

THE CRIMINAL'S CONFESSION

OR, SYBIL BERNER'S
VINDICATION

CHAPTER VII.—(Continued).

It was a clear, bright December day. The morning, if sharp and cold, was fresh and invigorating.

They spent the middle of the day in rambling through the loneliest parts of the mountain fastnesses, and gathering treasure of many sorts of the sweetest nuts.

That night while Gentiliska slept soundly, and Sybil sat with wide open eyes, wondering what fate had in store for her, there came a scratching from outside and like a flash a little dog dashed into the cavern.

"Why, Nelly! dear Nelly!" gasped Sybil, as the little terrier jumped on her knee, and expressed in dog-fashion its delight at finding its mistress.

As she fondled the dog a sudden inspiration came to her. This faithful little friend had found its way through some subterranean passage. Why should it not lead Sybil back through that passage? She was not guarded, save by Gentiliska, who was now fast asleep.

There was at least a chance; so catching little Nelly in her arms she wrapped Beatrix Pendleton's camel-hair shawl closely around her, and went to the entrance of the cavern through which the dog had entered.

Here she paused for a moment to listen. All was silent except for the deep breathing of Gentiliska, that only proved how profound was the sleep of the girl.

Then she caressed her little dog again, saying in a low voice:

"Lyon, Nelly! Where is Lyon?"

The little Skye terrier pricked up her ears and whimpered.

Then Sybil was sure that Nelly understood her words.

"Let us go find Lyon, Nelly; Lyon! Lyon! Lyon!" said Sybil, setting the little dog down and harking her on by the way she had come.

Nelly remembered where she had left "Lyon," and so, with a glad bark, she leaped forward and ran on as fast as the tortuous nature of the dark subterranean passage would permit her to do; pausing now and then to rest herself, and to allow her mistress time to overtake her.

"Poor, dear little faithful Nelly! don't run so fast. You were tired almost to death when you came in from your first journey, and now you set out immediately on this the moment I ask you to do it; but abate your zeal, dear little friend, or you will not be able to hold out to the end," said Sybil, sitting down and caressing her little dog while they both rested.

When they re-commenced their journey, they found the passage growing narrower, darker, and more tortuous than before. They were compelled to move slowly and cautiously.

Sybil had already recognized the natural underground road by which she had been brought to the robber's cave; but she did not know this portion of it. So she supposed that she must have been brought through it while in that state of unconsciousness into which she had fallen from terror on first being seized by the masked and shrouded forms of the men who had carried her off. She therefore hoped that she was near the outlet of the subterranean passage.

But where that outlet might be, she could not guess. The last she remembered before falling into that swoon of horror, was the vault of the Haunted Chapel. The first she saw, on recovering herself, was the middle of the subterranean passage. But whether that passage had started from the vault, or whether the men had carried her any distance over the upper earth, before descending into it, she had no means of knowing or surmising. She must wait for the revelation at the end of this underground road.

The end was fast approaching. Far ahead, a little, dim dot of grey light kept dodging right and left before her eyes, following as it were the abrupt turning of the passage. It drew nearer, nearer, and now at last it was before her.

The little dog that had been trotting beside her mistress now sprang past her and began to dig away at the hole with her paws.

Sybil stooped down, and peered through it. By the early light of the now dawning day, she discerned a section of a foundation wall, that she felt sure must be a part of the old vault under the Haunted Chapel.

The little dog now jumped through the hole, and turned around and pawed, and whimpered, as if inviting and expecting Sybil to follow her.

She understood the situation well enough now. She knew that this small hole was the entrance from the underground passage into the vault, and that it must have become partly filled up by the falling in of the bricks and mortar at the blowing up of the church. She went to work to try to remove the obstructions. It was a work of more time and toil than of real difficulty. With her delicate hands she began to take away the broken stones, timbers, and plaster,

until she pulled out a short, narrow piece of plank, which she immediately began to use as a tool to dig away the refuse. A half hour's hard work cleared her way into the vault. She passed it, and once more saw the dome of heaven above her head.

Little Nelly jumped around her with delighted barks, and then ran up the broken walls of the vault, and turned around and looked at her and barked, as if to say:

"This way! this way!"

But the irregularities in the dilapidated wall, that furnished a sure foothold for Nelly's little feet, would not serve her mistress' turn. So Sybil looked about the place, and cast around in her mind to consider how she should contrive to reach the upper ground. She soon saw the way, but she had to rest before she could commence a new work. So she sat down and called the dog to her, and both remained quiet for about ten minutes. And then Sybil arose and went to work, and piled up the bricks and stones, until she had raised for herself a rude stairway half up to the top. By these, at some little risk of life and limb, she climbed out of the vault, and found herself standing on the edge of a heap of rubbish, which was all that remained of the old Haunted Chapel.

Here again she sat down to look around her. The sun was just rising from behind the mountain, and tinging all the wintry scene with the golden hues of autumn. Though it was a clear, cold, frosty morning, Sybil was perspiring from her late hard work, so she drew her heavy shawl around her shoulders to protect her from a chill while she rested. The little terrier, who had leaped up after her mistress, would not rest, but continued to jump about and bark, as if to testify her joy and triumph in a work accomplished. Every leap and bark said as plainly as tongue could have spoken the words:

"I have found her, and brought her back! I knew I could! I knew I could! I have done it at last! I have done it at last!"

"I know you have, Nelly, dear, and I love you better than anybody in the world except Lyon! But now I want you to help me to find Lyon, Nelly! Lyon! Lyon!" said Sybil, holding the little terrier's face between her hands and gazing into its loving brown eyes.

Nelly jumped away at her bidding and ran all over the place, and sniffing zealously for some moments, and then finding herself clearly at fault, ran back and whimpered her disappointment on her mistress' lap.

"You have lost trace and scent of Lyon! Oh, Nelly! Nelly! what shall we do? Venture back boldly to Black Hall? Run right in the teeth of the law officers, and be snapped up by them?" sighed Sybil.

Nelly understood "a horror in the words, if not the words," and howled dismally.

Just at that moment a halting step was heard approaching, and a sad voice sighing:

"I sorer can't give her up! No, I can't! If she did bite me, it wa'n't outen malice to me; but outen dewotion to the mistress—only to make me drap her down, so she could go back to dis vault and wait for her mistress, which I do expect she have starved to death by dis time! But I'll see, Nelly! Nelly!"

Sybil's heart leaped with joy at recognizing the voice of her faithful servant Joe. And Nelly jumped forward with a cry of delight to meet him.

"So you is here yet in dis supernumerary speer. Thank my Marster in Heaven for dat!" exclaimed Joe, stooping painfully, while he leaned upon his crutch, to lift the little dog to his bosom. "But who dat young 'oman, Nelly?" continued Joe, whose eyesight was none of the best, pausing abruptly and staring at Sybil, who was completely disguised by the large India shawl and the red merino gown, both of which were entirely opposite to her usual style of dress.

Joe hobbled toward the supposed stranger cautiously.

"Don't you know me, dear old Joe?" inquired Sybil, dropping the shawl from her head and rising to her feet.

"Ah-h-h-ah!" yelled Joe in a prolonged howl of horror at what he took to be a ghost.

And then, as he could not run away, he dropped dog and crutch, fell flat upon his face and roared for mercy.

Sybil and her little dog tried to soothe and reassure him—Sybil by repeating to him over and over again that she was alive and well, and that there was nothing whatever to fear at the moment; and little Nelly, by running around him and trying to poke her nose under his face to find a place to kiss or to lick.

But Joe for a time was perfectly inaccessible to reason; and Sybil, in discouragement, left him to recover himself alone, while she went and sat down at some distance to wait the issue of the event.

After a little while Joe slowly lifted up his head, and cautiously glanced around, whispering:

"Is she gone?"

"No," answered Sybil, sharply; "I am not gone! I am sitting here waiting for you to come to your senses!"

Joe, who after the first glimpse had not dared to look upon the ghost, now ventured from this safe distance to steal a glance. The glance grew into a gaze, and then he spoke:

"Miss Sybil—"

"Well, Joe?"

"Is it you?"

"Yes, it is I."

"But an't you dead?" mysteriously inquired Joe, gazing at the pale face of his mistress, now very pale indeed through all that she had suffered. "An't you really dead, Miss Sybil?"

"Not much, Joe."

"But wa'n't you robbed and murdered by them rippate willians?"

"Neither the one nor the other, Joe! I am safe and sound, and have my money and jewels still about me."

"But—wa'n't you redacted?"

"I was abducted, Joe; but not harmed! It is a long story, Joe. I cannot tell it now, because I want to know about my husband. Is he safe?"

"Yes, Miss Sybil, he's all right now! only grieving arter you! 'cause everybody beliebes as you perished in the blowing up of the old chapel. Lord! where was you all the time? Did Nelly find you?"

"Yes, Nelly found me; but—"

"Lord! the sense of that little thing!"

"But tell me about my husband. Where is he?"

"He is at Capping Pendulum's, a doing very well now."

"Doing very well now! That means he has been doing badly lately! Has he been ill?" exclaimed Sybil, in breathless anxiety.

"No, Miss Sybil; but he was in the old Haunted Chapel when de debil blowed it up."

"Oh, good heavens!" cried Sybil, clasping her hands, and unable to speak another word.

"Don't be scared! he wa'n't hurt not to speak of; only stunned and bruised a bit. And he's all right now. On'y grievin' of hisself to death, which is perfectly natural, you see. Goodness knows as I myself hasn't eat a meal's wittels, nor likewise slept a wink of sleep, since gone you's been! And oh! how I thank my Heavenly Marster as has 'stored you to us once more alive and well!" cried Joe, hobbling toward Sybil, sinking at her feet, and giving way to his feelings in a burst of sobs and tears.

Sybil raised him up, and then noticed for the first time how lame he was.

"It's nothin' to speak on, Miss Sybil. On'y a sprained ankle. I can get on well enough with a crutch. And here I am as willin' and able to sarve you as ever," said the poor fellow, earnestly.

"Thanks, dear Joe! I want you, if you can, to go with me to my husband immediately."

"But, Miss Sybil, honey, you look so pale and weak and wore out. Better stay here while I go and get a conveyance."

"No, no, no, Joe! It would take you too long, and I cannot wait. I can walk," said Sybil, impatiently rising and drawing the shawl up over her head for she had no hat or bonnet.

"Name o' de Lord, then, come on, honey," replied Joe, who knew it would be useless to oppose his mistress when she was fully bent on any purpose.

They set out together, picking their way slowly over the rubbish that filled the churchyard and lay between the river road.

Little Nelly followed faithfully at their heels.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was yet early morning, and Lyon Berners still lay on his comfortable bed in the spacious front chamber, at Pendleton Hall. The window shutters were open, admitting a fine view of the wooded mountains, not yet wholly divested of their gay autumn hues. A fine wood fire blazed in the broad fireplace. A nice breakfast stood on a little stand by the bedside. A good-humored, motherly-looking negro woman presided over the little meal, while Captain Pendleton, stood by the invalid, trying to persuade him to take nourishment.

"But I have no inclination, dear friend," pleaded Mr. Berners, as he reached out his pale hand, took a morsel of bread from the plate, and put it to his lips.

"You must eat without inclination, then, Berners. It is your duty to live," remarked Captain Pendleton.

"But, in the name of Heaven, what have I left to live for?" groaned the bereaved husband.

"For a future of usefulness, if not happiness, for a future of duty, if not of domestic joys," replied the captain, earnestly.

Footsteps were heard upon the stairs without, but no one heeded them.

"Duty, 'usefulness!" bitterly echoed Lyon Berners. "I might, indeed, have lived and labored for them, and for my country and my kind, if—if— Oh, Sybil! Sybil! Oh, Sybil! Sybil! My young, sweet wife!" He broke off and groaned with the insufferable, tearless agony of a strong man's grief.

"Here she is, marster! Bress de Lord, here she is, and Nelly, too! Nelly found her!" frantically exclaimed Joe, bursting open the chamber door, while Sybil flew past him and threw herself with a sob of delight into the arms of her husband. His brain reeled with the sudden, overwhelming joy, as he clasped his wife to his heart.

"Good Heaven, man! why did you not prepare your master for this?" was the first question Captain Pendleton thought of asking the negro.

Joe stared, and found nothing to answer. He did not understand preparation.

Nelly jumped upon the bed, and insisted upon being recognized; but nobody noticed her. Noble humanity is singularly ungrateful to their four-footed friends.

Lyon Berners, forgetful of everybody and everything else in the world, was gazing fondly, wonderingly into his wife's beautiful pale face. His face was like marble.

"My own, my own," he murmured. "By what miracle have you been preserved?"

Sybil could not answer; she could only sob for joy at this reunion, forgetful, poor child, of the awful danger in which she still stood.

Captain Pendleton remembered it. He first looked around to take note of who was in her room. There were Mr. and Mrs. Berners, himself, Joe, and the colored woman Margy—only one new witness, if there were no others outside who might have seen the entrance of Sybil.

He went and locked the door, that no one else should enter the chamber. And then he called Joe to the distant window.

"You very reckless fellow! tell me who besides ourselves have seen Mrs. Berners enter this house?"

"Not a single soul, marster, outen dis room. We walk all de way from de Haunted Chapel, and didn't meet nobody we knowed. Miss Sybil she keep de shawl over her head. Dem as did meet us couldn't a told who she was or even if she was white or brack. When we got home here, I jes opens de door like I always do, and Miss Sybil she follows me in, likewise Nelly. Nobody seed us, likewise we seed nobody, 'cept it was Jerome, as was jest a passin' outen de back door; wid a breakfast tray in his hands; but he didn't see us, 'cause his back was to us, which that fellow is always too lazy to look over his own shoulder, no matter what may be behind him," said Joe, contemptuously.

"That is true; but lucky on this occasion. Then you are certain that no one out of this room knows of Mrs. Berners' presence in the house?"

"Sartain sure, marster!" answered Joe, in the most emphatic manner.

"Then I must warn you not to hint—mind, Joe—not so much as to hint the fact to any living soul," said the captain, solemnly.

"Hi, Marse Capping! who you think is a fernal fool? Not dis Joe," answered the negro, indignantly.

"Mind, then, that's all," repeated the captain, who then dismissed Joe, and beckoned the motherly-looking colored woman to come to him.

"Margy," he whispered, "do you understand the horrible danger in which Mrs. Berners stands?"

"Oh, my good Lord, Marse Clement, don't I understand it? My blood runs cold and hot by turns every time I look at her and think of it," muttered the woman, with a dismayed look.

"I am glad you feel and appreciate this peril. It is said that no secret is safe that is known to three persons. This secret is known to five: Mr. and Mrs. Berners, Joe, you, and myself! I think I can rely on the secrecy of all," said Captain Pendleton, with a meaning look.

"You can rely on mine, Marse Clement. I'd suffer my tongue to be bored out by the roots afore ever I'd breathe a word about here being here," said the woman.

"Quite right! Now we must see about concealing her for a few days, until we can slip her off to some foreign country."

"To be sure, marster; but are you certain that no one downstairs saw her when she came in?"

"Quite certain," answered the captain. Meanwhile Sybil sat down on the chair at the side of Lyon's bed, and with her hand clasped in his, began to tell the story of her abduction and captivity among the robbers.

Lyon Berners, seeing his host now at leisure, beckoned him to approach and hear the strange story.

Sybil told it briefly to her wondering audience.

"And if they had not carried me off, I should not now be at liberty," she concluded.

That this was true, they all agreed. Now Sybil had to hear the particulars of the explosion, and the names of its victims. She shuddered as Captain Pendleton went over the list.

"One feels the less compassion, however, when one considers that this was a case of the 'engineer hoist with his own petard.'"

"Don't you think, Marse Clement, as Mrs. Berners would be the better for a bit of breakfast?" inquired Aunt Margy.

"Certainly. And here is Berners, touching nothing yet, and everything allowed to grow cold in our excitement and forgetfulness," said Captain Pendleton, anxiously examining the condition of the tray.

"Oh, never you mind, Marse Clem, I can go down and fetch up some hot breakfast, and another cup and sasser, and then may be the master and missis will take a bit of breakfast here together," put in Margy, as he lifted the tray to take it from the room.

"Be careful to let no word drop concerning our new visitor," said Captain Pendleton, as he cautiously locked the door after the woman.

While she was gone on this errand, Sybil told her friends further details of her life among the mountain robbers; among other matters, she related the story of Gentiliska Dubarry, at which her hearers were much surprised.

(To be continued).

MILLIONAIRES' FEAST.

Superb Banquet in London to the Viennese Choir.

Amid a blaze of light and profusion of red roses the 300 members of the Wiener-Maennergesang Verein—or Viennese Male Choir—dined at the Savoy Hotel, London, England, recently.

The setting of the banquet was worthy of the guests. Mr. Pruger, the manager of the Savoy, again had proved himself a magician. Dinner was served at seven. Two hours later the courtyard, which had served as a reception tent, was transformed into a picturesque Tyrolean village.

On one side rose the grey walls of a royal castle, while on the corner Austrian peasants served lager beer. Austrian national flags were hung across the hall, and at a given signal champagne began to flow from a central fountain.

Men attired in the uniform of Austrian guards made dignified obeisance to the distinguished guests, while over them all there presided a plumed and bearded hero, who at one time served the Austrian Emperor. It was Austria in the Savoy.

"It is wonderful," said Herr Krupp, of the famous firm of gunmakers, the president of the Imperial Royal Exhibition, who gave the dinner to the visitors. "Entente cordiale does not half express one's sentiments. The prettiness of the scene is equalled only by the warmth of the reception that England has accorded us."

The choir, as stated in the London Express, is composed of wealthy men. Many of them own large hereditary estates, others have made fortunes in commerce.

The following is a list of the chief guests, with the amount of their fortunes:—

Herr Krupp (gunmaker)	£8,000,000
Herr Schneiderhohn (straw hat maker)	1,300,000
Herr Duschnitz (rope maker)	1,250,000
Count Melzdorf	1,150,000
Herr Herrenfeld (paper mill owner)	1,100,000
Herr Von Leonhardt (baker)	1,000,000
Prince Schvenberg (feudal lord)	1,000,000
Herr Ehrlich	900,000

ADVANCE OF SURGERY.

Twenty years ago 50 per cent. of cases of amputation terminated fatally; but under the modern system of antiseptic surgery the danger of this operation has been so far reduced that the rate of mortality does not now exceed from five to twelve per cent. of the number of cases.



Willie—Was you the one I heard making love to my sister last night? Fiddleback—I was here. Why? Willie—I didn't suppose there was any one living could make me feel a sick as that.