

NOT PROVEN.
—OR—
THE TRIALS OF ADAM CLEVELAND
CHAPTER XII.

THE RETURN TO DRUMMELAN, AND RECEPTION OF CLEVELAND.

"You know Beautiful Bessie, whom the police sought but failed to find?" he asked.

A sudden flushing of Andrew's face was a sufficient answer, but to it was added the words—
"What of her?"

"I saw her here in this building—in the Court room—a moment ago."

"Impossible!" cried Andrew, paling as he had done. "Where is she now?"

"Gone. She passed out dressed in black and with a thick veil over her face," answered Cleveland. "It was that which confused me, and disguised her to my eyes; the last time I saw her she was so broken down, and wayworn, and despairing."

Now she half of this was heard, for Andrew had dashed out of the wide lobby like one demoralized, to seek eagerly every face in Parliament Square likely to belong to Bessie; then a few under the pillars, along to the High Street, round St. Giles's Church, and back to the Court entrance, looking eagerly on every side, but without success. The lady in black had vanished.

Excited and breathless he stood close more before Cleveland, just as the latter moved forth into the fresh air, and raised himself to his full height to exultantly draw in the first long sweet breath of freedom.

"She is gone," Andrew faintly exclaimed. "Oh, why did you not tell me sooner? I would have given anything to have spoken to her if only for a moment."

"I scarcely knew, and I am not quite sure that it was she," answered the schoolmaster. "It is a secret? Why does the mention of that poor girl excite you so? Was I right in supposing that it was you and she I passed that night by the river side?"

"I know you can keep a secret," said Andrew quietly and trustfully. "It was Bessie, and Bessie is my wife. I look upon her as such in God's sight, and will make her so before all the world if I'm spared. But this is my secret—While I stood with her, yonder, by the river I thoughtlessly said that my father's death at such a time, when I was penniless, would be very convenient. The words look diabolical now, and that he was killed the same night, but I really meant nothing by them when they were uttered. I don't know yet why I said it; but I'm afraid the silly girl believes them that careless remark that I am the murderer of my father. See?"

Cleveland nodded gravely, and Andrew continued—
"I'm glad she was in that Court-room, too, for she must have heard my protest when that dodging old lawyer tried to insinuate that I was wicked enough to swear anything, and had a personal interest in my father's death. I forgot what I said now, but I think I gave it him hot, didn't I? Bessie would hear all that, and surely she would no longer suspect me. I wonder what took her there? Perhaps she thought you would be innocently convicted, and then meant to save you by being like a soldier, giving a bloodstained sum, and denouncing me as the murderer. She's always for doing things in the tragedy style. I'm different. It's a great farce, isn't it? her suspecting me, and me, at times, half suspecting her. Only it's a very funny farce—it's one I sometimes hardly know whether to laugh or cry over."

"You may discover her yet, and make clear to her your innocence, said Cleveland; "that is, if you are not going back to Drummellan immediately?"

"Drummellan?" cried Andrew, with an impatient snort. "I'm not going back to it at all, I've got enough of that miserable hole. The bend is being sold, and I'm not sure if I'll have a penny to draw when all's said. The schoolmaster's place—yours, you know—is filled up, and I was plainly told not to apply, as I had no chance."

"What! my place taken from me and filled up?" cried Cleveland, with a powerful start and quiver of dismay, which he vainly tried to suppress. "That is surely sharp work. That is the bitterest blow of all."

"Just like them—said so myself when I heard of it," rejoined Andrew. "But oh, bless you, there's plenty of better situations than that open for you—places where they'll be glad to get you. I only wish I had half your ability and experience; I should feel a little more comfortable about the future."

"Glad to get me, with a cloud of suspicion on my name?" bitterly retorted the schoolmaster.

"Change it, my dear sir, change it," said Andrew, easily. "Call yourself Thomas Jones or Matthew M'Shaughie, or anything else that strikes your fancy. I shouldn't let that stand in my way."

"Never! I'll keep my name till I die," said Cleveland with fearful energy. "I've never done anything to disgrace it, and I hope I never shall. Misfortune is no crime."

"Curious, now; that would never put me up or down," observed Andrew. "I like to laugh at the world in my sleeve; you look upon it as full of men of religion and honesty and earnest goodness like yourself. You're one of the leaven of the world, but you'll be dead long before you can leave the whole lump. Fact, I assure you. Now you look at me as if you thought me cracked; perhaps I am, but if so the crack has let in more light. Well, as I said, I'm not going back to Drummellan. I've got a pound or two to account from old Bodinard, and I'm going to stay in the city and look for an opening for my genius."

"And what's that, pray?" inquired Cleveland, half amused and half saddened by the careless chatter of the young man.

"That's just the thing I can never decide—fate must do that for me," said Andrew, with a solemn gravity, which gave him quite a comical look. "I've often thought I could make a good minister—used to help a probationer with his sermons—if I were only shaved and oiled and dressed up a bit, but then they've to frizzle and 'bust' and gossip to all the old wives of the parish, and that wouldn't suit me. I'm never a great favorite with said wives—quite the reverse. I might easily set up as a quack doctor with the training I've had, but I don't like to be a rogue. I'm smart enough to be a good war correspondent, but unfortunately there's quite a lasting peace just now. If some European despot would only kick up a rumpus and rouse a good bloody war just now, he'd be a benefactor to his species. Wouldn't I sling off the decorations of the fearful carnage, sitting in my snug tent miles away from the battlefield and away from every danger of a stray shot—but oh me! I look's always against me."

"Ah, you're young yet," said Cleveland pityingly. "Life will become a much more real and holy thing to you when you are a few years older. You will wonder at yourself when you remember and recall your thoughts and utterances. You will be inclined to think you have turned to look back on another man."

"Quite possible; shouldn't wonder," said Andrew musingly.

"If a few pounds would be of any use to you," said Cleveland in an under tone, "I will be most happy to let you have them. I am poor myself, and know not what my future may be, but I would give

to think that talents like yours should be lost to the world, or, worse still, diverted to some evil channel."

"Not for worlds! not for worlds!" exclaimed Andrew, with a slight flush and a manly earnestness. "No, I don't think I'll degenerate into a rascal; and I've resolved to wade out of the rat snared. I'll be something to boast of afterwards—thanking you heartily all the same. I'll get on as a clerk, or a copyist, or an advertising agent—not quite enough cheek for that, though—or an unqualified agent at the Police Court, five shillings a case; drunks half-a-crown. Something's sure to turn up. Well, I suppose, I may say 'Good-bye.' We've both got a fight before us, and what the end may be I don't know," and as he said this he had been talking of some pleasing incident. Andrew turned once more to Jean and Heartsease, who had been standing at a little distance, shook them by the hand, raised his hat with all the grace of a cavalier, and vanished easily away, lighting a cigar as he went.

"What a strange mixture of flippant nonsense and sound reasoning the fiddle is!" was Cleveland's thought as he moved off in an opposite direction. "He's right, though, about it being a fight for us both; but then he has no one to help him in the fight—only with an ambagage; I'm not. Cleveland was free walking the streets of Edinburgh at liberty, and with all he valued in the world—Heartsease and her mother—as his side. The future was gloomy enough to him, for in his sturdy independence he had firmly refused all aid in the expensive defense, and had got a hint from his lawyers that that would avail nearly all his little savings; but he was walking in the sunlight, breathing the fresh air and looking up at the blue sky and green hills—that was enough for him at present."

"God and a clear conscience will surely carry me through all the nights and trials before me," he said, with his heart buoyant and exultant with the delicious sense of freedom. Even the details of Jean's expulsion from the cottage, which were now revealed to him as gently as possible for the first time, could not quench the rapture of his heart, and they spent the rest of the day in wandering over the romantic city, seeing and enjoying the wonders which before Heartsease and Jean had only been able to pass over with tears.

In the evening Cleveland again saw his lawyers, and got a complete account of the expenses incurred, which, though generously reduced to a minimum without his knowledge, were sufficiently heavy to make him look so grave and troubled that it took Heartsease a full hour to bring back the smiles to his face.

Next morning they bade farewell to their humble lodging, and with most of their gloomy thoughts dispelled took train for Drummellan. The day was bright and sunny, and Cleveland had purposely chosen to return when all could see him enter the town, but as he neared the familiar town on the hillside, the growing excitement tinging his cheek and the beating of his own heart made him question the judiciousness of his resolve.

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