

LORNA DOONE

CHAPTER XLIII

NOT TOO SOON

When I started on my road across the hills and valleys...

Through the sparkling breadth of white, which seemed to glance my eyes away, and past the humps of snow...

As last I got to my spy-hill (as I had begun to call it), although I never should have known it but for what it looked on...

Now this was a great surprise to me; not only because I believed Glen Doone to be a place outside all frost...

It helped me much in this resolve, that the snow came on again, and thick enough to blind a man who had not spent his time among it...

If Lorna had looked out of the window she would not have known me, with these boots upon my feet...

Taking nothing by the movement, I was forced, much against my will, to venture to the door and knock in a hesitating manner...

"Only me, John Ridd," I answered; upon which I heard a little laughter, and a little sobbing...

"'Tis he shut in here, and starving, and durstn't let anybody in upon us. I wish thou wert good to see, young man: I could imagine more of thee."

I was so frightened by her eyes, full of wildish hunger, that I could only say, "Good God!"

But presently I knew the cause; for Gwenny came, and I ran, and found my darling quite unable to say so much as, "John, how are you?"

"I have eaten many things myself, with very great enjoyment, and keen perception of their merits, and some thanks to God for them."

"The meaning is sad enough," said Lorna, "and I see no way out of it. We are both to be starved to death."

"That is just what you choose to marry Carver Doone, and be slowly killed by him."

"I told them both that this state of things could be endured no longer; on which point they agreed with me, but saw no means to help it."

"To be sure I will, dear," said my beauty, with a smile and a glance follow it; "I have small alternative—to starve, or go with you, John."

It was the Counselor who had ordered after all other schemes had failed, that his niece should have no food until she would obey him.

Now when I sat reflecting much, and talking a good deal more in spite of all the cold, I thought of Lorna with me—she said, in her sly voice, which always led me so along, as if I were slaved to a beautiful bell:

"Remember, John," said Lorna, nestling for a moment to me, "the severity of the weather makes a great difference between us. And you must never take advantage."

"I quite understand all that, dear," Lorna said, "and I feel the better, while that understanding continues. Now do try to be serious."

"Come to this frozen window, John, and see them light the stack-fire. They will little know who looks at them."

"How on earth should that? Papists beg at once upon it. They had always borne a grudge against it; not that it ever did them harm, but because it seemed so insolent."

"Lo, it was easy track and channel, as if for the very purpose made, down the trail of sludge-need, slithering into the black whirlpool at the bottom, the middle of which was still unfrozen, and looking more horrible by the contrast."

"I trusted home at my utmost speed, and told my mother for God's sake to keep the house up till my return, and that I would just have a look at my first and painful entrance, to wit, the water-slide. I never for a moment imagined that this could help me now; I for I never had dared to descend it."

However, in spite of all my regrets, the snow fell very merrily, blazing red and white as it flew, as it leaped on different things. And the light danced on the snow-drifts with a misty lilac hue.

"I wish to manage, for when this pyram should be kindled thoroughly, and pouring light and blazes round, would not all the valley be like a white room full of candles?"

"Certainly not," I answered, "till we have settled something more. I was cold when I came in; and now I am warm as a cricket. And so are you, you lively yet; though you are not upon my lively yet."

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how our girls could have found any pleasure in bumping along. On the snow, however, it ran as sweetly as if it had been made for it; yet I durst not take the pony with it; in the first place, because his hoofs would break through the over-sleaking surface of the light and piling snow...

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if his gushing blood did not much mislead me. It was no time to linger now. I fastened my shoes in a moment, and caught up my own darling, with her head upon my shoulder, while she whispered faintly, "I had set up Lorna, beautiful and smiling, with the seal-skin cloak all over her, sturdy Gwenny came along, having trudged in the track of my snow-shoes, though with two bags to her back. I set her in beside her mistress, to support her, and keep warm; and then with one look back at the glen, which had been so long my home of heart, I hung behind the sled, and launched it down the steep and dangerous way."

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and one, being very drunk indeed, had given a great thump, and then nothing more to do with it; and the other, being three-quarters drunk, had followed his leader (as one might say) but feebly, and making a wretched noise with his feet. Lorna, and declared that her John was there.

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Cloak of Toleration

IT MUST COVER THE FAULTS OF FRIENDS. We must not expect to find the counterpart of our great ideas of moral excellence in daily life. He who seeks perfection in a friend will never find one. He who has found a friend must lose him, and he should lose all others, save his friend forever. And day by day, and every day, he must throw the cloak of toleration over many things which, if they are to be pardonable in himself, he must strive to regard as venial in others. This means the pain of clasping shadows, the torture of deception, the anguish of finding beneath the fairy domino a death's-head, and beneath the purple and the gold, a Dives—a skeleton that hides everywhere. But life is only tolerable by such delusions. The world's work would come to a standstill if we meditated too much on death; and we should lose all faith and hope for humanity if we examined the microcosm too closely. It is difficult to say whether it is all a tragedy or a comedy; but we had better keep masked under our viands to the end of the last act.—REV. P. A. SHEEHAN.

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