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HOW I LOST MY LEG.

A RAILWAY ADVENTURE.

SOME years since, at a time when Ireland was greatly disturbed by political agitation, it was my fortune to be called as a witness against two men who had been charged with an agrarian outrage, and whose conviction my evidence had helped to secure. As I left the court, I noticed that I was closely-watched by three or four savage-looking men, who, I was afterwards informed, were relatives and friends of the convict, and whom I might most certainly look upon as my future enemies.

A few months afterwards, I missed the last train from the same town, and as the distance to my home was not more than six or seven miles, I resolved to walk. Soon, to my extreme annoyance, I discovered that I was followed by the men I have referred to, and I had little doubt that some outrage was intended.

If I could conceal myself till they passed by, I felt that I might be saved. I feared to move onwards, lest they should hear my footfall, as I had heard theirs. I looked eagerly around. Through the dim light I saw a mass of brambles almost beside me. There was a gap in them. Without a moment's hesitation I plunged in. There was a terrible cracking of dry branches, a rending of clothes, and a tearing of flesh, and the next instant I lay sprawling in the dirt and slime of a half-dry ditch.

In two minutes my pursuers, for I could not help regarding them as such, were opposite the spot where I lay ensconced. They passed on. I began to breathe more freely. Suddenly they stopped, apparently to listen.

"I don't hear his footsteps now," I heard a voice say.

"I thought I heard a crackling among the branches this minute," said another. "Let us look about. Ah, these hedges!"

They examined them for a moment, but appeared to be ignorant of the ditch that lay behind.

"Oh, he's not there! There's a lane should be above—that's where he's gone," said a gruff voice.

Adopting this idea, they rapidly retraced their steps.

I emerged from my hiding-place. I knew they would soon discover their error, and be again on the right track. My safety now depended on my speed. Little more than a mile further on there was a road-side inn; if I could reach that I thought I should be in safety.

In an incredibly short space of time I was there, breathless and exhausted. The door was shut, but a light gleamed through the shutters.

With a prayer of thanksgiving in my heart, I knocked loudly for admission.

My summons was answered by a man's voice demanding to know who was there.

"A traveller," I replied, faintly.

"It is too late to open to-night; I am going to bed," was the reply.

"For heaven's sake open the door!" I implored; "there is life and death upon it. I will pay you handsomely for inconveniencing you."

The last argument took effect—I heard a bar withdrawn. The next moment I was within the house. I sunk on a chair, prostrated by fatigue and terror.

"Perhaps," I said, when I had explained that I was pursued, "you won't object to my lying down on the settle here till daylight?"

Before he could reply there was a loud knocking at the street-door.

"Don't open, for the love of Heaven!" I exclaimed; "it is those men. They have discovered me—they will murder me."

"All right—don't be afraid. They shan't come in if I can help it," was the reply.

The words had scarcely passed his lips when the men were in the house. After admitting me he had not replaced the bar, so the door was on the latch. One glance was sufficient—they were my pursuers.

"Come, come, my lads," said the landlord, "you must get out of this. It's long past shutting-up time, and I am going to bed."

"Bring us some whisky, and hold your jaw," said one, surlily.

The landlord was a big, strong man, but he quailed before the savage glances which were cast upon him. He evidently feared to provoke a contest, so thought it was better to endeavour to get rid of them quietly.

"Well, if I bring it, you must be off the instant you have drunk it."

"We shall use our own minds about that," was the insolent reply.

Here, then, I was sitting within a few feet of the men whom I felt, had vowed my death, utterly helpless, with no chance of escape. I met death face to face at that moment. I looked despairingly at my host. I could read no sign of hope in him.

To get them the whisky he passed through a door I had not noticed before. It was beside me. He closed it behind him. It opened outwards. He was absent several minutes, and I heard a rumbling noise. During this time a whispered conversation was going on between my pursuers, but, close as I was to them, I could not distinguish a word. What a horror it was to be left alone with them! I expected every instant that they would rush upon me, and murder me on the spot.

At length the landlord returned, with a measure of whisky in his hand. He left the door partly open. There was no fire on the hearth; the only light was a single tallow candle that burned on the table where the men sat. In putting the whisky on the table, he managed to extinguish it. The place was in total darkness. Instantly I felt a powerful grasp upon my arm, I knew not whether that of friend or foe. I was dragged a few steps, a door slammed, and I was in the open air, with the landlord beside me. He rolled some heavy-looking object against the door—it looked like a mill-stone—and then said, hurriedly—

"Off with you over the fields. You'll find a house a quarter of a mile off."

"But yourself?" I said.

"I can take care of myself. But get off—you have no time to lose."

I had not, for while he spoke a yell of rage burst from the house, and kicks and blows rained upon the door, until the planks cracked and splintered.

With my feet winged with terror, I sped on like a hunted deer. Crash! I knew the last frail barrier between my pursuers and myself had given way. I heard their fierce howl as they burst forth. I was several hundred yards ahead of them. Now began the race for life or death.

I was always a good runner, but I never ran as I ran that night, simply because I never ran for so great a stake—it seemed to me as though I were borne onwards by a whirlwind. The ground flew beneath my feet; ditches and gates were overleaped, walls clambered over—no barrier checked my speed. My preserver had spoken of a house. I looked round, but could discern nothing through the gloom. I must have passed over double the distance he had mentioned. I must have taken a wrong direction. I was distancing my pursuers a little, but this desperate pace could not be kept up much longer. My breath was fast failing me, my strength must soon give way, and then I should drop to the earth from exhaustion, and every second I ran the risk of being hurled to the ground by some obstacle in my path, which the darkness would prevent me seeing.

Suddenly I felt myself descending with frightful rapidity. I could not arrest my speed; I just had presence of mind enough left to throw myself backward—had I not done so I should inevitably have been dashed to pieces. A thousand lights danced before my eyes, but I was not stunned. I found myself at the bottom of a declivity, an enormous opening in the earth, like a huge cavern, before me. I knew not what it was—I had not sufficient sense left to think—it looked like a shelter. I dragged myself along into its depths, until I fell prostrate in a swoon.

I know not how long I remained insensible. I awoke with a sensation of the most parching thirst; my mouth and throat felt as though they had been seethed with hot iron. This feeling was