

every-day sensation characters, where a shrug and a clap-trap will get the rounds; but in the heavy lines—the Hamlet—ah, Gordon, if we could get a good mind, I say a good—Romeo, a good Hamlet, Macbeth, and Claudio Melotto, well you'd make your fortune and your last journey pretty quickly.

'You're right, Mark,' he said; 'but the real Hamlets and Romeos are scarce nowadays, and I'm satisfied with you, who, with all your modesty—which, by the living Jingo, sir! I believe is half mock / make a very passable one.'

'I know better'—commenced the actor, but suddenly broke off to exclaim—

'By Jove, look, Gordon! There's a hut. Who the devil would have expected to find a human being in this deserted wilderness?'

'You haven't found one,' retorted the other. 'It's only an empty hut built for the cattle runners. See, there's no smoke.'

'No,' said Mark, and they passed on. Suddenly he stopped, and, looking curiously at Gordon, said, in a half-apologetic tone, as if ashamed of his weakness—

'I say, old fellow, I'm possessed with a strange impulse to go and look at that old place behind, I can't understand the feeling, or why the devil I should have it, but I'm dashed if I do not seem as if I must go.'

The manager laughed.

'Nonsense, man,' he said. 'You'll be tired enough before we pull up, without running after fancies.'

'Fancy or no fancy,' I must go replied the actor. 'You go on, don't wait for me,' and leaping into the bush, he ran towards the hut.

Scarcely ten minutes had passed—just time enough for the living, robust figure to have reached the still one lying on the threshold of the solitary building—when a loud, startled cry of horror rang through the woods, and instantly the troop of men were dashing to the spot whence it came.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE DISCOVERY IN THE WOOD.

'A love that took an early root,
And had an early doom.'—HERVEY.

Bursting through the bush, the men came upon the hut, at the door of which Mark Douglas was beuding over something.

'Good heaven!' exclaimed Gordon, as, followed by the others, he saw the still, blood-stained form. 'What have you got there, Mark? Is he dead?'

'Don't know,' replied the actor; 'if he isn't, he is very nearly. Here, Montmorency,' he added, looking up at the good-looking fellow, who was noted for his rough knowledge of medicine, 'you are the best hand for this. Come here.'

Montmorency bent down, and raised the head gently, then scrutinizing the still, stained face with critical eyes, said, suddenly, 'Lend me a knife, some one.'

Mark handed him a long-bladed knife, and Montmorency opening the blade, held it close to the mouth of the prostrate figure.

The blade was dimmed slightly.

'He's alive, and that's about all,' said Montmorency,

'Thank Heaven!' muttered Gordon. 'Here, Starbury, lend a hand. Montmorency, you tell them what to do; how to lift him, and so on. Mark—' but Mark had already gone.

Directly he had heard the man was alive, he looked round to see that there were enough men to move him, and then ran off towards the caravan.

Reaching the end van, he tapped at the little painted door, and, in response to, 'Whose's there?' said—

'Lucy, it is I. Dress quickly, and come out, will you?'

In a few minutes the door opened, and the woman stood upon the steps, looking down upon him.

'What is the matter, Mark?' she said.

'A great deal, Lucy,' he answered, holding out his hand to help her down. 'I want you to help us, but you cannot do it unless you are cool and calm. Will you be so?'

She smiled confidently, then sadly.

'I have had a long experience of restraint,' she said, quietly; 'what is it?'

'Come to me,' he said. 'An accident—' he paused at the word, which he knew was a false one—'at least, there has been some foul play, and a man lies, dead or dying, in the hut you see there.'

She paled a little, but said only 'Let us hurry,' and quickened her steps.

Soon they came upon the silent group, and Mark, pushing Starbury gently aside, revealed the figure lying on two or three coats spread on the ground.

Lucy bent down to look at the face, but her eyes had no sooner rested on it than she uttered a piercing shriek, and started back.

Mark, fancying that its ghastly appearance had horrified her, hastily stepped in front of it, as if to shut it from her gaze, but she pushed him aside with a feverish, trembling eagerness, and looked again.

This time the agonized expression of her face gave place to a puzzled one, and after looking earnestly at the face for the space of a minute, she rose silently, and covered her eyes with her hands.

Something more than the sight of blood had moved her thus. Some stronger emotion than horror had wrung her heart and paralysed her limbs. What was it? In the dim daylight, the group of lookers-on did not see the sudden, strange light that lit up her eyes at sight of the death-like face, and looked for no other reason for her emotion than the bare facts.

Then suddenly, and evidently with a great effort, for her voice was dry and strained, she said—

'Bring me some water in one of your cups. Mark, have you any brandy?'

'Here is some,' said Gordon, pointing to a figure running through the wood; 'I sent for it.'

She took the flask from the man's hand and put it to the pale lips, the men noticing that her eyes quivered, and her own lips trembled, as she did so.

Then, when the water was brought in the cup, she washed the blood away from the face, and turning to Mark, who was silently kindling a fire, whispered to him to send the rest away.

'He must not be moved,' said Montmorency. 'Better get some rugs and blankets down from the van; I'll go and fetch them,' and taking the rest with him, he walked quickly off.

Mark and Lucy were alone with the motionless form.

With tender fingers the woman undid the clotted clothes, and shudderingly displayed the gaping wound the steel had made.

'Good God!' she exclaimed, 'what fiend can have done it? This is no chance blow. It meant murder—murder, and nothing else.'

Tremblingly the woman wiped the blood away, and bound the wound up, then she raised the head upon her lap

and moistened the lips again, Mark watching with an intense interest, so intense, indeed, that he had not cast a glance at the girl's face until she held out the linen bandage for him to moisten; and then, as he caught sight of it—all drawn and livid as if with some physical pain—and saw the eyes lit up with a horror and dread totally distinct from his, he started with concern.

'Lucy, this is no work for you!' he exclaimed. 'You are frightened. Go, and leave him to me; I can do what's necessary.'

She tried to speak, but could not, but shook her head.

Seeing all persuasion was useless, he turned aside and moistened the bandage; as he did so, his eyes fell upon a small leather knife-case. He picked it up, and, taking it to the firelight, read the word 'Guy,' printed on it in red letters; and, holding it out to her said—

'Here is something I have just found; perhaps that may help—'

Before he could finish she had snatched the case from his hand, and, reading the name with a suppressed shudder, hid it in her bosom, clutching his arm as soon as she had done so with a grasp of entreaty.

He looked up in astonishment, the bandage in his hand.

'Mark!' she whispered, hoarsely, her voice discordant and harsh: 'Mark, where did you find this?'

He pointed silently to the spot beside the fire where he had picked it up.

She hid her face in her hands and shuddered.

'Do—do—you think it belongs to him?' she whispered brokenly, dropping her eyes to the figure in her lap.

He shook his head.

'N—o,' he whispered back; 'I should think not—more likely to the devil who has done it.'

She stretched over and laid her fingers—icely cold—upon his lips.

'Hush! hush! For Heaven's sake hush!' she said. 'Mark—you said you loved me—you—oh, God!—Mark, swear you will not tell a living soul you found this knife—'

'Why?' he asked, almost forgetting the presence of the wounded man in his astonishment of her manner and words.

'Swear, swear!' she repeated, her face working with a mixture of fear and horror—'sweat!'

'I swear!' he said, almost mechanically.

She threw up her hands before her face, and fell to rocking herself, the man staring at her in amazement. But the next moment, as the steps of the men with the blankets and rugs were heard, she seemed to recover herself, and with a face calm—though still deadly pale even to the lips—she directed them were to lay the clothes, and helped to place the wounded man upon them.

Then the two—Lucy and Mark, sat down and watched the man, every now and then stirring the red wood fire, the girl moistening the white lips with the brandy, and never taking her eyes—still wild with the same look of horrified dread—from the still face.

The caravan had halted at the bend of the road, and the men were standing and sitting about in groups, talking quietly of the discovery and hazarding conjectures as to the assassin.

Suddenly, the girl saw the lips move and the eyelids quiver, and the next instant, bending down, caught the words—'Ida—Guy!'

With a suppressed eagerness, she turned to Mark, and told him to hurry off for some brandy, and rose, after he had gone, to close the door.

Returning to the sick man, she knelt down, and whispered in frozen syllables.

'Do you understand me when I speak?'

His eyelids opened and shut in reply.

A sudden light flashed over her face, and a look of determination shone on her lips, as she continued—

'Do not speak a word—not a word, if you value your life!'

From the moment in which the cord of life rang faintly out in the wounded man's whisper, until he gained strength enough to rise and look at the strange caravan, where it sood encamped amongst the trees, the woman called 'Lucy' kept strict watch and ward over him.

No one had been permitted to see him alone, and every word he had spoken to the good, simple-hearted men, who had looked in at all hours of the day to ask how he was, or to stand at his impromptu bed-side, was listened to anxiously and jealously by his nurse.

When he had gained strength enough to be moved, they had changed his rough suit of bush clothes for some soft linen ones, Lucy having urged the exchange with somewhat unnecessary anxiety, and taking possession of the discarded blood-stained suit.

Mark, who gave them into her hands, noticed the strange eagerness with which she grasped them, repressing a shudder as her hands came in contact with the stiff blood stains, and said—

'What are you going to do with them, Lucy? They ought to be kept, I think; who knows?—some small thing about them might lead to the discovery of the ruffian who nearly killed him.'

She looked up with a sudden twitch of the mouth, and half unconsciously put the bundle a little way behind.

'No, no; I will take them,' she said, with a forced calm.

'Very well,' he said. 'I'm afraid it's not much use keeping them in this outlandish place,' and he left the hut.

The same night she stole through the darkness into the wood, and with white, fearful face, tied the tell-tale clothes round a piece of rock, and flung the bundle with a shudder into the lake, making her way back into the hut, trembling like a leaf, and looking about her as if she feared some evil thing.

So that when the wounded man was sufficiently recovered to take an interest in things living and breathing, and after asking a few questions with a dazed look, said abruptly, with a sharp look upon his thinned face—

'Where are the clothes in which I was found?'

The girl said, with a cool indifference—

'Somewhere about. I took charge of them, but they were so spoilt that I am afraid they have been thrown away.'

To be Continued.

The difference between a tale-bearer and sealing-wax is, that sealing-wax burns to keep a secret and the tale-bearer burns to tell one.

If a lady in a red cloak were to cross a field in which was a goat, what wonderful transformation would probably take place? The goat would turn to butter and the lady into a scarlet runner.

A gentleman who recently travelled over a certain railroad, which it might excite jealousy to mention by name, declared his opinion that it is the safest road in the country, as the superintendent keeps a boy running ahead of the trains to keep off the calves and sheep!