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NELLIE NETTERVILLE; OR, ONE OF THE TRANSPLANTED.

By the author of 'Wild Times,' 'Blind Agnes,' etc.

CHAPTER VI.

The party from the tower came on meantime at a rapid rate; and, peeping cautiously from behind her hiding-place, Nellie saw that they had already reached the foot of the hill where she and her grandfather stood awaiting their approach. The lady—even at that distance Nellie fancied she could see that she was young and pretty, and, though clad in the saddest and strictest of Puritanic attire, anything but a Puritan in her looks and bearing—rode in front, with the military-looking personage, described already, upon one side, and a younger cavalier, with the air likewise of a soldier, on the other, while a couple of followers brought up the rear. At first the three foremost of the party rode abreast, but, as the uphill path began to narrow, the lady pushed her horse ahead so as to lead the way, and Nellie could hear one of her companions shouting to her to ride cautiously until she had turned the sharp corner of rock behind which Nellie herself was at that moment standing.—The warning came, as warnings often do come, too late by a single second. It could have scarcely reached the lady's ears ere she had dashed round the corner, and her horse, wild and unmanageable enough already, plunged violently at the unexpected apparition of Nellie and her grandfather on the other side. If the path had not widened considerably at that spot, the struggle must have ended fatally, and even as it was, Nellie expected every moment to see both horse and rider roll over the edge of the precipice, to which the heels of the former were in such fearful proximity. The lady, however, sat him to perfection, and after a short, sharp struggle for the mastery, she succeeded in forcing him to rush at a wild gallop straight down the path leading to the valley, the only safe course of action she could possibly have adopted.

Her companions had by this time reached the spot where Nellie had watched the contest, and the younger of the two was about to spur his horse on to the rescue, when his older and wiser companion shouted to him to forbear. 'Let her be, Ormiston! Let her be!' he cried. 'She knows well enough what she is about, my Ruth. And you will but infuriate her horse by following at his heels.' 'Thus adjured, the young man, addressed as 'Ormiston,' had no choice but to remain quiet. He drew in bridle, therefore, beside his chief, and watched as patiently as he could the downhill gallop of the lady. The result fortunately justified the confidence of the elder horseman.—No sooner had she reached the wide bottom of the glen below, than she checked her horse suddenly, and turning him almost before he had time to suspect her intentions, galloped him up the hill again with such right good will that he was glad enough to stop and breathe of his own accord by the time she had rejoined her companions.

Relieved from all anxiety on her account, the old Cromwellian officer, for such his scarf and embroidered shoulder-belt announced him, turned the vials of his wrath, as even the best men will upon such occasions, upon those who, however unwittingly, had been the cause of the disaster. In the present case Nellie and her grandfather were only too evidently the offenders, and the storm was accordingly sent full upon their heads. They were still standing in the recess formed by the shoulder of the retreating bank, and as Nellie, by an unconscious movement of girlish timidity, had retired behind Lord Netterville, he formed for a moment the chief figure in the group. Thoroughly roused and awakened up at thus finding himself unexpectedly face to face with his arch enemies, the old man stood out upon the foreground like a picture, his eyes sparkling, his white hair falling on his shoulders, and a grave and noble pride in his very attitude which belied alike the meanness of his apparent station, and the disfigurement of his stained and travel-worn attire. The latter indeed consisting entirely of the so-called 'Irish weeds,' the Cromwellian officer naturally enough concluded him to be a native, and addressed him accordingly in such terms of contemptuous abuse as it was too often the Saxon fashion of those unhappy times to bestow upon the Celt.

'How now, thou 'Irish dogg'? How hast thou dared, thou and thy wench, to cross our path, and so put the life of the Lord's elect in danger? Give place at once and let us pass, as thou wouldst not that I should do unto thee as I did at Tredagh, where my sword, from the rising even to the setting of the sun, wrought the vengeance of the Lord on an idolatrous and misguided people.'

Lord Netterville, during this agreeable harangue, had stepped right into the centre of the

path, so that the other could hardly have passed him without a struggle, and he barely awaited its conclusion ere, with eyes flashing fire, he violently retorted:

'Irish dogg! sayest thou? Learn, thou unmannerly Saxon churl, that my blood is as English, perhaps more so than thine own; and certainly from a nobler fountain! I am of the English Pale,' he continued, drawing himself up to his full height, and gaining in dignity what he lost in passion, 'and one of no mean standing in it either—a Netterville of the old Norman race, since the days of the first Plantagenet.'

'Lord Netterville—father!' said the young Amazon in a low voice, pushing her horse forward and touching the officer's shoulder with her riding whip in order to attract his attention.—'It must be the Lord Netterville of whom there was some question, I remember, when you were in negotiation for these lands.'

'Ha, wench, thou also to blaspheme!' he cried, turning furiously upon her. 'Knowest thou not that there is but one Lord, and that the pride of them that assume his titles stinks in his nostrils like the burning pitch of tophet? And thou,' he added, addressing himself to Lord Netterville, 'in vain dost thou boast of thy race or lineage; for whatever they once were, they have, I doubt not, been so often renewed in the blood of the Irish as to have little or naught left of English honesty or honor to bestow upon their own.'

'Little or much!' cried the old lord furiously, 'if thou, black dog of Cromwell as thou art, wilt but dismount and bid one of thy lackeys put a sword into my hands, I will show thee that, in spite of my seventy years and odd, I have still enough of English manhood left to chastise impertinence, wherever or in whomsoever I may chance to find it.'

'Sir,' cried Nellie, terrified at the turn affairs were taking, and placing herself between the disputants, 'there is no need for all these taunting words and bandying of harsh challenges. In peace have we come hither, and we do but seek to possess our own in peace—their honors, the commissioners at Loughrea, having assigned to us our residence amidst the mountains.'

'Residence!' cried the officer, roused at once into a far more bitter and personal feeling than the sort of proud contempt which was all that he had hitherto deigned to bestow upon the strangers. 'Residence among these mountains, dost thou say? Nay, then, young maiden, thou hast mistaken thy mark, and that most widely, since all these lands, as far as the eye can see—even this land of Murrisk, which we English call the 'Owles,' with its upper and lower barony as well—have been made over to me already, as mine own inheritance, the land which the Lord hath given (for surely the laborer is worthy of his hire) as the fruit of long service in the battlefield.'

'This is my grandfather, Lord Netterville, and we are as he has rightly told you, of the old English of the Pale,' said Nellie, making one step nearer in order to present her certificate.

'At first, in common with the other inhabitants of Meath, we were to have been sent into the more easterly baronies of Connaught; but the numbers set down for transplantation to those parts having been found greater than could be accommodated on the land, we were assigned at last our portion in the same barony of Murrisk.'

The officer looked at first as if greatly inclined to refuse the paper which she held up for his acceptance; but suddenly changing his intention, he snatched it rudely from her hand, and ran his eye over the contents.

'Humph, ha,' he continued to mutter as he read; and then turning to Nellie, he said in a voice in which, toned down as it was to an affectation of cold indifference, her quick ear detected, nevertheless, a lurking note of triumph.

'This certificate bears a date, as I see, of some three months earlier in the year. How, then, is it, maiden, that it was not presented sooner?'

'It is five months to-day since we left our home—our pleasant home in Meath,' said Nellie sadly; 'and much of that time was spent in sore suspense as to the settlement of our just claim for land, and after that we were detained by sickness. Our servant fell ill and died of the plague; my grandfather suffered also much from the same malady, and he has in some measure recovered from it; it has, alas, reduced him from a hale and hearty old age, to the wreck—mind and body—that you see before you. In this way our scanty stock of money was soon exhausted, and when at last he was fit to travel, we had to sell our horses and the best part of our wearing apparel, in order to satisfy the debts incurred during his illness; after which, there was nothing for it but to finish the journey as best we could on foot.'

'How marvellous are the mercies of the Lord—the mercies which He has laid up for them that fear Him,' cried the officer, turning trium-

phantly toward his companions, and yet shrinking in spite of himself beneath the angry glances shot at him from the blue eyes of his daughter. 'Surely His hand and His wisdom are visible in this matter,' he added, in a less openly exultant manner; 'for look ye, maiden, had you and the man you call Lord Netterville come hither at the time when, according to the date of your certificate, you should have done, you might, peradventure, have found no one to dispute possession with ye. But, behold! instead of that, the Lord hath vexed and troubled ye—He hath forced ye to tarry, even as He forced His rebellious people to tarry in the wilderness—He hath afflicted ye with sickness—He hath even visited ye with death, in order that I, His servant and soldier on the battle-field, might go up and take peaceable possession of that land which ye vainly fancied to be all your own.'

'But are not these the very lands—a portion of the barony of Murrisk—which are set down in our certificate?' said Nellie, not even yet comprehending thoroughly the greatness of the impending blow. 'How, then, noble sir, do you speak of them as yours?'

'Yea, and indeed,' replied the officer, 'these are of a certainty those very lands. Nevertheless, maiden, thou hast yet to learn that if thou hast a certificate, I also am provided with a debenture, signed and delivered to me two months ago. Consequently, my order on the estate being of later date, doth override and make void thine own, which, moreover, on looking closer, I do perceive to be merely *de bene esse*, a poor makeshift for the time being, until something more permanent could be assigned thee.'

'God help us, then,' cried Nellie, utterly overwhelmed by this last announcement. 'God help us, then, and pardon those who have trifled so cruelly with our fortunes! Strangers we are and without a place whereon to lay our heads; what then is to become of us in these deserted mountains?'

'Thou shouldst have looked to all that ere coming hither,' he answered harshly; 'as matters are at present, I would counsel thee to return to Loughrea at thy quickest speed, and to seek some other grant of land from their honors the commissioners, ere all that which is left in their hands has been absolutely disposed of.'

'We cannot,' said Nellie, in a tone of hopeless sorrow, which, save that of the old fanatic himself, touched the hearts of all who heard her. 'Look! she added, turning, and with a sudden wave of the arm indicating Lord Netterville, who, utterly exhausted by his late excitement, was leaning against the bank in a half state of stupor. 'Look at that old man, and tell me how is he to retrace his footsteps? Hope, indeed, aided him on his journey hither; but what hope is left to give him courage to go back?'

'As I have already said, thou shouldst have looked to all that ere undertaking such a journey,' he answered, and preparing to ride on; for he saw that in his daughter's face which made him feel sure that she would not remain much longer silent. 'And now get you both hence at once, I counsel ye; for my cholera is apt to rise in the presence of the enemies of the Lord, and I may not much longer be able to restrain my hand from striking—'

'Strike, if you will, but hear me!' cried Nellie, springing forward so suddenly that she had caught hold of his bridle rein ere he was even aware of his intention. 'If yonder tower is indeed your home, give him a night's shelter in it—only one night—a single night—that he may rest for his weary travels.'

'Nay, by the sword of Gideon, not even for an hour!' he cried furiously. 'Let go, maiden, let go! or I will strike thee as if thou wert a mad dog in my path.'

But Nellie was by this time driven to desperation and she would not let go. She clung to the bridle-rein, crying out, 'Only one night—one little night. God is my witness that if there was but so much as a peasant's hut within reach, I would die sooner than ask such a favor at your hands.'

Nearly as frantic with passion as she was with despair, he forced his horse to rear again and again, in order to compel her to let go; but finding at last that he could not shake her off, he raised his riding-whip, and it would have fallen heavily on her shoulders, if by a similar and almost simultaneous movement Ormiston and his daughter had not hastily interfered.

'Major Hewitson!' cried the former in a warning voice. And 'Father, you shall not! you dare not!' cried the girl, spurring her horse eagerly forward, and utterly regardless of the fact that its heels were actually grazing the edge of the precipice as she tried to wreat his whip from her father's grasp.

All the tenderness of the man's heart was wrapt up in his daughter, and even in the midst of that moment of mad passion he saw her danger, and cried out: 'Have a care, child, have a care! or you and

your horse will be over the precipice ere you know what you are doing.'

'Throw away your whip then, or I will back him over it with my own hands,' she cried passionately; 'for I would sooner perish at once than see my own father strike a helpless girl like myself.'

'Send the Irish beggar hence at once then, will you?' he answered furiously, flinging away his whip as he spoke, and, tearing his rein by main force from Nellie's grasp, he galloped rapidly down the hill.

Instead of following him, the girl backed her horse further into the recess in order to make room, and then weaved her hand with the gesture of an empress to the others to pass on. With the exception of Ormiston they all obeyed; and no sooner had they got to a little distance, than she flung herself off her horse, and, tossing the reins to her companion, threw herself into the arms of the astonished Nellie, exclaiming: 'O my God! my God! and these are the deeds that we do in Thy name! When wilt Thou arise and come to judgment?'

'Nay, grieve not thus, dear lady,' said Nellie, generously forgetting her own great wrongs at the sight of such voluntary humiliation. 'You at any rate have no cause to grieve, for willingly you have done no wrong.'

'Call me not lady, I am but a girl, a woman like yourself; only—she added with a touch of pride so like humility that it was almost as beautiful—only, probably, of meaner nurture, and certainly of less lofty lineage. What can I do for you? Alas! alas! why do I ask, for what can I do? Shelter, except in my father's house I have none to offer, and in that, after what he has said just now, I could not even ensure your lives.'

Here the young officer, who had by this time dismounted and approached the girl, endeavored to insinuate his purse into her hands; but she shook her head impatiently, and said, 'Money! money! of what use can money be in such wilds as these?'

Nevertheless, on second thoughts, she took the purse, and would, perhaps in a hesitating, shame-faced sort of way, have offered it to Nellie, if the latter had not said decidedly: 'As you say, dear lady, it would be worse than useless. Neither are we beggars. We did but seek what we thought to be our own. And now,' she added sadly, 'we ask still less—even that which the very beggars are thought to have a right to claim—but a shelter for a single night.'

'And even that I cannot give you,' said the girl disconsolately. 'But at least,' she added suddenly, in a brighter tone, 'I think I can tell you where to find that.' She pointed with her whip to a narrow path branching off a little lower down the hill, and leading apparently in the direction of the sea. 'Follow that path—it is neither long nor difficult and it will lead you to the waters of the creek below. At the very foot of the hill, where the path ends, you will find a hut; if empty, it will at least give you shelter; if otherwise, its owner will, I doubt not, make you welcome. He ought, at least,' she added quickly, 'for he also has lost something. Trust me, you are not the only ones whom we have robbed for the achievement of our own greatness. Farewell! and if ever you pray for your own enemies, put us among the worst and foremost.'

She turned to her horse as she finished speaking. Her companion would fain have aided her to mount; but putting him pettishly on one side, she leaped into the saddle without assistance, and galloped back by the road which she had come. The officer, thus repulsed, bowed respectfully to Nellie, and then, remounting his own horse, followed in the same direction. She gazed on, however, as if unconscious of his existence, merely urging her horse to a quicker speed in order to escape him—a manoeuvre which he took care, by imitating, to render useless. Finding, at last, that he would not be shaken off, she pulled up suddenly, and said angrily, and without even deigning to look round: 'Why do you follow me? Why do you dog my footsteps? Ride back to my father, will you? He is of your own creed and calling, and will better appreciate your society than I can.'

'Nay, Ruth,' he was beginning, but she interrupted him almost fiercely: 'Call me by my own name, if you wish that I should answer you. To you, at least, and to the world, I will still be Henrietta, though at my father's hands I am compelled to submit to this hummer of a change of name.'

'Well, then, Henrietta,' he answered quietly, but very gravely. 'believe me, I did not mean to anger you. I said 'Ruth,' because that name is so often on your father's lip—that it has begun to come almost naturally to mine. I would not willingly anger you at any time, and last of all just now, when, in spite of what I must call your

unkind waywardness toward myself, I love and worship you, as I never did before, for that nobleness of nature which recoils, at any cost, from all that savors of injustice.'

'Carry your love and worship elsewhere, then, for I will have none of it,' she said, evidently in no wise mollified by his apology. 'What should I care for your good opinion? Do you not feel in your heart of hearts, or must I tell you, that we are divided, as far as the north pole from the south, in our most intimate convictions, and that what you and my father call religion, I consider as fanaticism—or that something which is worse fanaticism, or almost than crime—hypocrisy.'

'You cannot believe what you are saying,' he answered, now indignant in his turn. 'You know how well and truly I have loved you, and you cannot believe that I am a hypocrite; you cannot—you could not—you would not so dishonor me in your thoughts—you who have promised to be my wife!'

'I retract that promise, then,' she answered passionately—'wholly and entirely I retract it. Never, so help me God, will I become the mother of a race of fanatics, who will find, for such deeds as we have seen done to-day, their pretext in religion.'

'Henrietta!' he cried, the blood rushing to his temples, 'you cannot be in earnest!'

'See if I am not!' she answered coldly. 'Ride back to my father now, and let me go my ways alone to the tower.'

'I will go to him, Henrietta; but it will only be to tell him that I am about to return to my appointment in Dublin—unless, indeed, he added, with a lingering hope of reconciliation—'unless, Henrietta, you retract.'

'I never retract,' she answered shortly. 'Then farewell!' he said, with a half movement, as if he would have taken her hand.

'Farewell!' she answered, affecting not to see his offered hand, and shaking the reins loose on her horse's neck.

Ormiston turned his horse's head in the opposite direction, and went forward a few paces, then he stopped and looked after his late companion. She was moving on, but slowly, and like one lost in thought. Stirred by a sudden honest impulse of regret, he turned and followed her. Henrietta heard him, and instantly checked her horse, as if determined not to suffer him to ride any longer at her side.

'Henrietta!' he said.

'What would you?' she asked sullenly.

'Only unsay that one word, 'hypocrisy,' and let things be as they were before.'

'I never unsay what I have said,' she answered coldly.

'Neither do I,' he retorted, now angry in earnest; 'and I swear to you that I will see you no more until under your own hand and seal you retract, of your own accord, what you have said, to-day, and tell me to return.'

'Farewell, then, for ever,' she replied, with rather a bad assumption of indifference—'for ever, if so it must be.'

'Farewell,' he answered, without, however, as even at that moment Henrietta noticed, adding the ominous 'for ever.' 'Farewell, and God forgive you for so trifling with the honest heart that loves you, and has loved you from your childhood. Some day—too late perhaps—you will do me justice.'

And so they parted.

CHAPTER VII.

Left to herself, Nellie Netterville sat down to collect her scattered senses. The situation in which she found herself needed, in truth, a calm sense and courage, not often the heritage of petted girlhood, in order to bear up successfully against its difficulties. Happily for herself, the brave Irish girl was possessed of both in no common degree, and the trials and troubles of the last few months had ripened these faculties into almost unaltered maturity. The tale she had just told to Major Hewitson was free of the smallest attempt at exaggeration, being, in fact, rather under than over the measure of the truth. Lord Netterville, in common with many another unfortunate gentleman of the English Pale, had been kept dancing attendance on the commissioners at Loughrea, until both hope and money failed him. The absence of home comforts told heavily upon a frame already weakened by age and sorrow, and just at the moment when he could least bear up against it, he was attacked by the plague, or some disease analogous to the plague, which at that very time was making most impartial havoc among the native Irish and their foes. Thanks to an iron constitution, he recovered, but he rose from his sick bed, if not absolutely a child in mind, yet as utterly incapable of aiding Nellie by advice, or of steering his own way unassisted through the troubled waters on which his ill fate had cast him, as if he had been in very deed an infant. His servant was already dead, therefore the whole responsibility of their future movements devolved upon his granddaughter. She proved herself fortunately not