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NELLIE NETTERVILLE;
OR,
ONE OF THE TRANSPLANTED.

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

CHAPTER XIV.—(Continued.)

As they entered the gatehouse, however, she quietly withdrew her hand and glided from his side to that of Roger.

Ormiston instantly recognized the latter as the dispossessed owner of the 'Rath,' and an officer, besides, of some standing in the recently-disbanded army of the Irish. Courteously saluting him, therefore, he informed him that he had been deputed by the Lord Deputy to inquire into the nature of the business which had brought him to Dublin, adding an earnest hope on his own part that it might prove to be in no ways connected with political affairs.

'That, most assuredly, it is not,' said Roger, pleased and touched by the young officer's manner, and satisfied by Henrietta's letter, which Ormiston still held open in his hand, that he was addressing the person for whom it had been intended. 'My business is one which solely concerns this young gentleman, and concerns her, in fact, so nearly that, if you cannot aid her, as Mistress Hewitson half-binted that you could, I trust, at all events, you will give me as much of my liberty for this one day as may enable me to do so myself. I too am a soldier and an officer, Major Ormiston, and you may trust me that I will not abuse your favor.'

'Sir,' said Nellie imploringly, 'you have not read the letter—if you would but read the letter! Mistress Hewitson half-promised that you would help me.'

Thus called upon, Ormiston ran his eyes over Henrietta's letter, which, concluding it to be on matters merely personal to himself, he had been reserving for more private, and therefore more satisfactory perusal.

Nellie watched him anxiously as he read on and with a spasm of anguish at her heart she saw that, as he gradually took in the nature of its contents, his first look of eager joy disappeared, and was succeeded by one of deep and tender pity—pity which made itself felt in the very accents of his voice, as he exclaimed:

'Young Mistress Netterville! Good God! And I never dreamed of the relationship! Alas! that you should have come so far, only to find sorrow and disappointment in the end.'

'Oh! not dead! not dead!' cried Nellie, terrified by his words and looks. 'Say, not dead—not dead—I do entreat you!'

'No, no!—not dead—yet,' he answered nervously. He could not bring himself to say that she was to die upon the morrow.

'Nay, Major Ormiston,' Roger here interposed, for Nellie was sobbing in speechless anguish, 'if not dead, all is well—or may at all events yet be well—for this most injured lady. I have hope still—hope in the honor and justice of even our enemy. See this paper! It was writ by the soldier who hath lately received as his share in the Irish spoil the house and lands of Netterville, and who is ready to aver on oath that he took it down word for word from the lips of the very woman who did that deed for which Mrs. Netterville stand condemned to die.'

Ormiston glanced rapidly over the papers which Roger had drawn from his bosom and given to him.

'Yes, yes!' he cried joyfully, 'I doubt it not in the least. Sergeant Jackson is well known as a man of truth beyond suspicion; and these lines, moreover, do but repeat the defence which the unhappy lady urged over and over again upon her trial, insisting that the accusation against her was an act of private vengeance. Time presses; and whatever is to be done to save her, must be done at once.'

'The Lords Chief Justices,' suggested Roger, but Ormiston shook his head with a little smile of scorn.

'Little likely they to reverse a sentence pronounced in their own courts!' he said. 'No, no! it is to the Lord Deputy we must appeal. I will ride after him at once, and in a couple of hours at the furthest you may look for me with the result. I trust in God that it may be a good one.'

He left the room without waiting for an answer, and in another minute they heard him gallop across the bridge. The next two hours were passed by Nellie in an agony of expectation which was painful to behold. She could not stay still a moment. Sometimes she paced the narrow guard-room with rapid and impatient footsteps—sometimes, regardless of the presence of the English soldiery, she flung herself on her knees, weeping and praying almost aloud in her agony. Every stir about the bridge—every sound from the street beyond, seemed to announce the return of her messenger, and at these moments she would stand up, shivering from head

to foot in such a fever of hope and fear, that Roger at last became seriously alarmed, and remonstrated firmly and affectionately with her on her want of self-command. At last, to his inexorable relief, a bustle at the doorway announced Ormiston's return, and a moment afterward the latter entered the guard-room. Nellie stood up, as white as ashes, and utterly incapable of either speaking or moving toward him. Shocked at the mute anguish of her face, Ormiston took her hand in his; but when she looked at him, expecting him to address her, he hesitated, like one doubtful of the effect of the tidings he was bringing.

'For God's sake, speak at once!' cried Roger. 'Anything is better for her than this suspense! Say, is it life or death?'

'Not death, certainly—at least I hope not,' said Ormiston, vainly seeking in his own mind for some fitter words by which to convey his meaning.

The blood rushed to Nellie's temples, and the pupils of her eyes dilated, but still she could not answer.

'You hope?' Roger repeated sadly. He saw, though Nellie did not, that there still existed some uncertainty in the matter.

'There is a reprieve at all events,' he said, in the same joyless tones in which he had before replied.

The color faded from Nellie's cheek, and the gladness from her eye. 'Only a reprieve—only that!' she muttered, in tones so hoarse and changed that the young men could hardly believe it to be hers—'only that!'

'But the rest will follow,' said Ormiston, trying to reassure her. 'The Lord Deputy will himself inquire into the business, and—'

'Nay, then, she is safe indeed!' Nellie interrupted him to say. 'With that confession, furnished by her chief accuser, her innocence must be clear as daylight. O sir! she is safe—surely she is safe! she added, trying to reassure herself by the repetition of the word, and yet sorely puzzled by a something in Ormiston's eyes which looked more like pity than sympathy in her joy.'

'Safe! I trust so—with all my heart and soul I trust so,' he answered gravely. 'Nevertheless, my dear young lady, I would counsel you, as a friend, not to suffer your hopes to soar too high, lest any after disappointment should be too terrible for endurance.'

'If she is reprieved, she will be pardoned; and if she is pardoned, she will live,' Nellie repeated slowly, like one trying yet dreading to discover the hidden meaning of his words.

'She will live,' he answered gently; 'yes, certainly, if God hath decreed it as well as man.'

'Nay, if she is in God's hands only, I am content,' said Nellie, with a sudden return to confidence, which somewhat astonished Ormiston. 'I also have been in God's hands,' she added, with an appealing look toward Roger, 'and can tell how much more merciful they are than man's. Sir, I conclude from what you say that she is ailing; may I not go to her at once?'

'If you are strong enough,' he was beginning, but she interrupted him with a burst of grief and indignation.

'How! not strong enough? and I have come all this way to see her! O mother, mother! she sobbed convulsively. 'Little you dream your child is near, bringing peace and pardon to your prison!'

Roger saw that Ormiston knew more than he liked to tell and asked in a low voice:

'The poor lady, then, is very ill?'

'Dying!' the other answered curtly.

'Will her daughter be in time to see her, think you?'

'In time; but that is all. She has burst a blood-vessel, as I have just now learned, and this reprieve seems little better than a mockery; for no one dreams that she could have survived for the tragedy of to-morrow.'

'Then let Nellie go at once,' said Roger promptly. 'She has ridden night and day to see her mother, and, sad as the meeting may be, it would be sadder still if they met no more. Let her go at once.'

And so it was decided.

CHAPTER XV.

Before leaving the guard-room, Ormiston poured out a large goblet of wine from a flask which he had sent one of the soldiers to procure at a wine tavern hard by, and insisted upon Nellie drinking it to the last drop.

The remainder of the flask he gave to Roger, who, truth to say, was almost as much in need of it as Nellie; and they then all went forth together, O'More having previously pledged his word, both to Ormiston and Holdfast, to consider himself merely as a prisoner at large, until they themselves should release him from his parole.

Their way led them from the gate-house into Bridge-street, and from thence to Ormond Gate, Earl's Gate, 'Geata-da Eorlagh,' as it was then sometimes called. With Major Ormiston in

their company, this was opened to them without a question, and they afterward proceeded, as fast as Nellie's strength permitted, up the steep hill street, debouching into the Corn Market.—Entering the latter, they found themselves face to face with Newgate, the great criminal prison of the city. There it stood, dark, strong, and terrible—too strong, Roger could not help thinking, to be a fitting prison for the frail, dying woman it was guarding for the hangman. It seemed, indeed, almost like an abuse of power to have cast her there, so helpless as she was, and powerless, in the strong grasp of the law.

Newgate had originally formed a square, barring at each of its four angles a tower, three stories high, and turreted at the top. Two of these, however, those facing toward the city, had been recently taken down; and when Nellie looked upon it for the first time, it consisted merely of the gate-house, with its portcullis and iron gates, and a strong tower at either end.—Near the prison stood the gibbet, metaphorically as well as really; for few, indeed, in those sad days were the prisoners who, once shut up within the walls of Newgate, ever left them for a pleasanter destination than the gallows. From the position in which it stood, they could hardly avoid seeing it as they passed onward toward the prison; but in the faint hope of sparing at least poor Nellie's eyes this terrible apparition, Ormiston stepped a little in advance of his companions, and placed himself between her and it. Roger, however, upon whose arm she leaned, knew by the sudden tremor which shook her frame that this tender caution had been in vain. Nellie, in fact, had already seen and guessed at the ghastly nature of its office there; and as her eye glanced reluctantly—and almost, as it were, in spite of herself—toward it, she felt as if she had never before thoroughly realized the awful position in which her mother stood. What wonder that she grew sick and giddy as the thought forced itself, in all its naked reality, on her mind, that her mother—her mother, the very type and personification of refined and delicate womanhood, might at any hour be dragged hither, shrinking and ashamed, beneath the rude hangman's grasp? What wonder that her feet failed to do their office, and that Roger was compelled rather to carry than to lead her past the spot, never pausing or suffering her to pause until they stood before the gates of Newgate?

Here, as at the city gate, the name and authority of Ormiston procured them ready admission, the jailer receiving them with courtesy, and showing them at once into a low vaulted room on the ground floor of the prison. Notwithstanding this, however, Ormiston had no sooner announced the name of the prisoner they had come to visit, than the man showed symptoms of great and irrepressible embarrassment.

'The prisoner had been very ill,' he muttered; 'had burst a blood-vessel in the morning, and the bleeding had returned within the hour. A doctor had been sent for, and was at that moment with her; but if Major Ormiston could condescend to wait, he would call his wife, who was also in attendance on the poor lady, and would tell her to announce the arrival of a visitor. It must be done gently,' he replied over and over again; 'very gently, for the doctor had already told him that any sudden shock would of necessity prove fatal.'

Ormiston eyed the man curiously as he blundered through this statement. He knew enough of Newgate, as it was then conducted, to doubt much if the visit of a doctor was a luxury often vouchsafed to its inhabitants; and feeling in consequence that some mystery was concealed beneath the mention of such an official, he was almost tempted to fancy that Mrs. Netterville was already dead, and that on account of the presence of her daughter, the man hesitated to say so. The next moment, however, he had leaped to another and more correct conclusion, though for Nellie's sake, and because intolerance formed no part of his character, he made neither question nor comment, as the jailer evidently expected that he would, on the matter. Greatly relieved by this apparent absence of suspicion on the part of the English officer, the man brought in a stool for Nellie to sit upon, and then once more announced his intention of going in quest of his wife. Just as he opened the door for this purpose, Ormiston caught a glimpse of a tall, gray-haired man, who passed down the passage quickly in company of a woman. The jailer saw him also, and with a sudden look of dismay upon his features, closed the half-open door, and turned again to Ormiston.

'It was the doctor,' he said with emphasis—'the doctor, who had just taken his departure; and as there was nothing now to prevent their seeing the sick lady, he would send his wife at once to conduct them to her cell.'

A long ten minutes followed, during which time Nellie sat quite still, her face hidden by her hands, and shivering from head to foot in fear and expectation. The door opened again, and

she sprang up. This time it was the jailer's wife who entered.

'The poor lady had been informed,' she said, 'of the arrival of her daughter, and was longing to embrace her. Would the young lady follow her to the cell?'

Nellie was only too eager to do so, and they left the room together. Ormiston hesitated a moment as to what he would do himself; but not liking to leave Nellie entirely in the hands of such people as jailers and their wives were in those days, he at last proposed to Roger to follow and wait somewhere near the cell during her approaching interview with her mother. To this Roger readily assented, and they reached the open door just as Nellie entered and knelt down by her mother's side.

More than a hundred years later than the period of which there is question in this tale, the treatment of prisoners in the Dublin Newgate was so horrible and revolting to the common sense of decency and humanity as to demand a positive interference on the part of government. There is nothing, therefore, very astonishing in the fact, that the state in which Nellie found her mother filled her brimful with sorrow and dismay. The cell in which she was confined was low, and damp, and dark, and this she might have expected, and was in some degree prepared for; but she had not counted on the utter misery of its appointments; and the sight of her pale mother—death already hunting her dark eyes, and written unmistakably on her ghastly features—stretched upon the clammy pavement, a heap of dirty straw her only bed, and a tattered blanket her only covering, was such a shock and surprise to Nellie that, instead of joyfully announcing the fact of her reprieve to the poor captive, as she had intended, she fell upon her knees beside her, and wept over her like a child.

'Mother! mother!' was all that she could say for sobbing, as she took her mother's hand in hers and covered it with tears and kisses. Mrs. Netterville appeared for a moment too much overcome to speak, or even move, but gradually a faint flush passed over her wan face, and her eyes at last grew brighter and more life-like, when Nellie, making a strong and desperate effort to command her feelings, suddenly wiped away her tears and bent over the bed to kiss her.

'O mother! mother!' the poor girl could not refrain from once more sobbing, 'is it thus that I see you after all?'

'Nay, child,' the mother gasped with difficulty, 'you should rather thank God for it on my knees. See you not it is an especial mercy? If I had not burst a blood-vessel to-day, to-morrow—yes, to-morrow—a shudder ran through her wasted frame, and she broke off suddenly.

But I have brought you a reprieve,' sobbed Nellie, hardly knowing what she said, or the danger of saying it at that moment—'a reprieve which is almost a pardon. Only a few days more, and you would have been free, whereas now—now—tears choked her utterance, and, hiding her face on her mother's scanty coverlet, she sobbed as if her heart were breaking. Mrs. Netterville half raised herself on her pallet bed for one brief moment she struggled with that desire for life which lurks in every human breast, and which Nellie's exclamation had called forth afresh in hers. For one brief moment that phantom of life and liberty, lost just as they had been found again—lost just as they had become more than ever precious in her eyes—that contrast between what was to be her portion and what it might have been, deluged her soul with a bitterness more intolerable than that of death itself, and her frail body shook and trembled like an aspen leaf beneath the new weight of misery thus laid upon it. That one unguarded word of Nellie's had, in fact, changed, as if by magic, all her thoughts and feelings and aspirations. Death and life, and health and sickness, freedom and captivity, had each put on a new and unexpected aspect in her eyes, and that very thing which, only a minute or two before, had seemed to her soul as a source of real consolation, had suddenly taken the guise of a great misfortune. It was as if God himself had mocked her with feigned mercy—a weaker soul might so have said, and sunk beneath the burden! But with that strong and well-tryed spirit the struggle ended otherwise.

Clasping her wasted hands together, and lifting up her eyes to heaven, the dying woman exclaimed, in a voice which none could hear and doubt of the truth of the sentiments it uttered, 'My God! my God! Thy will, not mine, be done!' Then she fell back quietly on her pillow, exhausted indeed with the effort she had made, but calm and smiling and resigned, as if that sudden glimpse of renewed happiness and life had never, mirage-like, risen to mock her with its beauty.

The first use Mrs. Netterville made of her victory over nature was to comfort Nellie.

'Weep not, dear child,' she whispered tenderly; 'weep not so sadly, but rather thank God with me for the consolation which he has given us in this meeting. Where is Hamish?' she added, turning her dim eyes toward the open door, where Ormiston and O'More were lingering still, and evidently fancying that one or other of them was her absent servant—'where is Hamish? He has done my bidding bravely; why comes he not forward, that I may thank him?'

'Hamish is not here, mother; I left him with my grandfather.'

'God help you, child!' moaned Mrs. Netterville, a sudden spasm at her heart at the thought of her unprotected child, 'God help you! have you come hither all this way alone?'

'Mother,' said Nellie in a smothered voice, 'I am not alone. Roger O'More came with me. Without him it would have been impossible.'

'Roger O'More—Roger O'More,' repeated Mrs. Netterville trying to gather together her memories of the days gone by. 'It was in the arms of a Roger O'More that your father breathed his last.'

'In mine, dear lady,' cried Roger, unable any longer to resist the temptation of presenting himself to Nellie's mother—in mine! and knowing that the father did me the honor to call me friend, Lord Netterville has had the great kindness to intrust me with the daughter in this long journey, which the love she bears you compelled her to undertake.'

Something in the tones of Roger's voice, rather than in the words he uttered, seemed to strike on the mother's ear. She smiled a grateful smile of recognition, and then turned a questioning glance, first upon his face and afterwards on Nellie's. Perhaps Roger interpreted that glance aright. At all events, he took Nellie's hand, and, as if moved by a sudden inspiration, laid it on her mother's saying:

'Only the day after that on which I saw her first, I told her that I would never ask for this dear hand until her mother was by to give it.'

'Her mother gives it,' said Mrs. Netterville solemnly. 'Yes! for I guess by Nellie's silence that her heart is not far from you already.'

'Mother, mother!' cried Nellie, resisting Mrs. Netterville's feeble efforts to place her hand in Roger's—'not here—not now—not when you are dying.'

'For that very reason,' gasped the mother. 'My son,' she added, fixing her eyes full on Roger, 'you can understand. I would see my Nellie in safe hands before I go.'

'It would be the fulfilment of my dearest wish,' said Roger earnestly, 'if only it be possible.'

'It is possible,' she was beginning, but pausing at the sight of Ormiston, who had by this time joined himself to the group around her bed, she added in an apprehensive tone, 'but there is a stranger present.'

'Not a stranger, but a friend,' the young officer replied, in a tone of sincerity it would have been impossible to doubt, even if Nellie had not whispered, 'A friend, indeed! Without him we could hardly have been with you now.'

'Then I will trust him as a friend,' Mrs. Netterville replied. 'The gentleman who left me as you entered—'

'The doctor,' Ormiston interrupted, with a marked emphasis on the word.

'Well, the doctor,' she replied, with a languid smile. 'He can do all I need, and he lives close at hand, with the merchant William Lyon, who knows him not, however,' she added, mindful of the safety of the person named—who knows him not in any other character than that of a lodger and chance sojourner in the city.'

'In ten minutes he shall be here,' said Ormiston, 'if I can induce him to come with me.—Meanwhile I will give orders to the jailer to leave you undisturbed.'

'If you permit it, Major Ormiston, I will go with you,' said Roger, not only zealous for the success of the embassy, but anxious, likewise, that, before taking such a decided step, Nellie should have the opportunity of a private conference with her mother. 'I think my name, and a word I can whisper in his ear, may be of use—otherwise he might fear a snare.'

Ormiston assenting to this proposition, the young men departed, and for the first time since the commencement of their interview mother and daughter were alone together.

For some minutes, however, neither of them spoke. Mrs. Netterville lay back, endeavoring to recover breath and strength for the coming scene, and Nellie was completely stunned. The shock of finding her mother dying at the very moment when she had hoped to restore her to new life—the bodily weariness consequent on her journey—the sudden, and, to her, the most inexplicable resolution to which Mrs. Netterville had come in her regard—all combined to paralyze her faculties, and, hardly able to think