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SHAWN NA SOGGARTH;

OR, THE PRIEST-HUNTER.

AN IRISH TALE OF THE PENAL TIMES.

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CHAPTER XXXV.

About six months after "The Swallow" had sailed with her freight of compelled or voluntary exiles, Sir Robert was approaching Ffolliot's Grove, to visit its owner. During that interval, the debauched and infatuated conformist, had even increased the riotous extravagances of his living. He was pillaged by his servants, made a fool of by his acquaintance, and gulled on the turf and at the gaming table. In short, from his improvident and reckless habits, his licentiousness and constant state of inebriety, he was a kind of fountain—an impure one, to be sure—from which for every one to draw, according to his circumstances and capability. Nor was there living one who took sufficient interest in him to be at the trouble of endeavoring to slacken or restrain his career of crime and folly.

He was proceeding along the avenue, when he was hailed, from the adjoining hedge, by the girl before named as Ally Higgins, and who was indeed, as Bryan Gavin had expressed it, a bouncing, showy girl, with a fine person, good features and a rich complexion.

Ally, unfortunately for herself, had been reared by a widowed aunt, who, as she neared the bottom of life's hill, became too much attached to whiskey and tobacco. Education was a crime against the vile laws at that dark period; and the household duties in her aunt's cabin, tho' she was now and then, constrained to do some out-of-door work, were too small to occupy the girl's time, so that the seeds of vanity and self-will, largely sown in her disposition, had ample time and opportunity to extend, and overtop whatever good ones might be scattered there.—She was deprived also, by those same vile laws, of the blessed restraint imposed by attention to her religious duties, which has always been so salutary a check to vice, among those in her rank particularly, who are unrestrained by the fear of losing caste and other adventitious checks, that might curb those in the higher sphere.

Instead of the prohibited place of worship, as she grew up, she became a regular attendant at fairs, markets, and wakes, and soon learned to despise the warnings and advice of her aged relative, whose example talked so little with her precepts, and whose own failings, unhappily, came so often under observation. As she advanced to womanhood, too, she ascertained, of course, the fact that she was good looking, and contracted, as a natural consequence, that relish for dress and decoration so ruinous to young females in her class. In short she was a prey peculiarly marked out for the spoiler; and readily she bartered her innocence and reputation for the elder Ffolliot's gold.

Immediately after Arthur's departure, she had been installed into the command of Ffolliot's Grove and the household, as she had been, for some time previously of its owner.

"I have been driven to this," said Ffolliot, to his friend Baker, one day in the mansion, after she had assumed the reins of government there, "by the irreverent conduct of that infatuated boy, who has shown regard, in his folly, neither to himself nor to me, the most anxious of fathers. Yet, for all this unfortunateness, would I not give her the title of his mother."

"The world must understand and appreciate your forbearance; at least, the moral and reflecting portion of it, which is, of course, all you care for," said the attorney, drily. "But take care, Ally," he added, with emphasis;—"women when they once get authority, are as hard to be shaken out of it as a veteran bailiff out of his capion. Besides, you know well, they are sometimes more uncertain than the verdict of a jury, when it's not all of the right sort, particularly, good looking and ignorant girls of the lower class, and when they are visited by lavish young fellows, like Sir Robert and Cornet Beaumont, and have to deal with an old man—excuse me, Bill, but you are getting fast into 'the sere and yellow leaf.'"

Sir Robert, having approached the hedge, began to fling out some coarse and licentious jests, in allusion to her position, which she, fallen creature that she was, rather provoked than repelled; and he was in the act of handing her down from the hedge, that they might walk together, when Ffolliot appeared at the opposite hedge. When the latter saw who was with Ally, the attorney's words flashed strongly on his mind; and, after eyeing the conformist malignantly for a moment he said, addressing Ally, in a tone of wrath—"How dare you, baggage, be seen by any visitor at the Grove? In to your housewifery at once."

"How dare I, is it, Mistor Ffolliot?" she rejoined, indignantly. "I suppose you'll be lookin' us up wan o' those days."

"If you're not instantly in, I shall leave you locked up for a month."

"I dare you, you purse-proud naiger," said the girl, who was naturally of a violent temper, knew well the character of him she had to deal with, and was enraged by the contemptuous manner in which she was treated before Sir Robert. "I dare you—I dare you," she repeated, with vehemence.

"Poo, Mr. Ffolliot," interrupted Sir Robert, "you should not be so hard on poor Ally for speaking to me, as she and I are old acquaintances."

"Ay, and will be agin' whin the ould skinnit is dead and rotten; look me up! I defy him to lay a wet finger on me," and the girl stamped passionately.

"I shall cool you on bread and water, as well as by confinement, for this insolence, you low-lived baggage," said Ffolliot, turning pale with rage.

"Low lived baggage," screamed the girl, the violence of her temper excited to an ungovernable pitch, her eyes flashing fiercely, and her handsome features distorted with excess of passion—"low lived baggage! Maybe I haven't as good blood in my veins as your ould grandmother Pegh Larkin, or your grandfather Liam; an' if I was as mane as the dirt, who'd have anything to do with you, barrin' some outcast as low as yourself; and who'd care you wor banded tomorrow barris for your money? An' if you wor itsel', you wouldn't be the first of the family that spiled a market—low lived baggage! Did you ever hear of one Jim Larkin? eh, Bill Ffolliot, did you?" She concluded, screaming more shrilly, and advancing closer to him, while her hands closed and opened alternately, with an apparent inclination to be fastened in his face.

Ffolliot's countenance alternated from its pale hue almost to blackness, at this last allusion to a maternal granduncle, who had been doomed to an exalted end for having exhibited, on many occasions, an overstrong partiality for taking charge of other men's cattle, without consulting their owners. But before he could speak Sir Robert interfered, keeping down, by some exertion, his bursting laughter.

"Ally," he said, "you must not be so violent; you must forgive Ffolliot and be friends with him again, as you were always good natured, I know."

"Friends with him that called me a low lived baggage," she resumed, with almost as much vehemence as before; "and he'll lock me up, and he'll keep me on bread and wather. Friends with him! Never while my head is hot. But I tell him to his teeth that I'll ait and drink the best in Ffolliot's Grove, while I'm in it, and appear, too, whin any wan comes there that I like. No," she continued, after a moment's pause, "I'll never ait a bit of the ould naiger's bread agin, as long as I'm alive, nor stay another hour unthier his roof."

Under the impulse of this conception, she sprang forward towards the house, doubtless with the intention, at the moment, of putting it into execution.

"To your visit I owe this pleasant scene, which you, no doubt, enjoy so much, Sir Robert," said Ffolliot, after she had disappeared.

"Not at all, Ffolliot. You owe it to your own nonsensical jealousy and violence. Why, until now, I always thought you too good natured a fellow, to shut up so fine a flower as Ally in Ffolliot's Grove, to regale no eye but your own."

"Sir Robert, if your visit is on business, the sooner we despatch it the better; if it is not, we need waste no more words," retorted Ffolliot, with angry bitterness, for he had completely lost, for the time, all his usual prudential control and regard to consequences.

"Why, Ffolliot, are you mad to-day, or do you forget to whom you speak?" rejoined the conformist, in an equal angry tone. "Can yourself and your trail not have a scolding tit, without your unpermitted humors being extended to your superiors?"

A violent altercation now ensued between the well matched pair, in the course of which no measured terms of reviling and reproach were used on either side. Low-lived swindling extortioner, and drunken unprincipled debauchee were among the complimentary expressions frequently bandied from one to the other; and they parted with mutual threats of revenge—and speedy revenge vowed and intended.

Ffolliot returned to his house, where Ally Higgins was busily employed in packing up her wardrobe. The time spent in this occupation had, however, given her leisure to become somewhat cooler and calmer; and, as she looked around at the rich furniture and dresses so completely at her disposal, she began to half repent that she had allowed the violence of her temper

so completely to overmaster all prudence.—Still, however, she calculated that, by spinning out the time in her arrangements, before she would have all ready for her departure, the species of infatuation with which he seemed to regard her, would induce him to make overtures for a reconciliation, notwithstanding all her ill language to him. And she calculated truly; for having stolen on tiptoe twice or thrice, to the door of her apartment, and taken a peep through key hole and crevice, at her occupation, he made the expected overture; and, after some time spent in explanations and feigned objections on Ally's part, the reconciliation was effected at the expense, to Ffolliot, of a new dress and some trinkets that had belonged to his wife.

Sir Robert had set out for Ffolliot's Grove, with far other intentions than of quarrelling with its proprietor. In fact his expenses had become so extravagantly lavish that though the possessor of between two and three thousand a year, like the man in the fable, whose hen laid a golden egg daily, he became impatient of waiting for the regular laying of the eggs in the shape of rents, which truth to say, were not very punctually handed over to him, and came to the determination of having all the gold at once, by selling the property, or at least a large portion of it. Indeed, within the space of the two years during which the property was in his hands, besides having expended as much of the rental as was delivered to him, he had contrived to borrow from Ffolliot six thousand pounds, and from Baker three, on various mortgages, so that, as those worthies began to refuse advancing any more, with his habits, a sale of at least a portion of the property became almost unavoidable; and it was to arrange with Ffolliot on this subject he had left the Hall that morning. The scene before described, and the consequent altercation had, however, completely reversed his intention.

"No, by——," he exclaimed to himself, as he turned his back to Ffolliot's Grove after the altercation, "the insolent Jew of an upstart shall never own an acre of it. I will go forthwith to Baker and give him the preference. Aye, he shall have it a thousand pounds under, as bad as he is, he has some pretensions to be a gentleman. If he won't do it, I must have the sale advertised, tho' I would rather avoid that. Any way the low extortioner shall never write himself owner of a sod of it."

The conformist found Baker, as usual, spectacled and deeply immersed in papers, parchments and statutes. When Sir Robert detailed to him the recent scene at Ffolliot's Grove, and his own object in going there, the attorney observed, in reference to the first subject, seeming to be in no hurry to approach the latter topic, "I should have hardly expected that Bill would allow himself to be hurried so far by passion, as to use such words to you, Sir Robert; at the same time that I must say, that you dashing young fellows, should refrain from approaching the preserves of an infatuated, love-sick boy like my friend Ffolliot."

"Well, at all events, he has shown the cloven foot, and debarred himself from ever being the possessor of an acre of the Lynch estate. What do you say to the purchase, Baker? I have come to give the preference, even at a loss."

The attorney shrugged his shoulders, and observed that it was not easy to come at money, those days.

"Come, come, Baker, I know you can get the money, and you'd better not lose an opportunity such as you'll never be likely to meet with again. Here is a sketch of the portion of the estate I purpose to dispose of, by that clever draughtsman Walker, with a list of the denominations, their content and present rents; and you see by the sketch that, even at the rate it is now let at, it yields a rental of twelve hundred a year. The other portion I shall retain always, as it pays most certainly."

"That is, in other words, Sir Robert," said the attorney, with a grin, "you would give us—I mean the purchaser—the skim milk, and reserve the cream for yourself."

"No, Baker, it won't apply; the rent is ill paid only to me. You would soon enlarge it and make it regular, too, so let us have no more beating about the bush. I have dropped you this visit before I would write to Attorney Grindall, in Dublin, as, if the matter suits, I will close the arrangement myself, without any professional interference, except to perfect the necessary documents. I am no extortionate buggler, and only wish to close on off-handed terms. Aye, I would forfeit a round sum in your favor, if it was only to annoy that swindling dog Ffolliot, that, I know, abominates you as I do a stumbling horse, bad cards or weak brandy."

"Well, Sir Robert, as you are so pressing, I must think of the matter—will you allow me till to-morrow, when I can ride to the Hall and state definitely what I can do."

"To-morrow let me see—no, my shooting

match with Beaumont, for a hundred, comes off on to-morrow; but, the day after, if you'll drop in and dine at the Hall we can arrange, and I can defer writing to Grindall till after."

The conformist now departed to practice for his shooting match the ensuing day; and immediately after his disappearance, Baker took some papers from a drawer, and glancing eagerly over them, though he had read them repeatedly before, exclaimed—"Yes, blast them, they are quite correct. Sir Gerald Lynch must have been a man of business and a sharp fellow, as it was too clear he was one of the few Connaught gentry that had a grant regularly enrolled. He had also the tact (excuse his shrewdness) it is equally clear, to get the grant made general and not restricted to heirs male, so that, failing issue to the baronet, his sister, by conforming, could claim the estates. However, she is at present completely hors de combat, and likely to remain so; and I am convinced that neither Sir John nor Ffolliot is aware of the enrolment of the grant, or its precise form. The whole question is certainly beset with some doubt—a lottery; but the prize would be a rich one, if I could retain those denominations on the terms I could make with the debauched conformist, and ultimately edge myself in for the rest of the property as there can be no doubt but the besotted owner will be compelled to dispose of it also, and that at no distant day."

He paused a moment in deep ratiocination—ran over the papers again—fastened a greedy eye on the sketch, and resumed his soliloquy:—"It is worth the risk and I will venture it. Once in possession, it will not be just so easy to unning a man of intelligence and loyalty like me; and if I can get the lot to be content with the advance of a small portion of the purchase money, (in addition to the three thousand he owes me) for a year or half a year, God knows what might be brought before then. Yes, 'tis a good though homely proverb, that says, 'nothing venture, nothing have,' I will try it."

Accordingly he rode to the Hall, the day after the ensuing one; and its proprietor and himself entered on the business at once.

"Well, what have you been advised to lay the purchase at?" asked Baker, "and remember, Sir Robert, that some of the portion you propose to dispose of is unproductive, and more ill-tenanted."

"No hedging, Baker, you know as well as I do that the greater part of the land designated in the sketch I gave you, is among the primest in the country, and that the proportion of mountain and bog is unusually small. So let us come to the point at once. I have neither got nor asked any advice as to the amount of the purchase money. I have settled all that for myself. There is a rental of twelve hundred a year, granted that some of it is ill-paid now; and as I want to drive no Jew's bargain, but to get money, I have fixed upon a sum that no one, that knows the value of land, would covet at, namely, sixteen thousand pounds, one thousand of which I shall take off, as I vowed to myself you should have it by that sum, cheaper than the old swindler Ffolliot; so that fifteen thousand will be to you the purchase money, out of which you may deduct the three thousand I owe you as payment, as your mortgages are on those lands, while Ffolliot's, you are aware, are on those I am retaining to myself."

Of this sum the attorney found it impossible to induce the infatuated seller to abate a single pound, though he renewed his attacks for that purpose both before and after dinner; and he feared to dwell on the nature of the grant, as he could not depend on Sir Robert's principles, that he might not use it as weapon against himself thereafter. But he did refuse him to take three thousand pounds for the present, with ample security for the payment of five thousand further in six months, and the remaining four thousand in three months after.

It was then arranged that, though the title deeds were to be handed over to Baker on the payment of the first three thousand, he was not to take actual possession of the lands for half a year, as the attorney was not more anxious to get a long day for the payment of the purchase money, than was Sir Robert for the adjustment of his own debts; and he knew well that other creditors, as well as Ffolliot, would instantly pounce on him, if any portion of the property was once beheld in the possession of Baker.

When the necessary deeds were perfected, the three thousand pounds paid down, and security for the remainder given, and the attorney found himself master of the title-deeds of 'all that and those that part of the lands, &c.'

"What a rage Ffolliot will be in," he ejaculated to himself, "when he finds himself out-manœvered. Sir John, though he may be somewhat annoyed, will think less about it, but the interloping money-lender will proceed at once to extremities, unless the conformist idiot keeps his own secrets for a few months, until he may be better prepared."

And he was right, for had Ffolliot the slightest inkling of the negotiation between Sir Robert and himself, he would have instantly commenced law proceedings on the mortgages. But he had no suspicion of such negotiation. So far from it, indeed, that when his passion had cooled down after the altercation, and calculating prudence resumed her sway, he made the most abject apologies for his unwonted and intemperate warmth. Nay, to such length did he proceed with his concession, that he voluntarily offered the conformist an additional thousand as a loan, which was, of course, readily accepted.

Both manœuvres were, however, fated to come speedily to an understanding, by the untimely fate of their intended victim—a fate which the generality of the district attributed to a judgment from heaven for his manifold and striking offences, and which few—very few indeed—regretted.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Early in the Spring after his sister and cousin, with their companions, had departed from their native land, and scarcely three months after he had made the sale to Baker, Sir Robert Lynch was pursuing the fox, mounted on a noble, but fiery and intractable hunter. The day was wet and, before mounting, he had swallowed a considerable quantity of brandy, so that, between the excitement of the liquor and the exercise, before the chase proceeded far, surrounded by his fierce and powerful steed, he rode more like the wild hunter of German superstition than a man of mortal mould.

Walls and hedges and trenches were swept across, as if with a bird's flight. But the ground was a perfect swamp and, powerful as was the action, and immense the endurance of the animal, his powers were over-taxed. Towards the close of the chase, which had been a most exciting one, a high and heavy gate intervened between the bounds, which had just brought the victim to a stand, and Sir Robert, with the few other sportsmen that had kept near him.—The latter had proceeded to search some facile spot for their wearied horses to pass the wall.—But he dashed his own, without an instant's pause, at the gate itself. The tired animal, for the first time during the day, balked, as if for a warning; but a shout of derision rang, or seemed to ring in the doomed rider's ears, and, digging deep the spurs, which had been unrequited all through the chase, the unfortunate animal bounded aloft; but its exhausted strength, and the softness of the ground it rose from, rendered it unable to clear the gate, and, with the fearful scream uttered by a horse in mortal agony, it was impaled on the gate, while its rider was flung on his head against a large and jagged rock, at some yards distance. He was dead in an instant, without having had time to pray, in word or thought, to his often and so grievously offended Creator.

His wake and interment were striking illustrations of the times and character of the conformist himself. Descended from a long line of ancestry, and, but a few hours before proprietor of thousands of rich acres, with his residence abounding in all necessities, it was scarcely with common decency the rites of 'laying out' the corpse were performed. Mourner, there was none among the debauched household. On the contrary, immediately after the body had been borne into the hall, a scene of pillage and drunkenness and uproar commenced, in striking and fearful contrast with the silent death. Money, trinkets, apparel—every article, that could be compressed into a small compass, was grasped at and battled for. The cellar was, of course, entered, and wine and brandy flowed about like streams after summer rains.

Bryan Gavin and Rose Scanlan, (once before alluded to in those pages) both in a state of half intoxication, were in the act of scuffling for a ring, which the deceased (the damsel resisted) had promised to give her, when Mr. Gordon, for the first time since he had come to prevent the duel, entered those walls, contaminated for many months by every species of vice and folly. He was accompanied by his curate and Aaron Andrews, whom he had called upon for that purpose, and, with them, he proceeded to affix seals to the doors and presses, to prevent further spoliation, as well as to give orders respecting the funeral. "This scene Mr. Dixon," said the rector solemnly, "affords melancholy and striking proof how little accession of real strength there is to us in conversion, unless it arise from conviction, and through unworldly motives."

"Aye, but the disrespect paid to the remains of a godless sinner, reared, too, in the lap of idolatry, cannot surely, sir, be adduced as a reason for the toleration of that creed, from which, doubtless, sprung all his vices and crimes; and from the professors of which, I have reason to know, can be expected nothing but deceit and treachery;" the curate added, with bitter emphases, as the drenching and loss of his horse, at the beach near Kiglass, rose to his mind.

"What bears most on my mind, yer reverence