

- - A SOUL OF FIRE - -

BY E. J. JENKINSON.

(Chapter III. continued.)

"Don't spare the liquor, Ranald," said the latter during a pause. Ranald's hand was already shaking, and his tongue unsteady, but nevertheless he reached over, and saving himself the trouble of pouring the brandy into his cup, raised the jug to his mouth. He drained it dry.

"I'm rather drouthy the night," he stammered, looking into the vessel to make sure there was none left, and finding it empty turned it upside down on the table. "I'm rather drouthy—droppie more—droppie drouthy—"

The stranger went to the door, and called. There was a new eagerness about him, and an energy hitherto carefully hidden.

Old Hugh brought in a small flagon. He filled a mug and handed it to the jailor who swallowed the contents at a gulp.

"Real fine, real fine," he muttered, "you'll have come by this right canny, Hugh." His voice trailed off into a whisper and the cup dropped from his fingers.

The stranger stood over him and in a quick sharp voice demanded, "The pass-word."

"Pikes and axes," answered the jailor and fell back in a drunken stupor.

"Pikes and axes, pikes and axes," repeated the traveller imitating Ronald's drunken brawl. Then the prostrate man was stripped of his boots and jacket; and presently the stranger stood accoutred as a guard of Castle Sarno.

He laid down on the table a little pile of gold over which the inn-keeper's hand closed glottingly. "That's your price," he said, "You've served me well, Hugh."

"Ah! Rory Macdon," answered the whining old man, "you were aye generous to the poor, and Hag's Ta' is an ill place to hide in. If aught evil comes of this night's work, we'll may be follow you to Glen Lara."

"Come," said the outlaw, "if you will," and looking to the priming of his pistols he strode out of the house towards Sarno.

The night was misty, lighted by a wan moon, and never did Quaking Hag look more ghastly than in that pale gleam. It lay silent, save for a moment, when two figures stole to its brink and a heavy form fell like a log into the gaping jaws of the moss-devil. Ranald, the jailor, was seen no more.

CHAPTER IV.—The Bonds of Brotherhood.

Helen had just awakened from uneasy dreams, and in that state between sleeping and waking—when wildest fancy and sober fact are tangled in a confused web,—she heard, or thought she heard, a movement at the door of her prison. She listened sharply. Could it be Fergus on another midnight visit? or was it just the rats scurrying in the dark? There it came again—a sound of bolts being withdrawn, and turning keys. She sprang to her feet in alarm as the door swung open, and a light flashed on her face. The torch was held aloft by a tall man; she thought him the jailor.

"What means this?" she demanded. "Why have you come here at this hour of night?"

"Hush," said the intruder in a whisper. "It is I, Rory Macdon."

The bright color surged into Helen's cheeks, and then retreated, leaving her deathly pale. She trembled; the sudden revulsion of feeling made her giddy; she could not think; she only knew her champion had come, and that he was an outlawed and a hunted man.

"Rory, this is madness," she murmured,

ed, clasping her hands round his arm, "Oh, Rory."

He bent down and kissed her. "Yes," he answered lightly, "utter madness, and thirty knives will be at my throat if we are not quickly out of Sarno. Come."

He moved to the door. Helen cast a swift look round on the dim walls. It was a mute farewell to this dismal chamber where she had spent so many dark hours, where so many of her own folk too had perished. She did not speak.

"Time flies," said Roderick, "hasten."

The girl threw a shawl round her shoulders and followed him. He extinguished the light, and with his hand on her arm guided her up the stairway which led from the dungeons into one of the towers. She let him lead her, though every step was as familiar to her feet as the breezy passes of the mountains were to his.

Suddenly he stopped and clasped his dirk. A glimmer of light was falling on the walls high above them, and there was the faintest sound of advancing footsteps.

"Back, Helen, and my own strong arm shall save us."

She retreated swiftly, choking her dismay into silence. What a fool she was ever to dream of freedom even for a moment. Fate was against her; it would dash the cup from her lips just as she was about to taste of it. And Roderick's blood would be on her head; she was his star of doom, she knew it. Ah! it was cruel. But these thoughts passed as swiftly as they came.

The outlaw had concealed himself in a deep recess. The light increased and the footsteps approached to the head of the stairway. There they paused; some one was evidently looking warily down, and holding a torch aloft, which flung a lurid glow on the bare walls. Then he began to descend.

But a blow like that of a sledge hammer brought him reeling to the ground. The torch fell from his grasp and lay smoking and sputtering on the flags, while before he could utter a word, a hand clutched his throat, and pressed his head backwards over the step. He made a vain attempt to scream, but the iron fingers threatened to choke the life out of him if he so much as moved. The next moment he was half dragged, half hurled into the dungeon.

"The torch, Helen," cried Rory.

She picked it up and blew it to flame. "Good God!" said he as he glanced at his captive; "Good God!"

It was his brother, Fergus Macdon. Releasing his grasp he covered him with his pistol.

Fergus panted; a gleam of hatred coming into his eyes as he recognized the outlaw. He raised himself on his elbow, wincing, as though in pain, and took a long deliberate look at the challenging face before him.

"So," he said at last, "so, my brother, we have met and—embraced. Mon Dieu! how affecting the touch of a brother's hand!"

Rory made no answer; he gave the pistol to Helen, and bidding her stand sentinel, sought for fetters.

"Now is your chance, fair Helen," sneered the prisoner, "I am at your feet—as I have always been though you would not believe it—; a single shot and old scores will be wiped out for ever."

She looked at him scornfully. His face was drawn with pain, there were black marks on his throat, and his garments were defiled with dust.

"Your dark day will come," she said slowly.

"My prophetic friend," he replied, "do not forget me when you reach Glen Lara—the happy valley of your hopes,—for thither I suppose you to be going. I shall miss you, Helen, but a woman's compassion is infinite; pray for me, only let it be a gentler prayer than your last."

Rory, meanwhile, having found what he wanted dragged a heavy chain from its rusty nail. Fergus glanced at it.

"Ah! I was hoping I should not have to discharge the debt of nature yet," he said.

"You are my brother, though Heaven knows there's little love between us."

"Mon Dieu! strong are the bonds of brotherhood. Shake hands before you bind me."

Fergus raised himself and stretched out his right hand, the other thrust into the breast or his jacket.

Rory drew himself away. "Never," he answered. "I don't forgive my wrongs. You are my brother; I remember that bond—God help you if I forget it!"

"You were always arrogant and vindictive, Rory; time has not softened you."

"Peace!" exclaimed the outlaw, "stand back, Helen."

"No," said she, still covering Fergus with her pistol, "not till he withdraws his hand from his jacket."

Fergus clasped his hands across his knees and smiled at her. "Ah, Helen," he said, but that was all.

Roderick bent down to adjust the fetters. They were old and rusty, and for a moment his watchful eyes were on the prisoner.

Fergus thrust his hand swiftly into his bosom, but Helen saw the movement.

"Have a care, Rory," she cried and springing forward struck his arm down. There was a flash, a loud report, and the pistol lay smoking on the floor. The shot had gone wide of its mark.

Rory felt his brother with a blow, seized Helen by the wrist and dragged her out of the vault. He closed the door, locked it, and took the key with him.

"Curse that shot," he said, "some-one will have heard it."

They sprang up the stairway and through the passages towards the sally-port, which he had taken the precaution to unbar before venturing to the dungeon. Every chance of escape was theirs, unless they were intercepted. But already voices could be heard afar off, and they had to move with utmost caution. Down and along the tortuous corridors of Castle Sarno the fugitives stole with noiseless feet. Once a deerhound sprang on Rory, but Helen quieted it with a whispered word; it had been a pet of hers. Doors banged and clashed in the upper stories, cries of "what's wrong?" passed from mouth to mouth but no one knew and all was in darkness and confusion. So they reached the sally-port and passed out safely.

"Free, Nell, my girl," said Rory, "they won't catch us now." He guided her to the shore where a boat lay hidden among the rocks. He was showing it into the water and about to take the oars, when a small figure darted forward and laid hold of the bow. "Take me too, Rory Macdon," said a voice with a short sob.

"Maisee!" he exclaimed in a tone of extreme annoyance. But there was no time to waste. He lifted her in beside Helen and pushed out under the shelter of the rocks.

The dawn was breaking and a pale green light hung over the eastern sky. A few stars trembled but night was gone.

Helen looked toward Castle Sarno with its frowning towers and battlements and then seawards. A little island lay almost opposite the fortress, round which the tide chafed and foamed with a soft boom. Behind it a larger hoveled and Roderick bent to his own little lit-