

Continued from Tenth Page.

Kate had been carried upstairs and put to bed before his arrival. She was still unconscious and her breathing had grown more difficult.

Lady Vere, a lovely picture in her soft white silk, stood beside the bed when the doctor entered the room. Her dark eyes—still with that look of terror in them—were fixed on the pale, unconscious face of her friend.

Her own face was only a little less pale. She looked up eagerly at the opening of the door.

“Oh, Doctor Baker!” she began, and then stopped short, surprised to see a stranger.

The tall young doctor bowed and briefly explained his position.

She seemed a little disappointed at the absence of Dr. Baker, but, nevertheless, received the locum tenens with a sweet graciousness which could not but add to the charm of her rare loveliness.

Kindly courtesy, and consideration for the feelings of those inferior to her in rank had ever marked the demeanor of Lady Vere.

“Doctor, will she die?” she asked, giving place to him by the bedside, and looking into his face as though he were the arbiter of life or death.

“She is very ill,” he said, gravely. The seizure must have been terribly sudden. Have you any idea what was the cause of it?”

“She said she thought she had taken cold, but no cold could have such an effect as this.”

“Certainly not. It looks like a case of blood-poisoning!”

“Poisoning!” repeated Lillian, in an accent of horror. “Oh, no, no! Surely not that?”

“I said blood-poisoning!” said Dr. Browne in an abstracted tone while Lillian sank into a chair, and covered her face with her hands, her entire attitude eloquent of woe.

He was examining his patient attentively, bending over her knitted brows, and a look of great perplexity—of wonderment almost—in his keen, deep set eyes.

Presently, as he pushed back the fringe of her night-dress, in feeling her pulse, he gave an involuntary start.

His eye had fallen on that tiny puncture which had before noticed by Lady Vere.

The discovery of this had an extraordinary effect upon him.

He turned round to Lady Vere in strong, though suppressed, excitement.

“I shall want someone to go back to the surgery for me, if you please. I must not leave the patient.”

Lillian rose, and came towards him.

“Doctor, can you save her?” she asked, breathlessly.

“I am not sure. I promise you I will do my best. If it is as I think, I believe I can. Excuse me one moment.”

He passed out of the room, and, after scribbling half a dozen words on a scrap of paper, despatched Jarvis, on horseback to the surgery with it.

“Ride for your life!” was his instruction, and then hastened back to his patient.

Lillian was again standing beside the bed her face white to the lips, her beautiful eyes dilated with that strange look of terror.

Dr. Browne, pitying her anxiety, said a hopeful word or two, though, in truth, he himself entertained grave fears as to the result of this awful sudden seizure.

She caught at them eagerly.

“Doctor, save her!” she panted. “Oh save her—save her if you can!”

It was some time before Dr. Browne's messenger came back, and meanwhile the doctor himself had done all that could be done, without, however, succeeding in restoring his patient to consciousness, though he worked hard and unremittingly.

Lady Vere, who could not be persuaded to leave the room for a single moment, watched his every movement with breathless suspense.

“Can you save her?” she said, again and again. “Oh! save her, if you can?”

As soon as Jarvis returned, the drug he had gone to fetch was brought upstairs.

It was in the form of a powder, pinkish grey in color.

The doctor mixed it with a little water, and administered it to the patient.

This latter task was only accomplished with great difficulty, so rigidly were the poor girl's lips set.

The powder given, Dr. Browne stood, with folded arms, beside the bed and watched its workings.

In a few minutes his brow relaxed, his keen professional eye had detected a slight change—a favorable change—in the patient.

Still he stood in utter silence, as though scarcely daring to breathe.

Lady Vere, leaning against the rail at the foot of the bed, was equally silent.

Her eyes never wandered from Kate's face.

There was no other person in the room. The minutes dragged slowly by—five, ten, fifteen—and still that utter silence reigned.

Those two watchers held their breath, both in an agony of suspense.

Then a faint moan from the bed broke the stillness.

Kate's lips had parted ever so slightly, and that man had issued from them.

At the same time her eyelids quivered, and there was a slight motion of the hand.

Dr. Browne turned to Lillian with such a look of pleasure on his face as quite irradiated his plain features.

“She will live!” he said, gently. “I believe I can speak with confidence. The antidote is doing its work.”

“Oh, thank Heaven! thank Heaven!” cried Lady Vere.

And then, losing all her composure, she broke into a very storm of tears.

It was as though the relief was too great after the long suspense!

CHAPTER XLIV.

DR. BROWNE'S OPINION.

Dr. Browne was right. The antidote he had administered was doing its work, and, in another hour or so Kate so far recovered consciousness as to be able to open her eyes, and to recognize those who stood beside her bed.

She was too weak to speak, however, and seemed much in pain.

Dr. Browne remained with her throughout the night, and Lady Vere shared his watch with him.

Nothing could induce her to leave her friend.

Her tenderness, her devotion, was beyond the power of words to describe.

If Kate's illness had been caused through some fault of hers, she could not have manifested greater solicitude and self-sacrificing devotion.

Early in the morning, the family at The Towers were communicated with.

Lillian, anxious that they should not be made to suffer any unnecessary anxiety, would not allow them to be sent to until Kate was out of a danger.

Vi came over at once, all anxiety and tender solicitude.

Kate however, was to ill to speak to her. Her pain during the night had been agonizing.

Lillian, had watched by her with a blanched face and quivering lips, pressing her own nails into her delicate palms when a more than usually severe spasm of suffering came.

By eight or nine in the morning these pains had been effectually subdued, and the poor girl, though sadly weak and worn was comparatively at ease.

“What has been the matter with me?” she whispered, faintly, to Lillian, as the latter stood by the bedside, holding her hand.

“The doctor is not quite sure, dear But, whatever it was, it is nearly over now. He thinks you need fear no more pain.”

“I do not think I could bear much more. I should like to die!” said the poor girl, in a faint voice. “Don't leave me, Lillian.”

“I won't, dear!”

And, with an unutterable tenderness, she stooped and kissed the sick girl on the brow.

Dr. Browne was in an adjoining room, partaking of a hearty breakfast, when Lady Vere joined him, and said—

“Are you quite sure, doctor, that she is out of danger?”

“Quite sure, Lady Vere. The poison has been ejected from the system, and all that is now needed is rest and care.”

“I must thank you for your great attention, doctor, and also for your marvellous skill. I am sure it is to you alone Miss Lisle owes her life!”

“It is very good of you to say so!” replied the young doctor, bowing low, and thinking how sweetly fair she looked in her white mourning gown.

The night's watching had made her cheeks very pale, and her eyes languid; but there was so much chastened sweetness in her glance, that the languor seemed but to etherealize her beauty.

“I am glad, now, I did not send for another doctor,” she said, softly. “The labor has all been yours. The honor ought to be all yours, too.”

Again he bowed, a rather abstracted look upon his face this time.

There was a question he longed to ask her, but he did not know whether it would be wise to do so.

“No,” he decided within himself at last. “It is not likely she could cast any light upon it, and it would certainly distress her very much if I were to hint at such a thing. A still tongue is best.”

Lady Vere, however, had a question to ask him.

“Doctor,” she said, with just a touch of hesitation, “do you mind telling me what you think has been the cause of this illness?”

“The cause?”

And Dr. Browne spoke as though trying to gain time.

“Yes, you spoke of blood poisoning but I didn't quite understand what you meant. Is it something she has eaten which has caused her illness?”

“I think not; but it is difficult to say,” replied the doctor, cautiously. “Blood-poisoning may be brought about in that way, or it may be the effect of some accident to the flesh. A pin-prick, is at times, sufficient to cause death.”

“That is if the pin were poisoned?”

“Yes,” said the doctor, gravely.

“And would there not be a mark?” asked Lady Vere, stopping, as she spoke, to brush an imaginary speck of dust from her dress.

“Yes, there would a mark. As a matter of fact, I noticed, almost as soon as I came a slight scratch on the young lady's wrist. The arm is not swollen at all—there has been no local effect; but I have not the slightest doubt, in my own mind, that, through that tiny puncture, the poison was injected into Miss Lisle's blood.”

“Writer Lady Vere could not grow, or she would have turned whiter than this.”

“And what do you think had caused it?” she asked.

“That I cannot say. It looked like nothing more than a prick of a pin!”

“It is terrible!” said Lady Vere, with a shudder. “Terrible! terrible! To think such a little thing would cause death!”

“Assuredly a very virulent poison had been taken into her veins,” went on Dr. Browne. “But there is really no further danger to be apprehended. The young lady will progress steadily towards recovery. There has, of course been a great shock to the system; but she had an excellent constitution, and will soon regain her strength.”

Lady Vere clasped her hands together, as though involuntarily; her beautiful eyes raised themselves ever so slightly.

Dr. Browne felt certain she was breath-

ing a prayer of thankfulness to Heaven.

Kate did progress steadily towards recovery, as Dr. Browne had predicted.

He was unremitting in his attendance, and for nurses, she had Lady Vere and Vi Muggleton, who, in their affectionate solicitude, could scarcely bear anyone else to do anything for their charge.

On the third day after her seizure, she was able to be dressed and to sit up for a little while in her room.

Her lover came to see her then, and she seemed quietly pleased to see him; but was perhaps, just a shade less affectionate in her manner towards him than she had been wont to be.

We all know how prone we are to yield to depressing fancies when we are weak and ill, and, perhaps, as she lay on her bed of sickness, the utterances of Madame Santanello had lingered pertinaciously in the poor girl's mind.

On that day, after Morewood had gone, Lady Vere came and sat down beside Kate with a look which seemed to say that something was disturbing her.

“Dear Lillian, how pale you are!” said Kate, stroking affectionately the fair white hand which had ministered to her wants with such tenderness during the last few days.

“You are worn out with waiting upon me. I'm afraid I've been very selfish!”

“You selfish? Then no one is unselfish Kate!”

“But, dearest, you do look pale and tired. Now that I am getting better I shall have to change places with you. I must be nurse and you patient.”

“I shall be as well as possible now you are better Kate, Oh, my darling, if only you could dream what it meant when I thought you might be going to die!”

“You did think that?” asked Kate, gravely. “Don't hesitate to tell me now, Lillian.”

“You were in great danger, dear.”

“I know it. All through that dreadful night, I kept thinking to myself: This is death! I cannot go through much more and live!”

Kate shivered a little, even at the recollection of all she had passed through.

Her voice was low and solemn.

“I shall never forget it,” she said; never! “Kate, can you at all remember hurting your hand in any way? You know Doctor Browne feels certain the poison was received through that pin-prick on your wrist. Can't you remember how it was done?”

“No, in the very least. I only know there was no mark there when I went out in the morning. I drove into town with Mr. Muggleton and Vi, and just before we started, Vi and I had a discussion as to which of our wrists was the larger. We measured them to see, and I am quite certain the scratch was not there then.”

“You went into the town, you say?” exclaimed Lady Vere, with a sort of suppressed eagerness. “Is it possible you did it there? Did you remove your glove for anything?”

“Yes, I believe I did,” admitted Kate, a little flush mantling her cheek as she remembered where and for what purpose she had removed it.

It was in the house of Madame Santanello and in order that the clairvoyante might examine her hand.

For one moment she was on the point of telling Lillian of this; then the recollection of what had been said of her lovers' passion for another woman held her back.

“I am almost sure I didn't get that scratch at Basingstoke,” she said. “At any rate, I don't remember anything about it. More likely it was done while I was dressing in the evening.”

“Perhaps so,” acquiesced Lady Vere, and a look of unmistakable relief flitted over her face.

In the course of a week Kate was well again—so well that Dr. Browne had to frankly own there was no necessity for him to continue to visit her.

Everybody thought she must have scratched her wrist with a pin whose point had chanced to touch some poisonous matter; and Dr. Browne, whenever the subject was referred to in his presence seemed perfectly satisfied with this explanation of Miss Lisle's illness.

A few days later, however, Dr. Baker returned to his practice, and his young locum tenens went back to London, where he occupied apartments in the neighborhood of Kensington.

He was not a married man, but he did not live alone.

A brother shared the apartments with him—a fragile man of five-and-thirty, who suffered from an incurable spinal complaint, which made him almost as helpless as a child.

HEARTBURN.

“In the Spring of 1897, I was attacked with Dyspepsia and Heartburn. So severe was the pain that I could not sleep or eat, and I was troubled with headache most all the time. I remained in that state for three months, and tried everything I could think of. At last one day I read in the paper about Burdock Blood Bitters, and thought I would try it. Great was my surprise on finishing the first bottle to find I could eat better, the headache left me, and before I had used the second bottle, I was completely cured. I cannot advise too strongly all sufferers from stomach troubles to try B.B.B.” MRS. WM. GRATTAN, Indianapolis, N.B.

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BURDOCK BLOOD BITTERS.

Dr. Browne loved this invalid brother with a great love, worked hard in order to be able to support him in comfort, and considered, rightly perhaps, that even then he had done but little towards paying the great debt he owed him, for it was in saving the younger brother from a fearful death, that the elder had met with the accident that had left him a cripple for life.

On the evening of Dr. Browne's return to London, as the two were sitting over a cozy dinner-tea, in the little Kensington parlor, Dr. Browne's said, in a very thoughtful tone—

“Jem, I'd a queer case while I was away.”

“Had you? What was it?” asked Jem, his pale, clever face lighting up with interest.

He, too, had been a doctor before his accident, and had hoped to make a name in the medical world.

Even now he took the keenest possible interest in all his brother's cases.

“What was it?” he repeated.

“Why, it was a very queer case indeed—the queerest I ever came across. Fortunately, the patient recovered; but I've never been able to get it out of my head that foul play was intended. I don't mention this suspicion, however, to a living soul but you.”

“Poisoning, of course?”

“Yes, but I'll begin at the beginning, and tell you all about it. I don't say a word in my letters, because I wanted you to hear the whole thing when I came home.”

“Well?”

“You've heard of Sir Gerald Vere. His place isn't more than a mile or so from Doctor Baker's and, last week, a man came riding over, in hot haste, to say that a young lady was taken suddenly and seriously ill, and it was feared she would die.”

“Of course I went as quickly as possible, and on the way I gathered from the man that the young lady was a visitor at the Court, and that she had seemed perfectly well until about half-an-hour before, when she had been suddenly seized with a sort of shivering-fit, and had fainted dead away. I thought it might be a case of poisoning, and took with me whatever was likely to be useful.”

“Go on!” said Jem, as his brother paused.

“Well, when I got there, I found the young lady in bed, quite unconscious. There was every appearance of blood poisoning, and every moment I feared tetanus would supervene. The suddenness of the attack puzzled me. It seemed to me that a very deadly poison must have been at work to cause it, and yet, mind you, I felt sure the poison had been injected directly into the blood.”

Again Dr. Browne paused for a moment or two; then he said—

“You remember the Brookstone Murder—the Great Poisoning Case, as it was always called?”

His brother nodded.

“And you know what mysterious poisons the murderers used—Oriental drugs of great subtlety, such as we, in Europe, had never so much as heard of before?”

“Yes, yes!” said Jem, eagerly.

“It was old Harland who was the principal medical man in that case, and when he knew I was meditating my treatise ‘On the Nature of Some Poisons’—”

“He gave you all the drugs that he'd found in Madeline Winter's room. I know that!” interrupted Jem.

“Yes, and there was one particular poison I've experimented with again and again, and the moment I saw Miss Lisle—that's the young lady who was ill—I seemed to have a sort of inspiration that she was suffering from that very poison!”

“Ah!”

“Yes, I felt quite certain of it; and I'll tell you what I did. When Harland gave me the poison, he gave me the antidote also, for Madeline Winter had had both in her possession, and it luckily appeared that I'd taken it down to Hampshire with me. I sent off for it, post haste, and administered it on the bare chance of it being needed. And, sure enough it was. In a few minutes it began to work. And I give you my word of honour that I knew of nothing else I could have given which would have saved the patient's life. If it hadn't been for my having that antidote, she'd have been dead before morning.”

There was silence for a minute or two.

Dr. Browne broke it by saying, abruptly—

“Now, what do you think of it?”

“I don't know what to think. It's very queer. The fact that the antidote worked so successfully does seem to point to the fact that the poison must have been the one you speak of. But one can't be sure. It might work as successfully in a case of ordinary blood-poisoning, and we know how fatally one may be injured sometimes by the mere point of a needle, or the wing of a fly.”

“Yes; but she's another thing. Of course I looked for a scratch of some kind, and I found one, little more than a pin-prick, on the young lady's wrist. Now I don't know whether you remember, that when Madeline Winter's room was searched, there was found a very peculiar ring. Harland showed it to me. It was a heavy barbaric-looking thing, with a blood-stone in the middle. And, inside the gold, there was a curious mechanical contrivance. If a certain spot was pressed, a tiny point-spar-shaped—came out, and, beyond there was a cavity which would hold a grain or two of poison. Now, the tiniest particle of such a poison as I've been telling you about would cause death if introduced into the blood; and the strange thing is, that the tiny wound on Miss Lisle's wrist looked for all the world as if it might have been inflicted by that fiendish ring.”

“What became of the ring?”

“I don't know. I should suppose it would be handed over to the murderers' relatives—if she had any. I don't quite remember.”

“Was there anyone, so far as you could make out, who was likely to have any interest in the young lady's death?”

“No; in a quiet way, I made all the inquiries I possibly could, and I should say

there never was a case where it would be harder to discover any possible motive for foul play.

“Miss Lisle is an orphan, of high birth, though not very well off, so far as money is concerned. She usually lives with a maiden aunt, but has been making a stay at a place near Vivian Court—The Towers, old Muggleton's place. You've heard of Muggleton the millionaire?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Well, one of his daughters is an old schoolfriend of hers, and so she's been making a visit to them.”

“I presume Miss Muggleton is quite above suspicion.”

“Oh, quite! The nicest little girl possible.”

“That's all right. But, sometimes you know, girls will do the most fiendish things especially if there's a little jealousy at the bottom.”

“Well, there's no such thing in this case. I can assure you of that.”

“Has Miss Lisle a lover?”

“Yes. A neighbour of Sir Gerald's. They are to be married soon.”

“And is he above suspicion?”

Dr. Browne broke into a laugh.

“Why, Jem, Morewood, of Beech Royal, as they call him, is thought about as much of as a duke.”

“I don't care. One hears of strange things nowadays. Human nature is pretty much the same everywhere, I take it.”

“Whether it is or not, you must please caquet Mr. Morewood. He is one of the finest, noblest fellows it has ever been my lot to meet, and is most tenderly devoted to Miss Lisle. There is not the shadow of a cloud between them.”

So spoke Dr. Browne, with honest sincerity.

But, in truth, a cloud had risen between Kate and Morewood, and was deepening and darkening every day.

“Very well. So be it. Was there any person at all against whom you felt a suspicion?”

“Not one. That's the strange part of it, and that's why I've never breathed a word of all this to anyone.”

“Well, then, Tom, I think we must conclude that it was a case of ordinary blood-poisoning, and that it was merely by a very fortunate coincidence Madeline Winter's antidote proved so useful.”

“I can't think so!”

“By-the-by, didn't the young lady herself know how she had hurt her wrist?”

“No; she had no recollection of that at all. You see, it was such a tiny wound. There would be practically no pain. The injury might very well be inflicted without her knowledge.”

“Well, I fancy you'll find my explanation of the case the right one.”

“I can't think so,” repeated Dr. Browne.

“In my own mind, I feel perfectly certain that the injury was inflicted by Madeline Winter's ring. The effects of the poison were so very remarkable. If you had seen the case, you would think as I do.”

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