

ONE STORMY NIGHT.

A stormy night, indeed,

"High up on the lonely mountains,"

the rain came down in streams, as if the sky were a great sieve, and not a ray of light found its way through the black clouds. The giant fir trees bent and awayed in the fierce wind, and sent their wild, wailing voices down through gulch and canyon to mingle with the roar of creek and cataract, or fell before the rocks that crashed down the mountains' sides. The terrified cattle lowed and cried in their corrals, huddling together for warmth and sympathy. Indoors, people drew near together, crowding around the hearth-fires that blazed in a fitful, almost uncanny way.

In a wayside inn on the mountain road, a little company sat thus gathered about an immense fire-place that glowed and flamed like a bonfire, and, not content with cheering the great room, sent its beacon light out at the windows to defy the night and the storm.

There was Mike Malone, the landlord, and Kitty, his fat, funny wife; little Maria, the Spanish girl whom Mike and Kitty had "rared;" Jake, the stable man, and last, because most important, "Bat," the French Canadian wood-cutter. There was nothing in the young fellow's appearance to suggest the winged horror whose name he bore. It was merely a sobriquet for Baptiste. Jake seldom availed himself of the abbreviation, but slowly and emphatically styled him "Canuck," usually prefixing a descriptive that had more force than elegance.

It was ill-natured, to say the least, for Bat was one of the kindest fellows in the world, "and the ways of him," as Kitty said "was wan strange o' sunshine; but sure," she added, "Jake is that jealous that he can't thrate him decent, though I'd sooner see Marce quiet in her grave nor married to the likes av him. Av she's in love wid the Frinchman? There ye have me now. She's that quare and shy, Marce is, that ye niver can tell her mind till she pleases to let ye know, and on this subject she hasn't pleased yit."

And that was quite true, for when Bat's blue eyes, sparkling with fun and deep with the light of love, beamed upon the little dark-eyed beauty, her long lashes swept her cheeks; sometimes not until the quick eyes of Jake had seen the outspringing of an answering love, though not all Bat's gallant wooing could bring a word of it to her lips—silent, cautious little Maria, who doubted the gay manners of this rollicking knight of the ax.

"Did ever yees listen to the loike o' that?" exclaimed Mike, at a sudden crashing sound.

Kitty and Bat crossed themselves fervently, but Jake, with unmoved, sullen face, sat and glowered at the fire. Suddenly Maria sprang up, excitedly:

"It is a voice!" she cried.

"Indeed, thin, it's the voice of many waters," laughed Kitty, though rather nervously.

"It is a human voice; it is calling for help."

"By golly, it's de debble den," said Bat. "Dat's nobody helms'll be on de road such a sight like dat. I'll bet he's call for Jake," he added recklessly.

A deeper glower was Jake's only reply, but soon, lifting his head, he said:

"She's right, Marce is; ther is some one callin'."

"Out wid yees, men, till the rescue!" cried Kitty, seizing Mike's hat and coat and thrusting them upon him.

"Sure ye're spakin'," said Mike, ruefully preparing to leave the cheery hearth.

Bat, aroused by the light in Maria's flashing eyes, sprang up with enthusiasm, for, low he it spoken, his was not a grand heroic soul. His brave deeds were mostly born of impulse and nourished by the approbation of others.

Jake sullenly joined them, but before they reached the door it opened, and full in the fire-light appeared a tall form, and handsome, yellow-haired face—a striking picture, with the dark night for a background.

"By me now, it's the Docther. In the name

o' the owid divil, who brings ye out in the loike o' this!"

"I don't go abroad in the devil's name, Mike," laughed the Doctor, making his way to the fire, and taking the chair that Kitty had hastened to place for him.

"No more ye don't Docther; it's Hiven's own sarvent ye are," she said earnestly. Bestir yerself, Mike, and bring him somethin' hot to drink, for indade, Docther, ye're the color of a ghost."

"I've had a pretty tough time to get here, and a few minutes ago I was more likely to arrive at the bottom of the gulch, where my poor horse is now."

The Doctor's voice trembled, and his eyes were wet with not unmanly tears, for, as the little company well knew, the horse was a pet and a beauty.

"Ah, wee's the night!" wailed Kitty. "Ye'll niver find a better baste nor a handsomer wan—and so proud he samed to bear ye, the poor faithful creature!"

"Yes, we've pulled through many a tough place together, and he never flinched nor failed me. The almost human cry he gave when he went down that horrible place will ring in my ears as long as I live," said the Doctor, shuddering. "But who's going to show me the way to Fraser's? There's a trail over the mountain, isn't there?"

"Begarry, there was wan," said Mike, with great hesitation, "but a very divil of a way ye'll find it now—the traas do be crackin' and fallin' and the rocks a rowlin' down in jest an infernal manner. It's as mach as yer loife is worth to ye to get there."

"And who's ailin' over there, annyway?" asked Kitty.

"I think it's the baby. Some one left word at my office that they feared one of Fraser's children was dying."

"Dorned if I'll risk my neck for one of Fraser's kids," said Jake, emphatically, going back to his seat by the fire.

"No great risk, thin," retorted Kitty. "Thin as is born to be hanged 'il niver be dhrowned."

"An' sure," said Mike, glancing at Kitty, "I'm thinking we're as safe outside as in alther this. We're in for it, annyhow; but danged if I'm anxious to drag my owid rheumatically legs over anny trail to-night."

The Doctor looked at Bat. Maria, too, had looked at him, and that look had fired his soul with the courage of an old warrior, whatever the risk or the terror.

"Le ciel est le prix," thought Bat, thrilling beneath that look.

"Well, a guess a know dat way pretty well, an' if hany ting is happo I got de Doctor, ain't it?" said Bat, gaily brushing back his brown curls, and drawing over them the veritable blue togs that he had worn in the backwoods of Canada.

Then, in his droll way, he took solemn leave of Kitty and Mike, imploring them, if anything should prevent his return, to be good to Jake. Over Maria's little brown hand he lingered long enough to say unheard by all but her:

"I come again to thee—je t'aime."

And in a language understood by all, the dark eyes answered:

"I love thee."

And in a language known and taught by the Father of Evil, sullen Jake replied to his laughing:

"Good-bye, my Jake—pray for me, with a look of hatred and a sullen, "Go to hell!"

"Behind you, my dear," answered Bat, with a profound bow.

Out into the black and terrible night went the two men—one obeying the mandate of his noble profession, filled with the sympathy it had taught him to give to sorrow and suffering everywhere; the other, his heart glowing with chivalric passion, to prove himself a hero in the eyes of her he loved—followed by the voluble thanks of Mike and Kitty, by the half proud, half anxious, and altogether loving, gaze of Maria, and also by the malignant glare of Jake's evil eyes.

"And Satan came also," thought the Doctor, observing the look.

Maria, too, turned in time to see the expression. It was just as Mike was telling them to look out for the bridge over Fraser's creek.

Then the door closed, and while the wind and the rain beat furiously against it, and Mike and Kitty speculated anxiously upon the chances of their safe arrival at Fraser's, Maria studied Jake's face as he gazed intently in the fire, where, from a pine knot, the lurid jets of flame darted out and leaped wildly up the black vault, as if eager to join their kindred spirits in the storm.

Suddenly Jake arose, and, muttering something in the way of a good-night, slouched out of the room. Maria, too, went softly out, retiring to her own apartment.

Meanwhile, safely on their way, through wind and rain and thick darkness, over fallen trees and raging waters, went the two men, Bat's jubilant heart overflowing in droll speeches, and songs that he sang at the top of his voice to scare away evil spirits, he said—and the doctor said he should think it would. Bat it did not, for behind them crept one whose intent was blacker than the night, more cruel than the angry streams.

Yet on they went along the narrow path, with the overhanging rocks on their right, and on their left, the fearful precipice; yet gaily onward, with cautious steps, until they reached the cottage, whose light shown out like a star in the black night.

"By golly, we've got here, don't it?" said Bat, drawing a long breath, as they paused at the door.

Is there anything, I wonder, that stirs a physician's heart more deeply than that look of mingled thankfulness and mute appeal, that greets him on his first arrival where life and death are struggling together?

"God bless you!" cried Fraser, who, alone with his wife, was watching the little one that lay flushed with fever, and moaning with pain. "God bless you, Doctor—we didn't think you could get here."

"There's a special providence for doctors, you know," he answered, smiling.

The mere sound of his pleasant voice seemed to give them courage, and the mother, with a gleam of hope in her eyes, and a deep sigh of relief, laid her baby in his arms, that clasped and bore the tiny burden with the tenderness of a woman. When a man has a gentle heart, tender not merely toward his own, but with a sympathy that reaches to all helpless, suffering creatures, how great it is!

"I was t'inkin'," said Bat, gravely, "bo't dat providence you been spikin' abo't, why it ain't take care of Doctor's horses de same time."

After the Doctor and Bat had crossed Fraser's creek, the stealthy figure that had followed them thus far, with something in his hand, stopped, cowering under a fir tree, till the gleam of their lantern was like a firefly in the distance; then he approached the bridge, and, with eyes grown accustomed to the darkness, examined the end that lay upon the bank. He could see sufficiently well for his purpose, which was soon apparent, for, taking up his pick, he commenced digging into the bank and displacing the rocks, working with a fiendish celerity.

"Curse him," he said between his teeth, "I fix him so that no doctor can't save him!"

And so, with muttered curses, with the hoarse, howling torrent beneath, and the shrieking pines above, the work was done, and the timber left in such position that one attempting to cross upon it would cause its fall. It was horrible to think of—plunged into that hell of waters and whirling debris, to be dashed against the sharp rocks or carried swiftly down the dark ravine to a death as sure and cruel if not as sudden.

"There, you infernal Canuck," said the man, "you bet you've done your last love-makin'. I'll take that little business off your hands," he added, with an ugly laugh.

"But first you'd better repair that bridge."

It was Maria, with her lantern suddenly turned full upon him.