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TURLOUGH O'BRIEN;

THE FORTUNES OF AN IRISH SOLDIER. CHAPTER V.—NARRATING ALL THAT BEFELL GRACE WILLOUGHBY IN THE WOOD OF GLINDARRAGH.

How much amiss is silence read at times even by the craftiest men. The thickening twilight obscured the subtle lines in whose varying expression the younger man, as he from time to time eyed his companion askance, had read the feelings which worked within him; this silence, therefore, he read favorably, and forbore to interrupt it.

'The honest knight,' thought he, 'is pondering deeply of my offer—even now, perchance, considering how he shall first and best employ my proffered interest; but soft, good, easy man, there's a condition tacked to the covenant I offer; we do not, at our years, make such splendid presents as those I have named wholly without a purpose.'

But, meanwhile, through the mind of the old man were flitting recollections, obscured but for a moment—scenes charged with black suspicions, inspiring terrible revenge—doubts, whose force shook his very heart within him—and, lastly, rose before him the chamber, where, in the direst hour of his dark despair and agony, he and the very man who now rode by his side, grappled and tugged in mortal conflict until both rolled weltering on the floor—the faces of the scared friends who forced asunder the murderous combatants—all the circumstances of the hideous fray rose up before him, like an exhalation from the pit, and with them swelled within him a storm of fiery passions, long dormant, not forgotten.—Stung as by an adder, he stuck his spurs rowel deep into his horse's flanks, and curbing him as furiously, the strong steed bolted and reared.

The scene which memory had evoked, dissolved and vanished in an instant; but the impressions it had revived remained fixed, stern, and terrible. Suffering the chafed beast to regain his composure as best he might, the old knight sat fixed and silent as a statue of bronze, while his companion, resuming his place by his side, rode silently forward for some time, awaiting the further conversation of the elder gentleman.—Finding that they were traversing the time and space which measured their distinct companionship, without any attempt on the part of Sir Hugh to renew the conversation, begun, as he conceived, so auspiciously, Miles Garrett resolved himself to break the silence, and in the full conviction that the weighty considerations which he had suggested, were not lost upon the mind of his bluff companion, he thus pursued his imaginary advantage—

'How strange and wayward is the course of thought—how unlooked for the suggestions of the memory—how unbidden and mysterious the rising, as from the grave of years, of slumbering recollections, to upbraid and soften the wayward heart of man.'

He spoke as if in contemplative soliloquy—his words, however, and the sentiment which they conveyed, jarred with painful and sudden coincidence upon the old man's ear—they came like a sneering commentary of the fiend, mocking with an odious parody of truth, the remembrances which had just risen within his own mind, blasting and fiery, as if ascending from the neathermost abyss of hell. Almost with a start, he turned full upon the speaker, and held his breath, well nigh expecting to see the infernal reader of souls himself beside him; and inwardly convinced, that if he were come incarnate in the human shape, to work him mischief, he could not have chosen a more appropriate form for such a mission, than that of his long detested and all but dreaded kinsman.

'I remember once,' continued Miles Garrett, 'and I scarce know how the remembrance has been now recalled; it is in my memory, that you once said, before the fatal quarrel which has for so long estranged us, had begun, and while we yet lived in interchange of confidence, and the free flow of natural affection—I remember you said, you earnestly prayed heaven there might subsist between our descendants the same close and friendly intercourse which then held us together. The recollection of this passing phrase, which may, perchance, long since have faded from your memory, has oftentimes returned to mine, yea, even when the feud was hottest and fiercest between us, and ever with this recollection came the thought—this prayer may be even yet fulfilled.'

He paused for a moment, and then resumed with greater animation.

'Ay, and lately with growing frequency and strength; with power, even to control my plans and actions—to balk self-interest, and disarm what others might have thought a just revenge—I speak of my claim at law, to the wood and manor of Glindarragh—let it not move you—may, I mean not to pursue it; despite the advice of learned counsel—it is forgone. I boast not of this remission of my claim; you may

think my title bad—others thought differently; but, be it good or bad, it is all one to me, I never mean to press it; it is, indeed, to all intents and purposes a nullity, so let that pass, and come we now to other matter, nearer to my heart than ever that was.'

They were now approaching that point of the road where their respective ways again diverged, and the same certainty of immediate separation, which, sustained by something of curiosity, enabled Sir Hugh Willoughby to tolerate in silence the companionship of his artful cousin, urged the latter with greater precipitancy to open himself fully, and without reserve; he, therefore, collecting himself for what he well knew would prove the crisis of the conference, summoning at once all his caution and his firmness, for he was, by no means, deficient in personal or moral courage—thus pursued his diplomatic discourse:—

'In a word, Sir Hugh Willoughby, I am your kinsman, therefore you will admit of no unworthy blood. I am, moreover, hereditarily your friend. I am so at this moment, by earnest disposition, by the desire to serve, or rather, Sir Hugh, to save you, if you will but give me leave; I am, besides, what the world calls rich. I want not my wealth, but even you will allow it considerable. I possess, besides, claims which, if pushed, must necessarily become troublesome;—observe me, however, I do not mean to push them;—troublesome certainly; perhaps perilous. I am, also, your neighbor; and in addition to all this, Sir Hugh, what touches the present matter nearly, your junior, by full twelve years. Here, then, you have a man, rich, friendly, well born, not without credit in high places, and, moreover, not an old man, as you well know, offering to make, in these perilous times, a close alliance with your house—an alliance, Sir Hugh, it had best be spoken plainly, and at once, by marriage. I, Miles Garrett, offer myself as suitor for your daughter's hand.'

Sir Hugh Willoughby wheeled his horse almost across the narrow road, and while his heart swelled within him, almost to bursting, and his massive frame trembled with ungovernable fury at this most unexpected master-piece of audacity, he stared at the unabashed delinquent with a scowl of the fiercest wrath.

'My daughter!—my daughter!—to you! at last he muttered, in accents almost choked with fury—to you, a scoundrel whose very presence I could scarce bring myself for one forgetful moment to tolerate—whose very name I execrate! Traitor to your friends, apostate from your God, consummate miscreant, monster and destroyer, dare to pollute my daughter's name once more, and I pistol you that instant where you sit.'

CHAPTER VII.—MILES GARRETT'S MESSAGE.

Miles Garrett, though no very impetuous man, was not proof against the torrent of insult and opprobrium thus suddenly and unexpectedly discharged upon him. The color fled from his cheeks, and then the tide of rage returning darkened his face in livid streams, and with a motion as quick as light, he half drew his rapier from its sheath; with a passionate effort of self-restraint, however, he dashed it back again, and waiting for an instant to recover his self-possession with a hideous sneer:—

'Very well, sir; we'll see who is the loser, you or I—a little time will show. As for me, I take the matter coolly enough, as you see, more calmly even than you do: nor shall you move me, by all your oratory, to raise my voice above its accustomed level, or to draw my sword, as others might, in a like case, do against your life. Happily, I have learned to control the foolish impulses of passion, otherwise, fore God! one or other of us should have left his life-blood on these stones: we are reserved, therefore, for our respective destinies. These are changeable and perilous times, Sir Hugh; none knows to-day what to-morrow may bring; and so, sir, I leave you to your reflections and to your doom.'

Having uttered this last word with a menacing emphasis and significance, he turned his horse up the road which led toward Lisnmoor, and without looking back again, he rode away at a sharp trot through the overhanging trees, and under the radiance of the moon, which now began to shine in the cloudless sky.

The abruptness of a steep ascent on a sudden, compelled him to slacken the pace at which he travelled, and instinctively pausing, as the far-off clang of the horse-shoe, whose tread was measuring Sir Hugh's retreat, rang faintly upon his ear, he looked down upon the broad plain from the summit of the hillock, and following with his eye the winding of the river, now shimmering like silver in the moonlight, his gaze at last rested upon a dark mass of building which crested the river's bank, and the summits of whose towers and chimneys were touched in silvery relief by the sailing moon. As he looked upon this distant pile, he drew up his gaunt figure to its full height, and while a bitter smile of infernal spite and triumph lit up his sinister features, made more appalling by the stillness and solitude of the surrounding scenery, he sternly muttered through

his clenched teeth, from time to time, such sentences as these:

'Towers and battlements, high walls and strong gates, grand things all to look upon; but will they keep out wreck and ruin?—will they quash a bill of indictment?—will they free your neck from the halter, or save your lands from forfeiture? Hearth and home, reeking kitchen and glowing hall—pleasant things, Sir Hugh—right pleasant things, with honest faces and safe company—but scarce so pleasant, methinks, with such unbidden guests as may look in on you to-morrow night, to share their jollity. Mill and weirs, bars and dove cots, turf and corn, and the rest of your rich substance, well builded, and long in gathering, too, may yet be quickly spent and spoilt, Sir Hugh, as you shall find—you shall; and so you'll learn at last—too late, old dotard—the full and dire effect of your intemperate rashness; frantic possession were its better name. The fool who dashes from his lips the one specific, which has power to drive the poison from his veins and save him—is a sage, compared with thee. The wretch who, weary of the world, cuts his own throat, is not more obviously his own destroyer than you, in your malignant blindness. Driveller! you have flung from you your last offer of salvation. The chance that by a thousand lucky accidents your good genius this day proffered you—in your immeasurable presumption, and your transcendent folly, you have spurned; and now shall ruin—in every terrible shape, from every side converging, pour down on you and yours, till there remains not, of all your wealth, and pride, and insolence a wreck or vestige. My sword, Sir Hugh, spared you to-night, that I might launch at your house and life a vengeance so stupendous that it will hurl you and your fancied greatness, like a thunder-blasted tower, into dust.'

He lifted his arm for a moment in an attitude of menace, and in the next he was once more, and at a rapid pace, pursuing his solitary night ride.

As Miles Garrett followed his homeward way through the misty shadows hung by wild hedges and straggling timber across the narrow road, he paced the tall, lean figure of a female, wrapt in a cloak of red cloth; her lank form was curved with age or bodily deformity; she carried a staff of blackthorn in her bony hand, but less, as it seemed, for support than for effect, for she often smote the stones of the road, and often the stooping boughs of the overhanging wood in malignant wantonness, as it seemed, while she advanced with long and leisurely strides over the unequal road. Her hood flapped in the light breeze, and occasionally disclosed a sharp hooked nose and the bowl of a short tobacco-pipe, from which she drew thin clouds of the narcotic vapor, which perfumed the chill night air.

As the grim horseman rode by, almost grazing her shoulder with his jack-boots, so closely did she keep the centre of the narrow road, she whined a mendicant petition, which degenerated into a fierce and bitter curse, as he, sullen and unheeding, pursued his way.

'Wisha! one little penny, Miles Garrett, agra, an' th' ould woman 'll be pravin' for you night and mornin', an' may—it's never mindin' he's keepin', the thatching picin! Ride away, and the widdy's curse behind you—you black, ill-lookin', lean, unlucky scoundrel; may the garron come down and crack your long neck in the piper's quarry, you yellow naiger; an' if you ever get back may you carry the Phooeca home on your shoulders—you shkamin', double-tongued, poison-faced dog, you! Oh! blur an' agers! it's stoppin' you are, is it?—an' it's plenty iv stoppin' an' slanderin' I wish you this blessed night. Turnin' round, is it?—may you never find the way home, you down-lookin' villain;—doesn't the world know you, what sort you are?—as bad as your murderin' ould cousin, Willoughby the hangman; bad luck to every mother's skin iv you, seed, breed, and generation—the bloody pack iv yez—may ye cuttin' one another's throats; it's all yez are fit for. Aia what's that? It's beck'nin' he is—it's a changin' your tune you are, afther all, is it?'

As she thus spoke, she quickened her pace, and advanced to meet Miles Garrett, who was now slowly retracing the intervening space which he had lately passed at so sharp a pace.

'Peg Maher,' he said, gruffly, as he approached, 'is that Peg Maher?'

'Ah, then, who else id be in it, agra? she responded it with a whine, 'it's the poor widdy, sure enough, wid no one to help her but the fatherless innocent, that's more in her way with his trick'n' an' his nonsense, God help him, than anything he's good for, the crathur.'

'There—there's a shillin', he interrupted, in the same gruff tone, as he dropped the coin into her hand.

'Wisha, my blessin' an' you night an' mornin', Miles Garrett, acushla,' said she, as she glanced from the coin, which glittered on her smoke-dried palm into the face of the donor, with an undisguised expression of wonder and curiosity. 'The widdy's blessin' be about you an' yours this night.'

She looked inquiringly in his face, for he had reined in his horse, and now sat motionless in his saddle, gazing upon her with a scowl of profound and, as it seemed, malignant thought.

'Peg Maher,' he continued, abruptly, after a pause of some seconds, 'I'll make that shilling a crown, if you do a message for me safely.'

'Begorra, it's a far message, an' a heavy one, the poor widdy would not carry for a crown piece, Misther Garrett, agra,' she rejoined, with alacrity; 'an' for safety, just lave that to myself—that's all.'

Without heeding her, he muttered thoughtfully, 'It mustn't be to Willoughby himself—the hot-headed old bully might frighten the hag into confessing whom she had it from—no, his right-hand man will answer better.'

And turning to the old woman again, he said, in a changed tone, 'You must tell old Tisdall, of Drumgunnill—observe my words, old woman—that his own house and Glindarragh castle will be rifled and burnt on to-morrow night, unless he and Willoughby gather their friends—you understand me—and defend themselves; just say so much and no more. If you mention one word of your having seen or met with me, you had better make up your mind to quit the country, for I'll undoubtedly make it too hot to hold you; do you understand me, witch?'

'An' how could I but ondherstand you, darlin' gentleman?—to be sure I do,' rejoined she; 'never spake to Peg Maher, if I don't carry the message right. That's enough—honor bright, an' no deludin'.'

Without further interchange of words, Miles Garrett flung the broad silver piece upon the road before her, and rode rapidly away. She picked up and examined the coin in the moonlight, and ringing her earnings together in her joined hands, she wagged her head exultingly, and, with a chuckle, muttered as she watched the receding form of the horseman—

'A crown an' a shillin', aisy earned, by gannies, an' for nothing else but mischief, as sure as my name's Peg Maher; for wherever it lies, an' whatever it mains, I know by his face, an' I know by his nature, there's mischief galore in Dark Garrett's message. Let them fall out; the blacker the better; let them be plunderin' aich other, an' cead mile failthe; they robbed and slaughtered us long enough, an' now, like the wild dogs, when there's no more left for them to tear an' devour, they only turn to one another. She sat down on the bank by the road side, and continued, in a changed tone, 'Oh! Shamus, mavourneen, did I ever forget you?—don't think it, my darlin'; I'm your own Peggy still—your own Peggy bawn, that you married an' loved—that was your young wife for two years, my darlin'. Did I ever lave you, Shamus, all the time you wor on your kep'n?—wasn't Peggy beside you in the woods of Aherloe, ma bouchal dhas, and didn't you sleep with your head in her lap on the side of Galtie More—oh! cushla machree, an' didn't we dar' the storms together, my darlin'? an' the hunger an' cowl, for Peggy was your first love and your last; an' when they killed you—killed you, my beautiful, undaunted boy, didn't Peggy—your own Peggy bawn—hold your head on her cowl knees for a day and a night; the way she used when you were sleepin' in the wild gilas and the mountains, Shamus laudher, ma bouchal breaigh, with no one but herself to guard you—until the sinces left me, and the neighbors carried me, God knows where, away from my darlin'—for, livin' or dead, I'd cling to you, Shamus; and afther your head was laid in the clay—then, when our first child was born, the poor innocent—oh! wasn't my heart hopin' I might die in the pains? that I might be with my darlin' again. Oh! Shamus, my husband!—my darlin' three-hearted boy! sure I'm thinkin' of you every minute that goes, an' promisin' an' prayin' my bouchal breaigh, that the time will come round yet, when I'll see your murderers hunted and harried from the hills to the woods, an' from the woods to the glens, an' back again—with no shelter from the winter's wind but the mountain car-rigs an' the brakes by the bog side. It's comin' yet; it's comin'—I see it comin'!'

She rose hastily, and climbed to the top of the bushy bank which overlooked the road, and as suddenly resuming her wonted accents of harsh and querulous discord, she shrilly called—

'Shaun—Shaun—you big omadhaun, will I never make you folly me. Shaun dhas, will you come, I tell you, or, by gannies, I'll lay this switch across your back.'

CHAPTER VIII.—OF PEGGY TINDAL AND HER PURTAN UNCLE—OR THE RUINED ABBEY OF GLINDARRAGH, AND OF THOSE WHO WALKED AMONG ITS GRAVES BY MOONLIGHT.

Meanwhile, Percy Neville, being left to his own devices, donned his hat and gloves once more, and prompted by the curiosity of idleness, loitered forth into the castle yard, and thence through the high-arched, frowning gateway, into the steep road, descending towards the old bridge which his fair cousin had so lately traversed. He turned, however, in the opposite

direction, and mounting the high grounds which overhung this abrupt declivity, he soon commanded the broad, bold prospect which spread, away for many a mile of wood and pasture and heathy bog, in one vast undulating plain, even to the feet of the far-off dim blue hills.

He looked round on this wide landscape with all its softened shadows and sunset glories expanding beneath and around him, and felt the freshening breeze which swept its broad extent and heard the wild and varied harmony of nature and all the pleasant sounds of rural life. The loving of kine and the distant singing of maidens floated upward, mingling with the many voices of the river and the hushed melody of the wind, to his rejoicing ear. Shrivell, but softly, harped the grey branches of the aged ash, and freshly rustled the thick ivy on the tower walls, in the exulting breeze. The innocent whistlings of the small birds, and the kindly cawing of the soaring crow winging to his far-off retreats in the shadowy wild-wood—all filled his senses with an unknown delight as he rambled onward, until at last, crossing a low and broken fence, he found himself in the great old orchard, whose overgrown and hoary apple-trees rivalled the monarchs of the forests in size—some half decayed, some by storm or leaven blast left of their lordliest boughs, but all gigantic and picturesque.—The sloping ground over which they spread was drawn into furrowed undulations by the rugged gripe of the spreading, moss-grown roots, and darkened by tangled boughs of the ancient fruit-trees, through whose grey and furrowed trunks the ruddy light was solemnly streaming.

The transition from the feelings which he was just attempted to describe, to melancholy, is easy and frequent; and Percy Neville, albeit unthought of the melting mood, did feel his heart touched with somewhat of the softness and the sadness of more sensitive and passionate natures, as he rambled onward through the natural cloisters of these huge old trees—a temperament which predisposed him, perchance, to impressions of a sweet and earnest kind, as passing a low mound which had once divided the extensive orchard into two distinct and independent enclosures, but was now no more than a gentle grassy bank, furrowed, unequal, and clothed in many places with straggling branches, he beheld the scene which we shall now describe.

As he ascended this bank, he heard at the other side the prattle of voices, and, on looking over, he beheld two or three country girl milking a group of cows, and, farther among the trees, several tattered urchins driving more kine upward, towards the party gathered there. A group more peaceful, rural, and harmonizing better with this present tone of feeling, could hardly have been presented, yet his eye rested upon it but for a moment. A form, simple and homely in all the accidents of dress and ornament, but, as it seemed to him, surpassing in grace and loveliness all that he had ever yet beheld, stood close before him, and a little aloof from the rest; it was the figure of a maiden—very young she seemed—perhaps seventeen years had passed over her, but no more; her small, classic head was quite uncovered; her hair was dark, dark brown, and soft and glossy as the finest silk—its rich folds gathered at the back by a small golden bodkin, and parting in front over her artless and beautiful forehead.—Her's was a countenance, once seen to be long remembered—not so much, perchance, for the exquisite symmetry of its features, peerless as they were—nor for the dark, melancholy eyes, which, full of beautiful expression, looked from beneath the shadow of her long lashes in such deep, soft eloquence—as for the matchless and ineffable grace and sadness that pervaded every look of that pale and lovely face; a saddened radiance from the innocent, deep, warm heart dwelt in its pale beauty; in its loveliness, trembled the loveliness of her own guiltless affections, and, smiling or pensive, in every change of her sensitive face—and they were ever varying, as the gently sparkling dimples of some shadowy, wild well—there spoke the same deep, tender loveliness—the same touching harmony of beauty and expression, which moved the heart with pity joy, and melancholy—softly, as might the thrilling strain of some sweet, old song. The grace and elegance of her form accorded meetly with the beauty of her face; tall, slight, and exquisitely symmetrical—a gracious gentleness and modesty, a simple dignity and ease moved in her every action, and made every gesture and attitude beautiful. She wore a red cloak of finer cloth than that employed by the peasant girls in theirs; and one of her small and slender feet, enclosed in a high shoe, buckled across the instep, was shown a little in advance of the drapery of her mantle, as she stood listening to the melody which one of the girls was singing while she plied her task.

'Beautiful—beautiful creature!' said Percy Neville, as he gazed upon this unexpected apparition.

He was not, however, long an undetected