

—hope springing suddenly in her heart, “you may not die so soon. Many linger for years before God calls them away; but Father John will soon be here, and until then try and compose yourself to sleep, while I kneel and offer up a prayer to God and His Blessed Mother for you.”

These words seemed to have a soothing effect upon the poor sufferer, and, raising her eyes to Heaven, with clasped hands muttered a fervent prayer. Suddenly she turned toward her daughter, and as a painful expression passed over her features, she hurriedly said:

“But what if young Crosby’s troopers are out to-day? May they not kill both Brian and priest? And then, Mabel, what would become of you?”

“Let us hope for the best, mother, and put our trust in Him who never yet deserted the suffering and deserving. And now, take a few spoonfuls of this sweet milk, it will refresh and strengthen you, and I will wake you up as soon as the priest comes.” She gently raised her mother’s head, and moistened her lips with the cool and refreshing beverage, and, adjusting the bed clothes around her, knelt on the floor to pray. After the lapse of some minutes she looked toward the bed, and knew by her mother’s breathing that she had fallen asleep. Then, rising from her position, she slowly opened the door and stepped out into the moonlight which now streamed upon the river. “Thank God,” she muttered to herself, as she gained the outside of the cabin. “Thank God, she is asleep at last, and I hope she will awake refreshed and better. But, O! I wish Brian would come!”

As she said this she uttered a deep sigh, and pressed her hands upon her bosom, as if to still the loud throbbings of her heart. At the same moment a slight rustling was heard among the bushes a few paces from where she stood. She started, but the next moment rushed eagerly forward as the form of her brother emerged from the thicket and stood before her in the clear moonlight.

“Brian! Brian!” she almost shrieked, “tell me, do you come alone? Did you not find the priest?”

A look of unutterable grief darkened the young man’s face as he slowly, and

with emphatic utterance, as if every word was wrung from his heart, replied:

“Mabel, I come alone; I could not find him.”

“Then God have mercy on our poor mother, for Brian, I am afraid she cannot live until morning.”

For a few moments these two young creatures, brother and sister, stood gazing on each other’s faces in mute despair. Two marble statues seemed not more lifeless and motionless. They looked as if stricken by the hand of death, so rigid and cold they appeared. Young as they were—he, the oldest, not more than twenty years—they had felt the bitterest sorrow that could fall to their lot, for, to be debarred the last sacraments of the Church is to an Irish Catholic the greatest of all misfortunes. At last Brian, averting his eyes from his sister, and gazing on the ground, gasped in a husky voice.

“Mabel, is there no hope? Will she not live until morning?”

“I fear not. I hoped until now and tried to cheer her until I would see or hear from you. But now I know not what to do or say.”

“Listen to me, Mabel,” said Brian, again looking into his sister’s eyes, “there is still hope. I expect Father John to be in his hiding place in Urney Woods at midnight, or, at the latest, by sunrise in the morning. I shall go there to-night; it is but a few miles from here, and wait until midnight for him. If he does not then return I will leave the message with old Michael, who lives with him in his den, and cross the mountains to Raphoe. I have been there to-day already, and miles beyond it, but I feel that God will give me strength and grace to find him, if he has not been murdered by the troopers, for they were out to-day.”

“May God grant that he has not, for then indeed was our last hope extinguished.”

“He went on a sick call beyond the mountains, so old Michael said, and as the old man himself is sick and deaf he either did not hear or else forgot the direction of the priest. But he promised to return soon, and as Hugh and Turlough are searching for him, it will go hard with us all if we do not find him.”