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CHAPTER XII. A HOT ENGAGEMENT. Here they come! here they come! hush! in the midnight drum, Oh, what a trysting we'll soon hold together!

The night air, raw and chilly, bearing on her cheeks as she was carried rapidly onward, aroused Kathleen from her long swoon.

"The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" shouted the Puritans; "no quarter to the sons of Belial! Smite the accursed Papist brood hip and thigh!"

"Down with the accursed Albanach!" cried the voice of Owen O'Rourke. "Death to the murderers of helpless women and children! No quarter to the merciless dogs!"

ber ye the burial of your father or grandfather, or who'er he was—devil take his bones, say I—in the old Papist rookery of Oreevea yonder? 'Twas in autumn last, you will bear in mind the howl and the scuffle, I warrant me, and the blow which your accursed lemming, O'Tracy, dealt me—may his hand wither for the act! Now, now, I doubt not but you remember Gilbert Harrison."

Another exulting Irish cheer floated in the air; but, just as a gigantic Breffan pikeman was about to administer the coup de grace to the prostrate Sir Frederick, a huge and powerful steed, black as night, and bearing a fabled burden, came dashing through the fray, snatching the pikemaster to pieces with his flying hoofs as he passed; and immediately, profiting by the evan, the Scots once more rescued their leader from his perilous situation.

"Steady, men;—give fire!" cried the voice of Hamilton again. The Puritan volley flashed and crackled all along the pass, placing many of the Irish hors de combat; and then both sides closed in a hot and desperate melee, no quarter being given or expected on either side.

"Come on, rebel spawn!" cried the latter; "have at ye, Irish dog! So, so!" and he lunged full tilt at the young man's breast with his Toledo. The thrust was dexterly parried by O'Tracy, and then both antagonists closed in hot and desperate combat, exchanging cut and thrust with lightning-like rapidity.

At the fall of their great enemy, the Irish sent up a shout of triumph, but the Scotch troopers formed a ring around their fallen leader, who was speedily on horseback again, bareheaded, his Spanish beaver and the small steel cap which he wore under it having been stricken from his head by the blow.

Instantly, with all his riders on fire, he sprang on the back of a diller as horse and dashed off on the track of the black charger; and in a few seconds he caught sight of the object of his pursuit about fifty yards in front of him, careering onward like the wind.

"The man was puzzled what to make of the girl, now that she was indeed all weak and helpless in his clutches. At least his conduct towards her implied as much. His visits to her were for the most part made at the close of the day, after his return from a mission of plunder or an adventurous reconnaissance, and then he was usually under the effects of deep potations, as if he were afraid to trust himself in her presence without the aid of the false spirit that springs from the wine-cup.

But what, in the meantime, of the Puritan rear-guard and their poor maniac guide? It is nearly time to satisfy the reader's interest with regard to them. After leaving Sligo they marched, a dark, rapidly-moving body, on the road towards Manor-Hamilton, the white-clothed form of MacSherry leading the van.

"Dinna rash, Dinna rash, dinna rash," was the reply; "the obel's main canny and lead than ye was speer; another hour or two an' we'll be getting wanbeck's c' hot bread and drinkin' ale at Manne's Manor-Hamilton."

CHAPTER XIII. THE WILD ROSE IN DANGER. A high gibbet, whose gaunt and hideous limbs were green with rain, and from whose fatal cross-beam many a poor Irish rogue, had been launched into another world, stood on the hill adjoining the castle of Manor-Hamilton.

"Oh, how she shuddered and trembled each succeeding evening as that coarse, blustering voice sounded in the passage without, as the door swung open on creaking hinges, and the evil face of her persecutor glared in upon her!

"Your brother, is it?" ejaculated her tormentor, noting her trouble; "don't worry about him either; you see he's got to be killed like the other rebels—that is, if he's not knocked on the head already. Besides, course it, it makes no difference; for Gilbert Harrison will be father and mother, brother and sister, husband, and all to you by-and-by. And what a happy time we'll have, my little sweetheart!"

Hamilton himself never visited the imprisoned maiden. The latter had caught sight of him on a few occasions, and felt seized with a feeling of terror at the glare of his basilisk eye. "In fact, Sir Frederick looked on the maiden as the most useless incubus that surrounded them; and but for the voice of Harrison he would soon have adopted a ready means of getting rid of her. Not, indeed, by setting her at liberty, and bidding her go back to her people. The ferocious cruelty that glared upon so many inefficient females, and watched with delight the dying struggles of poor Graine O'Dugan, and Graine Nic Aodh, and Graine O'Connell, and the wives of O'Hay Connahee, and other feminine victims who 'did sacrifice upon Manor-Hamilton gallows,' would provide a long rope and a short shrift for the 'Irish pigsticker,' and the accursed gibbet would bear the weight of the Wild Rose of Lough Gill."

More than three weeks had passed since the 1st of July—the date of the raid on Sligo and of our heroine's seizure by Harrison—when one evening the latter entered her chamber. He was attired as for a fight or a foray, wearing his helmet and corselet. He was not now intoxicated, but spoke with an air of earnest and gloating malice.

"Well, my lass," said he, "so the time is come at last for revenge—sure, sweet, and ample revenge. We are just going to take Droimhaire Castle over yonder; and there shall be no more quarter—mark me, no quarter."

"Droimhaire! How?" she exclaimed, in the first moment of surprise. He laughed. "How, is it my pretty bird? Ha, ha—you doubt me? Well, I'll just tell you, Sir William Oole has at length sent me from Enniskillen the force we've been so long expecting—four hundred gallant fellows, all ripe and ready for blood, fire, plunder or whatever sport turns up this night. But one thing is gloriously certain—that we shall burn Droimhaire to the ground. Satan burn it! What a bright, bonny blaze the infernal oil pile will make! and how the rats it contains shall shriek and squeal when the flames begin to singe them!—You know the vermin I mean, my lass, eh?"