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THE LAST IRISHMAN.

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CHAPTER V.

Richard O'Byrne, since we now know his name, took the insensible girl in his arms, and bore her far into a thicket, away from the frequented path where they might be seen. He laid her on the grass, and, though he vowed and premeditated her assassination a moment previously, he now exerted and lavished the most tender pain and care to revive her. Thanks to his efforts, Miss O'Byrne, ultimately recovered her senses, and slowly opened her eyes. Her brother dreaded lest his appearance might occasion a new shock and at the moment of her recovery, produce a relapse. With one knee on the earth, he held her hand and spoke to her with the hope of habituating her to the sound of his voice.

"Yes! it is myself, my darling sister!—why should your brother make you afraid? Do you not remember how well I loved you in your infancy—and how delighted I felt in your innocent caresses. Time and distance have not changed your brother—I am still your Richard, ready to console you in your sufferings and render you protection, if you have need of a protector."

This affectionate language appeared finally to inspire her with confidence; she at first made a silent struggle, as if she would fain escape from his presence and fly from his grasp. By degrees her eyes turned to her brother with tender timidity—then as if too weak to rise, she hung upon his neck, and melted into tears.

"Richard, my dear Richard!" she stammered, "can it be possible—is it really you?"

"For reasons that you shall know shortly, I quitted the Indian service and returned secretly to Ireland—a country to which solemn duties have summoned me—come, calm yourself, my darling, I beseech you calm yourself, and I shall explain everything which it is permitted me to explain."

He seated himself beside her, and gently and tenderly compelled her to observe silence for some minutes. At last his smile restored Julia to her speech.

"The more I think, the more I am confounded, my dear brother," said she, "it is amazing that you should be in Ireland, and neither I nor Angus should be aware of it."

"What should surprise you still more, Julia O'Byrne," said Richard, "is to see your brother or yourself in this park—I know who owns the soil we tread, the air we breathe, and the foliage which veils us with its shadow. But if I, the chief of our race, have penetrated into this accursed enclosure, where our hereditary enemies herd, it was to extricate a brother and a sister, who seemed equally to have gone astray. Julia, why should you be a corner of the hearth-stone of your inveterate enemy—why accept the crumbs that fall from their costly table—have you a right to convert your noble name into the trophy of their pride?"

"My dear brother," replied Julia, timidly, "family hate should not last for ever. Lord Powerscourt, whom you speak of, in spite of occasional fits of anger, is neither so avaricious nor so merciless as many Irish landlords. And if you knew how Lady Ellen, his daughter, nurses and tends the poor—"

"Never mention her name to me," interrupted Richard O'Byrne, in a loud voice; "I forbid you to breathe that name in my hearing." He put his hand on his own forehead as if he had received a blow.

"I will not speak of Lady Ellen, since you request it," said Miss O'Byrne, with astonishment; "but I cannot conceive why my words should irritate you; and I am apprehensive of committing a new offence should I seek to justify my conduct. Allow me merely to observe that, in obeying the sentiments of my heart, I complied with the desire of my brother, Angus."

"That is very possible, I fear," said Richard, with a pensive air. "The instincts of the Irishman have been extinguished by the sentiments of the priest, in the breast of my brother. I have already perceived the fatal change which our dear father could never anticipate. He would fain submit from Christian humility to every injustice, outrage, and oppression. He wishes to effect the impious approximation which ages of tyranny, and seas of blood, had interposed between our races. God grant he may not, one day, suffer a cruel expiation."

Julia regarded him with surprise.

"With what bitterness you speak of your brother!" said she, "Richard, have you yet seen him?—how has it come to pass that all your warm love should turn into bitter animosity?"

"I do not hate him," replied Richard O'Byrne, "but I have reason to know that a difference of opinion exists between us, which would result in altercation, should we meet face to face. I am, besides, occupied at present in business of the utmost importance, which necessitates an absolute secrecy. Hence it is that, since my re-

turn to Ireland, I have endeavored to avoid you and him, lest my presence should compromise your security and repose. Thus, Julia, I should not have made myself known to you to-day, were I not anxiously desirous of asking you a question which interests the honor of our name."

"The honor of our name, Richard!" exclaimed the young girl with a shudder—"What do you say?"

Her brother fastened a penetrating glance upon her face; taking the letter from his pocket which he had found in the park, he placed it in her hand—"Do you know this?"

Julia took the paper, and turned horribly pale. The moment she cast an eye upon its contents she seemed about to fall to the earth. "Richard!" she stammered, "by what sorcery—by what infernal art—"

"I ask you, Julia O'Byrne, do you know who wrote this letter?"

"Oh, brother!"

"Speak, Julia; I require you—I insist upon your telling me."

Her lips moved, but her voice failed; she filled up—her eyes swam in tears, and drawing herself forward with difficulty, with her face to the earth, she was seen kneeling before her brother. This attitude was significant. Richard's heart seemed cloven in his breast; he felt it rent asunder, but he remained externally calm. "I understand you," said he; "I now have another question—to whom was this letter written?"

"What?" replied the unhappy girl, crushed under the weight of her shame—"do you not know him?"

"Surely it could not be this miserable and ridiculous Englishman who was standing here a moment ago. If the daughter of the ancient kings of Leinster was desirous of selecting a paramour from the enemies of her people she would not choose, I am sure—she would not be blind enough—abandoned enough—to select the basest, vilest, and most stupid of the whole herd."

Julia buried her face in the grass, and watered the earth with her tears.

"Richard," she exclaimed, "take pity on me. Do not speak to me in the terrible tone of reproach, else I shall certainly expire at your feet. To myself I am an object of horror, and can scarcely appeal to Heaven, which seems to have forsaken me. But since you know so much—since some mysterious Power seems to have laid all my secrets open—you must know that I hate and despise the man as much as you yourself can possibly despise and hate him."

"What avail these subterfuges, wretched girl? You detest him now because he has forsaken you. But before now—"

"Do not for Heaven's sake overwhelm me with your fury," she sobbed. "I tell you my sentiments have never changed with regard to him. Of all men on earth he is the last to whom I could sacrifice the honor of my name, and my eternal salvation."

A glimpse of the horrible truth, now for the first time dawned upon the agitated mind of Richard.

"You must make a complete confession, Julia, painful as it may be. Be courageous, for I must be merciless. I am the chief of our tribe, I am your judge."

Julia continued silent; she did not hesitate; but she wanted strength. "Brother," she whispered in so low a tone that he was obliged to put his ear to her lips, and even then he rather guessed her meaning than caught her words.

"Returning from Lady Ellen's one evening, I was hurrying alone through the park, when two powerful hands grasped me—a handkerchief was thrust into my mouth—the wretch—"

Julia fell insensible on the earth—utterly exhausted by this confession. Richard uttered a hoarse roar like the cry of a hyena, while convulsively clenching his fist with an air of terrible menace.

"What then, sister?"

"I then deemed it my duty to seek the only possible reparation for the horrible outrage—a marriage with the monster. I begged and implored him, as he is free; he has given me a promise, but he certainly seeks at present to evade that promise. To remind him of this promise and awaken his compassion, I craved an interview in my fatal letter."

Richard stood appalled by the black depth of the abyss that yawned before his eyes. His trembling sister waited with unspeakable anxiety the result of his sombre reflections. At last, taking her gently in his arms, he kissed her forehead. "Rise," he exclaimed; "noble daughter of Byrne. It is not at my feet, but in my heart that you should lie. For in my eyes, as in those of Heaven, you are still chaste and pure. All that now remains is to console and avenge you."

"To avenge me, Richard?" asked Julia, in alarm; "are we to have more blood, fury and quarrel. Heaven knows how bitterly I hate him; but why shed his blood or your's?" Have

I not already told you that he promised me the only possible reparation of his crime. He will marry me, and the hostility of the two families will be terminated by this marriage."

"He marry you?" exclaimed Richard O'Byrne, with a bitter smile. "Are you foolish enough to believe in the sincerity of such an engagement. He the heir of this broad demesne—a future lord of England, to marry a poor, penniless girl sprung from a persecuted race.—He may now boast in the clubs of his triumph over the descendant of Irish Kings. He may have stooped a moment in order to enjoy that triumph, but he will never share his usurped wealth or tarnished name with Julia O'Byrne.—It is nonsense and even criminal to expect it. In reality," added O'Byrne, in a low tone: "I am not sure that my indignation would not be roused by the reparation as much as by the crime."

After some moments' silence, she exclaimed in a tone of melancholy, full of sweetness, "Nothing, then, remains for me but to die; for in this condition I certainly cannot live."

Richard stood facing her. "No daughter of our people, in the time of our greatness, could survive such a stain. It was the duty of her nearest kinsman to strike her dead, whether she were innocent or guilty. But times are changed, and ideas and laws are now different. Fear nothing, Julia; though the honor of our name be tarnished in your person, you must reconcile yourself to life."

"Though you will not avow it, Richard, I know you meditate revenge. But wait a few days before you execute your projects; I shall endeavor to obtain justice."

"I have as yet formed no projects, Julia. I could willingly sacrifice my life to avenge you.—But at present, interests absorb my mind which are dearer than the life I would sacrifice to honor. But on your part, what do you hope to do, my love?"

"I only ask a few days, and you shall know all. Angus is at present unacquainted with this fatal secret. If you see him, Richard, for Heaven's sake do not breathe a syllable of it—"

"Angus is the true cause of our present calamities," said Richard, "his hand pushed aside the barriers which separated our hostile families. He should be made to know the bitter fruits of his weakness and desertion. Why are you so anxious to shield him from anxiety? He will easily find a text in his Breviary to console him. But you need fear nothing on that score. I do not wish to see Angus. I must not see him."

"Richard," cried the young girl earnestly, "you wrong Angus. He does not deserve, I assure you—"

Julia suddenly paused. The most horrible and heart-rending cries struck her ear and paled her face.

"My God!" she exclaimed in affright, "some one is certainly in danger. Oh! brother, don't you hear those cries for help?"

"What is it to us?" asked Richard with ferocious calmness and indifference. "We have no friends in this place."

"I think I know the voice. Oh! God! it is Lady Ellen."

"Lady Ellen?" inquired her brother. He listened with attention. The cries, evidently those of a woman, terrified, palpitating, and out of breath, became more and more vehement and piercing. He bounded through the shrubbery—when he had advanced about twenty steps he entered a slight clearing. Here he at once perceived the cause of the cries of distress which rung in his ears.

Every one knows that wild beasts, and particularly stags, are subjected to fits of madness in spring. In this state they rush with blind and headlong fury on everything which approaches them. Among the animals which just then were cropping the sward in Powerscourt Park was a majestic stag with ten antlers. This wild, magnificent, and powerful creature was suddenly animated by the vertigo in question, and rushed impetuously on an individual in passing through the alley without suspicion. This unfortunate individual was Lady Ellen who had been detained in the Park by some inexplicable circumstance.

It was to very little purpose that the beautiful Amazon endeavored to shelter herself from the fury of the attack by flying into the shrubbery—the boughs of which in some degree obstructed the furious action of the driving antlers. How was it possible to escape an animal in delirium, that bounded over obstacles as if he were winged, and snapped boughs, branches and shrubs as thick as the human arm? Accordingly, when Richard entered the clearing, the drama was approaching its murderous catastrophe. Lady Ellen had fallen exhausted on the grass, still courageously facing her enemy, and brandishing a silver-mounted riding-whip. The stag, with haggard eyes and inflamed nostrils, driving forward with his formidable antlers, which were lowered to the ground, was six paces from her, vexing himself by tilting at a few feeble shrubs

that alone separated him from his prey. Richard O'Byrne, with all the coolness of a man accustomed to scenes of danger, perceived at a glance the dreadful imminence of her peril, and placed himself between the furious beast and the prostrate lady. He said, in a low, commanding voice, "Do not stir, Lady Ellen." He then swiftly rent his mantle from his shoulders, and as he spoke shook it rapidly, in order to attract the attention of the antlered monarch. The latter turned his threatening looks at his new adversary, hesitated a second, and lowering his horns, rushed upon him with brutal and headlong fury.—Richard awaited him with courage and firmness, and hastily availed himself of the stratagem which the *toradors* often employ in the Spanish games. He pitched his mantle dexterously over the head of the stag, so as to cover the animal's face.—The animal, suddenly blindfolded, drew back, then drove forward, and then capered and bounded in an awkward manner, in vain efforts to get rid of the cumbersome mantle; the ample drapery was apparently nailed to his horns, and increased the creature's fury by its wagging and sweeping undulations. The stag finally succeeded in rending it asunder and tearing it off his hand, and then vented his fury on the fragments by striking, tossing and trampling it. Richard took immediate advantage of this opportunity; he drew a long, keen poignard, which he never wholly laid aside, and struck the stag with the dexterity of an accomplished sportsman immediately inside the shoulders. The quadruped dropped upon its knees, and awkwardly threatened to strike an enemy it could not reach with those formidable antlers, but strength was wanting; the brute became gradually weak and weaker, for life was ebbing fast from the hairy breast in a gush of black thick blood, which sullied and spread over the grass, a moment before enamelled with flowers.

"Oh, thank God, you are saved, my dear Lady Ellen," exclaimed Julia; "but, good God! are you not wounded? The ferocious animal has, I fear, touched you with its horns—horns which are said to be horribly dangerous."

"I am not yet quite sure," replied Lady Ellen, with her usual vivacity; "allow me to ascertain," she continued, gently repelling Miss O'Byrne, who tried to help her to rise. "I suspect I am still alive. I believe I am more frightened than hurt. You see I can stand alone, and I fancy that for this time my precious person has escaped; but it was lucky my courageous liberator came so opportunely; if his hand had been less firm, and his aim less sure, we had both been done for."

Meantime Richard appeared busily employed in gathering up his mantle which had been sorely maltreated by the stag, and equally busy in wiping his bloody dagger in the herbage.

"I have met with more formidable animals in India," said Richard, turning his head aside; "a Bengal tiger is more difficult to kill than a tame stag in an Irish park."

"The poor stag," said Ellen, notwithstanding his natural gentleness, could not be expected to treat us better than tigers. But let us respect the dead. Can I know, sir, to whom I am indebted for this great service?"

"Lady Ellen," cried Miss O'Byrne, with surprise and impetuosity, "you do not know him then?—He is —"

An ardent glance from her brother silenced the young lady. But the motion that he made enabled Ellen to see his entire front face, and she exclaimed with a blush:

"Oh! this is my unknown acquaintance of the stean packet?"

"Is it possible?" cried Julia.

Richard bowed. "I could not flatter myself," he said, with embarrassment, "that Lady Ellen preserved the memory of so frivolous an event. I hope she has long since forgiven me, if there is anything in my language offensive to the daughter of Lord Powerscourt; I was not at the time aware of her rank."

Lady Ellen's blush became more and more vivid. "You spoke as the friends of Ireland should speak, sir, and notwithstanding the severity of your judgment on certain men, and modern times. But discussion on politics would be out of place in this park at the present moment. Will you permit me, sir, to invite you to follow me to Powerscourt House and receive the thanks of a father to whom you have restored an only child?"

"No, no, excuse me," replied O'Byrne, hurriedly; "you exaggerate the importance of a service that any of your game-keepers would have rendered as readily and effectually, as I.—Lady Ellen, excuse me; business of importance requires my presence elsewhere."

"I understand," said Lady Ellen, with a melancholy tone—"I have heard the opinions you uttered so lately of the aristocracy of Ireland, and I can easily comprehend your reluctance to accompany me to Powerscourt House. I should hope however that my father might form an ex-

ception to the hatred you cherish for an aristocracy of English origin. But, hold, Miss O'Byrne, let me tell you," added she, turning to Julia, "that when this accident occurred, I was following you, in the hope of overtaking you before you quitted the park—for I have good news for you."

"Good news, Lady Ellen," said Julia.

"The haste with which I ran to communicate it roused and irritated that horrible stag . . . my dear Julia, my father returned to the house, after his visit to the village, and though he is still irritated about McDonough's affair, I have extracted a promise that no one shall suffer for the assault."

"But it seems to me, lady Ellen," answered Julia, "that it is you whom we should thank for the act of mercy."

Richard could not conceal his astonishment.

"What," said he, "is it possible Lord Powerscourt pardons his tenants after an outrage so violent!—can he have really forgiven them without resource and unconditionally?"

"No one shall be legally prosecuted," answered Lady Ellen, in an embarrassed manner; "but it is impossible, it appears, to suffer such an outrage to pass entirely unpunished. Three farmers must be dispossessed of their holdings, as, amongst other reasons, they have not paid their rent. The Steward, Jamieson, will ascertain from McDonough the parties who deserve this punishment."

"Then the mercy of Lord Powerscourt consists," said Richard, "in driving out three families to beg, or starve, or perish of hunger on the highway."

The young lady raised her head and lowered her beautiful eyebrows as she replied:—

"Sir, if you saved my life a hundred times, I would not suffer you to question my father's generosity—I do not see what right you have to establish yourself censor of a nobleman in the presence of his daughter, and almost in his own house."

"My dear Lady Ellen," cried Julia, in a tremor of anxiety, "do not get vexed with him—if you knew—"

Richard, with a gesture, imposed silence on Julia, as he said to lady Ellen, in a melancholy tone:—

"Do not speak to me in that hostile way.—Though your acquaintance is not very long, it would be painful to me to merit your displeasure. Suspicion is, perhaps, permissible to him who has passed his existence in meditations on the misfortunes of his country; but I must not expose myself longer to the danger of using language which may possibly displease you. Adieu, Lady Ellen." He saluted her respectfully and was about to depart.

"Am I not to know the name of my brave defender?" said Lady Ellen. "Julia, you appear to know him—indifference on my part, on this subject, might be construed into ingratitude."

"Do you desire it, Lady Ellen?" resumed Richard, looking at her earnestly. "Well, I should make some reparation for employing language which appears to have displeased you—my name is, I fear, proscribed this very moment, and will doubtless, ere long, resound in your ears, accompanied with many odious and degrading epithets. To you, nevertheless, I confide a secret on which my life depends, I am Richard O'Byrne." So saying, he bowed low, turned away, and heedless of his sister, who repeatedly called after him, plunged into the foliage, and disappeared in the shrubbery from which he had previously emerged.

The alarm of Julia appeared to increase the moment he was lost to sight, while Lady Ellen remained silent and appeared quite stupefied.

"Is that really your brother, Julia? Did you not tell me he was in the Indies?"

"I thought, an hour ago, he was abroad," answered Julia.

"But did you hear what he said—his life is in danger—he is proscribed! What can be the nature of his new misfortune? Has he not told you his purpose—what?—don't you know—?"

"Nothing, I know nothing Lady Ellen. He stood suddenly before me a moment ago, here in the park, as if he had dropped from the skies, without telling me how he got in, or how he reached Ireland, or how he came hither. It turned out that facts, which I thought the world was ignorant of, were well known to him; he addressed me in terrible language—he made me tremble with his words. Now he has disappeared, and where he has gone no one knows. Nor did he tell me when he will return, nor would he consent to see his brother—a brother that idolized him. All this, I think, presages something dangerous—nay, something appalling."

Lady Ellen was silent for a moment.

"I am not without my fears, too," said Lady Ellen. "Nevertheless, your brother's secret must be religiously kept. He does not appear to be a man likely to exaggerate danger; and indiscretion on his part, or that of his friends