

YUSSUF THE GUIDE

CHAPTER I

MEDICAL AND LEGAL

“**B**UT it seems so shocking, Sir.”
“Yes, Madam,” said the doctor, “very sad indeed. You had better get that prescription made up at once.”

“And him drenched with physic!” cried Mrs. Dunn; “when it doesn’t do him a bit of good.”

“Not very complimentary to me, Mrs. Dunn,” said the doctor smiling.

“Which I didn’t mean any harm, Sir; but wouldn’t it be better to let the poor boy die in peace, instead of worrying him to keep on taking physic?”

“And what would you and his friends say if I did not prescribe for him?”

“I should say it was the best thing, Sir; and as to his friends, why, he hasn’t got any.”

“Mr. Burne?”

“What! the lawyer, Sir? I don’t call him a friend. Looks after the money his poor pa left, and doles

it out once a month, and comes and takes snuff and blows his nose all over the room, as if he was a human trombone, and then says, 'Hum!' and 'Ha!' and, 'Send me word how he is now and then,' and goes away."

"But his father's executor, Professor Preston?"

"Lor' bless the man! don't talk about him. I wrote to him last week about how bad the poor boy was; and he came up from Oxford to see him, and sat down and read something out of a roll of paper to him about his dog."

"About his dog, Mrs. Dunn?"

"Yes, Sir, about his dog Pompey, and then about tombs—nice subject to bring up to a poor boy half-dead with consumption! And as soon as he had done reading he begins talking to him. You said Master Lawrence was to be kept quiet, Sir?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Dunn."

"Well, if he didn't stand there sawing one of his hands about and talking—there, shouting—at the poor lad as if he was in the next street, or he was an outdoor preacher, till I couldn't bear it any longer, and I made him go."

"Ah, I suppose the professor is accustomed to lecture."

"Then he had better go and lecture, Sir. He sha'n't talk my poor boy to death."

"Well, quiet is best for him, Mrs. Dunn," said the doctor smiling at the rosy-faced old lady, who had turned quite fierce; "but still, change and something to interest him will do good."

"More good than physic, Sir?"

“Well, yes, Mrs. Dunn, I will be frank with you—more good than physic. What did Mr. Burne say about the poor fellow going to Madeira or the south of France?”

“Said, Sir, that he’d better take his Madeira out of a wine glass and his south of France out of a book. I don’t know what he meant, and when I asked him he only blew his nose till I felt as if I could have boxed his ears. But now, Doctor, what do you really think about the poor dear? You see he’s like my own boy. Didn’t I nurse him when he was a baby, and didn’t his poor mother beg of me to always look after him? And I have. Nobody can’t say he ever had a shirt with a button off, or a hole in his clean stockings, or put on anything before it was aired till it was dry as a bone. But now tell me what you really think of him.”

“That I can do nothing whatever, Mrs. Dunn,” said the doctor kindly. “Our London winters are killing him, and I have no faith in the south of England doing any good. The only hope is a complete change to a warmer land.”

“But I couldn’t let him go to a horrible barbarous foreign country, Sir.”

“Not to save his life, Mrs. Dunn?”

“Oh, dear! oh, dear! oh, dear!” sighed the old lady. “It’s very hard when I’d lay down my life to save him, and me seeing him peek and pine away and growing so weak. I know it was that skating accident as did it. Him nearly a quarter of an hour under the ice, and the receiving-house doctor working for an hour before he could bring him to.”

"I'm afraid that was the start of his illness, Mrs. Dunn."

"I'm sure of it, Doctor. Such a fine lad as he was, and he has never been the same since. What am I to do? Nobody takes any interest in the poor boy but me."

"Well, I should write at once to the professor and tell him that Mr. Lawrence is in a critical condition, and also to his father's executor, Mr. Burne, and insist upon my patient being taken for the winter to a milder clime."

"And they won't stir a peg. I believe they'll both be glad to hear that he is dead, for neither of them cares a straw about him, poor boy."

There had been a double knock while this conversation was going on in Guildford Street, Russell Square, and after the pattering of steps on the oilcloth in the hall the door was opened, and the murmur of a gruff voice was followed by the closing of the front door, and then a series of three sounds, as if someone was beginning to learn a deep brass instrument, and Mrs. Dunn started up.

"It's Mr. Burne. Now, Doctor, you tell him yourself."

Directly after, a keen-eyed gray little gentleman of about fifty was shown in, with a snuffbox in one hand, a yellow silk handkerchief in the other, and he looked sharply about as he shook hands in a hurried way, and then sat down.

"Hah! glad to see you, Doctor. Now about this client of yours. Patient I mean. You're not going

to let him slip through your fingers?"

"I'm sorry to say, Mr. Burne—"

"Bless me! I am surprised. Been so busy. Poor boy! *Snuff snuff snuff*. Take a pinch? No, you said you didn't. Bad habit. Bless my soul, how sad!"

Mr. Burne, the family solicitor, jumped up when he blew his nose. Sat down to take some more snuff, and got up again to offer a pinch to the doctor.

"Really, Mr. Burne, there is only one thing that I can suggest—"

"And that's what Mrs. Dunn here told me."

There was a most extraordinary performance upon the nose, which made Mrs. Dunn raise her hands, and then bring them down heavily in her lap, and exclaim:

"Bless me, man, don't do that!"

"Ah, Mrs. Dunn," cried the lawyer; "what have you been about? Nothing to do but attend upon your young master, and you've got him into a state like this."

"Well of all—"

"Tut-tut! hold your tongue, Mrs. Dunn, what's gone by can't be recalled. I've been very busy lately fighting a cousin of the poor boy, who was trying to get his money."

"And what's the good of his money, Sir, if he isn't going to live?"

"Tut-tut, Mrs. Dunn," said the lawyer, blowing his nose more softly, "but he is. I telegraphed to Oxford last night for Professor Preston to meet me here at eleven this morning. I have had no

answer, but he may come. Eccentric man, Mrs. Dunn."

"Why you're never going to have him here to talk the poor boy to death."

"Indeed but I am, Mrs. Dunn, for I do not believe what you say is possible, unless done by a woman—an old woman," said the lawyer looking at the old lady fixedly.

"Well I'm sure!" exclaimed Mrs. Dunn, and the doctor rose.

"You had better get that prescription made up, Mrs. Dunn, and go on as before."

"One moment, Doctor," said the lawyer, and he drew him aside for a brief conversation to ensue.

"Bless me! very sad," said the lawyer; and then, as Mrs. Dunn showed the doctor out, the old gentleman took some more snuff, and then performed upon his nose in one of the windows; opposite the fire; in one corner; then in another; and then he was finishing with a regular coach-horn blast when he stopped halfway, and stared, for Mrs. Dunn was standing in the doorway with her large florid cap tilted forward in consequence of her having stuck her fingers in her ears.

"Could you hear me using my handkerchief, Mrs. Dunn?" said the lawyer.

"Could I hear you? Man alive!" cried the old lady, in a tone full of withering contempt, "Could I hear *that*?"

CHAPTER II

THE SECOND GUARDIAN

“**T**HAT!” to which Mrs. Dunn alluded was a double knock at the front door; a few minutes later the maid ushered in a tall broad-shouldered man of about forty, His hair was thin upon the crown, but crisp and grizzled, and its sparseness seemed due to the fact that nature required so much stuff to keep up the supply for his tremendous dark beard that his head ran short. It was one of those great beards that are supposed to go with the portrait of some old patriarch, and over this could be seen a pair of beautiful large clear eyes that wore a thoughtful dreamy aspect, and a broad high white forehead. He was rather shabbily dressed in a pepper-and-salt frock-coat, vest, and trousers, one of which had been turned up as if to keep it out of the mud while the other was turned down; and both were extremely baggy and worn about the knees. Judging from appearances his frock-coat might have been brushed the week before last, but it was doubtful, though his hat, which he placed upon the table as he entered, certainly had been brushed very lately, but the wrong way.

He did not wear gloves upon his hands, but in his trousers pockets, from which he pulled them to throw them in his hat, after he had carefully placed two great folio volumes, each minus one cover, upon a chair, and then he shook hands, smiling blandly, with Mrs. Dunn, and with the lawyer.

“Bless the man!” said Mrs. Dunn to herself, “one feels as if one couldn’t be cross with him; and there’s a button off the wristband of his shirt.”

“Fraid you had not received my telegram, Sir,” said the lawyer in rather a contemptuous tone, for Mrs. Dunn had annoyed him, and he wanted to wreak his irritation upon someone else.

“Telegram?” said the professor dreamily. “Oh, yes. It was forwarded to me from Oxford. I was in town.”

“Oh! In town?”

“Yes. At an hotel in Craven Street. I am making preparations, you know, for my trip.”

“No, I don’t know,” said the lawyer snappishly. “How should I know?”

“Of course not,” said the professor smiling. “The fact is, I’ve been so much—among books—lately—that—these are fine. Picked them up at a little shop near the Strand. Buttknow’s *Byzantine Empire*.”

He picked up the two musty old volumes, and opened them upon the table, as a blast rang out.

The professor started and stared, his dreamy eyes opening wider, but seeing that it was only the lawyer blowing his nose, he smiled and turned over a few leaves.

"A good deal damaged; but such a book is very rare, Sir."

"My dear Sir, I asked you to come here to talk business," said the lawyer, tapping the table with his snuffbox, "not books."

"True. I beg your pardon," said the professor. "I was in town making the final preparations for my departure to the Levant, and I did not receive the telegram till this morning. That made me so late."

"Humph!" ejaculated the lawyer, and he took some more snuff.

"And how is Lawrence this morning?" said the professor in his calm, mild way. "I hope better, Mrs. Dunn."

"Bless the man! No. He is worse," cried Mrs. Dunn shortly.

"Dear me! I am very sorry. Poor boy! I'm afraid I have neglected him. His poor father was so kind to me."

"Everybody has neglected him, Sir," cried Mrs. Dunn, "and the doctor says that the poor boy will die."

"Mrs. Dunn, you shock me," cried the professor, with tears in his eyes, and his whole manner changing. "Is it so bad as this?"

"Quite, Sir," cried the lawyer, "and I want to consult you as my co-executor and trustee about getting the boy somewhere in the south of England or to France."

"But medical assistance," said the professor. "We must have the best skill in London."

“He has had it, Sir,” cried Mrs. Dunn, “and they can’t do anything for him. He’s in a decline.”

“There, Sir, you hear,” said the lawyer. “Now, then, what’s to be done?”

“Done!” cried the professor, with a display of animation that surprised the others. “He must be removed to a warmer country at once. I had no idea that matters were so bad as this. Mr. Burne, Mrs. Dunn, I am a student much interested in a work I am writing on the Byzantine Empire, and I was starting in a few days for Asia Minor. My passage was taken. But all that must be set aside, and I will stop and see to my dear old friend’s son.”

Poo woomp poomp. Pah!

Mr. Burne blew a perfectly triumphal blast with his pocket-handkerchief, took out his snuffbox, put it back, jumped up, and, crossing to where the professor was standing, shook his hand very warmly, and without a word, while Mrs. Dunn wiped her eyes upon her very stiff watered silk apron, but found the result so unsatisfactory that she smoothed it down, and hunted out a pocket-handkerchief from somewhere among the folds of her dress and polished her eyes dry.

Then she seemed as if she put a sob in that piece of white cambric, and wrapped it up carefully, just as if it were something solid, doubling the handkerchief over and over and putting it in her pocket before going up to the professor and kissing his hand.

“Ha!” said the latter, smiling at first one and then the other. “This is very good of you. I don’t

often find people treat me so kindly as this. You see, I am such an abstracted, dreamy man. I devote myself so much to my studies that I think of nothing else. My friends have given me up, and—and I'm afraid they laugh at me. I am writing, you see, a great work upon the old Roman occupation of—Dear me! I'm wandering off again. Mrs. Dunn, can I not see my old friend's son?"

"To be sure you can, Sir. Pray, come," cried the old lady; and, leading the way, she ushered the two visitors out into the hall, the professor following last, consequent upon having gone back to fetch the two big folio volumes; but recollecting himself, and colouring like an ingenuous girl, he took them back, and laid them upon the dining-room table.

Mrs. Dunn paused at the drawing-room door and held up a finger.

"Please, be very quiet with him, Gentlemen," she said. "The poor boy is very weak, and you must not stay long."

The lawyer nodded shortly, the professor bent his head in acquiescence, and the old lady opened the drawing-room door.