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A TALE OF CASHEL.

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CHAPTER XVIII.—KATE COSTELLOE.

A day or two after Lord Elingham's departure Harriet Markham and Mary Hennessy, walking out to enjoy the cool freshness of the evening, so grateful after the excessive heat of the hottest of the dog-days, stopped at Bryan's cottage, where Cauth sat knitting by the door, as usual. It was not the first time that either had been there, and the old woman seemed glad to see them. Hastily bringing forward the only two seats besides her own that the cottage afforded, she wiped them carefully with her apron and invited the young ladies to sit down, adding—'It's not often we see the likes o' you here, an' sure it's the great honor entirely ye do me.'

'Cauth,' said Miss Markham, after the young ladies had exchanged significant glances, 'Cauth, I hope you understand that Miss Hennessy and I wish you well, and take a great interest in both you and Bryan?'

'Wisha, then, it's myself knows it well,' said Cauth, 'an' good reason I have, too, for it's ever the kind, soft word ye both had for me, not to spake of the help ye gave me many's the time when, only for ye, I could hardly have the bit or sup before that poor simple ould man that 'id starve to death afore he'd go out to ask it on account of the forgetful way he has wid him.'

'Well, then,' resumed the young lady, 'you will not suspect us of being actuated only by prying curiosity when we come to ask you a few questions about yourself?'

'About me?' cried Cauth, dropping her knitting and turning on them with a face as pale as ashes, 'ah then, Miss Markham—ladies dear, what questions would ye be puttin' to me, God help me?'

Both young ladies applied themselves to reassure her, and told her that they came to her purely as friends, and that whatever she told them would be kept an inviolable secret unless she gave them permission to divulge it any time, or to any person.

'Well, an' what—what do you want to know?' she exclaimed in a husky voice, and with a sort of desperate resolution.

Before answering, Harriet rose and closed the door, at which Cauth nodded assent.

'Cauth,' said Miss Markham, her voice more deep and solemn than usual, though, perhaps, she knew it not herself; 'Cauth! was it you that broke in on Mr. Moran's story a few days ago on the rock? Now answer me truly as you hope for mercy hereafter?'

'There's no gettin' over that,' said Cauth gloomily, as if to herself; 'when you ask me that way, I can't deny the truth. It was me, Miss Markham, and who else would it be?'

'I thought so—and so did Mrs. Hennessy—but we never breathed a word of our suspicions to any one—that is,' she added, after a pause, recollecting what she had said to Lord Elingham, 'that is to any one who knows you even now, or in any way that could make you known. Now, having told us so much, you will not, I think, refuse to tell us more? are you, or are you not, Kate Costelloe?'

At the sound of the name the unhappy woman dropped her head between her knees, as suddenly as if she was shot through the brain, one heart-piercing groan escaped her, and then all was silent for a few moments, during which she might have been supposed dead were it not for the quivering motion perceptible in all her members, and the quick, irregular breathing that denoted her inward agony.

At last she slowly raised her head, and fixing her heavy, bloodshot eyes on her interrogator, said, 'I see there's no use in hidin' it any longer—the earth or the say on't hide murder, an' sure that was murder—the worst of murder—I am Kate Costelloe?' and as if relieved to get over the confession, and feeling herself a freer woman, she sat up erect in her seat, and looked the young ladies alternately in the face. 'I am Kate Costelloe. Is that all you want to know?'

'We want to know nothing that you do not want to tell us,' said Harriet, 'but—'

'But you'd wish to know why I did it, and all about it,' broke in Kate with that keenness of perception which belonged to her strange character. She laughed—a low, inward laugh, as it were in scorn, fixing her eyes moodily on the ground the while, and the young ladies began to fear that her next move would be to open the door and bid them to walk out. They were mistaken, for she looked up with a milder expression, and said in a voice low and mournful—

'There's not many livin' I'd tell it to, Miss Markham; but I'll tell it to you, an' Miss Mary, because I know you have the heart to feel—even for me, bad as I am—an' sure but I'm bad enough. Ask me any question you like, an' I'll answer you, no matter what it is!'

'Tell us, then,' said Mary Hennessy, seeing that Harriet shrank from putting the question, 'what was the motive that induced you to give testimony against your own friends and relatives?'

'Friends and relatives?' repeated Kate with strong and disdainful emphasis, 'God help your wit, child! that wasn't the worst of it, though it was bad enough, too. That wasn't what tore the heart out o' me, an' left me ever since without e'er a heart, at all.'

'What was it, then?' whispered Harriet, awed by the intensity of passion that breathed in every lineament of the withered face before her.

'What was it?—ha, ha, ha!—what was it? And thrusting out her head till her face almost touched that of Harriet—though both young ladies drew back instinctively—she said in a low husky whisper, 'It was the love that was in my heart for John Keogh?'

'You loved him,' exclaimed both her hearers in the same subdued tone—'you loved him, yet you hung him—and his brother, too?'

The woman drew back—raised her head to the highest, and flashed a look of fierce intelligence into the eyes of her astonished hearers—'Ay, I hung him—but I couldn't help it—it was his own fault—I didn't want to hang e'er a one—e'er a one, at all—an' them leastways—but he took it out o' me—he dared me to do it! slowly she arose from her seat, and stood looking down at her silent and, as it were, spell-bound auditors, with the eye and mien of a pythoness. 'Ay, he dared me to do it—and I did it!—her voice sank to a hoarse whisper—but I wouldn't have done it, even for that, only he taunted me with—with—no matter what—but I knew it was his sin and shame as well as mine—an' I knew how many bitter tears I cried many's the night an' many's the day for that same misfortune that came over me—and then I thought of all the promises he had made, and broken them all—an' how I forgave him every thing, every thing—every thing because I loved him—and how I kept my shame an' my sorrow locked up in my own heart, and never said a hard word of him even to his own father—ever and always hopin' for the best—but when he said that word to me, before he was taken, when I told him that I had his life—and Patrick's life—in my hands—and asked him wouldn't he put the marriage-ring on my finger—when he said that word to me, back again, and made as little o' me as if I was the dirt under his feet—then, she almost shrieked, throwing up her arms like a maniac, 'then—the love went out o' my heart, and I said to myself—though I didn't say it to him—'If you had fifty lives, they're not worth a straw—the gallows is your doom.' That was the last sight of him I ever got, till I seen him in the dock; and then I made him shiver with the one look I gave him, when I put the rod on his head—ha! he looked at me then with such a pitiful look in his eyes, all as one as if he said—'Kate, is it you that swears my life away!' but I didn't care for his looks then; that time was past; and I did what was in my mind to do, and in my heart, an' showed him what I could do when I was put to it, though he thought I'd never bring myself to do it. Och, och, och! sure it was no wonder he'd think it, for he knew how I loved him; farther gar, he did!' and breaking into a passionate flood of tears, she sunk heavily on her seat, burying her face in her hands.

Harriet and Mary exchanged glances—they dared not speak, fearing another outburst of passion from the unhappy woman; they would gladly have effected their retreat, but they could not bring themselves to leave the poor creature without a word of consolation, so they sat patiently and silently awaiting the moment when the calm would follow the storm, in order to say some words of kindness and encouragement before they left the unfortunate victim of passion to the companionship of her own dreary thoughts.

'They rose, nevertheless, and the motion, slight as it was, brought Kate back to consciousness.

'I see you're for goin', ladies,' said she, rising too, 'and sure it's glad you'll be, I know myself, to get me out o' your sight. The Lord in heaven forgive me!—she raised her clasped hands and swollen eyes to heaven—the Lord in heaven forgive me;—sure it's thinkin' of my poor sowl I ought to be, and askin' pardon night and day on my bare knees for all the harm I have done. Och, then, ladies dear, isn't it a poor thing and a misfortunate thing to forget God?—for, sure when we do once there's no tellin' what we'll come to—them that 'id tell me onst that I'd ever do what I done, or be the thing I am this night, oye, but it's me that 'id give little ear to them.'

'But, Kate—'

'Call me Cauth, if it's plasin' to you, miss, I'd wish to forget, if I could, that I ever was Kate Costelloe.'

'Well, then, Cauth, what was it brought you to this part of the country, for I know the sad events to which we have been referring took place in another part of the county?'

'Why, then, I'll just tell you that, as if I was at the priest's knee this mornin'. I couldn't bear to live where I knew everybody hated the ground I walked on. Besides that, the ould man was there—the lonesome ould man, that never raised his head after hearin' the sentence, but went about like a wanderin' spirit among the good Christians that had the heart to pity him. The sight o' me would a kilt him entirely, so I left the place altogether, an' came where I thought nobody knew me; but sure,' she added, 'there wasn't even that comfort for me—I'm as well known here as the town-pump, God help me: and if I happen to say a sharp word to any one, it's nothin' but 'Kate Costelloe' here and Kate Costelloe' there wid them all round, till I'd sooner be dead than livin'—if it wasn't for my poor sowl.'

'Speaking of that,' said Mary Hennessy, 'does the Dean, or Father Sheehan know who you are?—have you been to your duty since you came here?'

'Well, to tell you the truth, miss, I was not. Many's the time I got ready to go, but somehow another, the shame always got the better o' me, and though I knew well enough it was the Evil Spirit that was keepin' me back, I couldn't bring myself to go.'

Suddenly the latch was raised, the door was flung open, and in the aperture stood, leaning on her staff, an old woman in a red cloak whom Harriet recognised at once as the original of Moran's graphic sketch of the Reverend Mr. Goodchild's courteous friend of argentine notoriety. Peering up into the faces of the two young ladies as she stood resting both hands on her staff, her little black eyes began to twinkle with a brighter meaning.

'Ho, ho!' she croaked, 'I came here to invite Kate Costelloe up to my place—and a nice place it is, too;—she paused, and the pause was filled up by a despairing groan from Kate—'not that I expected much from her, for, like myself, she isn't much the better of all the bad she has done in her time—but here's two grand ladies—one of them from the lord's estate beyant—no less—and the other 'Torney Moran's purty sister—and the world knows that's what she is, only not so pale or so grand lookin' that way as the other—because why, the ould quality blood isn't in her—the blood of the Markhams that were great people onst, and even in my own memory.' These latter clauses of the speech were spoken in an under tone, and by way of soliloquy, though they reached every ear within hearing, as the acrid dame probably intended they should. 'Come, now, ladies,' and she pointed with her stick over her shoulder, 'come and see the line sight I have at home for the quality. Come, when I bid you,' she added in a tone of authority, 'I want ye up above there at my castle, and I know ye're nather o' ye'll be sorry for comin' when you get up.'

'My good woman,' said Mary Hennessy, after exchanging some whispered words with Harriet, 'we have no objection to go with you, if we can really do you or any one else a service. But we should like to know where, or for what purpose, you would have us go?'

'Ah then, where would you be takin' them to?' said Cauth in a confidential whisper.

'To the house above, to tell their fortunes,' was the short, ironical answer: now, don't be keepin' me here, I tell ye, but come along this mornin'—do ye think it's for harmin' ye I'd be?'

'I think ye'd best go,' whispered Cauth, 'she had odd ways wid her by times, but her bark is worse than her bite—she'll do ye no harm, I'll go bail.'

This and their own reflections decided the young ladies to follow the crone who was already hobbling down the road, nothing doubting, it appeared, that they would comply with her singular mandate. Cauth stood at the door looking after them till they had, at three, disappeared at a turn of the road; she turned, then, and looked up at the Rock, wondering whether Bryan would come down to his supper, yet hardly expecting that he would, the night being so rarely beautiful.

'Well, to be sure, but it's the square life he leads,' said she to herself, 'scrapin' and sweepin', and patchin' up ould walls all day long, and every day of the week, just as if he was paid for it—which he isn't, and never will be—in this world, anyhow; let it be as it may with the other.—Och, och, see what it is to have a good conscience: it's aisy seen that poor Bryan never harmed the livin', or he'd be more afraid o' the dead. Now there's me, and barrin' it was in broad daylight, and plenty o' company to the fore, I darnt set my foot up there among the graves and tombstones, and the ould, crazy walls that's in it—nor I wouldn't, if they gave me the best estate in Tipperary. Ocho, it's the dismal place to spend one's nights and days in—but sure, after all, didn't I hear Father Riordan, God be good to him! tellin' on the althar one Sunday, many's the year ago, about St. An-

thony, how he went and lived among the tombstones to be away from the livin' altogether, and wash his hands of the dirty, wicked world. An' all the fine ould hermits his reverence used to tell us about, when we were learnin' the catechism in the Chapel, ould ancient men with great long beards, that went away to the desert to live all alone with God, or in caves in the rocks, or mountains. Well, it's a folly to talk, but I think our Bryney is just as good a hermit as any of them, barrin' that he hasn't the beard. I'm sure he prays as much as e'er a one o' them, an' even the odd night that he's in his bed, don't I hear him when he thinks I'm asleep, prayin' for the sowl in purgatory, and for the conversion o' sinners—and sure myself begins to cry when I hear that, thinkin' that I'm the greatest sinner goin'. But whisht! who's that?'

She had just perceived a female figure with a shawl drawn closely around her head, moving stealthily in the shadow of the Rock on the opposite side of the road, moving in the direction of the gate leading to the sacred inclosure. The motions of the person, whoever it might be, were so cautious, so stealthy, that it was quite clear to any observer that there was, there must be, some strong motive for concealment, and Cauth stood leaning forward, peering with her keen dark eyes into the deep gloom after the object of her curiosity. Moved by some unaccountable impulse she at last followed her with the same stealthy pace; on and on moved the silent and muffled figure, on and on moved Cauth after her, as if impelled by invisible agency, till the gate had opened and closed a second time, with a few moments intermission, and both were within the sacred precincts, gliding up the steep ascent to the once stately portals of the Cathedral. Here Cauth's courage failed her, she remembered her soliloquy of a few moments before, and all the terrors of superstition, heightened by the fears of a troubled conscience, came back with overwhelming force. Frightened even at her own boldness, she stood in narrowing uncertainty as to what she had best do; advance she dared not, and retreat was little less formidable—if she could only reach Bryan, but God knows where Bryan was, as she said to herself, and to raise her voice on the Rock of Cashel, with the dead all around her, was something not to be thought of. Timidly and fearfully she glanced around, almost certain that some shape of horror would present itself to her aching eyes. In her terror she had half forgotten the immediate object of her almost involuntary intrusion on the lone place of death; she had rushed from her view round an angle of the palace wall, but all at once she caught sight of her again, crossing the broad strip of moonlight to the hall of the Vicar's Choral, then gliding along by the wall of the Cathedral.

'Where buttress and buttress alternately seem'd framed of ebony and ivory'

as the light figure flitted past them. Cauth watched her with fear-distended eyes, the cold sweat oozing from every pore of her body, and her tongue, as it were, glued to her burning palate. All at once another figure appeared on the scene, and to Cauth's inexpressible relief it proved to be Bryan. Somewhat encouraged by the sight of another living creature, and that, too, the good old guardian of the ruins, she drew back a little farther into the shade where she could see what passed, herself remaining unseen, for she began to suspect, seeing Bryan and the supposed ghost approaching each other, that it might after all be a creature of flesh and blood like herself. Then came distinctly to her ear the following colloquy:

'Why, and is this yourself, Celia?—what in the world brings you here, my poor girl, at this time of night?'

'I wanted to see him?' was the reply in a low, earnest whisper that only half reached Cauth's ear.

'Him!—why, who do you mane?'

'Nonsense, Bryan, you know well enough.—He's here, now—I know he is, an' I must see him—for God's sake, Bryan, don't be keepin' me?—And the voice spoke louder in increasing agitation.

Before Bryan could answer a man's arm was stretched out from one of the broken arches, black in night, that yawned close beside them, and, catching the female by the arm, whispered a word that arrested the scream on her pallid lips. Then Bryan and the young woman entered the arch, and Cauth managed to get so near them, creeping along in the black shadows of the walls, that she could hear their low cautious tones as they all three conversed in whispers.

'Jerry,' said the girl, her voice trembling with eagerness, 'for the love of God get down to the vaults or somewhere—the peelers is out looking for you with that stag, McGowan—'

'Well, an' what if they are—weren't they often out before, an' they didn't catch me yet?'

'Ay, but McGowan—an' you know there's some great crown-lawyer or another down from Dublin.'

'So I hear.'

'So you hear? and is that the way you're taking it, and me most frikened out of my wits? If you heard about the Counsellor, maybe you didn't hear what McGowan swore?'

'No! what did he swear?'

'That you were hidin' somewhere about the Rock.'

'There now, Jerry, didn't I tell you that?' said Bryan anxiously, 'I knew it 'id be found out at last that you were here, and now I'll have the whole country again me for harboring—for harboring—'

'A murderer!' put in the other with some bitterness, 'out with it, Bryan, like a man.'

'Well, it's an ugly word to say, any way, but you know what I mane—an' the reasons, too, that made me give in to you,—but what will the people say—vo, vo, myself an' the Rock's disgraced for ever!'

'Never mind, Bryan,' said the other man quickly, 'you done it for the best, you know yourself, an' God knows it, an' I know it, too, Bryan; and it's hard if we don't clear you and the Rock between us three. Never mind Bryan, you stood my friend when I most needed one, an' you'll not be sorry for it. Go home now, Celia astore—and make your mind aisy—with God's help and Bryan Colleman's they'll not catch me this time, either; I could hide here for a month, if all the peelers an' the army from here to Clonmel was after me, barrin' they'd blow up the Rock entirely. There's so many vaults an' places, that nobody knows anything about, barrin' Bryan—and myself, that got into the knowledge of them this while back. So go home, darling, and don't be frettin'—if McGowan and the peelers comes here after me, there'll be the greatest game of hide-an'-go-seek that ever was played about Cashel town, or Rock, either.'

'Oh, oh, oh, the Lord save us!' and Celia began wringing her hands, 'Arrah, Jerry, what's coming over you, at all? Is it losing your senses you are, to be talkin' that-a-way? Och wirra, wirra! what'll I do, at all?'

'Why, you foolish girl, it's you that's losin' your wits!—I tell you I'm no more mad than I ever was in my life. Go home now, when I bid you, but take care would anybody see you going down from here at this hour of the night. But that's true—tell me before you go—did you hear since morning how poor Tim Murtha is?'

'Well, no, Jerry, I didn't hear—God help him for one misfortunate man, but it's him has the hard times of it one way and another—and a harmless poor creature he ever and always was?'

'True for you, Celia—I suppose now you're thinking, only you don't wish to say it, that it's strange how God afflicts the innocent, and lets the wicked escape—at any rate, for a while? Come now, can't I guess well?'

The girl was silent, and a little confused, seeing which Jerry laughed a low, bitter laugh—'I knew it,' he said, 'but still I don't wonder at it—amn't I odious before God an' man, and how could I expect any one to excuse me, or to feel for me? Go home now, and God be with you.' So saying he plunged into the inner darkness, and Celia saw him no more. She was turning to address some agitated words to Bryan, when from out the same darkness came a melancholy voice singing:

'Out of Lady Nancy's there grew a red rose, And out of Lord Lovell's a briar—iar—iar— And out of Lord Lovell's a briar.'

'Lord bless us, who's that?' cried Celia, starting into the thick gloom.

'Why, don't you know the voice?' inquired Bryan.

Before Celia answered, out glided a ghastly figure wrapped in what appeared to be a sheet, a winding-sheet it was to Celia's affrighted fancy. But lo! a look at the face, only partially visible under the shroud-like covering, reassured poor Celia, for it was Mad Mabel, who went on quite unconcerned with a snatch from another old ballad no less quaint and sad than the other.

'My father married me to a knight, My stepmother owed me at a cruel spite— She sent three robbers that very night, They robbed my bower, and slew my knight.'

'Celia Mulquin, I want to tell you a saycret! And she put her head close to that of the shrouding girl, 'I'm going to bring Petticoat Loose to friken them all here—husht, I'm thinking she's in there now?—peering curiously into the ruined aisles where the moonbeams were now falling in silver sheen

'Through slender shafts of shapely stone By foliage tracery combined.'

'Don't you hear something? But maybe it isn't her—husht—h!—holding up the attenuated finger of one hand white the other held the ghostly drapery under her chin—husht! maybe it's