

Guelph Evening Mercury

MONDAY EVENING, MARCH 15, 1869.

Jeannie Sinclair,

OR
THE LILY OF THE STRATH.

CHAPTER XIV.

FUNERAL IN THE STRATH—AN EXCITING INCIDENT AT CLOVERLEA BETWEEN ROBERT DOUGLAS AND JACOB McQUEER—A CRISIS IMPENDING.

Meanwhile, William Denman walked by the river side all through that summer night, enduring the bitterness of crushed affection and blighted hope. To him the present was now all gloom, the future all blackness. In one moment he had been plunged from the height of joy into the depths of despair. He had allowed his affections to twine so closely round Jeannie that the wrench needed to untwine them was like tearing away the very fibres of his heart. In one hour a total change, an utter revolution, had taken place in his soul. The hopes and prospects which his love inspired had intensified the glories of nature and the beauties of the Strath. Then it had appeared the sweetest place for a settled home which earth could yield. Now he felt it would add tenfold to his misery to remain in it, where every object must remind him of his happiness and his loss. He was weary of the scene, which, when brightened by the light of love, was so radiant and attractive. Sometimes it ameliorated, sometimes it intensified, the bitterness of his love. It was not an unrequited affection by which he was blighted, but, on the other hand, it made the pain all the greater to think that the foundation of so much happiness had been truly laid, and by a cruel mistake, laid in vain. They loved each other, and could have made each other so very, very happy, yet a fatal barrier was between them, and they must for ever separate.

Next day William went up to Cloverlea, and found Robert walking solitarily in his garden. Had the latter not been so wretched and unhappy himself, he must have noticed the change that had come over Denman's countenance. He looked pale, haggard, and miserable, but this alteration Robert did not perceive.

'Well,' said William, with a smile, after they had gravely returned the morning salutation, 'are you still of the mind to go to the gold diggings?'

'Yes,' was the reply.

'The night's reflection has not changed your resolution?'

'No, on the contrary, it has settled it more firmly.'

'You will not accept the aid of friendship to help the course of true love to run smoothly?'

'Press me not,' said Robert, wistfully. 'Your generous offer is a great temptation, and my integrity is in danger when I think of it. It needs all my confidence to face the consequence of refusal, therefore, add not to the difficulty by urging me further. Once and for all, with a thousand thanks, and a feeling in my heart far beyond what words can express, I say, I have loved and I love, and I will be true to mine, I myself must win them.'

'And you are going to California?'

'Soon.'

'Immediately.'

'I will accompany you.'

'You,' exclaimed Robert, with unmitigated surprise.

Robert looked at him, and for the first time saw the grief so legible on his countenance.

'Good heavens!' he exclaimed, 'what has happened to you?'

'The worst that could happen,' answered William. 'My heart is blighted, and I go with you to the ends of the earth to seek what miserable comfort, change of scene and distance may give.'

Robert continued looking at him in wistful silence. 'I have no right,' he said, 'to seek your confidence, but—'

'You have a right,' interrupted William, 'ardently, the right of true and tried friendship, and when I came up to-day it was with the full intention of giving you that confidence you so modestly ask. I have loved and I love. Can you guess the object of my affection?'

'Jeannie Sinclair—it can be no other than Jeannie.'

'It is Jeannie. Last night, after parting from you, I avowed my love, and we have parted for ever.'

'She has not—it is not possible that she could treat you coldly, harshly?'

'Nay, friend, Jeannie is goodness, purity, virtue itself. More than that, I have good reason to know that she is true. A barrier is in the way, a fatal barrier, which, I confess to me, and Jeannie too, I fear, to misery. For months she has been betrothed to Sir Ferrius Sinclair.'

'Ha! there is truth in the rumour; I for one did not believe it.'

'It was a foolish, unfortunate blunder that was made. The offer had dazzled her friends, and having at the time nothing to consult regarding her own heart, she yielded to their and the Baronet's solicitations, and was engaged to him. I knew of this for the first time last night—knew of when it was too late; and now I must wrestle against the darkness of despair which has entered my soul.'

'My friend, who can sympathize with you like one who is enduring similar suffering?' said Robert, with a husky voice and moistened eyes.

'And each can alone give the other comfort, respond to William. 'Therefore we will go to California together, and find there what fortune has in store for us—for you I trust success—for me what healing time can give to my sore wound.'

The brotherly compact was sealed at once, and it was settled that, as soon as the necessary arrangements were made, they should depart for the gold diggings.

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