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TURLOGH O'BRIEN;

OR,
THE FORTUNES OF AN IRISH SOLDIER.
CHAPTER XXXII.—THE ANSWER.

It was not until they had nearly reached the statue by which she had taken her stand, that the king became aware of her presence.

"Whom have we here?" he said, with good-humored surprise, as he paused within a few paces of the girl, and gazed with some curiosity, and obviously not a little admiration upon her; "*par ma foi, c'est une jolie fille,*" he continued, looking towards his grave companion, who had lowered his eyes demurely to the ground. The king turned his gaze again full upon the shrinking girl, with that bold look of undisguised admiration which had earned for him, in his earlier days the reputation of being the most conspicuous ogler at court. "By my word, good father, I incline to think the true divinity had descended in person to shame these counterfeit Graces of lead and stone, and tempt me from your colder orthodoxy into the charming follies of the antique worship. What say you, father: are you, too, a proselyte?" he added, gaily, laying his hand upon his companion's shoulder; "are you, too, in danger?"

Father Petre answered not, but lowered his head, it might be about an inch more, with an almost imperceptible shake of grave disapprobation.

"My liege," said the girl, while the color which his bold criticism had called to her cheek again returned, leaving her features almost as pale as marble, and at the same time approaching and extending a folded paper in her hands, "if your majesty will graciously be pleased to read this petition, you will learn briefly the subject of my humble supplication."

James removed his glove gallantly, and taking the paper in his finger and thumb, held it up, and waved it warningly at her with a smile, as he said:

"I see how it is, I would stake my life on't: a place for some clever young fellow who needs but experience to turn out a capital financier; or, let us see, rather a commission for a brave gentleman, who asks but opportunity to prove a hero and a general? What say you, father, have you read aright our fair petitioners memorial in her eyes?"

"My liege, it is no such matter," he began. "By my faith, then, we are at fault," said the king, raising his eyebrows, and good-humoredly shaking his head; "you have baulked our penetration, and for a penance, we will have these open the matter to us by word of mouth."

"I will do so, may it please your majesty," said the girl, spiritedly. "I am the daughter—the only child—of Sir Hugh Willoughby, a true subject of your Majesty, accused of treason by false witnesses, and now condemned to die."

The king's face darkened ominously as she spoke, and he interrupted her by saying, coldly—

"We will read the paper—we will read it."

James walked slowly away, as he deliberately unfolded the petition and paused, while he read it; then walked on a pace or two further, and read a little more.

In all the sickening uncertainty of suspense, meanwhile, did poor Grace Willoughby watch his movements, striving to read in every look and gesture some ground of hope. James had walked some twenty yards away, in this desultory and broken fashion, when, at length he turned to the Jesuit who accompanied him, and placing his arm within his companion's, continued to walk down the trim alley, evidently conversing upon the topic which was, at that moment, making the heart of the poor girl flutter and throb, as though its pulsations would choke her. She saw them again pause, while the king read the petition through, and while he was thus employed, to her extreme surprise, the Duke of Tyrconnel entered the walk, and with the suavity of a courtier, and the confidence of a favorite, approached his royal benefactor.

They stopped and conversed together, in a little knot, at the far extremity of the terrace. The king handed the paper to Tyrconnel, who returned it, with a brief remark or two, and James having said a few words more, folded it, and coolly placed it in his pocket.

"It is decided now, one way or other," exclaimed the poor girl, as she watched, with an intensity of suspense little short of agony, the proceedings of the little group. "God grant it may be favorable. O yes! yes—it must be so—for see, they are laughing; thank God—thank God—they could not, I think they could not laugh so pleasantly, were it otherwise."

Her agitation was so extreme, that she was on the point of hurrying to the spot where the king was standing, to hear, at once, his answer to her prayer. "She feared, however, that the least precipitation might be construed into a want of respect, and so perhaps, fatally prejudice her suit; and rather than encounter, even in imagination, a risk so tremendous, she waited patiently

where she stood, until the king, in his own good time, might please to release her from the anguish of her doubts. Unhappily for her, James appeared now to have fallen upon a subject which peculiarly interested him, for his gestures became animated, and he drew in illustration of the matter of his discourse, a sort of diagram with his walking-cane, upon the gravel walk, and lectured thereupon, with a good deal of emphasis—pointing from time to time to different parts of his tracing, while his two companions listened with real or affected interest, and occasionally dropped a question, or remark which furnished the king with new matter of discussion. Nearly ten minutes had elapsed ere the poor girl saw them approach so near that she was now able to overhear what passed.

"It was not exactly so," said the king, again stopping short, "though pretty nearly so: 'tis easily explained. Opdam lay to our leeward, within half-musket shot, as it might be, there—I was standing at the moment by the bulwark, on the quarter-deck, as thus—and had just raised my glass; Muskerry stood, as it might be so, where you, Talbot, now stand; Palmouth scarce a step behind, as it might be, there, where you are, father; and Mr. Boyle, some pretty distance backward, not three steps from the binnacle; all happened, thus, in the same line—at which moment came the enemy's shot, and killed those three brave gentlemen; the ball, as I calculated, must have passed some four, perhaps five inches less than two feet from my shoulder."

"I've heard it reckoned by those who had the honor to serve on board with your majesty," said Tyrconnel, "at something less than a single foot."

"I will not be positive," said the king, evidently not displeased with the suggestive correction; "I will venture to aver, however, the distance was not more than I have said."

"Tis such narratives," said Father Petre, with a shake of the head, and a well-acted shudder, "which realise to us, timid sons of peace, the true dangers and terrors of battle; one such escape, methinks, might find a man gravity and caution for the remainder of his days."

"Tut, tut, father," said James, gaily but withal proudly, "'tis but the fortune of war, and a sailor who has been in a few hot fights, if he be fit for his calling, will witness such casualties as coolly as he would the shooting away of a spar, or the cutting of a shroud; not indeed," he added, in a graver tone, and crossing himself with an expression of devotion, in which, it must be confessed, a very obvious irradiation of vanity still lingered—not but that a good Catholic, wherever he be will, in all deliverances, look up with gratitude and love to Almighty God, and to his blessed saints. But, by my faith, we had clean forgotten the matter of this petition of Sir Hugh Willoughby's," he said, abruptly breaking off, as his eye chanced to encounter the form of Grace Willoughby, who now stood close by him.

He took the paper from his coat pocket, along with a pocket-book, in which, with a pencil, he seemed to take a note of its contents, and, after folding it up again, with a few brief remarks, he advanced slowly towards the poor girl, with a look of dark and haughty severity on his face, which ominously contrasted with the gaiety and affability with which he had accosted her before.

"We have read the petition, young lady," he said, with cold gravity, "which you have given into our hand, praying that we would extend our royal clemency to your unhappy father, Sir Hugh Willoughby. It is a bold prayer, considering, alike, the straits and troubles of these times, and the nature of the crime for which he stands convicted; and yet so far from wishing him, or any other of our subjects ill—there lives not that soul, even amongst the greatest and most unnatural of our enemies, against whom we harbour, so God be our stead, the least malice or revenge; and were we merely to consult the promptings of our own heart, we would, indeed, rather say to all our rebellious subjects (and God wot they are many), live and repent, than die in your iniquity. But alas! it is not with governors and rulers, as with other men; the safety of the body politic, and the discipline of the national manners, good government, law, subordination, peace, and prosperity, all hang upon the acts and words of kings; what might be gentleness and mercy in common men would be but weakness, nay, criminality in them; and as the king is the anointed of God Almighty, and, by Him, consecrated to his high office, it becometh him, as God's chief magistrate on earth, in distributing his judgments, to have a strict regard to that spirit in which the Almighty administers his own, namely, for a warning and prevention; by the terrors of occasional punishment, to coerce the ill-disposed into the ways of peace and honesty; this is as much the duty of the king as to forgive. Wherefore, and considering all the attending circumstances, we are obliged to refuse the prayer, and in your father's case, to suffer the law to take its usual course."

James spoke this formal, and, to the poor girl, most terrible address, with much gravity and discreet emphasis, but withal, as phlegmatically, as though it were no more than a mere lecture upon the abstract question of divine right and royal prerogative; and, having concluded, he was turning coldly away, when she cried, in a tone of sudden and thrilling agony—

"Stay, my liege; in the name of God, I conjure you, stay and hear me."

The king turned upon her, once more, the same forbidding look of cold displeasure.

"Young woman," interposed Tyrconnel, imperiously, "'tis neither seemly nor respectful thus to importune his majesty; do you not see—can you not perceive this urgency is unbefitting not to say indecent?"

"Nay," said the king, waving his hand backward in gentle reproof; "if the young lady has any matter to urge, as yet undisclosed to us—and pertinent to this petition—God forbid we should turn from her, and refuse a hearing. Proceed, then," he continued, turning again towards her, "if there be any matter of fact or argument omitted here, and he tapped the paper which he had just perused, 'let us have it,?' God's name, and speedily?"

"My liege," she said, "I am unskilled in argument; take pity on me; I can but pray for mercy. Oh, my liege, hear me, pleading for my father; and in your own troubles, may God incline your children to plead for you!"

"His majesty has already restricted you, young lady, to arguments and facts," interrupted Tyrconnel, who dreaded the effect of an allusion to his children—the only topic by which, through selfish channels enough, it must be confessed, the heart of the king was easily assailable; "you are but wasting his majesty's time and patience, in thus recurring to mere importunity."

"He speaks the truth," said the king; "we desire to know, simply, whether you have any new matter to add to that stated in this paper. We have conceded much in suffering this irregular intrusion thus far; we cannot consent to be detained by mere solicitation."

"My liege," she continued, with imploring earnestness, "the great God, the King of kings, the Judge of all the earth, before whom, at the last day, you and he shall stand to receive your everlasting doom, He knows that my father is entirely innocent of this crime. My liege, my liege, have mercy, and may your judge be merciful to you."

The king turned petulently from her as she spoke; and in the wildness of her agony she threw herself upon her knees before him.

"For pity's sake—for God's sake," she cried, almost frantically; "consider—think; it is innocent blood they seek to shed—the innocent blood that cries up before the throne of God for vengeance. My Lord Tyrconnel—good priest—oh, sirs, speak for me, he will hear you!"

Tyrconnel raised his eyes, and Father Petre lowered his meekly; and at the same moment the king interrupted the girl's melancholy appeal by saying, curtly—

"It cannot be; once for all, young lady, we tell you it cannot be; and desire you plainly to take your answer."

"Oh! no, no, no, my liege—for 'pity's sake' cried the poor girl, distractedly.

"Nay, damsel, this is scarce seemly," said the king, peremptorily, and at the same time disengaging the skirt of his coat, which in her agony she had grasped, "and only to be excused on the score of your unripe experience. We decide no matter with undue haste, and, having decided once, and upon sufficient reasons, we do not lightly change. It is determined in this case the law shall take its course; and, if we urge not the execution of the sentence on an early day, we expect not to be troubled for our forbearance."

The king turned austerely away, and terrified by the dreadful threat faintly implied in his closing sentence, she made no further effort to detain him.

Heart-sick and trembling, she followed him and his companions, with her eyes, as they slowly passed onward upon the broad walk which formed the royal promenade, and marked their careless gestures and easy laughter, as they renewed their light conversation; and then, scarce knowing whether she went, she turned in the opposite direction, and finding herself, after a few minutes alone, in a sequestered alley, she sat herself down upon a block of stone, under the shadow of the dark evergreens, and found relief in a burst of bitter tears.

CHAPTER XXXIII.—SWEET WORDS AND TEARS, AND FLOWERS.

We left Grace Willoughby seated mournfully in the Castle garden, in a lonely alley; among the trim, dark yews. She had dried her tears, and was sitting dejectedly, with drooping head and clasped hands, upon the rude moss-grown fragment of rock which she had chosen for her seat; when she was recalled from her reverie by a deep manly voice, close beside her.

"I have been seeking you," said Turlogh O'Brien, for he was the speaker—"I have been seeking you, Mistress Grace Willoughby, and grieve to find you thus sorrowfully. It is, then, as we feared; the king has rejected your suit."

"He has rejected it," said poor Grace, in a tone so piteous, that it touched the young soldier's heart. "Ah! what shall I do now? I fear—I greatly fear it is all over."

"Nay," said Turlogh, in a tone that was almost tender—"do not despair: it is but a first defeat—and many resources remain yet untried. I have friends—powerful friends; all their interest and my own—every influence that I command—shall be to the utmost exerted."

She looked up, to thank him, and, as her eyes encountered his ardent gaze, they dropped again, and, instead of speaking, she blushed, and every moment more and more deeply.

"You have too long misunderstood me, Mistress Grace," he continued in the same ardent and melancholy tone, and, at the same time, seated himself upon the high bank beside her, that his softened voice might distinctly reach her.

"A descendant—the last, it may be, of an ancient and unfortunate house, relinching their outcast and ruined fortunes, in some sort, to the deeds and daring of your ancestors;—nay, I will say it—educated, as I have been in the abhorrence of your race—I came hither with a heart charged with wrath and vengeance against your family—full of the darkest passions of that ancient feud; but all—all—all that is changed now."

As the sweet and melancholy tones of the young man's voice fell upon her ear, her head was turned a little away; but he saw that she blushed and trembled more and more every moment, while her white fingers straying among the moss and grass, unconsciously plucked the wild flowers that grew beside her.

"It is, indeed, all changed," he continued, passionately—"changed almost from the moment when I saw you first. You must not be angry with me—you are not angry? I cannot—cannot refrain from speaking; having spoken so far, I must speak all. From the time I saw you first, you have haunted me in my waking thoughts, spite of all my struggles; and, in my dreams, you have been alone all the joy, and all the sorrow of my existence. Yes, dear, dear Grace, I do, passionately, with my whole heart, fondly love you."

He had taken her hand, and held it fervently, while her color shifted momentarily from deadly pale to glowing crimson. She attempted to withdraw it, and arose, while a thousand, thousand thrilling thoughts and emotions were crowded into that brief interval of silence; and still holding her hand, while his cheek—that cheek which had never blanched for all the terrors of battle—was pale as death, he passionately pursued his impetuous discourse:—

"Yes, I love you, dear, dear Grace; I love you, as you will never meet another capable of loving you again; as I have loved but once and never; never can love more. Nay, do not, do not turn away; nay, suffer me to hold your dear hand for this brief minute—the first time—it may be for the last time—in my life. Hear me thus, then, tell you how I love you—even though the tale be told in vain; and say, dearest, ah, say if you can ever—dare I hope it—ever, ever love me in return?"

As he concluded, she withdrew her hand. Such were the confusion and tumult of her feelings, that she dared not, and could not frame an answer; but one look in her pale face told him truly he was loved again. He took her cold, trembling little hand once more; he held it fondly—for she now did not draw it away—but she tried once more to speak; and, instead of speaking—poor, pretty Grace—she fainted away.

Unmoved, unconscious, the loved burthen lay in his arms; and, as he looked in her pale face, and saw the color returning, Turlogh O'Brien had never known what it was to be really proud and happy before.

"Is it—is it all a dream?" at length she softly said.

"No, dearest, no," he said as softly, but with most passionate tenderness; "no dream—no illusion—but truth—reality—to me the proudest and the brightest that has ever been. Look, dearest, look up into my face; it is I, Turlogh, your lover—I who stand beside you—Turlogh O'Brien, your own true lover, who would rather lose a thousand lives than this dear hand—aye, who would rather perish where he stands than forget even one sweet look of yours."

As he thus spoke, her full heart at last found relief, and the bright tears gathered in her down cast eyes, and fell softly and silently among the wild flowers in her lap.

How absorbing was the proud, unutterable rapture of that minute—how unlooked for, through the desolate darkness of that hour, shone out this sudden, tender gleam of deepest happiness. Like an unexpected momentary glow of evening sun breaking through a sky of storm, and

pouring its radiance through wet leaves and drooping boughs; where, as the eye wanders, lost in the clear perspective of the opening glades the birds sing sweetly, and flowers shimmer bright as though they had never been overcast by the terrors and the gloom of tempest. Thus, for a moment, in the thrilling joy of that happy, happy interview, were forgotten the troubles, the fears, the agonies of the hour before.

But, perchance, we have already tarried too long over these gentle passages of love. It is, after all, but a cold task, recording scenes like these. Words will not do it, because no words spoken in such moments ever yet equalled the heart's emotions, from which they sprung—feelings which are, indeed, unutterable—while eyes and tones may tell, but common language never. What more was told by words and looks in that sweet, passionate conference, it were idle to record; suffice it to say, that when they arose to depart, they had exchanged the mutual truth of lovers.

CHAPTER XXXIV.—THE MESSENGER.

Meanwhile, in his gloomy chamber, Sir Hugh was not alone. His faithful agent, Caleb Crooke, sat with him; deep and anxious was their consultation.

"It is important—most important," said the attorney, toward the close of their conference, "that the deed of settlement should be placed safely in my hand. It is the only security—the only provision your poor child possesses. Should these villains, whom I suspect to be at the bottom of your prosecution, urge their victory to its murderous issue, this document secures your daughter against spoliation—and as he spoke he wrung his old patron's hand. "God grant—God in his mercy, grant it may not be so; but it is ever safest to look at the worst aspect of affairs, and guard not only against what is probable, but what is possible too. 'The deed is now in Glendarragh; can you say exactly where?'"

"Yes, the very spot," said Sir Hugh; "but how to get a bold and trusty messenger—"

"Hush—whom have we here?" interrupted the old knight. "Ha, my poor girl," he continued, fondly, but at the same time bitterly, as his daughter, followed by Turlogh O'Brien, entered, the sombre chamber; "I see full well how you have sped—even as I predicted. Put not your trust in princes, my child; there is One, and but One, to whom we may look with confidence, even in the worst of troubles. He can deliver me, if it be His will, though all the power of this world were leagued against me; and without the shield of His protection, with kings and armies on our side, we are not safe. Therefore, upon the God of all might and all mercy, in this sore extremity, I only and entirely rely."

Too much agitated and embarrassed to speak, Grace remained silent; but Turlogh O'Brien, in a few brief sentences, put Sir Hugh and his companion in full possession of the result of the young lady's mission; and, this done, once more their deliberations turned upon the important document, and the choice of a trusty messenger.

"Would I could offer my services," said Turlogh; "but I must, even to-night, set forth for Londonderry; such are the king's commands."

The now familiar sound of the grating of the bars and bolts which secured the prison door, interrupted him. All eyes were turned anxiously toward the narrow portal; and, to their mingled surprise and relief, Father O'Garra, the young priest whom we have had so often occasion to mention, entered the gloomy apartment.

The opportune appearance of this young man, in whom the old knight felt a degree of confidence for which, even in the momentous conference which he had had with him before, he could scarcely find a warrant, seemed to his excited fancy like a providential solution of his present difficulties; and this impression was, perhaps, heightened and confirmed by the further coincidence, that Glindarragh Castle turned out to be the immediate destination of their visitor. In accordance with the promise he had made Sir Hugh, when last they met in the Carriage, the young priest had now sought an interview with him, previous to his departure from Dublin, to join the regiment (Turlogh O'Brien's), of which he had been appointed assistant chaplain; and which, as the reader is aware, was now quartered in the hereditary mansion of the ill-fated knight of Glindarragh.

Here, then, was a messenger, in all particulars adapted to the mission, secured against the violence of the peasant marauders, by that sacred character, which even the most reckless of the rapparees never failed to respect; and protected from the insolent interruptions of the soldiery by his own demi-military office. Such advantages, backed by his frank offers of service, and by his already approved good will, in such an emergency easily overbalanced whatever scruples, under circumstances less urgent, might have suggested themselves to the mind of the old knight, and determined him finally to entrust to his execution this, to him, most momentous commission.