

"Well," replied the stranger, "we are all safe now; and you have satisfied yourself that he was not in the coach that night."

"You might as well tell me," rejoined McGowan, "that the bog is a potato-garden, as that ould Norton was amongst them. I was the first at the coach-door—I fired the first shot."

"Wretch!" muttered the old woman.

"What's that you say?" exclaimed McGowan, rushing to a blunderbuss that lay near him.

"Fool!" said the stranger, interposing, "what would you do? Your good Judith is a pious soul, and is only alarmed for your safety."

"Talker-dash!" said Judith between her teeth, and paced the apartment with her arms folded.

"There's always a woman to cross us," cried McGowan, in a grumble of half-suppressed vexation.

"No more of that," said the visitor. "unless you would destroy us all. We must keep our own secrets, and not quarrel among ourselves." He then drew McGowan to the window, and inquired, in a whisper, if his fire-arms were loaded. McGowan replied in the affirmative.

"Then you must immediately come with me. Norton and his son are expected home to-night. They ride without attendance. They must both die—and I will not confide my plans to a third person. See, I am prepared"—and opening his cloak, he displayed a brace of pistols.

McGowan, who seemed to enter into the plan at once, made a sign of acquiescence, and proceeded to examine the state of his own pistols. After a short preparation spent in trying the locks and triggers, and providing a further supply of ball, he desired Judith to put out the light as soon as they were gone, adding that he would shortly return. The stranger, on leaving the hovel, threw the woman a piece of gold; it fell at her feet, and she shrunk back from it as they left the room.

They proceeded at a rapid pace, interrupted by an occasional and unconnected exclamation, until they reached the boundary of the valley. At the head of it the stranger paused.

"To the right McGowan; did you hear the sound of horses' feet?"

"No," rejoined his comrade; "nor is it likely you will. Do you think he'd ride home in such a night?"

"I know he must, for I despatched a letter after him, forged in the name of his wife, saying that she was taken suddenly ill, and requiring him to return immediately; and by my reckoning he should be near at hand."

They moved on to a bank that was fenced by a hedge, beyond which the high road lay some feet below them. After a sullen examination of the

spot, McGowan, flinging himself on the earth, petulantly inquired: "May I make bold to ask, now that Norton is so near his fate, what has he done to deserve it? To be sure it's no great affair of mine, because he swore away my brother's life in the rebellion; and I have sought him day and night, by pistol and by fire, but in vain. There's a charm over his life; but what is his crime against you?"

"It is engraven on my heart in characters of flame," rejoined the other; "it has been there a quarter of a century. Time has not yet quenched the raging fire—it consumes me—and nothing but his blood can extinguish it. Listen to me patiently, and you shall learn it all. Was that a tread near us?"

McGowan started to his feet, and cocked his pistol. The stranger leaned eagerly across the hedge; but the shrill whistling of the wind was the only sound that reached them. When they resumed their places, the stranger, still standing in the front of McGowan, muffled up in his watch-cloak, proceeded.

"You recollect Fletcher's trial?"

"Augh!" muttered his companion, with a groan of disgust; "I see the old man before me, as his corpse blackened in the air. Many and many a night I went to look at it, until his bones dropped off, one by one, and were ground into dust."

"On that occasion," continued the other, apparently heedless of the commentary, "Norton was concerned in the trial. May my blood turn to jelly when I forsake my revenge! He sat upon me and my name, he was the judge between me and my character; can I forget that?"

"Never mind that, but tell me what he did," exclaimed McGowan, impatiently.

"He was a juror," resumed the stranger; "and when the verdict was agreed upon by his fellows, he insisted that Honor Fletcher should be sent for, and the odium that followed fell upon me."

"Stanley! Stanley!" cried McGowan, in an ungovernable burst of indignation, "you are worse than a fiend. Can you name that name and not tremble? Can you lift your eyes to the red lightnings, and not fear that they will lodge in your heart, for all you did and are doing? And have you not had enough yet?"

"Never, till Norton pays the penalty of what I have suffered; on him and his race shall the blight come heavily. They shall mourn it abroad and at home, and to the last of their days the fear shall be over them."

A distant sound of voices, resembling a shout, caught Stanley's ear; and drawing a pistol from his girdle, and motioning McGowan to do the same, he lay upon the bank, under shelter of the hedge that divided them from the road. The sound