw! my dear Roland, have I not already told you that my authority is the common Graybridge gossip?"

"I'll not believe that. You are the last man in the world to be influenced by paltry village scandal. You have better grounds for what you told me. Some one has seen Isabel and this man. Who was that person?"

"I protest against this cross-examination. You refuse to be spared, and must take the consequences of your own obstinacy. I was the person who saw Isabel Gilbert walking with a stranger—a shabbily dressed, disreputable looking fellow—in Nessborough Hollow. I had been dining with Hardwick, the lawyer, at Graybridge, and rode home across country by the Briarwood and Hurston-leigh road, instead of going through Waverly. I heard about Mrs. Gilbert at Graybridge—heard her name linked with that of some stranger staying at Nessborough Hollow, who had been known to send letters to her, and to meet her after dark. Heaven only knows how country people find out these things; but these things always are discovered somehow or other. I defended Isabel—I know her head is a good one, though by no means so well balanced as it might be—I defended Isabel throughout a long discussion with the lawyer's wife; but riding home by the Briarwood road, I met Mrs. Gilbert walking arm-in-arm with a man who answered to the description I had heard at Graybridge."

"When was this?"

"The night before last. It must have been some time between 10 and 11 when I met them, for it was broad moonlight, and I saw Isabel's face as plainly as I see yours."

"And did she recognize you?"

"Yes; and turned abruptly away from the road into the wasted grass between the highway and the tall hedgerow beyond."

For some moments after this there was a dead silence, and Raymond saw the young man standing opposite him in the dusk, motionless as a stone figure, white as death.

"Shake hands, Raymond," he said, in a dull, thick kind of voice; "I thank you heartily for having told me the truth; it was much better to be candid; it was better to let me know the truth. But, oh, if you could know how I loved her—if you could know!"

Roland Lansdell got up by and by, and walked to the open French window. There was a silvery shimmer of moonlight upon the lawn, and the great clock in the stables was striking 10.

"Good night, Raymond," said Mr. Lansdell, turning on the threshold of the window. "You can make some kind of apology for me to my uncle and Gwendoline. I won't stop to say good night to them."

"But where are you going?"

"To Nessborough Hollow."

"Are you mad, Roland?"

"That's a great deal too subtle a question to be answered just now. I am going to Nessborough Hollow, to see Isabel Gilbert."

CHAPTER XXIV.

The moon was slowly rising behind a black belt of dense foliage—a noble screen of elm and beech that sheltered Ruydale's domain from the common world without—as Roland Lansdell crossed the lawn, and went in among the thickest depths of the park.

"The money was wanted for this man, of course!" he thought. "And I thought her an innocent child, who had ignorantly broken a strong man's heart!"

He walked on slowly now, and with his head bent, no longer trying to make a short cut for himself among the trees, but absently following a narrow, winding path, worn by slow peasants' feet upon the grass.

Nessborough Hollow was some distance from Lowlands; and Mr. Lansdell, who was familiar with almost every inch of his native county, made his way thither by shadowy lanes and rarely trodden by-ways, where the summer wild flowers smiled sweetly in the dewy night. Never, surely, had brighter heavens shone upon a fairer earth. The leaves and blossoms, the long luscious grasses, faintly stirred by lazy summer winds, made a perpetual whisper that scarcely broke the general stillness; and now and then the long rich notes of the nightingale sounded among the clustering foliage that loomed darkly above tangled hedge rows, and broad wastes of moonlit grass.

"Perhaps this is a turning point in my life," he thought, during one of these pauses; "and there may be some chance for me after all. Why should I not have a career like other men, and try like them to be of some use to my species? Better, perhaps, to be always trying and always failing, than to stand aloof forever, wasting my intellect upon vain calculations. I will wash my hands of Mrs. George Gilbert and go back to the Priory and sleep peacefully, and to-morrow morning I will ask Gwendoline to be my wife."

But the picture of Isabel Gilbert and the stranger meeting in Nessborough Hollow was not to be so easily erased from Mr. Lansdell's brain. The habit of vacillation, which had grown out of the idleness of his life, was stronger in him to-night than usual; but the desire to see for himself how deeply he was wronged triumphed over every other feeling, and he never turned his face from the direction in which Nessborough Hollow lay. He came near the place at last, a little tired by the long walk from Lowlands, a good deal wearied by all the contending emotions of the last few hours. He came upon the spot at last, not by the ordinary roadway, but across a strip of thickly wooded waste land lying high above the hollow.

He saw all this; and then from the other end of the still glade he saw two figures coming slowly toward the inn. Two figures, one of which was so familiar and had been so dear that despair, complete and absolute, came upon him for the first and last time, in that one brief start of recognition. Ah, surely he had never believed in her falsehood until this moment; surely if he had believed Charles Raymond, the agony of seeing her here could not have been so great as this.

He stood as still as death, not betraying his presence by so much as the rustling of a leaf, while the two figures approached the spot above which he stood. But a little way off they passed, and were parting, very coolly, as it seemed, when Mrs. Gilbert lifted up her face and said something to the man. He stood with his back turned toward Roland, to whom the very expression of Isabel's face was visible in the moonlight.

After this the doctor's wife went away. Roland watched her as she turned once, and stood for a moment looking back at the man from whom she had just parted, and then disappeared among the shadows in the glade. Ah! if she had been nothing more than a shadow—if he could have awakened to find all this the brief agony of a dream!

All that was left of the original savage in the fine gentleman arose at the moment in Roland Lansdell's breast.

He leaped down the sloping bank with scarcely any consciousness of touching the slippery grass; but he dragged the ferns and branches from the loose earth in his descent, and a shower of torn verdure flew up into the summer air. He had no weapon, nothing but his right arm, wherewith to strike the broad-chested, black-bearded stranger. But he never paused to consider that, or to count the chances of a struggle. He only knew that he wanted to kill the man for whose sake Isabel Gilbert had rejected him. In the next moment his hands were on the stranger's throat.

"You scoundrel," he gasped, hoarsely, "you consummate coward and scoundrel, to bring that woman to this place."

There was a brief struggle, and then the stranger freed himself from Mr. Lansdell's grasp. There was no comparison between the physical strength and weight of the two men; and the inequality was sensibly increased by a stout walking stick of the bludgeon order carried by the black-bearded stranger.

"Hoity-toity!" cried the gentleman, who seemed scarcely disposed to take Mr. Lansdell's attack seriously; "have you newly escaped from some local lunatic asylum, my friend, that you go about the country flying at people's throats in this fashion? What's the row? Can't a gentleman in the merchant navy take a moonlight stroll with his daughter for

once in a way, to wish her good-by before he fits out for a fresh voyage, without all this hullabaloo?"

"Your daughter!" cried Roland Lansdell. "Your daughter?"

"Yes, my daughter Isabel, wife of Mr. Gilbert, surgeon."

"Thank heaven!" murmured Roland, slowly, "thank heaven!"

And then a little pang of remorse shot through his heart, as he thought how little his boasted love had been worth, after all. How ready he had been to disbelieve in her.

"I ought to have known," he thought—"I ought to have known that she was innocent. If all the world had been banded together against her, I should have been her champion and defender. But my love was only a paltry passion after all. The gold changed to brass in the fire of the first ordeal."

He thought this, or something like this, and then in the next moment he said, courteously:

"Upon my word, I have to apologize for my—" he hesitated a little here, for he really was ashamed of himself; all the murderous instincts were gone, as if they had never been, and the painfully acute perception of the ridiculous being fully aroused, he felt that he had made a consummate fool of himself.

"Stop a bit," cried Mr. Sleaford, the barrister—"stop a bit! I thought I knew your voice. You're the languid swell, who was so jolly knowing at the trial—the languid swell who had nothing better to do than join the hunt against a poor fellow that never cheated you out of sixpence. I said, if ever I come out of prison alive I'd kill you; and I'll keep my promise."

He hissed out these last words between his set teeth. His big muscular hands were fastened on Roland Lansdell's throat; and his face was pushed forward till it almost touched that other handsome face which defied him in the proud insolence of a moral courage that rose above all physical superiority. The broad bright moonlight streaming through a wide gap in the foliage fell full upon the two men; and in the dark face glowering at his, Mr. Lansdell recognized the man whom he had followed down for the mere amusement of the chase—the man described in the police records by a dozen aliases, and best known by his familiar soubriquet of Jack the Scribe.

"You dog," cried Mr. Sleaford. "I've dreamed about such a meeting as this; and it did me good to feel my fingers at your throat, even in my dreams. I'll do for you, if I swing for this night's work."

There was a struggle—a brief and desperate struggle, in which the two men wrestled with each other, and the chances of victory seemed uncertain. Then Mr. Sleaford's bludgeon went whirling up into the air, and descended with a dull thud, once, twice, three times upon Roland Lansdell's bare head. After the third blow, Jack the Scribe loosed his grasp from the young man's throat, and the master of Mordred Priory fell crashing down among the fern and wild flowers.

He lay very quiet where he had fallen.

CHAPTER XXV.

After that farewell meeting with Mr. Sleaford in Nessborough Hollow, a sense of peace came upon Isabel Gilbert. She had questioned her father about his plans, and he had told her that he should leave by the 7 o'clock train from Wareham on the following morning. His should be heartily rejoiced, he said, to leave a place where he felt like a fox in a hole. The sentimental element was by no means powerfully developed in the nature of Jack the Scribe, to whom the crowded pavements were infinitely more agreeable than the wild roses and branching fern.

His daughter slept tranquilly that night for the first time after Mr. Sleaford's appearance before the surgeon's door. She slept in peace, worn out by the fatigue and anxiety of the last fortnight; and no evil dream disturbed her slumbers.

Mr. Pawkatt sat looking at his patient longer than usual that morning. George Gilbert lay in a kind of stupor, and did not recognize his medical attendant, and sometime rival. He had long since ceased to be anxious about his poor patients in the lanes beyond the church, or about anything else upon this earth, as it seemed; and now that her great terror had been lifted from her mind, Isabel saw a new and formless horror gliding swiftly toward her, like a great iceberg sailing fast upon an arctic sea. She followed Mr. Pawkatt out of the room, and down the little staircase, and clung to his arm as he was about to leave her.

"Oh, do you think he will die?" she said. "I did not know until this morning that he was so very ill. Do you think that he will die?"

"I am very anxious, Mrs. Gilbert," he answered gravely. "I will not conceal from you that I am growing very anxious. The pulse is feeble and intermittent; and these low fevers—there, there, don't cry. I'll drive over to Wareham as soon as I've seen the most important of my cases; and I'll ask Dr. Henslett to come and look at your husband. Pray try to be calm."

"I am so frightened," murmured Isabel, between her low, half-stifled sobs. "I never saw any one ill—like that—before."

"I am not sorry to see this anxiety on your part, Mrs. Gilbert. As the friend and brother professional of your husband, and as a man who is—ahem—old enough to be your father, I will go so far as to say that I am gratified to find that you—I may say your heart is in the right place. There have been some very awkward reports about you, Mrs. Gilbert, during the last few days. I—I—of course should not presume to allude to those reports, if I did not believe them to be erroneous," the surgeon added, rather hastily.

(To be continued.)

SOLDIERS' STORIES.

ENTERTAINING REMINISCENCES OF THE WAR.

Graphic Account of Stirring Scenes Witnessed on the Battlefield and in Camp—Veterans of the Rebellion Recite Experiences of Thrilling Nature.

"Bishop McCabe," said the Major, "was Chaplain McCabe during the war. He went into the service with the One Hundred and Twenty-second Ohio, and was captured by the rebels at Winchester. He was sent to Libby prison, and was there for four months, having all sorts of experiences. Many men remember him for his cheerfulness as well as for his earnest Christian character."

"On a rainy, stormy night the Union prisoners on one of the lower floors of old Libby prison were huddled together in a vain attempt to escape the rain that fairly drenched them. Most of them were cold and wet and miserable. Just as the storm was at its worst, and there was some commotion among the prisoners, some one shouted: 'Hands on your pocketbooks!' As there was no money in anyone's pocket, the call was greeted with a laugh. The men had recognized Chaplain McCabe's voice, and they liked him the better for cracking a joke at a very dark time."

"Chaplain McCabe was a great favorite among the boys because of his cheerfulness and sense of humor. He belonged to the class that relieved depression incident to fatigue or disaster by droll gesticulation or comment. We had one man in our company who never took a discouraging view of any situation. When a heavy rain would strike us on the march and most of the men would be grumbling and swearing, this fellow would raise his voice to shout: 'Who in Sam Hill touched the tent?' (A tent leaked at the point touched on the inside.)

"Or if we were wading a stream and it seemed a long way across, he would serenely remark: 'I guess we struck this river endways.' Or if a storm blew over the tent he would yell: 'Strike a light, strike a light, I've lost my toothbrush.' Or if a shell burst near him and covered him with dirt, he would say, conventionally: 'I can lick the man who did that with one hand tied behind me.' This cheery fellow was a great comfort to the regiment, and Bishop McCabe was of the same sort, and a good many of the boys swung their caps when he was elected Bishop.

"Chaplains like McCabe were good soldiers as well as good preachers. Father Tracy, of the Fourth Regular Cavalry, rescued a rebel officer who fell between the lines and was applauded by both armies. Chaplain Bennett, of the Thirty-second Ohio, enlisted and served as a private, and was promoted to chaplain. He always went into a fight with a rifle. Chaplain Springer, of the Third Wisconsin, also went into every fight with a rifle, and died in hospital of several wounds received at Resaca."

"I have often wondered," said the Colonel, "what became of the war chaplains. I can trace, of course, chaplains like McCabe, Pepper, Childlaw, Loxler, and others of that grade. But I cannot trace many of the chaplains who went out in the three months' service of the first three-year regiments in 1861. Some of them, I know, became Captains and Colonels in the regiments organized a year and two years later, and not a few of them kept up their praying and preaching habits. But our first chaplain, for example, was a mystery, and he remains a mystery to this day."

"However, there are war mysteries without end. That story of a member of the old Chicago Dragoons reminded me of the case of Lieutenant James Howard, of the Forty-sixth Ohio. He enlisted as a private, but for exceptionally courageous conduct in one of the battles in the West was given a commission. While at home on a furlough, celebrating his promotion, he became intoxicated, and on orders from Secretary Stanton was dismissed from the service. This was a great humiliation, but Howard returned to his company and served as a private to the end of the war."

"The official record shows that he was wounded at Lookout Mountain; that he was promoted for meritorious conduct, and that he was dishonorably dismissed from the service. It does not show that he served in the ranks until the muster out of his regiment. The officers were in doubt how to treat the case, and no record was made of his later service, except on the pay roll, and that was regarded as irregular. When Howard's widow applied for a pension the application was rejected on the record of Howard's dismissal. Now the boys of the Forty-sixth Regiment are trying to establish the fact of his honorable service after dismissal."

"Some time ago," said the Sergeant, "I told the story of Colonel A. F. Rogers, of the Eighteenth Illinois, losing

his sword. When he was elected Lieutenant Colonel of the Eighteenth Illinois Rogers' mother presented him a sword, properly inscribed. The sword was lost at Rome, Ga., just previous to the Colonel's capture. After a year in prison Rogers returned to Illinois and organized the One Hundred and Forty-eighth Regiment. In 1865, just forty years ago, he began the search for his lost sword, all the men of his old brigade assisting him. Finally there came to the Adjutant General's office at Springfield a letter from J. Sturgis, of Grow, Okla., stating that he had information as to the whereabouts of the sword.

"This letter was sent to Colonel Rogers at Upper Alton, Ill., and a letter from him to Mr. Sturgis called out a communication from G. W. Wood, of Angora, Okla., whose brother found the sword on the battlefield in Georgia. After the war the finder of the sword took it with him to Texas. From there it was taken in May last to Oklahoma by G. W. Wood, and a few weeks ago was returned to Colonel Rogers at his home in Illinois. After this experience I am inclined to believe that any soldier mystery may be solved, and I feel that the boys of the Forty-sixth Ohio scattered all over the West can clear Lieutenant Howard's record."—Chicago Inter Ocean.

Captain Harris and Mrs. Davis.

"Not long ago," said the Major, "I found Captain Samuel Harris at one of the colored kindergartens on the South Side. He seemed greatly interested, not only in the children and teachers, but in all the colored people. He told me later that on one occasion, while in command of a detachment of his regiment, the Fifth Michigan Cavalry, he lost his way, and would have ridden into a strong force of rebels had not a young colored man explained the situation so clearly as to enable him to avoid the enemy."

"This led him to observe closely, and in the last year of the war he was cognizant of so many cases in which the loyalty and sympathy of colored men were put to severe test that he became the friend of their race for all time. Captain Harris, by the way, commanded a detachment at the famous Dahlgren raid on Richmond, in March, 1864. He led the charge on the Westham road, in which he was severely wounded. He was captured a few days later, was taken to Richmond, and, on the theory that the Dahlgren raiders had intended to capture Jefferson Davis, was sentenced by a drumhead court-martial to be hanged."

"Two months before he started on the raid Captain Harris had found a Mrs. Brooke and four children starving. He secured food for them, and provided for them the ordinary comforts of life. Mrs. Brooke told him that her husband was in the Confederate army, and that she herself had been the schoolmate and friend of Mrs. Jefferson Davis. A few days later she wrote Mrs. Davis at Richmond, telling the story of the Union officer's kindness to herself and children, and saying in conclusion: 'If Lieutenant Samuel Harris, of the Fifth Michigan Cavalry, should ever fall into your hands, do what you can for him for my sake.'

"This letter reached Mrs. Davis, and when it was announced to Mr. Davis that one of the officers of the Dahlgren raiders (who had penetrated the outer fortifications of Richmond) had been sentenced to death and was to be executed at once, Mrs. Davis asked his name. On being told that the wounded officer waiting in a wagon outside was Lieutenant Samuel Harris, she reminded her husband of Mrs. Brooke's letter, and sent Captain Waller, of Davis' staff, to inquire as to the identity of the officer under sentence of death. Waller came to the wagon, and after a few questions told Harris that he would not be hanged. Mrs. Davis had secured a reprieve."

"Harris was sent to Libby prison, where his wounds received careful attention. All of Mr. Davis' Cabinet insisted that he should be hanged, but Mr. Davis declared that he should be treated as any other prisoner of war. The surgeon gave Harris one chance in a hundred to live, but he recovered and is active in business in Chicago to-day. In 1895 Captain Harris visited Mrs. Davis at Narragansett Pier and thanked her for saving his life in 1864. All the circumstances were recalled, and the Captain learned by a visit to Richmond the whereabouts of the daughter of Mrs. Brooke and others who had played a part in this little war drama. In 1897 Captain Harris met in New Orleans Colonel Armand Hawkins, Provost Marshal in Richmond in 1864, who was preparing to hang Harris when he received an order from Mr. Davis not to do so. All of Captain Harris' friends know this story, but it is worth the telling again and again."—Chicago Inter Ocean.

The brave and wise perform great actions, not so much on account of the reward attending them, as on account of their own intrinsic excellence.—Cicero.