

"Peace, man. Your conduct has cut you off from the knowledge of gentlemen and soldiers. The hand raised to slay women and children has the weak blood of a coward running through it, and—"

Colonel Mordaunt snatched at his sword belt, but the sword was not there. With rapid movement he snatched the steel scabbard from its fastening, and lifting himself in the saddle, struck the speaker full across the face with it. Then, wheeling his horse around, struck the spurs deep into him, broke through the soldiers fumbling at his feet, tumbling and scattering them, and flew towards the sea. The tide was full in, the water deep, the banks at this place high and precipitous, and, as he came to the verge, he lifted his horse's head, dug his spurs into its sides, and bold y sprang into the night and sea. The horse sank to his mouth, bringing the rider to his shoulders, but he rose again promptly, and Colonel Mordaunt guiding his head seawards, swam out into the lightless water.

It would be madness to follow him, even if the trackless water could give them the clue, and listening for a moment on the verge of the cliff to the faint motion of the swimming animal, O'Byrne said:

"It was a bold leap, and worthy a braver man. It has saved him his unworthy life. Time is precious, Maurice, and we must away. We are passing through the enemy's country here, and my men are worn and tired with much travelling. Come; ride on; we can talk as we go. Drogheda is lost to us this time, and things look gloomy enough; but brave hearts and resolute men can master fate even yet—ride on."

"I cannot go, Hugh. Miss Mordaunt—"

"Who?"

"What of her?"

"She was here—I shall tell you why later on—but she is wandering on a wild steed through these marshes, and shall get lost. I must find her and protect her."

"Oh, Maurice, Maurice! What a faint heart you bear to Ireland when a daughter of that scorpion race can win your love from her!" said the Wicklow man, in mingled sorrow and anger.

"It cannot be helped, Hugh. I should sooner lose my own life than that anything could happen her. Hide on and leave me to search for her. I should be more than cowardly did I abandon her."

"Oh, Maurice, Maurice! Such talk in times like these! But—stay man—what is this?" he asked, as the step of a galloping horse came across them, and presently a flying steed with trailing reins, and a form reeling in the saddle, came up with them. The horse, with the instincts of military training, had galloped back and rejoined its fellows, mistaking the steeds of the Wicklow men for those of the scattered detachment.

"This is she—this is Carrie, Miss Mordaunt," cried Maurice, in an ecstasy of delight, as he leaped from his horse, clutched the trailing reins and caught the semi-unconscious form from the saddle in his arms with every expression of intense joy.

"What now, Maurice?" asked the Wicklow chief, as he viewed these demon rations with cynical eyes. "What after this? We are delaying our time perilously long. These fellows who have escaped will have entered the gates of Dublin by this; and others will have booted and saddled. Shall you ride with us or stay?"

"With you," said Maurice, resolutely, as, placing the form of Carrie Mordaunt on the saddle before him, he leaped on his horse.

"Forward, then—men! The dawn will have come before the Wicklow hills appear in view. Hide fast!"

And softly, as the phantom horsemen of the marshes might have done, the horsemen defile before him, break into a trot, and move noiselessly on.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Lady Ellen Maguire sat in the drawing-room of Roscommon House, Dublin city, with heart filled with various emotions. She was reading a letter from Carrie Mordaunt, rapturous with delight at the news she had to tell of her brother's escape, and was indeed, partly expecting a visit from one or the other, or both. She was overjoyed herself, too, at his escape; but along with these pleasurable feelings came the drear sorrow for her brother and cousin, who were, after being sent by sea to the Tower in London, there to be imprisoned until their sentences should be determined. If she had known that the shadows of night would come and the dawn break upon their cells through all the nights and days in four long years, with their painful and monotonous succession she would have more cause for trouble! But if she had known that their long imprisonment would only terminate on the morning when they trod the dark passage that led to the scaffold and the block, and they would take their last look at sun and sky, she would have cause for greater trouble still. As it was, however, the future was happily hidden from her, and these sacrifices were unknown to her. But, as the hours of the evening grew, she wondered that neither Raymond Mordaunt or his sister called upon her. If they had only part of the anxiety to see her that she had to see them, they would have been with her long before. But as the dusk fell, and they came not, her anxiety and her impatience became blended with anger and a sense of ill-treatment. Her proud blood and haughty spirit rose up against the apparent indifference and contempt with which she was treated, and her heart was beating in an access of hurt affection. There was an unaccountable absence of that love he had always manifested towards her, and which her heart told her she bore him, in thus arriving and yet failing to call upon her. A high-spirited, hot-blooded lover would have cast aside all other considerations, would have set apart all other duties, and, after such long absence, paid his first visit to his beloved.

Helen was pained, hurt and offended; her plighted love—given him above all other persons and to the grievous anger of her friends, who would have liked to see her intermarried with some of the great Irish families—had been treated coldly and unworthily, and her quick and haughty temper resented it; and finally, when the conflicting feelings grew to greater heat, she burst into a storm of passionate tears that could not be restrained or controlled, when a ring and knock came to the hall door.

"Raymond—Raymond Mordaunt," she thought, and, starting up, made a hasty toilet, and bathed her face to remove the trace of

tears. Not for worlds would she have him see, in her present offended and haughty state, that his non-coming had given cause for them. When she had ended, she descended again to the drawing-room to meet her neglectful lover.

She started back as she gained the centre of the apartment; for, standing with his back to her, looking out of the window, was a stranger. Her light footfall had not caught on his absent ear, but he turned round now, disclosing his face.

"Friar Tully!" she faintly screamed, in extreme surprise, as she grasped the ledge of the table for support?

"It is I, Lady Ellen," he said, coldly; "are you affrighted to see me, or did you expect another visitor?"

"Friar Tully, what—what brings you here? What evil news brings you now?"

"To see you, my lady."

"To see me!—What for? You surely would not have come for that alone! What brings you? You know what peril your life is in by being in Dublin?"

"I do, Lady Ellen; but if it were in ten times as much I should still come. But even so, I am not in as much peril as you."

"As I," she said with a faint scream, "as I. How? Speak—how?"

"Because you are in double danger—in soul as in body."

"You speak in riddles."

"I speak the truth, my lady. You are thinking of joining in marriage with Raymond Mordaunt—aye, even when your brother and the great lords of your family are in gaol or in deadly peril—and to this end you are prepared to abandon the religion of your fathers."

"It is untrue. I never thought of it."

"I know you better than you know yourself. You don't know what you intend or would do—I do. And I'll tell you, Lady Ellen, what the result will be, clearly as if the mantle of Elias had descended on my shoulders. You will lead a life of sorrow and misery; you will link bonds of woe, that will be unbreakable, around yourself; you will bring down the curse of Him who punishes those that give up His service for earthly loves, for carnal love, equally with those who give up love of land and liberty for service with the stranger and the oppressor."

"Did you come to tell me this?" she asked angrily and rising from her chair.

"I came to warn you of this. Nay, Lady Ellen, do not stir. I have more to say." She resumed her seat with an air of compelled unwillingness. "I came not only to tell you of this, but to entreat you to change your intention. Lady Ellen, the lords of your family are in gaol or on the battlefield. Their broad estates are in jeopardy; failing in this insurrection, there will not be their names in the land, nor an acre in their possession. Is this a time to wed with their bitterest foe, their deadliest enemy—with one who, even if things were otherwise, is unworthy of you? I will answer for you, Lady Ellen," he continued, with a quick wave of his hand, motioning her to be silent. "It is not. Think of your position when you shall have moved into another land, where your very name will cause you to be hated, with the additional reputation of having turned renegade to your faith and kindred at the moment when both were in the deadliest peril. There is one thing that commends itself to the whole human race, to savages as to civilised men—fidelity and truth and honour to our own; there is one thing also that excites the universal detestation and horror of men—falsehood, treachery, or desertion to them in the hour of their need. I speak the truth—your own heart tells you I do."

"I am not guilty of falsehood, or treachery, or desertion," she said, appalled by the energy and intensity of his words.

"You are travelling on the road without intending it, without knowing it. It is for this I came here—to warn you against the path you are marking out for yourself—to warn you to abandon it. Drogheda has failed to fall before the arm of the friends. The cause is in the gravest peril. You can do much to restore it. The estates you hold are broad and vast, the dwellers thereon lusty and bold. They are holding back, waiting your orders. They can be of service now—immense service. They are well armed, many of them well trained. There was one whom you loved before the sullen Puritan threw his glamour around you. Return to his love now!"

"You, Friar Tully!" she cried, with a faint scream.

"Pardon me, Lady Ellen. The cloth I wear cuts me off from earthly loves. No; not me. The very idea is sacrilegious, and it shows how little you remember our ancient faith when you mention it. No; not me. Whatever affection—I shame to use the word—existed when we were foster-brother and foster-sister the vows spoken before the high altar of St. Peter's in Rome rent and sundered for ever."

"Which was your voluntary doing," she said, with bitterness and energy.

"Pardon me again, Lady Ellen—it was God's will. There is a hand higher than ours that sways our actions and our thoughts in spite of ourselves. But I would not recall these things. I would let foolish affections and loves of old, immature and ill-considered, rest in the buried past. But he of whom I speak—Hugh O'Byrne—Colonel Hugh O'Byrne—"

"Colonel O'Byrne!" almost shrieked Ellen.

"Yes. You loved him—at least I heard so—once. He loves you. He is young, gallant, bold of heart and chivalrous. He comes of a stock old and true, old almost as the hills within his patrimony—old as your own. He is of your creed and nation. He—"

"It is impossible, Frank Tully," she cried, addressing him for the first time by his Christian name. "My heart, my love, is in another's keeping. Impossible."

"Earthly loves are of our own creation," he said coldly. "We can sunder them at will. We should do so—the higher law of God commands it—when they are opposed to duty, virtue, to faith and patriotism."

"It is impossible—impossible," she cried in dismay. "It might have been done before—if—if—but it is impossible now. It cannot be done. He has my love, Raymond Mordaunt—and shall keep it."