

Literature, &c.

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THE TUTOR'S DAUGHTER.

BY MRS. M. A. FORD.

On a calm, but very clouded summer evening, I entered a beautiful valley, bordering on the Juniata river, from which I had been absent nearly three years. Many of my happiest days had been spent amidst its rural shades and warm-hearted people. One, whom all the neighbourhood held in veneration, had been my tutor during several years of my youth, and in the family circle under his roof, my heart had found much to contribute to its enjoyments. His two sons filled the place of brothers, to one who had none, and their young sister, lovely and modest as the violet of the valley, had won a yet dearer title to my affection. Nearly three years seemed a long time to pass far from these associates, but I had spent it in acquiring a profession on which would depend my future advancement in life, and was now hastening to revisit the valley, and receive from her venerable father the hand of my gentle Linda.

How often during the bright and beautiful days which had hitherto favored my journey, the joyful anticipation of the warm welcome which would greet my return, came with gushing fullness over my heart.

After leaving the stage on the public road, I had hired a horse, and entered a lane, leading through embowering woods, to that portion of the valley which contained the endeared home of other days. In the lightness of my heart I sang catches of songs as my horse gayly bore me along the well-remembered road. But night came on while I was yet in the thick forest, with a mantle darker than usual. Heavy clouds veiled the scene around, and as the gloom increased, my meditations assumed a more serious nature. I might lose the way, and my horse was a stranger to it. The few stars visible gave so little light through the foliage of the woods, that the track soon became undefined. The silence of this darkness was not broken by the night-wind which seemed to have died on its winged way. Thus circumstanced, it was more prudent to proceed slowly.

Was that a footstep? Did not the under-wood rustle as if parted by something passing through it? I looked around, but saw nothing amidst the deep gloom, when suddenly the reins were snatched from my hand, and an attempt made by some one to drag me from the horse. I had just time to draw and fire a pistol, a groan followed the discharge, and the strong arm that grasped me loosed its hold, while a person fell heavily to the ground. Giving my horse the spur, I was soon borne out of the wood.

On reaching the open country and looking back, I saw no one, but hastily resumed my journey.

It was the hour of retiring to rest, when the welcome light from the window of the Grange, the home of my friend, Mr Milton, met my view. How eagerly I dismounted and hurried across the lawn in front of the mansion. My hand was on the latch of the door, the next moment it was opened, and I felt myself pressed to the heart of my kind old tutor, to whom a letter had announced my coming. As we entered the parlor another form approached, a little hand was clasped in mine, and Linda, covered with blushes and looking more lovely than ever, faltered my welcome. Late as was the hour, they had yet waited supper for me, and we sat down with hearts too full of joyful emotions to do justice to the bountiful supply of the table.

Although my cup of happiness was so full of the strange and unpleasant adventure in the forest shared my thoughts, and the uncertainty of the fate of my assailant pressed rather heavily on one whose habits had always been peaceful. The scene of the encounter was not more than four miles from the Grange.

And yet I delayed informing those so interested in my welfare of the occurrence, partly because their earnest inquiries related to the period of my absence, and I would not interrupt the first gushings of joy and tenderness by any thing unpleasant.

And where are my friends James and Ernest? I asked for their vacant chairs were placed at the table.

Some one entering the door behind me, covered my eyes playfully with his hands; I caught those hands, and turned to embrace my early fellow student and warm hearted friend James, who had waited until my meeting with his sister was over, and now poured out the frank greeting of his kind and generous nature.

But where is Ernest to share our happiness? he inquired. What can detain him to this late hour? He rode out this evening to meet you Charles and I expected to see him with you.

I regret I did not meet him. There is another road to meet the stage route, perhaps he took that.

Oh no, he went by the same which you travelled. It is strange you did not see him.

As James spoke, he directed a look of anxious inquiry toward his father, who sighed, and turning to me, said Ernest has caused me much pain lately. He is sadly altered.

I looked surprised, but he did not explain, and the silence of the next few minutes left me to ponder on his words.

Ernest altered!—the studious, mild, spiri-

tual Ernest? How altered?—in what way? It could not be favorably, for he had already been my standard of excellence, and in my enthusiastic admiration he could rise no higher. Was it for the worse? Heaven forbid! Yet some years had passed since we parted, and, alas! for changeful man, even Ernest might have fallen into error.

In his continued absence the time seemed slowly and anxiously to pass away. Linda rose to retire, and as I pressed her hand in saying 'good-night,' I observed a look of sadness, and a starting tear had changed the expression of her sweet face. As had always been her custom from childhood, she knelt for her father's blessing, and when his venerable hand, pressed on the rich clusters of her dark brown hair, and 'God bless you, my child,' came from his lips, she earnestly added, 'And may he protect my brother from all danger.'

I could not help sharing the general anxiety, and felt more unwilling to impart to them the late encounter in the wood, lest it should increase their fears for the safety of Ernest. Yet what enemy had he? and the road leading to his home would be plain to him on the darkest night. But I might with the same reason ask, What enemy had I? And who was my assailant? If a highwayman, he would have demanded my purse.

As I turned on my pillow after retiring to the chamber allotted to me, I vainly sought repose. The journey of the day had been a long and weary one, although supported by the joyous anticipations of a buoyant spirit: tired I felt, but not sleepy, for a strange feeling of uncertainty and anxiety was now upon me, which was not relieved by the murmur of voices in the next apartment. My chamber, which was the same I had occupied in boyhood, was only separated from the next by a wooden partition, so common in country houses, and what was spoken there, even in a low voice, could be heard with a little attention by me. Shall I confess this attention was not wanting on my part? For the first time in my life I listened willingly to the communications of others not intended for my ear. My conscientious scruples were quieted by the reflection that long-existing ties bound me to the interests of the family, and besides, was I not about to unite myself to its dearest member, and had, I not something like a brother's right to learn what were the sorrows or troubles of Ernest, whose name was more than once spoken in the subdued but agitated voice of my venerated old friend, his father, whose chamber I knew adjoined mine. My name was also mentioned, and regret expressed by James that he had not confided in me and entered into an explanation. This certainly exonerated me from all blame in eaves-dropping, and I listened without dreading the admonitions of my inward monitor.

'I will share your pillow to-night, my dear father,' said James, 'for I fear you cannot sleep.'

'As you please, my dear son,' he replied, 'and surely we have cause for alarm. Oh! Ernest, Ernest, you whom I thought by intellectual culture and literary acquirements to place above the trials and troubles of this world, that after all you should act so rashly.'

'Nay, my dear father, I trust nothing wrong has happened—My brother received a note just before his departure; but I do not know that it was from Bertha. It is true his love for her is most fervent, and another insult from Durell would arouse him almost to frenzy.'

Here they spoke so low I could not connect the words, but 'encounter—revenge—insult—Bertha—attack—ride—chastise'—and others as strange met my ear.

And who was Bertha? I now recall a lovely girl of some fourteen summers, that bore that name, and at the time I left the valley, resided with her widowed mother in a neat cottage about three miles from the Grange. The name was no unusual one, unlike the simple appellations of her neighbors, and it is one of the pleasing effects of the settlement of our country by colonists from so many different nations, that some of the wildly beautiful names brought from other lands may still be heard in the deep shadows of our valleys, on the rugged brow of the mountain, by the gush of the waterfall, or in the flower-studded prairies of the West. To this also, may be attributed the varied style of beauty in our land which travellers have remarked.

There is no true standard of American loveliness; the blonde, the brunette; the eye soft as the gazelle or bright as the glancing meteor; features so differently moulded, some full of commanding dignity others replete with forms rounded into the freshness of a Hebe, or delicate and graceful as the tendrils of the vine. Figures, tall and majestic in their proportions, or small and fairy-like in their beauty. Each have their peculiar charm: but I have digressed too far, and must return to the scenes of that distressing night.

Bertha was no longer a child, but a beautiful woman, and had taken possession of the heart of my friend Ernest, in defiance of the nine Muses, and all the brilliant array of classic dames and ancient heroines with which study had stored his memory. How relieved I felt to know that this was the change which had come over him; how unjust it was to his merits to suspect for a moment that he could act unworthily.

But he had a rival and might be in danger, and again I listened; when what was my dismay and horror to hear the father and brother express their fears that he had attacked his insolent rival, and been injured in the contest. My heart beat as if it would have burst from my breast. What if my friend had in the darkness mistaken me for this

Durell. What if my unknown assailant was Ernest, and alas! what if—but I could think and listen no longer, and sank back on my pillow, with an intense feeling of agony it is impossible to describe.

Recovering myself by a strong effort, I sprang from the bed and hastily threw on my clothes. I believe my intention was to rush out of the house, and seek in the forest the relief or confirmation of my fear.

The noise I made drew the attention of James, who soon entered the chamber. He was not undressed, yet seemed surprised to find me up.

'Why are you rising Charles? It is yet two hours before day.'

I could not answer for some moments. At last I faltered out,

'I have overheard your conversation with your father, and like yourselves, must feel unhappy.'

'My dear friend,' he cried, 'I wish we had explained all to you before. My anxiety about Ernest will not allow me to sleep. I will arouse the gardener to go with me in search of him, and would have done so before, but knowing my brother's sensitive and delicate feelings, I feared as if he was safe he might be displeased.'

'I will accompany you,' I replied, 'do not awaken Richard.'

'No, no, you are not well Charles. How you shake. Why, you are as pale as ashes. Richard can go, for my father will not let me venture alone.'

Still I persisted in following him down stairs, and with cautious footsteps we passed Linda's door; but our care was useless, it was ajar, and a light was burning on the table. Her brother looked in, Linda was not there, but on re-entering the passage we caught a glimpse of her form leaning from a window at the extreme end, and gazing out on the road.

She started as we approached, and an exclamation rather of distress than alarm broke from her—'My brother! my Ernest!'

'Be calm, dear sister,' said James; 'I am going to seek him. He may have gone to the next town, and the night being dark, his friends have detained him until morning.'

'Alas! I cannot hope this,' said Linda; for Ernest would not willingly give pain and anxiety to our father, I fear some evil has befallen him.' And she burst into tears.

I could not approach to soothe her anguish, for her words were torture to my heart, as I accused myself of being the cause of all this distress.

'Are you going, too, Charles?' she inquired, raising her tearful eyes to mine. Before I could answer, the voice of Mr Milton called me, and I hastened to his chamber. He was sitting up in bed, and the painful anxiety of the last few hours had visibly affected his usually healthy appearance. His had been a green old age, so beautiful in its gradual decline, but now his features appeared sharp, and his face very pale.

'Charles,' said he, 'I can scarcely tell you how wretched I feel. You cannot comprehend the reality of our alarm, as you know so little of the circumstances that cause it. In a few words, then, I will inform you. Ernest loves and is beloved. A stranger, without character, came lately into the neighbourhood, and struck with the beauty of Bertha (whose sweet childhood you must remember) has rudely pressed his attendance on her when walking, and intruded frequently into her mother's dwelling. Finding his suit rejected, and bearing of Bertha's engagement to my son, he has spoken of him in the most insulting manner, and Ernest, learning his inexcusable conduct, has forbidden him ever to enter the cottage again. So this he has only returned insolent language, and perseveres in his annoyance when my son is absent. Ernest, naturally so mild, is now quite changed, and has threatened him with chastisement. The note received by my son I fear conveyed the knowledge of some fresh intrusion on our sweet Bertha, and we dread his meeting this insolent stranger again. In riding through the forest he may have crossed his path, and been provoked to chastise him, and in the struggle may have received some fatal injury from one so devoid of principle and honor. And now, do you not think we have great cause for alarm at the continued absence of Ernest?'

I was too agitated to answer, and he continued:

'My kind Charles, I knew how deeply you would sympathize in our feelings. Ernest ought to have met you at the stage, and returned with you. This would have prevented any collision with his foe. Oh! why did he not do so? My dear, my unhappy son!' and tears coursed his venerable cheeks.

Linda and James had followed me to the chamber, and now hastened to soothe and console him with hopes that cheered not their own hearts. Suddenly he addressed me again with startled energy:

'Why do you not speak, Charles? Can you suggest nothing to comfort me? Was all silent in the forest as you passed through, or did you hear a noise? I adjure you by your hopes of heaven to answer me! Do not fear my weakness. The great being who sustains my age will not forsake me now.'

I had advanced to the bedside, and sinking down, buried my face in the covering. The truth was on my lips, struggling for utterance—but could I thus destroy all their hopes, brand myself as the murderer of Ernest, and be separated from Linda for ever? I sprang, in the energy of despair, to my feet.

'Tis madness to remain longer,' I exclaimed, clasping my hands in agony, 'we are losing time; come, come. Oh, wretched me!

'He is beside himself,' cried Linda, in a voice of terror; 'speak to him, James.'

I was rushing from the room, when he intercepted me.

'Stay one moment, dear Charles, I will go immediately. Linda, support our father.'

'Alas! I fear my friend has heard or seen something in that forest that makes his alarm even greater than ours. Heaven grant we may be in time to save my brother.'

I broke from him and ran along the passage, he followed, and swift as lightning we descended the staircase. By this time the housemaid and gardener were aroused, and running from opposite directions, increased the confusion. James gave the necessary orders, and assisted Richard to saddle the horses, when we hastily mounted, and attended by him galloped toward the woods I had so lately entered with such different feelings.

As we moved silently and swiftly along, the gray dawn began to appear in the east, but the increasing light cheered not my oppressed heart, for I dreaded its revealing.

How often in my happy youth, before I left the valley, had I watched with delight the gradual unfolding of the landscape, as the magic glances of the dawn lighted the rock, the hill, the wood, or when it mounted higher, heralding the glorious sun, and reflecting its rosy hues on the waters of the Juniata. Young life, with its dewy freshness, joined in that which was congenial to its feelings, but how little suited to the darkness within me now; I almost shrank from the playful breeze that fanned my cheeks.

As we entered the deeply shadowed wood, I dreaded to look forward. Would I see the pale form of Ernest, fallen by rashness, for worse than rashness it now appeared to me? Why did I fire so suddenly? If I had grappled with the person who attempted to drag me from the horse, I might have overcome without fatally injuring him. Had I spoken one word, the sound of my voice would have convinced Ernest of his mistake. But the reason thus was now useless, and only added to my anguish.

'Charles,' said James, in a low agitated voice, 'what is that beneath yonder oak?'

One plunge of my horse brought me to the object; a white handkerchief, stained with blood, lay on the spot which I thought must be that of last night's assault.

I raised it quickly, exclaiming—'Thank God! he is not here!'

James could not understand my feelings, and replied—'True, but whose is that blood? Oh if it is my brother's he may have been dragged away!'

Alas! I knew too well I had left him there but hope dawned in my breast. The wound had not been immediately fatal—he might be alive—might yet live long to bless his family, and to forgive me. Hope made me strong, again. We searched every thicket around, and then hastened toward the main road. A lane on the right led to the little village, near which Bertha resided. We turned into it, and in a short time the cottage was in view; its lowly roof almost hid by overhanging branches from the trees around it.

The distressed James hurried me on, in the hope of hearing something to relieve our anxiety. We soon reached the gate, and springing from our horses, entered the little flower-garden in front. Although the sun had not yet risen, the sound of footsteps passing rapidly through the house was distinctly heard. Presently two persons, who appeared to be neighbors, came hastily out of the door to meet us.

'Is the doctor with you?' inquired one of them.

'What doctor? Who is injured?' exclaimed James, rushing past them into the house.

'I followed him, trembling in every limb. Several persons were in the room we entered, but I saw but one—and what a sight was that?'

Stretched on a bed, lay a tall form motionless. The face was turned toward the wall, but the pale hands were white as the counterpane. With a cry of agony and grief, James threw himself on his knees by its side. I saw no more, for nature gave way, and I sunk on the floor in a state of insensibility.

When restored to perfect consciousness, I found myself lying on a sofa in a small parlor. The window shutters were half closed to exclude the light.

Where am I? I exclaimed, attempting to rise, but a gentle hand prevented me, and turning I saw a lady, advanced in life, but with a most benignant countenance, who had been watching by my couch. It was the mother of Bertha, the widow of an American officer.

'Be composed, sir,' she said, 'we have all suffered much anxiety on your account, and your friend Ernest would not leave the house until assured you were in no danger.'

'Ernest!' I exclaimed, 'is he alive? Oh, Heaven be praised!'

'He is alive and well,' she replied, with some surprise; 'but now I recollect that you and his brother were both shocked by supposing the wounded person was Ernest. It was the stranger who has so constantly annoyed us, and yet we regret he is hurt. He had only fainted from loss of blood when you entered the room, but has been shot in the leg, and probably will be lame through life.'

It is impossible to describe the sudden and joyful change in my feelings. I thought not of the stranger, but of Ernest my friend, the brother of my Linda, restored to us safe and well. How the happiness of my overcharged heart struggled for utterance at my lips, but I