

A Man Misjudged.

IN TWO INSTALMENTS—PART II.

"It is," she replied, reassured, for she at once recognized the face. "It is, Micky Farraby; and what would ye be wanting, hid in the bushes like a fox or a wild cat?"

"Tis a word wid ye I want, Miss Bride, thin," said the man, still in a whisper. "I daren't spake louder, or wan av the boys might be hearin' me. Miss Bride, I saw ye wid Sir Neville today, an' I'm thinkin' he'll be yer swareheart—whisht! niver mind that, miss, 'tis a matter of life or death I'm on. I love him, too, Miss Bride; he saved my little gossoon's life, God bless him! an' I'd die for him. But he's to be boycotted, an' now Larry'll be there in the thick of it, the murderin' scoundrel! An' oh! Miss Bride, phwat can we do to save him at all?"

"Is it the truth ye're telling, Micky Farraby?" asked the girl sternly.

"Indade, thin, miss, it is, worse luck! May I never see the gates of Heaven if it's a lie I'm tellin' ye! Ah! Miss Bride, for the love of the Lord, tell me how I can save him, an' I'll do it, even if I hang for it afterwards."

Bride knitted her brows in thought, then she said quietly—

"My sister is coming back now. We must be quick. Can we send for the constabulary?"

"No; for the way's barred be the boys, an' no one'll pass to the village tonight."

"Then we must do without. Are any of the men with Sir Neville?"

"Only the lads at Ard-na-carrig—two grooms, an' the coachman, an' butler." "Then I will go to Ard-na-carrig, and warn them myself. You stay with the others; it's better so. You may have a chance of restraining them, or of helping Sir Neville if the worst comes to the worst. And, Micky."

"Yiss?"

"If—if you get hurt, I'll see to Mary and the children for—his sake; so don't be worrying about them."

"May the saints preserve ye for that, miss!" said the man gratefully. "Heaven bless ye, an' may you an' him live to see your granchilder's chibber grow up—whisht! 'tis Miss Peggy. Good-bye, miss, and good luck!"

He dived into the bushes again as Peggy reappeared, and the two girls walked briskly homeward.

As they neared their gates, Bride remarked casually—

"Oh! will you go in and see about getting father's supper? I should like to run round to the Lodge to see Mrs O'Neill. Don't be frightened if I'm late, because Jack will see me home. Go right up to bed when you feel inclined; I've got a latch key, and you won't even hear me come in. I'll be so quiet. I'm dying to see Kathleen, and she came home last night, so good-bye for the present," and she ran lightly off down the road towards the Lodge, where resided one of her particular friends, the wife of a constabulary officer.

To night, however, she had no time to bestow on Kathleen O'Neill, and passing the house, she turned up a by-way which led to Ard-na-carrig.

By this time it was almost dark, and her heart beat rather faster than usual as she hurried along the little lane between the low turf walls, for she wondered if any of the 'boys' lay concealed behind them.

It was the case, however, they did not molest her, and she gained the hall-door in safety.

Ard-na carrig was a fine old house, long and low, its casement windows almost concealed by the ivy and creepers which covered it.

Once its lawns and shrubberies had been the admiration of all the county, but of late years it had grown to look uncared-for and desolate.

The bushes were unclipped, the rose-trees unpruned, and the lawns overgrown with weeds.

As the great bell clanged through the building, the door was opened by an elderly man in shabby black clothes, who looked surprised on seeing Bride.

"Good-evening, Sullivan," she said. "Is Sir Neville at home?"

"He is, miss; shure it's at his dinner he is."

"Take me to him quickly, Sullivan. Yes, into the dining-room. You needn't stand on ceremony tonight."

Sir Neville and Val were seated opposite each other at the long dining table when Bride was ushered in.

Sir Neville was in evening dress, Val in tweeds, having only just come in from the farm.

They both sprang up, and Sir Neville hurried to meet the girl with outstretched hand.

"Why, good evening, Miss McCarthy. Nothing wrong, I hope? You look as if you had been running."

"I have," panted Bride, sinking into a chair and fanning herself with her handkerchief. "I have. Oh! Sir Neville, have you heard?"

"About the boycott? Yes."

"But you are to be moonlighted to night and Larry O'Leary has sworn that he'll kill you!"

Val whistled, Sir Neville looked grave. "How did you hear that?" he asked.

"Micky Farraby told me. He's grateful to you for saving his boy's life, and he'll do what he can to stop it; but it's very little good he'll be against all the others. Oh, Sir Neville! what are you

going to do?"

"Are the roads blocked to the village?"

"They are—every one."

"Call in the men, Sullivan," said Val; "Kelly, and Donovan and Murphy."

The three men trooped in, their mouths open at the unexpected sight of Miss McCarthy seated in the dining-room at that hour of the evening.

Sir Neville related briefly what had happened, and told them to be in readiness to defend the house.

"Take them to the gun-room, and get out the rifles and revolvers," he said to Val. "And now, Miss Bride, I will see you home."

"Oh, no; you mustn't!" cried Bride in horror. "Sir Neville, don't dream of it! They'll waylay you, and shoot you down. You shan't do anything so reckless."

Sir Neville smiled.

"And suppose they do? I shan't be much loss to anyone, and I shall no longer be in the way of Val's marriage. Really, it would be the best thing that could—"

"If yer please, sorr," put in Sullivan quietly, "ye can do no such thing at all. Little Jerry, the coachman's boy, has just found out that we're surrounded. They're all in the garden, the scoundrels! waitin' till the moon rises to attack us; just now the shadows aren't black enough for them. The young lady'll have to be stayin, now, sorr."

"Perdition!" said Sir Neville, showing the first signs of vexation he had displayed that evening. "What is to be done, Miss Bride? Look here," he added, bending over her—Sullivan had retired—"I haven't thanked you yet for coming to warn me, but I can't tell you really how obliged I am to you. It was simply grand of you to come through so many dangers to save me, and now your kindness is repaid by this! I shall never forgive myself if harm comes to you. Of course I know that, in general, not one of them would hurt a hair of your head, but finding you here—knowing you came to warn—oh, my God! what might not the consequences be! Why didn't you go home and leave me to my fate?"

"Is it likely I would?" said Bride indignantly. "Do you think that I could do such a thing? No, no, Sir Neville! I'm not a bit sorry I came; in fact, I'm glad—it's so awfully exciting."

"It certainly is," replied Sir Neville drily, rather too excited, for my taste, knowing that there are women in the house. I only hope cook won't have a fit or anything. Ah! an Irish landlord's life is a hard one. Val tells me I'm rough on the people, but believe me, Miss Bride, it's for his own sake I've insisted on getting my rent. What would become of him when he inherits the place if I hadn't put some money by for him? You know his tastes, you know he'll never do any work. Well, I shouldn't have lived much longer. The doctor told me, if I stayed in Ireland for a couple more winters, and went on working as I have been doing lately, I'd go into a rapid consumption. And I meant to. There's nothing for me to live for, and I'm no good to anyone. But this vow of Larry's is better still; I'd much rather die of a gunshot wound than of consumption, and so—well, I suppose this is my last night on earth. Rather a ghastly thought, isn't it? Still, it'll be all right when it's over. Why, what is the matter, Miss Bride?"

Bride had risen to her feet, and her eyes were full of tears.

"You shan't talk like that!" she said. "It's wicked! And you shan't die either!"

Sir Neville gently put his arm round her, and tried to soothe her.

"There, I didn't mean to grieve you," he said. "Don't cry, little girl."

A moment after, Val burst into the room, followed by the men, carrying their guns.

"Let me see," said Sir Neville thoughtfully. "I think you, Val and Kelly, had better defend the back of the house. Go up to the gun-room, one of you, the other had better be in my room—that's about as central as any. Sullivan and Jerry Donovan can guard the west side of the house, and Donovan, Murphy, and I will defend the front, which is the most likely side for an attack. The women-servants can help by loading our rifles for us. What will you do, Miss Bride?"

"Oh! let me help load for you, Sir Neville. I can do it quite well. I often load father's."

"Very well, then; come up with me to the state-room. You, Murphy, take the end room on the right; you, Donovan, go to the left. Keep a sharp eye on the bushes, and any moving shadows you see. Don't any of you fire till you're obliged. Have you all a revolver besides your rifles?"

"We have, sorr," chorussed the men.

"Very well. Miss Bride, here is one for you; you may need it. Are all the lower windows barred and shuttered?"

"They are, sorr."

"Then go and post yourselves as I have told you. What is it, Val?"

Val had taken Bride's hand, and was whispering in her ear—

"If—anything happens—my love to Peg."

"All right, Val. Good-bye and good luck," Bride replied cheerfully.

Her alarm had quite departed.

She was trembling with excitement, that was all.

As she and Sir Neville entered the state-room together the room was just rising

over the tree tops.

Sir Neville groped his way across the room to the window.

"They think we're unprepared," he said grimly. "Rather a delusion. Ha! one of them's trying for the window!"

A moment later there was a faint rustle in the ivy.

Someone was climbing up.

Sir Neville noiselessly opened the window just as a head appeared below.

A blow from the butt end of his gun, and the head vanished.

There was the sound of a thud on the ground.

"Number one!" he said coolly.

Suddenly a shot rang out on the clear night air.

Bang! Whizz!

Sir Neville stepped aside, and the bullet buried itself in the hangings of the bed.

"Bride!"

"Yes, Sir Neville?"

"Mind you keep well out of the way."

"Yes; I'm quite safe, thank you. Mind you do."

The creeping black shadows below were much nearer to the house than they had been before.

A man stood at last in the midst of a patch of light, his rifle aimed at the window where Sir Neville stood concealed.

"I'm going to pick him off," said the baronet coolly. "One must make an example."

Bang!

The man lay motionless on the lawn.

"That will keep them quiet for a bit, Bride. I wonder what Val and the others are about."

"Shall I go and see?" volunteered Bride. "If you like. Be careful."

Bride crept noiselessly from the room and down the long corridor lit up with the silver moonlight, which shone on the pictured faces of dead and gone Ffolliots, old Sir Brian and Sir Gerald in powdered wigs and gaudy coats.

One of them—a Sir Gerald—who had been exiled for his share in the rebellion of '98, seemed to smile at her with mocking eyes—eyes so like Sir Neville's that she gave an involuntary start, and stepped on a creaking board.

"Who is it at all outside there?" demanded Murphy's voice. "If it's the ghost of old Sir Gerald, will yer honor please be callin' another time, for we've no talk to waste on ye tonight at all, be rason of these livin' rascals below here; bad 'cess to them."

"It's only me, Murphy," responded Bride humbly, conscious of her own inferiority beside the magnificence of the Ffolliot ghost.

"Ah, Miss Bride! Deed thin, I'll be axin' yer pardon for my mistake. An' how's the night farin' wid the mather? Have the bullets been flyin' much? I heard a couple of shots."

"He's pretty well done for two of them, I think," said Bride. "I'm the patrol going on my rounds, so good-night to ye for the present."

She had little to report on returning to Sir Neville, and so things went on for a couple of hours, few shots being fired on either side.

Apparently, however, the besiegers began to weary of such inactivity.

The shadows began to hurry to and fro, and the sound of muffled voices arose from below.

Suddenly a man stood out from the rest, waving a white handkerchief.

"I want to shpake wid Sir Neville Ffolliot!" he cried.

"What do you want?" replied Sir Neville without exposing himself to the gaze of his t-nantry.

"Sure, I want to say that, if ye'll come out to us, we'll go away peaceably and let the others be. If not, we fire the house."

"By Jove!" murmured the baronet, "that's a cheering prospect!—Hobson's choice. Give me ten minutes to decide, and don't move till they're up!" he shouted to the men below.

Bride was sitting in a corner, trembling in every limb.

Sir Neville crossed over, and stood beside her.

"Bride," he said, "it has come."

"But you won't go?" she cried. "Oh, you shan't, you shan't!"

"I think so," he said; "it will be best. You see, I'm a useless sort of fellow alive and I shall be doing some good by dying. Val will marry your sister, so they'll be glad in the end; and after all, no one cares what becomes of me."

He gave a hard, bitter laugh.

But Bride McCarthy's self control gave way at last.

"I care!" she cried passionately. "Yes, I do, and you know it. If you are killed, I'll be killed too! I won't let you die alone, Neville."

w let all these others, who are absolute innocent, go free and unmolested."

"We will—we will; we swear it!" cried a chorus of voices.

"Then I am coming," said their victim, quietly, and he closed the window.

Good-bye, darling," he whispered, as he caught Bride in his arms once more, and kissed her passionately. "Good-bye, and God bless you!"

"You shan't go alone, Neville. I'm coming, too!" she cried.

"They won't hurt you if you do," he replied, "and you'll only see—no, darling, stay here."

But she insisted on following him.

Outside the door of the room they found Murphy and Donovan.

The two honest men had tears in their eyes, and their voices trembled.

"Ah, don't be going out to them dirty blackguards, sorr!" pleaded Murphy.

But Sir Neville was firm.

"I shan't tell Mr. Val," he said; "he'd only make a fuss, and I'm determined to go. It's the only thing to be done."

So the four descended the old polished oak stairs together in silence, Bride in front with the baronet, the two men behind.

In the hall, Sir Neville paused.

"Thank you all for your help," he said huskily. "Good-bye, Bride, my darling. Good-bye, lads; take care of Miss Bride and don't let her follow me," he whispered.

He unbarred and opened the great hall door and passed out.

Bride, dashing after him, was caught and held on the threshold by the two men.

"Neville! Neville! Come back!" she cried in agony.

"Good-bye," his voice called out to her. She saw him step forward further into the moonlight.

There he stood, waiting, his head erect, his arms folded.

The Ffolliots, whatever their faults, at least knew how to do.

Then there came the sound of a shot—a shot, and so a wild shout—and at the same moment a figure ran desperately forward and flung itself upon Sir Neville.

Bride saw nothing more; she had fainted, and the men carried her into the drawing-room and laid her on the sofa.

Outside was wild confusion—shots and yells, curses, and cries for mercy.

Murphy crossed himself, and Donovan whispered fearfully—

"What can be the matter at all?"

Then there was a clatter on the stairs, and Val's voice crying out to know what was the noise about.

Murphy ran out to him, and there was a consultation in the hall.

"We must go out and see what's happened," cried Val excitedly, and he made a dash for the door.

"I'll go first, sorr," Kelly said hurriedly. "Shand back till I see how things are goin'."

He opened the door, and was about to step forward, when he stopped in amazement at the sight which met his eyes.

A fierce battle was being waged outside. There, in the foreground, Larry O'Leary was wrestling desperately in the grasp of two sturdy members of the Royal Constabulary, and the other moonlighters were engaged in deadly conflict all around.

Close to the house two bodies were lying on the ground, and Kelly ran forward to examine them, followed closely by Val and Murphy.

There lay Sir Neville, his white face turned up in the moonlight, and across his body had fallen Micky Farraby.

It was the latter who, to save Sir Neville, even at the expense of his own life, had rushed forward and flung himself upon him at the very moment the shot was fired at the baronet.

"Help me to carry them indoors," cried Val hoarsely.

The fight was a brief one, for the moonlighters were soon bested by the stalwart policemen, and in ten minutes they were all captured, and secured hand and foot, in readiness for their removal to Cork next morning.

"And now tell me who sent you," said Val to the police-sergeant, as they all refreshed themselves with whiskey in the dining-room afterwards, the stalwart policemen mopping their heated foreheads while they drank their spirits almost neat.

"Why, sir, 'twas our little dog," replied the men, laughing; "at least, that's all we know about the matter. Two hours or more ago he came runnin' into the barracks, and McNamara stooped down and began playin' with him. 'Why, here's a note,' sez he, and cuts it off the dog's collar, where 'twas tied be a bit of shtring. I opens it, an' reads it, expectin' to find 'twas a bit of a joke. 'Twas hard enough to decipher I can tell you, sir, but at last I made out the words 'Come with strong force to Ard-na-carrig at the risin' of the moon.' No name at all was signed to it, sir. So I gets the boys together and hurries off, an' here we are, sir, only just in time, too."

"Is it in time, I wonder?" said Val sadly.

"By the way, the doctor ought to be here by now; I've sent for him."

"An' here he is," said someone, as the door opened.

"Good-evening," doctor," said a chorus of voices, as the tall figure of Dr. McCarthy strode into the room.

"Why, Val, what's the matter?" cried the newcomer, as his eye fell upon the strange scene before him, every detail of which he took in at a glance; the police-constables grouped about the room drinking whiskey, their pistols lying on the table, their faces hot and shining, one or two of them with roughly bandaged wounds; then Val, excited and dishevelled and lastly, the two men lying side by side upon a sort of improvised couch, with pale faces and closed eyes.

Have you all been fighting?" he inquired wonderingly.

Val explained as briefly as possible.

"Can you save them?" he asked anxiously.

Dr. McCarthy bent over the two motionless forms, and for a few moments there

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was dead silence in the room.

Val's heart was beating wildly, and a lump had risen in his throat, almost choking him.

Somehow, he no longer looked upon Neville as being in the way; he only knew that he had misjudged him all his life before, that his brother was as great a hero as any man who wore the Victoria Cross, and that, if he died—if he was already dead—his conscience would always reproach him for his behaviour to that heroic brother.

The moments seemed like hours until the doctor raised his head.

"Sir Neville's all right," he said; "he's only stunned by his fall. Give me some brandy, and I'll soon get him round. Poor Micky's gone, I'm afraid; shot right through—"

But suddenly his words were cut short, for the door was flung violently open, and, followed by Donovan, who was vainly trying to hold her back, Bride dashed into the room, and rushed toward Sir Neville's side.

"Is he dead? Oh! is he dead?" she cried passionately.

Her father stared at her in absolute amazement.

"Bride!" he ejaculated, when he was at last able to find words in which to express his feelings, "what in the name of all that's wonderful and mysterious are you doing here? I don't understand it. Did you lead the constabulary, or the moonlighters, pray?"

She looked at him wildly, hardly understanding what he said.

"Is he dead?" she repeated.

"Who? Sir Neville? No. Look! he's coming round; no more dead than I am. Hullo, old man! Feel better, eh? That's right. Can you sit up? Take away this poor fellow, men; he'll only distress Sir Neville if his eyes fall upon him."

As the constables bore away poor Micky's corpse, Sir Neville, with the doctor's help, managed to struggle into a sitting position and look about him.

As he did so, his gaze fell on the girl who was kneeling beside him on the floor, her big, tearful eyes fixed intently on his face, and he put out his hand with a smile.

"Bride! You still here?" he exclaimed joyfully.

"Yes," the doctor impatiently cried; "and naturally, I want an explanation! I thought I left my daughter safe at home in bed, and I find her here at midnight, mixed up with policemen, and moonlighters, and swooning baronets. What does it mean? Tell me that now."

Sir Neville told the story with a ring of pride in his voice, and his eyes fixed lovingly on his sweetheart; and, when he had finished, the men gave three cheers, for "Miss Bride," while the doctor took her hand, saying gently—

"I'm proud of my little girl tonight—prouder than words can say."

And at last she was persuaded to depart with her father and an escort of constabulary, having been assured that no one would further molest Ard-na-carrig, and that Sir Neville really was not hurt at all.

So ended the most exciting night that she was ever likely to know.

CHAPTER IV.

Sir Neville Ffolliot sat at his writing-table, surrounded by piles of