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NELLIE NETTENVILLE;
OR,
ONE OF THE TRANSPLANTED.

By the author of 'Wild Times' 'Blind Agnese,' etc.
CHAPTER XI.—(Continued)

Half an hour before, this had been the hottest and most dangerous position in the church, but O'More had well calculated his chances. The real danger now was from the roof, which, having been burning for some time, might fall at any moment. Below, the fire, having rapidly exhausted the light material upon which it had fed its fury, was gradually dying out, and boldly scattering the fagots upon either side as he moved on. Roger made his way up to the only spot in the building from whence escape was possible. Here the floor sank considerably below the general surface, and dashing down a heap of brushwood which still lay smouldering near, he laid bare an aperture effected in the wall itself, and going right through it to the cliffs beyond.

Through this he passed at once, carrying Nellie as easily as if she had been a baby, and landing her safely on the other side. The people saw, and with a wild cry of hope rushed forward. Even as they did so the roof began to totter. They knew it, and, maddened by the near approach of death, pressed one upon another, blocking up the way and destroying every chance of safety by their wild efforts to attain it.

In the midst of this confusion, a shower, as of red-hot fire, poured down from the yielding rafters. Then came another cry (oh! so different from the last)—a cry of grief and terror mingled—then a crashing sound and a heavy fall—and then a silence more terrible even than the cry of terror—a ghastly, death-like silence, only broken by the hissing and crackling of the flames above and the deep sigh of the sea below—and all was over.

CHAPTER XII.

When first O'More unfolded the cloak in which he had brought Nellie safely through the flames, she lay so white and still that, for one brief, terrible moment, he almost fancied she was dead. The fresh air, however, soon revived her, and opening her eyes, filled with a look of terror which afterwards haunted them for months, she fixed them upon Roger, and whispered nervously:

"Where are the rest—the priest and all?—Where are they?"

"They are with their God. I trust," he answered solemnly. At that awful moment he felt that he could say nothing but the truth, terrible as he knew that truth must sound in the ears of the pale girl beside him. His words, in fact, seemed to cut through her like a knife, and she fell upon her knees, exclaiming, "I only saved—I only saved! O my God, my God! have mercy on their souls!" Then suddenly remembering that, if she were safe, she owed it entirely to Roger, she added earnestly, "You have risked your life for mine. How shall I thank you?"

"By helping me once more to save it," he answered curtly. "Nellie," he went on rapidly, he knew too well that every moment they lingered there was fraught with peril—"Nellie, you are saved, and yet not safe yet! Your life, however, is in your own hands now, and with courage and good trust in Providence, I doubt not we shall pull safely through."

Nellie seemed to gather up her mind for a great effort, and said calmly:

"Only say what I must do, and I will do it."

"The case is this," said Roger shortly: "Yonder tower," and he pointed to the burning pile over head—"yonder tower must fall soon, and, if we linger here, will crush us in its ruins. On the other hand, even if we could creep round to the opposite side of the church, a thing in itself almost impossible, the fanatical demons who guard the gates will probably shoot us down like dogs. The cliff, therefore, is our best—almost our only chance. Nevertheless, I leave the choice in your own hands. Only remember you must decide at once."

"The cliff, then, be it!" said Nellie, with white lips but flashing eyes. "God is more merciful than man. He will save us, perhaps; if not His will be done—not mine. I will trust entirely to Him—entirely to Him and you."

Almost ere she had finished speaking, Roger had undone the rope which he carried round his waist, and was looking eagerly about him for some means of securing it in such a way as to make it useful to Nellie in her descent. Fortunately for his purpose, a thorny tree had planted itself, some hundreds of years before, in a fissure of the rocks so close to the walls of the tower that, old, and gray, and stunted, as it now was, its roots had in all probability penetrated

beneath their broad foundation, and were quite as firmly settled in the ground. Upon this Roger pounced at once, and having tied it sufficiently to make tolerably sure of its powers of endurance, he passed one end of the rope round the thickest and lowest portions of the stem, and made it fast with a sailor's knot. The other end he threw over the cliff, and then watched its fall with a terrible, silent fear at his heart lest it should prove shorter than his need required.—Down it went, and down, and he stooped over to mark its progress, until Nellie felt sick with fear, and turned away to avoid the giddiness which she knew would be fatal to them both.

At last she heard him say, "Thank God, it has reached the platform!" Then he turned round and anxiously scanned her features.

"Nellie," he said, "this thing is difficult, but not impossible. I have seen you bound like a deer down cliffs almost as steep, if not so high. The great, the only real peril, is in the eyesight. Lot's wife perished by a look. You must promise me neither to glance up nor down, but to keep your eyes fixed on the rocks before you. Hold well by the rope; take it hand over hand like a sailor, (I remember that you know the trick;) and leave the rest to me. There is really a path, though you can hardly see it from this spot; and there are clinks and crevices besides, in which you will easily find footing. You must feel for them as you descend, and when you are at a loss, I shall be below to help you.—Neither will you be quite alone, for I am going to fasten you by this cord, so that if you should happen to let go, I may perhaps be able to support you."

"My God!" said Nellie, white with terror, as he passed a strong, light cord, first round her waist and then his own, in such a way that there was length sufficient to enable them to act independently of each other, while, at the same time, neither could have fallen without almost to a certainty ensuring the destruction of both. "My God, I cannot consent to this. Go by yourself; my fall would kill you."

"But you will not fall—you shall not fall," he pleaded anxiously, "if only you will abide by my directions."

"Go alone, I do beseech you!" she answered, with a shiver. "You cannot save me, and I shall but ensure your destruction with my own."

"Nay, then, I give it up," he answered, almost sullenly. "We will stay here and die together; for never shall it be said of an O'More, that in seeking safety for himself he left a woman thus to perish."

"Then, in God's name let us try!" said Nellie; "only tell me what to do, and I will do it—if I can."

"Hold fast the rope, that is all. Never let one hand go until the other has grasped it firmly, and leave the rest to me. I will help to place your feet in safe resting-places as we go down. Only trust me, and all will yet be well."

"I will trust to you, and to God, and our Lady," said Nellie, unconsciously repeating the password of the morning. Her color was rising fast, and her eyes had begun to sparkle with excitement. O'More seized the propitious moment and, almost before Nellie knew it, she had begun her perilous descent.

"Are you steady now—quite steady?" he asked, in a low voice as if he feared to startle the air with motion by speaking louder. Yes! with the natural instinct of a mountain climber Nellie had already found a rough indented spot in which her foot was firmly planted, and he descended a step lower. Thus inch by inch they went, Nellie ever clinging to the rope, and O'More guiding her descent with a success he had hardly looked for, and which he felt to be almost miraculous. His heart at last beat high with hope; for he saw by the distance which they had descended that they must be nearing a sort of platform formed by a sudden bulging out of the lower strata of the cliffs, and he knew that they were safe if they could only reach that spot, the rest of the path being so well marked that, even without his aid, Nellie could easily have found her way from thence to the sands beneath.

But the surge of the sea boomed louder and louder as she approached it, and at last, fairly forgetting Roger's caution, she turned her head a little and glanced downward. Then for the first time, she became fully conscious of the terrible position she occupied, suspended as it seemed by a very thread between earth a sky, and with the great, deep, awful ocean rolling hundreds of feet below her. Her head swam, her eyesight failed her, she had just enough presence of mind left to grasp the rope firmly by both hands, when, feeling as if her senses were utterly deserting her, she cried out:

"O my God! I am going! Save me, Roger, I am going!"

"No, no!" he cried, in agony, for he knew only too well the danger of the thought. "Hold fast—hold on; for Christ's dear sake, hold on!"

One step—two steps more, and you are safe.—"There!" he cried, in a voice hoarse with emotion, as he felt his own foot touch the platform; and seizing Nellie by the waist, he drew her, hardly conscious of what he was doing, by main strength to his side. "There, oh! thank God—thank God, you are safe at last!"

He was just in time. Nellie had that very moment let go the rope, and, if he had not caught her, would inevitably have been dashed to pieces on the rocks below. As it was, he landed her safely and gently on the ledge where he himself was standing, and without venturing to loose her entirely from his grasp, laid her down, that she might recover from her nervous panic.

"You are safe," he kept repeating, as if it required the assurance of his own voice to make certain of the fact. "You are safe!" and then with an instinctive yet entirely unacknowledged consciousness on his part, that his own safety might perhaps be at least a portion of her care, he added: "We are safe now. You can stay here until you are quite yourself again; only do not look up or down—at least not just yet, not until the giddiness is gone. You forgot Lot's wife, or this never would have happened."

Nellie was not insensible, though she looked so. She only felt as if she were in a dream.—She understood perfectly all that Roger said; the shadow even of a smile seemed to pass over her white lips as he alluded to Lot's wife; but his voice fell with a muffled sound, as if it came from a great distance, on her ear; and earth, and sky, and cliff, and ocean, all seemed blending and floating in a wild fantasy through her brain. By degrees, however, a sort of awakening seemed to creep over her, but she did not use it at first either to look up or speak. Possibly she felt that words would be powerless to express her thoughts, and was glad of any excuse for silence. Roger did not like to hurry her, and he therefore employed the next few minutes in scanning the sea in search of Henrietta. She was there, exactly in the place in which he had hidden her to wait for him; but she was watching the burning tower overhead, and had evidently very little notion that any of its victims had escaped.—From the spot where he was standing, he could easily have made her hear him; but fearing that his voice might rouse up some hidden foe he turned to Nellie for assistance.

"Have you a handkerchief," he asked, "or anything of that kind, which you could give me for signal?"

Without answering, without even looking up, (so obedient had she grown, poor Nellie!) she untied the scarlet kerchief, which, in her harmless vanity, she had that morning thrown over her head and knotted beneath her chin, as the last thing wanting to her costume of a native girl, and gave it into Roger's hand. He waved it for some time without success, but at last Henrietta saw it, and began to row vigorously into shore.

"Now you may look," cried Roger joyfully helping Nellie to stand up; "now you may look for you will see nothing but what it is good for you to see. Henrietta Hewitson is waiting for us in the boat below, and the sooner we leave this resting-place the better."

"Henrietta Hewitson!" cried Nellie, roused effectually to life again by the mention of her name. "His daughter! How kind, how noble! Shall we not go to her at once?"

"If you are able," he answered. "The rest of the way is easy—easier far than the cliffs of Clare Island, which you climbed with me yesterday."

"Easy! oh! yes, surely it is easy," cried Nellie wildly. "O my mother—my mother!" she sobbed, with a little gasp; "I shall see her once again—and my grandfather! the poor old man will not be left desolate, after all!"

Roger saw that she was growing every moment more and more excited, and he cut the matter short by carrying her down to the beach and laying her in the boat, as if she had been a baby. Henrietta received her with a look of remorse, as if she felt that she herself must seem, somehow or other, responsible in Nellie's eyes for the pain and misery she had been enduring for the last few hours; and while she wrapt her tenderly and affectionately in a cloak taken from her own shoulders, Roger sent the boat, by a few vigorous strokes of the oar, to a safe distance from the rocks near which they had embarked. This manoeuvre placed them full in view of the burning tower, and he dropped his oar and gazed upon it as if irresistibly attracted by the spectacle. The body of the church was by this time a smouldering heap of ruins, but the tower, wrapt in its terrible robes of fire, still stood bravely up as if in defiance of its coming doom. For a single second it remained thus, unyielding and apparently unharmed, then it began visibly to totter. Another moment, and it was swaying backward and forward like a leaf in an autumn storm; and yet another, and, as if in a last wild effort to escape from the flames that swathed it, it plunged right over the cliffs, the fragments of

its ruined walls crashing and crumbling from rock to rock till they fell with a roar like thunder into the waters underneath. Both girls, at the first symptom of the catastrophe impending, had instinctively shut their eyes; but Roger, on the contrary, looked on as steadily as if he were keeping a count of every falling stone in order to set it down in his debt of vengeance against those who had done the deed. Not a syllable, however, did he utter, until the last stone had fallen, and the last fiery gleam disappeared from the cliff; but then, as if unable any longer to endure in silence, he threw up his arms toward heaven, and exclaimed:

"Men, women, and children all sent before their time to judgment! O God! what punishment hast thou reserved in this world or the next that shall be heavy enough for such a deed as this!"

"Curse me not—curse not!" cried Henrietta, with anguish in her voice. "The doom, God knows, is heavy enough already."

"Curse you!" said the astonished Roger, "you, to whom I owe more than my own life a thousand times. Nay, Mistress Henrietta, what madness has made you fear it?"

"I fear! I fear! Why should I not?" sobbed Henrietta. "The sin of the parents shall be visited on the children, and he is my father, after all!"

"Your father! your father!" Roger muttered, trying to keep down the storm of passion that was choking him. "Well, well, he is, as you say, your father, and so I must perforce be silent!"

"Alas, alas!" Henrietta pleaded, "if you did but know the completeness of his religious mania, you would also comprehend how easily a man, merciful in all things else, can in this one thing be merciless."

"Nay," said Roger bitterly; "it needs, I think, no great stretch of intellect to understand it thoroughly. A man, fresh from the siege of Tredagh, where children were dashed from the battlements lest, like nits, they should become troublesome if suffered to increase, will doubtless, merely consider the holocaust of human life which lies buried beneath yonder ruins, as a whole burnt offering, smelling sweet in the nostrils of the Lord, which he, as his high priest, has been deputed to offer up."

He broke off suddenly, for a hand was laid upon his arm, and a white face lifted pleadingly to his. "Speak not thus of her father," whispered Nellie. "Speak not thus; see how she is weeping!"

"Her tears are his best plea for mercy, then," said he in a gentler tone, and seizing the oars, he began to row as vigorously as if he hoped to quiet his boiling spirit by the mere fact of bodily exhaustion. Nellie made no answer, and silence fell upon them all.

The deed just done was not of a nature lightly to be forgotten, and they went quietly on their way, as people will, upon whom the shadow of a great terror still hangs heavily. Just, however, as they entered the harbor of Clare Island, Nellie caught sight of a well-known figure, and uttered a cry of joy. It was Hamish, and, in her impatience, she scarcely waited until the boat was fastened ere she was at his side. But there was no gladness in his eye as he turned to greet her. He was deadly pale, and his left arm hung powerless at his side. Nellie saw nothing of this at first, however, she was thinking so entirely of her mother.

"Is she come, dear Hamish?" she cried.—"Where is she?"

"In Dublin," he answered curtly.

"In Dublin—and you here?" cried Nellie in dismay.

"Because she sent me," he replied.

"What is it, Hamish? What is it?" faltered Nellie, struggling with a sense of some new and terrible misfortune impending over her.

"She is sore sick—sick even unto death," Hamish reluctantly replied. He could not bring himself to utter the terrible truth as yet. Nellie stood for a moment mute with terror. She read upon her foster-brother's face that worse news than even this was about to follow; but when she would have asked what it was, courage and voice completely failed her. She knew it, however, soon enough. From his seat by the door of the tower, Lord Netterville had caught a glimpse of Hamish, and came down at once to greet him. Excitement seemed for one brief moment to have restored all his faculties, and he cried out eagerly:

"You here, good Hamish—I am heartily glad to see you! And what news bring you from Netterville? How goes my lady daughter? Ill do you say—sore stricken? Nay, man, remember that she is still but young. It cannot surely be an illness unto death?"

"Yes, but it is, my lord," said Hamish, speaking almost roughly in his agony. "Death, and nothing short of death, as surely as that I am here to say it."

"Art thou a prophet?" asked Roger, bending

his dark brows upon him, and half tempted to suspect a soothsayer. "Art thou a prophet, that thou dares to speak thus confidently of the future?"

"Sir," said Hamish, driven at last beyond his patience, and hardly knowing how to break his news more gently, "it needs not to be a prophet to foresee, that the widow of a royalist and a Catholic to boot, shut up in prison and condemned on a false charge of murder, is in danger—nay, said I danger?—and is as certain of her doom as if she were already in her coffin."

Nellie uttered a wild cry, the first and last that escaped her lips that day, and Lord Netterville repeated faintly, "Murder!"

"Ay, murder; and in another week she dies," Hamish answered, now desperate as to the consequences of his revelation.

Nellie turned short round toward Roger. "I must go!" she said. "I must go at once!"

"Of course you must," he answered, in that helpful tone which had so often that morning already reassured her.

"She has sent me hither to conduct you," Hamish—with some latent jealousy of the interference of a stranger—was beginning, when unable any longer to conceal the bodily anguish he was enduring, he uttered a moan of pain, and leaned back against the low wall of the pier.

Then for the first time Nellie looked into his face and saw that he was as white as ashes.

"My God! my God!" she cried in her perplexity. "What is to become of us, he is dying too!"

"No, no," Hamish muttered his failing strength to answer. "It is nothing. They shot at me as I took boat from the beach, and hit me in the arm; but it is not broken, and if only I could stop the bleeding, I should be well enough to start at once."

But he grew paler and paler as he spoke, and the blood gushed in torrents from his arm, as he tried to lift it for their inspection. Roger shouted to Norah to bring down a cordial from the tower, and he then helped Nellie and Henrietta in their nervous and not very efficient endeavors to check the bleeding with their kerchiefs. Hamish was by this time well nigh insensible, but a cup of wine revived him, and having ascertained that he was merely suffering from a flesh wound, Roger sent back Norah to rummage out some bandages which he remembered were among his soldier stores. With these he stanchd the blood, and carefully bound up the wounded arm, assuring Nellie at the same time that her faithful follower was merely suffering from loss of blood, and that in a few days he would be as well again as ever. Nellie must be forgiven if at that moment she had no thought excepting for her mother.

"A few days!" she cried despairingly; "then I must go back alone, for my mother will be dead by that time."

Hamish did not hear her. He was leaning back in that half-dreamy state which often follows upon loss of blood; but Roger answered instantly:

"You shall go at once; but certainly not alone." He turned round to look for Lord Netterville; the poor old man had sunk upon the ground, and in his helplessness and perplexity was weeping like a child.

"Lord Netterville!" said Roger suddenly.

Lord Netterville dashed the tears from his eyes, and looked up anxiously in the young man's face.

"Lord Netterville," Roger repeated, giving him his hand and helping him to stand up, "you see how the case stands; your grand daughter must go to her mother, and go at once. Any delay were fatal. This poor fellow is totally unable to accompany her. Will you trust her to my care? I swear to you that she shall be as dear and precious to me as a sister, and that I will watch over her and wait upon her as if I were in very deed her brother."

With a look of relief and confidence that was touching to behold, the old man wrung the hand which Roger gave him, and then silently turned toward Nellie. Roger did not ask her if she would accept him as an escort; he felt that after the events of the morning she would need no protestations of loyalty at his hand, and merely said:

"In two hours we can start; but I shall have to go first to the mainland to look for horses."

"Nay, that shall be my business," said Henrietta suddenly. "In two hours hence, at the foot of the round tower, you will find them waiting; and I will bring you at the same time a letter to a friend, who may, I think, prove useful to you in Dublin. Follow me not now," she added in a tone that admitted of no reply, as Roger made a movement as if he would have gone with her to the boat—"follow me not now, I can best arrange matters if I go alone, but in two hours hence I shall expect you."

CHAPTER XIII.

Henrietta was as good as her word, and thanks to her energy and kindness, Nellie, with