

Standish Burt L.

Dick Merriwell Abroad: or, The Ban of the Terrible Ten



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Burt L. Standish

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CHAPTER I. – THE STORY OF QUEEN MARY

“Well, here we are, boys, in Scotland, the land of feuds, of clans, of Wallace, Bruce, Scott, Burns, and of limitless thrilling stories and legends.”

Professor Zenas Gunn was the speaker. With Dick Merriwell and Brad Buckhart, Merriwell’s friend and former roommate at the Fardale Military Academy, as his traveling companions, he had landed at Leith the previous day, having come by steamer from London. The three were now in Edinburgh, strolling down High Street on their way to visit Holyrood Castle.

It was nipping cold. There had been a light fall of snow; but the sun was shining, and the clear air, in strong contrast to the heavy, smoky atmosphere of London, gave them a feeling of lightness and exhilaration.

Perhaps it is not quite true to say it gave them all such a feeling, for there was an expression of disappointment on the face of the boy from Texas, a slight cloud of gloom that nothing seemed to dispel.

The old professor, however, was in high spirits.

“While we’re here, boys,” he said, “we’ll visit as many of the interesting places as possible. Already we have seen Scott’s monument, and to-morrow we will make an excursion to Melrose, and visit Melrose Abbey and Abbotsford. Later on, perhaps, we’ll run over to Loch Lomond and see Rob Roy’s prison and the cottage where Helen MacGregor, Rob Roy’s wife, was born. At Stirling we’ll feast our eyes on the Wallace Monument, which stands on the spot where the great hero defeated England’s army of invasion. Think what it will mean to stand on the field of Bannockburn!

“The English army, my boys, numbered one hundred thousand, while the Scots were less than forty thousand. But Scotland had not forgotten the terrible death of Wallace, who had been captured, carried to London, condemned to die, hanged, cut down while yet alive, to have portions of his body burned, and at last to be decapitated, his head being afterward placed on a pole on London Bridge. The Scottish army of forty thousand was led by the successor and avenger of Wallace, Robert Bruce, who achieved the marvelous object of driving the invaders from the country, fighting on until nowhere did an English foot crush the heather of Scotland.

“Ah! boys, these tales of heroism are the things to stir one’s blood, and make him feel that he might do great, and noble, and heroic things should the opportunity present itself. But in these prosaic, modern times men have little chance to become heroes. Now I feel that I, Zenas Gunn – had I been given the opportunity – might have become a great leader, a great hero, and my name might have lived in history. I’ve always regretted the fact that I was born too late to take part in any of the great struggles for human liberty. I am naturally a fighter. I think that old rascal, Barnaby Gooch, found out that I possessed the courage of a lion and the ability to fight like blazes. When we return to Fardale, boys, he’ll find out something else, I promise you that. Yes, sir, he’ll find out that he’s not the whole thing at that academy.”

“I hope so,” muttered Brad. “I certain hope he’ll get all that’s coming to him.”

“Leave it to me,” nodded Zenas. “I’ll attend to that in due time. In the meantime, boys, we’ll travel and enjoy the things we see while we are educating ourselves at the same time. Ha! there is Holyrood Palace, once the home of that loveliest of women, Mary, Queen of Scots. And there is the chapel in which she was married to Lord Darnley.”

The grim old castle stood before them, its turrets and towers rising against the bleak mountain background in impressive grandeur. There was snow on the mountains, and this made the outlines of the castle stand out sharply and distinctly.

“Stand here a few minutes boys,” invited the old professor. “Before we enter the castle, which will open to admit visitors at eleven o’clock, let’s brush up a little on the romantic and pathetic history of Queen Mary. I’ve always taken the liveliest interest in the story of her career. You know that first she was married to Francis II. and lived in France. After Francis died she returned to Scotland where she was immediately surrounded by a throng of royal suitors. Out of them all she selected that handsome, egotistical, vain, selfish young reprobate, Lord Darnley, which was a frightful mistake, for in a short time he began to treat her with discourtesy and absolute brutality, drinking to excess and behaving in a manner that made him generally detested at court.”

“But I have read that Queen Mary transferred her affection to an Italian musician named Rizzio,” said Dick.

“Hum! haw! Haw! hum!” coughed the professor. “A slander invented by the scheming noblemen about her who wished to rob her of her power in order to advance their own selfish ends. It is doubtful if they made Darnley himself believe it, but they told him it would advance him, and he fell into the trap.”

“But historians say Rizzio was very handsome.”

“Some do, and some say he was very plain and uncomely. It is impossible to tell which story is true; but beyond doubt he was a splendid singer. It was his voice that first attracted Mary. One winter’s day, while at mass, she heard a rich, sonorous voice of great sweetness and power ringing through the aisles. In answer to her inquiries concerning the singer, they told her it was Rizzio, private secretary to the ambassador from Savoy. Mary’s taste in music was of the finest, and she became greatly interested. There is a famous painting by David Neil, which shows the queen standing on the palace steps and regarding Rizzio, who has fallen asleep, mandolin by his side, near at hand. In this picture he is represented as being very handsome; but artists, like poets, take license with facts.”

“Is there any question as to the great friendliness that sprang up between them?” asked Dick.

“Oh, undoubtedly they became friends,” nodded Gunn; “and in this friendship the scheming noblemen who surrounded the queen saw their opportunity. They did their best to arouse the jealousy of Darnley, filling his ears with lies. Darnley was still little more than a boy, and he easily became a tool in the hands of the schemers, who planned to murder Rizzio in Mary’s presence, hoping perhaps that the terrible spectacle and the shock might kill her, which would leave Darnley in apparent power, but really powerless in the hands of the scoundrels who controlled him.”

“Fine business for the countrymen of Wallace and Bruce!” growled Buckhart.

“In those times the nobility seemed very corrupt, in Scotland, as well as other countries. This band of reprobates carried out their bloody plot. They hid in Mary’s bedroom, where they awaited their time. Mary was at supper with three friends in her library. One of the three was Rizzio. In the midst of it Darnley entered the room, took a seat beside the queen, put his arm about her and gave her the kiss of Judas. Then the murderous plotters suddenly appeared in the room, their weapons drawn. Instantly Rizzio started up, his face growing ghastly, for he knew his hour had come. He appealed to Mary, who answered that the king would never permit him to be slain in her presence.

“But Darnley attempted to hold her, and one of the ruffians placed a loaded pistol at her breast, while the others fell on Rizzio. In despair the doomed man caught at Mary’s dress, for he was unarmed and could not make resistance. The assassins slashed at him with their gleaming weapons, and in the struggle the table with its dishes was overturned. Its lights were upset and extinguished, but some of the invaders had brought torches and by the flaring light the bloody work went on. As Rizzio’s clutch on Mary’s dress relaxed she fainted. He was then dragged out into a narrow passage, where he was stabbed until his shrieks became hushed by death. They say the stain of his blood still remains on the oaken floor, and undoubtedly it will be pointed out to us to-day.”

“It’s a great thing, professor, to visit such spots,” said Dick. “I’ll never forget this bit of history after seeing and visiting the castle where it all took place.”

“The finest way in the world to learn history is to visit historic spots,” nodded the old pedagogue. “I suppose you both remember the rest of Mary’s story. The dastardly noblemen made her their prisoner, carrying her to captivity in a grim old castle on Lochleven. She was removed in the night, placed on a horse and compelled to ride at full gallop for several hours. When the castle prison was reached her brutal guards compelled her, under threat of death, to sign an abdication of the throne in favor of her son, at the same time naming one of the plotters, the Earl of Murray, regent, until the boy should come of age. Then she was left there, crushed and heartbroken.”

“But she escaped,” cried Dick.

“Yes, through the assistance of George Douglas, the son of her jailer, who had become so enamored of the sad and beautiful captive that he swore to save her, even though it cost him his life. One Sunday night as the queen sat in her window, gazing out on the placid bosom of the lake, she saw a boat silently approaching. In the boat was Douglas and his younger brother, who contrived to get hold of the castle key while the rest of the Douglas family were at supper. Without delay the daring youths locked the family in and hastened to set Mary free, rowing her across the lake and throwing the keys into the water.

“Mary assembled her followers, who hastened to flock to her support; but in a battle with the army of the regent, the Earl of Murray, she suffered defeat and again became a fugitive. For some time she remained hidden in Dundrennan Abbey, undecided what course to pursue. Some of her friends advised her to flee to France, but she decided to trust to the supposed friendship of her cousin, Elizabeth, Queen of England, and she fled across the English frontier. This was a fatal mistake, for Elizabeth had been her constant foe, fearing her claim to the English throne, and she was again cast into captivity. In the end she was falsely convicted of a conspiracy to assassinate Elizabeth, who was persuaded to sign her death warrant. When she was led to the block her executioners fell on their knees and asked forgiveness for the duty they were compelled to perform, which she freely gave, then entreated the women attending her not to weep, as she was glad to leave the world. Twenty years later her son was sovereign of both England and Scotland; and to-day the bodies of Mary and Elizabeth lie side by side beneath the same cathedral roof.”

CHAPTER II. – THE MEETING AT THE CASTLE

After having the romantic story of Queen Mary thus repeated for them by the old professor, the boys felt a deeper interest in Holyrood Castle as they wandered through its rooms. The guide showed them through the Chapel Royal, which is a beautiful fragment of the ancient abbey, conducted them into the picture gallery and the tapestry apartment, gave them a chance to inspect Lord Darnley's rooms, and finally brought them to Queen Mary's apartments, showing where the queen had supped on that fatal night and pointing to dark stains on the floor of the narrow corridor outside, which, in broadest Scotch, he soberly declared "were made wi' th' blud o' Rizzio himsel'."

Throughout the inspection of the castle Dick was keenly interested, but he noticed that Brad remained gloomy and downcast in appearance.

"What's the matter, old man?" he finally exclaimed. "Why don't you brace up and chase that thundercloud off your face?"

"I can't," answered the Texan. "I can't help thinking something wrong has happened."

"Something wrong? Why, you're thinking of –"

"Nadia Budthorne and her brother," confessed Brad, flushing somewhat. "You know they were to meet us at the hotel in Edinburgh, and they have not done so."

"Brad, you've been smitten on that girl ever since you first saw her on London Bridge. I didn't think it of you, you husky son of the Lone Star State!"

"Now, don't try to kid me, pard!" growled Buckhart. "You can't say much, for if ever a fellow was badly smashed over a girl, you have been smashed over June Arlington."

"Oh, June and I are just good friends," Dick hastened to say.

"Good friends, indeed!" mocked the Texan. "Right good friends, and that's no lie! You were such a mighty good friend to her that you got her sneaking brother back into school after he had been fired, with the result that he put up a low-down job on you that caused you to be expelled. If you try to guy me any at all about Nadia Budthorne you'll certain hear a few remarks from yours truly concerning June Arlington."

"Oh, well," laughed Dick, "I admit you have me there, but how do you know that Nadia cares anything for you?"

"I don't know," acknowledged Brad, "and I sure opine that's what's keeping me right well fussed up the most of the time. You know you were surprised yourself when we struck Edinburgh, and failed to find the Budthornes at the hotel where they agreed to meet us."

"They came by rail, and I suppose they have visited Glasgow and other places on their way."

"Pard, you know that any one who comes from London by rail would naturally visit Edinburgh first. I tell you I have a feeling that something is wrong. We lost track of Miguel Bunol, Heck Marsh, and Luke Durbin right away after the Budthornes left London, and I'm some afraid that onery gang followed Nadia and her brother up here into Scotland. If Bunol could meet Dunbar Budthorne alone, and get a chance to talk with him a few minutes, I reckon he'd get the fellow in his power again, for you must allow, partner, that he exercises some sort of baleful power over Budthorne."

"I thought it possible we broke Bunol's spell over Budthorne the night we proved to the latter that Bunol and the others had been fleecing him in a crooked manner at cards."

"Temporarily we did, I judge; but you know Budthorne's will power has been some weakened by drink, and he might cave in to Bunol again if the Spaniard found him."

"I don't think there is any great cause for worry, Brad. I believe Nadia and her brother will appear in good time."

During this conversation the old professor had been talking with the guide. He now announced that he was ready to go, and soon the three were leaving by the castle gate.

Just as they passed through the gate they came face to face with two persons who were on the point of entering. They halted in surprise, for they were Hector Marsh and a corpulent, vulgar-appearing man known as Luke Durbin.

A growl of rage came from the throat of Brad Buckhart, and he planted himself in front of Marsh and Durbin, his fists clinched and his whole atmosphere breathing fight.

"Whatever are you two sneaking, onery, low-down coyotes doing here?" he roared, his rugged face dark as a storm cloud.

"My goodness! my goodness!" gasped Zenas Gunn, in great alarm. "Stop him, Richard, or he will attack them! We shall be arrested for making a disgraceful disturbance here!"

Dick caught Brad's muscular arm in a grip of iron.

"Go slow, old man!" he said, in a low tone.

Neither Marsh nor Durbin acted as if the encounter had given them great surprise. Durbin was smoking a black, rank-smelling cigar, which he rolled into the corner of his mouth, thrusting his pudgy hands deep into his trousers pockets, and surveying the trio before him with an air of insolent contempt.

Marsh exposed his teeth in a sneering grin.

"Why, hello!" he said, in a voice like the croaking of a bullfrog. "So you people are here, eh? What are we doing? Well, I rather guess we have just as good right to visit this old castle as you have."

"Right," said Durbin. "And he wants ter be careful about callin' folks names, or he'll git his block knocked off. See!"

Dick felt Brad's arm quiver and the muscles tighten.

"I'd certain enjoy it a heap if either of you varmints would try to knock my block off!" exclaimed the Texan. "I'd enjoy it if you both tried the trick! Just break loose and sail right into me. I'll stampede over you red-hot and a-whooping, as sure as I'm the Unbranded Maverick of the Rio Pecos!"

"You're just as big a blower as ever," said Marsh. "Why don't you cut out that hot air and learn decency in your talk."

"Learn decency! Whoop! Would I learn it any of you? Why, you crawling cur, you haven't one decent bone in your body!"

"Stop him – Dick, do stop him!" gasped the professor. "He'll get us into a broil!"

Dick's good judgment told him that it was better to avoid an encounter at that time and place, and, therefore, he spoke a few words to Buckhart, seeking to quiet him.

"That's right!" cried Marsh. "Better pull him away if you don't want him hurt."

"You'll never harm any one," said Dick, remembering Hector's natural cowardice. "I don't wish him to soil his hands on you, that's all."

"If the hot-air merchant wants ter fight," said Durbin, "why don't you give him all he's lookin' fer, Heck? We'll jest step aside somewhere an' you can knock the stuffin' outer him. I'll see that his frien's don't interfere."

Marsh turned pale at the thought. He had not the slightest desire to meet Bradley Buckhart in a square fight, man to man.

"Oh, no!" he quickly said. "The fellow talks fight, but it's all talk."

"It is, eh?" cried Buckhart, attempting to free himself from Dick's clutch and stride forward, a furious gleam in his eyes.

Suddenly the bold front Marsh had assumed disappeared. Knowing Merriwell's disinclination to engage in a personal encounter unless forced to do so, and counting on the pacifying influence of Professor Gunn, the fellow had assumed an air of bravery that was entirely fictitious. Thinking the Texan might get free and come at him, he now dodged behind Durbin, crying:

"Keep your distance! I'll have the law on you if you touch me! I can prove that we were going about our business when you stopped us."

Buckhart paused in disgust, muttering:

“I might have known it! I didn’t stop to think what a coward he was at school.”

Durbin showed disappointment.

“Here, what are you dodging for?” he snapped. “You’ve tol’ me fifty times that that fellow was nuttin’ but a bag of wind, and that you could knock the tar out of him in a minute.”

“So I can – if I want to,” said Heck. “But I don’t want – at least, not here. There’s plenty of time. I’ll see him again. I’ll fix him all right.”

“Come along, Brad,” urged Dick. “Here come some other visitors from the castle. Don’t let them see you wasting words on such a worthless and cowardly scamp.”

Professor Gunn also took hold of the Texan and urged him to move away.

“It is the regret of my life,” said the old pedagogue, “that while the fellow was in school I did not sooner learn his true character. I am sorry he was permitted to remain there so long to contaminate other boys.”

“Bah, you old fossil!” croaked Marsh. “You’re an old back-number anyhow, and you’re not fit to teach a monkey school. Why don’t you go die and get yourself buried out of the way! You’d never be missed.”

“Outrageous – outrageous!” gasped Zenas, shaking his cane at the insulting chap. “I’d like to break this stick over your back, you scamp!”

“You never will, old lobster. If you should try it I’d give you a punch in the bread basket that would unhinge you.”

“Are you going to remain here longer and give him further opportunity to insult me, Bradley!” demanded Gunn.

“I’ll go,” said Buckhart, cooling down a little. “Dick is right about him. He is a pitiful coward, and any one who touches him will simply soil his hands.”

As they walked away Marsh continued to shout taunts and insults until they were quite out of hearing.

“Now what do you think about it, partner?” asked Buckhart, as they retraced their way into the city.

“About what?” asked Dick.

“About the possibility that there is something wrong, and that is why Nadia and her brother failed to meet us here. Marsh and Durbin are here, and you can bet your sweet life Bunol is not far away. They followed the Budthornes.”

“It may be that you are right.”

“I’m plumb certain of it. That gang has not given up the hope of again getting hold of Dunbar Budthorne and squeezing money out of him. But what worries me most is the fact that Bunol has an infamous scheme to force Nadia into marriage with him. Just think of it! That sweetest of girls married to a snake like Mig Bunol! It’s enough to make a chap crazy!”

“He’ll never succeed in that, don’t worry, Brad. She knows him, and she despises him quite as much as we do.”

“But they may make her a right good lot of trouble.”

“The fact that those fellows are here in Edinburgh would seem to indicate that the Budthornes must be in the city. Perhaps there was some mistake about the hotel where we are to meet them. We must search for them, Brad.”

“That’s the stuff, pard; we’ll turn this old city over, but we’ll find them.”

“Dear me!” said Professor Gunn. “I hope there will be no serious trouble. I do hope we’ll not get into a fight of any sort with those ruffians.”

“But, professor,” smiled Dick, “a short time ago, as you were recalling the fact that we are in the land of Wallace and Bruce, you said you knew there was good fighting stuff in you and you lamented greatly because you had never been given an opportunity to demonstrate what a hero you

really are. It is possible you may have an opportunity while we are in Scotland. Who knows? I seem to scent fighting in the crisp air here.”

“Goodness knows that’s not the sort of fighting I meant! I could shed my blood joyfully for my country, or something like that; but fighting of any other sort is low and degrading and I abhor it – I abhor it.”

Upon arriving at their hotel they found a letter there, addressed to Dick.

“A lady’s writing,” said Merriwell, in surprise. “Who can it be?”

He tore the envelope open. A moment later he uttered an exclamation, calling Brad and the professor to read it. This was all the letter contained:

“Dear Mr. Merriwell: We – my brother and myself – are stopping at Ben Cleuch Inn, which is near Kinross on Lochleven. Left Edinburgh suddenly because I saw Miguel Bunol there, and I believe he had followed us. This will explain why we failed to meet you as agreed. Hope you and your friends may be able to join us at Lochleven. We desire very much to see you again, if only to thank you for all your kindnesses to us. My brother is pretty well, although quite nervous. Your grateful friend,

“Nadia Budthorne.”

On first reading this brief communication Buckhart looked relieved and delighted, but in a few minutes the shadow returned to his face, and it seemed deeper than ever. Dick noted this and questioned him as to the cause of it.

“Oh, nothing,” answered the Texan somewhat gruffly.

“But it *is* something. I thought you would be pleased to hear from Nadia?”

“I am.”

“You look it!” said Merriwell sarcastically. “Here you have been worrying because she did not meet us, and now that you know where she is you put on a face like a funeral.”

“It’s all right,” muttered Brad, failing to meet his companion’s eye. “It’s all right! I don’t care!”

“What’s all right? What is it you don’t care about?”

“She didn’t have to write to me! She had a right to address the letter to you if she wished.”

Suddenly the truth dawned on Dick; Brad was hurt because Nadia had not addressed the letter to him.

“Well, you’re the limit for silliness!” Dick exclaimed.

“Perhaps I am,” grated Brad. “I can’t help it. I know I’m no prize beauty. I know that beside you I’m a half-finished shine. It’s all right! Of course, all the girls are bound to get struck on you. They can’t help it. But you’ve got girls enough!” he added, in resentful rebellion. “To say nothing of June Arlington, there is Doris Templeton and – ”

Dick put an arm round his friend and laughingly checked him.

“Don’t be such an ass, old man!” he entreated. “Nadia Budthorne is a beautiful girl, but I’m not struck on her, and – ”

“She is on you!”

“I don’t believe it.”

“Then explain some why she sent that letter to you. Why didn’t she address it to me or to the professor?”

“It just happened that way. You know I disguised myself as old Mr. Allsquint and in that manner exposed Bunol and his gang, and I suppose that is why – ”

“Perhaps so,” admitted the Texan suddenly. “I reckon I am an ass, pard! I always was, and it’s becoming more and more natural for me. Of course you can’t be to blame if Nadia took a liking to you. Why shouldn’t she like you more than me? You’re the best chap in the world, and I’m just

a very common and a very ordinary chump, without any particular polish and without any pretense to good looks.”

“Brad,” said Dick earnestly, “you are one of the truest, finest, noblest fellows alive. Any one who comes to know you well can’t help liking you; and as for good looks – well, you bear the stamp of a man on your face, and therefore in the very best sense you are handsome. Stop running yourself down. What shall we do? Shall we light out of Edinburgh and make for Kinross and Lochleven to-day?”

“Instanter!” exclaimed the Texan eagerly. “Let’s not lose an hour, pard!”

CHAPTER III. – AT BEN CLEUCH INN

The Ben Cleuch Inn at Lochleven was kept by the Widow Myles, a plain, kind, motherly soul, the best part of whose life lay behind her.

The inn stood by the highway that wound close along the shore of the wooded lake, about a mile from Kinross.

In summers, visitors to Lochleven desirous of seeing Queen Mary's island prison often patronized the little inn, and the widow thus derived revenue enough to keep her in frugal comfort through the long winters.

In November the strangers were few and far between, and glad the widow was when one dropped in for a meal or a night's lodging. Doubly glad was she when two strangers, a young man and a beautiful girl of sixteen, came in a carriage to her door and bargained with her for rooms and board for several days, saying they expected to remain three days, and might, if they liked it, stay a great deal longer.

The landlady did her very best to please them, for they did not ask her to make her price smaller when she named it, and they readily paid for three days in advance. The girl, as Widow Myles could not help noticing, was very pretty, while the young man – her brother – looked pale and wearied and had about his face something indicative of weakness and irresolution. Indeed, he seemed on the verge of illness, and he permitted his sister to do most of the business with the landlady.

On the afternoon of the third day after the arrival of these guests another stranger appeared and stopped at the inn. He came afoot and wore a long, black cloak with a cape, while his wide-brimmed hat was pulled low over his eyes. His complexion was dark, and on his upper lip there was the shadowy outline of a new-born mustache.

Although the sun was shining without, there was snow on the ground and the air was nipping cold, which led the stranger to hold out his hands to the warmth of the widow's cheerful open fire, in the little sitting room, having removed his gloves and placed them with his hat on the floor at his side.

"It's cauld to-day, sir," said the widow. "Th' sun i' ower bright, but the air ha' a nippin' in it."

"Indeed it is cold, madam," said the young stranger, in a pleasant voice. "It is far too cold for comfort. It must be frightful up here in the dead of winter."

"Oh, it's na sa bad – na sa bad," protested the widow. "Wi' a guide roof ower one's haid an' a warm fire to sit near, th' winter soon runs awa'. Ha' ye come fa'?"

"Not very far," was the answer. "To me it would be a great favor, my good woman, if you could give me a drink of something warm to start my blood."

"Tea?" suggested Widow Myles.

The visitor shook his head.

"I would prefer something warmer than that," he said. "Have you any whisky in the house?"

"I canna tell. I much doot i' I ha'!"

"Because if you have," said the stranger, jingling some money in his hand, "I'll pay well for a stiff drink."

"I may ha' a wee drap," confessed the landlady. "I sometime' ha' it far me'cine."

"It is for medicine I need it now, so if you will hasten, madam, you need but to name your price."

The widow disappeared. After about ten minutes she reappeared with hot water, whisky and sugar, at sight of which the face of the stranger showed his satisfaction. Deftly and with loss of little time the stranger mixed his drink, tasted it, smacked his lips over it and then asked the widow to name her price.

She declined to state a price, whereupon he placed two pieces of money in her hand, and when she saw their value she showered him with thanks and called down blessings on his head.

In this manner the stranger placed himself right with the widow, whom he engaged in further conversation as he stretched his booted feet to the fire and sipped his steaming drink.

“At this season I presume few are the visitors who come here to stop?” he questioned.

“Few ye ma’ weel say,” she nodded.

“Is your house empty at the present time?”

“Na, na! not quite sa bad as that.”

“Then you have some guests?”

“I ha’ twa.”

“Two? How long have they been with you, madam?”

“They came three days gone, sir.”

“And is it long you expect them to remain?”

“As to that I canna tell. When they came they said it might be they wud stay three days or more; but it is now the third day an’ they have na spoke of leavin’.”

“I hope my curiosity you will pardon, but it seems strange any one should come here at this season to remain so long. Where are they from, if you don’t mind telling?”

“I ha’ na reason to know, for I didna ask them, but London I think ha seen them none sa lang ago.”

“They are English?”

The widow slowly shook her head.

“They are na like th’ English. I think they may be fra America.”

“I presume they are man and wife?”

“Na, na; they are brother an’ sister. A bonnie lassie is the girl, sir; but her brother seems na well.”

“Not well?”

“Na, sir. He keeps over close to his room. If they came to see Queen Mary’s prison they ha’ not yet accomplisht it.”

“It is not likely Americans would take so much trouble to get a look at Queen Mary’s prison, madam. It must be they are here for some other purpose.”

“Then what it can be heaven knows! Once I said to the lassie that her brother were fra too pale, an’ I thought a wee bit o’ whisky might be guide fa him; but she went white an’ trembly an’ begged me na to gi’ him one drop o’ it. She made me promise if he came and asked for it I wud say there was naething o’ th’ kind i’ th’ house. I ken she is feared to ha’ him drink it.”

The stranger smiled a little, and there seemed something a trifle sinister about his face in that moment.

“It is a man poor in command of himself that cannot drink when he likes and leave it alone when he chooses,” he declared.

“Many a guide man canna do it.”

“Well, I don’t understand them. What is the name of this unfortunate man, if you don’t mind telling?”

“It is Budthorne.”

“Rather odd name.”

“But I ha’ na asked your name, sir. You are na English yoursel’?”

“No.”

“Nor still American. I think you must be – ”

“French? Well, you are right, madam. I am Henri Clairvaux, of Paris. Think not I am curious or prying. These questions I have asked merely the time to pass. I am walking through Scotland, but the weather is getting too cold, and I soon shall depart for the south. In winter I much prefer Italy to your bleak north country here.”

At this the widow bridled a bit.

“Scotland alwa’ ha’ been guide enow fa me!” she exclaimed. “I ha’ took notice it is alwa’ th’ weak that prefer the warm countries i’ th’ winter. I ha’ been thinkin’ ma’hap it wud be well fa th’ young man upstairs to go south fa th’ winter time.”

Outside the door there was rustling. The door was opened and a musical, feminine voice called to the widow.

The man in the cloak had his back toward the door, and he did not move.

Excusing herself, the landlady hurried from the room. The moment she was gone the stranger picked up his hat and gloves and hastily rose.

“It is well enough that she should not see me now,” he muttered. “I must get out at once.”

He clapped his hat on his head and pulled it hard down, taking pains to make the limber brim lap over his face. Then he swiftly crossed the room to the door, buttoning his cloak over his breast.

Pausing at the door, he listened.

“The coast is clear,” he whispered; after which he stepped briskly out to the front door.

Just as he was passing through that door the girl came from another room and saw his vanishing back. She clutched at the widow, who had followed her.

“That man?” she cried, in a trembling, frightened voice. “Who is he?”

“He ga’ his name as Henri Clairvaux, o’ Paris,” answered the Widow Myles.

“And lied!” panted the girl. After which she fled up the stairs to the room of her brother, her face ashen pale.

CHAPTER IV. – BUDTHORNE’S STRUGGLE

The working of alcohol on some constitutions is remarkable. It is a singular thing that some men seem to keep themselves steeped in the poison for years without breaking down, while others rapidly go to pieces and become physical wrecks before its vitality-destroying influence. The latter class is by far the larger.

Occasionally a man whose nerves are deep set, whose constitution is ironlike and whose coarser nature predominates, persists in drinking regularly and heavily for years and seems to remain in good health. To those who know him well, and meet him day after day, he presents no abnormal aspect; but almost certain it is that drink has taken such a hold on him that he cannot appear to be in his natural condition unless he constantly keeps in his stomach enough of the stuff to intoxicate an occasional drinker to the point of reeling. Take it away from him and he collapses like a pricked bladder.

Dunbar Budthorne was a man without the stamina to withstand the blighting effect of constant drinking. The rapidity with which the stuff fastened its clutch upon him was appalling. His relapse when, at the entreaty of his loving and faithful sister, he stopped drinking and let it wholly alone, was pitiful.

Ever since arriving at the Ben Cleuch, Budthorne had been in a state of mental distress and physical collapse. The desire for drink was with him constantly, and in his soul a fierce battle raged unceasingly. In the night he rose and paced the floor of his room, his hands clinched, his nerves taut, mumbling, mumbling, mumbling. Every night, at his request, Nadia locked him in that room, keeping the key with her.

“You must master the desire, Dunbar, my brother,” she said. “You can do it.”

“Yes, by Heaven!” he cried, setting his teeth. “For you, Nadia, I will do it!”

“Not for me alone, Dunbar; for yourself, as well. You can see what you have come to in less than a year. A year ago you were not the slave of drink.”

“I should say not! And had any one told me I’d get this way in twelve months I should have thought him a fool. I don’t understand it now. Nadia, why can other men drink when they choose, and let it alone when they choose?”

“Not all of them can, Dunbar, I am sure. I believe there are thousands just like you.”

“Perhaps you’re right; they keep it hidden from others, or they do not realize it themselves.”

“That’s the way it is.”

“What a wise little chicken you are, sister! What a brave little girl! And what a worthless brother you have!”

Then she would caress him and pat him on the cheek, and tell him he was “all right.”

“All wrong, you mean. Sis, I’m going to make my share of the fortune left us over to you. I’ll do it at the first opportunity. I’ve made a hole in it already. Were I to keep hitting the booze, I’d go through the whole of it in another year.”

“But you have stopped, and you’ll never touch it again. You have escaped from those evil friends whose influence was ruining you. Their hold on you is broken.”

She did not chide him with his folly and weakness in ever becoming friendly with such unworthy companions. She did not remind him that Luke Durbin was a barroom acquaintance, a race-track gambler, and a creature he had been forced to introduce to her with a flush of shame on his cheeks. She knew he had thought of this with regret and remorse.

But it was not Durbin she most feared; it was the Spaniard, Bunol, who had been forced upon them by Durbin. She believed Bunol possessed some evil power of unknown force which he had exercised upon Budthorne, and the spell of which he had tried to cast upon her. Durbin knew about this mysterious power, and he had brought Bunol forward that the fellow might exercise it to accomplish the downfall of Budthorne and the snaring of his sister.

“Yes, their hold is broken,” he agreed. “We have our chance acquaintances which we met on London Bridge to thank for that. It was your scheme – ”

“Not mine; Dick Merriwell did it. It was he who formed the plan to disguise himself as Mr. Allsquint and get into your room in London that night of the card party, where he exposed the cheating of Bunol, who was robbing you at cards.”

“A wonderful chap that boy is! I like him, Nadia, and I like his chum, the fellow from Texas. Don’t you?”

“I do, indeed. Brad Buckhart is splendid, and the old professor is a genial soul. I am sorry we were unable to remain in Edinburgh until they came; but Bunol was there, and I knew we might encounter him any time. I thought it best to come here, but I have written our friends, making an explanation, and I hope they will take the trouble to hunt us up.”

“If they do, it will be on your account, sis. Oh, yes it will! Look out for Buckhart, Nadia! The fellow is smitten.”

“Nonsense, Dunbar!”

“He is. I noticed how he held your hand as they were seeing us off at the station in London. His eyes followed you all the time. You’ll have a wild and woolly Texan on your staff if you’re not careful.”

“I don’t see that there is anything so very wild and woolly about him.”

“Ha! ha! You resent that, eh? It looks suspicious, girl – very suspicious. Better be careful.”

“Stop your teasing, Dunbar! I’m sure I don’t care a snap about him, and I don’t believe he cares anything about me. Why should he? We barely know each other; we may never meet again. He is only a boy – ”

“And you’re only a girl. Many a boy-and-girl affair has ripened into something binding. Better wait until you find out more about him. We know practically nothing.”

“Oh, but I know he is a gentleman!” protested the girl. “If he were not he would not be with Dick Merriwell and Professor Gunn. I have seen him, too, when he dropped his Western manners and was as refined in every way as any one can be. You don’t think all Westerners are wild and woolly, do you?”

“Far from it. I am sure a chap from that part of our country may be as much a gentleman as any one; but your earnest defense of him increases my suspicions. You’ll have to be on your guard.”

“Why don’t you try to tease me about Dick Merriwell? I addressed the letter to him, telling him whither we had gone.”

“All the more significant. The wise bird takes flight at first sight of the sportsman.”

“You’re perfectly tormenting, Dunbar! If you continue talking in such a foolish manner I shall think your brain is affected.”

He laughed again.

“All right; I’ll let up – for the time being. But I’ll wager Buckhart shows up here as soon as possible after your letter is received, and he’ll bring the others with him. We’ll have them with us by to-morrow.”

“I hope so,” she confessed.

The thing predicted was to happen even sooner.

CHAPTER V. – LIKE A BIRD OF EVIL OMEN

Having seen the back of the departing stranger, Nadia fled up the stairs to the room of her brother, who was lying on a couch and seeking to divert his mind by reading. He did not note that she was pale and agitated as she came in, but he saw her hurriedly cross the room to a window that commanded a view of the road which wound down toward the rim of Lochleven, where she drew aside the curtain and stood peering out.

“What is it, sis?” he yawned. “What do you see?”

She did not answer.

“Eh?” he exclaimed, putting down the book. “What are you staring at, Nadia?”

“Come here!” she whispered hoarsely.

Her manner and tone caused him to sit up at once.

“Is anything the matter?”

“Come quickly!”

He hurried to the window.

“Look!” she urged, clutching at his arm with her trembling fingers. “See that man going down the road?”

The stranger who had lately departed from the inn was walking briskly away, the cape of his dark cloak flapping about him, his head bent to the chill wind that was blowing. His figure, in spite of the folds of the cloak, seemed slender and graceful.

“I see him,” said Dunbar.

“He was here a few moments ago – in this house!”

“Well?”

“Do you see nothing familiar about him?”

“Why, it seems as if I – I – By the Lord Harry! I believe – ”

Budthorne checked himself.

“You believe what? Who is it?”

“Nadia, it looks like Bunol.”

“Yes, it looks like him.”

“But it can’t be! Did you see his face?”

“No, nothing but his back as he passed out at the door.”

“It can’t be Bunol,” repeated Budthorne.

“Why not?”

“How could he trace us here?”

“How could he trace us to Edinburgh? How much easier to trace us from Edinburgh here than from London to Edinburgh!”

“I think he appeared in Edinburgh by chance, without knowing we were there.”

“I do not,” declared the girl decidedly. “I think he followed us in some manner.”

Budthorne did not like to believe this.

“You give him credit for the acumen of a Sherlock Holmes. Bunol is no detective.”

“He is a human bloodhound! You do not know how much I fear him, Dunbar.”

“You say that man was here in this house a few minutes ago?”

“Yes.”

“You have seen the landlady since?”

“Yes.”

“And questioned her?”

“I asked her who he was.”

“Her answer?”

“She said he gave his name as Henri Clairvaux, of Paris.”

“Then it is not Bunol, sister. Why are you so agitated? It is merely a resemblance. Were we to see his face, I am sure it would prove to be that of a perfect stranger.”

Suddenly she shrank back, lowering the curtain until she had partly concealed herself behind it.

“Look!” she exclaimed. “He has stopped before entering the woods! He has turned to look back! He has pushed the hat up from his forehead to get a better view! Look, Dunbar! Even at this distance you cannot fail to recognize him!”

“By Jove, you’re right, Nadia! It is Bunol, himself! Satan take the scoundrel! What is he trying to do?”

“He has located us here, and he will try to get you into his clutches again, Dunbar.”

“Confound him! He wants to keep away from me! I’ve had enough of him! He’ll find his day with me is past! He is wasting his time.”

“I fear him more than any one else in all the world,” confessed the girl.

“Don’t you be afraid, Nadia,” said her brother. “I’ll protect you.”

“But that man’s eyes – you cannot resist their evil power.”

“Don’t you believe it! I’m stronger now than I was. I have conquered my weakness for drink, and that was what enabled him to deceive me.”

He truly thought he had conquered, but the girl realized that the battle had only just begun, and that it was her influence and her watchfulness that had kept him from drinking since the night of the exposure in London.

Hidden behind the curtain, they peered forth and watched the man in the cloak. For a few minutes he remained gazing back at the lone inn, but at last he turned once more and, with his cape flapping wing-like about his shoulders, glided in the manner of a bird of evil omen into the bleak woods, which swallowed him from view.

“He is gone!” said Budthorne.

“But he will return,” declared Nadia. “What shall we do, brother – shall we flee from here?”

“No!” cried the man, flourishing his fist. “I’m no criminal, and I refuse to act like one any longer! Let him return! I am my own master, and a score of scoundrels like Miguel Bunol cannot make me hide in cover like a frightened rabbit. This thing must come to an end, sister. He believes we are afraid of him. I’ll show him his error. That is the only course to be pursued. It’s ridiculous to think of us running away from a common cur like that. If he annoys you or threatens you, I’ll have him arrested and locked up.”

Although his words were very bold, she had come to believe that he would weaken and fail when the critical moment arrived.

For a long time they sat in that room, talking of the matter, Nadia feeling doubts concerning the best thing to be done. Finally she exclaimed:

“If the friends we met in London were here they could advise us. I would feel safer, too. It might have been better had we remained in Edinburgh. It’s lonely here in the country, and I fear what may happen.”

The afternoon wore away. Night was at hand when both were startled by the sound of hoofs and wheels outside.

With her heart fluttering in her bosom, Nadia sprang up and rushed to the front window. A closed carriage had stopped before the door. Budthorne joined his sister at the window.

The carriage door opened and from it sprang two boys, followed more leisurely by a man past middle age.

A cry of delight burst from Nadia.

“Our friends have come at last!” she joyously exclaimed.

CHAPTER VI. – BUNOL'S PLOT

The man who had said he was Henri Clairvaux, of Paris, was in truth Miguel Bunol, a scheming and villainous young Spaniard.

Bunol had first met Luke Durbin on the race track in New Orleans, and, being congenial rascals, they became very well acquainted. But Durbin was a rather slow, thick-witted rascal, while Bunol was quick, pantherish and full of crooked schemes.

It was some time after this meeting, that Durbin became acquainted in Chicago with Dunbar Budthorne, who had commenced a career of dissipation and seemed anxious to spend as swiftly as possible his portion of the fortune left him at the death of his mother.

Durbin saw his opportunity, and determined to help Budthorne get rid of that fortune. At that time Budthorne was plunging on the races, and Durbin professed to have “inside information” and tips of the greatest value. With the aid of assistants, who professed to be bookmakers or pool-room men, Durbin succeeded in getting several thousands of dollars belonging to the reckless young man.

This money he spent freely, and it simply whetted his appetite for more.

When Nadia Budthorne fully realized the pace at which her brother was going she devised the plan of inducing him to take her abroad, hoping that in this manner he would escape from his evil companions.

But ere leaving Chicago Budthorne went on one last spree, met Durbin in a saloon and told the rascal of his plans.

Durbin did not try to dissuade the fellow, but he took passage on the same steamer, and it was during the voyage across that Nadia suffered the humiliation of an introduction to the man, who succeeded in keeping Dunbar constantly under the influence of liquor and fleeced him awkwardly at cards.

In London Durbin ran across Miguel Bunol, who, with Hector Marsh, formerly a student at Fardale, as an assistant, was working a fake hypnotic and fortune-telling scheme.

Durbin told Bunol and Marsh about Budthorne and his pretty sister. They expressed a desire to meet Budthorne, and directly the three of them were concerned in the plot to ruin the young American.

But, as was entirely natural, being far shrewder than Luke Durbin, Miguel Bunol soon became the chief mover and head of the rascally trio.

On his first sight of Nadia, Bunol became infatuated, and two days later he announced to his companions that he was determined to make her his wife.

“All the money you can get from her brother, Durbin, you shall have – you and Marsh,” said the Spaniard. “I will help you get it from him, too. But for me I must have Nadia and her share of the fortune. My part of the graft this shall be.”

To this the others agreed, yet not without some growling from Durbin. Bunol, however, had the power to command and control the man, and he exercised this power with little difficulty.

In truth, the Spaniard possessed hypnotic influence, although he had not fully developed it. This influence he brought to bear on Budthorne. He likewise tried it on Nadia, but her mind was stronger, and she successfully fought against his baleful influence.

Budthorne refused to believe his sister's assertion that his comrades were cheating and robbing him; but at last, through the cleverness of Dick Merriwell, they were exposed, and he swore he would never again have anything to do with them.

Fearing his will power would not be strong enough to hold out, Nadia had induced him to leave London and come north into Scotland, thinking the rascals might be tricked and baffled.

But Bunol had succeeded in tracing them, while Marsh and Durbin remained behind and watched Merriwell's party, correctly fancying that Dick and his friends intended to join the Budthornes later.

Dick, Brad, and Professor Gunn were followed to Edinburgh by the two. In Edinburgh, by the merest accident, the scoundrels learned that the Budthornes had gone to Kinross.

Without the knowledge of Dick and his friends, the very train that bore them north to Kinross carried Marsh and Durbin in another compartment.

Thus the opposing forces were gathering at a point on Lochleven, where it seemed that another clash between them might occur.

Bunol had wired his pals in London, but not until after they had left for the north. He had received no answer from them.

Having left the Ben Clench and walked as far as the woods, the Spanish youth turned and looked back. His keen eyes surveyed the house, and even at that distance he fancied he saw one of the curtains move at an upper window.

"If they are looking," he muttered, "I am now too faraway for them to recognize me."

At the back of the inn he saw a small man appear and wave something white.

"It is well," muttered the rascal.

Then he turned and disappeared into the woods.

The trees broke the biting wind, but Bunol cursed the cold and the country.

Coming to a little footpath where the thin snow showed the imprints of many feet, he turned off and walked a short distance to the shore of the lake, on which lay a stout boat.

Sitting on a fallen tree near the boat was a sandy-haired, bearded, rough-looking man, who had a rather brutal face, and, judging by his massive frame, possessed great strength.

"Well, MacLane, I am returned," said Miguel.

The man nodded.

"I see ye are," he said. "Did ye ha' guid luck?"

"Oh, yes; you were right in saying my birds were at the Ben Cleuch. Now, if Aaron keeps his part of the contract – "

"Fear nawt, he wi' keep it," nodded MacLane. "Aaron kens Rob MacLane fu' well, an' he dare na disobey me. He will come."

"I think he will," agreed Bunol. "I looked back, and a small man waved something at me from the back of the house."

"That were Aaron. I told him to follow ye, man, when he left, but to take guid care he were no' observed. He will be here."

"Well, I hope he comes soon, for this devil's weather is uncomfortable."

"Hoot man! Ye dinna ken what cauld weather is."

"If that's the case, I don't want to know," retorted Bunol. "This is quite enough for me."

They sat on the log, talking in low tones, until a little, bent man, with a shawl wrapped about his shoulders, came gliding softly through the woods and stood before them.

"Here's Aaron," said MacLane. "Aaron, this is the man I would ha' ye meet."

Aaron said nothing, but surveyed Bunol with a pair of small eyes that were set close together and were filled with a light of mingled cunning and simplicity. It was not the face of a man to trust, yet for five years Aaron had been with the Widow Myles, and had seemed faithful as a grateful dog.

"Tell Aaron what ye want, man," said MacLane. "He will do it."

"Aaron, at the inn there are two guests – a brother and a sister."

The little man in the shawl bobbed his little head.

"I will not attempt to explain my reasons to you, Aaron," the Spanish youth went on; "but this night MacLane and I will get our hands on the man, and you must help us. You will be paid well."

“I ha’ told him that,” interrupted the huge man. “I gied him the siller ye ga’ me. Did I no gie ye th’ siller, Aaron?”

“Yes,” said Aaron, “I ha’ the siller.”

“You shall have twice as much more if you follow directions faithfully,” promised Bunol, and the eyes of the little man glowed greedily. “If you are half as shrewd as MacLane says, you’ll get into no trouble over it. You wait on the guests at table?”

Aaron nodded.

“What does Budthorne drink at supper?”

“A cup o’ tay.”

“Well, see this package,” said the Spaniard, holding up a tiny package. “It contains a powder. To-night you must contrive to get it into Budthorne’s cup of tea.”

“It is poison!” said Aaron fearfully.

“Nothing of the sort. Budthorne has been a drinking man, but he is trying to stop. The effect of this powder will be to make him crazy for liquor. Twenty minutes after he takes the powder he’ll be ready to barter his soul for one drink. Then, Aaron – listen closely – you must contrive to meet him and tell him somehow that you can get him a drink. Tell him to step outside the house and come round to the back, promising to meet him with liquor, but state that the stuff is some you have stolen from the widow. Do you understand?”

“I do,” said Aaron. “But what will happen when he comes out?”

“MacLane and I will be hidden there. We’ll fall on Budthorne and carry him off. MacLane is strong as a giant, and we’ll have little trouble.”

“Na! na!” exclaimed Aaron. “It is I that will hae th’ trouble!”

“It is not necessary.”

“What can I say?”

“You must tear your clothes, rumple your hair, cover yourself with dirt, and half an hour after we have carried Budthorne away you may appear and tell how he came outside, you spoke to him, and then you both were attacked by a band of armed men, who struck you senseless. Of course you will not know what has happened to Budthorne.”

“I must ken, man,” said Aaron grimly. “I dinna want ma neck strecht. I canna hae hand in murder.”

Bunol laughed.

“But it’s not murder.”

“Then what is’t?”

“We are going to make Budthorne a prisoner for reasons of my own. He’ll not be harmed, and in due time he’ll have his liberty.”

Aaron seemed doubtful. He turned fearfully to MacLane.

“Maun I do it?” he asked.

“Yea,” growled the big man.

Aaron was afraid of MacLane, but now he almost fiercely declared:

“I will na do it ’less I know where ye tak’ him.”

“Why do you want to know that?” impatiently demanded Bunol.

“Ye ha’ to satisfy me,” stubbornly said the little man. “I ha’ to know ye really mean to keep him captive wi’out doing him harm. ’Less ye tell me where ye tak’ him, I will no do it.”

MacLane knew Aaron to be immovable as the Scottish hills once he had set his mind on anything, and therefore he turned to the Spanish youth, saying:

“Ye hae to tell him, man.”

“But can he be trusted?”

“Aaron will na dare to betray me, but he has his whims, an’ ye’ll hae to humor him.”

Bunol hesitated, not fancying the idea of trusting the little man with the foolishly shrewd face to such an extent.

“It’s against my judgment,” he declared.

“Then tak’ th’ judgment o’ Rob MacLane. Ye canna do anything wi’ Aaron till ye trust him fully, as he thinks he has tae trust ye.”

“All right,” said the Spanish youth. “He will be taken to the old castle on the island, Aaron.”

“Wha Queen Mary were kept a captive?”

“Yes.”

“An’ ye swear to harm him nawt?”

“Sure. I’m going to make his sister marry me. It’s a way they have in America of winning a bride. The Americans like it.”

“It’s a way they had years syne in Scotland,” chuckled MacLane, “only it was th’ lassie hersel’ th’ lover stole awa’.”

“Is that a’?” exclaimed Aaron, apparently relieved.

“That is all.”

The little man took the powder.

“I will do all ye ask,” he promised.

CHAPTER VII. – DONE BENEATH THE STARS

The delight of Nadia and her brother at the appearance of Dick and his companions was great. Buckhart's face was crimson as he pressed the girl's hand, and she seemed somewhat confused. Dick she met with perfect frankness.

When the greetings were over and they had warmed themselves at the fire, the old professor went out and gazed long at Lochleven, over the wind-ruffled bosom of which the night was creeping.

"To-morrow," he said, "I will feast my eyes on Queen Mary's prison. What a grand thing to be here on this romantic spot! Ah, those old days when men fought and bled and died for their country!"

In spite of the appearance of Miguel Bunol, it was a jolly party that gathered about Widow Myles' table that night at supper time. Nadia had recovered her high spirits and was gay and vivacious, while her brother forgot for the time being the struggle against appetite that he had been making for the last few days and was the smiling, courtly, jolly young gentleman nature intended him to be.

Widow Myles herself sat at the head of the table, beaming on her guests. She had a face like a withered russet apple, and one knew at a glance that a generous, kindly old heart beat in her bosom. Naturally affable, the presence of so many guests at that season made her doubly so.

Brad had been placed in a chair opposite Nadia, much to his satisfaction, as it gave him an opportunity to watch her mobile, changing features. It seemed that each passing minute revealed for him some new and fresh attractiveness in the charming Chicago girl. He had been badly smitten before, but during that supper at the Ben Cleuch he fell head-over-heels in love with her. Boy love it was, perhaps, but none the less sincere. It might not last, but even though time brought a change, it would ever be a pleasant memory.

Aaron waited on the table. At this he was very deft, seeming to know precisely what was wanted at the lifting of the widow's finger.

"A peculiar servant you have, Mrs. Myles," observed Dick, at a time when Aaron was absent from the room.

"Ay," nodded the widow, her cap ruffles dancing. "Aaron is alwa' faithful."

"Has he been with you long?"

"Five year this snowfall, poor lad. He came trudgin' to my door, barefoot, near dead wi' cauld, near perisht wi' hunger. I took him i' th' house an' gied him bread an' clauthes. I warmed his bones, an' sin' that day he has been wi' me."

"Is he trustworthy?"

"I wad trust him wi' my life," was her answer. "Th' poor lad is not over bright, an' yet he's na fool. Have na fear he will molest your valuables. He is th' watchdog o' Ben Cleuch."

Aaron returning at this minute, the conversation turned into another channel.

The old professor could not get over his enthusiasm at being there in that quaint little Scottish country inn.

"To-morrow, boys!" he cried – "to-morrow shall be a great day. We'll visit Queen Mary's prison."

"Let's all go," proposed Dick.

"That's the thing!" exclaimed Brad eagerly. "We'll make a grand excursion to the old castle. Will you do it, Nad – er – ah – Miss Budthorne?"

"I think it would be fine," she answered. "What do you say, Dunbar?"

"I'm agreeable," said Budthorne, sipping at his tea. "I've been keeping too close in the house. Perhaps if I get out I'll feel much better."

Out of the corner of one small eye Aaron watched Budthorne drink the tea.

"Then it's settled," said Dick. "I suppose we can get a boat near here. I don't fancy there are any of the old-time Scottish outlaws around here now, Mrs. Myles?"

“Na, unless ye ma’ ca’ Rob MacLane one,” was her answer.

“Who is Rob MacLane?”

“He i’ th’ Auld Nick’s own!” was the answer. “A bad egg, if e’er there were one. I’ these law-abidin’ times he minds na law, an’ he fears nane – man nor de’il. It’s a’ things he has done but murder, an’ I think soon to hear he has done that.”

“Well, well! this is interesting, indeed!” cried the professor. “Why don’t they arrest him and put him in jail?”

“Arrist Rob MacLane!” cried the widow. “It’s richt plain ye ha’ na heard o’ him! He i’ strang as twenty men, an’ na officer daurs to go take him. Twa o’ them tried it once, an’ wi’ his bare hands he near beat them both to death. One didna get over that beatin’ till the day he died.”

“He would have made a fine outlaw in the old days,” laughed Dick. “Where does this ruffian live?”

“Na man kens. Mayhap to-day he be here, to-morrow he is i’ th’ mountains far awa’.”

“How does he live?”

“He takes a’ he wants, an’ no man says him nay. Were he to come here the nicht, I’d gi’ him a’ he asked an’ be thankit for my life when he left.”

“Well, I’m getting some interested in Mr. MacLane!” exclaimed Buckhart. “I don’t suppose he is around here now?”

“I canna tell. He comes an’ goes like the wind. He may be outside th’ door this minute, or he may be i’ Sutherland.”

Dunbar Budthorne was doing his best to repress a peculiar sensation that was creeping over him. He wanted something, but for the time he could not imagine what it was. Of a sudden he knew, and he turned pale as the truth dawned upon him. He was ready to give anything or do anything for a drink of liquor.

While the others chatted on this restlessness and craving grew on Budthorne. Finally, politely asking to be excused and saying he was going to his room, he rose from the table.

His sister gave him a glance of questioning apprehension, but he smiled on her reassuringly.

“You’re not ill, Dunbar?” she asked.

“Never felt better in my life,” he answered, and her mind was relieved.

Outside the dining-room door he encountered Aaron, who had left the room ahead of him.

“I’ there a’thing I could gi’ ye, sir?” inquired Aaron, with the utmost deference and solicitude.

“No, nothing,” answered Budthorne, and started to pass on.

Suddenly he paused and looked over his shoulder at Aaron, dimly seen by the faint light in the hall.

“Wait,” he said in a low tone. “Come here a moment, Aaron.”

The serving man stepped noiselessly toward him.

“Aaron, I’m not feeling quite right.”

“Ay, sir; I thought ye lookt a wee disturbed. I hope ye are na ill?”

“I’m afraid I shall be unless I can get something to ward off the attack. Do you know if there is whisky or liquor of any sort in the place?”

Aaron seemed alarmed.

“I no hae anything to do wi’ it,” he hastily declared. “The widow alwa’ keeps a wee bit i’ a bottle, but I hae na richt to touch it, sir.”

Eagerly, almost fiercely, Budthorne grasped the little man by his bony wrist.

“I must have something of the sort!” he breathed, huskily. “Aaron, you must get me some of the contents of that bottle!”

“I canna do it,” declared the serving man, as if in great alarm. “Were I to touch it th’ widow wud be sair mad wi’ me.”

“You need not let her know it. She’ll never miss a little – enough for one good drink.”

Still Aaron seemed alarmed.

"I ha' been wi' her five year an' no' once ha' I failed to mind her biddin'," he said weakly.

"I'll pay you – I'll pay you well," said Budthorne. "See, Aaron, here is money. Take it. Bring me enough for a drink from that bottle."

He pressed the money into the hand of the little man, who seemed on the point of refusing it.

"She wi' find it out, sir."

"How? I'll never tell her."

"Ye sw'ar it?"

"Yes."

"Na matter wh' may hap, ye sw'ar ye willna tell Aaron gi' ye one drop from that bottle?"

"I swear it! Hurry up, man, or I'll explode for the want of a drink."

"I canna gi' it to ye here."

"In my room, then?"

"Na! na!"

"Then where?"

"Ye maun meet me back o' th' house."

"Anywhere, so that I get the drink. How can I do it? Hurry up!"

"Ye maun go out by th' front dure; I'll go out by th' back. Step round the corner an' find me at th' back."

"All right. But don't lose time about it."

"Have na fear."

"Bring a big drink – a stiff drink. The longer I am without it the more I want."

A few moments later Budthorne left the cottage by the front door. There was no moon, but millions of bright stars gleamed in the dome of heaven. The wind had fallen with the coming of night, but although it did not feel as cold, the temperature was much lower. To the east, close at hand, slumbered Lochleven; to the north, farther removed, rose the rugged Ochill Hills.

It was a night of peace and repose, with no suggestion of danger lurking near.

Within the cottage the merry party chatted and laughed about the supper table. Not until Budthorne had been absent some time did Nadia think of him again; but at last she began to worry why he did not return.

Finally she rose from the table, saying she would see what was detaining him.

"He has not been quite well of late," she explained. "Of course I'm foolish to worry about him, but I can't help it. He must be in his room. I'll return in a few moments."

She did return in a few moments, a frightened look on her pale face.

"He's gone!" she said. "I can't find him!"

At this moment the door leading to the kitchen was flung open by a heavy body striking against it, and into the dining room staggered Aaron, his clothes torn, his face pale, and a streak of blood across one temple.

At sight of him the others sprang up.

"What has happened?" cried Dick.

"I canna tell!" moaned Aaron. "Th' guid young man asked me to meet him at th' back o' th' house. When I did so an' we were speakin' together a band o' men wi' masks ower their faces sprang out upon us. One o' them grappled wi' me. I tried to tear fra him, an' thin I saw all th' stars o' heaven fa' on my haid. Next I found mysel' strecht on th' ground an' th' stars back i' their places; but th' young man were gone an' th' men ha vanished."

Having made this explanation, Aaron fell heavily to the floor.

Nadia promptly fainted in Brad Buckhart's arms. The old professor threw up his thin hands and looked quite helpless. The widow assisted Buckhart to take the senseless girl into the sitting room and place her on the couch near the crackling, open fire.

Dick Merriwell lost not a moment in kneeling beside Aaron and examining his injury. He found a very slight cut in the hair near the temple.

“Stop that groaning!” he sternly commanded. “You’re not even badly hurt; you’re scarcely scratched.”

“Na! na!” gasped the little man. “I think I maun dee!”

“You won’t die from anything that has happened to you to-night. Get up! Stop this foolishness! Why, I can’t even find a bump on your head, and there should be a swelling there if you were hit so frightfully hard. Sit up!”

Dick’s manner was commanding, and, although he continued to take on, Aaron sat up.

“Now, see here,” said young Merriwell, “I want you to tell me that story again, and tell it straight. Just what did happen outside the inn?”

Aaron repeated his tale, without much variation. Practically it was the same.

“Do you mean to tell me that little scratch rendered you unconscious, man?” demanded Dick. “Why, it wouldn’t hurt a sick kitten!”

“I were struck on th’ heid wi’ somethin’.”

“Where is the abrasion or the swelling?”

“I ken naething about abreesions, sir. A’ I know, the sky seemed to fa’ on me.”

There was insincerity in Aaron’s tones, and Dick doubted him.

“Get a lantern,” he ordered. “I suppose you have one about the place?”

“Ay.”

“Get up! Bring me that lantern, and lose not a second.”

He assisted the little man to his feet. Aaron professed to be weak and confused, but Dick placed a heavy hand on him, saying sternly:

“If you cause me delay, I shall suspect that you do it purposely. Budthorne is rich, and those concerned in any harm to him cannot fail to be punished severely. If masked men carried him off, a hundred armed hunters will be engaged to search for them and kill them like dogs when found. Those who are not killed will be arrested and imprisoned. Work hard and fast, Aaron, that you are not suspected of having part in this bad business.”

“Na one who knows poor Aaron will suspect him o’ any wrong,” was the fellow’s protest.

“You don’t know the manner of Americans. They suspect every one concerned in an affair until he is found guiltless. Is this the lantern, Aaron? Light it instantly and lead me to the spot where this struggle took place.”

Somewhat awed by Dick and feeling the power of the boy’s will, the serving man tremblingly lighted the lantern, after which he conducted Merriwell from the house to the spot where the encounter had taken place.

“Stand still,” ordered Merriwell, taking the lantern from the man’s hand. “Let me read the signs here.”

There were tracks in the snow and some indications of a struggle. At one point was an imprint that seemed to indicate a man had fallen there. Dick picked up something, glanced at it by the light of the lantern and slipped it into a pocket.

Anxiously Aaron watched the boy, about whose manner there was method that alarmed the servant. Somehow Aaron began to believe Dick was reading those imprints and footmarks like the printed words of a book.

He was not far from right.

“What have you found, pard?” It was the voice of Buckhart, who had issued from the back door of the inn.

“Budthorne was struck down by men who had been concealed behind this little building,” said Dick. “They stepped out upon him as he stood here at the corner of the building, with his back turned

in their direction. Aaron stood in front of him. They struck him with a sandbag, or some muffled weapon that did not cut his head.”

“How many of them were there?”

“Four. Three of them lifted and carried him toward the road, two holding his arms, while the third had his legs. The fourth chap, who was the leader, walked in advance. Three of them do not belong hereabouts, but the fourth, a heavy man with very big feet, belongs in the country.”

“Guid Lord!” whispered Aaron to himself, “how do he ken a’ that?”

Dick’s early training by the old Indian, Joe Crowfoot, was standing him in good stead now.

Holding the lantern low, Merriwell followed the tracks toward the road.

“It’s likely they carried him off in a carriage, partner,” said the Texan.

But when the highway was reached, where it seemed that the boy with the lantern could find nothing to guide him to any conclusions, Dick continued his search, seeming to pick out the trail amid the many imprints there.

“There was no carriage here,” said the lad with the lantern. “They still carried him in the original manner.”

“But they could not contemplate carrying him far in that way.”

“Surely not.”

“Pard, are you armed?”

“No; are you?”

“I’m a-heap sorry to say I’m not.”

Aaron had followed tremblingly at the heels of the boys. Now Professor Gunn came hastening from the house and joined them.

“It’s awful – perfectly awful!” he fluttered. “I fear the shock will kill his sister. She’s in a dreadful condition. Boys, we must send to town right off for the officers. We are in danger of our lives. At this moment we are in deadly peril. I’m afraid out here where the ruffians may spring upon us, and I’m afraid in there with no one but a woman and a girl.”

“Go back to the inn, professor,” directed Dick. “Stay with the widow and Nadia.”

“What if the ruffians come?”

“You’ll be there to protect the ladies. It will give you an opportunity to display your heroism and fighting blood.”

“But this isn’t the right kind of an opportunity,” said Zenas. “Boys, you are recklessly exposing your lives! Come back into the inn at once. I can’t permit you to be so careless.”

“You’ll have to permit it now,” retorted Merriwell.

“What, do you dare disobey my orders?”

“On an occasion like this, yes. It is necessary, professor.”

Zenas gasped and hesitated.

“Do come in!” he urged. “What can I tell your brother if anything serious happens to you?”

“Tell him the truth, and he will be satisfied. I am doing what my brother would wish me to do.”

“Dear! dear!” muttered Gunn. “I regret that we ever came here. I fear we’ll all be murdered before we get away.”

Mumbling to himself, he hastened tremblingly back to the inn.

“His courage has all oozed out,” said Dick.

“Waugh! I should say it had!” growled Brad, in disgust.

Aaron now attempted to frighten the boys by telling them how fierce the masked men were and how thoroughly armed.

“Singular you saw so much of them,” observed Dick. “Never mind if they are armed thus and ready to commit murder at the drop of a hat; we’ll do our best to trail them, just the same.”

“Right, partner!” cried Buckhart. “It’s up to us to do everything we can for the sake of Nadia. It hurt me a heap to see her heartbroken over her brother, and I couldn’t stay with her any longer. I told her we’d find him.”

Down the road went Dick and Brad, with Aaron following them like a dog.

They entered the woods, where the bare trees stood silent and grim, coming at length to the path that turned off toward the lake. This Dick took.

Reaching the shore, Merriwell quickly announced that Budthorne had been placed in a boat and taken away.

“That lad ha’ th’ power o’ a witch!” whispered Aaron to himself. Then he shook as he beheld Dick’s eyes fastened on him.

“Come,” said the boy grimly, “we can’t follow them on water, for that leaves no trail. We’ll return to the inn.”

As they entered the inn Nadia rushed at them, asking if they had learned where her brother was and what had happened to him.

“Not yet,” answered Merriwell; “but we’ll know all about it in a minute.”

“How – how will you learn the truth?”

“From Aaron,” was the quiet answer that made the little man gasp.

“Aaron? He – ”

“He knows much more than he has seen fit to tell.”

“Guidness kens I ha’ told ye everything!” protested the alarmed man.

Dick’s dark eyes were fastened on Aaron, and to the latter they seemed to bore into his very soul.

“Sit there,” commanded the boy, pointing toward a chair.

Aaron felt that he was compelled to do so.

Dick drew another chair before the man, sitting where he could look him straight in the eyes.

“Aaron,” he said, “who is your best friend?”

“Mrs. Myles, sir.”

“Do you wish to ruin her?”

“Na, na; not for th’ world!”

“Do you know that what has happened here to-night will ruin her unless you tell the whole truth and thus enable us to follow Budthorne’s captors and rescue him?”

“Na, na!”

“But it will. The story will travel far and wide. Every one will hear how a young American, a guest at this inn, was captured by ruffians and carried off. Travelers will shun the place. Mrs. Myles will find her business gone. With no income, she’ll soon come to want and suffering. Without money she’ll be unable to buy flour, and meat, and fuel. There will be no warm fire on her hearth in the bleak winter, and she’ll suffer from hunger. You will be responsible – you, the one she took in when you were in wretchedness, the one she has fed, and housed, and trusted.”

Aaron held up his hands.

“I canna be to blame for it!” he cried.

“You will be. You met Budthorne out there by understanding. You knew those men were hidden behind the little building. You knew they meant to carry him away. You were not injured or struck down. You even cut that tiny gash on your own head with a common knife. Here it is. I picked it up where in your excitement you dropped it in the snow.”

Dick produced and held up the knife.

Aaron’s face was ghastly, and a terrible fear was in his eyes. This boy with the searching eyes knew just what had happened, and it was useless to lie.

“I canna tell!” moaned the little man. “Do na look a’ me wi’ them eyes! I canna tell! I canna tell!”

“My poor lad!” exclaimed the widow. “Do na fear, but speak out th’ truth.”

“He wi’ kill me if I do!” whispered Aaron.

“No one shall harm you,” promised Dick.

“You canna tell that, for you do na ken him.”

“Whom do you mean, Aaron?” asked the widow.

“Rob MacLane,” he breathed, shuddering with fear.

“Rob MacLane?” cried the landlady, in consternation: “Do na tell me he had hand i’ this black work!”

The shivering little man nodded.

“Then,” said the widow, “th’ poor young man is lost forever an’ there is na hope for him.”

“You may as well confess everything now,” said Dick, once more fixing Aaron with his piercing eyes. “It can do no further harm to you. Make a clean breast of it – for the widow’s sake, for the one who has warmed, and fed, and trusted you.”

“I will!” said the little man; and in shaking tones he hurried through the confession.

When Dick heard that Budthorne was to be taken to the old castle on the island and held a captive there he sprang up, turning to Nadia.

“We will find a way to save him, Miss Budthorne,” he promised. “Trust us.”

“How can you – how can you against Miguel Bunol and this terrible ruffian, MacLane?” she cried. “Then Aaron says there were more than two of them who attacked Dunbar at the door and struck him down.”

“The other two were Marsh and Durbin. Marsh is a pitiful coward, at best, so that practically reduces their fighting force to three. There are two of us, Brad and myself.”

“And I sure allow we’ll make it a whole lot hot for those three fine gents,” said the Texan, whose fighting blood was beginning to course hotly in his veins. “We know Bunol and Durbin. MacLane may not be half as dangerous as he is pictured. Nadia, we propose to bring your brother safe back to you before morning. You hear me chirp!”

CHAPTER VIII. – BUNOL MAKES HIS DEMAND

Miguel Bunol stood in front of his weak, helpless captive in a room of the crumbling castle of Lochleven. The bare room was lighted by a torch thrust into a great crack in the wall. There was no furniture in the place. Dunbar Budthorne sat on the floor, with his back against the wall.

Bunol's arms were folded. His head was bowed a little, and he was steadily regarding Budthorne from beneath his black eyebrows.

"Well," said the captive, weakly, "have you come to finish me?"

The Spaniard made a gesture of remonstrance with his gloved hand.

"How can you ask such a foolish question, my dear friend?" he said.

"Don't call me your friend!" exclaimed Budthorne, with a slight show of resentment and spirit. "I am no friend to such a wretch as you!"

"Then let me assure you that I am your friend. I am deeply interested in you, else I should not have taken all this trouble to-night."

Something like a mirthless, mocking laugh came from the lips of the prisoner.

"A fine, friendly act!" said Budthorne. "It is the act of a solicitous friend to fall on one, sandbag him and carry him off by force to a place like this, I suppose! Where are the rest of your ruffians?"

"They are near enough to come at my call should I need them," said Bunol. "Never mind them. I wished to have a little private chat with you, and they kindly retired to give me that privilege."

"What is your game, Bunol? Out with it!"

"Don't be in such haste. There is plenty of time. We have the whole night before us. Indeed, should you remain obstinate, we may have many nights before us. You are quite safe, my dear Budthorne, here in this old castle. At this season of the year there is no danger that troublesome visitors will come to inspect the stronghold that was once, long ago, the prison of Queen Mary and is now yours."

"If they should come – "

"If they should come – see that door? It can be closed and barred. Beyond it is another door that can be made secure. If troublesome persons came, they would never find you. In here you might shout until your throat you split without ever making them hear one faint cry. Have you ever heard of Rob MacLane? Well, some years there have been that he has lived with a price on his head, and always he had found this a safe hiding place when in this vicinity. There is not one chance in ten thousand that your friends at Ben Cleuch will come here to look for you; but should they come they will find no trace of you."

"You devil!" cried Budthorne.

"Just how it was I wished you to know before we began talking. Now, listen, my dear Budthorne. You are a very reckless and extravagant young man, wholly unfitted to handle large sums of money. This I have learned since my acquaintance with you. I have discovered that soon you will spend your own share of the fortune which you inherited, and then I am sure you will make inroads into that of your sister, who cares so very much for you that she is unable to refuse you anything. What you greatly need is some one to look after you and your sister and to prevent you from beggaring yourself and her. Who in all the world is better fitted for this than your very dear friend, Miguel Bunol?"

"What folly!" exclaimed the captive. "What are you driving at?"

"First I wish to prove that I am sincere in my protestations of friendship," the Spaniard calmly continued. "When first I knew you, a certain man, who is now not far away, had chosen you as a victim to be despoiled of your money. He thought I might be of assistance to him in the pleasant occupation, and so he took me into partnership."

"You mean that miserable wretch, Durbin!"

"I have called no names. At the outset I joined him, with no other thought than to obtain a portion of the spoils. But in time I came to admire you and care for you very much. It became a repulsive task for me to assist him in his bungling plans, but the money I needed, and you had so much that I felt you well might spare a little. Thus it went on. Then you did me the honor to present me to your lovely sister."

"I was a fool."

"No, for I learned to care a great deal for Nadia, and in time I decided that for her sake you must be saved. In order to save you I decided to marry her."

In spite of his weakness, Budthorne struggled to his feet as if to attack Bunol, but he was forced to lean against the wall for support.

"Don't excite yourself too much," urged the Spaniard, with mock solicitude. "You are not strong."

"No, no!" groaned Budthorne. "My legs will scarcely bear my weight. I believe you somehow contrived to drug me, you wretch!"

Bunol smiled, thinking of the drug he had given Aaron.

"You do me great injustice," he protested. "Let me continue. I resolved to marry your sister, for I felt she stood in great need of a faithful guardian who would care for her tenderly and prevent you from squandering her share of the fortune. Little by little I gained influence and control over you, and I should have succeeded in full but for the interference of that fellow Merriwell. He upset all my plans. Had those plans worked as they should, the moment I became sure of Nadia I should have cast aside both Durbin and Marsh. Rid of them, I could cause you to cease your recklessness and prevent you from squandering what remained of your fortune. You see, Budthorne, my intentions toward you were of the most friendly sort."

"Bah!" cried the captive.

"After the exposure in London," Bunol went on, "I succeeded in following you here, leaving Marsh and Durbin behind. With the aid of a faithful fellow, good fortune led me to meet, I planned to get hold of you, just as I have, in order to talk reason to you. I could have done very well without Marsh and Durbin, but it chanced that they followed Merriwell and his companions to Ben Cleuch, and they were passing on the highway when I hailed them. I thought it best to use them once more this night, and then to get rid of them forever. They think I am now trying to squeeze from you more money that is to be divided equally between us. Thus they deceive themselves. If you have in your head the reason you should, it is little they will get."

"What are you trying to propose?" demanded Budthorne.

"That you swear to me by all you hold sacred, by the memory of your mother and the fear of God, that you will not prevent me from making your sister my wife, either by word, deed or suggestion. That is all I ask."

"And if I do that – what then?"

"I will outwit the others. I will lead you from this place when they know nothing of it. We will take the boat and row away. When we arrive at the inn, I will tell how I found and rescued you from Rob MacLane, Hector Marsh, and Luke Durbin. You will say it is true, every word to the last. After that my own cards I will play, and your sister will I win, for I have the power to make her mine."

Always self-confident to an amazing degree, knowing his influence over Budthorne, and believing he could force the man to do his will, Bunol believed that in this manner he might make himself a hero in the eyes of Nadia, might ensnare her in his hypnotic net, and might obtain her for his own at last.

But all the while he was playing double with Budthorne, for he had outlined his plan to Durbin and Marsh, promising to wring money from both brother and sister if he succeeded, and to divide liberally with his accomplices. Rob MacLane was to be paid a set sum for his services.

"What if I refuse?" asked Budthorne.

“Then I shall leave you here alone in the dark to meditate upon it a time.”

“You fool!” panted the captive. “You were crazy to fancy you could force me into such a thing! Not in a thousand years!”

Bunol shrugged his shoulders.

“It is you who are foolish,” he asserted. “Look into my eyes a moment, Budthorne, and – ”

“No! no!” hoarsely cried the young man, as he suddenly started forward, his hands clinched, resolved to attack his enemy. “I’ll fight you here, man to man.”

The Spaniard struck those clinched hands aside and gave Budthorne a thrust that sent him again to the wall, against which he struck and then dropped to the floor.

“Very well,” said Miguel. “Having thought it over, you will change your mind, I believe. I will leave you to consider it all.”

Snatching the torch from the crack, he strode from the room, closing and barring the heavy door behind him.

CHAPTER IX. – THE FIGHT IN THE CASTLE

The night was on the wane when Miguel Bunol returned and found the shivering, half-frozen captive stretched on the bare floor.

Budthorne lifted his head from his curled arms and looked at his enemy with eyes filled with fear and hatred.

“Leave me to die!” he hoarsely said. “You can never force me to sacrifice my sister!”

“Still obstinate!” sneered Bunol. “I had hoped to see a change in you. Unless you decide at once to comply, you will have to remain here through another day, for morning approaches, and we can leave this island only by night.”

“I’ll never give in! I’ll never surrender to your evil influence! You – ”

The speaker stopped suddenly, starting up and listening, for from some distant portion of the old ruin came a sudden cry of alarm. This cry was followed by others and then a shot was heard!

For a moment, as Budthorne struggled to his feet, Miguel Bunol stood amazed and thunderstruck. Then he snarled out an oath and wheeled toward the door.

With a sudden burst of strength, Budthorne dashed at the fellow and leaped on his back, clutching him round the neck with both arms.

At the same time he lifted his voice and shouted for help.

Budthorne believed rescuers had arrived.

He was right. With muffled oars, a boat containing four persons had noiselessly approached the island, slipping into the dark shadows of its wooded shore.

The four in the boat were Dick Merriwell, Brad Buckhart, Zenas Gunn, and Aaron, the latter having provided the boat and accompanied them in the effort to find and rescue Budthorne.

Professor Gunn was shaking like a man with the ague.

“Bub-bub-bub-boys,” he whispered, as Dick and Brad cautiously stepped out of the boat, “I th-th-think I had bub-bub-bub-better remain here and gug-gug-gug-guard the bub-boat.”

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