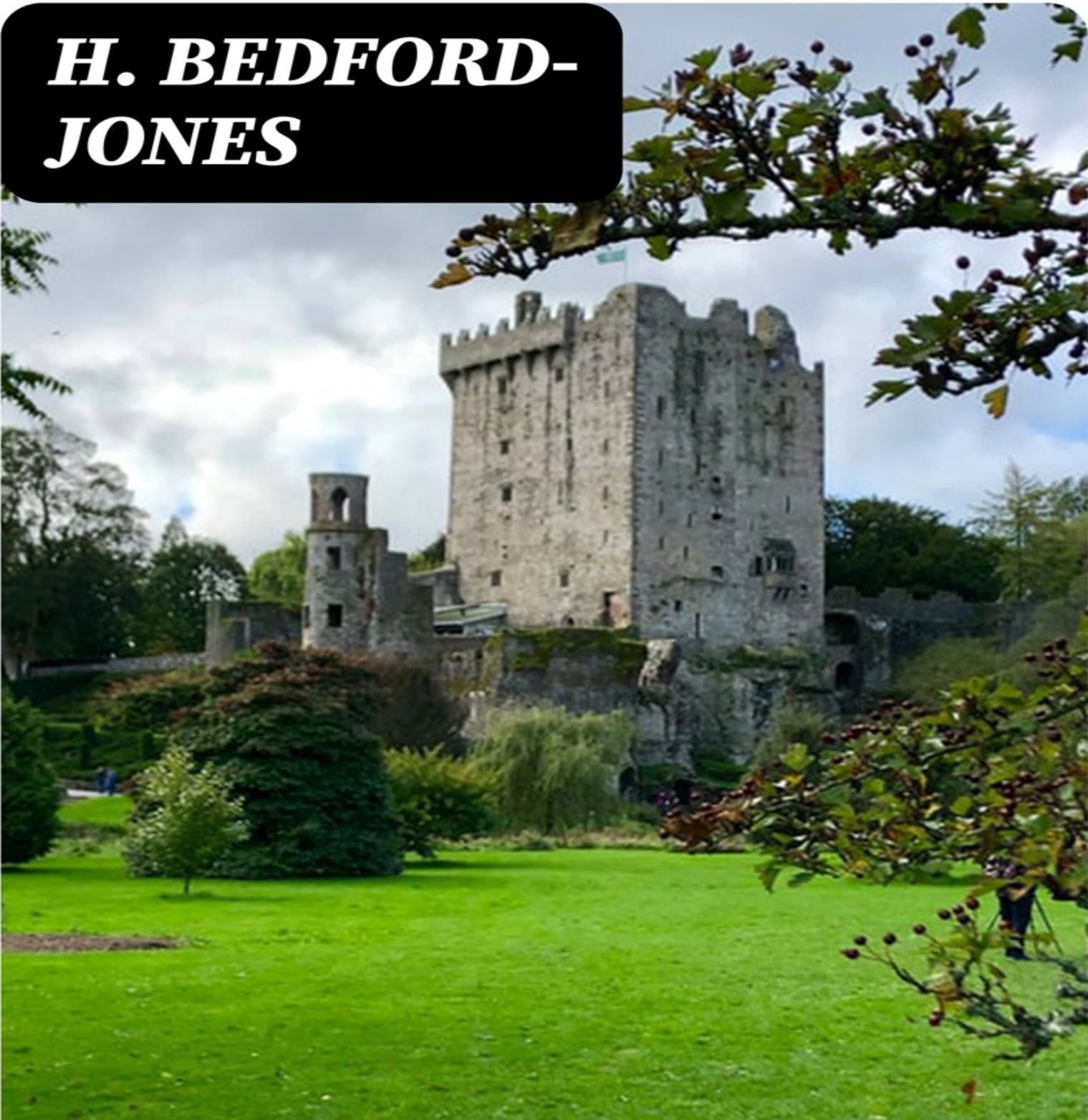


***H. BEDFORD-  
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***NUALA  
O'MALLEY***

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# **Nuala O'Malley**

EAN 8596547351757

DigiCat, 2022

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# **CHAPTER I. THE BLACK WOMAN.**

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The horseman reined in as his jaded steed scrambled up the shelving bank, and for a space sat there motionless, for which the horse gave mute thanks. The moon was struggling to heave through fleecy clouds, as it was hard on midnight; in the half obscurity the rider gazed around suspiciously.

There was nothing in sight to cause any man fear. Behind him rippled the Dee, and all around was desolation. Ardee itself lay a good two miles in the rear, burned and laid waste six weeks before, and ten miles to the south lay Drogheda. Indeed, as the horseman gazed about, he caught sight of a faint glare on the horizon that drew a bitter word from his lips.

Dismounting with some difficulty, owing to his cloak and Spanish hat, he examined a long, raking gash in his horse's flank; then flung off hat and cloak and calmly proceeded to bind up his own naked shoulder beneath.

His was a strange figure, indeed, now that he stood revealed. He wore no clothing save breeches and high riding-boots; an enormous sword without a sheath was girt about his waist, and the caked blood on his shoulder and cheek made his fair skin stand out with startling contrast.

About his shoulders fell long hair of ruddy yellow, while his face was young and yet very bitter, tortured by both physical and mental anguish, as it seemed. He bound up the deep slash in his shoulder with a strip of cloth torn from his

cloak, felt his wealed cheek tenderly, then flung the cloak about him again and drew down his broad-brimmed hat as he turned to his weary horse.

"Well, my friend," and his voice sounded whimsical for all its rich tone, "you've had a change of masters to-day, eh? I'd like to spare you, but man's life is first, though Heaven knows it's worth little in Ireland this day!" With that he reeled and caught at the saddle for support, put down his head, and sobbed unrestrainedly.

"Oh, my God!" he groaned at length, straightening himself to shake a clenched and blood-splashed fist at the sky. "Where were You this day? God! God! The blood of men on Thine altars—"

"Faith, you must be new come to Ireland, then!"

At the shrill, mocking voice the man whirled about and his huge blade was out like a flash. But only a cackling laugh answered him, as down from the bank above slipped a perfect hag of a creature, and he drew back in alarm. At that instant the moon flooded out; his sudden motion had flung off his wide hat, and he stood staring at the wrinkled creature whose scanty garments and thin-shredded gray locks were pierced by a pair of weird brown eyes.

Then he quivered indeed, and even the poor horse took a step backward, for the old woman had flung up her arms with a shrill cry as she gazed on the yellow-haired young man.

"The O'Neill!" The words seemed to burst from her involuntarily. She craned forward, her hands twisting at her ragged shawl, and a flood of Gaelic poured from her lips as she stared at the awe-struck man.

"Are you, then, the earl, come back from the dead? Ghost of Tyr-owen, why stand you here idle in the gap of Ulster, where once Cuculain fought against the host of Meave? Do you also stand here to fight as he fought—"

"Peace, mad-woman!" exclaimed the young man, stooping after his hat. "Peace, and be off out of my way, for I have far to ride."

The Gaelic words came roughly and brokenly from him, but the old hag took no heed. Instead, she advanced swiftly and laid her hand on his arm, still gazing into his face with a great wonder on her wrinkled features.

"Who are you?" she whispered. "Tell the Black Woman your name, if you are no ghost! For even as you stand now, once did these eyes see the great earl himself."

"I am from Drogheda," answered the man, something very like fear stamped on his powerful and bitter-touched young face. "My name is Brian Buidh, and I ride to join Owen Ruadh—"

"Liar!" The old woman spat forth the word with a cackle of laughter. "Oh, you cannot fool the Black Woman, Yellow Brian! Listen—Brian your name is, and Yellow Brian your name shall be indeed, since this is your will. Owen Ruadh O'Neill lies at the O'Reilly stead at Lough Oughter, but you shall never ride to war behind him, Brian Buidh! No—the Black Woman tells you, and the Black Woman knows. Instead, you shall ride into the west, and there shall be a storm of men—a storm of men behind you and before you —"

"For the love of Heaven, have done!" cried Yellow Brian, shrinking before her, and yet with anger in his face. "Are

you crazed, woman? Drogheda has fallen; O'Neill must join with the royalists, and never shall I ride into the west. Be off, for I have no money."

He turned to mount, but again she stopped him. It seemed to him that there was strange power in that withered hand which rested so lightly on his arm.

"The Black Woman needs no money, Yellow Brian," she cackled merrily. "You shall meet me once again, on a black day for you; and when you meet with Cathbarr of the Ax you shall remember me, Brian Buidh; and when you ride into the west and meet with the Bird Daughter you shall remember me.

"So go, Yellow Brian, upon whose heart is stamped the red hand of the O'Neills! *Beannacht leath!*"

"*Beannacht leath,*" repeated the man thickly.

There was a rustle of bushes, and he was alone, wiping the cold sweat from his face.

"Woman or fiend!" he muttered hoarsely. "How did she know that last? Yes, she was crazed, no doubt. I suppose that I do look like the earl—since he was my grandfather!"

And with a bitter laugh he climbed into the saddle and pushed his horse up the bank. The bushes closed behind him, the night closed over him, but it was long ere the weird words of the old hag who called herself the Black Woman were closed from his mind.

For, after all, Yellow Brian was of right not alone an O'Neill, but The O'Neill.

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## **CHAPTER II.**

# **THE BEGINNING OF THE STORM.**

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The people of every nation—that is, the tillers of the soil, the people who form the backbone of their race—are in continual expectancy of a Man and a Day. Theirs is always the, perhaps, dumb hope, but still the hope, that in their future lie these two things, a Man and a Day. Sometimes the Man has come and the Day has failed; sometimes the Day has come and there has been no Man to use it; but now all Ireland had swept up in a wild roar, knowing that the Man and the Day had come together.

And so, in truth, they had. Owen, the Ruadh, or red, O'Neill, had fought a desperate struggle against the royalists. Little by little he had cemented his own people together, his personal qualities and his splendid generalship had overborne all else, and the victory of Benburb had crowned the whole. Then Owen Ruadh was stricken down with sickness, Cromwell landed and stormed Drogheda, and Yellow Brian had fought clear and fled away to the kinsman he had never seen.

Now, standing on the castle ramparts overlooking Lough Oughter, Yellow Brian stared moodily out at the lake. His identity had been revealed to none, and the name of Brian Buidh had little meaning to any in Ireland. Years since he who was The O'Neill, the same whom the English called Earl of Tyr-owen, had fled with his family from the land. His eldest son John had settled at the Spanish court.

John was a spineless man, unworthy son of a great father, content to idle away his life in ease and quiet. And it was in the court of Spain that Brian O'Neill had been born, with only an old Irishwoman to nurse him and teach him the tongue and tidings of Ireland which his father cared nothing for.

Yellow Brian had written out these things, sending the letter to the sick general who lay within the castle. His terrible news of Drogheda had created consternation, but already O'Neill's forces had been sent to join the royalists against the common foe. All Ireland was distraught by war. Royalist, patriot, and Parliament man fought each against the other, and the only man who could have faced Cromwell lay sick unto death.

The Day was passing, the Man was passing, and shadow lay upon all the land.

A man came up and touched Yellow Brian's arm, with word that Owen Ruadh would see him at once. Brian nodded, following. He was well garbed now, and a steel jack glittered from beneath his dark-red cloak as he strode along. Upon his strong-set face brooded bitterness, but his eyes were young for all their cold blue, and his ruddy hair shone like spun gold in the sunlight; while his firm mouth and chin, his erect figure, and his massive shoulders gained him more than one look of appreciation from the clustered O'Reillys.

He followed the attendant to a large room, whose huge mantel was carved with the red hand and supporting lions of the clan Reilly, and passed over to the bed beside the window. He had requested to see O'Neill alone, and the attendant withdrew silently. Brian approached the bed, and

stood looking down at the man who was passing from Ireland.

Sharp and bright were the eyes as ever, but the red beard was grayed and the face was waxen; a spark of color came to it, as Owen Ruadh stretched forth a hand to take that of his visitor.

"Brian O'Neill!" he exclaimed, in a voice singularly like that of Brian himself. "Welcome, kinsman! But why the silence you enjoined in your letter?"

"My name is Yellow Brian," answered the younger man somberly. "I have none other, general. You know the gist of my story, and here is the rest. I broke with my father, for he would hear nothing of my coming to Ireland. So I cast off his name and left him to his cursed idleness, reaching Drogheda barely in time to take part in the siege. I managed to cut through, as you know, and meant to take service with you—"

He paused, for words did not come easily to him, as with all his race. A low groan broke from the crippled warrior.

"Too late, kinsman, too late! Cromwell is come, and I will never sit a horse again—ah, no protests, lad! How old are you?"

"Twenty-three."

"By my faith, you look thirty! Lad, my heart is sore for you. I am wasted and broken. I have no money, and Cromwell will shatter all before him; I can do naught save give you advice."

"I want naught," broke in Brian quickly, a little glint as of ice in his blue eyes. "Not for that did I cast off my name and come to—"

"Tut, tut, lad!" O'Neill reproved him gently. "I understand, so say no more of that matter. You are Brian Buidh, but to me you are my kinsman, the rightful head of my house. You can do two things, Yellow Brian—either follow my advice, or go down to ruin with all Ireland. Now say, which shall it be?"

Brian gazed at him with thoughtful face. What was the meaning of this dark speech? As he looked into the keen, death-smitten eyes of the man who might have saved Ireland, he smiled a little.

"I see naught but ruin, Owen Ruadh," he replied slowly. "I care little for my life, having no ties left on this earth—"

"Oh, nonsense!" broke in the other impatiently. "You are young, lad—the bitterness will soon pass, trust me. Now see, here is my advice, such advice as I would give no other man alive. I am dying, Yellow Brian. Well, I know that Cromwell will break down all I have built up, and I can see no brightness for my country. But for you I can see much. You are young, powerful, the last of the old race; you look strangely like the old earl, Brian!"

The younger man started. For the first time in many days he remembered that crazed hag he had met by the Dee water the night of Drogheda.

"Now, harken well. I tell you that our house lies in the dust, Brian; there is no hope for it or for any O'Neill. But for Yellow Brian there is hope. You must carve out a holding for yourself, for you are a ruler of men by your face, lad. Go into Galway, and there, where Cromwell's men will have hardest fighting of all, gather a force and make head. I have heard strange tales of a man who has done this very thing—they say he has seized on a castle somewhere near Bertraghboy

Bay, in Galway, and— But I am getting weak, Brian lad. Harken well—Ireland is lost; carve out now for your own hand, for the Red Hand of the old house, lad! And take this for my sake."

Almost whispering the last words, Owen Ruadh took from his finger a signet graven deeply with the Red Hand of Tyr-owen. Brian accepted it gravely, kissed the hand that gave it, and with tears choking his throat, left the chamber of the man who was passing from Ireland.

He had been there a brief fifteen minutes, yet it seemed that an age had passed. Both he and the sick man had said much in few words, for they were both men who spared speech and did much. But Brian had received a great wrench.

As he had said, he had cast off his father, for the grandfather's blood ran riot within him, and had kindled to burning rage against the sluggard who had made his name a thing of reproach in all lands. With the overstrong bitterness of youth he had meant to die sword in hand, fighting for Ireland. The few burning words of Owen Ruadh had stripped all this false heroism from him, however, and had sent a flame of sanity into his brain.

Brian returned slowly to the round tower, and stood looking out over the waters, for the castle was built on an island in the lake a mile from shore. It was nearing sunset, and snow was in the air—the first snow, for this was the end of September.

"Ruin—the storm of men!" He repeated unconsciously the words of the hag who had stopped him by the Dee water. "What shall I do? Which is the part of a man, after all; to fall

for Ireland or to hew out new lands and found a new house in the west? By my hilt! That old hag told me truly after all!"

At that thought he stood silent, his eyes troubled. What was this fate which seemed to drive him into the west, instead of leading him to the flame of swords as he had so long hoped and dreamed? Death meant little to him; honor meant much. All his life he had lived in Spain, yet it had been a double life. He had ridden and hunted and learned arms with the young nobles of the court, but he had talked and sorrowed and dreamed with the old Irishwoman who had nursed him.

After all, it is often the dreams of the youth which determine the career of the man, he reflected.

Which path should he take? As he stood there struggling with himself, his hand went unconsciously to his long, powerful jaw; it was a gesture habitual with him when in deep thought—which he seldom was, however. Now the youth in him spoke for death, now the sanity which had flashed into his brain from that of the sick man spoke for the life of deeds and renown which lay in the west.

An incident might turn him either way—and the incident came in the shape of a very tall old man who wore the Irish garb of belted, long-sleeved tunic and woolen hose, with iron-soled shoes. The old man's face was cunning, but his eyes were bright and keen and deep gray; his gray hair hung low to conceal his lopped ears, and there hung about him an indescribable air of shrewdness faced with apparent openness of heart.

Brian glanced at him, remembered that he had heard him called Turlough Wolf, and looked away carelessly,

absorbed in his own thought. But the old man halted abruptly with an exclamation:

"*Corp na diaoul!* Where got you that face and that gesture, Drogheda man?"

Brian looked at him, frowning.

"What mean you, Turlough Wolf?"

The other stared, his thin jaw fallen.

"Why—why," he stammered, "I thought it had been The O'Neill come to life again! When I was a boy I have seen the earl hold his hand to his chin—often, often! And—and you look like him, Brian Buidh—"

"Nonsense!" Brian forced a laugh, but as he folded his arms again the glitter of O'Neill's ring on his finger caught the sharp gray eyes.

Turlough Wolf started.

"Listen!" he said, coming forward insinuatingly. "Yellow Brian, no man knows who you are, nor do I ask. But Turlough Wolf knows a man when he sees one, a chieftain among men. I owe no man service; but if you will need a swift brain, a cunning hand, and an eye that can read the hearts of men, I will serve you."

Brian looked down into the shrewd face in wonder, then waved an impatient hand.

"No use, Turlough Wolf. I have no money to pay for service, and to-night I must ride out to seek I know not what—nay, whether I ride west or east or south, I know not!"

He turned abruptly, wishing to close the matter, but the old man laid a restraining hand on his shoulder.

"I seek no money, Yellow Brian. I seek only a master such as yourself; a man who is a master among men, and whom I

can set higher still if he will heed my counsels. I am old, you are young; I know all parts of the land by heart, from the Mayo shore to Youghal, and I am skilled at many things. Take my service and you will not regret it."

Brian hesitated. After all, he considered, the thing came close to being uncanny. The Black Woman by Dee water; Owen Ruadh himself, and now this Ulysseslike Turlough Wolf—whither was fate driving him? Was he really to meet such persons as the Bird Daughter and Cathbarr of the Ax, or were they only the figment of a crazed old woman's brain?

So he hesitated, gazing down into those clear gray eyes. And as he looked it seemed to him that he found strange things in them, strange urgings that touched the chords of his soul. After all, adventure lay in the west, and he was young!

"Good!" he said, gravely extending his hand. "To-night we ride to the west, you and I. Come; let us see O'Reilly about horses."

And this was the beginning of the storm of men that came upon the west.

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## **CHAPTER III. THE DARK MASTER.**

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"There are two things, Yellow Brian, for you to mind. First, you must have men at your back who know you for their master; second, you must stand alone, giving and receiving aid from no man or party in the land."

Brian nodded and stored away the words in his heart, for in their three weeks of wandering he had learned that Turlough Wolf was better aid than many men. It was his doing that, when they had chanced on a party of ravagers beyond Carrick, Yellow Brian had been led into strife with their leader. The upshot of that matter was that there was a dead rover; Yellow Brian had a dozen horsemen behind him and money in his purse, and of the dozen none but feared utterly this silent man who fought like a fiend.

To the dozen had been added others—four Scotch plunderers strayed from Hamilton's horse and half a dozen Breffnians from Ormond's army, who had been driven out of Munster by the rising of the Parliament men there. They were a sadly mixed score, of all races and creeds, but were fighting ruffians to a man, and were bound together by Brian's solemn pledge that he himself would slay any who quarreled. The result was peace.

So now, with a good score of men behind him, Yellow Brian had ridden down into Galway, was past Lough Corrib and Iar Connaught, and was hard upon Connemara.

There was a thin snow upon the hills, and the bleak wind presaged more; but the score of men sang lustily as they

rode. Two days before they had come upon a dozen strayed Royalist plunderers, and had gained great store of food and drink—particularly drink. So all were well content for the time being.

"Turlough," asked Brian suddenly, as they rode side by side, "did you ever hear of one called the Black Woman?"

The Wolf crossed himself and grimaced.

"That I have, Yellow Brian, but dimly. They say she deals in magic and sorcery, and no good comes of meeting with her. But stop—there are horsemen on the road! Scatter the men, and quickly; let us two bide here."

There was cunning in the advice, for the two had come to a bend in the road and the men were a hundred yards behind them. Brian drew rein at sight of a score of men a scant quarter-mile away and riding up the hill toward them. He knew that they must also have been seen, but his men would still be out of sight, so he turned with a quick word:

"Off into the rocks, men! If I raise my sword, come and strike. Off!"

As he spoke he bared that same huge cut-or-thrust brand he had borne from Drogheda and set the point on his boot. Instantly the men scattered on either side the road, where black rocks thrust up from the snow, and within two minutes they and their horses had disappeared.

The riders below came steadily forward in a clump, and Brian saw old Turlough staring with bulging eyes. Then the Wolf half caught at his bridle, as if minded to fly, and his hands were trembling.

"What ails you, man?" smiled Brian. "Are they magicians and sorcerers, then?"

"No, *fareer gair*—worse luck!" blurted out the other. "Look at the little man who rides first, Yellow Brian!"

Brian squinted against the snow-glare, and saw that the leader of the approaching party seemed indeed to be a little man with hunched shoulders and head that glinted steel.

"A hunchback!" he exclaimed. "Well, who is he?"

"The Dark Master—O'Donnell More himself! It is in my mind that this is a black day, Brian Buidh. O'Donnell More is the master of all men at craft, and the match of most men at weapons. Beware of him, master, beware! I had thought that he was still under siege at Bertragh Castle, else I had never taken this road."

"Nonsense!" laughed out Brian joyously, drinking in the clear afternoon air. "So much the more honor if we slay him, Turlough Wolf! Let him match me at weapons, or you at wits, if he can!"

Turlough muttered something and drew back behind Brian's steed with pallid face. Yellow Brian, however, having a sure trust in his own right arm and his hidden men, scanned the approaching O'Donnell curiously, seeking what had inspired such unwonted fear in the old gray Wolf.

He could find nothing ominous in that hunched figure, save its mail-coat and steel helm. Yet the face was peculiar. Over a drooping mustache of black flared forth two intense black eyes. Brian noted this, and the thin, curved nose and prominent chin, and laughed again.

"Who is this Dark Master, Turlough?"

The other shivered slightly. "He is an O'Donnell from the north, come here some ten years since—he seized on Bertragh even as we intend seizing on a stead, and has

since done evil things in the land. Now hush, for they say the wind bears him idle talk."

Brian's thin lips curved a trifle scornfully, but he kept silence, watching the approaching men. At fifty yards' distance they halted. Their leader eyed the motionless pair for a moment and then slowly rode on alone, waving back his followers. And Yellow Brian made a strange figure, with his ruddy hair streaming from beneath his steel cap and the bright, naked sword rising up from toe to head beside him.

"Well?" O'Donnell More's voice was deep and harsh, though Brian afterward found that it could be changed to suit its owner's mood. "Who are you thus disputing my passage?"

"I am Brian Buidh," came Brian's curt reply. "As for dispute, that is as you will."

"Yellow Brian?" The black brows shot up in surprise. "A strange name. Whence come you, and seeking what?"

"I seek men, O'Donnell More." Brian swiftly determined that this was a man who might give him aid, a man after his own heart. "Whence I come is my affair. Give me men, and I will repay with gold."

"What need have you of men, Yellow Brian," came the sardonic answer, "when your own lie hidden among the rocks?"

Now indeed Brian started, whereat the other smiled grimly.

"How knew you that?"

"If you recognized me from afar, you had not stayed to meet me unless you had men," stated O'Donnell shrewdly enough.

"True," said Brian, and laughed out. "Well said, O'Donnell. I have a score, and want another score. I will match mine against yours, or make a pact, as you desire."

The Dark Master sat fingering his sword-hilt and considered. With the black brows down and the black eyes fixed on him, Brian suddenly began to like the man less.

"I will give you service," returned O'Donnell at last.

Brian smiled. "Men serve me, not I them."

At this curt answer O'Donnell looked black, then fell into thought, his shoulders hunched up and his head drawn in like the head of a turtle. Brian wished now that he had struck first and talked afterward.

Finally the Dark Master looked up with a slow smile.

"Welcome to you, Brian of the hard eyes and hollow cheeks," he said. "*Slaintahut!* I will not give you men, but I will give you the loan of men if you will do me one of two favors. Ten miles to the south of here there is an old tower on a cliff, and in the tower dwells a man with certain companions who sets me at naught. On an island out near Golam Head is a castle where a woman rules, who has also set me at naught. Go, reduce either of these twain, and I will lend you twoscore men for three months."

Brian sat his great horse and looked at the Dark Master. He would have sought advice from Turlough Wolf, save that he did not like to turn his back on those burning eyes. After all, the pact was not a bad one.

"These enemies of yours—who are they, and what force have they?"

The Dark Master chuckled, and his head shot out from between his shoulders.

"The man is called Cathbarr of the Ax, and he is a hard man to fight, for he has ten men like himself, axmen all. The woman cannot fight, but she has a swift mind, many men, and her name is Nuala O'Malley, of the O'Malleys of Erris."

"I had sooner fight a man than a woman," returned Brian slowly. "Also, this Cathbarr of the Ax has fewer men. I will do you this favor, O'Donnell Dubh."

He gave no sign of the wonder that had shot into his mind at the name of Cathbarr, except that his blue eyes seemed changed suddenly to cold ice. The Dark Master saw the change, and his smile withered. Brian, watching him, reflected that this malformed freebooter could be venomous-looking at times.

"I have passed my word," O'Donnell the Black made curt answer. "Fetch either of the twain to Bertragh, dead or alive, and you have the loan of twoscore men for three months, free. Is it a pact?"

"It is a pact," answered Brian, and at that the other galloped back to his men.

Brian swung his sword and flung it high into the air; before it had flashed down to nestle in his palm again, his men were scrambling into the road. He sheathed the sword, smiling a little, and turned to Turlough.

"Well? To your mind or not, Wolf?"

"My father saw the Brown Geraldine at Dublin," responded that worthy, scratching the gray beard which had begun to sprout. "They broke his bones with the back of an ax and swung him out in a cage until he died, and after. He made pacts too easily."

"Well?" asked Brian again, but a dull flush crossed his cheeks.

"I gave you my rede," said Turlough sullenly. "I said to stand alone, receiving aid from neither man nor faction. Now there is mischief to be repaired."

"Then my sword shall repair it," said Brian, and ordered the men to swing in after him. "Guide us to this tower of Cathbarr's, for my honor is in my own keeping."

They swung about and headed to the south and the sea.

The hill-paths, which Turlough Wolf seemed to know perfectly, were cruelly hard on the horses; none were as yet trodden down, for the snow was fresh, and all the west coast lay desolate. The plague had stricken Galway and Mayo heavily that year, smiting the mountains with death. Some few parties of Roundhead horse had come through, because they feared God and Ireton more than the plague, and some Royalists had fled up from the south for much the same reason.

In any case, Yellow Brian found all the land desolate, and liked it. The more wasted the land, he reflected, the more chance for that sword of his to find swinging-room. As he had ridden, news had come from the east—news of the Wexford killing and the curse that was come upon the land. Owen Ruadh O'Neill was not yet dead, but Brian knew that he had prophesied truly. Ireland's day was gloaming fast.

Despite the dismal tone of Turlough Wolf, Brian told himself that he had done a good day's work. O'Donnell Dubh would keep his word beyond any question. As for the man he was to slay, the only part of it which troubled Brian was the prediction of the Black Woman at the Dee water. She

had known him, and had prophesied O'Neill's death, and had spoken of the west and this Cathbarr of the Ax. After all, however, she might have shot a chance shaft which had gone true. Brian had no faith in magic.

All that afternoon he rode on, Turlough Wolf ahead of him, the men behind. They feared and hated the old Wolf as much as they feared and loved Brian.

Progress was slow, owing to the bad paths, the snow, and sundry changes of direction, so that when night fell they had covered but eight miles of the ten. Turlough suggested that they push on and finish their business at a stroke, but Brian curtly refused. So the men made camp in lee of a cliff and proceeded to feast away the last of their provisions and wine, in confidence that on the morrow they would have more, or else would need none.

Brian and Turlough built a fire apart, and after their repast Brian broke silence with a request for information about Cathbarr. It was his first speech since the parting with the Dark Master.

"I never heard of him," responded Turlough. "No doubt he is some outlaw who has become a thorn in the Dark Master's flesh. With the woman it is different."

"Tell me of her," said Brian, gazing into the fire.

"She is an O'Malley, and, like all the clan, makes much of ships and seamen and little of horses and riders. When the Dark Master came, ten years ago, he slew her father and mother by treachery, and would have slain her but that her men carried her off. She was a child then. Now she is a woman, very bitter against O'Donnell Dubh, and is allied with the Parliament so that her ships may have the run of

the seas, it is said. O'Donnell takes sides with no faction, but caters to all. He lays nets and snares, and men fall into them, and he laughs."

"Why is Nuala O'Malley called the Bird Daughter?" asked Brian quietly.

At this question old Turlough rose on his elbow, and in his wide, gray eyes was set mingled fear and wonder.

"*M'anam an diaoul!*" he spat out. "Who are you to know this thing?"

"Answer my question," returned Brian, hiding his own surprise.

"Seven years ago, master, I was at Sligo Bay with O'Dowda when Hamilton cut us to pieces. Nuala O'Malley had brought us some powder—she was but a slip of a girl then. In the evening I was down at the ship when I saw her come from below, a hooded pigeon in her hands. She whispered in the bird's ear, set off the hood, and the bird flew into the night. I named her Bird Daughter, but no other man knew the name."

"Then a woman did," chuckled Brian dryly. "It was but a carrier pigeon, Turlough; I have seen them used in Spain. Now listen to me."

With that he told him of the Black Woman and his weird meeting at Dee water. Old Turlough listened in no little amazement, for he was full of superstitious fancies, but Brian said nothing of his own name. The uncanny prophecies, however, which now seemed on the road to fulfilment were enough to give any man pause.

When he had finished, a very subdued Turlough Wolf stated that the Black Woman was an old hag who wandered

all over the land, that some called her crazy and others thought her inspired, and that his own belief was that she was a banshee, no less.

At this Brian saw the thing in a more rational light. The old woman knew of this nook in the west, and, attracted to him by his resemblance to the long-dead earl, she had endeavored to steer him thither. After all, it was quite simple.

Of course, old Turlough swore that he had never breathed his name of Bird Daughter to a living soul, and that it was but a name he had used in his own mind for the slim girl who had fetched powder from the south. Brian chuckled, guessing that Turlough was not the only one who had seen carrier pigeons used, and who had ascribed the thing to higher powers.

The incident served the purpose of establishing a firmer intimacy between Brian and the old man, however, and convinced Turlough that his master was destined to fly high. Nor through all the storm of men that befell after did Turlough again breathe reproof as he had dared that day.

"I begin to see that your advice was good, Turlough Wolf," said Brian the next morning, as he rode shivering from camp. "As to making my men know me for their master, that troubles me little; but I think it will be a hard matter to avoid making pacts, and to stand alone."

"Lean on your sword," grunted old Turlough. "To my notion, such friendship as that huge blade of yours can give is better than good. Order men ahead."

Brian nodded and sent two of the men ahead as scouts, with the Wolf himself. For the better part of an hour they