

## THE WICKED WOODS OF TOBEREEVIL

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

## A STRANGE NIGHT.

WHEN Miss Martha saw the condition into which Paul had strangely fallen, she agreed with May that it would be well to remove him to new scenes, and leave his restoration to time and Providence. Her anger was at once lost and forgotten in her pity; and she began to pack her trunk in preparation for a journey which must begin before twenty-four hours should go past. There was no reason to fear that Paul would refuse to accompany her; she had every cause for haste, for the mood of his mind had changed since his arrival at Monasterlea. He no longer lived in that quiescent condition which was almost a state of unconsciousness. Things which he saw around him here seemed striving to arouse his memory, and a struggle was beginning between the reason obscured within him, and that power by whose agency he was afflicted, the result being a growing irritability which threatened to increase to wildness did he remain long in the atmosphere which induced it. So Miss Martha made preparations for her journey, while Paul wandered in his restless fashion about the fields and moors; and May hovered between the two, now silently helping her aunt, now seeing that Paul was safe. Her face was white, and her eyes had that look in them which we turn upon the dead; yet she was ready with her hands, and had her wits about her, and did not heave a sigh, nor shed a tear.

When the Kearneys, watching their opportunity, had left their cave in the mountain, they had sought shelter for a night with a friend in the lowland, about a mile away on their road from Tobereevil. Here they must wait for the eldest gossoon, who had been hired by their friend to drive her on an errand to Camlough. The Kearneys waited gladly, suspecting that Bid's mysterious journey had something to do with Paul; that she was making an effort to save them, though she had not thought fit to inform them of the venture. The errand was one of importance, that the house-mother knew; for had not Bid got a loan of Miss Martha's little wagon-cart for the journey! Now, when the gossoon had made the mule a bed in the stables, put the cart in the shed, and left Bid enjoying her breakfast at Monasterlea, he ran off to tell his mother that Mr. Paul had come home at last.

Then Mary, the mother of all the Kearneys, rose up and thanked the Lord for sending her this friend, who would take the trouble out of her heart. So easily will people grasp at hope, that Mary began to believe that Paul came all the way from Camlough for the sole purpose of forcing Simon to restore her to her home. She would go now to Monasterlea with her children round her, and relate to young Mr. Finiston the dismal tale of her distress; but first, ought not she to wait to see if Bid would come and fetch her? She waited till past sunset, and yet Bid had not appeared; the truth being that the old woman was engaged with Miss Martha, and knew that the Kearneys would not think of departing till she went to see them off. Bid would not quit Monasterlea till Miss Martha and Paul were fairly started on their journey.

But Mary Kearney had not patience to wait for this. As soon as twilight began to fall she started with her children, and walked to Monasterlea, Paul was walking up and down the road with his head bent on his breast, and his hands clasped behind him, in that dreary, restless way which was habitual with him now. He stopped now and then, and passed his hand over his forehead, and threw up his face with a look of pain, as if he strove to recover his memory at one bound, whereas it would only return to him by slow degrees. Sometimes he stamped his foot in despair, or kicked the pebbles out of his path, as if they had angered him. His mood was indeed changing, and it were well that he was out of the country. Suddenly Mary Kearney and her children came round him, it being still just light enough for people to see each other dimly. They came lightly along in their bare feet, and surrounded him swiftly and suddenly, Paul starting as if ghosts had risen up to confront him. This sensitiveness in itself was evidence of a change; a few days ago he would not have stared if the strangest visions on earth had passed under his eyes.

"God save you, Mither Paul!"

"Mrs. Kearney!" cried Paul, looking keenly in her face.

"See that, now!—how well he knew me, an' it dark!" said the woman. "Lord love you, Mither Paul! its you that had the wish for us. We have walked the roads back to get a word wid you."

"What is it?" said Paul, with something of his old air. It seemed as if the start with which he had greeted these old friends had helped him in his struggle, and shaken some of the mists out of his brain.

"It's only our little trouble, sir. I mane that Simon—that the miser—I mane yer uncle, sir, has threw a heap o' us out of our houses, Mither Paul. O' course you know that sir, an' some o' us is dead an' undher groun' out o' his road, an' some o' us is gone across the way. Some is gone to beggary; but I'm here yet myself, wid the little girshes and gossoons. An' I made bould to tell myself that if I seen a sight o' yer honor you would remember ye had a wish for us, and'd put a word in wid yer uncle to let us go back to our little house. We built it a'most oursel's, sir, when he threw us out before, an' little Nan's gettin a clever han' at the basket makin'. The gossoons'll be men after a bit, please the Lord; an' there's not an idle bone in them, an' they'll pay it back to yer honor."

Paul stood listening, somewhat like a deaf man who suddenly found that he could hear; his eyes fixed on the woman while he devoured all her words.

"Simon put you out!" he said; "is that what you have told me? Simon, the miser, put you out? You and how many more?"

"Thirty families, sir. Sure I thought yer honor know'd it."

"I did not know it," said Paul, "or I should have seen to it before. You may go now, my woman, and I will settle with Simon."

He walked quickly up to the cottage; May met him on the garden path, and looked at him with amazement; his eyes were flaming, his mouth was moving nervously. He was walking straight towards the door, and did not see her.

"Paul!" she said, "oh! what is the matter?"

"Nothing," he said fiercely, "only I am going to settle with Simon. This has been a long time delayed. I was born to do it: and look at me, a man come to my time of life, and my work still undone! I have been astray this long time, and I had quite forgotten my duty; but a messenger has just come to remind me of it. Simon has driven out the people to die about the world. He has repeated the sin of the first Finiston; it now remains for the last one to punish him, and put an end to this foul race!"

He pushed into the hall, and took his gun down from the wall.

May said, "What are you going to do? Come in here, and tell me;" and she drew him into the parlor, and turned the key in the lock behind them.

"Do?" cried Paul. "Why, of course, I will shoot him through the heart. I often told you," he said testily, "that I have got to do this thing, and you would not believe me; but now you shall have proof of it."

"Very well, but you must wait a little. You have nothing to load your gun with; your things have not arrived."

"That is most provoking. How soon will they be here!"

"Oh! in about half an hour; in the meantime you can rest yourself, so as to be better able for your work." She shook up the pillows on the couch, and he flung himself impatiently upon them, taking out his watch to count the minutes; while May, hovering about the room, began telling some laughable story. After a time he gave her his attention, and put away the watch. Presently, she began to sing softly a drowsy lullaby, which she had heard mothers sing to their babies in the cabins; and Paul listened to her tranquilly, having quite forgotten his passion as well as the cause of it. At last he lay so still that she turned her head cautiously to observe him, and found he was asleep. She brought wrappings, and covered him, so that he might rest there safely during the night; for it was now eleven o'clock, and she hoped he would not wake till the morning. She locked him in the room and the household went to rest.

Yet May could not sleep, only lay staring at the little pools of moonlight on the floor, and wondering about the ending of this sad drama, in which she played so sore a part. Would Paul ever get well again? Would he, indeed, seek the miser when he awakened on the morrow, and accomplish in his madness that doom which he had dreaded before the madness came? She could not sleep while there was so much to be prayed for; that Paul might be saved from impending evil, and guided into the keeping of good and faithful hands.

In the midst of her sad thoughts she heard a noise, and sat up and listened intently. Surely that had been the sound of a window opening! She did not wait a moment, for there was but one thought in her mind. She went swiftly to the parlor door, and opened it softly. The moon shone into the room; the window was wide open and Paul was gone.

She dressed herself rapidly, and fled out of the house, hurrying down the garden and out on the road. She could see a long way before her in the clear midsummer night, which is scarcely night at all. Paul was not to be seen, but her lively terror could only lead her flying feet in one direction. She sped, like the wind, towards Tobereevil, thinking as she went along of the likelihood of the mansion being well barred up, so that no one, not even a madman, could make his way inside the walls. She should find Paul wandering about the avenue, or in the woods, or about the windows; would find him and bring him home.

Her heart beat so quickly, and her feet went so fast, that she had often to pause for breath, leaning against a hedge or tree, straining her eyes everywhere in hopes of seeing a figure, either behind her or before her on the road. At last she was obliged to go more quietly, lest, having utterly exhausted herself, she should faint at the sight of Paul, and be of no further use to him.

The beautiful calm country lay all around her, the hills wrapped in solemn shadow, but with lustrous peaks crowned with stars in the sky; sad glimmering fields and moors, with all their human lights extinct at the moment; the patient and melancholy land that had suffered and smiled and been beautiful under the tread of many afflicted generations born to a cruel time, but perhaps to a kind eternity. "How long, O Lord, how long?" seemed written over the wistful face of the valley. The woods had caught no tender glance from the moon, but rolled in black masses against the sky, as if the surges of their wicked restlessness would flood the fair face of the heavens, drowning the innocent stars which grew like blossoms of light therein. Thus appeared the woods in the last hour of their magnificent pride and might, even while there was a red spot in the midst of them that glowed and pulsed like an angry thought in their heart.

May did not notice it, as she pierced her way through the crowding trees to the avenue. She had seen smoke and flames in the distance when she first set out on the road; but fire-wreaths were common on the mountain now, and the sight had been no surprise.

As she drew near the dreary mansion she sickened at the thought of approaching it with such a terrible fear in her mind. Was it not altogether fantastic, this journey of hers in the midnight? How could she have allowed terror so to work upon her—knowing Paul as she did, and that he would not hurt a fly? A man quite unarmed! What harm could he do to another, even if Simon's doors and windows were not locked and barred? Perhaps even now he was safe at home, having returned to his rest after roving a little, in his wild way, about the fields. Admitting these thoughts, she leaned tremblingly against a tree, and again strained her eyes towards the thickets and across the moors.

(To be continued.)