

A Midnight Adventure

Females often possess presence of mind and the power of self-control under circumstances of eminent peril which seem almost foreign to their nature, and beyond the endurance of a delicate organization. Here is a striking instance of self-command by a lady whose fears must have been powerfully excited, and whose life of affluence had probably never before given her nerves a severer test than is incident to the vexations of domestic care. We copy the adventure, premising, by way of explanation, that the lady was the daughter of a rector, residing in a quiet English country village, and was upon the eve of her marriage.

The wedding day was to be on the morrow of the day on which our adventure happened. Grand preparations were made for the wedding; and the rector's fine old plate, and the costly gifts of the bride, were discussed with pride and pleasure at the Hare and Hounds, in the presence of some strangers who had come down to a prize-fight which had taken place in the neighborhood.

That night Adelaide, who had occupied a separate room from her sister, sat up late—long after the household had retired to rest. She had a long interview with her father, and had been reading a chapter to which he had directed her attention, and since had packed up her jewels. She was consequently dressed when the church clock tolled the hour of midnight. As it ceased, she fancied she heard a low noise like that of a file; she listened, but could distinguish nothing clearly. It might have been made by some of the servants still about, or perhaps it was only the creaking of the old trees. She heard nothing for some minutes but the sighing of the winter wind. House-breakers were mere myths in primitive Tyndon, and the bride elect without a single thought of fear resumed her occupation. She was gazing on a glittering set of diamonds, destined to be worn at her wedding, when her bed-room door softly opened. She turned, looked up, and beheld a man with a black mask, holding a pistol in his hand standing before her.

She did not scream, for her first tho't was for her father, who slept in the next room, and to whom any sudden alarm might be death, for he was old, feeble, and suffering from heart complaint. She confronted the robber boldly, and addressed him in a whisper:

“You have come to rob us. Spare your soul the awful guilt of murder. My father sleeps in the next room, and to be started from his sleep would kill him. Make no noise I beg of you.”

The fellow was astonished and cowed. “We won't make no noise, if you give us everything quietly,” he replied.

Adelaide drew back, and let him take her jewels—not without a pang, for they were precious love-gifts, remarking at the same time that two other masked ruffians stood at the half-opened door. As he took the jewel-case and watch from the table, and demanded her purse, she asked him if he intended to go into her father's room. She received a surly affirmative; he was not going to run all the risk and leave the tin behind. She proposed instantly that she herself would go.

“I will bring you what you wish, and guard me thither; and kill me if I play false to you.”

The fellow consulted his comrades, and after a short parley they agreed to the proposal; and with a pistol pointed at her head, the dauntless girl crossed the passage, and entered the old rector's room.—Very gently she stole across the chamber, and removing his purse, watch, keys, and desk, she gave them up to the robbers, who stood at the door. The old man slept peaceably and calmly, thus guarded by his child, who softly shut the door, and demanded if the robbers were yet satisfied.

The leader replied that they should be when they had got the show of plate that was spread out below, and that they could not let her out of sight, and that she must go with them. In compliance with this mandate, she followed them down stairs to the dining room, where a splendid wedding breakfast had been set out, to save trouble and hurry on the morrow. To her surprise, the fellows—sight in number when assembled—seated themselves and prepared to make a good meal. They ordered her to get them out wine, and to cut her own wedding-cake for them; and then seated at the head of the table, she was compelled to preside at this extraordinary revel.

They ate, drank, laughed and joked, and Adelaide, quick of ear and eye, had time to study, in her quiet way, the figures and voices of the whole set.

When the repast was ended, and the plate transferred to a sack, they prepared to depart, whispering together and glancing at the young lady. For the first time her courage gave way, and she trembled; but the consultation was not against her, it so proved. The leader approached her and told her they did not wish to harm her—that she was a jolly wench, regular game, and they would not hurt her, but that she must swear not to give the alarm until nine or ten o'clock the next day when they should be all safe. To this of course, she was obliged to give assent, and they all insisted on shaking hands with her. She noticed, during the parting ceremony, that one of the ruffians had only three fingers on the left hand.

Alone, and in the despoiled room, Adelaide, faint and exhausted, awaited the first gleam of daylight; then, as the robbers did not return, she stole to her room, undressed and fell into a deep slumber.—The consternation of the family next morning may be imagined; and Adelaide's story was still more astounding than the fact of the robbery itself. Police were sent for from London, and they, guided by Adelaide's lucid description of her midnight guests, actually succeeded in capturing every one of the gang, whom the young lady had no difficulty in identifying, and swearing to the three-fingered Jack—who was the guiding clue to the discovery. The stolen property was nearly all recovered, and the old rector always declared, with truth, that he owed his life to the self-possession and cool judgement of his daughter.

Smyrna [DE] *Times*, January 6, 1859

The Memphis Daily Avalanche, January 22, 1859

Weekly News Democrat [Emporia KS], February 12, 1859

The Kansas Herald of Freedom [Lawrence, KS], June 25, 1859

Lancaster [PA] *Intelligencer*, May 31, 1864

Alma [KS] *News*, August 30, 1870

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