

Wild Darrell of Dare.

IN TWO INSTALLMENTS.

CHAPTER I.

He had been called Wild Darrell of Dare ever since the time, seven years ago, when he had come back to Castle Dare with the brand of Cain upon him.

He was a man of a different type; he had shed a fellow creature's blood. So much the sterner Scotch folk knew, and they had no disposition to take into consideration circumstances which might tend to soften his guilt.

It was enough for them that in a fit of passion, he had killed a man.

The fatal deed had been committed while he was travelling in South America.

It had been the result of a quarrel, and in that wild, lawless place such things are little thought of.

Darrell had escaped lightly—a few months' imprisonment at most was all that he had to suffer—it indeed any punishment at all were meted out to him.

But when he came back to Scotland—back to Castle Dare—he made the unpleasant discovery that his neighbors looked askance at him.

No one called at the castle, no one invited him to dinner, and when he met the lairds on the moors, or their wives and daughters in the neighboring town, it was made clear to him that his acquaintance was not desired.

Hubert Darrell was not the man to take such treatment meekly.

For polite coolness he flung back fiery scorn, and he deliberately set himself to work to outrage all the proprieties as they existed in the eyes of his decorous Highland neighbors.

He summoned friends from London—wild carousing fellows, who made the old castle ring with their orgies, and were a scandal to the place.

Year after year this went on, one set of visitors succeeded another, but all were wild and reckless, and at length the castle had as its name as though Satan himself had been its master.

It was perched on a crag like an eagle's nest—a dark, rugged, fortress-like place it was, frowning down upon the sea, and with no creeping plant or bit of moss to soften down its grimaces.

One stormy September evening, Wild Darrell was striding along a narrow path at the edge of a lake.

His figure looked almost gigantic in the light of the setting sun, for he was six feet two in height, and proportionately broad and stalwart.

He was strikingly handsome, after a dark Rembrandt fashion.

His head was grandly shaped, and he held it erect with the air of a warrior or a king.

His hair was coal-black, and so were his eyes.

His skin had a clear, pale brownness; his brow was massive; his glance was eagle-like in its keenness.

It had been raining, and even now, though the sun was shining freely, the wind was ruffling the surface of the lake, and threatening another storm.

He was striding along, with his firm, swinging step, when an unwelcome sound caught his quick ear, and, glancing upwards, he saw a female form half way up the hill which helped to shut in the lake.

"Is there anything amiss?" he called out, and a clear voice answered—

"Yes, I have hurt my foot; I cannot get down. Do come and help me, please."

Darrell could climb like a goat.

He took the shortest cut to the spot whence the voice came, and in a minute or two saw a girl, in a crimson cloak, sitting on a great boulder, and looking as though she were in pain.

Fain of any kind chase the beauty from many faces, but this girl appeared all the more lovely by reason of the paleness of her cheek, and the suspicion of a quiver round her mouth.

Certainly Hubert Darrell had never seen a face which, to his mind, was of a more perfect beauty.

It was lighted up by a pair of dark hazel eyes, clear and liquid, and yet so deep as to seem fathomless.

Dark silken lashes swept the exquisitely rounded cheek; the mouth was like some beautiful crimson flower, and the chestnut hair which escaped in delicate tendrils from underneath the hood of the crimson cloak, waved over a brow that was broad, and pure, and white.

"What can I do for you?" questioned Wild Darrell, as he raised his hat on reaching her.

"I hardly know. I'm afraid I've hurt my foot rather badly. I can't walk at all. If only I could get home!"

"Where do you live?"

"At Glenuskie, naming a village three-quarters of a mile away."

Clouds were gathering again and he knew that there would soon be a tremendous downpour.

There was absolutely no place of shelter near, and to leave the girl while he went to the village for assistance would mean that she would inevitably be drenched through.

He solved the difficulty in summary fashion.

"I must carry you," he said.

"Oh! I'm afraid I should be too heavy!" exclaimed the girl. "I couldn't think of troubling you like that!"

"Heavy?" echoed Darrell, with a short

laugh of disdain. "You'll be a mere feather's weight to me. We Highlanders don't let our muscles get flabby for the want of using."

He didn't ask whether she objected to being carried.

His wild reckless life had perhaps made him masterful with women as well as with men; certainly he had forgotten the conventionalities of civilized life.

He simply stooped without more ado, and raised the girl in his arms, held her there as lightly and easily as though she had been a young fawn and strode with her down the steep hillside.

When they reached the path by the lake she spoke.

"You cannot carry me all the way to Glenuskie."

"Why not?"

"Oh! because it would tire you so."

"It does I will tell you. No; I must take you straight to the village."

The girl made no further resistance.

The truth was, she felt a little faint and unable to say much.

He strode on with his firm even tread, and in less than a quarter-of-an hour the village came in sight.

"I live at the first house," said the girl; "that white cottage with the garden in front."

Darrell nodded.

It was a pretty cottage, small but picturesque, with a thatched roof, deep mulioned windows, and a garden filled with all manner of sweet old-fashioned flowers.

As he strode up the path with his burden an elderly lady came in the porch in evident alarm.

"Oh, Nora! what is the matter? Are you hurt?" she cried.

"Only a very little, aunt. I slipped on a stone and hurt my foot. But is nothing serious. I don't know what I should have done, though, if it hadn't been for this gentleman. I simply couldn't have walked. He has carried me all the way from the lake."

By this time they had entered the house. Darrell placed the girl in an easy chair, and at once turned to depart.

"I am sure, sir, I do not know how to thank you," said the elderly lady.

"No thanks are needed," replied Darrell, and his voice sounded brusque simply from his anxiety not to seem to expect thanks.

"I shall do myself the honor of calling to inquire how the young lady is," he added. "I hope there is no serious injury. Good evening ladies."

And raising his hat he strode away.

Miss Beresford went down on her knees to examine her niece's injured foot, and assure herself there was nothing worse than a bad sprain.

While she was thus engaged, Elspeth, their middle aged Scotch servant, rushed in from the kitchen with wide open mouth and extended her hands.

"Lord hear and save us!" she exclaimed. "To think of Miss Nora being brought home by him!"

"Who is he, Elspeth?" asked Nora with some eagerness.

"Who is he miss? Why, he's that wicked Wild Darrell of Dare. Ye manna he heard tell of him, surely?"

"No, Elspeth, we have not."

"My certie! He's the wickedest man in Scotland. He's dune a murder, at any rate, and belike a gude mony mair. He'd ha' been hanged for it—as high as Haman as our nan can say—it he had; been a rich man and a Darrell. And he lives the wickedest life; there's no telling what wickedness goes on in that castle on the hill. It's a main mercy, Miss Nora, that he didn't murder ye instead of carrying ye home."

Nora smiled, though she turned a little pale, too, and her aunt quite shuddered. Elspeth's description of wild Darrell had not been without its effect on both.

But before they had time to ask any questions, Elspeth herself created a diversion by running to the door, exclaiming—

"My certie, if there isn't Doctor Donald! Hadn't I better ask him to step in and look at Miss Nora's foot?"

In a couple of minutes the doctor was inside the cottage.

He examined the injured foot, pronounced the injury a sprain, promised to send some liniment and was about to depart, when Miss Beresford, in whose mind Elspeth's accusation against Darrell had been fermenting, said, a little anxiously—

"Doctor, who is this Darrell of Dare, as Elspeth calls him? She says she's met dreadful things—says he is a murderer."

Elspeth had retired to the kitchen.

The doctor nodded in that direction, and laughed good humoredly.

CHAPTER II.

The next morning, Nora Beresford was resting on the couch in the cottage parlor.

Her foot was better, but she could not stand on it yet; and, as someone must needs take her place in the village school, her aunt had volunteered for the office.

Elspeth was busy preparing dinner in the kitchen, and Nora was alone.

She had a book in her hand, but she was not reading.

Her thoughts had flown far away to the time when she had been the petted daughter of a luxurious home, when she had been the apple of her father's eye, and he a wealthy widower, who could afford to gratify her every wish.

That had been only two years ago; but unkind recollections had been followed by his sudden death, and she and her sister had found themselves with a bare pound a week between them.

It was clear something must be done to augment their income.

Nora was high spirited and brave. She resolved to become a teacher.

For nearly two years she had taught in a private school in England, but she had secretly hated the life, and when a friend had offered to secure for her the post of school mistress in this remote Scottish village, she had accepted it with thankfulness.

Presently, as she lay on the couch, her mind wandered still further away.

She fancied herself beneath the burning suns of Africa, and a tender smile crossed her perfect lips.

Her lover was there—the man to whom her troth was pledged—to whom her girl's love had been given.

Keith Talbot had been her friend and playmate since early childhood, and when, immediately after her father's death, he had been about to set sail for South Africa, he had confessed that friendship from her was not enough for him, and she had suddenly discovered that in her own breast, too, friendship had ripened into love.

He would fain have made her his own at once, but her father's death was too recent, and, besides, he had his fortune to make.

It was for that he was going out to Africa.

They pledged no troth. Nora did not wear his ring on her finger, though she had his portrait in a locket on her bosom.

She desired to leave him free, but she would return and claim her for his bride. Two of these years he had.

Talbot had succeeded in his will to be had expected, if not quite as well as he had hoped.

"I shall have a fair position to offer you, dearest," he wrote. "Not such a one as you ought to have, for you are fitted to be a queen; but still, you will not be without

"Oh, my good friend Elspeth lays on her colors with a whitewash brush!" he said. "Darrell isn't quite so black as she paints him."

"But it is true he has committed murder!"

"It is, unfortunately, true that he killed a man some years ago. It was in South America, and I should say it was a case of what we should call manslaughter rather than murder. A man insulted Darrell, there was a quarrel, and he struck a fatal blow."

"How dreadful!" cried Miss Beresford, while Nora's beautiful face looked very grave.

"However much in fault he was," he has suffered pretty keenly," went on Dr. Donald. "His life here is a sort of social ostracism, for no one of his own rank recognizes him."

"Why doesn't he go away, then?" questioned Nora.

"He is intensely proud, and pride scorches him to show the white feather. He simply bids defiance to public opinion, and braves it—nay, goes out of his way to outrage it on every possible occasion. They say he leads a terrible life up at Castle Dare. I can't say how true that may be. When I meet him, he is always civil; and if birth counts for anything, he is certainly a gentleman. It is quite true, however, that people of Elspeth's type regard him as a perfect incarnation of evil. The peasant are absolutely frightened of him, I verily believe."

Meanwhile Darrell had reached home.

He went straight to his own private room and sent for his steward, a white haired old man, who had had the full management of the Dare estate for fifty years.

"Macgregor, I own most of the houses in Glenuskie village, don't I?" asked Darrell abruptly.

It was rarely indeed that "the master" asked any questions about the estate.

"Get the plan, Mac," he went on. "Ah! there it is. Now look here. Whose house is this?"

And he pointed to a mark which indicated the house he had visited.

"It's yours, sir."

"Is it? And who lives there?"

"Why, sir, it's but just changed hands. An English lady's taken it. She came a fortnight ago. Her name's Beresford, and she has a niece who's the new teacher at the village school."

"Is the niece young?" asked Darrell, with impatient eagerness.

"Oh, yes, sir; quite a girl. Those young things are all the fashion now. In my young days it was always an old dame who kept a school; but, eh, dear! they alter everything."

Darrell listened dreamily, or, rather, did not listen at all.

He was absorbed in self-communing. His dark eyes were fixed on vacancy, his straight, jetty brows bent meditatively above them.

"So I am Miss Beresford's landlord," he said abruptly, after a minute or two of silence. "Remember, Mac, it is my special wish that those ladies are treated well."

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those luxuries to which you were once accustomed, and whatever is lacking I will make up to you in tenderness and love. Never was wife loved more devotedly than you shall be by me, my Nora, my own dear, beautiful darling."

"Dear, dear, Keith," the girl was murmuring beneath her breath as she thought of this passage in his latest letter; and, indeed, she knew every word of that letter by heart.

She drew forth the tiny gold locket, and looked at his pictured face.

A fair Saxon face it was, with a pleasant mouth and bright, bold blue eyes.

"My darling!" murmured Nora, and she pressed her lips to it.

The next moment, a crimson flush overspread her cheek and brow, and she thrust the locket away with a hurried movement, for Elspeth, in her abrupt fashion, had opened the door to admit a visitor, and the visitor was Wild Darrell of Dare.

His great height showed itself strikingly in the little cottage.

He had to bow his proud, dark head to get through the doorway, and even in the room there seemed very little space between his head and the ceiling.

Now, Keith Talbot was only of middle height, Nora found herself wondering, almost unconsciously, how much taller Darrell was than he.

"I have called to ask how your foot is, Miss Beresford," said Darrell, in that brusque tone which almost always gave the impression of haughtiness.

"Thank you; it is much better. My aunt is out. I am sorry to say Will you sit down?"

He took a chair opposite her couch with out any hesitation.

It was so long since he had had anything to do with the ordinary usages of society that he probably forgot it was scarcely "the thing" for an unmarried man, a comparative stranger, to sit tete-a-tete with a young lady such as Nora Beresford.

Nora herself was not disposed to be severely critical.

She felt a certain degree of interest in this proud, reckless man, whose life had been shadowed by a terrible deed.

She looked at him as he sat opposite her, and decided that he was very handsome, though in a stern and haughty fashion.

His eyes were eagle like in their glance, but they were handsome eyes nevertheless, and she could easily have fancied him the most admired man of a London season, if only he had not looked so stern and gloomy—if only his hand had been withheld from that fatal deed which had shut him out from the world.

He, in his turn, looked at her, and, lovely though she had seemed when he first saw her on the hill side, he thought her looking still lovelier now.

She had been pale then, and now there were soft, sweet damask roses in her cheeks, and her beautiful lips looked fuller and her eyes more luminous.

What glorious eyes they were!

Darrell was quite certain he had never seen such eyes before in any other woman.

What was their color—black, or gray, or hazel?

He could not quite decide.

He had thought of those clear, deep eyes during the still watches of the night as he tossed restlessly on his bed, and he had come out this morning with the determination to find out whether they really were as beautiful as he had pictured them.

He told himself now that they were more beautiful.

They were so clear, and yet so deep; they had such a soft, bright radiance, and their long silken lashes drooped so charmingly upon the rounded cheek.

And her beauty was not the girl's only charm.

Of that much Wild Darrell was certain, even though he had seen her for scarce half-an-hour in all.

She had a lofty soul and mind, or else that broad white brow and those perfect lips and eyes, were beautiful; and nature seldom lies.

Presently he spoke—a little abruptly, as was his wont, but still in gentler fashion than his tongue had used for years.

"I did not know yesterday that I had the honor of having you for a tenant, Miss Beresford. I wonder whether you are quite comfortable here; there are any alterations your sister would like me to make?"

"Thank you. We are perfectly comfortable. I don't think we could possibly suggest anything in the way of improvement."

"Pray remember that if you do want anything you have only to name it. I am afraid I am by no means a model landlord;

but, at any rate, I desire the comfort of my tenants."

Nora inclined her head in courteous acknowledgment; she did not know what to say.

She felt a certain degree of embarrassment.

She wished her aunt would come in—or that he would go.

He was sitting beside a small table; on it there was a sketch book.

His fingers began to play with it unconsciously.

He even opened it in his abstraction, then closed it hastily, with a word of apology.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I did not know what I was doing."

"Oh, it was only a sketch-book," said Nora, smiling. "You are quite welcome to look at it if you like."

"Are they yours?" he asked, with interest, taking up the book again.

"Yes; but I am no artist. I only sketch for amusement."

"They are very good," he said turning the sketches over, and examining them with attention. "I see you have begun on the scenery round here. I wonder whether you know Castle Dare? I think you might like to sketch it."

"No, I don't know it. We only came here a fortnight ago."

"If you would care to sketch it, either outside or inside, I should be very glad to give you all facilities."

"Thank you; you are very kind. But I am so much engaged that I have really very little time for sketching now. I have only my evenings that I can call my own."

The color deepened ever so slightly on her cheek, and she added quite calmly, though with a secret effort—

"I am the school-mistress of Glenuskie. I teach in the village school."

"I know," said Darrell simply. "But surely your duties in the school do not take up all your time. I should like you to see Castle Dare. It is not exactly a beautiful place; but I believe you might find a picturesque scene about it."

"Thank you," said Nora again, and she was saved the embarrassment of deciding how to get rid of her visitor by the entrance of her aunt.

It was mid-day, and the school had been dismissed.

Darrell was as courteous to the aunt as he had been to the niece.

He repeated his readiness to make any alterations they might desire, and after five minutes' further conversation, he took his departure.

"He is an odd character," remarked Miss Beresford, as she stood at the window, watching the tall, massive figure as it emerged from the garden into the road. "I am sure he means to be extremely civil to us; but he reminds me of Ishmael, nevertheless. I can quite believe that every man's hand would be against him and his hand against every man."

"Yes; he gives me that impression, too," said Nora thoughtfully. "But do you know aunt, I think I rather like him. I am sorry for him. It must be a terrible thing to feel you have shed a fellow creature's blood."

Castle Dare, perched on the top of the sea girt crag, was looking especially fine with a background of purple clouds, streaked here and there with crimson, as the sun sank slowly, like a ball of fire, below the horizon.

At a convenient spot Nora sat, with an open sketch book on her knees, so much sketching as listening to the castle's master who stood near her, leaning against a jutting rock and watching her progress with critical eyes.

It was a remarkable thing but not more remarkable than true, that this wild Darrell, who had held no converse with his neighbors for seven years, had in less than a month, established quite an intimacy between himself and his tenants at the White Cottage.

On consideration, Miss Beresford had found that some few alterations were needed.

Darrell had undertaken them in the most generous fashion, and had personally supervised them.

It was to the aunt rather than to the niece, that all the attentions were paid.

He discovered that he had once met a cousin of hers, and this, in the good lady's mind, was enough to establish a species of friendship at once.

Then he would often call to present some of the game he had shot, or a basket of fruit or flowers would be sent down from the castle.

But they were always sent to the elder lady—never to Nora.

Nora was still interested in him—still felt sorry for him; but that was all.

Sometimes at an evening, he would accept a cup of tea at the cottage as he returned home from a tramp over the moors.

At such times Nora is always at home, school hours being over; but he rarely addressed any of his conversation to her, and she never noticed—never dreamed of noticing—that although he did not speak to her, he always placed himself where he could watch her every feature and her every movement.

He was standing thus now, even while he affected to be examining her sketch rather than regarding her.

"I should like to show your aunt inside the castle some time," he remarked. "Do you think she would come?"

"I have no doubt she would, Mr. Darrell."

"And you? Would you come with her?"