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ANNIE LESLIE.

A TALE OF IRISH LIFE.

Annie Leslie was neither a belle nor a beauty—a gentlewoman, nor yet an absolute peasant—

The sun-fires had faded in the west, and Annie was leaning on the neat green gate that led to her cottage: her eyes wandering down the branching lane, then to the softening sky, and not unfrequently to a little spotted dog, Phillis by name, who sat close to her mistress's feet, looking upwards, and occasionally raising one ear, as if she expected somebody to join their party.

"Down, Phillis!—down, miss!" said she at last to the little dog, who, weary of rest, stood on its hind legs to kiss her hand:—"down, do;—ye're always merry when I am sad, and that's not kind of ye."

"Never say the word twice—ye do it already, ye little rogue!" replied a voice that sent an instantaneous gush of crimson over the maiden's cheek—while, from a group of fragrant elder-trees, which grew out of the mound that encompassed the cottage, sprang a tall, graceful youth, who advanced towards the blushing maiden.

"I am sorry for it, but it is, nevertheless, an incontrovertible fact, that women, young and old—some more, and some less—are all naturally perverse; they cannot, I believe, help it; but their so being, although occasionally very amusing to themselves, is undoubtedly very trying to their lovers, whose remonstrances on the subject, since the days of Adam, might as well have been given to the winds.

"Keep your distance, sir, and don't make so free!" said the pettish lady. "Keep my distance, Annie! Not make so free!" cried James; "an' ye, jist this minute, after talking about loving me."

Surely ye havn't forgot that y'er father has as good as given his consent; and though y'er mother is partial to Andrew Furlong—the tame negur—jist because he's got a bigger house (sure, it's a public, and can't be called his own), and a few more guineas than me, and never thinks of his being grayer than his old gray mare—yet she'll come round;—let me alone to manage the women—(now, don't look angry)—and didn't y'er own sweet mouth say it, not two hours ago, down by the loch—and, by the same token, Annie, there's the beautiful cur! I cut off with the reaping-hook—that, however ye traite me, shall stay next my heart, as long as it bates—and, oh, Annie! as ye sat on the mossy stone, I thought I never saw ye look so beautiful—with that very bunch of flowers that ye're been pulling to smitherens, resting on y'er lap. And it wasn't altogether what ye said, but what ye looked, that put the life in me; though ye did say—ye know ye did—James, says ye, 'I hate Andrew Furlong, that I do, and I'll never marry him as long as grass grows and water runs, that I won't.'—Now, sure, Annie, dear, sweet Annie!—sure y'er not going against y'er conscience, and the word o' true love."

"Sir," interrupted Annie, "I don't like to be found fault with. Andrew Furlong is, what my mother says, a well-to-do, dacent man, staid and steady. I'll trouble ye for my curl, Mister James—clever as ye are at managing the women, maybe ye can't manage me."

James had been very unskilful in his last speech; he ought not to have boasted of his managing powers, but to have put them in practice; the fact, however, was, that though proverbially sober, the fatigue of hay-making, and two or three "noggins" of Irish grog, had in some degree bewildered his intellects since Annie's return from the meadow. He looked at her for a moment, drew the long tress of hair half out of his bosom, then replaced it, buttoned his waistcoat to the throat, as if determined nothing should tempt it from him, and said in a subdued voice—

"Annie, Annie Leslie—like a darlint, don't be so fractious—for your sake—for—"

"My sake, indeed, sir. My sake!—I'm very much obliged to you—very much—Mister James; but let me tell ye, ye think a dale too much of y'erself to be speaking to me after that fashion, and ye inside my own gate; if ye were outside I'd tell ye my mind; but I know better manners than to insult any one at my own door-stone; it's little other people know about dacent breeding, or they'd not abuse people's friends before people's faces, Mister James McCleary."

"I see how it is, Miss Leslie," replied James, really angry: "ye've resolved to sell y'erself for y'er board and lodging to that grate cask of London porter, Andrew Furlong by name, and a booby by nature; but I'll not stay in the place to witness y'er perjury—I'll go to sea, or—I'll—"

"Ye may go where ye like," responded the maiden, who now thought herself a much aggrieved, injured person, "and the sooner the better." She threw the remains of the faded nose-gay from her and opened the green gate at the same instant; the gate which, not ten minutes before she had rested on, thinking of James McCleary—thinking that he was the best wrestler, the best hurler, the best dancer, and the most sober lad in the country;—thinking, moreover, that he was as handsome, if not as general, as the young squire; and wondering if he would always love her as dearly as he did then. Yet, in her perversity, she flung back the gate for the faithful-minded to pass from her cottage, careless of consequences, and, at the moment, really believing that she loved him not. So much for a willful woman, before she knows the value of earth's greatest treasure—an honest man.

"Since it's come to this," said poor James, "any how bid me good bye, Annie—What, not one 'God be wid ye,' to him who will soon be on the salt, salt sea? But Annie looked more angry than before; thinking, while he spoke, that he would come back fast enough to her window next morning, bringing fresh grass for her kid, or food for her young linnets, or, perchance, flowers to deck her hair; or (if he luckily met Peggy the fisher) a new blue silk neckerchief as a peace-offering.

"Well, God's blessing be about ye, Annie;—and may ye never feel what I do now." So saying, the young man rushed down the green lane, frightening the wood-pigeons from their repose, and putting to flight the timid hare and tender leveret, who sought their evening meal where the dew fell thickly and the clover was most luxuriant. There was a fearful reality about the youth's farewell that startled the maiden, obstinate as she was;—her heart beat violently, and the demon of coquetry was overpowered by her naturally affectionate feelings. She called, faintly at first, "James, James, dear James;" and poor little Phillis scampered down the lane, as if she comprehended her mistress's wish. Presently, Annie was certain she heard footsteps approach-

ing; her first movement was to spring forward, and her next (alas, for coquetry,) to retire into the parlor and await the return of her lover;—'what she wished to be true love bade her believe;' there she stood, her eyes freed from their tears, and turned from the opened window. Presently the gate was unfastened; in another moment a hand softly pressed her arm, and a deep-drawn sigh broke upon her ear.

"He is very sorry," thought she, "and so am I." She turned round, and beheld the good-humored rosy face of mine host of the public;—his yellow bob-wig evenly placed over his gray hair; his Sunday suit well brushed; and his embroidered waistcoat (pea-green ground, with blue roses and scarlet lilies) covering, by its immense lapel, no very juvenile roundness of figure.—Poor Annie! she was absolutely dumb; had Andrew been an horned owl she could not have shrunk with more horror from his grasp. Her silence afforded her senior lover an opportunity of uttering, or rather growling forth, his "proposal." "Ye see, Miss Leslie, I see no reason why we two shouldn't be married, because I have more regard for ye, tin to one, than any young fellow could have: for I am a man of experience, and know wrong from right, and right from wrong—which is all one. Y'er father, but more especially y'er mother (who has oceans of sense, for a woman) are for me; and, beautiful as ye are, and more beautiful for sartin than any other girl in the land, yet ye can't know what's good for ye as well as they. And ye shall have a jauntying-car—a bran new jauntying-car of y'er own, to go to Mass or church, as may suit y'er conscience, for I'd be far from putting a chain upon ye, barring one of roses, which Cupid waves, as the song says, 'for all true constant lovers.' Now, Miss, maachree, it being all settled—for sure ye'er too wise to refuse such an offer—here, on my two bare knees, in the moon-baines—that Romey swore by, in the play I saw when I was as good as own man to an honorable member o' parliament (it was in this service he learned to make long speeches, on which he prided himself greatly—do I swear to be to you a kind and faithful husband—and true to you and you alone."

Mister Andrew sank slowly on his knees, for the sake of comfort resting his elbows on the window-sill, and took forcible possession of Annie's hand; who, angry, mortified and bewildered, hardly knew in what set terms to vent her displeasure. Just at this crisis the garden gate opened; and little Phillis, who by much suppressed growling had manifested her wrath at the clumsy courtship of the worthy host, sprang joyously out of the window. Before any altercation could take place in the attitudes of the parties, James McCleary stood before them, boiling with jealousy and rage.

"So, Miss Leslie—a very pretty manner you've treated me in—and it was for that carcass (and he pushed his foot against Andrew Furlong) that ye trampled me like the dust; it was because he has a few more duty bits o' dirty bank notes, that he scraped by being a lick-plate to an unworthy mumber, who sold his country to the Union and Lord Castlereagh; but ye'll sup sorrow for it—ye will, Annie Leslie, for y'er love is wid me, bad as ye are; y'er cheek has blushed, y'er eye brightened, y'er heart has bated for me, as it never will for you, ye foolish old cratur, who thinks the finest—the holiest feeling that God gives us, can be bought with gold. But I am done; as ye have sowed, Annie, so reap. I forgive ye—though my heart—my heart—is tore—almost, almost broken; for I thought ye faithful—I was wound up in ye—ye were the very core of my heart—and now—"

The young man pressed his head against a cherry tree, whose wide-spreading branches overshadowed the cottage, unable to articulate. Annie, much affected, rushed into the garden, and took his hand affectionately; he turned upon her a withering look, for the jealous fit was waxing stronger.

"What! do ye want to make more sport of me to please y'er young and handsome lover?—Oh! that ever I should throw ye from me!" He flung back her hand, and turned to the gate;—but Andrew, the gallant Andrew, thought it behooved him to interfere when his lady-love was treated in such a disdainful manner; and after having, with his new green silk handkerchief, carefully dusted the knees of his scarlet plush breeches, came forward—

"I take it that that's a cowardly thing for you to do, James McCleary—a cow!" "What do you say?" vociferated James, whose passion had now found an object to vent itself on—"did you dare call me a coward?" He seized the old man by the throat, and, gripping him as an eagle would a land tortoise, held him at arm's length: "Look ye, ye fat old calf, if ye were my equal in age or strength, it isn't talking to ye I'd be; but I'd scorn to ill treat a man of y'er years—though I'd give a thousand pounds this minute that ye were young enough for a fair fight, that I might have the glory to break every bone in y'er body—but there." He

flung his weighty captive from him with so much violence that mine host found himself extended amid a quantity of white heart cabbages;—while poor James sprang among the elder-trees, which before had been his place of happy concealment, and rushed away.

Annie stood erect under the shadow of the cherry tree against which James had rested, and the rays of the clear full moon, flickering thro' the foliage, showed that her face was pale and still as marble. In vain did Phillis jump and lick her hand; in vain did Andrew vociferate, in tender accents, from the cabbage-bed where he lay, trying first to turn upon one side, and then on the other—"Will no one take pity on me?—Will nobody help me up?" There stood Annie, wondering if the scene were real, and if all the misery she endured could possibly have originated with herself. She might have remained there much longer, had not her father and mother returned from the meadows, where they had been distributing the usual dote of spirits to their laborers.

"Hey, mercy, and what's the matter, now," exclaimed the old Scottish lady, "why, Annie, ye're clean daft for certain; and, good man Andrew! what has happened to you, that ye're rubbing y'er clothes with y'er bit napkin, like a fury? Hey, mercy me, if my beautiful kail isn't perfectly ruined, as if a hail boghead of yill had been row'd over it. Speak, ye young hizzy!"—and she shook her daughter's arm—"what's the matter?"

"All about it, love; how pale you are!" He led his child affectionately into the little back parlor, while Andrew, with doleful tone and gesture, related to the "gude wife" the whole story, as far as he was concerned. The poor girl's feelings were at length relieved by a passionate burst of tears; and, sobbing on her father's bosom, she told the truth, and confessed it was her love of tormenting that had caused all the mischief.

"I do believe," said the honest Englishman, "all you women are the same. Your mother was nearly as bad in our courting days. James is too hot and too hasty—rapid in word and action; and, knowing him as you do, you were wrong to trifle with him; but there, love, I must, I suppose, go and find him, and make all right again; shall I, Annie?"

"Father!" exclaimed the girl, hiding her face in that safe resting-place, a patent's bosom.

"Send old Andrew off, and bring James back to supper—eh?"

"Dear father!"

"And you will not be perverse, but make sweet friends again?"

"Dear, dear, father."

The good man set off on his embassy, first warning his wife not to scold Annie; adding, somewhat sternly, he would not permit her to be sold to any one. To which speech, had he waited for it, he would doubtless have received a lengthened reply.

As Mr. Leslie proceeded down the lane I have so often mentioned, he encountered a man well known in the country by the soubriquet of "Alick the Traveller," who, with his worn-out donkey, was in search of a place of rest. Alick was a person of great importance, known to everybody, high and low, rich and poor, in the province of Leinster; he was an amusing, cunning, good-tempered fellow, who visited the gentlemen's houses as a baker of various fish, particularly oysters, which he procured from the far-famed Wexford beds; and, after disposing of his cargo, he was accustomed to re-load his panniers from our cockle-strand of Bannow, which is equally celebrated for that delicate little fish. Alick's figure was tall and erect; and the long stick of sea-weed, with which he urged poor Dapple's speed, was thrown over his shoulder with the careless air that in a well-dressed man would be called elegant. A weather-beaten *chapeau de paille* shaded his rough but agreeable features; and stuck on one side of it, in the twine which served as a hat-band, were a "cutty pipe," and a few sprigs of beautifully tinted sea-weed and delisk, forming an appropriate but singular garniture. He was whistling loudly on his way, and cheering his weary companion occasionally by kind words of encouragement.

"God save ye, this fine evening, Mr. Leslie; I was just thinking of you, and all y'er good family, which I hope is hearty, as well as the woman that owns ye. And I was just saying to myself that maybe ye'd let me and the baste stay in the corner to-night—for I've a power o' beautiful fish, and I want to be early among the gentry. But if the mistress likes a taste of news, or a rattling hake—"

"Alick," said Leslie, who knew by experience the difficulty of stopping his tongue "when once it was set a going—go to the house; and there's a hearty welcome—a good supper and clean straw for ye both. But tell me, have you seen James McCleary this evening?"

"Och! is it James ye'er after! There's a beautiful lobster—let Kenny, Paddy Kenny (maybe ye don't know Paddy the fishmonger, wid the blue door at the corner of the cold market in Wexford), let Paddy Kenny bade that—"

"But James McCleary—"

"True for ye, he'll be glad to see ye. Now, Miss Leslie, tell us the truth, did ye ever see sich crabs as this in England? Where 'ud they get them and they so far from the sea?"

"I want—"

"I humbly as y'er pardon—I saw 'em jist now cutting off in that way, as straight as a coo-gar eel—I had one 'tother day, Mister Leslie (it's as true as that ye're standing there), it weighed—"

"What?—did he go across the water, that direction?"

"Is it he?—trath, no, I skinned him as late—"

"Skinned who?—James McCleary?"

"Och! no; the conger."

"Will you tell me in what direction you saw James McCleary go?—the misfortune of all Irishmen is, that they answer one question by asking another."

"I don't like ye to be taking the country down after that fashion, Mister Leslie; it's bad manners, and I can't see any mistoime about it; and if I did, there's no good in it of making a cry about it; but there's an illigant cod—there's a whopper—there's been no rest or peace wid that lump of a fellow all the evening—whacking his tail in such a way in the face of every fish in the basket; I'll let the mistress have him a bargain if she likes, jist to get rid of him—the tory!"

Leslie at last found that his questions were useless; so he motioned "Alick the Traveller" to his dwelling, and proceeded on his way to James's cottage; while Alick, gazing after him, half muttered, "there's no standing then, Englishmen; the best of them are so dead-like—not a word have they in their head; not the least taste in life for conversation. Catch James—I hope it didn't turn out bad, though," he continued, in a still lower tone: "what I said a while ago was all out o' innocence, for a bit o' fish wid the cod one." He turned, and for a moment watched the path taken by Leslie, then proceeded on his way, muttering, "tis very quiet, though."

At the door of James McCleary's cottage, Leslie encountered the young man's mother.—"I was jist going to your place to ask what's come over my boy," said she; "I can't make him out; he came in such a fluster about tin minutes ago, and kicked up sich a boohery in no time; floostered over his clothes in the press, cursed all the women in the world, bid God bless me, and set off, full speed, like a wild deer, across the door."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Leslie.

"I know, Mr. Leslie, that my boy has been keeping company wid your girl; and I have nothing to say agin her; for she has a dale o' the lady about her, yet is humble and modest as any lamb; but I think maybe they've had a bit of a ruction about some footy thing or other; but men can't bear to be contradicted, but I own it's good for them, and more especially James, who has a dale of his father in him, who I had to manage (God rest his soul) like any baby.—However, James has too much sense to go far, I'm thinking—only to his aunt's husband's daughter, by the Black-water, fancying, maybe, to bring Annie round; and so I was going to see her, to know the right of it."

The kind-hearted man told her nearly all he knew, with fatherly feeling glossing over Annie's pettishness as much as he possibly could. Mrs. McCleary remained firm in her opinion that he had only gone down to the Blackwater, and would return the next day.

CHAPTER II. But Leslie's mind foreboded evil. When he arrived at home he found "Alick the Traveller" comfortably seated in the large chimney corner; a cheerful turf fire casting its light sometimes in broad masses, sometimes in brilliant flashes, over the room; the neat white cloth was laid for supper; and the busy dame was seated opposite the itinerant man of fish, laughing long and loudly at his quaint jokes and merry stories. Annie was looking vacantly from the door that was shut to the window through which she could not see;—and Phillis was stretched along the comfortable hearth, rousing herself occasionally to reprimand the rudeness of a small white kitten, Annie's particular pet, who obstinately persisted in playing with the long silky hairs of the spaniel's bushy tail. When Leslie entered, the poor girl's heart beat violently, and the color rose and faded almost at the same moment. She busied herself about household matters to escape observation; broke the salt-cellar in endeavoring to force it into the cruet-stand, and verified the old proverb, "spill the salt and get a scolding;"—for the mother did scold, in no measured terms, at the destruction of what the careless hizzy had