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CHAPTER XIX.

The dwelling of Fairymount, towards which Angus was proceeding, was celebrated in Connemara, though few could boast of having seen it, and still fewer were acquainted with the secret paths which led to it. It had been constructed by a member of the Fitzgerald family who was "on his keeping," and who defied the agents of the law. This man could command the whole country, and, assisted by the peasants, had often captured the officers who attempted to capture him. According to popular tradition, he had subjected them to horrible tortures, such as carding and scorching on a red-hot griddle; and gouts of blood were still dabbled on the wall, where the jaded victims of Fitzgerald's cruelty were tortured first and shot afterwards. Ultimately George Robert Fitzgerald was killed in a skirmish with the English soldiers; and his ghost is popularly believed to haunt the stronghold in which he committed crime, and wanders howling round the walls—scaring and terrifying all intruders. These legends gave a fantastic and supernatural character to Fairymount. On the other hand, the outlaws, who fled to this stronghold for refuge after the death of Fitzgerald, aggravated these absurd rumors and increased their safety by augmenting the fears of the peasants. In this way the Irish police (disconcerted by these incredible and contradictory rumors) concerning this unknown retreat, came ultimately to doubt the very existence of the place, and deemed Fairymount as fabulous as fairyland.

Fairymount was, nevertheless, a reality; and we, in virtue of our power as romancers, shall introduce the reader before the arrival of the priest and companions.

This ancient dwelling of the ferocious Fitzgerald was situated nearly midway up the side of one of three mountains popularly known as the "Three Sisters." No visible path led to Fairymount; none but the initiated could tread the corkscrew ways which it was necessary to wind through in order to reach its interior. No one could approach the dwelling without being exposed to the fire of musketry from a sort of rampart which commanded the way. The inhabitants of Fairymount could not be deprived even by a blockade, of air, light, or exercise. Above the building was a natural platform which spread out and formed a garden studded by numerous shrubs. In this shelf there was a rocky basin hewn by human hands to receive the water of a fountain—a holy well which furnished a pure and abundant beverage that was unchanged and inexhaustible at all seasons of the year. At the extremity of the garden stood a block of basalt, from the summit of which a vast and savage landscape might be surveyed. On one hand lay the Valley of the "Three Sisters" with its black and motionless lake; its death-like solitude, humid vapors, and foaming cascade; on the other was a little lap of mountain where Kavanagh dwelt. In the rare were more majestic mountains whose white summits seemed to soar, melt and mingle with the pale vapors of the wintry sky. A female leaning on this block of basalt, was gazing on the landscape which spread far and wide in every direction. A large shawl draped her head and shoulders like the plaid scarf of a Scotch mountaineer. The features which were discernible amid the foldings of the shawl, were characterized by a degree of beauty and delicacy which no one expected to find in such a place. In spite of the northern winds that occasionally inflicted their harsh kisses on her countenance, she remained perfectly motionless apparently awaiting some one's return whom she looked for with anxiety.

Finally she left her post of observation and began to stray through the garden of Fairymount. "He does not come," she exclaimed; "I am always alone in this horrible house where the walls sweat blood! I cannot blame him however. He must provide for our security and procure provisions. But who would have said that I should ever support such terror and misery without dropping dead?" she stopped, and, for a moment, yielded to an irresistible gush of grief. "I must endeavor to appear content," she said—"he may come at any moment, and must not suspect I have been weeping. Yes, yes, I shall hide my sufferings from him. For him my eyes shall express only love! my lips open only to smile. He must know nothing—see nothing—divine nothing of my secret sorrows. This I have promised; I shall give the lie to the old prophet of Lady's Church."

She approached the granite basin, dipped her fingers in the water, and endeavored to wash away the traces of tears. While thus employed, a shrill, distant whistle, repeated three times, made her start. "That's he," she exclaimed, and was immediately moving as light as a fairy through the garden in the direction of the door. When she reached the portal by which admission

was gained to this singular dwelling, she exclaimed with affected gaiety—"You seem very cautious to-day, Richard. Any news from the lowlands? Come in, come in. Your enemies are not here."

A lively athletic military looking man dressed like the peasants of the country, in dark frieze, but carrying, like a fowler, a firelock on his shoulder, bounded from a recess in which he lay concealed until his signal was answered. The lady stretched out her hand which he caught and kissed. "Do not be alarmed, my dear Ellen, but I met a peasant while I was fowling, who told me that he saw a horseman riding alone through the valley of the 'Three Sisters.' You know the appearance of a stranger always inspires me with suspicion. It was for that reason that just now—But there is nothing seriously alarming in the appearance of this stranger, I hope. Has Jack Gunn returned?"

"No, Richard, I have seen no one; but as I always become afraid when I remain long in this place by myself, I went out for a moment to breathe the fresh air."

"What can you possibly fear in such a stronghold as this?"

"They tell such frightful stories of this house and the gloomy caverns under it—I am, I confess, ashamed of myself."

"Ellen, my dear Ellen, you were not born for this adventurous life. I perceive it more and more every day."

While thus talking, they approached the house, when Richard resumed in a tone of gaiety.

"While the enemy is coming we shall have a perfect feast to-day. I shot four wild ducks, and Jack, the cook, will make a perfect feast of them. But you are very silent, my love."

A foregoing remark of Richard had affected Ellen's mind to such a degree that she was afraid to speak lest her voice should betray her emotion. Richard looked in her face.

"Ellen," said he, "you have been weeping, my love."

"I'm not at all, Richard. You mistake! The cold wind blowing on my eyes has filled them with rheum."

Richard said nothing, but shook his head with a melancholy air. They entered a vaulted room—nearly destitute of furniture. A pyramid of turf was blazing on the hearth, diffusing cheerful light and genial warmth. Richard placed his gun in a corner and put his game on a hook. He then sat down before his companion. Both were silent for a moment.

"Ellen," said Richard, at last, "you are unhappy." She expressed dissent by shaking her head. "It's useless to deny it, Ellen. I had long suspected—but am now certain you are unhappy. I knew well you had too much confidence in your own strength when you—so young, so delicate, and so accustomed to luxuries—consented to share the hard fortunes of an outlaw. I foresaw this melancholy relapse when I made you the associate of my misfortunes and dangers. You must remember that, in spite of the ineffable consolations your society afforded me, I experienced remorse in accepting it."

"Richard, do not say so," said the young lady, putting her arm round the neck of the outlaw, and giving way to a gush of tears.

"It is impossible to hide it from you, Richard; my tears betray my secret. Yes, I must confess, amid the privations, terrors, and sufferings which overwhelm me, I sometimes remember the past. But you must pardon a few tears called forth by the memory of a happy and joyous infancy—an old father, whose kindness I recall while his faults are forgotten. Do not suppose my regret for other days diminishes my affection for you, and—"

"You have given me so many proofs of your affection that I cannot doubt your love. But what am I to do? It is impossible to see you afflicted without making some effort to relieve you, as the poet says—

*Neque enim caelestia tingi
Ora decet lacrymis.*

"It is only too true, dear and generous lady," added Richard with tenderness, "I have caused your misfortunes—I have dragged you down into the abyss into which I, myself, plunged."

Richard hid his face in his hands and stifled the sobs—suppressed the paroxysms of grief, which he would have willingly indulged if alone. Lady Ellen suddenly rose and wiped his eyes.

"Forgive me, Richard," she resumed, in a firmer tone. "You know I have been always vain enough to deem myself superior to the weaknesses of my sex. Pardon the folly for which I blush. The pleasure of being near you—of being the object of all your thoughts, vastly surpasses the advantages I regret. And as to my father, did he not set me an example of indifference when he abandoned me. Come, it is past. I do not weep now, Richard. I assure you I am happy. I love you tenderly, and shall never leave you."

These affectionate words were uttered with so

much sincerity, simplicity and candor that the outlaw quivered. The gloom passed from his countenance, which became radiant with hope. He took the lady in his arms, and strained her to his breast convulsively.

At this moment the hoarse bray of a horn was heard outside. The two young people started up, moved to different parts of the room, and listened with profound attention.

"That is the alarm," said Richard, with agitation. "The traveller must have been unquestionably a government spy in disguise."

"What matter about him, Richard. You are surely too brave to fear a single man. But the sound is approaching, and Jack Gunn will be here in a moment, and let us know what he means by this noise."

"I shall go out on the terrace and meet him. In our position we cannot be too cautious."

Richard was hastening out when three men rushed wildly and precipitately into the hall.

"Make your escape as fast as you can," exclaimed Tom Kavanagh, "the soldiers are coming."

The lady uttered a cry of distress and terror; but Richard, knowing Kavanagh's simplicity, thought the latter might be mistaken. He turned to Gunn for more reliable information.

"It is only too true," exclaimed Gunn, "the soldiers are rapidly approaching. We got some inkling of it early this morning, but did not expect them so soon. They are only half a mile distant at the very farthest, and consist of infantry, cavalry, and pealers. In short they are too many for us. That's all I have to say."

"Very good," said the outlaw calmly, "but there is no proof that they know the way to Fairymount, and—"

At this moment, Richard's eye fell upon the priest, whom he had hitherto mistaken for one of the country people. Angus threw off his cloak.

"Richard, you may speak without apprehension," said Angus, "I am your brother; I love you warmly, and only want to save your life."

He embraced the outlaw with cordial affection, but Richard neither returned nor refused his caresses.

The moment Angus revealed himself, Ellen, blushing, trembling and confused, took refuge in the darkest part of the room; but her agitation was unnoticed by either of the brothers. Having extricated himself from Angus's embrace, Richard said to Gunn in an irritated tone—

"You disobeyed my orders; you betrayed me. I told you to let no one know where I lived, and, above all—"

"My dear Richard, accuse no one of a fault of which I alone am culpable," said the priest with dignity. "I had been long desirous of discovering your retreat. I should never have made you out if a dying ribbon-man, in a neighboring county, had not communicated the secret—in an imperfect manner—while I was attending him on his death bed. When I met Gunn and Kavanagh I told them that if they valued your life they must let me see you. You should find in your own heart, Richard, motives to excuse the faults of your servants."

These words, uttered in a tone of melancholy reproach, appeared to touch Richard.

"You are right, Angus. I thank you for your devotedness. You will soon know—but what are you doing here?" he said, suddenly addressing Kavanagh and Gunn. "Station yourselves behind the terrace, and see what's going on. If anything occurs, bring me word immediately. Above all, don't let yourselves be seen."

He gave them additional instructions in a low tone, and they went out with their firelocks.

While Richard was speaking to these men, the priest managed stealthily to approach Lady Ellen.

"Take courage, Lady Ellen, your liberation is at hand," said the priest in a whisper.

The young woman looked fixedly at him as if she did not well understand his words. The next moment he was beside Richard, who observed him with an air of suspicion.

"Few words are necessary in our present circumstances, Richard," said the priest in a serious tone. "You see the dangers which threaten you, for it is perfectly clear that you are the object at which the government aims. For you, nothing remains but flight, while I am endeavoring to repair the fault you have been guilty of—a crime of which I deemed you incapable."

"What crime do you mean, Angus?"

"The unpardonable crime of tearing a young female from her father's arms to gratify the bitter hate with which you regard her family, and thus running the risk of bringing dishonor on her innocent head. At this moment you are suffering the penalty of that guilty act. I am quite certain that Lord Powerscourt is the person who has prompted the government to send a regiment, I might say, an army, into these inaccessible mountains. You must know, Richard, what you have to expect if you fall into the hands of these parties."

"Yes, yes," replied the outlaw, in a bitter tone, "I know I have been condemned, and my brother, I dare say, has approved of the sentence. But I cannot be convinced that the government is acquainted with the place of my retreat. But should it be known to them, we are not entirely destitute of the means of defending ourselves in this place."

"Do not speak in that manner, my dear Richard. Do not suppose that it is possible for me to share the feelings of those who have reduced you to the miserable condition in which I see you placed. Do not be so unjust and cruel to me, Richard; it is the common error of persons suffering under misfortunes to accuse innocent parties of producing the disasters which embitter their minds and exasperate their hearts. Let us come to an understanding: what course do you intend to pursue? Will you make vain and futile efforts at resistance, or will you avail yourself of the subterranean passages under this building to effect your escape, and fly to some foreign country? If you do, you must forsake your prisoner, for it would be inhuman as well as impossible to compel her to accompany you."

"Since you are so fertile in suppositions, Angus, you cannot find it very difficult to imagine that I will conduct Lady Ellen into the subterranean passage you mention—the secret of which I am alone acquainted with. Why should I not retain her until the English army has quitted these mountains? This would not be so difficult; for there are recesses in the caverns into which it would be very easy to introduce in an instant provisions sufficient to support life a long time. Thus I should not be separated from my prisoner, as you term her, and I could—"

Richard paused, for he saw Lady Ellen recoiling in terror, and a sardonic smile played upon his features.

"Richard," said Angus, "do not take pleasure in appearing worse than you really are. Neither your past sufferings nor your present anger would justify you in such conduct towards an innocent girl, who was the attached friend of our unhappy sister. Let me in my turn explain the plan which I have framed for your safety; for I had no other object in coming here but to rescue you from the terrible fate with which you are threatened. About twenty miles from this spot, in Kilkerran harbor, a French vessel is at present anchored, with the captain of which I am acquainted. This captain has pledged himself to take you secretly on board, and land you in France, where you will be safe. You may reach Kilkerran harbor before dawn, if you walk all night, and if you present the Frenchman with a letter which I have prepared, he will take you on board at once. As for my part, I shall take Lady Ellen by the hand, and present her to the commanding officer of the English troops. When these two things are effected, the military expedition will no longer have an object, and I am convinced it will be countermanded."

Richard listened with attention, and seemed to hesitate.

"I find I have been once more mistaken as to your intentions, Angus," said he in a cordial tone, "you are a good brother, forgive me. The execution of your plan seems perfectly facile;—but before I answer, I am desirous of learning what Lady Ellen thinks."

The young lady seemed confounded by this sudden appeal. Then recovering herself, she ran up to Richard and took him by the hand.

"Richard, you already know my answer. I shall never consent—"

Her utterance was arrested by suffocating sobs.

"What does she say?" asked the priest.

"Lady Ellen," said Richard, with a mixture of irony and sadness, "feels some little pity for an unhappy fugitive who is destined henceforth to remain alone in the world without hope or consolation. In spite of the long captivity in which she has experienced so many privations and sufferings, she will feel regret on quitting the man who was the cause of her misery. But the pleasure of meeting her family, and leading again that life of luxury to which she was long accustomed, will doubtless speedily remove such troublesome recollections."

"Do not say so," exclaimed Lady Ellen with impetuosity, "for were I to expire with shame at the feet of your reverend brother—"

"Richard," resumed Angus with a frown, "what is the meaning of those words? Why should Lady Ellen receive the news of her deliverance in this manner?"

"The poor girl," said Richard, "is unprepared for so great a change; and a little perplexity is natural under such circumstances."

Lady Ellen was incapable of answering the sarcasms of the outlaw; she was agitated by a violent struggle between love and duty, and knew not which should gain the mastery. Her extraordinary trouble of mind increased the suspicions of Angus, when the arrival of Jack Gunn produced a diversion in her favor.

"Colonel," said the old trumpeter, "the day is lost; a traitor is serving among the English

as a guide. Kavanagh and I succeeded in recognising this rascal at a distance. His name is Pat Kirwan. He has shown the 'pealers' the secrets of Fairymount."

"That is very probable," said Richard; "I was long suspicious of Pat Kirwan; but he luckily does not know much. I shall go myself and see what the enemy looks like. We shall then know how to shape our conduct. Come, Angus," said he, addressing his brother, "there is nothing to hinder you and Lady Ellen from coming out and looking at your liberators."

The two brothers went upon the terrace, and Lady Ellen moved after them mechanically;—they found Kavanagh ambushed behind the natural parapet, taking aim at some distant object.

"You villain!" are you going to fire?" said Richard. "Do you want to show them where we are?"

Tom Kavanagh laid aside his firelock. "Faix, I believe your honor is right. I never thought of it; but its enough to set one mad!—so it is, to see one of the villains of dhrogons hunting my Biddy, the mother of five children; an' that's what turned my brain. The rascals! they won't leave a potato in my cabin for my childer, nor a dhrap o' whiskey for my friends."

Without attending to his complaints, Richard thrust Tom to one side, and anxiously perused the enemy. At the first glance Richard was convinced there was treachery in the case. The assailants were scrupulously following the corkscrew sinuosities which led to Fairymount; at times they disappeared in the deep hollows and foldings of the hills, and one might fancy they had gone astray; but this error was of no long continuance; they reappeared speedily at the precise point where alone it was practicable to proceed. Nevertheless, their advance was dilatory, either on account of the roughness of the road, or from apprehensions of attack, for they often looked pointedly at the rocks, and indicated them to one another, as places from which death might issue any moment to mow them down.

"Their attack," said Richard, "is well conducted. Sentries have been placed at every point to guard the passes of the mountains.—Were it not for the cavern and the subterranean passage we should be captured like rabbits in a burrow. Their guide deserves his wages."

At this moment, the guide, who was moving between four soldiers, was seen standing at a short distance right before the terrace. But the road undulated deeply in the interval which separated Fairymount from the guide. The latter perceived this, and apparently refused to proceed further, lest a ball from the terrace should reward his treason. He stopped short, and indicated by a sign the remainder of the way to the soldiers. His fears might have been confirmed by an attempt on the part of Jack Gunn, "Yer honor," said he, addressing Richard in a low tone, "Pat Kirwan is a nice mark; if yer honor permits it, I'll waste a little powder and ball on him."

"Let him alone," said Richard, "one traitor in such a multitude, is neither here nor there."

"Oh, yer honor," said Kavanagh in his turn, "we must not let them into Fairymount so easy as all that. I'll role down the rocks that are piled up there, and for this time at least the Sassanachs will return as they came."

"No, Tom," replied the outlaw, "we shall make no resistance. I have made up my mind on that point."

Kavanagh and Jack Gunn looked on one another with stupefaction.

All on a sudden Lady Ellen uttered an exclamation of joy. "Richard—your Reverence!" cried she, pointing with her finger through the natural crenels of the terrace, towards a person enveloped in furs, whom we have already indicated as head of the expedition, "Do you not think—I fancy I recognise—Oh, my God! is it possible?"

"It is your father—Lord Powerscourt himself!" said Angus, warmly, "you see nothing can arrest him; neither the intemperance of the weather nor his advanced age, when his beloved daughter is to be recovered."

"It is very true," said Lady Ellen, thoughtfully. "Poor father—how weak and tottering he seems!—Oh, this attachment and courage effaces the recollection of another period—he loves me, I am sure he loves me."

"Do you not also remark, Lady Ellen," said Richard with irony, "the officer who accompanies your father, and seems to threaten us with his sword of parade. You know him also, I make no doubt; and he too will share the joy of your deliverance."

The young girl blushed and cast down her eyes.

"Lady Ellen," added the outlaw in a lower tone, "do you remember the words that you uttered when I carried you out of the churchyard—'kill me rather than replace me in the hands of that monster'—Ellen, you are greatly changed!"