

Jeannie Sinclair, OR, THE LILY OF THE STRATH.

CHAPTER XXII. THE SHEPHERD'S SHELLING AND ITS IMBUES—THE TRAVELLER WAYLAIN—THE NATURE OF WILL SANDERSON'S REVENGE—SHADOWED NORTH.

This was the only vestige of human habitation—the only sign of human presence which the desolate winter ruled region presented. Far as the eye could roam over the long bare moor, or across the brown heathery slopes of the hills, no house or cottage was visible—nothing but this solitary shepherd's shelling, whose occupants could not now be the shepherds who had made it their summer quarters, for no aspects of white sheep dotted these wind-swept hills, and no cattle—not even on solitary ox or cow—grazed the dry, rustling grass of the moor.

The scene had been left to its winter desertion and desolation—the flocks and herds which had browsed on the summer herbage were down now in the lowlands, and the shepherds who tended them in the long serene summer days were enjoying domestic felicity by their own firesides. Yet was the shepherd's shelling inhabited.

Two men were its occupants, and these were Will Sanderson and the young gipsy, his companion, who had borne such a part in the detection and conviction of Lynedoch Sinclair.

They each sat on a low seat in front of the blazing fire, and ever and anon Will rose with restless impatience to go to the door of the hut and look with a long, lingering gaze to the far end of the road where it emerged from the western heights.

'See you nothing of him, you wished to see?' asked the youth, as Will returned with a mattering of disappointment from one of these surveys.

'Nothing, Randal. Fore heaven, why loiter he? The road is not such a plain one that he may covert to walk in it after night-fall. Besides, there have been signs of a snow-storm all day, and that should have made him like nightwork all the less.'

'Perchance he has gone by some other way,' suggested the youth, 'and may even now have reached the town, where his work is to do.'

'The fiends forbid,' said Will, with a frown, and a savage snap of his teeth. 'That would baulk us of the sweetest part of our revenge. But I cannot think. From the inquiries I made, I am almost sure that this is the road he must come. The road over the heights is reckoned shorter, but at this season it is dangerous, and he, a stranger, would never take it. But to be sure, Mark was to be stationed up there, and give us the signal when he came that way. The signal has not been given. None but a madman would take the hill road when night is so near, so that we may pretty well calculate he will come by this track. Yet what the foul fiend keeps him I know not. He should have been here at least a two good hours since. Marry, but the Magistrates will be made uneasy by his tarrying.'

'That's why I can't help thinking he has gone some other way,' remarked the younger, whom Will had named Randal. 'In a matter of such importance he was not likely to be late.'

'I would give twenty pounds if I had it to know that he is still to pass along this road,' said Will, with stern emphasis. 'Our revenge is but half complete if it be otherwise.'

'He'll swing all the same,' said Randal, with a short sharp nod.

'He will swing, but not all the same. If I do the office he'll have a shorter rope and longer suffering. Besides, won't it be some thing for us to have the strangling of him; who owe him such a heavy debt of vengeance?'

'Well, I don't know,' observed the younger gipsy. 'I think our best advantage over him has been got by sending him to the gallows. We have done that at any rate.'

'Right, boy, right. We have sent him there, and that is the largest instalment of our revenge. But what a rare sweetening of the cup would this last plan of mine make. Why, Randal, it would make the very essence of it, especially as I would not fail to tell him before I turned him off who it is that sends him into the other world. Oh, the joy of that delicious moment! It would give balm to my heart for the rest of my days. Haven't you the same feeling, Randal?'

'I might have, if I knew the cause as well. You have taught me to hate that man Lynedoch Sinclair, and I do hate him, because you say he destroyed my mother.'

'He did, boy, he did. He ruined her and murdered her.'

'Curse him,' said the youth, as he fiercely clenched his hand. 'My blood boils when I hear it. Why, father, why did you not crush his life out at the time?'

'I waited that my revenge might be the sweeter, and his punishment be heavier—I waited till your hand was strong enough to strike the blow, and say you, boy, I did not well? Would a hasty despatch been half so satisfactory as this retribution? I have brooded over it for years, Randal, and never hit upon a scheme so rare as this which I have brought into our hands. Ha! Fore heaven, I am forgetting to keep watch.'

And with a sudden bound, Will left his seat by the fire, and proceeded to the open door, which commanded an uninterrupted view of the road as it stretched across the long line of moor.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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