

(Continued from 11th page.)

he that sold Stron-Saul!"

"Who sold Stron-Saul?"

The question came like a thunder-bolt. Helen Vor stood on the outskirts, eyeing them with a wide questioning gaze. She had come upon them unawares.

Who sold Stron Saul?

For a moment no one answered. Then he who had ridden hard after Rory said with a sneer, "Your lover, Helen Vor."

Her hand sought her dirk.

"It is a lie," she cried letting the blade fly at him, "you ken it is a lie, craven."

The by-standers uttered a startled, "oh!" and parted to this side and that. But the frightened cries of the children which rose babel-like from among their feet drowned for the moment other sounds. When they looked up again, the man was holding his hands to his face, while a narrow red stream trickled down through his fingers.

"It is false," Helen repeated challenging them all with a defiant glance. "Where is Dark Rory?"

They pointed silently to the hut. Such sudden retribution startled them.

She walked to the door and pushed it open. There she halted.

Roderick was seated on a low chair by the fire. His head was resting on his hands. A basin of water on a table near showed what Maisie's work had been.

A flash of jealous anger flooded Helen's face. All the bitter unreasoning fury in her Nature rushed to the surface. The scene came like a shock on the top of her vehement assertion of his honour: she felt like a dupe.

"So," she said harshly, "I have have been vouching for your nobility without while you—you were—here with—Maisie Lamont. I want to speak to you, Rory."

Maisie drew aside, and old Hugh, wise in his day and generation stepped out of the hut.

For a second longer Maisie hesitated, but Helen was in no mood for delay. She quietly laid her hands on her shoulders and quashed her out. Then she shut and bolted the door.

"Now," she said turning around and facing him, "what does all this clamour mean?"

"What clamour?" he replied doggedly.

He was surprised that she asked no questions as to why he was there. He wanted to explain to her that he was on his way to the cave, when his horse, wornout with fatigue stumbled and flung him to the ground. Old Hugh and his daughter had found him lying beneath the animal whether dead or unconscious they could not tell. They carried him into the hut, bound up his wound, that had burst open again, and brought him round. Helen, however asked no questions. She was proud; and if he cared to seek the dwelling of Hugh Lamont first it was nothing to her.

"What clamour?" she said, "do you not hear it? They are saying that you sold Stron-Saul. Where is he? Where is my father?"

"John Vor put himself willingly in Fergus' power. I could not help it." He felt his defence was weak; but he was angry at the bitterness of her voice.

"Could not help it!" she cried, her face now white as death, "when has Dank Rory ever before owned he was beaten? Is he—is my father—dead?"

"Gad!" said he taking no notice of her last question, "if I'd had five of my brave band at my back instead of

five fools, I'd have charged the whole fourteen of them, and died or conquered."

"Is my father dead?"

"How can I tell? No one knows Fergus' mind—Sir Fergus as he styles himself now—damn him! He throws dust in everybody's eyes, the devil's too. I believe."

"Could you \* \* \* " she faltered, could you not have saved him?"

There was no answer. She drew herself up and steadied herself by the table: she must know the truth.

"They say you sold him," she cried, "is it true? Speak, Rory, for Heaven's sake! Is it true?"

"Do you believe it?" he asked.

"I answered 'no' to the glen-folk. Here you must answer me.

"Well," he said harshly, stung to the quick by her words, "it is a lie."

Then he told her all of that dark day's doings.

"And he—my father—an old, old man—made prisoner by Fergus and never an arm stretched out to save him—not even yours Rory, I'd rather have had you there dead, than here as you are."

"You are unreasonable, Helen."

She clutched the neck of her dress as though it choked her.

"Unreasonable!" she cried, "when I see my idol shattered, unreasonable to weep for it! Verily I am unreasonable then."

"God forbid I should lay the blame on your clan, Helen," he said raising himself on his arm, "they are, as they were made and what I have done, I've done with clear head and eyes: I cannot say I was forced into it, and yet and yet—there seemed no other way."

"What will you do now?" she asked.

"Do! there is nothing that can be done but fight—if they can fight."

"Fight—for what?"

"Sarno."

"Oh! Sarno—I wish a great storm would raze it to the ground."

He made no answer, but rose wearily to his feet and opened the door.

The glen-folk were still gathered in groups on the loaning. The moment their eyes rested on him, a deep hush fell. He moved forward leaning on his sword. They parted a little and stood as though waiting for him to speak.

He looked at them sternly then his eyes fell on the horse. He pointed to it.

"Come, you fools," he said, look after the mare, she's the best in the glen. Hands here."

Not a man moved.

"Do you hear?" he asked.

Someone in the crowd tore up a clod of earth and flung it at him.

Rory stood up.

"What's the meaning of this?" he cried.

The answer came like a roll of distant thunder. "You have sold Stron-Saul. Down with the man who has sold Stron-Saul to Fergus Macdon Down with him, down with him, where the clods are let his head lie."

Roderick felt in that moment that reason, hope and energy were fast flying from him. What was the use of continuing the struggle? The old chief might be dead long before he could reach Sarno. Besides the men he would have to lead were cowards all. They believed the worst of him, even Helen's faith in his honesty was gone. He had hoped to rouse them for a final struggle to spur them on to some show of manliness in the hope of saving their chief. But they thirsted for his blood. They were only treacherous and unreasonable tigers. Well; he would at least have his revenge on the liar who had defamed

him.

"Who says that I have sold Stron-Saul?" he demanded drawing his pistol.

Helen grasped his arm.

"Not that, Rory," she whispered, for God's sake, do not fire." Then aloud. "It is a lie. My father has gone to Sarno of his own free will. I, Helen Vor, daughter of your chief, tell you that it is a lie: Dark Rory has not sold him. He who stands yonder is a traitor, and has come home only to mislead you with idle tales. I know him. I saw him once at Sarno. If you will trust me you shall be back at Stron Saul in less than a month. Clansmen will you follow the daughter of your chief?"

The appeal came just at the right moment. 'Ay! ay!' shouted the crowd. "Coward," they hissed.

"Ay! coward and traitor, who in this dark, dark hour would destroy the clan. This is his need." She seized Rory's pistol and shot the man. "Away to your homes," cried she, "we shall meet at dawn." Then she turned to the outlaw.

"I'll send Alaster to waylay the others. They will swear what I say is true. They will not, for their own sakes, dare to speak as yonder craven."

"Why have you done it?" he asked. She turned away.

"Because I am, like every woman, a fool."

\* \* \* \* \*

An hour later, the glen-folk gathered again on the loaning round the four men who had just returned from their journey.

"Strange things happen in the Glen. It is true that we return to Stron-Saul?" they asked the horsemen eagerly.

"It is true."

"And the chief is safe?"

"Ay."

"Long live the chief," cried the people, "and long live Helen Vor."

#### SPARKLES

Miss Rossbud—Why did you make such a fuss when Charlie kissed you in the conservatory? Were you shrieking for help?

Miss Oldgirl—No, for witnesses.

Tommy Tucker (still smarting) — "Grandpaw, did you ever spank paw when he was a kid?"

Grandfather—"Whenver he needed it, Tommy, and that was pretty often."

Tommy (hugging himself)—"Well, ther's some comfort in that!"

Wiseman: "To look at that Englishman you'd think he was a tramp, wouldn't you?"

Jokeley: "Well, I know for a fact that he hasn't a place that he can call home."

Wiseman: "Nonsense! Why, his mansion in London is—"

Jokeley: "Sumptuous, yes, but he calls it 'ome.'"

Church: "I had to walk the floor all night with the baby. Can you think of anything worse than that?"

Gotham: "Yes; you might have married in Greenland, where the nights are six months long."

N'wrich: "How'd you get along at the dinner?"

Mrs. Newrick: "Fine. When they eat pie with a fork I done it, too, so as not to let 'em see their break."

Father (sternly)—"I am sorry you are not a girl of your word, Mabel. You promised me faithfully that your young man would say 'good-night' to you at ten o'clock, and I heard him go after eleven last night." Mabel—"So he did, father; but he started saying good-night at ten."