

The Storyteller

THE OLD HATRED.

We are the the Uniackes of Castle Dare, and our cousins are the Uniackes of Burren Castle. There is not a quarter of a mile of country from one doorstep to another, but it was a distance no Uniacke had crossed for many generations. The distance between us in other matters was indeed a world wide. We are of the old religion and they of the new. We are gentle and they violent. And now at Dare we were shrunk to but two of us—my father, the Lord Uniacke, and myself, his daughter, Ursula. Once there had been three gallant gentlemen of our name, my brothers Ulrick, Terence, and Maurice. But they had followed Sarsfield and were dead in French Flanders, and so there was none to keep up the honor of our house saving only a girl.

My father was a very grave and somewhat sorrowful man, with one solace and one pastime in the pursuit of astronomy. When he had the heavenly globe between his hands he forgot for a time, I believe, how much of earthly happiness had slipped out of them with the death of my mother in her lovely youth and the following after her of her sons.

I used to sit by him like a mouse at my needlework while he pursued his studies, and if we spoke not for hours there was still a comfortable and loving communion between us. He had his study high in air, a lantern-room with four windows which surveyed the countryside, and from one corner of it a little winding stair ascended to the telescope on the tower-top. Often he has called me to follow him to the telescope end of a starry night, and then, applying his own eye to it, has forgotten all about me. Nor would I recall him by so much as plucking at his sleeve, but have waited patiently by him till he returned from heaven to earth, when it was his habit to be most repentant and to upbraid himself for his forgetfulness.

Indeed, he never seemed to love me less, but rather more, that I was a girl, and he was proud of me in his gentle way because I was fearless, and could ride and swim like any gentleman, and could shoot, too, if need be, though not the deer nor the birds, for they were all old friends to me, and I could never bear to hurt dumb creatures. But, although I could do these things, and had learned the dead languages from Father Richard, whom we had sheltered from the storms outside till we found him one day with his kind old gray head fallen between his crucifix and skull, and the last sands of his hour glass long run out, I was yet skilled in household matters. Indeed, I could candy with any one or distill sweet waters or make cordials or salves and I could never be of opinion that a woman was the worse for being able to spin and sew.

However, 'tis too much of myself.

The Uniackes of Burren were also at this time shrunken to one representative of the name, a young man, Sir James Uniacke, who had lived much in England and abroad, and at this time was doing the grand tour, as was the fashion with young men of rank, out in the world beyond the trials and poverty of Dare. He had had a brother, Ralph, a wastrel and a soldier, but he was reputed killed in the wars of the Low Countries. Often, often at night, when I have stood waiting for my father to remember me on the tower, I have looked across to the dark mass of Burren, black against the sky, with its woods and waters at its feet, and my thoughts could not help but play about the unknown cousin, the only other of our blood living, whom my father had taught me, as much as

consistent with his meekness and religiousness, to hate. For it was his conviction that nothing good could come out of Burren, so that to hate the last Uniacke of Burren was as though one hated a sin.

But one night, as I stood there by my father, a summer night of stars and purple, when hardly a leaf stirred in the woods below the tower, I saw that there was a light in Burren, in every window of the long range that ran to westward of the hall door. And, though it startled me, I said nothing, for I felt my father would not like me to think upon the house or the family.

The next morning I climbed the tower again. It was a shining morning of early June, and the woods for miles around sang a sleepy song, as though they rocked many cradles, which doubtless they did. And, standing there, I looked across to Burren, and as I looked I saw a servant leading a horse up and down. Then the doors opened and a gentleman came out on the steps. I shrank behind the telescope, lest he should look up and see me outlined against the sky, and from thence I saw him mount and ride away.

Even at the distance I could perceive that he looked a gallant and dignified figure and made no doubt that my cousin James had come home, but I kept my counsel to myself.

However, it was not a week from that time when a servant came to my father, where he and I sat together in the tower-room, and announced a visitor, and no less a one than Sir James Uniacke. I saw my father's face whiten and then turn a dark red, as though some one had struck him.

'Tell Sir James Uniacke that Lord Uniacke receives no visitors,' he said, controlling himself, as I perceived, with difficulty.

But when the servant had gone he broke forth into such a passion of violence that I had not believed him capable of. His meekness and his piety seemed to have dropped away from him, and, seeing him in these transports of fury, I realised all at once that we were sprung from the same bloody and violent stock which had produced the Uniackes of Burren, with all their rough riding and cruel deeds. Nor could I forget him as he appeared then, although afterwards he did penance and wore himself thin with fasting, and was more meek than ever before.

A few days later Sir James Uniacke wrote, but my father, seeing the superscription, laid the letter upon the faggots unread and watched grimly the wax and the ribbons sucked in by the fire and the parchment roll itself up and disappear.

I sat with my eyes down while this happened, as becomes a girl, and kept my hands folded on my lap, yet I will confess that I had to struggle with myself to sit by so calmly and see the letter burn. Indeed, I was half ashamed of myself, a Uniacke of Dare, because something whispered within me that it was time the old hatred was forgotten. Yet, there was my father, as near a saint as I ever knew a man to be, and he could not forgive, and was I to be better than he?

Very soon after that the old flame of persecution, which had sunk low, suddenly sprang up again and the fines and threats of imprisonment came faster than ever.

'They will have all Dare before they are done,' said my father.

Alas, as though it were prophetic, the trouble was already on its way. Within a few hours we heard that Dare was no longer our own. It had passed from us to the younger branch of the house. A Papist had

no rights to lands nor houses, nor to anything of value. All that was ours had passed to Sir James Uniacke.

I thought in the first moments that the blow would have killed my father. But as soon as he had somewhat recovered himself, though trembling pitifully, he commanded me to put together the barest necessities and leave Dare free to James Uniacke to enter it.

In Dublin we found our refuge. There was just one friend in the world with whom my father had kept up communication, and that was Lady Barbara de la Poer, a friend of his youth and my godmother.

Lady Barbara found us lodging in Dominick street near her own, and it was very pleasant to be so near orchards and open country, and since we must be citizens, to have our lodging high on the steep hill which overlooks the city from the north.

I had never seen Lady Barbara, though I had always associated her with pleasant things, since many a gift such as girls love had come from her year after year to her godchild.

Now, when I saw her I thought I had never seen anything so pretty. She wore diamonds in her powdered hair, but they were no brighter than the black eyes under their black brows, which sparkled and laughed incessantly. I do not know how much her cheeks owed to the rouge pot. I was not skilled in city ways. But their delicate carmine repeated in her lips, contrasted delightfully with her powdered head. And her eyes, where little faint lines were, she had set a patch here and there to distract the gaze from them, and on her cheeks there was a crescent moon and a coach-and-horses to point the road to her dimples.

She was on her way from some rout or other when I first saw her, and she was wearing a sacque and quilted petticoat of pink satin, with a large brown velvet hat, its feathers clasped by a diamond buckle, set astride on her curled head.

I had taken her to be very rich by her garments and her jewels, but I knew later that she was poor. She was very reckless at the gaming tables and royally generous with her friends, so she had stripped herself of wealth, but, as she had never seemed to want for a fine frock or a guinea her poverty, I took it, was not the sort that irked.

When she had taken me in her arms—she was littler than I, and the plumes of her hat tickled my nose—she broke out in praises of me, saying she would show me at court. But my father shook his head, smiling at her as though she was pleasant to him; and so must she have been to any man, though he were a saint or an anchorite.

'No, no, Lady Babs!' he said. 'We are too poor to go to court, since even what remains of our portion has gone into James Uniacke's pouch. We shall bide at home, or pray in the church yonder. We have no fine, extravagant tastes.'

'If Ursula have none,' said she, looking at him from under her great feathers, 'then she is less or more than woman.'

'She has had a different training from most women,' my father reminded her.

'Ah! but under the scholar you shall find the woman,' she answered, stepping lightly to his side, and shining in the dark room like a pink moth.

'Ursula is grave,' said my father. 'Because you have made her so, Terrence,' said the lady.

Still, she had not her will of taking me to court, although she tempted my fancy with the fine clothes she would have given me. My father had indeed withdrawn from the world and taken me with him. We went nowhere except to the Church of the White Friars, over against our lodging, and, when the weather served, we took long walks through the apple and cherry orchards of