

SATURDAY EVENING, APRIL 24, 1869.

Jeannie Sinclair,

OR
THE LILY OF THE STRATH.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SHEPHERD'S SHEILING AND ITS INMATES—
THE TRAVELLER WAYLAIN—THE NATURE OF
WILL SANDERSON'S REVENGE SHADOWED
FORTH.

'Here is a cold and weary traveller I have come across, Randal,' remarked the gipsy. 'And you have brought him to give him shelter for the night,' exclaimed Randal, rising from his seat before the fire. 'That's right, father. The sheiling has no great comfort to offer, but on a night like this it is better than the open moor or the bleak hill-side.'

'I wanted him to stay for the night, but it seems his business is too pressing.' 'And sorry I am that it is so,' remarked the traveller, as he came into the ruddy fire-light, and spread his hands towards the blaze. 'You may be sure, my lads, that I do not brave the storm for the next four miles in preference to a seat by the side of this warm fire except from dire necessity. I would give a good deal to stay where I am, but it may not be.'

'Well, here is the next best thing we can do for you,' observed Will, as he filled the glass from the flask, and at the same moment, in obedience to a private signal from the elder to the younger gipsy, the latter quietly withdrew, and passed outside. He was gone only for a moment, but in the interval he had made signals with a lantern, which had been answered from a neighboring hill.

The stranger, suspecting nothing of design or treachery in the proceedings of his entertainers, drained at a draught the glass which Sanderson had filled, and handed it back empty with a sigh of supreme satisfaction. 'Prime liquor, and no mistake,' he remarked. 'You said no more than truth when you declared it to be the best of Highland brewing. Gad, I feel it warming my stomach already.'

'Take a seat for a moment, and drain another glass before you go,' said Randal, who returned at the instant and passed a secret signal to his friend.

'Of course he will,' added Sanderson. 'A few minutes of the fire will quicken the action of the liquor.'

'But hardly my desire to leave,' rejoined the traveller. 'However, a minute or two won't add much to the time I am behind.' 'If it is to see the hanging you are going,' remarked Will, 'you will be time enough for that in the morning.'

The man winked, and bestowed on the speaker a slying laugh. 'Well, it isn't exactly to see the hanging that I am going, though I don't doubt I will see it. But, egad, if I weren't to show face till to-morrow some folks in Shawhead would spend the night more comfortably than the convict himself. You don't know me, you two, he went on, the liquor taking rapid hold of him, 'few people know me, and those who, in the course of business, are brought to know me, would give a pretty round sum to be quit of the introduction. You take me?—you twig? eh?'

'Perhaps you are an officer of the law,' said Will, speaking in the tone of one who had a guess.

'An officer of the law,' echoed the stranger, with the same disagreeable leer and chuckle. 'You have guessed it—I am an officer of the law; a very—par—ticular—officer—of the law, I say, friend—that's—devilish—strong—strong wits—key of yours. It—it has—has taken—my head—con—con—foundedly. I declare—my tongue is—getting as—stiff—stiff—as a poker, and I am as drowsy—as—Oh, yes, I—I'm—I'm—an off—ficer—of—of—'

Here articulation, which every moment had been growing more difficult, failed him altogether; his eyes, which had been gradually glazing, closed, his head fell forward, and he would have slid into the fire, had not Will and Randal, who were close by watching him, caught him in their arms, and laid him at full length on a bed of furs and rushes which were strewn in one corner.

'There—he is effectually disposed of, and quickly, too,' said Will. 'The powder has done its work admirably.'

'Art sure he is the man you think,' observed Randal. 'If he be, he is not a bit like his office. I fancied a big, red-faced, brutal-looking fellow, but that is a quiet, pleasant-faced chap. He doesn't look able to kill a sheep or stick a pig, let alone hanging a man.'

'He can do it, though, for all that,' rejoined Will. 'When he laughed in your horrible way, his face told the tale. And then you noticed what he said about few people knowing him or wanting to know him. Pity the powder got so beforehand with the liquor, for else he would have blabbed everything on himself. Never mind, I expect the contents of this bundle will confirm our suspicions.'

The bundle in question was that which the stranger had carried beneath his arm, and this Will Sanderson had laid hold of, and unfasting the leather strap which confined it.

The outer covering was a dingy cotton handkerchief, and this being unfolded disclosed a fur cap, a pair of black gloves, a clean shirt, some broad strong leather straps with heavy buckles, a piece of rope made of hair, and constructed in the form of a running noose, and a white cotton nightcap.

'There—these things settle the question, and mistake there is none,' said Will, as with grim satisfaction he handled one by one the things we have mentioned, and which indicated significantly enough the office of the man who carried them.

'And this is the halter that is to strangle him?' remarked Randal, as he put his arm through the hair loop.

'The halter that was to strangle him, but it won't do now,' rejoined Will, his restless eyes emitting wild and fearful gleams. 'Instead of hair, his wend was will closed up with hemp, and enough for him, too.'

'But wouldn't this make the work all the surer,' observed Randal. 'By all the fiends, I swear to make it sure enough. Hemp can be trusted as well as hair if plies and the twisting are looked to. As to doing it with that noose, it musn't be thought of. Were we to go to hang the rascal with the hangman's implements, suspicion would light on us concerning the hangman's absence.'

No, Randal, no. A noose of hemp had twisted is what we shall strangle him with. And you shall keep the rope as a trophy of your triumph. I would Mark were come, for time presses, and we must be gone. I do wish Mark would come.'

'And Mark is here,' said a hoarse, husky voice, as a heavy form entered the hut, pretty much whitened with snow.

This was Mark Gideon, an older man by twenty years than when we last saw him, but still a strong and muscular man—more surly, more dogged in his looks, his face showing a deeper olive, and his vagabond appearance not a whit improved.

'Ha!' he exclaimed, as he shook the snow from his heavy garments, 'have you got him fast and sure already? Zoe's powder has turned out a potent compound.'

'Yes,' returned Will, as he slept as sound as those who have had him to tie their last cravat. There's his stock-in-trade—bells, cap and noose, all complete.'

'And a pretty set of trinkets they are, truly,' said Mark, handling them with a shudder of repulsion. 'Who knows how many pretty fellows' limbs these bracelets have confined when they dangled from the beam with this hairy collar round their throat. Fugh! the thing smells of the last breathe it has stopped. By heaven, Will, this will be the identical noose which scragged our comrade Jim Flawstiff, for this is the fellow who did his business. I've a mind to treat him to a dose of his own medicine; only he didn't hang Jim out of spite, but all in the way of his honorable calling. Bah! away with the horrid things, and let me have a draught from the flask to knock the cold out of me, and put away the vapours which the sight of that cord has given me.'

TO BE CONTINUED.

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E. CARROLL & CO.,

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