

MATT.

A TALE OF A CARAVAN.

(Continued.)

It was arranged that Monk should drive Matt in the dog cart, while William Jones and his father followed in the commoner vehicle. At Pen-cross, where the ceremony was to be performed, they were to meet with one Mr. Penarvon, a country squire and kindred spirit of Monk's, who had promised to be "best man."

Monk took the reins, while Matt got in and seated herself beside him, the groom getting up behind; and away they went along the sand-choked road, followed by Jones and his father.

The day was bright and merry, but Matt never thought of the old proverb: "Merry is the bride that the sun shines on;" she was too busy examining the prospect on every side. All at once, as the bridal procession wound round the edge of the lonely lake, she uttered a cry of delight. There, standing in its old place by the lakeside, was the caravan.

Monk looked pale—there was something ghostly in the re-appearance even of this inanimate object. He was a man of strong nerve, however, and he speedily smiled at his own fears.

As they approached the spot they saw Tim standing near the vehicle in conversation with two strange gentlemen—one a little man in black broad cloth, the other a tall, broad-shouldered fellow wearing a light overcoat and a wide-awake hat. Directly the procession approached, this group separated, and its three members walked severally to the road, he with the wide-awake hat standing right in the centre of the road quietly smoking a cigar.

As the dog cart came up he held up his hand. Unable to proceed without running him down, Monk pulled up angrily.

"What is it? Why do you block the road?" he cried fiercely.

"Excuse me, governor," returned the other coolly. "Mr. Monk, of Monkshurst, I believe."

"That's my name."

"Sorry to trouble you on such a day, but I should like a few words with you."

"I cannot stay—I am going to be married!"

"So I heard," said the man, lifting his hat and bowing with a grin to Matt. "Glad to see you, miss. How do you do? But the fact is, Mr. Monk, my business won't keep. Be good enough to step this way."

Full of some unaccountable foreboding, inspired partly by the stranger's suave yet determined manner, partly by the reappearance of the caravan, Monk alighted, and followed the other across the grass to the house on wheels. The little elderly man followed, and the man who had first spoken went through the ceremony of introduction.

"This is Mr. Monk, sir. Mr. Monk, this gentleman is Mr. Lightwood, of the firm of Lightwood & Lightwood, solicitors, Chester."

"And you—who the devil are you?" demanded Monk, with his old savagery.

"My name is Marshall, Christian name John, though my friends call me Jack," answered the other with airy impudence. "John Marshall, governor of the detective force."

Monk now went pale indeed. But recovering himself he cried, "I know neither of you. I warned you I was in haste. What do you want? Out with it!"

The little man now took up the conversation, speaking in a prim, business-like voice, and occasionally referring to a large note book which he carried.

"Mr. Monk, you are, I am informed, sole heir, male, of the late Colonel Monk, your cousin by the father's side, who was supposed to have died in the year 1862."

"Yes, that's true. What then?"

"On the report of his death, his name being included in an official list of officers killed and wounded in action, and it being understood that he died without lawful issue, you laid claim to the demesne of Monkshurst, in Cheshire, and that of the same name in Anglesea. Your claim was recognized and in 1865 you took possession."

"Well, have you detained me to hear only what I already know?"

"Pardon me, I have not finished. I have now to inform you that you inherited under a misconception—first, because Colonel Monk was married and had issue; second, because he did not die in India, but reached the shores of England, where he perished in the shipwreck of the vessel *Trinidad* on Christmas day, 1864."

Monk was livid. At this moment Jones, who had been watching the scene from a distance, came over panting and perspiring in ill-concealed terror.

"Lor', Mr. Monk, what's the matter? Look ye now, we shall be late for the wedding."

As he spoke Marshall, the detective, clapped him playfully on the shoulder.

"How d'ye do, William Jones? I've often heard of you, and wished to know you. Pray stop where you are. I'll talk to you presently."

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"I don't what you mean," Monk now said with dogged desperation, "with all this rigmarole, Mr. Lightwood, or whatever your name is. It seems to me you are simply raving. If I am not my cousin's heir, who is, tell me that?"

"His daughter," said the man, quietly.

"He never married, and he never had a daughter."

"His daughter, an infant twelve or fourteen months old, sailed to England with him, was shipwrecked with him, but saved by a special Providence, and has since been living in this place under the name of Matt Jones."

"Your intended bride, you know," added Marshall, with an insinuating smile. "Hullo, where is the young lady?"

Monk looked round towards the dog cart and on every side, but Matt was nowhere to be seen.

"I see her go into their cart," said William Jones.

"Call her," cried Monk. "I'll stay no longer here. Listen to me, you two. Whether you are telling truth or lies, that girl is going to be my wife—I have her guardian's consent, and she herself, I may tell you, fully appreciates the honor I am doing her."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Lightwood smiling. "Unfortunately I, as Miss Monk's legal advisor, must have a say in the matter. Doubtless this marriage would be a very pretty arrangement for keeping the late Col. Monk's fortune and property in your possession, but I cannot conscientiously approve of the young lady's marriage to an assassin."

"An assassin!—what—what do you mean?" gasped Monk, staggering as if from a blow.

"Tell him, Mr. Marshall."

"All right, sir. Well, you see, Mr. Monk, of Monkshurst," continued the detective, grimly, yet playfully, you're accused of making away with—murdering, in fact—a young gentleman who came to Aberglyn a few weeks ago in that little house on wheels; and this nice friend of yours, (here he again slapped William on the shoulder) 'is accused of being your accomplice.'

"No, no. I never done it! I'm innocent, I am," cried William Jones. "Tell 'em, Mr. Monk, tell 'em—I'd nowt to do with it."

"Silence, you fool," said the other, then he added, turning on his accusers: "You are a couple of madmen, I think. I know nothing of the young man you speak of. I have heard that he is missing, that is all; but there is no evidence that any harm has come to him, for his body has not been found."

Here Marshall turned with a wink to William Jones, and nudged him in the ribs.

"Don't you think now," he asked, "it might be worth while looking for it in that little underground parlor of yours down alongside the sea?"

William Jones uttered a despairing groan, and fell on his knees.

"I'm ruined!" he cried. "O Mr. Monk, it's your doing! Lord help me! They know everything."

"Curse you, hold your tongue," said Monk, with a look of mad contempt and hatred. "These men are only playing upon your fears, but they cannot frighten me."

"No," remarked the detective, lighting his cigar which had gone out. "I think we shall even manage that in time."

As he spoke he carelessly, as if inadvertently, drew out a pair of steel handcuffs, which he looked at reflectively, threw up and caught underhand in the air.

"You accuse me of assassination?" said Monk, trembling violently. "I warn you to beware, for I will not suffer such accusations without seeking redress. If you have any proof of the truth of your preposterous charge produce it!"

At this moment Matt, looking bright as sunshine, leaped out of the caravan.

"There is my proof," said Marshall. "Miss Monk, this amiable bridegroom of yours denies being concerned in harming Mr. Charles Brinkley. Is he telling the truth?"

Matt's face darkened, and she looked at Monk with eyes of cordial detestation.

"No," she said, "he's lying."

"Matt," cried Monk, fiercely, "take care."

"He's lying," she repeated, not heeding him. "I see him do it with my own two eyes, and I see William Jones helping him and looking on; they thought that no one was nigh, but I was. I was hiding behind them sacks and barrels in the cave."

Monk now felt that the game was almost up, for he was beset on every side, and the very ground seemed opening under his feet. The wretched Jones, in a state bordering on frenzy, remained on his knees wailing over his ruin. The two strangers, Lightwood and Marshall, looked on as calm but interested spectators. Matt, having delivered her homethrust of accusation, stood and gazed into Monk's face with cool defiance.

"It is a plot!" Monk cried, presently; "an infamous plot to ruin me! You have been tampering, I see, with this wild girl, whom you foolishly suppose kin to me by blood. Arrest me, if you please—I shall not take the trouble to resist, for I am perfectly innocent in this matter."

He added, while they looked at one another as if somewhat puzzled: "As to the girl's relationship to my dead cousin, the very idea is absurd. Where are the proofs of her birthright?"

"Here," said a quiet voice.

Monk turned his eyes and started back in wonder, while William Jones

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