

THE CRIMINAL'S CONFESSION

OR, SYBIL BERNER'S VINDICATION

CHAPTER VIII.—(Continued).

"I think it is easy to see through this matter," said Lyon Berners, after a pause; "this robber chief—this Captain Inconnu—this Satan of the band must be, or rather must have been the husband of Rosa Blondelle, and most probably her assassin. The motive for all his crimes seems clear enough. He could never have been a gentleman. He must always have been an adventurer—a criminal adventurer. He married the beautiful young widow for her money, and having spent it all, and discovered another heiress in this poor vagrant girl, he put Rosa out of the way, that he might be free to marry another fortune.

"No devil is so bad, however, but that there is a speck of good about him somewhere; and this adventurer, gambler, smuggler, robber, murderer, was unwilling that an innocent woman should suffer for his crime; therefore he had you abducted to prevent you from falling into the hands of the law."

"I do not know," said Sybil; "but I think that in having me carried off, he yielded to the threats or persuasions of Gentilska, who certainly seemed to know enough of the matter to give her great power over him. Indeed, she hinted as much to me. And she certainly knew of his presence at my mask ball."

"The daring impudence, the reckless effrontery of that man!" exclaimed Captain Pendleton, in astonishment and disgust.

"You said, dear Sybil, that he came in the character of Death?" inquired Mr. Berners.

"Yes," replied his wife, with a shudder.

"Ah, then I do not wonder at that poor woman's great, instinctive horror of that mask! I remember now that, every time he approached her, she shivered as with an ague fit. And yet she could not have suspected his identity," said Mr. Berners.

Next Sybil spoke of the discovery of the Pendleton plate and jewels in the possession of the robbers.

"I am glad that, at all events, Clement, since it gives you a sure clew to the recovery of your stolen goods," suggested Mr. Berners.

"A clew that I shall not follow, as to do so might seriously compromise the safety of Mrs. Berners. Our first care must be for her," answered Captain Pendleton.

"Always thoughtful, always magnanimous, dear friend," warmly exclaimed Lyon Berners, while Sybil eloquently looked her gratitude.

At that moment there was heard a low tap at the door, and a low voice saying:

"It's only me, Marse Clem, with the breakfast things."

The captain stepped to the door, unlocked it, and admitted Margy with the breakfast tray, and then carefully locked it again.

As the woman drew nearer to Sybil, she began to stare in astonishment at the Indian shawl that lady wore round her shoulders.

"You know it, do you, Margy? Well, yes, you are right. It is the celebrated Pendleton shawl that the captain's great-grandfather brought away from the palace of the Rajah, at the siege of some unpronounceable place in Hindostan," smiled Sybil.

"That's it," laughed her host. "My great-grandfather, a captain in the British army, stole it from the Rajah, and Mr. Inconnu, a captain of banditti, took it from us!"

But Margy was much too dignified to relish such jokes at the expense of her master's family, even from her master's lips. She put the tray upon the stand and arranged the breakfast, all in stately silence.

Captain Pendleton, with old-fashioned hospitality, pressed his guests to their repast; and so Lyon Berners being propped up with pillows, and Sybil sitting in the easy-chair, with the stand placed between them, ate their breakfast together; not forgetting to feed little Nelly, who was certainly the most famished of the party.

When the breakfast was over, Margy went out with the tray, followed by Joe. Mr. and Mrs. Berners being left alone with their host, the captain began to devise means first for her temporary concealment in the house, and afterward for her successful removal to a seaport.

"I confess," Mrs. Berners, began the captain, "that when I saw you enter this room I was as much alarmed for your safety as astonished at your appearance. But since your servant has told me, and you have confirmed his story, that no one recognized you, either on the road or in the house until you reached this room, my anxieties are allayed. The prevalent belief that you perished in the explosion at the Haunted Chapel has caused all pursuit of you to be abandoned for the present. And so long as we can keep you out of sight of others than the few who have already seen you, you will be perfectly safe."

idea how long the masquerading would last, so far as we were concerned, had we, dear?" inquired Lyon Berners. Sybil smiled and shook her head. They were armed with a pass such as colored people were required to have from their masters to show to the authorities before they could be permitted to travel.

Our fugitives were not now going to Norfolk, where their story and their persons were too well known; but to Baltimore, where they were perfect strangers. So their pass was to this effect:

Pendleton Park,
Near Blackville, Dec. 14th, 18—.

To all whom it may concern:—This is to certify that my man Caesar, with his wife Dinah, are permitted to go from this place to Baltimore to return between this date and the first of next March.

Clement Pendleton.

This was designed to protect the supposed darkies until they should reach the Monumental City, where they were to take the first opportunity of throwing off their disguises and embarking under another name in the first outward bound ship for a foreign port.

Provided with this protection, and with a well-filled old knapsack that "Caesar" slung over his shoulders, and with a well-stuffed old carpetbag that "Dinah" carried in her hand, the fugitive couple took a long last leave of their friend, and entered the farm wagon, by which Joe was to drive them to the hamlet of Upton, to meet the night coach for Baltimore.

The night was very dark; they could scarcely see each other's faces, much less the road before them.

"Marster," said Joe, in his extreme anxiety, "I hopes you'll pardon the liberty, sir; but has you thought to take money enough for you and the missus?"

"Plenty, Joe! Pendleton, Heaven bless him, has seen to all that," smiled Mrs. Berners.

"And, marster, sir, I hopes as you've made some arrangements as how we may hear from you when you gets over yonder."

"Certainly, Joe. A correspondence that will be both sure and secret has been contrived between the captain and myself."

"And, missis," said Joe, turning weepingly toward his lady, "when you're over yonder, don't forget poor Joe; but send for him as soon as ever you can."

"Indeed I will, Joe," promised Sybil. "And, missis; please don't let little Nelly forget me, neither. I love that little thing like a child!"

"Nelly will not forget you, Joe," and the little dog, that Sybil had insisted on taking with her, even at the risk of its being recognized as hers, now jumped up from her place at her mistress's feet, and ran and licked Joe's face, as if to assure him of her continued love.

At which, for the first time, Joe burst out crying, and sobbed hard.

"Come, my man, prove your devotion to your mistress by deeds, not tears! Drive fast, or we will miss the coach," Lyon Berners advised.

Joe wiped his eyes with the cuff of his coat, and whipped up his horses, and they rattled over the rocky road for an hour or more before they reached the little hamlet, where they were to wait for the coach. It was very late, and all Upton was asleep, with the exception of the hostlers at the stable, where the coach stopped to change horses. Here Joe drew up his wagon, but his passengers retained their seats while waiting for the coming of the stagecoach. They had not waited more than five minutes, when they heard the guard's warning horn blow, and the huge vehicle rumbled down the street, and pull up before the stable door.

Very quickly the tired horses were taken out and led away to rest, and the fresh ones brought forth.

Meanwhile Lyon Berners alighted, and spoke to the agent, to take places for himself and his wife.

"Show your pass, my man! show your pass! We can't take you without a pass. How do we know but you are running away?" objected the agent.

Lyon Berners smiled bitterly to think how near the man had inadvertently approached the truth. He handed up the pass, which the agent carefully examined before he returned it, saying:

"Yes, that's all right; but you and the girl will have to get up on top, there. We can't have any darkies inside, you know. And in fact, if we could, there's no room, you see; the inside is full."

Caesar helped Dinah up on the top of the coach, and then climbed after her. Joe handed up the little dog; and was about to take a dangerously affecting leave of his beloved master and mistress, when luckily the coachman cracked his whip and the horses started.

Joe watched it out of sight, and then got into his seat on the wagon, and drove back to Pendleton Park, the most disconsolate darkey under the sun.

Meanwhile the flying pair pursued their journey, almost happy, because at length they were together.

Soon after sunrise the next morning the stage reached the station at which it was to breakfast. Not wishing to subject their disguise to the too-prying eyes of strangers in broad daylight, they took the provisions that they had brought along, and went apart in the woods to eat them, after which they resumed their places on the top of the coach, in time for its starting.

At noon, when the coach stopped to dine, they went apart again to satisfy their hunger.

It was not until night, when they reached an obscure roadside inn, that they dared to enter a house or ask for a cup of tea. Being darkies, they were sent to the kitchen, where they were re-

galed with a very hot pot of the beverage that "cheers but not inebriates."

Here, also, as they had to change coaches, they were required to show their pass before they could be permitted to take their uncomfortable seats on the top of the vehicle to continue their journey.

They travelled both by day and night, never giving themselves any rest. The policy of the first day was continued to the end of their journey. They always took their meals apart from other people, during the broad daylight, denying themselves the comfort of a cup of tea or coffee until night, when, in some dimly-lighted country kitchen, they could safely indulge in that refreshment.

At the end of the third day they arrived at Baltimore.

It was just nightfall when they reached the inn where the stage stopped. They alighted, with knapsack, carpetbag and dog, and found themselves on the sidewalk of a crowded street.

"This way," whispered Lyon Berners to his wife, as he turned into a by-street. "Sybil," he continued, when they felt themselves comparatively alone in the less-thronged thoroughfare—"Sybil, if we are to drop our disguises here, we must do so before we enter any inn, because we should have no opportunity afterwards, without detection."

And, relieving her of the carpetbag and carrying that as well as the knapsack, he led her by a long walk to the woods on the outskirts of the city, where, by the side of a clear stream, they washed the dye from their faces and hands, and then changed their upper garments. Their knapsack contained every requisite for a decent toilet; and so, in something less than half an hour, they had transformed themselves back again from plain, respectable darkies, to plain, respectable whites; and "Caesar" and "Dinah" became in their next phase, the Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Martin. The only thing that could not be changed was the color of Lyon's hair, which, having been dyed black, must remain black until time and growth should restore its natural color.

As the Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Martin they walked back to the city. At the first hack stand "Mr. Martin" called a carriage, placed "Mrs. Martin" with her pet dog, knapsack and carpetbag in it, entered and took a seat by her side, and told the hackman to drive to the best hotel.

"For it is our policy now to go boldly to the best," he said, as he took Sybil's hands, cold from her outdoor toilet, into his and tried to warm them.

They were driven to the Calvert House, where Mr. Berners registered their names as the Rev. Isaiah Martin and wife; and where they were received with the respect due to the cloth, and shown a handsome room on the first floor, which was cheerfully lighted by a chandelier, and warmed by a bright coal fire in the great.

Here poor Sybil enjoyed the first real repose she had seen since the commencement of her flight. Here Lyon ordered a comfortable and even luxurious supper; and the fugitive pair supped together in peace and safety.

Although it was late when the table was cleared, Lyon felt that no time was to be lost before he should make inquiries about the outward-bound ships. So having ordered the morning and evening papers to be brought to their room, he first examined the shipping advertisements, and finding that the Energy, Captain Strong, was to sail for Havre on the next day but one, taking passengers as well as freight, he put on his hat, and leaving Sybil to amuse herself with the newspapers during his absence, he left the hotel to see the shipping agent.

A strange sense of peace and safety had fallen upon Sybil, and she sat there before her cheerful fire reading the news of the day, and occasionally contrasting her situation now, in the finest room of

a large and crowded hotel, with her position but a few days before in the Robbers' Cave. The time passed pleasantly enough until the return of Mr. Berners.

He entered very cheerfully, telling her that he had engaged a cabin passage in the Energy, which would sail on the day after to-morrow, and that they must be on board the next afternoon.

Sybil was delighted to hear this. Visions of perfect freedom, and of foreign travel with her beloved Lyon, flitted before her imagination.

They talked over their plans for the next day, and then retired to bed, and slept well until the next morning.

They arose and breakfasted early. The morning was fine and clear, and they wrapped themselves in their outer garments, and started with the intention of going out to purchase a couple of trunks and other necessaries for their long voyage.

Lyon was cheerful; Sybil was even gay; both were full of bright anticipations for the future. For were they not flying toward freedom?

They had reached the great lower halls of the hotel, when they were stopped by a sound of altercation in the office, which was on their right hand as they went out.

"I tell you," said the clerk of the house, in an angry voice, "that there is no one of that name here!"

"And I tell you there is! And there she is now! I'd know her among ten thousand!" exclaimed a harsh, rude-looking man, who the next instant came out of the office and confronted Sybil, saying roughly:

"I know you, madam! You're my prisoner, Madam Berners! And you'll not do me, I reckon, as you did Purley! I'm Jones! And 'lan't you murder you've got to answer for now, but half a dozen!"

And without a word of warning, he snapped a pair of handcuffs upon the lady's delicate wrists.

"Villain!" thundered Sybil's husband, as with a sweep of his strong arm he felled the ruffian to the floor.

It was but a word and a blow, "and the blow came first."

He caught his half-fainting wife to his bosom, and strove to free her from those insulting bracelets; but he could not wrench them off without wounding and bruising the tender flesh.

Meanwhile the fallen officer sprang to his feet, and called upon all good citizens to help him execute his warrant.

A crowd collected then. A riot ensued. Lyon Berners, holding his poor young wife to his bosom, vainly, madly, desperately defended her against all comers, dealing frantic blows with his single right arm on all sides. Of course, for the time being, he was insane.

(To be continued.)

THE ITCHES AGAIN.

"Once in Banbury," says a writer, "I dined with an English farmer. We had ham for dinner—a most delicious ham, baked. The farmer's son soon finished his portion and passed his plate again."

"More 'am, father," he said.

"The farmer frowned. 'Don't you say 'am, son; say 'am.'"

"I did say 'am,' the lad protested, in an injured tone.

"You said 'am!' cried the father fiercely. 'Am's what it should be. 'Am, not 'am.'"

"In the midst of the controversy the farmer's wife turned to me with a little deprecatory smile.

"They both think they're saying 'am!' she said."

Mistress: "Now, remember, Bridget, the Joneses are coming to dinner to-night." Cook: "Leave it to me, mum. I'll do me worst. They'll never trouble you again!"



First Neighbor—Look here, sir! your dog has eaten one of my chickens!
Second Neighbor—Well, sir, do you object to my dog roaming around my own yard.