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THE

LIMERICK VETERAN; OR, THE FOSTER SISTERS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "FLORENCE O'NEILL."

(From the Baltimore Catholic Mirror.)

CHAPTER XXI.—THE OLD HOUSE IN THE EDINBURGH CLOSE.

The Wynds and Closes of the new old town of Edinburgh, with their great tall houses of gray stone eight, ten, and even twelve stories high, crowned in the distance by that grand old castle, the relic of former days, standing on the summit of a precipitous rock, at once arrested Margaret's attention.

Little indeed did the beautiful and haughty woman ken, as the Marshal's cumbersome equipage wound its way up the High Street, that in that portion denominated the Lawn-Market her grandsire had kept his woolen and linen store, or she would almost have wished herself back again in France.

In one of those old Closes wherein the houses are so very near each other that they almost shut out the blue sky and the free air of heaven, now sinking into decay and ruin, but in the year 1735 places of fashionable resort, as their names bear witness, the Marshal had engaged a portion of a spacious Flat for the use of his family during their sojourn in Edinburgh. The best rooms were situated at the back of the house, and they overlooked a pleasant garden, quaintly laid out with patches of green turf, gravel walks, and leafy trees, between the branches of which you might catch a glimpse of the castle, frowning grandly on the scene beneath.

The attendants on the Marshal's family were principally the wife and daughter of the landlord of the Flat in question; the one a homely middle-aged woman, the younger was good-looking, and was reserved, quiet, and staid in her demeanor; there was also one serving-maid, whose office appeared mainly limited to keeping the rooms cleanly and in good order. The younger woman, Janet, particularly pleased the ladies upon whom she waited. She appeared to be the presiding genius of the very comfortable and homelike lodgings into which, for some six weeks, they were located.

A man far advanced in life particularly excited the risible faculties of Margaret, who, from her chamber window, was in the habit of looking down into the garden beneath, in which he usually took his seat for many hours on the bright summer days, his bald head covered with a flannel night-cap, and his bent frame swathed in a large plaid; and from thence she not infrequently heard him raving soundly at the women of his household, or reading the Bible in a clear, sonorous voice for their edification.

That he ever intruded himself into the portion of the Flat his lodgers had engaged they were not aware; but one morning when the sun was shining brightly on the castle walls in the distance, with its green slopes and frowning mass of rock beneath, and idle Margaret not yet out of her bed, she amused herself by listening to the following colloquy whilst an adjoining room was being cleaned: "Dinna glower at me in sic a fashion, woman. I dinna care wha the folks are, I'll not

gie plack o' my savings for my chield to become a lazy limmer."

"They be braw people," was the reply, "and the young leddy thinks much o' hersel and gies mickle trouble. Janet does na ken how to do sic wark."

"Haud thy clavers, woman. All the siller I hae saved will be Janet's when I dee. I let her hae ane taw pie to help, and she maun do her best, or I sall turn my back upon her as ye ken, gudewife, I hae dune before. You had it your ain way years ago, I working hard and you and your bairn hauding your heads as high as any o' the leddies o' the land; and now that the Lord sees fit some o' my siller and gowd suld pass frae me, and I canna let you ruffle your plumes as the wife and chield of a rich trader, and now you hae only to come back to the same point at whilk you started when I made you my wife, but you make sic a clavers about my ears as never was heard before."

"But, Davie, mon, I could put up wi all, an I didna ken you had muckle siller, still, an you were really a poor mon, Davie, I"—

"I tell you, gudewife, I hae not a bawbee to spare, and you maun tell Janet as soon as you list, if she wanna be blithe and happy, then she maun fit, as ane as gude or better than she had to do lang syne."

Then there was a pause, and Margaret heard the old man shuffle down the long gallery without to his own portion of the Flat, and a little later came the light step of Janet, followed by that of the servant-maid.

"O, mither, mither," she heard the former distinctly say, though she spoke in an undertone, as if she feared she should be heard, "I hope the fine folks hae na heard my father's din. He hae sent me and Marion to help you."

"I am just sick of my life," was the reply. "Your father's a miser, Janet. He is saving his siller and making us wark like horses."

"Sic an awfu' temper the gudemon hae got," said the handmaiden. "He is amaist daft the morn, deaving ane wi his clavers. To speak among oursel, were I in your shoon, the gudemon suldna mak me wark. I'd be as braw a leddy as ony i' the land, instead o' waitin on others."

The answer, whatever it might have been, was lost on eaves-dropping Margaret, beyond the careful. "Whist, lassie, the folks may hear you" of the old man's wife, who gently closed the door as she spoke.

It was not in the nature of proud Margaret to be courteous and affable to those whom she considered beneath herself, and the humble Janet had suffered from her superciliousness from the moment she entered the house.

CHAPTER XXII.—THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

"Gude guide us, what do I see?" said Janet, starting back, and giving utterance to a loud shriek.

"Hout na, Miss Janet, dinna ye skeirgh like that. Ye hae gien me sic a fright. Wha is in that wee bit o' locket to gar ye turn so pale?"

Thus spoke the maid as, one bright morning, she stood beside Margaret Lindsey's toilet-table earnestly regarding Janet, who, busily employed in the task of putting away sundry articles prior to the chamber being cleaned, had taken up, amongst other trinkets, the locket which that young lady's dead mother had hung round her neck, and which, rarely laid aside, had been on this identical morning forgotten.

With parted lips and eyes rivetted on the tiny miniature contained in the locket, Janet remained for a few moments silent; then, without answering the girl, she rushed like one demented along the gallery leading to her father's room. And speaking never a word when she entered, she went to the antique mantel-piece and took down from thence a very small, but finely executed portrait. She stood for a moment silently comparing it with the miniature in the locket; the one was a perfect fac-simile of the other.

Her father gazed at her in mute astonishment.

"Art thou ganging clane daft? Janet, wha's the matter wi ye?"

"Father, father," and Janet crept round to the old man's side, "I can bring you comfort. Look here, tell me whose portrait is this?"

"Janet, you are worse than silly, for you open an old sore. Have I not often told you it is the portrait of your half-sister Margaret, whom I druv from heart and hame, and whose bairn, may the Lord forgie me, I turned adrift?"

As the old man spoke his hands trembled and his face grew pale.

"Look, father, look at this!" and Janet showed him the locket. "It has upon its back the name of Margaret Graham!"

The old man pushed back the white locks which strayed over his forehead, on which a damp dew had gathered.

"Margaret! Margaret!" he twice repeated, and then, putting on his glasses, he gazed intently, first on one, and then on the other.

"Gude Lord! Thy ways are sae wonderful ways," said he, with head bowed down, and in tones of the deepest emotion. "Tell me, lassie, frae where did ye get this locket?"

"It belongs to the fine young leddy whom they ca' Margaret; she whom we thought was the Marshal's daughter, father;" and there was a slight touch of sarcasm in the tones of Janet's voice. "The maid told me she was no relation to him or to the ladies. Wha if she be my ain long-lost tilkie, father?"

"Silly lassie, she wad be auld enough to be thy mither. But the Lord can bring light out o' darkness. Wha if she be the bairn whom I in my wicked fury turned adrift?"

Again his face grew white with a ghastly pallor, and his long, withered fingers trembled as he placed one hand on his heart and with the other strove to steady himself as he grasped his daughter's arm.

Then he tore off the flannel cap which disfigured his head and called hastily for his coat and walking-stick; his whole manner was marked by extreme nervous agitation.

With somewhat of alarm, his wife and daughter—the former having just entered the room—watched his movements; but their anxiety increased when they found he was about to proceed to the apartments of Lady St. John, the Marshal having been for some days absent in a distant part of Scotland.

Janet and her mother did their best to detain him, but without effect.

"Haud your clavers, gudewife," said he, "I hae found again the bairn I turned adrift."

He left the room, and when he had nearly reached Lady St. John's apartments he suddenly paused.

"Gang awa quickly, lassie, and ask the leddy to gie me speech a few minutes. Is my bairn—is the young leddy frae hame?"

"Yes, father, Lady St. John is alone."

Her heart beating more wildly than usual, Janet left her father alone, and with a tremor in her voice beyond her power to control, she enquired if her "Leddyship" would let her father have the honor for a few moment's conversation.

Somewhat surprised, for but that the old man was the butt of Margaret's ridicule, Lady St. John had not known there was such a person in existence, as the apartments had been taken from his wife. She signified her acquiescence, and in no small wonderment awaited the coming of her visitor, whose feeble steps and panting breath she heard as he approached her room.

The Lady Florence was now advancing into years, but time seemed chary of leaving his usual trace on her still fair, unwrinkled brow, and like another Ninon, the charms of her youth had survived the hand of time.

Introduced by his daughter, the old man stood for a moment at the entrance of the apartment nervous and irresolute, one trembling hand grasping the stick, the other clutching the miniature Janet had discovered, together with the portrait, both of which had been taken at the same time, and were each the production of the same artist.

"My father, my Leddy," stammered out poor Janet, as she tried to lead him further into the room.

"Come hither, my good Janet, and tell me what your father wishes," said the lady good-naturedly.

But Janet did not heed her words.

"Come, father, come," said she, in the tone in which one would address a little child; "what do you wish to say to Lady Florence; do you not see she is waiting for you to speak?"

Then the old man hobbled forward, leaning on his stick; he approached the table at which the lady was seated, looked at her as if she could inspire him with the words for which he felt at a loss, and then placed side by side, before her wondering eyes, the portrait and the miniature.

"Pardon the trouble an old man gives you, my Leddy," he faltered out, "but look, and tell me, Madam, are not both alike?"

In his nervous agitation he no longer spoke his Scottish dialect.

"Undoubtedly," was the reply, in a tone of unfeigned surprise, for Lady Florence at once recognized Margaret's locket.

"Alack-a-day, Madam! alack-a-day! that I should stand in your honorable presence and be obliged to own that I turned from my home and from my heart the child of whom I had those portraits taken."

Here a low sob choked the old man's utterance, and Lady Florence felt as one spell-bound at the revelation which was bursting upon her.

Wishful to help him, if possible, she said, pointing to the locket:

"A miniature, like that, is worn by the young lady who lives with me and whom I adopted when an infant."

"It is the same, my Lady," replied Janet; "surprised at recognizing my half-sister's like-

ness, led me to take the locket from the toilet table to show it to my father."

"Ah! Madam, Madam, pity me for the shame I feel," burst forth the old man, "I turned my Margaret's bairn from the door even as I had driven forth its mother, and I have told, and wept, and prayed in hopes that the Lord would sooner or later restore her to me, and that day has at last come, Madam."

"We shall see, we shall see," said the Lady, lost in a maze of the wildest conjecture. The meeting with this old man had been so sudden, the revelation so startling, and then came the remembrance of the proud and haughty disposition of Margaret; this very old man had been the object of her ill-timed ridicule; his simple-minded daughter, in her eyes, had been as less than nothing.

"Yes," he rambled on, in a low voice, speaking rather to himself than to the Lady Florence, "by night and by day, for many a year, I hae never ceased to pray that the Lord would send back her bairn to me; holy be His name! He hath seen fit to grant my prayer before He calleth me frae the world."

At this moment, the quick ear of Janet caught the sound of voices in the gallery.

"I wish I could have seen Margaret alone before she hears this startling revelation," thought Lady Florence, and at the same moment, Janet observed, with a glance of pity at his pale face;

"My father is much excited, Madam. I wish he would leave you, my Leddy, to break out the truth to—to his grand-daughter."

But there was no time to take him away, for the next moment, preceded by the stately Madame St. John, and in all the luxuriance of wealth, and youth, and beauty, proud Margaret swept into the apartment.

Like Madame, she paused when midway; the presence of the palid, trembling old man, and the simple, awe-struck Janet, holding a conference with Lady Florence, filled them both with surprise.

"Margaret, my own winsome bairn," burst forth David Graham, tears of joy trickling down his furrowed cheeks, "have I found thee at last; welcome, dear lassie, to my home and heart," and, as he spoke, he advanced to the wondering beauty and laid his trembling hand upon her arm.

Terrified, surprised, fearing she knew not what, Margaret visibly shuddered, and recoiled from his touch.

A glimmering of the appalling truth had floated across her mind.

"I do not understand, what does all this mean?" said she, in a cold and frigid tone; then her eyes fell on her own locket, containing the miniature of her dead mother, and beside it the larger portrait, and she faintly comprehended how matters stood.

A shiver ran through her veins. Why, oh! why had she neglected to place the miniature round her neck? are these low, vulgar people claiming affinity with me? were thoughts which flashed with the rapidity of lightning through her brain. She then came forward, with a pallid face, and, in a voice the trembling tones of which she could not check, exclaimed proud Margaret:

"I do implore you, dear Lady Florence, tell me at once what means this strange tale? I know nothing of this man who presumes to claim kindred with me."

There was supplication in the tones of Margaret's voice, entreaty, even horror. Lady Florence, who knew well the passion of pride that had enthralled her soul from infancy upwards, noted all this, but most the pure, humble-minded lady felt for the unhappy old man, and his gentle daughter, who stood pale and trembling by her side.

"My dear Margaret," said she, "that your dead mother was the daughter of this aged man, and that you are, consequently, his grand-daughter, admits not of a doubt. The miniature you had left upon your toilet table has been compared, my love, with yonder portrait; both were taken at the same time, before—before—"

Here Lady Florence hesitated. "Before, wretch that I was, I turned my poor bairn from my home," said David Graham; "but, alack! alack! I have wept and sorrowed long, and now let me but hear you say you forgive me, and come and share with me the money I hae saved for you, for whom I hae so long waited, and I can die happy and my heart will never sorrow more."

"I cannot credit this wild story, I do not admit the relationship, old man," and the haughty beauty drew herself up to her full height; "I have only your bare, unsupported assertion that I am the child of a daughter of yours."

"Spare him; he speaks, alas! the truth," and gentle Janet drew her father to a seat, and strove to kiss away the tears which fell down his furrowed cheeks; then, observing the ghastly pallor of his countenance, she exclaimed:

"Proud Margaret Lindsey, if you want further proof, my mother can supply it; unfortunately for her and for me, you are of our kith and kin."

"No word, not one word of affectionate forgiveness, and yet the Lord knoweth David Graham hath sorrowed long over the sin of twenty years syne; he hath toiled that she might reap, if ever again his bairn's bairn should cross his path; he made his wife and daughter toil that there should be enough and to spare for all. Speak, lassie, speak, say but one kind word to thy ain grandsire; thy mither would not have been half sae hard."

"Enough! I will hear no more. It is all an idle tale; I believe not a word of it," said Margaret, wrenching the end of her robe from her grandfather's grasp, as she passed him by.

"Proud, cruel woman, pause and see what you hae done," said Janet, grasping her niece by the arm and compelling her to stop. The aged head had fallen heavily on the bosom of his child, and the features, still wearing the same expression of piteous entreaty with which he had addressed his ruthless kinswoman, were now fixed in the repose of death.

Struck with horror at the sight, a revulsion then took place in the heart of this haughty woman. That the tale she had listened to was true she had not for one moment doubted; but her terrible pride, that hideous master-passion, the hydra-headed monster which had prompted many of her deeds of wickedness, and which she had suffered to sway every action of her still young life, had stole her heart. To be claimed by him, to be proved to be the grand-child of this man, of an inferior class of life, the niece of the woman who was as a servant to them all, and whom she had looked on as the dust beneath her feet, was far more than she could endure.

But she was now in the presence of death, nay, of that which she dreaded far more, of the stings of her own conscience; for he could never speak again, would that he could! But there sat the Lady Florence, whose sorrowful eyes said far more than words. There stood Madame St. John, whose "Hush, you shock me child," when she had last addressed the old man, still trembled in her ears.—There was his daughter, her dead mother's half sister, her arms still thrown around the corpse, her eyes raining torrents of tears on the pallid features; and more, even, than all these, there stood the dead man's irate wife, who, out of respect for her lodgers, had not intruded in their presence, but had listened in the gallery without, her blood at boiling heat when she ascertained why he had suddenly become penurious, and had sentenced himself and her daughter to a life of toil.

But she could impose restraint upon herself no longer when she found, from Janet's lamentations, that her husband, in the midst of his excitement, had been struck with death.

"Ye hae had nae pity on his white hairs, proud queen," said she, forgetting, in her excitement, the English she had so carefully studied, "and sma' comfort may his gowd and siller bring till ye; an' unco bad thing it is for ye to hae killed him wi your bitter words; ah! it is sma' use to grat noo, ye maun drink as ye hae brewed; and ye hae my malison wi the gowd and siller my misfortunate David hae kept for ye."

"Woman, spare me; none can sorrow more deeply than I now do over the past; would—that I could recall it; yet, suffer me," said she, advancing to where Janet stood, and pushing aside a lock of white hair, she pressed her lips on the forehead of the corpse; then, clasping her hands together, she exclaimed, as she left the room:

"Ah! my God! would that I could recall the words I have uttered."

"You must do more than wish, Margaret Lindsey," said the Lady Florence, who, with Madame, had followed her from the apartment; "pray that the grace of an humble spirit may be given you; put far away from you, once and for ever, that indomitable, miserable pride, for it has become the very curse of your nature."

If tears could have restored the spark of life, those of Margaret would have availed, if the remorse she really felt might be accepted as an atonement; her heart was pierced through and through, now, alas! too late.

She locked herself up in her own room, visited by none but Janet and the angelic Lady Florence.

With the former, she every night and morning visited the chamber in which the corpse was laid until, a few days later, the remains of the old woollen-drawer were interred in the churchyard of the Gray-friars.

The day following the Marshal returned from Argyshire, and the family prepared for their journey to St. Germain's.

To the amazement of her former protectors, Margaret avowed her determination of remaining in Edinburgh, and also avowed her intention of profiting by the fortune