

# A WILD IRISH LASS.

(Concluded.)

She ran swiftly through the patch of whispering oats and across the bog, straight toward the Reeks. The heart within her was all aflame now.

'Ailsie! Ailsie!' called out a sudden voice.

There was a clatter of brogues behind her, where a streak of waning moonlight still lay upon the path.

'Ailsie! Ailsie!' cried Larry O'Shane.

He had been lurking about the cabin, then, instead of going home—poor, silly, love-sick Larry! The girl was fairly caught.

'Ailsie, avourneen, come back!'

Instead of obeying this injunction, she dropped her cloak and ran—away, away, like a wild thing, over the black, quaking bog, fear lending her wings. Her heart was in her throat, her breath came in gasps. Behind her, on the wet earth, like some cast-off fairy mantle, lay the cloak—a patch of ragged scarlet to frighten the strutting magpies and the moping herons.

Ailsie had seen the last of it; and, though he little knew it, Larry O'Shane, in that far, flying figure, had seen, too, the last of his pretty sweetheart.

At the lodge-gates she ventured to look back. He had not followed—all was quite still. Still quaking, she went up the broad drive among the thorn trees and laurels to the hall-door, standing wide open beyond.

What with the lights, and the carriages, and the bustle, the servants in livery running about, and the burst of music, Ailsie stood for a moment quite dazed.

The ball had begun, sure enough. She walked straight up to the hall-door, and peered in.

'Faith! what is that?' said a man in white stockings and a coat all green and scarlet, advancing hastily toward Ailsie.

The girl stood now on the threshold, plain and uncovered to all eyes.

'Who are you?' said the man, sharply, 'and what do you want here?'

'Please, sir,' answered Ailsie, dropping a courtesy, 'I've come to dance at the ball.'

The man was dumb for a moment, then he laughed scornfully.

'Oho! It's Molly O'Shane's pretty granddaughter. She's dazed. Go home, my lass; this is a party of quality. You can't come in here.'

'Nay,' answered Ailsie; 'it's one o' yer fine gintlefolks that axed me, sir. I'll not go home for the like o' ye.'

'Barney,' grimly called he of the green coat to one of the footmen, 'just speak to the master.'

A quick step crossed the great hall, with a loud burst of music following after through an open door.

Ailsie, held at bay by the green coat, flashed a frightened glance upward, and met the blue eyes of Captain Arthur Beaumont.

'I've come,' she said, her cheeks flushing like the dawn.

He might have been annoyed, provoked, perhaps, only the amazing beauty of the girl, as she stood there in the light of the lustres, was such as to disarm all feeling save that of blank and unreasoning admiration.

'I've come to dance wid yer honor,' she repeated timidly.

'And dance you shall, by all the gods!' muttered Beaumont, through his teeth. 'Miss Ailsie, come with me.'

The group of servants stared at each other in mute amaze, and the butler in the green coat shivered with rage and scorn.

'Is it ye that's master o' the Reeks?' said the girl wondering. 'Shure, ye don't tell me that.'

For an answer, he took her slender brown hand and led her straight into the ballroom.

Ah, what a sight was there! From far and near the gentry had flocked to the young heir's ball. Flowers, and lights, and music; satins rustling and fans waving everywhere! There were the grand ladies from Hogarth, enormous trains and feathers, and jewels without number on their skinny arms and bosoms; there were young beauties in lace and pearls, and old dowagers, hideous exceedingly, in lace and pearls likewise; and there into the very midst of the light, and the crowd, and the dancers, the heir of the Reeks led the wild Irish girl, in her homespun dress and scarlet stockings, and placed her at the head of the set just forming in the centre of the room.

Had a thunderbolt burst suddenly over the round tower where Rossmore was murdered, the consternation succeeding could scarcely have excelled that which followed this extraordinary turn of affairs.

First there was an ominous hush. Everybody looked at everybody—everybody stared hard at Ailsie. Instantly a wicked buzz filled the room.

'What is it?'

'Where did it come from?'

'He is really going to dance with her!'

The while the heir of the Reeks, delightfully cool and serene, had got his arm about the lithe little figure, and was already moving with her down the room.

'Don't look about you,' he whispered, 'or you'll be turned to stone by evil eyes. Look at me instead.'

She tried to obey, but the black lashes drooped. He could feel her heart fluttering against his side. The grand Hogarth ladies were standing stock-still in the set, with feathers bristling and eyeglasses raised.

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'Maybe,' faltered the girl faintly, 'one o' thim be your honor's sweetheart?'

'No, thank you! I have no sweetheart, Miss Ailsie.'

In a twinkling, the whole set was falling apart. It did not matter. All the scorn and amaze of the goodly company seemed lost upon the master of the Reeks. He only smiled, and bowed to the musicians, and the next moment was leading off his lovely partner to the scattering measures of an Irish reel.

It was time for the old dowagers to fling up their eyes and hold their indignant breath. Such a reel as that was never before danced in the hall of the dead Rossmore. The girl was uncanny. They could swear her feet did not touch the floor. Nevertheless, the high heels of the Sunday shoes kept up a tapping faint and fine, like the clurican's hammer on the sunny sides of a peat-stack.

What with the face of the girl, her wild grace and flashing black tresses, and the way the heir of the Reeks gazed at her in their giddy, tantalizing whirls, that crowd of gentry stood on either side looking on, as dumb and motionless as if they were all under the influence of a spell.

Suddenly a great uproar was heard at the door of the entrance. The music was pealing its maddest and merriest, and nobody had time to turn and look—not until a wild, gray, dishevelled figure came flying into the midst, burling the great folks right and left from the way. Then, like a tiger-cat Molly O'Shane sprang upon Ailsie, and clutching her bonny hand in the girl's black tresses tore her violently from the arms of the master of the Reeks.

'So ye thought to stale away, an' I not know!' she cried, her hand on the terrified girl, her glaring eyes on Beaumont. 'Faix! ye've come to a fine gatherin'! Does yon yellow-haired upstart think to dance with such as ye? 'Tis time for my lass to have her own.'

She pushed the pale, shrinking Ailsie into the open space cleared for the dancers, laughing bitterly.

'Look,' she cried, 'look well at her, all ye gintlefolks that knew the house o' Rossmore! Good, ye say, will show. Who but a Rossmore ever had such a hair as this? Who but a Rossmore ever looked at ye wid that blinking o' the eye? MacSullivan, o' the Cross-post, ye knew her father well. Spake! is she not like him?'

Not waiting for any answer, Molly O'Shane went on, wildly:

'It were these two arms, yer honors, that carried her into the bog, the night Rossmore was murdered at the head o' the stair—whin yer honors, ivery soul o' ye, thought her murdered, too. Safe and sound I meant to kape her from her father's inimies—shure, an' I've done that same; an' had she but w d wid Larry—oh, had she but wed my lad, I'd have made her lady o' the Reeks long ago!'

The old woman turned furiously on Beaumont.

'An' ye!' she cried, 'git ye out o' this place! it's hers now. Do ye think ye've heard but an idle tale? Harken, thin, to his riverence—he'll tell ye o' the oath I swore to him, that when the stranger entered here, my lass should have her own.'

Through the uproar and confusion abounding now on every side, Beaumont, like one in a dream, saw the grave figure of a parish priest advancing toward the spot where the old woman stood, hostile and implacable, betwixt him and the daughter of the Rossmores.

'My friends,' said the reverend father, lifting his calm voice above the noise of the crowd, 'the story you heard is no idle tale—it is a solemn and singular truth. This young girl is not the grandchild of Mary O'Shane, but the daughter of Dermot Rossmore, killed, as you all know, in this house fifteen years ago.'

For one little moment Beaumont's gaze fell on Ailsie. Their eyes met—his softening into something like tenderness, hers wild and dilated, and darkening into utter midnight with the terror that filled her.

'Yer honor,' she cried, turning to him, grasping wildly at his arm, 'spake, spake! Is it thue?'

'My child, I think—I am sure it is.'

She gasped for breath.

'And ye—God o' heaven!—what will ye do?'

'I shall depart at once.'

She flung up her hands. Then the slender figure, all limp and lifeless, slipped away from his arm—away from Molly O'Shane's outstretched hands—away from the astonished eyes all bent upon her, and fell, a silent and senseless thing to the floor.

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There was a grand ball at Dublin Castle one night late in the autumn. The Lord-Lieutenant was about to depart for England, and this was his farewell reception. In point of crowds and magnificence, and all those things which go to make up the sum-total of a grand ball, the occasion had seldom or never been surpassed.

His excellency, bland, rotund and good-humored, was moving among his guests, dispensing hospitality with a right good will. Rich dresses and fair faces abounded; so did uniforms. In one group near a window a half-score were gathered together, deep in ballroom gossip.

'Of all the lovely women I ever saw,' Captain Rutherford was saying pensively, 'this west-country helress is the loveliest. It is impossible that a woman with such a pair of eyes can be heartless.'

Faith, answered O'Rourke of the dragoons, 'you can't but own, my lad, that she's deaf, blind and dumb to-night to the whole handsome lot of us.'

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