LORNA DOONE

B. R. D. BLACKMORE.

CHAPTER XII. CONTINUED

As for the Doones, they were thriving still, and no one to come against them, except indeed by word of mouth, to which they lent no heed whatever. Complaints were made from time to time, both in high and low quarters (as the rank might be of the people robbed), and once or twice in the highest of all, to-wit, the King himself. But his majesty made a good joke about it (not meaning any harm, I doubt), and was so much much pleased with himself thereupon, that he quite forgave himself the mischief. Moreover, the main authorities were a long way off; and the Chancellor had no cattle on Exmoor; and as for my lord the Chief-justice, some rogue had taken his silver spoons; whereupon His Lordship swore that never another man would he hang until he had that one by the neck. Therefore the Doones went on as they listed, and none saw fit to meddle with them. For the only man who would have dared to come to close quarters with them, that is to say, Tom Faggus, himself was a quarry for the law, if ever it should be unhooded. Moreover, he had transferred his business to the neighborhood of Wantage, in the county of Berks, where he found the climate drier, also good downs, and commons excellent for galloping, and richer yeoman than ours be, and better roads to rob them on.

Some folk, who had been wiser attended to their own affairs, said that I (being sizable now, and able to shoot not badly) ought to do something against those Doones, and show what I was made of. But for a time I was very bashful, shaking when called upon suddenly, and blushing as deep as a maiden for my strength was not come upon me, and mayhap I had grown in front of it. And again, though I loved my father still, and would fire at a word about him, I saw not how it would do him good for me to harm his injurers. Some races are of revengeful kind, and will for years pursue their wrong, and sacrifice this world and the next for a moment's foul satisfaction; but methinks this comes of some black blood, perverted and never purified. And I doubt but men of true English birth are stouter than so to be twisted, though some of the women may take that turn, if their own life runs unkindly.

Let that pass—I am never good at talking of things beyond me. All I know is, that if I had met a Doone who had killed my father, I would gladly have thrashed him black and blue, supposing I were able; but would never have fired a gun at him unless he began that game with me, or fell upon more of my family, or were violent among women. And to do them justice, my mother and Annie were equally kind and gentle, but Eliza would flame and grow white with contempt, and not trust herself to speak to us.

Now a strange thing came to pass that winter, when I was twenty-one years old, a very strange thing, which affrighted the rest, and made me feel uncomfortable. Not that there was anything in it to do harm to any one, only that none could explain it, except by attributing it to the devil. The weather was very mild and open, and scarcely any snow fell; at any rate none lay on the ground, even for an hour, in the highest part of Exmoor; a thing which I knew not before nor since, as long as I can remember. But the nights were wonderfully dark, as though with no stars in the heaven; and all day long the mists were rolling upon the hills and down them, as if the whole land were a wash-house. The moor-land was full of snipes and teal, and curlews flying and crying, and lapwings flapping heavily, and ravens hovering round dead sheep; yet no red shanks nor dotterel, and scarce any golden plovers (of which we have great store generally); but vast lonely birds, that cried at night, and moved the whole air with their pinions; yet no man ever saw them. It was dismal as well as dangerous now for any man to go fowling (which of late I loved much in the winter), because the fog would come down so thick that the pan of the gun was reeking, and the fowl out of sight ere the powder kindled, and then the sound of the piece was so dead, that the shooter feared harm, and glanced over his shoulder. But the danger of course was far less in this than in losing of the track, and falling into the mires, or over the brim of a precipice.

Nevertheless, I must needs go out, being young and very stupid, and feared of being afraid—a fear which a wise man has long cast by, having learned of the manifold dangers which ever and ever encompass us. And besides this folly and wildness of youth, perchance there was something, I know not what, of the joy we have in uncertainty. Mother, in fear of my missing home—though for that matter, I could smell supper, when hungry, through a hundred land-yards of fog—my dear mother, who thought of me ten times for one thought about herself, gave orders to ring the great sheep-bell which hung above the pigeon-cote, every ten minutes of the day; and the sound came through the plaits of fog, and I was vexed about it, like the letters of a copy-book. It reminded me, too, of Blundell's bell, and the grief to go into school again.

But during those two months of fog (for we had it all the winter), the saddest and the heaviest thing was to stand beside the sea—to be upon the beach yourself, and see the long waves coming in; to know that they are long waves but only see a piece of them; and to hear them lifting roundly, swelling over smooth green rocks, plashing down in the hollow corners, but bearing on all the same as ever soft, and sleek, and sorrowful, till their little noise is over.

One old man who lived at Lynmouth, seeking to be buried there, having been more than half over the world, though shy to speak about it, and fain to come home to his birth place, this old Will Watcombe (who dwelt by the water), said that our strange winter arose from a thing he called the "Gulf Stream" rushing up Channel suddenly. He said it was hot water, almost fit for a man to shave with, and it threw all our cold water out, and ruined the fish and the spawning-time, and a cold spring would come after it. I was fond of going to Lynmouth on Sunday to hear this old man talk, for sometimes he would discourse with me, when nobody else could move him. He told me that this powerful flood set in upon our coast so hard, sometimes once in ten years, and sometimes not for fifty, and the Lord only knew the sense of it; but that when it came, therewith came warmth, and clouds, and fog, and moisture and nuts, and fruits, and even shells; and all the tides were thrown abroad. As for nuts, he winked a while and chewed a piece of tobacco; yet did I not comprehend him. Only afterward I heard that nuts with liquid kernels came, traveling on the Gulf Stream; for never before was known so much foreign cordial landed upon our coast, floating ashore by mistake in the fog, and (what with the tossing and the mist) too much astray to learn its duty.

Folk, who are ever too prone to talk, said that Will Watcombe himself knew better than anybody else about this drift of the Gulf Stream, and the places where it would come ashore, and the caves that took the indraught. But De Whichehalse, our great magistrate, certified that there was no proof of unlawful importation; neither good cause to suspect it, at a time of Christian charity. And we knew that it was a foul thing for some quarrymen to say that night after night they had been digging a new cellar at Ley Manor to hold the little marks of respect found in the caverns at high-water weed. Let that be: it is none of my business to speak evil of dignities; only we common people joked of the "Gulp Stream," as we called it.

But the thing which astonished and frightened us so, was not, I do assure you, the landing of foreign spirits, nor the loom of a lugger at twilight in the gloom of the winter moonrise. That which made us crouch in by the fire, or draw the bedclothes over us, and try to think of something else, was a strange mysterious sound.

At gray of night, when the sun was gone, and no red in the west remained, neither were stars forthcoming, suddenly a wailing voice rose along the valleys, and a sound in the air, as of people running. It mattered not whether you stood on the moor, or crouched behind rocks away from it, or down among reedy places; all as one the sound would come, now from the heart of the earth beneath, now overhead bearing down on you. And then there was rushing of something by, and melancholy laughter, and the hair of man would stand on end, before he could reason properly.

God, in His mercy, knows that I am stupid enough for any man, and very slow of impression, nor ever, could bring myself to believe that our Father would let the evil one get the upper hand of us. But when I had heard that sound three times, in the lonely gloom of the evening fog, and the cold that followed the lines of air, I was loath to go abroad by night, even so far as the stables, and loved the light of a candle more, and the glow of a fire with company.

There were many stories about it, of course, all over the breadth of the moor-land. But those who had heard it most often declared that it must be the wail of a woman's voice, and the rustle of robes fleeing horribly, and fiends in the fog going after her. To that, however, I paid no heed, and when any body was with me; only we drew more close together, and barred the doors at sunset.

CHAPTER XIII

MASTER HUCKABACK COMES IN

Mr. Reuben Huckaback, whom many good folk in Dulverton will remember long after my time, was my mother's uncle, being indeed her mother's brother. He owned the very best shop in the town, and did a fine trade in soft ware, especially when the pack-horses came safely in at Christmas time. And we being now his only kindred (except, indeed, his granddaughter, little Ruth Huckaback, of whom no one took any heed), mother beheld it a Christian duty to keep as well as could be with him, both for love of a nice old man, and for the sake of her children. And truly the Dulverton people said that he was the richest man in their town, and could buy up half the country armigers; ay, and if it came to that, they would like to see any man, at Bampton, or at Wivelscombe, and you might say almost Taunton, who could put down golden Jacobus and Carolus against him.

Now this old gentleman—so they called him, according to his money; and I have seen many worse ones, more violent and less wealthy—he must needs come away that time to spend the New-year-tide with us; not that he wanted to do it (for he hated country life), but because my mother pressing, as mothers will do to a good bag of gold, had wrung a promise from nim; and the only boast of his life was that never yet had he broken his word, at least since he opened business.

Now it pleased God that Christmas-time (in spite of all the fogs) to send safe home to Dulverton, and, what was more, with their loads quite safe, a goodly string of pack-horses. Nearly half of their charge was for Uncle Reuben, and he knew how to make the most of it. Then, having balanced his debits and credits, and set the writs running against defaulters, as behooves a good Christian at Christmas-tide, he saddled his horse, and rode off toward Oare, with a good stout coat upon him, and leaving Ruth and his head man plenty to do, and little to eat until they should see him again.

It had been settled between us that we should expect him soon after noon, on the last day of December. For the Doones being lazy and fond of bed, as the manner is of dishonest folk, the surest way to escape them was to travel before they were up and about, to-wit, in the forenoon of the day. But herein we reckoned without our host; for, being in high festivity, as became good Papists, the robbers were too lazy, it seems, to take the trouble of going to bed; and forth they rode on the Old-year morning, not with any view to business, but purely in search of mischief.

We had put off our dinner till one o'clock (which to me was a sad foregoing), and there was to be a brave supper at six of the clock, upon New Years' eve; and the singers to come with their lanterns, and do it outside the parlor-window, and then have hot cup till their heads should go round, after making away with the victuals. For although there was nobody now in our family to be church warden of Oare, it was well admitted that we were the people entitled alone to that dignity; and though Nicholas Snowe was in office by name, he managed it only by mother's advice; and a pretty mess he made of it, so that every one longed for a Ridd again, soon as ever I should be old enough. This Nicholas Snowe was to come in the evening, with his three tall, comely daughters, strapping girls, and well skilled in the dairy; and the story was all over the parish, on a stupid conceit of John Fry's, that I should have been in love with all three, if there had been but one of them. These Snowes were to come, and come they did, partly because Mr. Huckaback liked to see fine young maidens, and partly because none but Nicholas Snowe could smoke a pipe now all around our parts, except of the very high people, whom we durst never invite. And Uncle Ben, as we all knew well, was a great hand at his pipe, and would sit for hours over it, in our warm chimney-corner, and never want to say a word, unless it were inside him; only he liked to have somebody there ever against him smoking.

Now when I came in, before one o'clock, after seeing to the cattle—for the day was thicker than ever, and we must keep the cattle close at home if we wished to see any more of them—I fully expected to find Uncle Ben sitting in the fire-place, lifting one cover and then another, as his favorite manner was, and making sweet mouths over them; for he loved our bacon rarely, and they had no good leeks at Dulverton; and he was a man who always would see his business done himself. But there, instead of my finding him, with his quaint, dry face pulled out at me, and then shut up sharp not to be cheated—who should run out but Betty Muxworthy, and poke me with a saucepan lid.

"Get out of that now, Betty," I said, in my politest manner; for really Betty was now become a great domestic evil. She would have her own way so, and of all things the most distressful was for a man to try to reason with her.

"Zider-press," cried Betty again, for she thought it a fine joke to call me that, because of my size, and my hatred of it; "here be a rare get-up, anyhow."

"A rare good dinner, you mean, Betty. Well, and I have a rare good appetite." With that I wanted to go and smell it, and not to stop for Betty.

"Troost thee for thiecy, Jan Ridd. But thee must keep it bit langer, I rackon. Her baint coom, Maister Ziderpress. Whatt'e mak of that now?"

"Do you mean to say that Uncle Ben has not arrived yet, Betty?"

"Raived! I knaws nout about that, whuther a hath or noo. Only I tell 'e her haint coom. Rackon them Doonesses hath gat 'un."

And Betty, who hated Uncle Ben, because he never gave her a groat, and she was not allowed to dine with him, I am sorry to say that Betty Muxworthy grinned all across, and poked me again with the greasy saucepan-cover. But I, misliking so to be treated, strode through the kitchen indignantly, for Betty behaved to me even now as if I were only Eliza.

"Oh Johnny, Johnny," my mother cried, running out of the grand show-parlor, where the case of stuffed birds was, and peacock-feathers, and the white hare killed by grandfather; "I am so glad you are come at last! There is something sadly amiss, Johnny."

Mother had upon her wrists something very wonderful, of the nature of fal-lal, as we say, and for which she had an inborn turn, being of good draper family, and polished above the yeomanry. Nevertheless, I could never bear it, partly because I felt it to be out of place in our good farm-house, partly because I hate frippery, partly because it seemed to have nothing to do with father, and partly because I never could tell the reason of my hating it. And yet the poor soul had put them on, not to show her hands off (which were above her station), but simply for her children's sake, because Uncle Ben had given them. But another thing, I never could bear for man or woman to call me "Johnny." "Jack," or "John," I cared not which; and that was honest enough, and no smallness of me there, I say.

"Well, mother, what is the matter, then?"

"I am sure you need not be angry, Johnny. I only hope it is nothing to grieve about, instead of being angry. You are very sweet-tempered, I know, John Ridd, and perhaps a little too sweet at times"—here she meant the Snowe girls, and I hanged my head—"but what would you say if the people there"—she never would call them "Doones"—"had gotten your poor Uncle Reuben, horse, and Sunday coat, and all?"

"Why, Mother, I should be sorry for them. He would set up a shop by the river-side, and come away with all their money."

"That all you have to say, John! And my dinner done to a very turn, and the supper all fit to go down, and no worry, only to eat and be done with it! And all the new plates come from Watchett, with the Watchett blue upon them, at the risk of the lives of everybody, and the capias from good Aunt Jane for stuffing a curlew with onion before he begins to get cold, and make a woodcock of him, and the way to turn the flap over in the inside of a roasting pig—"

"Well, mother dear, I am very sorry. But let us have our dinner. You know we promised not to wait for him after one o'clock; and you only make us hungry. Everything will be spoiled, mother, and what a pity to think of! After that I will go to seek for him in the thick of the fog, like a needle in a hay-band; that is to say, unless you think"—for she looked very grave about it—"unless you really think, mother, that I ought to go without dinner."

"Oh no, John, I never thought that, thank God! Bless Him for my children's appetites! and what is Uncle Ben to them?"

So we made a very good dinner indeed though wishing that he could have some of it, and wondering how much to leave for him; and then, as no sound of his horse had been heard, I set out with my gun to look for him.

I followed the track on the side of the hill, from the farm-yard, where the sled marks are—for we have no wheels upon Exmoor yet, nor ever shall, I suppose; though a dunder-headed man tried it last winter, and broke his axle piteously, and was nigh to break his neck—and after that I went all along on the ridge, of the rabbit-cleve, with the brook running thin in the bottom; and then down to the Lynn-stream, and leaped it, and so up the hill and the moor beyond. The fog hung close all around me then, when I turned the crest of the high-land, and the gorse both before and behind me looked like a man crouching down in ambush. But still there was a good cloud of day-light, being scarce three of the clock yet, and when a lead of red deer came across, and I could tell them from sheep even now. I was half inclined to shoot at them, for the children did love venison; but they drooped their heads so, and looked so faithful, that it seemed hard measure to do it. If one of them had bolted away, no doubt I had let go at him.

After that I kept on the track, trudging very stoutly, for nigh upon three miles and my beard (now beginning to grow at some length) was full of great drops and prickly, whereat I was very proud. I had not as much as a dog with me, and the place was unked and lonesome, and the rolling clouds very desolate; and now if a wild sheep ran across he was scared at me as an enemy; and I for my part could not tell the meaning of the marks on him. We called all this part "Gibbet-moor," not being in our parish; but though there were gibbets enough upon it, most part of the bodies was gone for the value of the chains, they said, and the teaching of young chirurgeons.

But of all this I had little fear, being no more a school-boy, now, but a youth well acquaint with Exmoor, and the wise art of the sign-posts, whereby a man, who barred the road, now opens it up both ways with his finger-bones, so far as rogues allow him. My carbine was loaded and freshly primed, and I knew myself to be even now a match in strength for any two men of the size around our neighborhood, except in the Glen Doone. "Girt Jan Ridd," I was called already, and folk grew feared to wrestle with me; though I was tired of hearing about it, and often longed to be smaller. And most of all upon Sundays, when I had to make way up our little church, and the maidens tittered at me.

The soft white mist came thicker around me, as the evening fell, and the peat-ricks here and there, and the furze-hucks of the summer-time, were all out of shape in the twist of it. By-and-by I began to doubt where I was, or how come there, not having seen a gibbet lately; and then I heard the draught of the wind up a hollow place with rocks to it; and for the first time fear broke out (like cold sweat) upon me. And yet I knew what a fool I was, to fear nothing but a sound! But when I stopped to listen, there was no sound, more than a beating noise, and that was all inside me. Therefore I went on again, making company of myself, and keeping my gun quite ready.

Now, when I came to an unknown place, where a stone was set up endwise, with a faint red cross upon it, and a polish from some conflict, I gathered my courage to stop and think, having sped on the way too hotly. Against that stone I set my gun trying my spirit to leave it so, but keeping with half a hand for it; and then what to do next was the wonder. As for finding Uncle Ben—that was his own business, or at any rate his executor's; first I had to find myself, and plentifully would thank God to find myself at home again, for the sake of all our family.

The volumes of the mist came rolling at me (like great logs of wood, pillowed out with sleepiness), and between them there was nothing more than waiting for the next one. Then everything went out of sight, and glad was I of the stone behind me, and view of mine own shoes. Then a distant noise went by me, as of many horses galloping, and in my fright I set my gun and said, "God send something to shoot at." Yet nothing came, and my gun fell back, without my will to lower it.

But presently, while I was thinking "What a fool I am!" arose as if from below my feet, so that the great stone trembled, that long lamenting, lonesome sound, as of an evil spirit not knowing what to do with it. For the moment I stood like a root, without either hand or foot to help me, and the hair of my head began to crawl, lifting my hat, as a snail lifts his house, and my heart like a shuttle went to and fro. But finding no harm to come of it, neither visible form approaching, I wiped my forehead and hoped for the best, and resolved to run every step of the way till I drew our own latch behind me.

Yet here again I was disappointed, for no sooner was I come to the cross-ways by the black pool in the hole, but I heard through the patter of my own feet a rough low sound very close in the fog, as of a hobbled sheep a-coughing. I listened, and feared, and yet listened again, though I wanted not to hear it. For being in haste of the homeward road, and all my heart having heels to it, loath I was to stop in the dusk for the sake of an aged wether. Yet partly my love of all animals, and partly my fear of the farmer's disgrace, compelled me to go to the succor, and the noise was coming nearer. A dry, short, wheezing sound it was, barred with coughs and want of breath; but thus I made the meaning of it:

"Lord have mercy upon me! O Lord, upon my soul have mercy! An' if I cheated Sam Hicks last week, Lord knowest how well he deserved it, and lied in every stocking's mouth—O Lord, where be I agoing?"

These words, with many jogs between them, came to me through the darkness, and then a long groan and a choking. I made toward the sound, as nigh as ever I could guess, and presently was met, point-blank, by the head of the mountain pony. Upon its back lay a man bound down, with his feet on the neck and his head to the tail, and his arms falling down like stirrups. The wild little nag was scared of its life by the unaccustomed burden, and had been tossing and rolling hard, in desire to get ease of it.

Before the little horse could turn, I caught him, jaded as he was, by his wet and grizzled forelock, and he saw that it was vain to struggle, but strove to bite me none the less, until I smote him upon the nose.

"Good and worthy sir," I said to the man who was riding so roughly, "fear nothing: no harm shall come to thee."

"Help, my good friend, whoever thou art," he gasped, but could not look at me, because his neck was jerked so; "God hath sent thee, and not to rob me, because it is done already."

"What, Uncle Ben!" I cried, letting go the horse in amazement that the richest man in Dulverton—"Uncle Ben here in this plight! What, Mr. Reuben Huckaback!"

"An honest hosier and draper, serge and long-cloth warehouseman"—he groaned from rib to rib—"at the sign of the gartered kitten in the loyal town of Dulverton. For God's sake, let me down, good fellow, from this accursed marrow-bone; and a groat of good money will I pay thee, safe in my house to Dulverton: but take notice that the horse is mine, no less than the nag they robbed from me."

"What, Uncle Ben, dost thou not know me, thy dutiful nephew, John Ridd?"

Not to make a long story of it, I cut the thongs that bound him, and set him astride on the little horse; but he was too weak to stay so. Therefore I mounted him on my back, turning the horse into horse-steps, and leading the pony by the cords which I fastened around his nose, set out for Plover's Barrows.

Uncle Ben went fast asleep on my back, being jaded and shaken beyond his strength, for a man of three score-and-five; and as soon as he felt assured of safety he would talk no more. And to tell the truth, he snored so loudly that I could almost believe that fearful noise in the fog every night came all the way from Dulverton.

Now, as soon as ever I brought him in, we set him up in the chimney-corner, comfortable and handsome; and it was no little delight to get me to him off my back; for, like his own fortune, Uncle Ben was of a good round figure. He gave his long coat a shake or two, and he stamped about in the kitchen until he was sure of his whereabouts, and then he fell asleep again until supper should be ready.

"He shall marry Ruth," he said by-and-by to himself, and not to me; "he shall marry Ruth for this, and have my little savings, soon as they be worth the having. Very little as yet, very little indeed; and ever so much gone to-day along of them rascal robbers."

My mother made a dreadful stir, of course, about Uncle Ben being in such a plight as this; so I left him to her care and Annie's, and soon they fed him rarely, while I went out to see to the comfort of the captured pony. And in truth he was worth the catching, and served us very well afterward, though Uncle Ben was inclined to claim him for his business at Dulverton, where they have carts and that like. "But," I said, "you shall have him, sir and welcome, if you will only ride him home as first I found you riding him." And with that he dropped it.

A very strange old man he was, short in his manner, though long of body, glad to do the contrary thing to what any one expected of him, and always looking sharply at people, as if he feared to be cheated. This surprised me much at first, because it showed his ignorance of what we farmers are—an upright race, as you may find, scarcely ever cheating indeed, except upon market-day, and even then no more than may be helped by reason of buyers expecting it. Now our simple ways were a puzzle to him, as I told him very often; but he only laughed, and rubbed his mouth with the back of his dry, shining hand; and I think he shortly began to languish for want of some one to higgle with. I had a great mind to give him the pony, because he thought himself cheated in that case; only he would conclude that I did it with some view to a legacy.

Of course, the Doones, and nobody else, had robbed good Uncle Reuben; and then they grew sportive, and took his horse, an especially sober nag, and bound the master upon the wild one, for a little change, as they told him. For two or three hours they had fine enjoyment chasing him through the fog, and making much sport of his groanings; and then waxing hungry, they went their way, and left him to opportunity. Now Mr. Huckaback, growing able to walk in a few days' time, became there upon impatient, and could not be brought to understand why he should have been robbed at all.

"I have never deserved it," he said to himself, not knowing much of Providence, except with a small p to it; "I have never deserved it, and will not stand it in the name of our lord the King, not I!" At other times he would burst forth thus: "Threescore years and five have I lived an honest and laborious life, yet never was I robbed before. And now to be robbed in my old age; to be robbed for the first time now!"

Thereupon, of course, we would tell him how truly thankful he ought to be for never having been robbed before, in spite of living so long in this world, and that he was taking a very ungrateful, not to say ungracious, view, in thus repining and feeling aggrieved; when any one else would have knelt and thanked God for enjoying so long an immunity. But say what we would, it was all as one. Uncle Ben stuck fast to it, that he had nothing to thank God for.

TO BE CONTINUED.

NOVENA OF ANASTASIA O'SHEA

By rights, with such a name, Anastasia O'Shea should have been typically Irish. But in her appearance there was nothing to suggest her Hibernian ancestry. She was a slim, willowy creature, with small, neat features, wild rose coloring, and mouse-colored hair, which was always dressed in what she herself would have described as "the latest."

But in the only things that really mattered she was no unworthy daughter of "the Isle of Saints." Her passionate devotion to the faith of her fathers was Irish. Her child-like innocence and purity of heart were Irish. And, above all, in her unfaltering faith in the love and goodness of God, when all in her poor life seemed to contradict it, she was Irish.

"Ah, shure, it's the will o' God," is what her Kerry grandmother would have said. Anastasia did not utter the words with her lips, but her heart said them over and over, even though God seemed deaf to her prayers; for her novena to the Sacred Heart was ended, and still her Saviour made as though He heard her not.

* * * *

Anastasia balanced herself adroitly on a short ladder, poised at a perilous angle in the deep old oaken doorway of the great building where her widowed mother was caretaker. She rubbed vigorously at the brass name-plate set in the wall above her head. A cart loaded with heavy luggage for the American boat sailing in the afternoon rumbled slowly down the street, and as she caught sight of it the tears trickled down Anastasia's cheeks.

When the brasses before her shone so that her sorrowful little face was grotesquely reflected in them, she descended from her perch and sat down in a shadowy corner of one of the wide steps. For a few minutes she could be alone, a rare luxury in the crowded, insistent life of her class.

It was early yet. Too early for the pulsating stream of life which in an hour's time would flow through the heart of the city. Too late for that other stream of toilers relentlessly hurried to the earning of their daily bread almost at the break of day.

As she sat there in the shadow of the doorway, Anastasia went feverishly over in her mind every incident of the last three weeks. For two years, almost, indeed, since his reception into the Church, she had "walked out" with Matthew Hambridge.

Anastasia was always glad to think that he had been a Catholic before she knew him, and that his conversion from Methodism was due to conviction, and no influence save God the Holy Ghost. For the past six months she had proudly worn a ring which Matt had given her, a slender setting of gold which guarded jealously a minute ruby and a very few infinitesimal diamond sparks.

And it was just when they had begun to make happy plans of what might happen during the next three months that, without the slightest warning, the blow had fallen. Matthew Hambridge's eldest sister, who lived "up to Penrith," was possessed by a passion for doing well by her family according to her own rather limited lights.

Up to now her energies had been devoted to bedding out her younger brothers and sisters, and this successfully accomplished, she was able to devote her entire attention to Matthew and his future.

An opening which she regarded as providential presented itself. A Penrith neighbor, a local preacher in their own little sect had made a successful venture in Florida fruit-farming.

Now home for a holiday, he was anxious to take back with him an assistant who knew something of both country life and city tactics. With the strong clan feeling of the north country man, he was inclined to make overtures to Matthew Hambridge, who, if his sister was to be believed, possessed both qualifications in a marked degree.

An additional attraction to the mind of the ardent Dissenter was the alluring thought that he might be the instrument used to pluck Matt as a brand from the burning classified in his mind as "the errors of Popery."

To insure her brother's acceptance of the fruit farmer's offer, Caroline Hambridge took an excursion ticket to Liverpool, where Matthew's reception of her was neither encouraging nor grateful.

He professed himself quite content with his present humble prospects, and even confessed, under pressure, that he was thinking of marrying at an early date. Any question of apostasy from the faith he had learned to love he refused entirely to discuss.

But Caroline was not easily daunted. With a dogged persistence she talked down his objections, ignored his reasons for remaining where he was, and was diplomatically silent about his religion. With a dull resentment in his heart, and a great contempt for his own weakness, Matthew found himself carried forward on the restless tide of her pitiless will.

She then lost no time in calling on Anastasia and her mother, when, with a great show of friendliness, she confided to them the roseate nature of Matthew's future, taking care at the same time to make it quite plain that it was a future in which the girl to whom he had given his humble betrothal ring was destined to play no part.

Of course, if Anastasia had possessed what her Lancashire mother called "a mite of proper spunk" she would have risen to the occasion and defied Caroline to do her worst.

Instead of that, she sat by in silent suffering, while an overbearing nature, under the deceptive guise of family affection, brushed her beautiful dream palaces aside as though they were cobwebs.

'It was her mother who intimated to the caller that, for her part, she had no opinion of those who were not contented with the land of their birth.

"Makin' your pile in furrin parts," she said, "is a thing I never had no opinion of. There's a good bit of talk about it, so they tell me, but talkin's easy whether you try it in England or America. 'Rollin' stones,' we used to call them, that was oneasy where God Almighty'd placed them, in my young days, an' it suits them still in my opinion. Thank God my boys an' girls are content where I put them. Furrin parts! it's yes, thank you! for them that fancies it, but not for daughters nor sons of mine. Ivery one of them shall die in the s'il they was created in, for anything else would be goin' clean agin my prayers for them, and upsettin' prayers is a thing I don't 'old with."

Before Caroline Hambridge could reply to this masterly grasp of the position, the black kitten created a diversion by suddenly circling through the air and clawing wildly at an inoffensive canary, whose cage hung over a little table in the window.

Anastasia rose hastily. She had an absurd feeling that it was she who was caged, and that velvet-sheathed claws were tearing at her foolish little heart.

Then her eyes fell on the picture of the Sacred Heart, wounded, stricken, pierced, and dimly groping, there flashed upon her some faint realization of all That Supreme Suffering had required.

* * * *

The events moved quickly. There was the evening when Matt's incoherent letter came, in which he explained that he could not help himself, and hoped it was all for the best.

There was the morning when Anastasia wrapped up her ring in a pill-box and sent it to the dairy where Matthew worked, tied in a parcel with a picture postcard album, a cruet-stand, a pair of china figures, and an alarm clock, all his gifts to her.

There was the day when she began her novena to the Sacred Heart, and there was the day it ended, when someone told her that Matt's ticket was taken, and the date of his departure fixed.

And now the very morning had come when the cart loaded with luggage had rumbled down to the dockside, and before night the ship, with Matt on board, would be far, far beyond her reach, and she would be left behind to face the intolerable pain which had come upon her, and which her shrinking heart endeavored to embrace because her faith told her it must be the will of God.

* * * *

With difficulty she pushed her way through the crowd, pressing against the wooden bars of the barrier, only to be motioned back with the rebuff, "Ticket holders only."

At the sight of her dismay a man behind her laughed, and made some jesting remark. Anastasia shrank back abashed, and eager to miss nothing of the drama of the liner's departure the crowd forgot her and closed in again.

She hurried, half running, half stumbling on the wooden footholds of the long pontoon, which sloped upward from the stage to the covered roadway at the top.

Here was a barrier reserved for the descent of the saloon passengers, but when she made timidly as though she would pass now, the same refusal met her, "Ticket-holders only."

"Oh sir for the love of God, let me down," she implored, "I didn't know I wanted a ticket, an' it's too late to get one now. He'll be gone in a minute, an' it's my only chance of seein' 'im."

The police officer was young, and the man had not yet been lost in the official. It was late, and there was no one about to witness a blinking at discipline. He scrutinized keenly Anastasia's little tear-stained face, with its look of utter despair.

For two years he had had his appointed hours of duty at these barriers, and in that time he had learned to recognize the meaning of the expression which he saw now on the face of the girl before him. He had seen it on many other faces. Without speaking he motioned to her to pass down, turning his back lest he should see her go.

The great liner was preparing to loose her moorings. The bell for "Friends ashore" was clanging noisily, and people were hurrying down the gangway.

Some of those who had reached the stage were waving gay farewells and calling up last words to those on board.

Others could not trust themselves to look up. One girl, young and in deep mourning, was crying in a heartbroken way.

Anastasia slipped under the protecting chain and made her way unheeded to the river's verge.

Sheer above her rose the towering ramparts of the giant ship. Tier upon tier of stolid faces met her gaze. Then a group of Scandinavians, with bright-colored kerchiefs on their lint-white locks. Then a party of children from an orphanage, gay in scarlet cloaks and hoods.

But nowhere could she find the one face for which she sought. A dry sob rose in Anastasia's throat. She looked and looked with smarting, miserable eyes until the mighty outlines of the vessel were lost in the mists of the river.

* * * * *

The key was no longer under the mat where she had placed it, so her mother must have come in, and Anastasia would have to explain where she had been. She wished she could have had a little time alone. Her eyes were burning and her head ached, yes, and her heart ached, too.

As she softly pushed open the inner door she hoped that her mother would not say very much.

But it was not her mother who was sitting by the fire.

Anastasia put her hand over her eyes. She was tired. That was what made her think she saw people who were on board a ship that was hastening to the other side of the world.

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