

murmuring sound of voices broke upon their ears, not proceeding from the shore below, but coming from the interior of the cavern.

"What noise is that?" Isabel asked in astonishment.

"It sounds like people talking. The saints be good to us! Where are they at all, at all?" was Rose's whispered answer, in sudden alarm.

"There must be another outlet to the cavern," Isabel remarked, in the same low tones.

"There must be, sure enough, though it was unknownst to me."

The murmur of voices continued, but it did not approach nearer. Rose's curiosity was aroused.

"Bedad, I'll see what it is!" she said resolutely, and she moved noiselessly farther into the cavern, Isabel following timidly. Before long a light gleamed in the distance.

"I never knew the cavern went so far back," observed Rose, stopping a moment, as if afraid to advance farther. The voices now sounded more distinctly, and the tones seemed strangely familiar to her ears.

"I wonder who they are!" she said, under her breath, "but faix I'll find out;" and curiosity again prevailing, she proceeded cautiously forward.

A strange sight soon met the eyes of both girls. Round a rude wooden table sat a party of men talking eagerly, the light from a flaring torch of bog wood—fastened in a large iron scone—revealing their faces, in which the working of fierce passions was but too evident. Some of the men were not unknown to Isabel Crofton. She had seen them before on the lawn at Elm Lodge, in that hostile interview with her father. All the party were known to Rose Kavanagh, and among them she was startled by the sight of her brother Dermot.

"The Lord save us!" she whispered in trembling accents. "It's Captain Rock and some of his men!"

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE CAVERN.

THAT was a strange scene on which Isabel Crofton now gazed in silent alarm. Those men, her father's enemies, for what purpose had they met in this subterranean den? In their hard passionate faces she read the startling answer, — the gloomy purpose to avenge the blow recently dealt by Lord Arranmore's agent. Intuitively she felt this, and the first words that distinctly came to her ears from the rude council table confirmed her worst fears.

"As he is from home it ought to be done to-night. We have waited long enough for our revinge. More nor two months, and that's long enough, anyhow."

"It'll be all the sweeter when it comes boys!" was the remark of Captain Rock, an athletic elderly man, with a hard, determined countenance,—a stranger both to Rose and Isabel. "When did you say Crofton was expected?"

"Not till to-morrow," was the answer of one of the party.

"I heard he was coming to-night," put in another eagerly, "and, begorra, it'll be a beautiful bonfire to welcome him," he added, with a discordant laugh.

"It's only what he deserves," bitterly observed Captain Rock; "the villain that's so fond of burning the roof over other people's heads should not have his own left standing."

"Bad luck ever follow him! it isn't punishment enough for the like of him," broke in a third speaker, with fierce vehemence.

This man Isabel recognized as Flannagan. His face once seen could not easily be forgotten.

"They are going to burn the lodge!"—whispered Rose Kavanagh, in a voice of terror. "Blessed Mary, if they knew we were here listening they'd be the death of us!"